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Debate-Based Civic Education and Its Effects on Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving, and Decision-Making in Border Conflict Resolution

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Abstract: This study aims to explore and evaluate the effects, contribution levels, and interrelationships of debate-based civic education on students' critical thinking (CT), problem-solving (PS), and decision-making (DM) skills within the context of border conflict resolution simulations. The study employed a quantitative approach using an experimental method involving 120 participants whose competencies were assessed. Data were collected using open-ended tests and analyzed through inferential statistics, including simple linear regression, t-tests, R-square, and correlation analyses. The findings revealed that debate-based civic education significantly influenced critical thinking (R^2 = 21.5%), problem-solving (R^2 = 32.3%), and decision-making (R^2 = 18.6%). However, the correlations among the independent variables (CT, PS, and DM) were found to be weak. The results emphasize the applied importance of civic education practices in cultivating 21st-century skills among students in higher education institutions.

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Introduction

In the increasingly complex dynamics of globalization, border conflicts have emerged as one of the most challenging issues for political stability and human security (Pemunta et al., 2021; Zarei, 2020). Several cases of border disputes, such as the Ambalat territorial issue with Malaysia, land border tensions in North Kalimantan, and fishing disputes in the Natuna waters with China (Abdullah et al., 2022; Lai & Kuik, 2021; Raharjo & Idris, 2025; Supancana, 2022). Furthermore, the maritime boundary dispute between Indonesia and Malaysia in the Sulawesi Sea and Malacca Strait (Gunawan et al. 2025) and the maritime border conflict between Indonesia and the Philippines in the Sulu-Sulawesi Sea (Raharjo et al. 2024). At the same time, communities living in border areas often experience marginalization due to limited access to education, infrastructure, and political participation. These conditions may weaken their sense of nationalism and social solidarity (Karulus & Askandar, 2020; Loganathan et al., 2023; Munandar, 2020; Prayuda et al., 2025; Zulkipli & Askandar, 2021). Therefore, strengthening citizens' capacity through contextual and reflective critical reasoning in civic education is essential for the younger generation to understand, evaluate, and respond to border issues with a balanced perspective between nationalism and humanity (Ajaps & Obiagu, 2020; Haduong et al., 2024; Joris et al., 2022; Wray-Lake & Abrams, 2020). Unfortunately, most civic education practices in Indonesia remain oriented toward rote learning and normative morality rather than reflective reasoning and dialogical

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engagement that cultivate global citizenship awareness (Pratiwi et al., 2025; Santika & Tripayana, 2025).

The rationale for this study lies in the necessity to modernize civic education in response to 21st-century demands that focus on fostering critical, analytical, and rational decision-making skills (Buasuwan et al., 2022; Hoggan-Kloubert & Mabrey, 2022; Ongesa, 2020; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). These competencies are not only relevant in academic contexts but are also crucial for decision-making in social and political life, particularly when dealing with conflict situations or serving as a framework for conflict resolution simulations (Donbavand & Hoskins, 2021; Estellés & Fischman, 2021; Hwang et al., 2025). Debate-Based Learning (DBL) serves as one approach that can integrate civic values with higher-order thinking skills (Alghamdi Hamdan & Aldossari, A. T., 2021; Schueler & Larned, 2025), and thus offers a relevant pedagogical model for conflict resolution simulations (Habibah & Fauzi, M. A. N., 2025). When debate contexts are directed toward concrete issues such as border conflict resolution (Smidt, 2020), the learning process not only cultivates critical reasoning but also builds awareness of the importance of resolving conflicts peacefully and democratically (Sanjaya et al., 2022).

However, most previous studies have not specifically linked Debate-Based Learning to conflict resolution contexts, particularly in simulating border conflict resolution to enhance critical thinking (CT), problem-solving (PS), and decision-making (DM) skills. Prior research has generally examined these aspects separately, for example, quantitative studies on the role of debate in cognitive development and civic awareness among youth (Baketa et al., 2023), debate influences analytical thinking among students (Spaska et al., 2021), or analyses of discussion as a tool to enhance CT and civic skills (Caughell & Holzer, 2025). Other studies have examined classroom discussions of controversial political issues as a form of higher-order thinking. (Gronostay, 2019). As an evaluative strategy in interactive civic education, deliberative learning promotes the development of analytical discussion and collaborative PS skills (McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006), and competitive debate as a competency-based learning model that strengthens civic competencies (McIntosh & Milam, 2016).

Given these research trajectories, there remains a limited number of studies exploring the integration of Debate-Based Civic Education (DbCE) as a civic education practice in higher education for fostering CT, PS, and DM in the context of border conflict resolution. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the influence, contribution value, and correlation of Debate-Based Learning implementation on students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities. This study shows clear progress in the use of the DbCE model to measure cognitive development, not only CT, but also PS and DM, as well as analyzing the correlation between independent variables (CT, PS, DM). The findings of this study explicitly offer recommendations for replication and contribute to exemplary learning innovations using the DbCE model in other universities, particularly addressing the hot issue of border conflict resolution to foster a sense of nationalism among students.

Research Method

This study employed a quantitative approach using an experimental method with a one-group pretest–posttest design. The research was conducted in several stages, namely the preparation stage, implementation stage, evaluation stage, and dissemination stage. The experiment was conducted with students enrolled in the Civic Education course at UIN Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padang Sidempuan. As detailed in Table 1, 120 students participated in the DbCE intervention. The data collection technique used was total

population sampling, namely, a group of first-semester students taking civic education courses.

Table 1. Participants of the DbCE Intervention

Gender	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Male	63	52.5
Female	57	47.5
Total	120	100

Data were collected using a Performance-Based Cognitive Test in the form of open-ended questions, scored with an analytic rubric based on the revised Bloom's Taxonomy cognitive levels (analyzing, evaluating, and creating). Hence, five measurement topics (Table 2) were applied across three dependent variables. The items were previously content-validated by subject-matter and measurement experts.

Table 2. Study Topics for Each Meeting

Meet	Conflict Issue
1	Indonesia-Malaysia land border (case study: Camar Bulan and Tanjung Datu, West Kalimantan)
2	Indonesia-Malaysia maritime border (case study: Ambalat Block, Sulawesi Sea)
3	Natuna Islands and maritime claims in South China Sea
4	Administrative boundary dispute between Aceh and North Sumatra provinces over four small islands
5	Armed conflict in Papua (armed clashes between the Indonesian National Army and the West Papua National Liberation Army in Intan Jaya)

Quantitative data were analyzed inferentially using simple linear regression, t-tests, R-square, and correlation analyses. Formula 1 (The effect of DbCE on students' CT, PM, and DM in border conflict resolution)

$Y_{post}=\beta_0+\beta_1 Y_{pre}+\beta_2 FID+\varepsilon$ where Y = CT, PS, DM (1)

Formula 2 (Contribution value of DbCE)

DbCE Contribution = $(R^2_{Model2} - R^2_{Model1}) \times 100\%$ (2)

Formula 3 (Correlation among independent variables)

$r_{X_1X_2}, r_{X_1X_3}, r_{X_2X_3}$ (3)

Results and Discussion

Results

The experimental analysis comprehensively examined the effects, contribution values, and correlations among variables in DbCE intervention on CT, PS, and DM. Descriptive statistics of the intervention are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistical Results

Statistics							
		Pretest CT	Pretest PS	Pretest DM	Posttest CT	Posttest PS	Posttest DM
N	Valid	120	120	120	120	120	120
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		64.60	66.09	63.35	71.61	73.49	70.27
Median		65.00	66.00	63.00	72.00	73.00	70.00
Mode		63[a]	62[a]	62	70	80	70
Std. Deviation		4.666	5.529	4.623	6.027	9.101	7.739
Minimum		52	47	52	50	40	50
Maximum		77	79	75	88	90	88
Sum		7752	7931	7602	8593	8819	8432

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Source: Authors' Analysis (2025)

Overall, the intervention demonstrated a positive effect. The N-Gain analysis (Table 4) shows varied improvements across variables. Drawing from these findings, it may be

inferred that the DbCE intervention produced a positive and moderate improvement across all three dependent variables.

Table 4. N-Gain Test Results

	Pretest CT	Pretest PS	Pretest DM	Posttest CT	Posttest PS	Posttest DM
Mean	64.6	71.61	66.09	73.49	63.35	70.27
Difference		7.01		7.4		6.92
N Gain		7.02		5.56		7.44
Category (Hake, 1999)		Moderate		Moderate		Moderate

Source: Authors' Analysis (2025)

Effect of the Intervention

An in-depth analysis was conducted to examine the significance of the Debate-Based Civic Education (DbCE) intervention on CT, PS, and DM using the Paired Samples Test and Paired Samples Effect Sizes.

Table 5. Results of the Paired Samples Test

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Significance	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	Pretest CT - Posttest CT	-7.008	5.659	0.517	-8.031	-5.985	-13.566	119	<0.001	<0.001
Pair 2	Pretest PS - Posttest PS	-7.400	7.498	0.685	-8.755	-6.045	-10.811	119	<0.001	<0.001
Pair 3	Pretest DM - Posttest DM	-6.917	7.098	0.648	-8.200	-5.634	-10.675	119	<0.001	<0.001

Source: Authors' Analysis (2025)

The findings indicate that DbCE had a significant effect ($p < 0.05$) on students' CT, PS, and DM scores. Paired Samples Effect Sizes were calculated to further validate this significance as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of the Paired Samples Effect Sizes

Paired Samples Effect Sizes

		Standardizer[a]	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval Lower	Upper
Pair 1 Pretest CT - Posttest CT	Cohen's d	5.659	-1.238	-1.475	-0.999
	Hedges' correction	5.695	-1.231	-1.466	-0.992
Pair 2 Pretest PS - Posttest PS	Cohen's d	7.498	-0.987	-1.204	-0.767
	Hedges' correction	7.546	-0.981	-1.196	-0.762
Pair 3 Pretest DM - Posttest DM	Cohen's d	7.098	-0.974	-1.191	-0.756
	Hedges' correction	7.143	-0.968	-1.183	-0.751

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.
Cohen's d uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference.
Hedges' correction uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference, plus a correction factor.

Source: Authors' Analysis (2025)

The large Cohen's d and Hedges' correction values across the three pairs demonstrate strong effect sizes, exceeding 5 for CT and approximately 7 for both PS and DM. The negative point estimates (ranging from -1.238 to -0.968) indicate that posttest scores were consistently higher than pretest scores, aligning with the direction of the mean difference. The 95% confidence intervals that do not cross zero confirm the statistical significance of these changes.

Contribution Levels of CT, PS, and DM

Forecasting Results:

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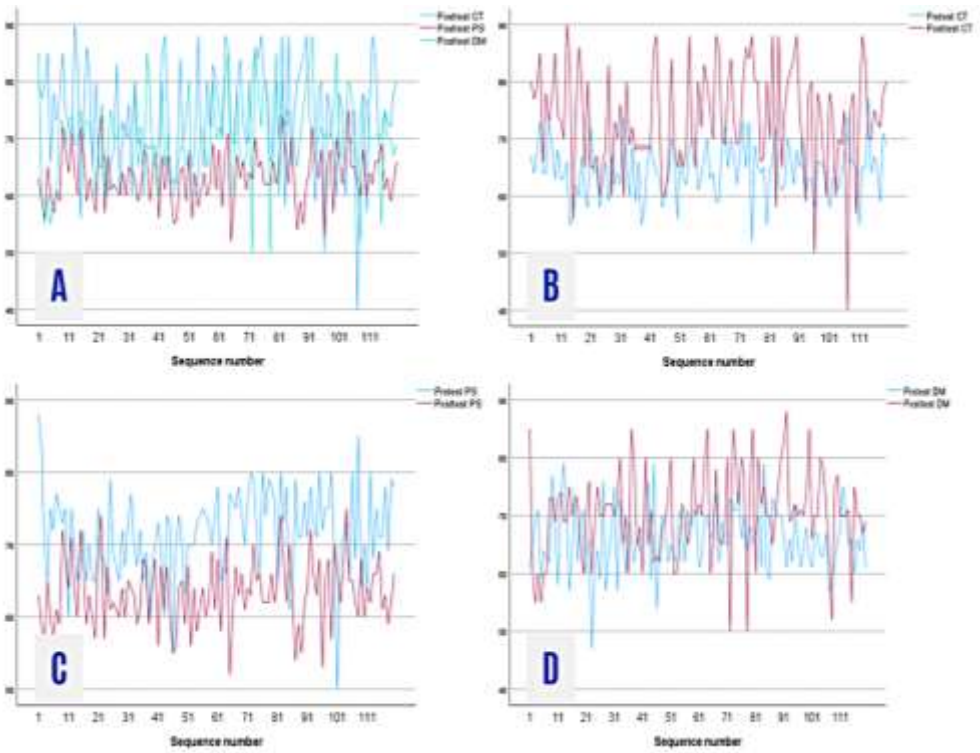

Figure 1. Forecasting Results Comparison of Posttest Scores among Independent Variables (CT, PS, and DM) (A); Forecasting Results of Pretest–Posttest CT (B); Forecasting Results of Pretest–Posttest PS (C); and Forecasting Results of Pretest–Posttest DM (D)

From the data analysis (Figure 1), it can be synthesized that the comparison among CT, PS, and DM shows that CT demonstrates a higher degree of variation compared to PS and DM. As for the contribution level to each variable (CT, PS, and DM):

Critical Thinking (CT)

R-Square Results for CT

Table 7. R-Square Results for CT

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	0.464[a]	0.215	0.208	5.363	0.215	32.292	1	118	<0.001	2.058

a. Predictors: (Constant), Pretest CT
b. Dependent Variable: Posttest CT

Source: Authors' Analysis (2025)

As presented in Table 7, the R-Square analysis for the CT variable yielded a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.464, reflecting a moderate positive association between the pretest and posttest CT scores. Meanwhile, the contribution of DcBE to CT (R^2 value) is 21.5%, with 78.5% influenced by other factors.

Problem Solving (PS)

R-Square Test Results for PS

Table 8. R-Square Test Results for PS

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	0.568[a]	0.323	0.317	7.521	0.323	56.222	1	118	<0.001	2.219

a. Predictors: (Constant), Pretest PS
b. Dependent Variable: Posttest PS

Source: Authors' Analysis (2025)

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As presented in Table 8, the R-Square analysis for the PS variable yielded a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.568, reflecting a moderately strong positive association between the pretest and posttest scores. Meanwhile, the contribution of DcBE to PS (R^2 value) is 32.3%, with 67.7% influenced by other factors.

Decision Making (DM)

R-Square Test Results for DM:

Table 9. R-Square Test Results for DM

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	0.432[a]	0.186	0.179	7.011	0.186	27.020	1	118	<0.001	1.918

a. Predictors: (Constant), Pretest DM
b. Dependent Variable: Posttest DM

Source: Authors' Analysis (2025)

As shown in Table 10, the R-Square analysis for the DM variable produced a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.432, suggesting a moderate positive association between the pretest and posttest scores. Meanwhile, the contribution of DcBE to PS (R^2 value) is 18.6%, with 81.4% influenced by other factors

Correlation Among Independent Variables (CT, PS, DM)

Findings from the correlation matrix (Figure 2) among posttest variables show that the relationships between CT, PS, and DM are weak and statistically insignificant. The highest correlation was observed between PS and DM (r = 0.157), followed by CT and PS (r = 0.149), while the lowest correlation occurred between CT and DM (r = 0.033). The heatmap visualization displays light to dark blue colors indicating weak correlations among the variables, while the red diagonal line (1.000) represents a perfect correlation of each variable with itself.

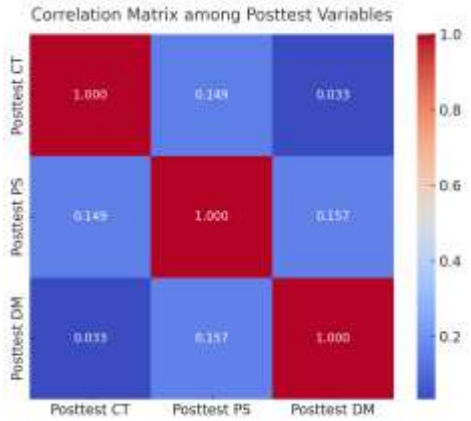

Figure 2. Correlation Among Independent Variables (CT, PS, DM)

Discussion

DbCE interventions implemented as civic education practices at the higher education level through discussions on border conflict resolution have proven to be effective pedagogical strategies for developing CT, PS, and DM skills. Several previous studies have demonstrated that debate-based instruction enhances higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking (Alharbi Elfeky, A. I., & Ahmed, E. S., 2022; Rivas et al., 2022), problem-solving (Dewangga et al., 2024), and decision-making skills (Dawson & Carson, 2020; Napoleon & Kuchenrither, 2023). The improvement in CT, PS, and DM in DbCE occurs through activation of the cognitive as well as social mechanisms during the debate processes. First, cognitive conflict provokes students to assess contradictory arguments and re-evaluate evidence, thereby enhancing critical thinking. Second, the debate structures provide

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argumentation scaffolding that assists students in structuring claims, evidence, and refutations systematically, thereby optimising problem-solving. Third, the delegative process promotes dialogic reasoning, which is the capability to weigh up alternative viewpoints and formulate decisions in a rational and ethical manner, which is crucial in decision-making on difficult geopolitical issues. Moreover, interventions through debate have also been found to improve students' argumentative & motivational skills (Guo et al., 2023; Majidi et al., 2021; Mokhtar et al., 2020), and communication skills (Chikeleze et al., 2018; Nurakhir et al., 2020).

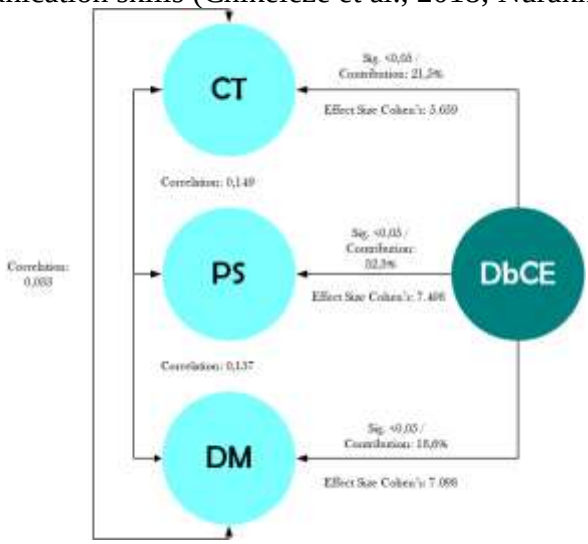

Figure 3. Quantitative Design of DbCE for CT, PS, and DM and Their Correlations

The quantitative contribution of DbCE to the improvement of CT, PS, and DM (Figure 3) can be observed from the R^2 values, which represent the proportion of variance in learning outcomes explained by the intervention. The R^2 values of 0.215 for CT, 0.323 for PS, and 0.186 for DM indicate that approximately 21–32% of the improvement in students' cognitive abilities can be attributed to the DbCE intervention. The remaining variation is likely influenced by external factors such as digital infrastructure and access to information sources (Kaldaras et al., 2024), learning or academic environment (Amin et al., 2024; Golden, 2023), social support, inclusive classroom atmosphere, and collaborative learning approaches (Xu et al., 2023).

Furthermore, our analysis revealed that while CT, PS, and DM share a close conceptual relationship, their empirical correlations were weak or statistically insignificant. This result diverges from previous findings. The weak or insignificant correlation between CT, PS, and DM may be caused by several factors, such as the limitations of instruments that can capture specific aspects of each construct, differences in contextual factors among students that affect uneven development of abilities, and the nature of the domain-specific debate task that may have stimulated one ability more powerfully than others. Hence, this empirical discrepancy reflects the complexity of the context and measurement more than the theoretical irrelevance between the independent variables (CT, PS, and DM). For instance, (Özgenel, 2018) observed that school administrators' critical and creative thinking dispositions affected their problem-solving abilities through various decision-making styles, such as rational, avoidant, and spontaneous approaches. Likewise, (Tanty et al., 2022) revealed that individuals' capacity to identify problems influenced their problem-solving performance, though it did not necessarily enhance their decision-making skills. In contrast, (Ahmady & Shahbazi, 2020) demonstrated that social problem-solving competence positively contributed to students' critical thinking and decision-making abilities. Based on these findings, the application of DbCE in border conflict resolution learning demonstrates

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significant effectiveness in strengthening students' CT, PS, and DM skills through active engagement in evidence-based discourse, ethical reflection, and multi-perspective analysis of complex geopolitical issues.

Conclusion

The implementation of DbCE has shown a significant impact on improving students' CT, PS, and DM skills in civic education, particularly in the context of border conflict resolution. The N-Gain values, which fall within the moderate category, and the Cohen's d and Hedges' correction, which indicate a very large effect size, confirm that the debate approach effectively enhances higher-order cognitive capacities. Additionally, the R^2 results indicate that DbCE contributed 21.5% to CT, 32.3% to PS, and 18.6% to DM, showing that a portion of the variance in students' abilities was explained by the intervention. However, the weak correlations among the three cognitive variables suggest that, while conceptually related, they develop through distinct cognitive processes and require a more integrated instructional design to achieve simultaneous improvement.

Recommendation

This study is limited by the absence of mediating and moderating variables such as learning motivation, participants' argumentative background, thinking style, and group dynamics, all of which may influence the effectiveness of DbCE in enhancing CT, PS, and DM. Further research is recommended for civic education educators (lecturers) to develop a DbCE model that can improve other skills with different themes, especially in fostering nationalism among university students.

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