

Strengthening Political Tolerance through a Digital-Based Democratic Education Model at Baturaja University, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study analyzes the condition of political tolerance among university students in the digital era, aiming to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of a digital-based democratic education model called *Sahabat Demokrasi*. The research employed a Research and Development (R&D) design using a learning framework validated by two experts. Data were collected through surveys, in-depth interviews, and a teaching trial. Quantitative data were analyzed using pretest–posttest comparisons to assess changes in political tolerance, while qualitative data captured students' perceptions, motivations, and learning experiences. Conducted at Baturaja University in South Sumatra, the study involved 21 Civic Education students and two expert lecturers. Results showed that students' political tolerance was initially at a moderate level, with an average score of 3 on a 5-point scale. After one semester of implementing the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model, scores rose to an average of 4, reflecting enhanced openness to differences, healthier political dialogue, reduced digital provocation, and greater empathy toward opposing views. Qualitative findings supported these outcomes, showing increased participation, respectful communication, and evidence-based reasoning among students. The study recommends broader adoption of the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model in higher education as an innovative approach to Civic Education, supported by the development of interactive simulations and ethical dialogue guidelines to promote an inclusive and responsible democratic culture among youth.

Keywords: *Civic education, democratic education, digital literacy, political tolerance.*

Introduction

The world is entering the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0, characterized by extensive connectivity, digital interaction, and rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual technology that are transforming analog systems into digital ones (Maskuriy et al.,

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2019). This paradigm shift impacts multiple dimensions of human life (Lasi et al., 2014; Lase, 2019). As these transformations are inevitable, the development of highly competent human resources (HR) capable of adapting, competing globally, and possessing a comprehensive understanding of technology has become essential (Lubinga et al. 2023; Mlangeni & Seyama-Mokhaneli, 2024; Mayes et al., 2015; Pereira et al., 2020; Raharja, 2019).

The contemporary education system must evolve from traditional approaches toward more modern, technology-driven models (Xu et al., 2018). In this context, education should aim to produce graduates equipped with advanced skills and global competitiveness to enhance overall quality and relevance (Anton & Trisoni, 2022; Hutomo et al., 2022; Orakova et al., 2024). The current generation, often referred to as digital natives, has been immersed in digital technology since childhood (Creighton, 2018). They demonstrate a stronger technological aptitude than previous generations and process information in different ways (Rintayati et al., 2022). Moreover, this generation confidently utilizes modern technologies such as the internet, digital games, mobile devices, and various online platforms (Dewi, 2021; Prensky, 2001; Pushpanadham et al., 2023). The rapid advancement of digital technology has led to profound transformations across multiple sectors, including education (Japar et al., 2023; Trilling & Fadel, 2010). As a key component of civic education, democratic education plays a vital role in shaping students' character and fostering political tolerance (Wahyudi et al., 2022). In the digital era, political information circulates swiftly but is frequently accompanied by misinformation, hate speech, and growing political polarization (Sunstein, 2020). These challenges necessitate a more adaptive educational approach—one that incorporates digital-based democratic learning models to promote a deeper understanding of democratic values and strengthen political tolerance within society (Mueller, 1988).

In higher education, students represent a group particularly susceptible to both the positive and negative influences of digital information (Japar et al., 2024). Research indicates that incorporating digital media into learning can enhance students' understanding of democratic principles, expand their political perspectives, and cultivate critical awareness of political diversity (Dahlgren & Hill, 2022; Liu, 2025; Videla et al., 2025). However, without appropriate guidance, exposure to digital information can also reinforce political biases and reduce tolerance for opposing viewpoints (Guess et al., 2020). Consequently, a democratic education model is needed that not only conveys theoretical knowledge but also develops students' critical thinking abilities and capacity to evaluate digital information responsibly in today's digital age (Chauke et al., 2024; Nally, 2024).

Political tolerance is a fundamental pillar of sustaining democracy, particularly amid escalating political polarization in many countries, including Indonesia (Hanaf, 2023). Research shows that engaging in healthy political discussions enhances students' understanding of democratic principles and fosters greater openness toward diverse ideologies (Moloi et al, 2023; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). However, in practice, many students remain influenced by identity politics and exclusive narratives that contribute to social fragmentation (Marleku, 2020; Sasere & Mathashu, 2024). Developing a digital-based democratic education model offers a potential solution for creating more inclusive spaces for dialogue and promoting a politically tolerant culture among university students.

Research on democratic education and political tolerance has been extensively explored through various methodological approaches. A review of prior studies is essential to demonstrate the state of the art, reinforce the rationale of this research, and clarify its unique contributions. For instance, Cress & Stokamer (2020) found that digital platforms such as online forums and academic social media create inclusive discussions and deepen students' understanding of democratic principles. Similarly, Zhao and Zhang (2024) highlighted the role of technology in promoting democratic values through interactive learning experiences, showing that digital simulations and political educational games enhance students' comprehension of democratic processes and their tolerance for differing political perspectives. Additionally, Kahne et al. (2012) demonstrated that digital media literacy education increases online political participation and broadens students' political viewpoints.

Furthermore, a study by the Wahid Foundation (2023) in Indonesia showed that the digitalization of civic education can considerably reduce intolerance among students. The findings indicated that students who actively engaged with online learning platforms demonstrated a stronger understanding of pluralism and democratic values than those who relied exclusively on traditional learning methods.

Based on the review of prior studies, most existing research has tended to examine democratic education and political tolerance as separate themes. The novelty of the present study lies in integrating digital technology into democratic education to strengthen political tolerance through interactive, media-based learning approaches. Therefore, the development of a digital-based democratic education model has become an urgent necessity in today's information era. Such a model should not only emphasize the transmission of knowledge about democracy and political

tolerance but also incorporate interactive learning strategies, including online discussions, political simulations, and digital media analysis (Westheimer & Kahne, 2020). Accordingly, this study focuses on designing and implementing a digital-based democratic education model aimed at fostering and strengthening political tolerance among university students.

Research Questions

Based on the research background and relevant previous studies, the research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What is the current condition of students' political tolerance of Baturaja University in the digital era?
2. How can a digital-based democratic education model be developed to enhance students' political tolerance?
3. How can the model be implemented at improving students' political tolerance?

Theoretical Framework

Democratic Education

Democratic education is a learning process designed to develop citizens' cognitive, affective, and behavioral capacities, enabling them to participate critically and constructively in public life (Rista & Wiranata, 2024; Sezer & Can, 2018). Theoretically grounded in the civic education tradition, this approach emphasizes the internalization of democratic values—such as freedom of speech, respect for human rights, and rational argumentation—rather than the mere transmission of information (Anderson & Gardner, 2024; Nazmi et al., 2025). Democratic education is characterized by the promotion of freedom of speech, where students are encouraged to express opinions openly in academic discussions or classroom debates without fear of discrimination or punishment. It also manifests in respect for human rights by fostering inclusive learning environments that appreciate diversity—such as religious, cultural, ethnic, and political differences—ensuring equal opportunities to participate in decision-making. Furthermore, rational argumentation is cultivated through structured deliberation activities that require students to justify claims with evidence, respond to counterarguments respectfully, and collaboratively resolve disagreements.

Recent studies in higher education underscores that purposefully structured civic learning and engagement experiences enhance students' political participation and deliberative competence.

Comparative studies have also showed that higher education positively affects voter turnout and civic behavior, positioning universities as key agents in revitalizing democratic culture (Hulbert & Harkins, 2024; Jensen, 2025).

In pedagogical practice, democratic education in higher education integrates formal components such as curricula and civic education courses with non-formal experiences including student organizations, public debates, and community service projects, while also promoting critical engagement with media and political literacy (Basariah et al., 2024). For example, a qualitative case study of a student organization showed that regular deliberations and internal decision-making within the organization helped shape democratic attitudes among its members (Astutik & Pujiyanto, 2024). Similarly, recent literature review suggests that participatory civic-education, volunteer activities, and community-based citizenship projects facilitated through civic education significantly strengthen civic engagement and political participation among young people (Putri et al., 2025).

Recent literature highlights the importance of linking democratic education with media and digital literacy—specifically, the ability to assess information credibility, recognize algorithmic biases, and practice ethical communication in online environments—given that digital media strongly affect students' opinions and political identities (Polizzi, 2020; Safitri et al., 2025). Review articles and meta-analyses on democracy education in the social media era advocate for critical media literacy pedagogy that combines open discussions, case analyses, and collaborative project-based learning to promote the contextual internalization of democratic values (Knowles et al., 2023; Teegelbeckers et al., 2023). Examples of such practices include structured classroom debates on current public issues, fact-checking workshops analyzing misinformation circulating on digital platforms, and student-led civic action projects addressing real community problems. Empirical evidence shows that democratic education initiatives integrated with participatory learning practices positively influence tolerance, political efficacy, and students' willingness to engage in cross-group deliberation (Solhaug, 2006). Recent research and policy reviews advocate for systematic evaluation of such programs—through tools like pre- and post-tests of democratic attitudes, assessments of discussion quality, and measurements of civic participation—to ensure that the model developed at Baturaja University can be refined based on empirical data. Additionally, the literature emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration among education, communication, and political science scholars to design modules that reflect both local

campus realities and national sociopolitical contexts. This approach ensures that democratic education moves beyond symbolic implementation and becomes a genuinely transformative force in shaping students' political behavior (Hulbert & Harkins, 2024; Teegelbeckers et al., 2023). Integrating digital technology into democratic education is crucial for equipping students to become active and responsible citizens in the digital era. The digital landscape reshapes how civic values—such as dialogue, participation, and tolerance—are expressed and experienced. Through online platforms, digital simulations, and social media, students can engage in real-time democratic interactions that transcend traditional classroom boundaries. However, beyond theoretical perspectives, this study argues that digital integration must be intentionally designed to not only provide access to technology but also cultivate critical democratic competencies, such as ethical digital participation, critical evaluation of information, and deliberative communication. Therefore, linking democratic education with digital innovation should not be understood merely as a technological shift, but as a transformative pedagogical strategy that strengthens digital citizenship and ensures that democratic principles remain dynamic, inclusive, and relevant within virtual environments.

Digital Technology

Digital technology—including online learning platforms, social media, collaborative applications, and information infrastructure—has become the primary medium through which knowledge, discourse, and political practices are generated and disseminated. Digital technology is defined in this study as an integrated system of digital tools and environments that enable interaction, communication, and participation in virtual civic spaces. Democratic education, in turn, refers to a pedagogical model that fosters democratic values, participatory skills, and political tolerance through reflective dialogue and collaborative decision-making among students. Consequently, its role in democratic education is dual: serving both as a facilitator of participation and as a source of new challenges (Prihatin & Sutangsa, 2025; Sudibyo, 2022).

Studies on digitalized higher education highlights how universities have integrated Learning Management Systems, online discussion forums, and collaborative tools that support synchronous and asynchronous learning, enabling interaction across geographical boundaries. Within this context, the curriculum plays a central role in shaping the values of digital democracy by embedding learning activities that cultivate political tolerance, responsible digital participation, and critical evaluation of information. In this study, the participants are

undergraduate university students who are positioned as digital natives and actively engage in online academic and civic interactions. However, this transformation requires pedagogical designs that address issues of privacy, accessibility, and digital equity to prevent the deepening of existing inequalities. Studies at the intersection of democracy and technology further emphasize the importance of developing platforms that foster inclusive deliberation—incorporating features such as moderation tools, verification systems, and design architectures that encourage exposure to diverse viewpoints (Fischli & Muldoon, 2024; Komljenovic et al., 2025).

Regarding student competencies, the literature on digital literacy and cyber-citizenship emphasizes that technical proficiency with digital tools is not sufficient; students must also develop critical skills to evaluate information credibility, understand algorithmic content curation, and engage ethically in online political discourse (Boghosian, 2025; Raza et al., 2023; Villar et al., 2022). Empirical studies in higher education demonstrate that integrating digital literacy training—such as source evaluation, fact-checking, and responsible content creation—with participatory activities like civic campaigns and online debate simulations enhances students' ability to engage respectfully and tolerantly in digital environments. Furthermore, recent works on “digital democracy” and “the design of digital democracy” offer both normative and technical frameworks, addressing topics from decentralized participation infrastructures to the commercialization of digital platforms—insights that are highly relevant for developing digital-based democratic learning models (Fuchs, 2022; Smith & Storrs, 2023).

The integration of digital democracy frameworks into civic education highlights the importance of focusing not only on participation but also on the quality of interaction within digital environments. As students become more active in online spaces, fostering political tolerance emerges as a crucial factor in maintaining meaningful and respectful dialogue (Dyantyi & Mkabile-Masebe, 2025). Although digital learning environments expand opportunities for democratic engagement, they also expose students to risks such as polarization and misinformation. To address this, digital literacy practices must be embedded within democratic learning activities, including guided fact-checking exercises, digital source credibility analysis, structured online debates using evidence-based arguments, and reflective discussions on ethical communication norms in social media interactions (Magochaa et al., 2025). Embedding tolerance education within digital democratic practices is therefore essential to ensure that technological

empowerment is accompanied by ethical, empathetic, and responsible communication, ultimately promoting the development of conscientious digital citizens.

Political Tolerance

Political tolerance refers to the willingness to acknowledge and respect the political rights and existence of others, even when opinions or affiliations differ—a vital quality for maintaining social cohesion in pluralistic countries such as Indonesia (Toha et al., 2021; Supriyanto et al., 2020). Theories in political behavior and social psychology conceptualize tolerance as a product of interactions among internalized democratic values, intergroup experiences, and informational contexts shaped by media environments (Japar et al., 2022; Sugarda, 2022). Recent studies in Indonesia reveal complex dynamics: while some student populations exhibit moderate to high levels of tolerance, national indicators suggest a rise in intolerance, particularly in digital spaces, often associated with political polarization and the proliferation of hate speech on social media (Anas et al., 2025). Consequently, educational approaches that prioritize intergroup interaction and structured deliberation are essential for fostering and reinforcing political tolerance among students.

Campus-based interventions aimed at strengthening political tolerance typically integrate cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions. In practical terms, these dimensions are embedded within the curriculum through citizenship education courses, project-based learning, and issue-based discussions that develop students' analytical and collaborative skills. Moreover, the academic atmosphere supports tolerance through structured dialogue forums, debate classes, and student organization activities that promote respectful interaction and inclusive participation among diverse groups. The cognitive component focuses on providing knowledge about human rights, conflict history, and democratic mechanisms; the affective component develops empathy and shared narratives; and the conative component involves practical activities such as dialogue exercises, negotiation, and cross-group collaboration (Almahdali et al., 2025; Judijanto et al., 2025; Huxley, 2025).

Studies in multicultural and civic education show shared experiential learning—such as community service initiatives, heterogeneous group projects, and political simulations—effectively reduces stereotypes and fosters mutual respect, particularly when supported by reflective practice and skillful facilitation (Setiawan et al., 2024; Zakiah et al., 2023). Furthermore, research connecting digital media literacy with political tolerance demonstrates that students

trained to critically filter information and recognize algorithmic manipulation are less susceptible to online polarization and provocation (Smith & Storrs, 2023). For Baturaja University, this finding underscores that a digital-based democratic education model should not function merely as instructional “content” about democracy but as a series of experiential learning activities that promote intergroup interaction, critical media literacy, and structured deliberative engagement. To illustrate the conceptual direction and interrelationships among these variables, a simplified Theoretical Framework Visualization is presented below.

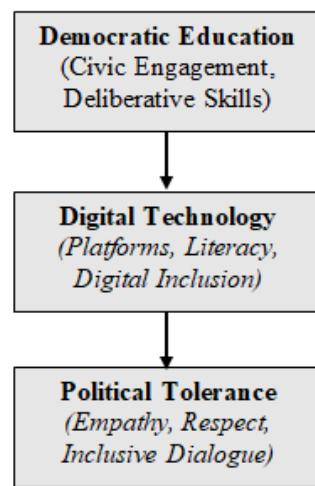


Figure 1: Visualization Conceptual Theoretical Framework

The relationship among Democratic Education, Digital Technologies, and Political Tolerance is inherently interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Democratic education instills core values such as participation, equality, and respect for diversity; digital technologies provide innovative platforms that enhance access to dialogue, collaboration, and civic engagement; while political tolerance ensures that these interactions are grounded in mutual understanding and respect. When effectively integrated, these elements form a transformative educational model in which students not only comprehend democratic principles but also apply them responsibly within digital environments, thereby cultivating inclusive and tolerant civic behavior across both online and offline contexts.

Method

Research Design

This study adopts a Research and Development (R&D) approach to design, develop, and validate a digital-based democratic education model aimed at strengthening students' political tolerance.

The R&D framework integrates qualitative and quantitative methods in a systematic and sequential manner to ensure both conceptual depth and empirical rigor (Gall et al., 2007; Sugiyono, 2018). Qualitative methods are employed in the preliminary stages to explore needs, contextual conditions, and stakeholder perspectives, while quantitative methods are used in the development and evaluation stages to assess the effectiveness of the proposed model through measurable outcomes. This integrative methodological design allows for a comprehensive understanding of the research problem and supports iterative refinement of the model based on empirical evidence (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

To strengthen methodological rigor, the research utilizes a sequential mixed-method design in which qualitative inquiry precedes quantitative measurement to ensure alignment between the development process and the evaluation of the democratic education model. The first stage uses qualitative methods—including interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis—to explore students' current political tolerance and to identify the pedagogical and digital factors needed for model development. The second stage applies a quantitative approach through pre-test and post-test instruments to examine the effectiveness of the model implementation. This design is appropriate because it allows qualitative findings to inform the development of the intervention model, which is subsequently tested quantitatively for its impact on students' political tolerance. The research questions therefore align: RQ1 is addressed through qualitative exploration, RQ2 through model construction based on qualitative results, and RQ3 through quantitative evaluation of model implementation.

The process was conducted in several phases: needs analysis, model design, expert validation, limited pilot testing, large-scale implementation, and evaluation of the model's effectiveness. The qualitative approach was employed to explore in depth the perceptions, experiences, and contextual understanding of digital democratic learning through interviews with key informants and document analysis. In contrast, the quantitative approach was utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of the digital-based democratic education model in improving political tolerance using pre-test and post-test instruments administered to 60 students. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify core patterns and themes, while quantitative data were examined using descriptive statistics and paired sample t-tests to determine significant differences. The integration of these approaches produced a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of the model's effectiveness in fostering political tolerance among students.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in, or preparing to enroll in, the Civic Education course at Universitas Baturaja, along with the lecturers responsible for delivering the course. A total of 60 undergraduate students participated in the trial phase of developing the digital-based democratic education model. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which is appropriate for development research because it enables the deliberate selection of individuals who meet specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. The criteria included: (1) actively participating in Civic Education learning activities, and (2) possessing basic digital literacy skills and access to digital learning tools required during the model implementation process.

In addition to the student participants, two Civic Education lecturers were involved as expert participants. Their selection applied criterion-based purposive sampling, based on academic competence, teaching experience, and prior involvement in designing digital learning materials. The lecturers acted as collaborative partners in validating the instructional content, supporting the implementation process, and providing continuous feedback for the refinement and improvement of the model.

Table 1

Characteristics of Research Participants/Informants

Participant designation	Frequency	Informants/Initials	Gender
Undergraduate Students (Sarjana/S1)	60	St1-St60	30 women and 30 men,
Lecturer of Civic Education	2	L1-LI2	1 Female Lecturer and 1 Male Lecturer

Data and Sources of Data

This study obtained data from two primary sources: qualitative data and quantitative data. Qualitative data were collected through observations and in-depth interviews during the implementation of the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model, which provided rich contextual information about students' experiences and perceptions related to digital democratic learning. Quantitative data were generated from a political tolerance questionnaire administered during the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model trials to measure changes in tolerance before and after the intervention.

1. Primary data consisted of qualitative sources (observations and in-depth interviews) and quantitative sources (political tolerance questionnaire and result records from the model implementation trials).

2. Secondary data, which consisted of curriculum documents, Civic Education course syllabi, findings from previous studies, and relevant literature on democratic education and instructional technology.

Table 2*Research Instrument on Political Tolerance and Digital-Based Democracy Education Model*

No	Research Focus	Indicators / Aspects Measured	Research Items / Interview Questions	Data Collection Techniques & Sources
1.	Political tolerance condition of students in the digital era	a. Respect for different political views. b. Openness to discuss with opposing views. c. Resistance to hate speech. d. Active participation in ethical political dialogue	- I respect peers who hold different political opinions. - I am willing to engage in discussions with those having different political choices. - I am not easily provoked by political comments on social media. - I participate in political dialogue in a polite and rational manner.	Questionnaire using Likert scale (1–5) and semi-structured interviews with students and lecturers
2	Development of the digital-based democracy education model (<i>Sahabat Demokrasi</i>)	a. Relevance of learning materials to students' political context b. Student engagement in digital learning c. Suitability of the digital platform (LMS) d. Ability to foster tolerant attitudes	- The materials presented are relevant to students' political experiences. - The digital forum encourages active student participation. - The platform is accessible and easy to use. - Activities in the LMS foster empathy toward differing views.	Expert validation (civic education lecturers and digital education experts), observation, and reflective interviews
3	Implementation and effectiveness of the <i>Sahabat Demokrasi</i> model in improving political tolerance	a. Openness to political differences b. Ability to conduct healthy political dialogue c. Caution in responding to digital provocation d. Empathy toward political opponents	- I have become more open to differing political views after using the digital model. - I can express political opinions politely in digital forums. - I am more cautious when responding to political issues on social media. - I try to understand the background of others' political perspectives.	Pretest–Posttest questionnaire (Likert 1–5), classroom observation, and reflective interviews with students and lecturers

Justification of Secondary Data Selection

The selection of secondary data in this study aims to establish a strong theoretical and contextual foundation for the development of a digital-based democratic education model. Curriculum and syllabus documents from Civic Education courses were analyzed to ensure alignment between national learning objectives and institutional policies. Furthermore, a review of previous studies was conducted to identify research gaps and to substantiate the model's novelty in strengthening political tolerance through digital learning. Relevant literature on democratic education and

educational technology was then utilized to formulate the model design, pedagogical framework, and validation procedures. Accordingly, the integration of these secondary data sources not only enhances theoretical rigor but also increases the practical relevance of the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model.

A summary of the data sources and their purposes is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Summary of Data Sources and Their Purposes

Type of Data	Sources		Purpose of Uses
Primary Data	- Observation of learning processes and student interactions	-	To obtain a real picture of the learning process and students' political tolerance attitudes
	- In-depth interviews with students and lecturers	-	To produce qualitative data
	- Political tolerance questionnaire	-	To assess responses to the implementation of the model
	- Records from model trials	-	
Secondary Data	- Curriculum documents and Civic Education course syllabi	-	To ensure the model's alignment with the existing curriculum
	- Previous research findings	-	To strengthen the theoretical foundation of the study
	- Literature on democratic education and instructional technology	-	To compare the research findings with previous studies

Research Procedure and Data Collection

For the purpose of this scientific article, this study adapts the 10 steps of Borg & Gall into five core stages that still represent the overall process of model development, namely:

1. **Needs Analysis:** This stage aimed to identify students' baseline level of political tolerance and their learning needs related to democratic education. Data were collected through a survey using a 5-point Likert scale and semi-structured interviews with selected student representatives. The results of the needs analysis served as the foundation for designing a relevant and context-based digital learning model.
2. **Model Development:** Based on the findings from the needs analysis, the researchers developed a prototype of the digital-based democratic education model utilizing an interactive digital platform to facilitate discussion, collaboration, and critical reflection. The initial product included a learning flow design, digital instructional materials, and collaborative democratic learning activities.
3. **Expert Validation:** The prototype was reviewed by experts in democratic education and instructional technology to evaluate feasibility, content relevance, pedagogical suitability,

and technological integration. Expert feedback was used to revise and refine the model before implementation.

4. Limited Trial: The revised model was then implemented with a small group of students to obtain initial feedback on clarity of instructions, usability of digital tools, and participant engagement in learning activities. Data were gathered through observation, questionnaires, and participant reflections to support further revision.
5. Large-Scale Implementation: The fully revised model was implemented with a larger group of students to evaluate its effectiveness in improving political tolerance and democratic participation. Effectiveness data were collected using pre-test and post-test measures, supported by student response evaluations, and analyzed to determine model outcomes and educational implications.

Figure 2 illustrates the research procedure grounded in the R&D model, illustrating each stage from the initial needs analysis through to the final evaluation and revision phase. The diagram provides a clear and systematic visualization of the research workflow, allowing readers to easily follow the sequential steps involved in designing, validating, and implementing the digital-based democratic education model.



Figure 2 *Research Procedure*

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study followed the Research and Development (R&D) framework and was aligned with each stage of the model development process. Qualitative data from document analysis, interviews, and observations were thematically analyzed to inform needs analysis, model design, and revision. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to evaluate changes in students' political tolerance before and after the implementation of the model. The findings from both data types were then integrated to support model refinement and to assess the effectiveness of the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model.

Validity and Reliability of the Study

To ensure rigorous validity and reliability, each research instrument was tested using different procedures appropriate to its methodological characteristics. The questionnaire underwent expert judgment validation by two specialists in civic and digital education, producing an average score of 4.45, indicating high validity, and its reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.87$) to confirm strong internal consistency. In contrast, the interview and observation guides were validated through peer debriefing and expert consultation, ensuring alignment with the theoretical constructs of democratic education.

Furthermore, trustworthiness in qualitative data was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability techniques. Triangulation was applied by comparing and cross-checking findings from interviews, observations, and questionnaire results, enabling qualitative interpretations to validate quantitative changes in political tolerance levels. This triangulation approach ensured that both data sets supported one another consistently, making the integration of qualitative and quantitative results methodologically sound and reinforcing the coherence and credibility of the study's conclusions.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented in alignment with the previously formulated research questions, encompassing three primary areas of focus. First, they describe the current state of students' political tolerance in the digital era, along with the associated challenges and opportunities. Second, they outline the development process of the digital-based democratic education model aimed at strengthening political tolerance. Third, they present the results of the model's implementation and evaluate its effectiveness within the learning environment at

Universitas Baturaja. The findings are organized systematically, beginning with descriptive results and followed by analytical interpretation, to provide a comprehensive and integrated understanding of the study's outcomes.

The Current Condition of Students' Political Tolerance in the Digital Era

Based on surveys and interviews involving 60 undergraduate students at Universitas Baturaja enrolled in, or planning to take, the Civic Education course, along with two lecturers from the same program, the results indicated that students' political tolerance levels fall within the moderate category. While most students expressed respect for differing political views, their willingness to engage in dialogue with individuals holding opposing perspectives remained limited. During interviews, several students admitted feeling hesitant to discuss political topics in digital environments, citing concerns about escalating conflicts or potential backlash from other online users.

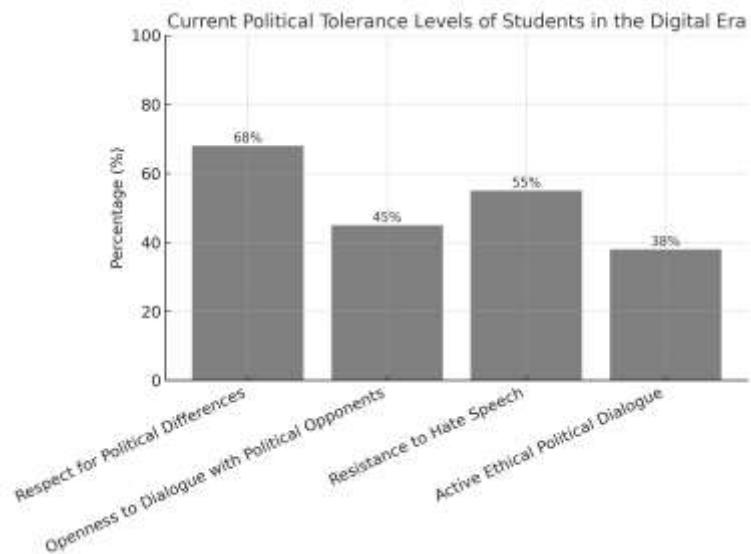
Quantitative data showed that students' political tolerance varied across several key dimensions: respect for differing political views scored 68% (medium category), openness to discussion with political opponents reached only 45% (low category), resistance to provocation by hate speech was 55% (medium category), and active participation in ethical political dialogue registered at 38% (low category). The two lecturers interviewed corroborated these findings, noting that students generally exhibit passivity when engaging with political topics, both in classroom discussions and on social media. This tendency was attributed to the pervasive influence of digital information flows that often contain provocative or polarizing content.

These findings highlight that while students possess a foundational awareness of the importance of political tolerance, they continue to need structured, digitally oriented learning interventions to further develop dialogic communication skills, enhance their capacity to critically evaluate information, and cultivate tolerant attitudes in political interactions within today's rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Table 4*The Current Condition of Students' Political Tolerance*

Aspect of Political Tolerance	Percentage (%)	Category	Interview Findings
Respecting differences in political views	68	Medium	Most students respect differences but remain passive in expressing opinions
Openness to engage in discussions with political opponents	45	Low	Reluctant to engage in discussions due to fear of conflict
Resistance to being provoked by hate speech	55	Medium	Able to restrain themselves, but sometimes get carried away emotionally
Active participation in ethical political dialogue	38	Low	Rarely involved in digital forums related to politics
Overall average	51.5	Medium	Requires digital-based learning intervention to enhance tolerance attitudes

These findings underscore the need for more systematic educational interventions to strengthen students' awareness, dialogical competencies, and tolerant dispositions, particularly in the context of political interactions within digital environments. Figure 5, which illustrates the current state of students' political tolerance in the digital era, shows that overall tolerance remains at a moderate level, with the dimension of "active political dialogue" identified as the weakest area requiring targeted pedagogical attention.

**Figure 5 Visualization of the Condition of Student Political Tolerance**

Interviews revealed that while most students demonstrate a positive conceptual understanding of tolerance, they have yet to consistently apply this understanding in their digital interactions. One participant stated:

Table 5.

Qualitative Interview Findings: Current Condition of Students' Political Tolerance in the Digital Era at Baturaja University

No	Informant	Interview Excerpts (Verbatim)	Thematic Interpretation
1	M1 (Student)	"I respect friends with different political views, but I rarely join discussions on social media because I'm afraid it will lead to arguments" (August 11, 2025).	Students appreciate diversity but lack the confidence to engage in open digital discussions.
2	M3 (Student)	"When there's a political post, I prefer to stay silent. Even close friends can get offended if we disagree" (August 11, 2025).	A passive attitude emerges due to fear of digital conflict.
3	D1 (Lecturer)	"Students actually understand tolerance, but they lack the skills to engage in respectful political dialogue, especially online" (August 11, 2025).	Lecturers emphasize the need for systematic learning to foster ethical political dialogue skills.

These findings indicate that although students possess a solid conceptual grasp of tolerance, their practical application in digital contexts remains limited. This observation aligns with quantitative results, which show that the "active political dialogue" dimension received the lowest score among all measured aspects.

Can a Digital-Based Democracy Education Model Be Developed to Enhance Students' Political Tolerance

The digital-based democracy education model, Sahabat Demokrasi, was developed through a comprehensive process that included a literature review, field needs analysis, and expert validation. The model integrates contextual democratic content, interactive digital media, and a participatory pedagogical approach designed to enhance students' political tolerance in the digital era. It is implemented through a website-based Learning Management System (LMS) featuring discussion forums, reflective quizzes, digital election simulations, and interactive video-based case studies. Figure 6 provides an overview of the Sahabat Demokrasi model interface.

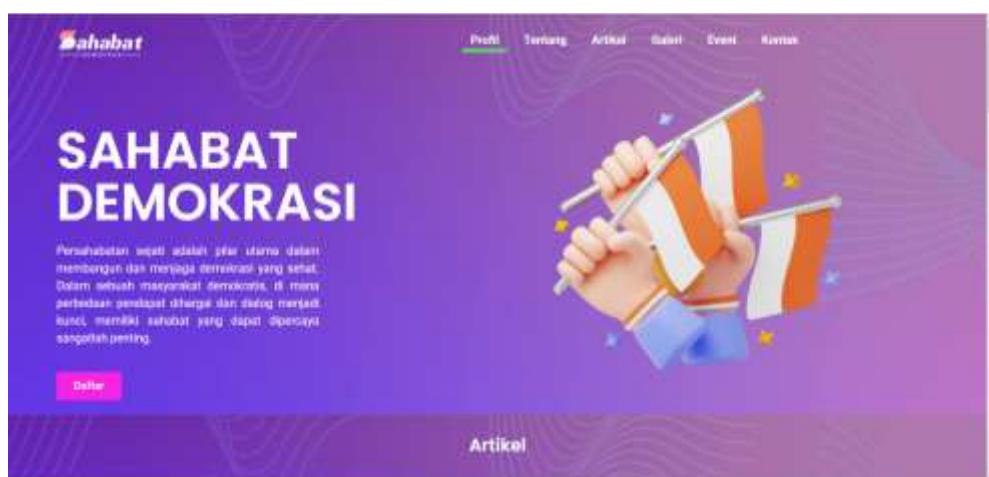




Figure 6 *Democracy Friend Model View*

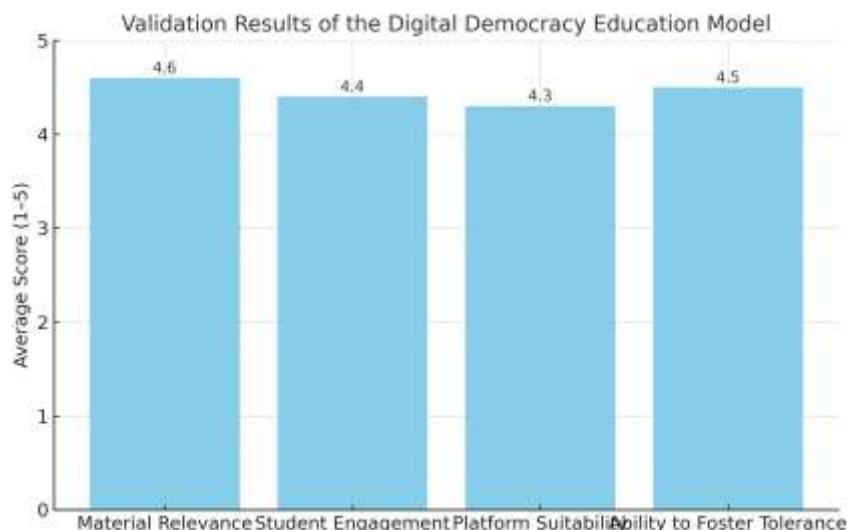
The model was validated by two expert lecturers and achieved an average score of 4.45, classified as “very valid.” The evaluation covered content relevance, student engagement, digital platform suitability, and the model’s effectiveness in fostering tolerant attitudes. Validation was conducted by aligning the model with the existing Civic Education curriculum, including the syllabus, course learning outcomes, and weekly learning plans that emphasize democratic values and political tolerance. The model operationally integrates digital literacy components—such as fact-checking, critical evaluation of online political information, ethical communication, and responsible social media use—into structured learning activities to strengthen democratic civic engagement. Expert interviews confirmed that the platform provides a safe and structured discussion environment, enabling students to express political views freely without fear of personal attacks. The model aligns with the academic context of Civic Education and is implemented through project-based digital learning, online debates, and collaborative reflection activities, demonstrating its practical relevance beyond theoretical claims.

Furthermore, students participating in the initial trial reported that the inclusion of digital election simulations and video-based case studies made the learning experience more engaging and realistic. The reflective quiz feature effectively encouraged students to critically examine their attitudes toward current political issues, while the discussion forum promoted ethical and respectful interactions among individuals with diverse viewpoints.

Table 6*Validation Results of the Digital-Based Democracy Education Model*

Evaluation Component	Mean Score (1-5)	Category	Interview Notes
Content relevance	4.6	Very Valid	The content is relevant to the political context of students in the digital era
Student engagement	4.4	Very Valid	Students became more active in participating in digital forums
Suitability of the digital platform	4.3	Very Valid	The LMS is easily accessible via mobile devices and laptops
Ability to foster tolerant attitudes	4.5	Very Valid	Able to enhance empathy and openness toward differences
Overall average	4.45	Very Valid	Feasible to be implemented in Civic Education learning

These findings indicate that the model is both content-wise feasible and technically as well as pedagogically effective in supporting democracy education among university students. Figure 7 illustrates the validation results of the digital-based democracy education model, showing that it is classified as highly valid, with an average score exceeding 4.4 on a 1-5 scale.

**Figure 7 Visualisasi Hasil Validasi Model Pendidikan Demokrasi Berbasis Digital**

Validation and pilot testing confirmed that the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model effectively cultivates a safe and reflective learning environment. One validator remarked.

Table 7*Qualitative Interview Findings: Development of the Digital Democracy Education Model (Sahabat Demokrasi)*

No	Informant	Interview Excerpts (Verbatim)	Thematic Interpretation
1	D2 (Expert Validator)	“This model is good because it provides a safe and structured discussion space, making students more comfortable expressing their opinions” (August 12, 2025).	Expert validation confirms the model supports safe and free expression.
2	M5 (Trial Student)	“The digital election simulation is interesting; it helped me evaluate candidates rationally without getting emotional” (August 12, 2025).	The model enhances student engagement and reflective awareness.
3	M7 (Trial Student)	“Discussions on the platform were calmer since there was a moderator, so no one attacked others personally” (August 12, 2025).	The LMS effectively fosters ethical and tolerant political interaction.

These perspectives closely align with the quantitative validation results, which yielded an average score of 4.45, categorized as “very valid” across all components. Both students and lecturers emphasized the model’s effectiveness in promoting active participation and providing a safe digital space for open discussion. Overall, the findings confirm that the model successfully fosters tolerance-building behaviors within online learning environments.

Model Implementation for Improving University Students’ Political Tolerance

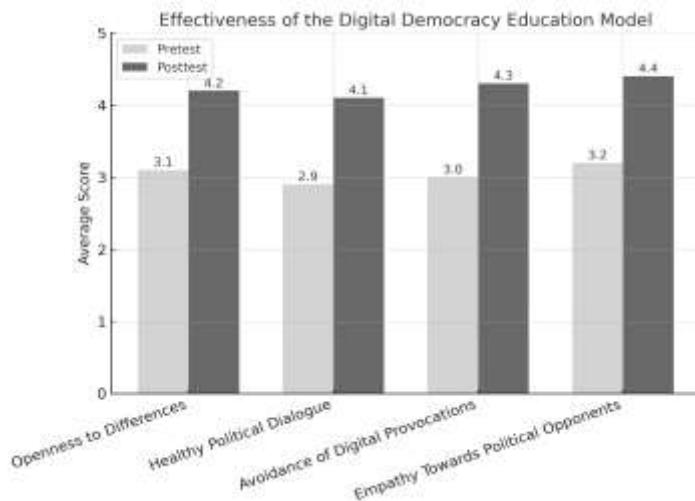
The implementation of the digital-based democracy education model *Sahabat Demokrasi* was conducted in two phases: an initial small-group trial with six students, followed by a broader application involving fifteen students and two lecturers. Its effectiveness was evaluated through pretest and posttest instruments measuring four key indicators of political tolerance. The analysis revealed significant improvements across all indicators following the model’s implementation.

For the indicator of openness to differences, the mean score increased from 3.1 to 4.2; the ability to engage in constructive political dialogue improved from 2.9 to 4.1; the tendency to resist digital provocation rose from 3.0 to 4.3; and empathy toward political opponents increased from 3.2 to 4.4. Interview data revealed that students found the LMS discussion forums helpful for practicing polite expression of opinions and for listening to opposing views without reacting negatively. Lecturers likewise observed that students showed increased openness in discussions, both in the classroom and on social media. Several students who were initially passive became more confident in asking critical questions and verifying information before sharing it online. These findings indicate that the model is effective not only in enhancing conceptual understanding but also in shaping concrete behaviors that reflect political tolerance.

Table 8*Effectiveness of the Digital-Based Democracy Education Model*

Political Tolerance Indicator	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Change Category	Interview Findings
Openness to differences	3.1	4.2	Increased ($t = 6.87$)	Students began to be more open in accepting different viewpoints
Ability to engage in healthy dialogue	2.9	4.1	Increased ($t = 7.12$)	Discussions in the LMS helped them express opinions politely
Ability to avoid digital provocation	3.0	4.3	Increased ($Z = -4.21$)	More cautious in responding to political issues on social media
Empathy toward political opponents	3.2	4.4	Increased ($t = 7.45$)	Able to understand the background of differing perspectives
Overall Mean	3.05	4.25	Significantly Increased	Positive changes were evident in students' tolerant attitudes and behaviors

The results show that the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model effectively enhances students' understanding, awareness, and skills in responding to political dynamics with tolerance and responsibility in the digital era. Figure 8 illustrates the model's effectiveness, demonstrating significant improvement across all indicators of political tolerance after its implementation in learning activities.

**Figure 8 Visualization of the Effectiveness Results of the Democracy Friend Model**

Following the implementation of the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model, students exhibited a clear improvement in their ability to accept differing political opinions. One participant remarked:

Table 9*Qualitative Interview Findings: Implementation of the Model in Enhancing Political Tolerance*

No	Informant	Interview Excerpts (Verbatim)	Thematic Interpretation
1	M10 (Implementation Student)	“After joining this program, I became more open to listening to friends with different political choices” (August 13, 2025).	Increased openness toward diverse political perspectives.
2	M12 (Implementation Student)	“Now I’m more careful when reading political news on social media; I verify it before commenting” (August 13, 2025).	The model encourages reflective behavior and avoidance of digital provocation.
3	D1 (Course Lecturer)	“Students are now more confident in discussions and less easily provoked by political issues. That’s a visible improvement” (August 13, 2025).	Lecturer confirms significant behavioral improvements in political tolerance.

These qualitative findings align with the quantitative results, which revealed an increase in political tolerance scores from 3.05 to 4.25, demonstrating a significant improvement following the model’s implementation.

Discussion

This discussion elaborates on the key findings of the study, which aimed to assess students’ political tolerance in the digital era, develop a digital-based democracy education model, and evaluate its effectiveness in fostering tolerant attitudes within academic contexts. The explanation follows a logical sequence, beginning with an overview of students’ initial tolerance levels based on survey and interview data, followed by the design of the instructional model, and concluding with implementation results that show notable improvements in dialogical skills, openness to differences, and constructive management of political interactions in digital spaces. The discussion is supported by recent and relevant studies, providing a solid theoretical and empirical basis for the findings.

The Current State of Students’ Political Tolerance in the Digital Era

The initial survey revealed that political tolerance among Universitas Baturaja students remains at a moderate level, with an average score of 51.5%. This indicates that although students possess the potential for tolerance, it has not yet fully developed. While they tend to respect political diversity, many remain hesitant to engage in dialogue and are vulnerable to digital provocations, reflecting broader patterns among the digital generation—highly exposed to rapid information flows but lacking adequate political digital literacy.

As noted by Claassen and Gibson (2019), political tolerance entails accepting the existence of opposing political views, even when those views conflict with one's own. In the digital era, this tolerance is tested not only in direct interactions but also on social media platforms that often exacerbate polarization (Safitri et al., 2025). Persily et al. (2020) further show that social media can reinforce political biases when not supported by adequate political literacy education. These insights underscore the urgent need for structured educational initiatives to strengthen students' critical thinking and empathy within digital environments.

Research also shows that emotional intelligence significantly contributes to the development of tolerance. Harahap (2022) found that individuals with higher levels of empathy and social competence tend to display greater tolerance toward political differences. However, without structured educational interventions, this potential often remains underdeveloped (Knowles et al., 2023). Therefore, the findings highlight the importance of democracy education models that intentionally integrate digital literacy, empathy, and democratic values to better prepare students for constructive engagement with political diversity in the digital era.

Digital-Based Democracy Education Model to Enhance Students' Political Tolerance

The *Sahabat Demokrasi* model was developed in response to the moderate level of political tolerance observed among students. This digital-based model aims to foster political tolerance through interactive, reflective, and contextually relevant learning experiences at Universitas Baturaja, South Sumatra. Unlike traditional teaching methods, it employs a digital platform featuring discussion forums, educational videos, quizzes, and debate simulations designed to encourage critical thinking and openness.

Constructivist learning theory forms the core foundation of this model. Piaget and Vygotsky emphasize that meaningful learning takes place when learners actively construct knowledge through social interaction and real-life experiences (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Within this framework, digital technology functions not merely as a medium but as an interactive space for exploring and practicing democratic values (Fischli & Muldoon, 2024; Japar et al., 2023).

The model thus encourages students to engage in dialogue and digital learning experiences that connect directly to their everyday lives. The model was validated by experts, achieving an average score of 4.45 on a 1–5 scale, indicating high validity in terms of content, media, and pedagogical approach. These results align with the findings of Farikiansyah et al. (2024), which demonstrate that digital-based learning models enhance student engagement and understanding of social and

political issues when designed interactively and contextually. Thus, the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model is deemed appropriate for addressing the challenges of civic education in the digital era.

It is essential to highlight that the model also adopts a value-based educational approach. As Tilaar (2004) emphasizes, value-oriented education plays a crucial role in shaping a nation's democratic character. Accordingly, the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model integrates not only political knowledge but also the internalization of core values such as equality, justice, and empathy in daily life.

Model Implementation for Improving University Students' Political Tolerance

The *Sahabat Demokrasi* model was implemented in two trial stages: a small-group trial followed by a field trial. During the small-group stage, students engaged in several digitally designed interactive learning sessions. Their feedback was then used to refine the model before broader application, ensuring that it was not only theoretically robust but also responsive to students' learning needs and habits.

The effectiveness test results demonstrated a significant improvement in students' political tolerance attitudes, with the average score increasing from 3.05 in the pretest to 4.25 in the posttest. This improvement indicates that after participating in learning through the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model, students became more open to differences, more capable of engaging in constructive political dialogue, and more resistant to political provocation in digital environments. These findings demonstrate that a well-designed digital learning approach can positively influence students' affective development (Smith & Storrs, 2023). These findings are supported by Hasanudin (2025), who found that digital political simulation-based learning enhances students' empathy and discussion skills when addressing controversial issues. Moreover, models that integrate values and technology have been shown to effectively strengthen student engagement in political learning processes (Supriyanto et al., 2020).

The effectiveness of the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model is also evident in students' increased participation and reflection. Many who were initially passive in political discussions developed greater confidence in expressing their opinions logically and respectfully on digital platforms. This outcome reflects the model's success in transforming not only students' knowledge but also their attitudes and habits in democratic engagement. Overall, the implementation of the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model has had a measurable impact on improving students' political tolerance. This success creates opportunities for further development, including replication in other universities with similar contexts, to strengthen digital-based democracy education on a broader national scale.

The findings of this study align with and extend prior research in digital civic education. Consistent with the work of Fuchs (2022) and Smith and Storrs (2023), the results demonstrate that digital platforms can serve not only as learning media but also as democratic spaces that promote reflection, dialogue, and tolerance among students. This study advances the discourse by integrating these digital components into a systematically validated educational model, *Sahabat Demokrasi*, which has been empirically tested for its effectiveness in enhancing political tolerance. Moreover, the results correspond with the findings of Farikiansyah et al. (2024) and Hasanudin (2025), who reported positive effects of interactive civic learning on students' empathy and democratic engagement. Thus, this study contributes by offering empirical evidence and a replicable framework for implementing digital-based democracy education in higher education, particularly within emerging democratic societies such as Indonesia.

Furthermore, the development of the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model was directly grounded in empirical findings obtained from the needs analysis stage, where data revealed students' moderate tolerance level, limited dialogical skills, and vulnerability to digital polarization. These results became the basis for designing key components of the model—including interactive discussion forums, debate simulations, reflective activities, and digital literacy materials—ensuring that each learning feature specifically addressed the problems identified in the initial survey and interview data. Thus, the structure and content of the model did not emerge abstractly, but were systematically constructed to respond to the real challenges experienced by students in developing political tolerance within digital learning environments.

Conclusion

The survey and interview results reveal that political tolerance among Baturaja University students in the digital era remains at a moderate level, with an average score of 51.5%. Although students generally respect differing political views, many lack the skills needed for constructive dialogue, especially in digital environments often characterized by misinformation and provocation. This limitation leads to low levels of active participation in meaningful political discussions, both in classrooms and on social media. These findings highlight the urgent need for structured educational interventions to strengthen critical thinking, dialogue competence, and the ability to manage differences with discernment.

This study developed a digital democracy education model, *Sahabat Demokrasi*, aimed at enhancing students' political tolerance. The model integrates online discussion forums, digital election simulations, reflective quizzes, and video-based case studies accessible through a web-based LMS platform. Expert validation confirmed its high feasibility, with an average score of 4.45 across dimensions including material relevance, student engagement, platform suitability, and the capacity to foster tolerant attitudes. The model's primary strength lies in its integration of theory and practice through technology, enabling students to learn in a flexible, safe, and systematic environment.

The implementation of the *Sahabat Demokrasi* model proved highly effective in significantly improving students' political tolerance. All indicators showed notable progress, including openness to differences, the ability to engage in constructive dialogue, resistance to digital provocation, and empathy toward political opponents. Students became more active, respectful, and evidence-based in expressing political opinions, both in academic contexts and digital spaces. This success demonstrates that *Sahabat Demokrasi* serves as a relevant and impactful learning strategy in the digital era for cultivating citizens who are critical, ethical, and inclusive.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered. The implementation of the R&D design in a single institution limits the generalizability of the findings. Data collection relied on short-term surveys and interviews, which restrict the assessment of long-term changes in political tolerance. The evaluation focused primarily on attitudinal outcomes measured through pretest–posttest scores, without examining students' behavioral practices in real political contexts. In addition, variations in students' technological readiness and the limited number of expert validators may have influenced the results. Future research should involve broader institutional contexts, longer implementation periods, behavioral-based assessments, and a wider range of expert perspectives to strengthen the robustness of the findings.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported through a collaborative applied research program between Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ) and Universitas Baturaja (UNBARA), funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemendiktisaintek). The authors

express their sincere appreciation to all parties who contributed to this study, including those who provided academic input, technical assistance, and institutional support throughout the research process.

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