

# Exploring School-Based Civic Engagement for Enhancing Life Satisfaction in the *Baduy* Indigenous Community

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## ARTICLE INFO

### *Keywords:*

civic engagement;  
indigenous education;  
life satisfaction;  
*Baduy* community

### *Article history:*

Received 2025-05-31

Revised 2025-06-10

Accepted 2025-12-19

## ABSTRACT

Life satisfaction is a critical indicator of democratic governance, reflecting citizens' well-being and their active participation in societal development. However, prior studies often emphasize government responsibility, neglecting the role of citizen-driven initiatives—particularly in Indigenous contexts such as the *Baduy* community in Indonesia. This study adopts a narrative literature review method to examine the potential of school-based civic engagement in enhancing life satisfaction among the *Baduy* people. Relevant peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2024 were sourced from Scopus, ScienceDirect, DOAJ, and Google Scholar. The selection process involved screening, eligibility assessment, and thematic synthesis of 27 studies focused on civic engagement, life satisfaction, and Indigenous well-being. The findings suggest that civic engagement, facilitated through educational institutions, fosters community participation, social cohesion, and cultural preservation. In Indigenous contexts, such as the *Baduy* community—renowned for their local wisdom, ecological values, and self-reliance—civic practices aligned with traditional norms can enhance subjective well-being. Engagement models involving collaborative education, service learning, and institutional partnerships emerged as promising strategies. School-based civic engagement offers a culturally responsive and sustainable alternative to state-centric development approaches. For the *Baduy*, integrating civic values into education may strengthen communal identity while promoting life satisfaction. These insights underscore the need for inclusive civic education models tailored to Indigenous contexts, with implications for policymakers, educators, and future research.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Life satisfaction is a central construct in well-being research and is frequently associated with happiness. Unlike momentary emotional states, life satisfaction refers to an individual's reflective evaluation of their overall life quality based on personal values, expectations, and social contexts (Coleman et al., 2019; Krys et al., 2019). It encompasses how individuals assess whether their life circumstances align with what they deem important or desirable (Becchetti et al., 2016; Embree & Yueh-Feng Lu, 2017). Scholars widely acknowledge that life satisfaction is influenced by both personal and social factors, including relationships, health, environment, and cultural norms, which interact within broader societal structures (Wray-Lake et al., 2019).

Despite the increasing attention to life satisfaction in contemporary research, studies have predominantly focused on urban and modern populations. As a result, the experiences and perceptions of Indigenous communities remain significantly underrepresented. This gap limits the inclusivity and cross-cultural applicability of well-being theories and models (Bang et al., 2023). Understanding life satisfaction from the perspective of Indigenous groups is vital, as their conceptions of well-being often differ from those found in Western frameworks, emphasizing collective harmony, cultural continuity, and ecological balance rather than material prosperity or individual achievements.

In Indonesia, one of the most recognized Indigenous communities is the Baduy people, residing in Kanekes Village, Lebak Regency, Banten Province. The Baduy community, adherents of the traditional Sunda Wiwitan belief system, exemplifies a way of life grounded in simplicity, self-reliance, and ecological stewardship. Their strict adherence to customary law (*pikukuh*), limited interaction with external influences, and commitment to preserving nature and cultural traditions represent a unique socio-cultural system that resists mainstream modernization pressures (Nurfalah et al., 2023). Despite minimal access to formal infrastructure and modern public services, the Baduy maintain a strong sense of identity, social cohesion, and overall well-being.

A key feature of Baduy society is its culturally embedded form of civic participation. One of the most symbolic examples is the ritual of *seba*, an annual pilgrimage to deliver agricultural produce to government representatives without seeking any material reward. This practice reflects deep-rooted civic responsibility and a moral commitment to social harmony, reciprocity, and loyalty to the state (Aprianti et al., 2024). Such community rituals, though not framed within modern democratic terminology, embody forms of civic engagement that may contribute to the community's life satisfaction. These practices challenge conventional understandings of civic participation as formal political activity, highlighting alternative, culturally specific modes of engagement.

Civic engagement generally refers to active involvement in communal and societal affairs intended to promote the common good. It encompasses a range of activities, including volunteering, collective decision-making, environmental activism, and participation in local governance (Gusmadi, 2018). In Western democratic contexts, civic engagement is often institutionalized through electoral processes, civil society organizations, and policy advocacy. However, among Indigenous groups such as the Baduy, civic engagement is manifested through culturally embedded practices, traditional leadership structures, and customary laws. These modes of participation are more informal, spiritually guided, and rooted in communal obligations rather than legal frameworks or political ideologies.

This study explores civic engagement as a lens to better understand life satisfaction in Indigenous settings, with a particular focus on the Baduy community. It examines how community involvement—especially through school-based civic initiatives—can enhance subjective well-being without undermining traditional values. As formal education gradually expands into Indigenous areas, there is growing interest in how schools might serve as platforms for fostering civic consciousness while respecting cultural autonomy. In the context of the Baduy, educational engagement has the potential to bridge traditional knowledge systems with participatory values that support social resilience and life satisfaction.

Therefore, the primary aim of this research is to investigate the potential of civic engagement—particularly when integrated into educational settings—to enhance life satisfaction within the Baduy community. The study seeks to identify which forms of participation are most aligned with Baduy cultural values, how these practices sustain social harmony, and in what ways they contribute to broader understandings of happiness in Indigenous contexts. By doing so, this research contributes to a more inclusive and culturally sensitive framework for understanding well-being, moving beyond dominant Western paradigms and recognizing the significance of localized, collective, and culturally embedded civic practices.

## 2. METHODS

This study utilized a narrative literature review to explore the relationship between civic engagement and life satisfaction in Indigenous communities, with a specific focus on the Baduy people of Indonesia. The narrative review approach was chosen to allow for a comprehensive and interpretive synthesis of existing literature across diverse cultural and contextual settings. This method integrates qualitative analysis to identify key concepts, recurring themes, and conceptual relationships, thereby generating theoretical insights grounded in existing empirical and conceptual studies.

### 2.1 Data Sources and Search Strategy

Relevant literature was systematically gathered from several academic databases, including Scopus, ScienceDirect, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). To ensure contextual relevance and the inclusion of region-specific insights, additional references were obtained through Google Scholar, particularly studies published in accredited Indonesian journals.

### 2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The following inclusion criteria were applied:

1. Articles published between 2015 and 2024;
2. Peer-reviewed journal publications;
3. Studies focused on civic engagement, life satisfaction, or Indigenous well-being;
4. Articles written in either English or Indonesian.

The exclusion criteria included:

1. Non-academic sources such as news articles, opinion pieces, and theses;
2. Publications not directly related to civic engagement or life satisfaction;
3. Studies lacking empirical grounding or conceptual relevance to Indigenous populations.

### 2.3 Selection Process

The literature selection process was conducted in three stages:

1. Identification – Retrieval of 112 articles based on keywords and relevance from selected databases;
2. Screening – Elimination of duplicates and removal of titles not aligned with the study's focus, resulting in 78 articles;
3. Eligibility and Inclusion – Full-text reviews were conducted on 41 articles, and a final set of 27 studies were selected for thematic synthesis based on their alignment with the research objectives.

A summary of this selection process is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Summary of Literature Review Process**

Stage	Description	Number of Articles
Identification	Articles retrieved from Scopus, ScienceDirect, DOAJ, Google Scholar	112
Screening	Duplicates and irrelevant titles removed	78
Eligibility	Full-text assessed for relevance to civic engagement and life satisfaction	41
Inclusion	Final studies included in the synthesis	27

## 2.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, which involved systematic reading, coding, and classification of key themes across the selected studies. The analysis followed these steps:

1. Data reduction: condensing and organizing information based on relevance;
2. Thematic synthesis: identifying and clustering recurring patterns related to civic engagement and well-being;
3. Interpretation: drawing conceptual insights and articulating implications for Indigenous contexts.

Comparative analysis was also conducted to examine how civic engagement influences life satisfaction in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, highlighting cultural and contextual variations. To ensure methodological transparency and theoretical coherence, the synthesis process was guided by best practices in qualitative literature review, as outlined by Ramdhani and Setiawan (2023). The final manuscript was developed to reflect these findings in a cohesive narrative that informs both academic discourse and practical applications.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings derived from the narrative literature review, organized into thematic categories that reflect the multifaceted relationship between civic engagement and life satisfaction in Indigenous communities, particularly the Baduy people of Indonesia. The review synthesizes insights from cross-cultural studies, educational research, and Indigenous knowledge systems to explore how both individual and institutional civic practices influence subjective well-being. It begins with an examination of how life satisfaction is conceptualized in Indigenous contexts, followed by discussions on the roles of education, experiential learning, and institutional collaboration. The section also highlights the importance of cultural embeddedness in sustaining civic identity and ends with implications for policy, education, and future research.

### 3.1. Life Satisfaction in Indigenous Contexts

Recent literature highlights the multifaceted nature of life satisfaction, emphasizing that it cannot be fully understood through material or economic indicators alone. Especially within Indigenous communities, life satisfaction is often constructed through cultural, spiritual, and relational dimensions rather than financial prosperity. Rather than measuring happiness through wealth accumulation or consumption, many Indigenous societies interpret well-being through connections to family, nature, tradition, and communal living. Reyes-García et al. (2021) provide compelling evidence of this in a cross-cultural comparative study involving the Baka people of Cameroon, the Punan of Indonesian Borneo, and the Tsimane of Bolivia. Their findings reveal that in all three groups, subjective well-being was primarily shaped by health, interpersonal relationships, and cultural cohesion. Material wealth, including income or personal possessions, had minimal impact on how individuals perceived their

quality of life. These insights affirm the need to approach life satisfaction through culturally sensitive frameworks that acknowledge the centrality of non-material values.

A particularly illustrative example of this is found in the Baduy community of Indonesia, one of the most prominent Indigenous groups in Southeast Asia. Deeply committed to the traditional Sunda Wiwitan belief system, the Baduy uphold a lifestyle centered on ecological balance, self-reliance, and spiritual discipline. Although their interaction with formal state institutions and modern infrastructure remains limited, the Baduy maintain strong internal systems of governance and social order. Their annual *seba* ritual—where representatives travel to offer harvests to government officials without expecting compensation—symbolizes a form of civic participation rooted in humility, reciprocity, and cultural tradition (Aprianti et al., 2024).

Such practices demonstrate how civic engagement can take culturally specific forms that differ markedly from Western paradigms focused on institutional political participation. Rather than diminishing civic responsibility, these Indigenous models enrich our understanding of how community involvement, ritual practice, and spiritual beliefs intersect to sustain collective well-being. Consequently, policy frameworks aimed at improving Indigenous life satisfaction must avoid one-size-fits-all approaches and instead recognize the legitimacy of local customs. Supporting these culturally embedded practices not only affirms Indigenous identity but also enhances community resilience and happiness. Acknowledging and valuing these alternative expressions of civic life is critical for building inclusive and contextually relevant well-being strategies.

### 3.2. Education as a Vehicle for Civic Engagement

Education holds a central role in cultivating civic engagement across both individual and institutional dimensions. Beyond its function as a vehicle for academic instruction, education serves as a vital platform for shaping civic identity, promoting social responsibility, and nurturing democratic participation. Ekman and Amnå (2012) conceptualize civic engagement as encompassing social, systemic, and psychological dimensions, emphasizing the critical role of education in developing civic competence. Higher education institutions, in particular, have been found to enhance students' understanding of civic duties and foster a deeper sense of connectedness to society (Powers & Webster, 2023). Through structured curricula, extracurricular activities, and community involvement, educational settings can empower learners to engage actively in their communities and contribute to public life.

Historically, education systems have functioned as intermediaries between citizens and the state. The British education system, for instance, transformed over time from being under religious and aristocratic control to a state-driven instrument of social mobility, underscoring bureaucratic norms and meritocratic ideals (Egerton, 2002; Fatherly et al., 2020). Today, educational institutions increasingly emphasize their civic mission by promoting democratic values and public participation (Witschge & van de Werfhorst, 2020). These efforts reflect a global recognition of the school as a space for civic learning and social development.

In Indigenous contexts, such as the Baduy community in Indonesia, the integration of civic education must be approached with cultural sensitivity and respect for traditional values. Education can act as a bridge between Indigenous wisdom and modern civic competencies, provided it is contextually adapted. Programs emphasizing environmental stewardship, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and inclusive dialogue are well-aligned with Baduy cultural principles. Such initiatives not only support civic learning but also reinforce the community's ecological ethics and social harmony.

Ardoin, Bowers, and Gaillard (2023) argue that when environmental citizenship education is tailored to local traditions, it can simultaneously advance sustainability and civic participation. In the Baduy context, this could take the form of school-based ecological projects, youth-led cultural initiatives, or the integration of Indigenous ecological knowledge into the curriculum. These culturally grounded approaches offer more than academic value—they help sustain civic identity, promote

intergenerational knowledge transfer, and enhance life satisfaction through meaningful community engagement.

### ***3.3. Individual Civic Engagement and Experiential Learning***

While institutional approaches to civic engagement are essential, increasing attention has been given to the role of individual participation—particularly among youth—in shaping civic outcomes. Many young people today demonstrate a strong interest in contributing to their communities through volunteerism and grassroots initiatives, yet they often exhibit limited involvement in formal political processes such as voting, attending public hearings, or engaging with governmental institutions (Ekman & Amnå, 2012). This observed gap points to a critical need to broaden the definition of civic engagement to include alternative, informal, and culturally grounded forms of participation that are more reflective of young people's realities and motivations.

Educational interventions such as service-learning and experiential education have emerged as promising methods for addressing this challenge. These pedagogical strategies engage students directly in community-based activities that encourage reflection, empathy, and social awareness. By participating in real-world problem-solving and collaborative projects, learners not only develop critical thinking and leadership skills but also strengthen their connection to civic life (Faith & Prieto-Martin, 2016; Valenti, D'Amato, & Rossi, 2023). Moreover, such experiences are linked to greater psychological well-being and a sense of belonging, reinforcing both individual growth and community cohesion.

In Indigenous contexts like the Baduy community of Indonesia, experiential and participatory learning aligns closely with cultural practices that emphasize collective responsibility, ecological stewardship, and respect for ancestral knowledge. For instance, engaging students in community gardening, traditional handcrafts, or cultural documentation projects can serve a dual function: preserving cultural identity while fostering civic consciousness. These activities create a sense of purpose and intergenerational continuity that supports both education and well-being.

Zarembo and Martin (2024) emphasize the importance of dialogic learning—an approach that promotes open dialogue and mutual understanding across cultural and generational lines. In the Baduy setting, this could be implemented through intergenerational storytelling circles, youth-led environmental campaigns, or collaborative mapping of sacred spaces. Such initiatives promote civic engagement not through formal institutions, but through lived experience, cultural immersion, and meaningful relationships.

Ultimately, individual civic engagement, when nurtured through culturally responsive and experiential methods, has the power to enrich education, sustain Indigenous heritage, and enhance community resilience in ways that formal civic channels often overlook.

### ***3.4. Institutional Civic Engagement and School-Community Collaboration***

Institutional civic engagement involves collaborative efforts between educational institutions and community stakeholders. Organizations such as the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) have long promoted partnerships that align education with democratic renewal (Chu & Shen, 2017; Levine et al., 2006).

Empirical studies support the notion that schools acting as democratic institutions foster stronger community relationships and more sustainable development outcomes (Guillaume, Morin, & Taylor, 2015; Encina & Berger, 2021). These institutions can serve as hubs for participatory governance, public research, and civic learning.

For the Baduy community, school-based civic engagement could offer a culturally appropriate model for enhancing life satisfaction. Educational institutions can act as mediators that facilitate interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities while safeguarding local autonomy.

Possible initiatives include collaborative curriculum development, student-led conservation projects, and cross-cultural exchanges that honor Indigenous perspectives.

Babey and Wolstein (2018) emphasize that institutional partnerships grounded in mutual respect and shared goals are most effective in promoting long-term civic engagement. In the Baduy context, such partnerships could involve universities working with local leaders to design context-specific civic education modules or conduct participatory action research focused on cultural preservation and community resilience.

### ***3.5. The Role of Culture in Sustaining Civic Identity and Well-Being***

A growing body of literature emphasizes the essential role of culture in shaping both civic identity and subjective well-being, particularly within Indigenous communities. Culture is not merely a backdrop to civic life in these contexts but serves as a core framework through which social interaction, moral obligation, and environmental stewardship are understood and enacted. Civic engagement initiatives, therefore, must be embedded within and responsive to the unique cultural landscapes they aim to support (Bang, Lee, & Park, 2023).

In the Baduy community of Indonesia, culture is deeply interwoven with spiritual beliefs, ecological values, and communal responsibility. Their traditional worldview, rooted in the Sunda Wiwitan belief system, guides every aspect of life, including forms of civic participation. A powerful example is the annual seba ritual, where Baduy representatives deliver agricultural offerings to government officials without seeking material reward. This act is not only spiritual in nature but also reflects key civic values such as reciprocity, respect for authority, and humility (Aprianti, Suparmini, & Setyono, 2024). Such practices serve to strengthen social bonds, uphold collective identity, and maintain harmony between the community and external institutions.

These culturally embedded expressions of civic engagement challenge dominant Western paradigms, which often emphasize individual autonomy, legalistic participation, and institutionalized forms of activism. While these models are valuable in democratic societies, they may overlook or misinterpret the ways in which Indigenous groups enact civic responsibility through ritual, tradition, and social norms. As noted by Bang et al. (2023), recognizing the cultural context of Indigenous populations is crucial for developing meaningful and respectful frameworks for civic participation and life satisfaction.

Therefore, any effort to foster civic engagement in Indigenous settings must begin by acknowledging and validating Indigenous knowledge systems. When civic initiatives align with cultural values and local practices, they not only enhance civic identity but also contribute to the broader well-being and resilience of Indigenous communities.

### ***3.6. Implications for Policy and Practice***

The findings of this review have several implications for policy, educational practice, and future research. For policymakers, there is a need to move beyond standardized civic education frameworks and develop programs that are flexible and culturally responsive. Indigenous civic engagement should be recognized as legitimate and valuable, even when it deviates from formal Western norms.

For educators, this study highlights the importance of integrating local cultural knowledge into teaching practices. Civic education in Indigenous settings should not be imported wholesale but co-constructed with community input, ensuring alignment with local values and traditions. Teacher training programs should also include cultural competence modules to prepare educators for working in Indigenous contexts.

Finally, for researchers, the study points to the need for more empirical investigations using ethnographic and participatory methods. While this review synthesizes existing literature, it does not include primary field data. Future research should engage directly with Indigenous communities like

the Baduy to validate the practical applicability of civic engagement models and explore lived experiences of life satisfaction.

### 3.7. Limitations

As a narrative literature review, this study is subject to certain limitations. It relies on secondary sources, which may not fully capture the nuances of civic engagement practices within the Baduy or other Indigenous communities. Furthermore, the applicability of civic engagement frameworks developed in Western contexts may be limited in Southeast Asian Indigenous societies due to historical, cultural, and institutional differences.

Moreover, the literature reviewed spans a variety of global contexts, which, while enriching, may also present challenges in drawing context-specific conclusions. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings, and future research should prioritize localized, community-driven studies to inform practice and policy more accurately.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This review underscores the significant potential of civic engagement—both individual and institutional—in enhancing life satisfaction among Indigenous communities such as the Baduy. Educational institutions, when aligned with cultural values and local governance systems, can play a central role in promoting civic identity, social cohesion, and community resilience. However, effective implementation requires culturally sensitive approaches that honor Indigenous knowledge systems and avoid imposing external frameworks.

By reconceptualizing civic engagement in terms that are inclusive and contextually grounded, this study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for more equitable and culturally informed education policies. Future research should seek to build on these findings through field-based, participatory methodologies that engage Indigenous voices at every stage.

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