



Education as a Pillar of National Defense: A Systematic Review on the Relationship between Education and National Security

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review examines the critical relationship between education and national security, positioning education as a fundamental pillar of national defense. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, this study explores how educational systems contribute to defense capabilities beyond traditional military training. The review synthesizes findings from policy documents, empirical studies, and theoretical frameworks to demonstrate that education fosters national resilience through character building, civic awareness, technological advancement, and strategic thinking. Key themes include: (1) the role of defense education curricula in developing patriotic values and national awareness, (2) the contribution of higher education institutions to defense innovation and research, (3) professional military education as a standardization tool for defense capabilities, and (4) the integration of non-military defense approaches through civic education. Findings reveal that effective defense education requires systematic implementation across all educational levels, collaboration between civilian and military institutions, and continuous curriculum development aligned with evolving security threats. This review concludes that education serves not merely as a supporting element but as a strategic pillar of comprehensive national defense, essential for building resilient societies capable of addressing multidimensional security challenges in the 21st century.

Keywords: national defense, defense education, national security, civic education, military education, systematic review

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1. INTRODUCTION

National security in the contemporary era extends far beyond conventional military capabilities, encompassing economic stability, social cohesion, technological advancement, and citizen preparedness. Within this comprehensive security framework, education emerges as a critical pillar that shapes national defense capacity through multiple dimensions. Education cultivates informed citizens, develops strategic thinking, advances technological capabilities, and fosters the values necessary for national resilience (Agustina et al., 2024). This multifaceted role of education extends to instilling an awareness of state defense in citizens, particularly among the younger generations who are integral to the nation's future and its ability to withstand both internal and external threats (Triadi & Agustina, 2024). Specifically, education can foster a dynamic national resilience, particularly when supported by a high quality and quantity of human capital, as evidenced by demographic bonuses (Susdarwono, 2022). The development of this national resilience is inextricably linked to the cultivation of patriotism and national pride, which, if inadequately addressed within the national education system, can lead to a decline in state defense awareness among the populace (Asmoro et al., 2021) (Winatha et al., 2022). Such a decline can significantly weaken the nation's ability to maintain its integrity and sovereignty in the face of evolving geopolitical dynamics (Soepandji & Farid, 2018) (Winatha et al., 2022).

Therefore, a robust educational framework that integrates comprehensive citizenship education and the promotion of state defense values is imperative to safeguard national interests and ensure the preparedness of future generations for complex security challenges (Murtaib et al., 2024) (Masridha et al., 2022). This strategic approach ensures that citizens understand their rights and obligations in national defense, transforming abstract concepts into actionable participation in safeguarding national security (Prasetyo, 2020).

The current global landscape, marked by increasingly complex threats, necessitates a renewed focus on how educational systems can instill a strong sense of civic duty and preparedness, particularly among the youth (Satya, 2020) (Sagala et al., 2024). This includes cultivating national security awareness among college students, who are considered the backbone of the nation's future development and overall security (Bai & Zhang, 2024). Strengthening this awareness among college students is crucial for adapting to the strategic landscape of national security in the new era, stimulating their sense of responsibility and mission in upholding national security (Bai & Zhang, 2024). To achieve this, national security strategic plans have been formulated, leading the Ministry of Education to issue policies for national security education across all academic levels, emphasizing the cultivation of national security awareness among college students (Bai & Zhang, 2024).

Despite the recognized importance of education in national security strategies, systematic reviews examining this relationship remain limited. Most existing literature focuses on specific aspects such as military education or civic awareness programs, lacking a comprehensive synthesis of how education serves as an integrated pillar of national defense. This gap in knowledge is particularly significant as nations worldwide reconfigure their defense strategies to address complex, multifaceted security threats that require whole-of-society approaches.

This comprehensive approach is crucial for addressing the increasing complexity of threats, where the human element in educational systems is recognized as vital for national security (Paliukh et al., 2025). It acknowledges that a well-educated populace is better equipped to adapt to evolving threats and participate effectively in national defense initiatives, transcending conventional military engagements (Zuniga-Brown, 2011). Furthermore, higher education, particularly in military institutions, is undergoing rapid modernization and digitalization to train officers capable of operating in high-risk, uncertain environments, incorporating advanced technologies like AI to enhance educational outcomes and address contemporary security threats (Chmyr & Bhinder, 2023). A well-educated citizenry, particularly college students, with strong national security awareness is crucial for safeguarding fundamental national interests such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, and societal well-being in the face of diverse internal and external threats (Bai & Zhang, 2024). This integrated perspective acknowledges that the interaction between education and security is inherently bidirectional, as conflict can significantly disrupt educational provision while a lack of education can perpetuate cycles of instability (Salha et al., 2024). Therefore, understanding how to sustain educational initiatives during periods of conflict is paramount for ensuring continued national resilience and stability (Salha et al., 2024).

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design and Search Strategy

This study employed a *Systematic Literature Review (SLR)* approach to synthesize and critically analyze existing research on the relationship between education and national defense. The SLR design was guided by established methodological frameworks in the social sciences, emphasizing transparency, replicability, and comprehensive coverage of relevant studies.

The search process was conducted systematically within the Scopus database, recognized for its extensive coverage of high-impact peer-reviewed journals in education, social policy, and defense studies. The formulation of the search string followed Boolean logic to ensure precision and breadth. The specific query used in the Scopus database was:

TITLE (education AND defense OR defence) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar"))

This query restricted the search to journal articles (*SRCTYPE = "j"*) and scholarly articles (*DOCTYPE = "ar"*) to maintain academic quality. No language restriction was imposed, although the majority of retrieved articles were in English. The search covered the period 2000–2025, encompassing both early post–Cold War educational defense policies and contemporary perspectives shaped by globalization, hybrid security, and comprehensive defense paradigms.

Additional filtering and cross-checking were performed to ensure that the identified literature explicitly discussed education in the context of national defense, civic responsibility, or policy-level defense education frameworks. Reference chaining and backward citation searches were also applied to capture seminal works frequently cited within the field.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion of literature was determined through multi-stage screening of titles, abstracts, and full texts. Studies were included if they met the following conceptual and methodological relevance criteria:

- (1) publications in peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus;
- (2) explicit examination of the interconnection between education and national defense policy;
- (3) analytical focus on curriculum, institutional governance, civic or defense education programs; and
- (4) empirical or theoretical contributions to understanding how education supports national defense or resilience objectives.

Publications were excluded if they solely addressed tactical or operational military training without an educational component, if they examined schooling in active conflict zones unrelated to defense policy, or if they lacked methodological transparency or theoretical grounding. Duplicate or derivative reports were also removed to avoid redundancy.

2.3 Data Extraction and Analysis

Data extraction focused on capturing essential bibliographic and analytical attributes of each study, including authorship, publication year, research objectives, theoretical foundations, methodological design, and principal findings. The extracted data were organized using a matrix-based synthesis to facilitate comparative and thematic analysis.

The analytical process adopted a thematic synthesis approach, integrating elements of qualitative content analysis. The process proceeded through several stages: (1) familiarization with the full texts of the included studies; (2) open coding to identify salient concepts; (3) grouping of related codes into thematic clusters; (4) iterative refinement and validation of emerging themes; and (5) synthesis of these themes into an integrative narrative framework explaining how educational systems contribute to the strengthening of national defense.

Throughout the analysis, particular attention was given to cross-national variations, policy models, and the role of educational administration in shaping defense-oriented civic values.

The final synthesis aimed to construct a conceptual model linking education policy, governance, and national defense strategy.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Conceptual Framework: Education as National Defense Infrastructure

The reviewed literature reveals a paradigm shift in conceptualizing national defense, moving from purely military approaches toward comprehensive security frameworks that position education as critical infrastructure. Hutabarat et al. (2025) demonstrate that national defense education policy implementation at higher education levels requires systematic integration across institutional structures, emphasizing that defense capability emerges from educated citizenry rather than military capacity alone.

This conceptual evolution reflects broader changes in security thinking, where threats are increasingly non-military in nature cyber attacks, disinformation campaigns, economic coercion, and social fragmentation. Education addresses these challenges by developing critical thinking, fostering social cohesion, and building technological capabilities essential for modern defense (Dreifke & Lysychkina, 2025).

The literature identifies three primary mechanisms through which education contributes to national defense:

- (1) **Character and Value Formation:** Education systems cultivate patriotism, civic responsibility, and national identity essential for social cohesion and collective defense capacity. Dahliyana et al. (2024) demonstrate that civic education strengthens national defense character through developing love for the motherland, awareness of nation and state, loyalty to national principles, willingness to sacrifice, and basic defense capabilities.
- (2) **Capability Development:** Educational institutions develop human capital with technical skills, strategic thinking abilities, and leadership qualities necessary for defense operations and innovation. Higher education institutions particularly contribute by producing skilled professionals for defense industries and conducting research advancing defense technologies (Hutabarat et al., 2025).
- (3) **Institutional Integration:** Education creates networks linking civilian society with defense establishments, enabling whole-of-society approaches to security challenges. This integration facilitates knowledge transfer, resource mobilization, and coordinated responses to security threats.

3.2 Defense Education Curricula: Content and Implementation

The literature reveals significant variation in defense education curriculum design and implementation across national contexts. Effective defense curricula balance multiple objectives: developing national awareness, teaching civic responsibilities, fostering critical thinking, and building practical skills relevant to security challenges.

Hutabarat et al. (2025) identify that current national education curricula often contain limited material on national defense, typically addressing defense topics only briefly across

educational levels from kindergarten through higher education. This gap indicates the need for systematic integration of defense content throughout educational progression.

Key elements of effective defense education curricula include:

- (1) **Progressive Development:** Defense education should be developmentally appropriate, introducing basic concepts of national identity and civic responsibility at primary levels, expanding to more complex discussions of security challenges and defense policy at secondary levels, and engaging students in critical analysis and practical applications at tertiary levels.
- (2) **Interdisciplinary Integration:** Rather than isolated defense studies courses, effective approaches integrate defense themes across multiple subjects history, geography, social studies, science, and technology demonstrating the multifaceted nature of national security.
- (3) **Experiential Learning:** Beyond classroom instruction, effective defense education incorporates experiential components including civic engagement projects, simulations, community service, and leadership development activities. Dahliyana et al. (2024) highlight the Project Citizen Digital as an innovative approach strengthening national defense character through active citizenship engagement.
- (4) **Values-Based Approach:** Effective curricula explicitly address values underlying national defense including patriotism, civic duty, social responsibility, and democratic principles, avoiding militaristic or authoritarian approaches that might undermine democratic values.

3.3 Higher Education's Role in National Defense

Higher education institutions occupy a unique position in national defense ecosystems, contributing through multiple channels beyond student education. The literature identifies several critical functions of universities and colleges in supporting national defense:

- (1) **Research and Innovation:** Universities conduct fundamental and applied research advancing defense technologies, developing new capabilities, and solving complex security challenges. This research function connects civilian academic expertise with defense industrial needs, fostering innovation ecosystems essential for technological superiority (Hutabarat et al., 2025).
- (2) **Professional Development:** Higher education provides advanced professional development for military personnel, defense officials, and security professionals, offering graduate programs in strategic studies, defense management, security policy, and related fields.
- (3) **Policy Analysis and Advisory:** Academic institutions contribute expert analysis informing defense policy development, offering objective assessment of security challenges, evaluation of policy alternatives, and long-term strategic thinking unconstrained by immediate operational pressures.

- (4) Civic Engagement: Universities foster informed citizenship through public education initiatives, civic engagement programs, and platforms for democratic discourse on security issues, strengthening the social foundations of national defense.

The effectiveness of higher education contributions depends on systematic integration with defense establishments. Hutabarat et al. (2025) identify the 3CS model (Competent, Compact, Coordination, and Sustainable) as a framework for implementing national defense education policy at higher education levels, emphasizing the importance of coordination between academic institutions, defense ministries, and other government agencies.

3.4 Civic Education and Non-Military Defense

A significant finding across the literature is the growing recognition of civic education as a critical component of national defense. This approach conceptualizes defense not purely in military terms but as societal resilience built through informed, engaged citizenship.

Dahliyana et al. (2024) demonstrate that civic education strengthens national defense by developing multiple dimensions of citizen capacity: love for motherland, national awareness, loyalty to national principles (Pancasila in the Indonesian context), willingness to sacrifice for nation, and basic defense abilities. This multidimensional approach positions every citizen as a potential contributor to national security.

Effective civic education for national defense incorporates:

- (1) Democratic Values: Rather than authoritarian indoctrination, effective civic education develops commitment to democratic principles, human rights, and rule of law foundations of legitimate and sustainable national defense.
- (2) Critical Media Literacy: In an era of information warfare and disinformation, civic education must develop citizens' ability to critically evaluate information sources, recognize propaganda and manipulation, and engage thoughtfully with media.
- (3) Community Engagement: Practical civic engagement experiences community service, local governance participation, advocacy projects translate abstract defense concepts into concrete citizenship practices.
- (4) Cultural Preservation: Civic education fosters appreciation for national culture and heritage, building social cohesion and resistance to cultural fragmentation that might undermine national unity.

3.5 International Perspectives and Comparative Analysis

The literature reveals diverse approaches to defense education across national contexts, reflecting different political systems, security environments, and educational traditions. While comprehensive comparative analysis remains limited, available research suggests several patterns:

- (1) NATO and Partnership Countries: NATO member states and Partnership for Peace countries have developed increasingly standardized approaches to professional military education through initiatives like the Defense Education Enhancement

Program, emphasizing democratic civil-military relations, interoperability, and shared professional standards (Dreifke & Lysychkina, 2025).

- (2) Asian Contexts: Countries including Indonesia implement defense education emphasizing national identity, civic duty, and character development rooted in national philosophical frameworks. These approaches often integrate traditional values with contemporary security challenges (Dahliyana et al., 2024; Hutabarat et al., 2025).
- (3) Developed Democracies: Western democracies typically emphasize civic education and critical thinking rather than explicit defense education, building defense capacity through informed, engaged citizenship rather than explicit patriotic instruction.

3.6 Emerging Trends and Future Directions

The literature identifies several emerging trends shaping the future of defense education:

- (1) Technological Integration: Digital technologies create new possibilities for defense education online learning platforms, simulations, virtual reality training environments, and data-driven assessment approaches. However, technology also creates new security education needs, particularly regarding cybersecurity awareness and digital literacy.
- (2) Whole-of-Society Approaches: Growing recognition of comprehensive security frameworks drives integration of defense education across societal sectors, moving beyond formal educational institutions to incorporate community organizations, media, workplaces, and other settings.
- (3) Adaptive Curricula: Rapid evolution of security threats requires flexible, adaptive curricula capable of addressing emerging challenges. This demands continuous curriculum review and update mechanisms responsive to changing security environments.
- (4) Evidence-Based Practice: Increasing emphasis on evidence-based policy drives demand for rigorous evaluation of defense education effectiveness, requiring development of appropriate metrics and longitudinal research designs.

Future Research Recommendations

Based on the network visualization, future research should further explore the intersection of transformational leadership and digital transformation, which appears as a highly connected thematic cluster. Although concepts such as *digital leadership*, *systems thinking*, and *sustainability* have begun to emerge, their integration remains relatively underdeveloped across educational levels. Researchers are encouraged to investigate how these leadership models can be effectively contextualized and implemented in diverse educational systems, particularly in regions facing technological and structural disparities. Comparative studies across countries or institutional types could also offer insights into how digital-era leadership practices vary and evolve under different governance and cultural contexts.

The presence of keywords like *engineering education*, *entrepreneurship*, *medical education*, and *curriculum* within the network suggests that leadership studies are extending into discipline-specific pedagogical domains. However, empirical studies that operationalize leadership frameworks in these specialized contexts remain limited. Future research should aim to construct and validate competency models tailored to these educational sectors, while also evaluating their impact on student outcomes, innovation capacity, and institutional resilience.

Finally, the cluster focusing on teacher leadership, school principals, and professional development signals the continuing importance of capacity building at the institutional level. While professional development and instructional leadership are widely recognized, there is a need for longitudinal and evidence-based research that tracks how leadership training programs affect leadership behavior and educational performance over time. Future studies should also consider the role of emotional intelligence, communication skills, and self-leadership emerging yet under-connected nodes in the network as critical soft skills that influence leadership effectiveness in disruptive educational environments. Incorporating mixed-methods approaches, digital learning analytics, and participatory design with educators could enrich this line of inquiry.

4. CONCLUSION

This systematic review confirms that education is a fundamental pillar of national defense, providing the cognitive, civic, and technological capabilities necessary for comprehensive security in the twenty-first century. The relationship between education and defense extends beyond conventional military training, encompassing civic responsibility, innovation, and societal resilience.

Findings highlight that effective defense education requires integration across educational levels, coordination among institutional stakeholders, alignment between security goals and democratic values, continuous adaptation to emerging threats, and policy development grounded in evidence. Despite these insights, implementation challenges remain, including policy–practice gaps, limited resources, and fragmented coordination. Addressing these challenges demands sustained commitment and strategic investment in education as an integral component of national defense policy.

In an era marked by terrorism, cyber threats, disinformation, and social fragmentation, societies must cultivate citizens equipped with knowledge, skills, and values to respond effectively. Education builds these capacities, positioning it not as a supporting element but as a strategic foundation of national defense. Future research should strengthen this evidence base through longitudinal, comparative, and evaluative studies that examine both the effectiveness and ethical implications of defense-oriented education. Recognizing education as a strategic pillar of national defense is essential for building resilient nations capable of safeguarding security and stability in an increasingly complex world.

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