



Strengthening civic education through project citizen as an incubator for democracy education

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 16 August 2021

Revised 18 November 2021

Accepted 26 November 2021

Available online

Keywords:

civic education,
democracy education,
democratic education,
incubator,
student

Abstract

This article sought to describe the contribution of project citizens in civic education as an incubator for democratic education. Therefore, previous studies have only mentioned civic education as learning democracy but have not stated how much it contributes. Data collection was carried out using a quantitative approach through a survey method. The research population was students of the Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia enrolled for civic education course. The research sample was 10 (ten) study programs with 432 students. The results showed that the effect of project citizen-based civic education on strengthening student democracy education was 38.2 percent.

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Introduction

Civic education is a vehicle to sustain and develop democracy through democratic participation among students (Fry & Bentehar, 2013; Nanggala, 2020). However, the implementation of learning democracy, through civic education is highly dependent on the curriculum of each college (Nanggala, 2020; Nurdin, 2017). Although with more than half a century of civic education, even at all levels of education from elementary, secondary to higher education, such still leaves the general and classical issues of low levels of political literate, and moreover, to achieve the goal of creating intelligent and skilled Indonesian citizens (Komara, 2017).

This is because students are often strictly confined in the topics they can discuss in the decisions they can make (Huddleston, 2016). Therefore, citizenship learning relies on traditional approaches and is often seen as a conservative approach to citizenship that implies inclusion for the majority at the expense of exclusion practices aimed at others (Cain, 2012; Healy, 2019).

There have been growing concerns about the democratic deficit, pluralism, multiculturalism, and an increase in extremism; this is especially worrying if civic education received by young people is not improved (Sardoc, 2012; Yoldaş, 2015). In addition, civic education is better positioned to meet the civic needs of students in the 21st century (Cain, 2012). There is no doubt that civic education alone is not sufficient to convey information about rights and obligations in a democracy and to motivate young people politically (Yoldaş, 2015). Therefore, civic education must entertain people's education to prepare students to think critically and act democratically through awareness activities to become

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democratic (Fajri et al., 2018). Democratic awareness involves creating an environment both in schools and individual classrooms that reflect “living together.” Dewey seeks to connect these environments with communities outside the school and classroom walls to make mature and capable citizens play an important role in modern democratic political culture (Yoldaş, 2015).

Research has shown that civic education is a necessity to educate citizens about their rights and for a democratic system to function appropriately and healthily (Swift, 2017). In many of the world’s democracies, civic education has long been an essential component of government strategies to support civil society development and strengthen citizens’ democratic competencies (Martens & Gainous, 2012). Civic education is also closely related to political awareness and state ideology (Dewantara et al., 2019; Muchtarom et al., 2016; Martens & Gainous, 2012). Europe and Australia make civic education a democratic education (Mattson & Curran, 2018; Muleya, 2015). In South Korea, democratic civic education is integrated with moral education (Zhang, 2011). Even in China, civic education is integrated as ideological-political education and patriotic education (Liu, 2013).

However, such programs are not highly successful. Although research has identified essential components of successful democratic civic education programs, including the use of learner-centered methods and experiential civic learning opportunities rooted in real-world contexts, these programs continue to deliver weak results because they always emphasize the cognitive aspects (Komara, 2017; Martens & Gainous, 2012; Nanggala, 2020). The results showed that civic education learning for the promotion of the ideals of democratic citizenship in higher education institutions and universities has not run as expected. First, the study found that lecturers and students had minimal understanding of the concept of citizenship. Second, although the civics education lecturer training curriculum has sufficient content to promote democratic citizenship, it lacks active and practical learning pedagogies such as service-learning. College and university lecturers believe in the active teaching method for civic education but rarely implement the method. Finally, colleges and universities are faced with many challenges that hinder the effective teaching of civic education and the promotion of democratic ideals of citizenship. The problems range from a vast number of students, less qualified lecturers, limited lecture rooms to undemocratic university leadership that does not recognize student voices in decision making (Smith, 2016).

Therefore, there is a necessity for a learning model that serves as a democracy incubator in civic education courses in universities. This can be done with a model that develops stages such as investigation, dialogue, circulation, production, and mobilization all of which are paramount for broad and effective participation in democratic life according to educational norms and the social context in which civic education is offered (Kahne et al., 2016). In addition, the practice must be doable by anyone and performed with proper training so that it can promote student enthusiasm and civic life (Levinson, 2011; Liu, 2013).

One of the proposed models to foster civic education as an incubator for democracy education is project citizen. With this model, civic education is more than just facts and concepts, but it provides life lessons that enable students to be involved in the democratic process through enhancing critical thinking skills (Cain, 2012; Marzuki & Basariah, 2017). In addition, this learning model can accommodate the needs from the bottom up, improve cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects so that students are able to take concrete actions as democratic citizens. It also looks at the family, school, and community environment (Trisiana et al., 2015). Student even find the project production process effective, efficient, and fun (Ozturk et al., 2021).

This statement is in line with the objective of the project citizen model, i.e., to motivate and empower students to exercise democratic civic rights and responsibilities through an intensive portfolio of public policy issues at universities or the communities where they interact (Fajri et al., 2018). This is because, through project citizenship, students are able to find integration of human potentials, integration of institutions, integration of curriculum, integration of learning domains, integration of three centers of education, integration of theory and practice, and integration of learning activities because students are able to understand the relationship between civic education and the field of science that is their expertise (Muchtarom et al., 2016; Nurdin & Dahliyana, 2017). Thus, this project is able to enumerate the three visions of citizenship commonly found in colleges or universities, namely, being personally responsible, participatory, and oriented towards social justice (Boontinand & Petcharamesree, 2018; Westheimer, 2015). The project can adapt to rural and urban contexts, ages, backgrounds, needs, and interests of different citizens (Ngozwana, 2017). Hence, the main research question to be addressed here is as follows, “is the project citizen able to strengthen civic education that impacts on the realization of a democratic incubator in higher education?”

Methodology

Adopting a survey method shared online, this study took a sample of a population at the Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia through Cluster Random Sampling. The samples used were 10 study programs with 432 students. The research instrument used was SSHA (Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes) questionnaire from Brown and Holtzman with the following scale: 5 = Always; 4 = Often; 3 = Sometimes; 2 = Rarely; and 1 = Never. The questions contained in the research instrument are related to the stages of the project citizen model, democratic values, and citizenship competencies. The data collection results with the instruments that met the requirements of the validity of reliability, discriminating power, and the ideal level of difficulty were then processed and analyzed, maintaining the confidentiality of the respondent's identity. The analysis was performed to see whether the data had met the requirements to be tested via validity and reliability tests, simple correlation test, multiple linear regression test, f test, and *t*-test.

Results and Discussion

The statistical analysis using SPSS 26 reveals that the effect of project citizens on civic education was 38.2 percent. This is done through the process of identifying problems, selecting problems, collecting information and data, collecting document portfolios and designing a display portfolios accordance with the skills of each student, conducting showcase, and reflecting on learning outcomes. The impact felt by students is that the democratic learning process is not in the form of theory but practice in the learning process in civic education learning. In addition, there are other aspects to facilitate students' democratic behavior, such as learning resources and personal lecturers. Therefore, civic education as a value-based education is a crucial complex assessment step of student behavior and emotional responses (Nurdin, 2015).

The data collected through the distribution of questionnaires to 10 (ten) study programs with a total of 432 students concerning the output of the civic education data normality test indicated that the value of Sig. on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was 0.200. The alpha criterion used was 0.05. Therefore, H₀ is accepted if the value of Sig. is greater than the specified alpha level. Because the value of Sig. = .200 > .05, then H₀ is accepted. This means that civic education data from a population and the output of the normality test of democracy education data were normally distributed.

To illustrate the relationship between civic education and project citizen, the following table presents the obtained scores.

From the table above, it can be concluded that learning project citizen-based civic education was effective, and there was a significant positive relationship between project citizen-based civic education and democracy education.

The above result can be attributed to the proposed learning model, which constituted: (1) self-reflection as an Indonesian nation and involving students in solving problems of the nation; (2) employing the constructivism method through identification of problems, determining class studies, developing portfolios, showcases, and reflections; and (3) loving one's own country by, for instance, preserving culture and loving national products. The result demonstrated that project citizen is a 'grassroots' program, implemented from the bottom up, based on experience, being student-centered, problem-oriented, democratically delivered, and pertaining to local community-based topics (Walker, 2015). The practice of grouping in this project appears to be associated with the creation of social studies settings in which individuals can build their capacities and desires to participate effectively in democratic life, but only if democratized conceptions of knowledge and learning frame everyday practices and discourses in the classroom when the learning process is carried out effectively, efficiently, and is fun (Ozturk et al., 2021).

Table 1 The relationship between civic education and project citizen

The relationship between civic education and project citizen		Civic_Education_Project_Citizen	Democracy_Education
Civic_Education	Pearson Correlation	1	.431**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	<i>N</i>	432	432
Project_Citizen	Pearson Correlation	.431**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	<i>N</i>	432	432

Note: **Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

The project citizen adopted such themes as drugs, corruption, and food security in Indonesia. The attitude scale reflected: (1) student interest in political and social issues; (2) civic self-concept; (3) student support for equality; (4) student confidence in college-based (community) participation; (5) students' beliefs and attitudes towards the state and state institutions; and (6) a sense of student civic independence (Stokamer, 2011). By focusing on these aspects, citizenship competencies pivotal for the successful functioning of democracy may improve. Developing knowledge of citizenship and governance in democracy, cognitive skills of democratic citizenship, character, and development of democratic citizenship characteristics for effective democratic participation are global and national imperatives that many higher education institutions have embraced through teaching strategies of community-based learning and service-learning (Lin, 2015; Stokamer, 2011).

Civic education promotes the active involvement of students in society, which in the Indonesian context must be adapted for rural and urban residents in the context of democratic transition in a country that still adheres to solid traditional ties to a communitarian life (Muleya, 2015; Ngozwana, 2017). Thus, civic education as an incubator of democratic education that provides a robust moral goal to hone understanding of democratic practices in diverse democratic societies can be actualized in various circumstances both in universities, organizations, and online environments (Bennett et al., 2011)

Project citizen focuses on the skills needed for responsible, effective, and scientific participation in the political process and civil society. Interaction is concerned with citizens' skills in communicating and collaborating with others. It also constitutes asking questions, answering and negotiating politely, as well as building coalitions and managing conflicts peacefully and honestly. Project citizen punctuates student participation in various activities in the communities. Participation in the form of kindness is done by contributing ideas to solve problems faced together for the common good. A significantly strong relationship between project citizens and civic skills is mediated through nature activities. This model offers opportunities for students to practice critical thinking, interact and discuss with classmates, negotiate, cooperate and make the best decisions for the public interest. The concept of mutual cooperation and deliberation is a cultural value of the nation. Thus, cooperation is a social capital that must be explored and optimized in the learning process in the classroom (Adha et al., 2019). In addition, project citizens can simulate a democratic process, leadership, and decision making by

making students think critically, involved in achieving the common good, maintain and promote democratic values, and willing to fight for equal opportunities and respect diversity (Gutiérrez & Pineda-Alfonso, 2013; Healy, 2019).

In addition, the results of calculations using the summary model yielded the following values.

Table 2 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.618 ^a	0.382	.370	8.367

Note: a. Predictors: (Constant), democracy_education, civic education_project_citizen.

Based on the table above, the R square number is 0.382 or (38.2%), which shows that the effect of project citizen-based civic education on democracy education is 38.2%. This signifies that the strength of this approach lies in its ability to bring out aspects of less-considered democratic virtues in the learning process through the maintenance of a democratic way of life depending on the knowledge, skills, and character of individuals who can realize the dimensions of social justice (Snir & Eylon, 2017).

Through this citizen project, students go through a meaningful learning exposure in the civic education course, where they learn to think critically through interaction with classmates, experience collaborative learning, and support fellow students in learning activities. In this model, learning is seen as occurring in society through the interaction between social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence, where students can develop civic competencies, namely, civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic discipline, and experience democratic interactions, which are the core of civic interaction in democratic societies through adding a problem-focused activity to their unit (Tienken, 2020; Setiani & MacKinnon, 2015).

The calculation with ANOVA obtained the following results.

This influence can be optimal if educators embrace a democratic mind that can be actualized to not only teach civic content but also to help students become active democratic citizens, so the integrity of lecturers and students is needed (Nanggala, 2020). Therefore, the learning culture embedded in the classroom will determine the success of civic education, functioning as an incubator of democratic education. The key to this project citizen is communication, liberation, and decision-making tools and strategies that enable people to share

Table 3 ANOVA^a

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4462.515	2	2231.257	31.873	.000 ^b
	Residual	7210.429	103	70.004		
	Total	11672.943	105			

Note: ^a = Dependent Variable: Democracy Education; b. Predictors: (Constant), Project_Citizen, Civic_Education

Because F count > F table (31.873 > 3.082), Ho is rejected, indicating a significant influence between project citizen-based civic education on democracy education.

multiple perspectives and work towards building new knowledge by understanding their public institutions and being good citizens (Swift, 2017).

However, due to limitations on the part of educators, curriculum policy, university policy in institutionalizing civic education, infrastructure, and even funding in Indonesia, a national-scale project citizen has never been materialized. This contrasts with the United States, where the highlight of the project citizen program is a national exhibition held even at the school level. Held annually, exhibitions during the year of study involve groups of students arriving at a central Warsaw location and exhibiting various aspects of their project steps. As students share their projects and talk to visitors, they demonstrate their new communication skills, new knowledge of their ability to bring about change in their communities, and ongoing evidence that schools can influence the development of democratic citizens (Martens & Gainous, 2012; Nurdin, 2015; Nurdin & Dahliyana, 2017). Therefore, project citizen has succeeded in equipping students with the skills and knowledge to function as active citizens because it can contextualize formal instructions and concrete actions based on age, class, and even racial differences (Cain, 2012; Farouk & Husin, 2011; Healy, 2019). Even in the United States, the use of this project citizen is aimed at making citizens concerned with the future of democracy by evaluating policies and programs developed to offer them real opportunities to practice the skills and competencies needed for conscious democratic civic engagement (Cain, 2012).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Project-based civic education is developed as democracy education by making students understand real state problems and discover joint solutions from identifying alternative policy studies to finding how to solve these problems through concrete measures. Through this step, students acquire the knowledge, understanding,

experience, and democratic actions they usually gain through teaching. With this project model, however, students experience directly through the final stages of making decisions about problems they solve through systematic solutions. Indeed, the process embedded in the project citizen stage provides more empirical democratic education and even encourages students to reflect more deeply on their personal, social, cultural, and economic life, as well as defense, security, and ideology issues of their country. Thus, the citizen project implemented in civic education courses in higher education may serve as an incubator of democracy tailored to all realms of knowledge, skills, and character students need to attain. The difficulty in developing this project is that it is quite expensive. It may not necessarily be doable in remote areas with certain limitations, such as facilities preparing document materials and showcases unless adjustments are made under the surrounding conditions. The suggestion is for further research, developing a digital citizen project so that the implementation of the project citizen model can be carried out anywhere and by anyone.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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