

Strengthening the Democratic Character of Young Citizens through the Citizenship Project

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This study aims to describe: 1) the strategy of strengthening the democratic character of young citizens through the application of the citizenship project learning model in citizenship learning in universities, 2) democratic values that arise in citizenship learning by applying the learning model of citizenship projects, 3) the obstacles faced in implementing a citizenship project to strengthen the democratic character of young citizens in the learning of citizenship, and 4) efforts made to overcome obstacles in the application of citizenship projects to strengthen the democratic character of young citizens in citizenship learning. This research is a descriptive study using a qualitative approach. Determination of the subject in this study used a purposive sampling method, consisting of students who took citizenship education courses, and lecturers who took citizenship education courses. Data collection in this study employed interview techniques, observation, and documentation. The validity of the data checking utilized triangulation techniques. The results of the research that have been carried out showed that: 1) strategies undertaken to strengthen democratic character through the application of the citizenship project learning model in citizenship learning was carried out, directly and indirectly, 2) democratic values that arose in citizenship learning by applying the learning model of citizenship projects between others were respecting the opinions of others, expressing opinions politely, responsibility, interactive and dialogic communication, and decision-making skills, 3) the obstacles faced in implementing the citizenship project model on citizenship learning was the very limited time to explore and solve problems thoroughly, and 4) the efforts made to overcome obstacles were by simplifying the steps in applying the citizenship project model to citizenship learning.

Key words: *Democratic Character, Young Citizens, Citizen Projects.*

Introduction

Citizenship education has a vital role in shaping the character of citizens into becoming democratic and responsible citizens. Article 3 of Law Number 20 the Year 2003 concerning the National Education System expressly stipulates citizenship education as a means for the education of values, morals, Pancasila characters, and the development of a democratic and responsible Indonesian citizenship personality. As a democratic education, citizenship education is responsible in building the character of democratic citizens as the primary foundation towards a democratic society in establishing national and state life.

Citizenship education also has a strategic role in strengthening the values used as a philosophy in the life of the nation (Pancasila) and state (Farahani, 2014; Ghebru & Lloyd, 2020; Ghosn-Chelala, 2020; Goren & Yemini, 2017; Toots, 2003). According to Nussbaum (Banks, 2008: 134), citizenship education must help students develop identity and attachment to the global community and human relations to others throughout the world. Citizenship education has an essential role in building young people into intelligent and good citizens. Good citizens are at least reflected in three main aspects of quality citizenship education. These three aspects include (1) citizenship knowledge, (2) citizenship skills, and (3) citizenship traits (Branson, 1999: 8). Citizenship knowledge, among others, is related to what citizens should know. Citizenship skills in a nation can be intellectual and participatory skills. Besides, citizenship traits are the main public and private traits that citizens possess for the maintenance and development of constitutional democracy.

The democratic character possessed by young citizens can be built through the inculcation of democratic values in the learning process. After the democratic values are instilled in young citizens, it will influence the attitudes and ultimately determine young citizens' behaviour. Young citizens who have a democratic character can uphold values such as tolerance, respect for differences, be open, engage in dialogue or deliberation when facing a problem, and are actively responsible in daily life.

The democratic character of young citizens is fundamentally built through the process of citizenship learning. The phenomenon in society shows that the values of democracy have not been internalized in every young citizen. Cases, such as the occurrence of intolerance, not being responsible for the behaviour carried out, forcing the will, not respecting differences, and the behaviour of wanting to win for themselves, become clear evidence that democratic values have not been well embedded in every young citizen.

A democratic character can be built through the process of learning citizenship. The central point of each learning process actually lies in the success of students in organising their experiences and developing thinking skills, not in the truth in replicating what has been done

by educators (lecturers or teachers). In the context of learning, citizenship education aims to form smart, skilled, and character-filled citizens who are loyal to the Indonesian nation and state by reflecting in themselves the habit of thinking and acting in accordance with the mandate of the Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution.

To achieve the goal of citizenship learning properly, especially in forming citizens who have character, it is necessary to choose an appropriate learning model in accordance with the characteristics of citizenship learning. One of the proper and appropriate learning models for developing the democratic character of young citizens is the citizenship project learning model, or better known as the portfolio-based citizenship learning model. The citizenship project learning model is student-centred. The citizenship project learning model refers to a number of basic principles of learning. The basic principles of learning referred to are the principles of active student learning, cooperative learning groups, participatory learning, and reactive teaching (Budimansyah, 2002: 8; Heeg, Hundertmark, & Schanze, 2020; Jääskelä, Heilala, Kärkkäinen, & Häkkinen, 2020).

The citizenship project learning model is an innovative learning model that makes the citizenship learning process more effective and interesting. The application of the citizenship project learning model in citizenship learning is expected to build the democratic character of young citizens. In this learning model, students learn democratic values by practising them directly in the learning process. The citizenship project learning model is a form of change in mindset from teacher-centred learning to student-centred learning. This learning model is a learning innovation designed to help students understand theory in depth through practical-empirical learning experiences. The citizenship project learning model can be a program of approaches that encourages students' competence, responsibility, and participation through learning to assess and influence public policies, encouraging them to participate in activities between people, between schools, and between members of the community.

The description that has been stated shows that research to strengthen the democratic character of citizens through the application of the citizenship project learning model is a strategic and urgent step that must be undertaken. It is hoped that through this research, democratic values can be built and developed through citizenship learning. Thus, the results of this study are expected to contribute to efforts to develop character education, primarily through citizenship learning in tertiary institutions.

The citizenship project learning model in citizenship learning is better known as portfolio-based citizenship learning. In the world of education and teaching, the term portfolio is relatively still not widely known. A portfolio can also be interpreted as a form of physical objects, a social pedagogical process, or an adjective. As a physical object, the portfolio is a bundle, a collection, or documentation of students' work stored in a bundle. As a social

pedagogical process, a portfolio is a collection of learning experiences found in the minds of students in the form of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. As for an adjective portfolio, it often is juxtaposed with other concepts, for example, with the concepts of learning and assessment (Budimansyah, 2002: 1-2).

Portfolios in learning can be seen from three aspects, namely in terms of strategy/methods, media, and evaluation. In terms of strategy/method, portfolio learning is the application of problem-solving strategies. In terms of media, portfolio learning concerns the development and production of media. Furthermore, in terms of evaluation, portfolio learning is the application of unique evaluation techniques (Gafur, 2003: 68). As a problem-solving strategy, the application of portfolios in citizenship learning trains students to think critically to find and solve problems in society.

The basis of the citizenship project learning model is a constructivism learning theory, which in principle illustrates that learners shape or build their knowledge through interactions with their environment (Duane & Satre, 2014; Elby, 2000; Kılıç & Gürdal, 2010; Moons & De Backer, 2013; Pande & Bharathi, 2020; Sjøberg, 2010). The most general and essential principle derived from constructivism is that in designing learning, learners gain much knowledge outside the classroom. Diverse learning experiences provide opportunities to elaborate. The application of constructivism in learning means placing students in a central position in the whole learning program. For example, issues or problems arising are used as a basis for dialog, discussion, and investigation of activities inside or outside the classroom. Portfolio-based learning pays close attention to and even does so in the learning process. Based on social constructivism proposed by Vygotsky (Fajar, 2004: 44), basically, by holding discussions or listening to other people's opinions, someone has formed knowledge or changed previous knowledge that has been owned.

Through the citizenship project learning model, in addition to gaining physical experience of objects in learning, students also gain experience or get mentally involved. Physical experience is in the sense of involving or bringing students together with the object of learning. Mental experience is in the sense of paying attention to the initial information that already exists in students and gives freedom to compile (reconstruct) the information obtained.

Research Methods

This research is a descriptive study using a qualitative approach. Determination of the subjects in this study employed a purposive sampling method, consisting of students who took citizenship education courses, and lecturers who took citizenship education courses in the even semester of 2018/2019. In this study, the data collection utilised interview techniques, observation, and documentation. The validity checking of the data used triangulation

techniques. Data analysis techniques employed inductive analysis, and the discussion process included patterns, themes, and categories derived from data, not determined before data analysis was collected.

Results and Discussion

The application of the citizenship project learning model as a strategy to strengthen the democratic character of young citizens was carried out in the civics education course. Based on the research results, all research subjects said that strengthening democratic character could be done through the application of citizenship project learning models. The citizenship project learning model was an alternative learning model to improve the quality of citizenship education learning in tertiary institutions.

Strengthening democratic character through citizenship projects was done in two ways, namely direct and indirect. Learning a democratic character was directly carried out when the lecturer told students to develop knowledge about democratic values. Knowledge of democratic values is one of the prerequisites for students as young citizens to be able to behave democratically.

The strategy to strengthen the democratic character of young citizens through direct strategies was carried out by making teaching plans by applying the citizenship project model. These steps in developing learning were outlined in the semester learning plan as a guide for lecturers in applying the model. Every step developed in applying the citizenship project model contained democratic values that were prepared directly to be developed in lectures. Thus, the strengthening of democratic character has been planned by lecturers through the planning of semester lectures with predetermined steps.

The strengthening of democratic character, which was performed indirectly was not done explicitly, but rather to the positive impact of learning the citizenship project itself. For example, in the stage of group division, the teacher would indirectly strengthen the democratic character through deliberation. In the deliberation activities, values will be developed to respect opinions, politeness in expressing opinions, and so on.

This indirect strengthening of democratic character was not explicitly stated in the Learning Implementation Plan/ Lesson Plan (RPP). Strategies for strengthening democratic character were carried out more to hidden curriculum. Democratic values developed more as positive effects arising from learning activities through the citizenship project undertaken by the teacher.

Democratic values that emerged in learning citizenship with the model of citizenship projects included respecting others' opinions, expressing opinions politely, responsibility, interactive

and dialogical communication, and decision-making skills. In more detail, each of these democratic values can be explained as follows.

The value of democratic character that values the opinions of others would appear in various activities implementing the citizenship project learning model. As it is known that in learning to use the citizenship project model, four groups must be formed, namely; explaining the problem, proposing alternative policies, selecting one of the various alternative policies proposed, and compiling a plan of action. The four groups formed in the implementation of the citizenship project learning model all contained democratic values within them.

The four groups should work in groups to find problems, propose alternative policies, choose alternative policies, and develop action plans. In group work activities, students were trained to be able to respect the opinions of others so that agreement could be found. In applying the citizenship project learning model, group activities occurred between individuals in small groups and between groups 1, 2, 3, and 4 in solving the problem being studied. Thus, the value of being able to appreciate opinions got many opportunities to be developed.

The value of expressing opinions politely in learning by using the citizenship project model also obtained quite a large share. The number of group activities students should do in applying the citizenship project learning model made it possible for each student to express their opinions.

In expressing this opinion, there was a politeness that had to be obeyed by all students. Politeness in expressing opinions through the application of citizenship projects, among others, was shown by behaviour: showing hands if one wants to express an opinion, revealing one's identity, saying hello, expressing an opinion in the right way, ending with thanks and greetings.

As a learning model that involved group activities, and the exchange of opinions within a group, the value of respecting the opinions of others was very solid in the citizenship project learning model. The behaviour of respecting others' opinions was shown by not being busy by themselves when others stated their opinion, and by not criticising others' opinions.

Appreciating the opinions of others was also seen when students could be patient listening and waiting for their friends who were expressing their opinion. Students did not cut their friends who expressed opinions in class. The ability to respect others' opinions was clearly visible when presenting the results of the citizenship project they have developed. Thus, through the application of the project model of citizenship, students could learn to respect others' opinions, which is one of the essential values in a democracy.

The value of responsibility as part of a democratic character could be grown through the application of the citizenship project learning model. Each group had the responsibility to complete the task. The first group would be responsible for identifying and explaining the problem. In this group, the responsibilities carried out were related to identifying problems in the community and urgently resolving them.

Each group had members who worked according to the agreement in each group. Every student was responsible for the assignment that became his duty. Periodically, students would meet in groups to report the results of the assignments they were responsible for. Through the application of the citizenship project model, every student practised developing the value of responsibility. For example, when a student in his group was assigned to an interview with the interviewees, he/she would carry out his/her duties with full responsibility.

Another value that could be developed through the application of the citizenship project model was interactive and dialogic communication. This value could be well developed in the learning of citizenship education with the project model of citizenship. Interactive and dialogical communication arose when students presented the work that they have developed.

Interactive and dialogic communication that occurred was between groups who were presenting their work with other students as participants. Alternately, in accordance with the group, students would present the results of a citizenship project that has been done. The presentation was performed interestingly because each group documented the work in the field in a five to ten-minute video. Thus, through the project model of citizenship, students could develop the value of interactive and dialogic communication well.

Another democratic value that could be developed and strengthened through applying the citizenship project model in the learning of civic education was the value of decision-making skills. This value could be seen clearly when students in groups determined the problem that would be used as a group study. Every student had a proposal for an urgent social problem to be resolved immediately. Through various considerations, in the end, it would be decided just one problem would be studied in the groups.

Each group would be led by a group leader whose task was to coordinate the group members in carrying out the task. Through citizenship project activities, students were trained to make the right decision among the many alternatives. Thus, learning citizenship education using the model of citizenship projects could strengthen decision-making skills as an essential value in a democracy.

From the results of the research that has been described, several important issues related to the problems in this study can be analysed and discussed. It was related to the strategies adopted in strengthening the democratic character of learning citizenship education with the model of

citizenship projects that used direct and indirect strategies. Learning a democratic character was directly carried out when the lecturer told students to develop knowledge about democratic values. While through indirect means, it was not done explicitly, but rather the positive impact of learning the citizenship project itself.

Strengthening democratic character both directly and indirectly was basically an effort made by lecturers through the application of the citizenship project model in teaching democratic values to students. Democratic values cannot emerge or be passed down by parents to their children but must be learned and become accustomed by citizenship behaviours or actions carried out by someone in daily life. It is in line with the opinion of Nurcholis Madjid (Ubaedillah and Rozak, 2013: 69-71), who stated that there are six norms needed in a democratic society, namely: awareness of pluralism, deliberation, ways in line with objectives, honesty in consensus, freedom of conscience and equality of rights and obligations, and a continuous process. This long and continuous non-stop process will strengthen the democratic character possessed by citizens.

In learning citizenship education by applying the citizenship project model, the values of democratic characters that arose included: respecting others' opinions, expressing opinions politely, responsibility, interactive and dialogical communication, and decision-making skills. The democratic values that emerge in the learning of citizenship education can be strengthened by applying the citizenship project model. In line with the results of the study, Lickona (2012: 81) stated that the character is interpreted as a moral response shown by someone to certain situations through good behaviour, such as honesty, responsibility, and other noble characters. Responsibility as one of good behaviour can be strengthened through the application of the citizenship project model.

One of the obstacles encountered in implementing the citizenship project model on citizenship learning was the limited time to explore and solve problems completely. Limited time became an obstacle for students to discuss and solve problems thoroughly. In addition, the steps for implementing a citizenship project model, which were too long, also require a considerable amount of time so that all steps can be implemented well. The solution to solving problems related to the implementation of the citizenship project learning model is to simplify the steps so that it is more efficient but does not reduce the objectives of the model implementation.

Basically, the application of the model of citizenship projects in learning citizenship education aims to equip students with the physical experience of learning; students also gain experience and be mentally involved. Physical experience is in the sense of involving or bringing students together with the object of learning. Mental experience is in the sense of paying attention to the initial information that already exists in students and gives freedom to compile (reconstruct) the information obtained. Learning, by using a citizenship project model, trains students to



integrate concepts obtained from explanations in class or books/readings with their application in daily life (CCE Indonesia, 2003).

Conclusion

Based on the discussion stated, several things can be concluded in strengthening the democratic character through the application of the citizenship project model in citizenship learning. The strategies implemented in strengthening democratic character through the model of citizenship projects in citizenship learning were carried out directly and indirectly. Democratic values that emerged in citizenship learning used the citizenship project model, including respecting others' opinions, expressing opinions politely, responsibility, interactive and dialogical communication, and decision-making skills. The obstacle faced in implementing the citizenship project model in citizenship learning was the limited time to explore and solve problems completely. Efforts were being made to overcome obstacles by simplifying the steps in applying the citizenship project model to citizenship learning.

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