



CENDEKIAWAN:
JURNAL PENDIDIKAN DAN STUDI KEISLAMAN

Volume 3 Nomor 4 Tahun 2024 Page 600-605

<https://zia-research.com/index.php/cendekiawan>



Teachers' Strategies in Fostering Civic Values through Inquiry Learning: A Qualitative Study on Civic Education in Elementary School

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Abstract

Citizenship issues in elementary school students are increasingly complex along with social and digital developments. This study aims to examine teachers' strategies in fostering citizenship values through an inquiry learning approach in the context of Citizenship Education in elementary schools. The research used a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and data analysis assisted by NVivo 14 software. The research setting was several primary schools in Kendari City, with the main informants consisting of class teachers, principals, and students. The results showed that teachers implemented five main strategies, namely the use of contextual triggering questions, facilitation of exploration and critical discussion, collaborative reflection on values, participatory citizenship projects, and exemplary values by teachers. These strategies contributed significantly to increasing students' awareness, democratic attitudes and active participation in school life. The findings suggest that the inquiry approach is effective in shaping civic literacy from an early age. This research provides theoretical contributions to value-based pedagogical approaches, as well as practical implications for teachers and policy makers in designing more contextual, reflective and transformative civic learning in primary schools.

Keywords: *Civic Education, Elementary School, Inquiry Learning, NVivo.*

PRELIMINARY

Civics education in elementary schools plays a crucial role in shaping the foundation of character, national identity, and democratic awareness in students from an early age (Astarita et al., 2024). Amidst global and national social dynamics—such as increasing intolerance, disinformation, and a cultural identity crisis—efforts to strengthen civic values are becoming increasingly relevant and urgent. As a concrete manifestation of the implementation of the Pancasila ideology in education, the Pancasila and Civics Education subject serves as an important tool for instilling values such as justice, tolerance, responsibility, and active participation in community life (Assingkiy, 2021). However, many learning practices remain cognitive and verbal in nature, leaving students with insufficient space to build contextual, reflective, and meaningful learning experiences.

In this context, the role of teachers as agents of value transformation becomes crucial. Teachers are not only required to deliver learning materials but also to shape students' civic attitudes and behaviors through appropriate learning strategies. One approach believed to be able to address this challenge is inquiry-based learning. This approach emphasizes students' active involvement in exploring issues, asking questions, seeking solutions, and reflecting on the values embedded in their learning experiences. However, inquiry-based learning strategies in civic education have not yet been widely adopted, especially at the elementary school level. Teachers often encounter obstacles in developing learning models that are appropriate to the characteristics of early childhood students and the context of the values being taught.

This study aims to describe and analyze teachers' strategies in fostering civic values through an inquiry-based learning approach in elementary schools. This objective is expected to reveal how teachers' pedagogical practices occur in real-life learning contexts, as well as the extent to which the inquiry-based approach can support students' internalization of Pancasila values. Through a deeper understanding of the strategies implemented by teachers, this study also seeks to provide practical contributions to the development of more relevant, participatory, and meaningful civics curricula and learning models.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on combining inquiry-based learning strategies with the development of civic values in elementary school students. This approach enables students not only to understand civic concepts theoretically but also to internalize them through an active, exploratory, and reflective learning process. Using a qualitative approach, this research offers a new perspective on how teacher strategies can bridge the gap between civic knowledge and the formation of national character. The findings are expected to significantly contribute to the development of contextual, participatory civic education theory and practice, firmly rooted in Pancasila values.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach. The primary objective of this approach is to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' strategies in fostering civic values through inquiry-based learning in elementary schools. Qualitative descriptive studies were chosen because they are appropriate for exploring educational phenomena that are complex, contextual, and cannot be reduced to numbers or measurable variables alone. The focus of this research is on the meanings, processes, and strategies employed by teachers in the context of natural and authentic civic learning.

An inquiry approach in education requires a contextual understanding of the dynamics of interactions between teachers, students, and the classroom environment. Therefore, the strategy used in this study was exploratory and holistic. The research was conducted at a public elementary school in Kendari City, Southeast Sulawesi, which is administratively located in an urban area with quite heterogeneous socio-cultural characteristics. This school was selected purposively based on the availability of an active citizenship education program and the teachers' willingness to participate in the research process.

The informants in this study consisted of teachers who teach Pancasila and Citizenship Education (PPKn) in upper grades (grades IV to VI), the principal, and students as supplementary subjects. Informants were selected purposively, considering their direct involvement in the learning process and the relevance of their experiences to the research focus. Three teachers served as primary informants, while the principal and six students were selected as supporting informants to provide a triangulation perspective on the data obtained.

Data collection techniques used three main methods: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation (Assingkily, 2021). Observations were conducted directly in the classroom during the learning process to record learning strategies, teacher-student interactions, and reflective activities that emerged during the inquiry learning process. In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide to explore teachers' perspectives on the inquiry approach, challenges faced, and how they internalize civic values in students. Documentation included syllabi, lesson plans, student worksheets, and teachers' reflective notes as supporting data.

All collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques assisted by NVivo 14 software, which enabled the coding, categorization, and visualization processes to proceed systematically and efficiently. The analysis process began with the transcription of interview data and observation notes, followed by an open coding stage to identify relevant units of meaning. Axial coding was then conducted to connect the emerging categories with the main focus of the research, namely learning strategies, civic values, and forms of student engagement. Finally, selective coding was conducted to formulate the main themes that became the theoretical conclusions of the research findings.

The use of NVivo as an analysis tool offers advantages in managing complex qualitative data and supports internal validity through transparent and auditable tracking of the analytical process. Furthermore, visualization features such as word clouds, relational models, and theme matrices are used to strengthen interpretations of the relationships between categories and strategies used by teachers.

To maintain data validity, this study applied four criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was maintained through data triangulation techniques (between methods and between informants), member checking, and the researcher's lengthy involvement in field observations. Transferability was supported by a detailed contextual description of the social and cultural background of the school where the research was conducted. Dependability was ensured through an audit trail of data documentation, while confirmability was achieved through documentation of the researcher's reflective process and the use of NVivo software, which allows for systematic tracing of the analysis trail.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

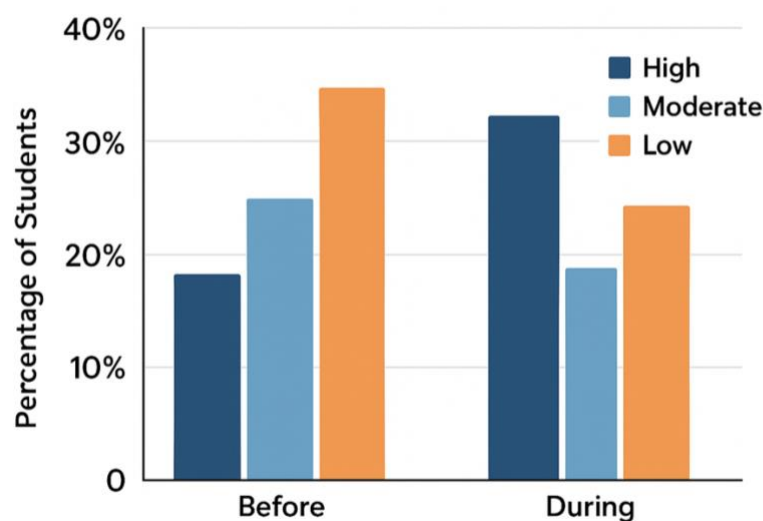


Figure 1. Inquiry Learning Strategy

The results of qualitative data analysis conducted with the help of NVivo software revealed that the inquiry learning strategies implemented by teachers contributed significantly to the development of citizenship values in elementary school students. From the open coding process to axial coding, several main categories were found that describe the strategies implemented by teachers and their impact on the internalization of students' citizenship values. Five main themes were identified, namely: (1) trigger questions based on citizenship issues, (2) facilitating information exploration and discussion, (3) collaborative reflection on values, (4) strengthening students' active roles as citizens, and (5) teacher role models in the classroom context.

First, the use of issue-based trigger questions proved to be an initial strategy that stimulated students' curiosity and active engagement in learning. Teachers consistently designed open-ended questions related to social issues surrounding the students' environment, such as school cleanliness, discipline, tolerance of religious diversity, and students' roles in maintaining public facilities. NVivo analysis showed that the "trigger questions" node had a strong relationship with the "awareness of social responsibility," "rights and obligations," and "democratic attitudes" nodes, indicating that the types of questions used by teachers were effective in raising awareness of civic values from the early stages of learning.

Second, facilitating exploration and discussion became the dominant strategy in the inquiry process. The teacher gave students the freedom to seek information through various sources, including textbooks, direct observation, and group discussions. Nodes related to this strategy, such as "group discussion," "information search," and "presentation of findings," appeared repeatedly and dominated the word tree visualization in the NVivo analysis. Students were actively involved in formulating opinions, presenting arguments, and listening to their peers' perspectives. These results indicate that this strategy not

only developed students' critical thinking and information literacy skills but also fostered mutual respect, empathy, and participation in the context of shared decision-making.

Third, collaborative value reflection emerged as an important pedagogical practice used by teachers to help students understand the meaning of civic values from their learning activities. In the final session of the lesson, teachers guided students to reflect on their learning experiences through questions such as "What important values did you learn today?" or "How did you feel when working together in a group?" The nodes "value reflection," "student feelings," and "moral awareness" emerged as central categories directly connected to the results of student reflection. These results indicate that collective reflection encouraged students to internalize values more deeply and personally, and to build self-awareness as part of the school community.

Fourth, the analysis shows that strengthening students' active roles as citizens has become an explicit orientation in teachers' strategies. This is evident in the assignment of mini-projects such as classroom cleanliness campaigns, class election simulations, and poster-making on students' rights and responsibilities. NVivo noted the emergence of a "citizenship project" node connected to the "active behavior," "initiative," and "cooperation" nodes. These activities not only strengthen conceptual understanding of civic values but also transform students from mere recipients of knowledge into active actors in the school's social practices. This aligns with an action-oriented citizenship education approach.

Fifth, the analysis also shows that teacher role models play a crucial role in the internalization of values. Teachers consciously demonstrate behaviors that reflect values such as honesty, discipline, and inclusiveness when interacting with students. The node "teacher role models" is closely connected to the nodes "student responses to teachers" and "identification of values through observation." This means that students learn not only from materials or activities but also from the interpersonal interactions and ethos demonstrated by teachers on a daily basis. This reinforces the understanding that learning civic values is not only explicit but also implicit in the dynamics of social relationships in the classroom.

In addition to these five main themes, the NVivo analysis also revealed that inquiry learning strategies contribute to the development of three key dimensions of student citizenship: cognitive, affective, and conative. The cognitive dimension is evident in students' increased understanding of civic concepts; the affective dimension is reflected in the growing attitudes of tolerance and empathy; while the conative dimension emerges through students' active involvement in activities related to shared interests. This aligns with the theoretical framework of progressive citizenship education, which emphasizes a balance between knowledge, attitudes, and actions.

In the context of the literature, these findings corroborate previous research findings that suggest inquiry-based learning is effective in encouraging student participation and character development (Hoskins & Crick, 2010; Banks, 2017). However, this study also provides a new nuance by emphasizing the importance of teachers' roles as value facilitators and social agents in primary education. This distinction constitutes an important theoretical contribution of this study, particularly in the context of Indonesian citizenship education, which faces the challenges of globalization and social heterogeneity.

Furthermore, the results of this study have strong implications for educational practice in elementary schools. Teachers are not only required to master inquiry-based pedagogical strategies but also to be consistent in their values and actions. Schools, as social institutions, need to create spaces that support student participation in school life as part of the process of forming their civic identity. This means that inquiry learning strategies are not merely teaching methods, but a holistic approach that positions students as active subjects in values education.

Overall, these findings confirm that inquiry-based learning is a pedagogical strategy that is not only effective for cognitive development but also has a significant impact on the formation of students' civic identity and character. By using a planned, reflective, and contextual inquiry approach, teachers can play a strategic role in fostering civic values from an early age—a crucial prerequisite for the sustainability of democracy and a civilized social life.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the inquiry learning strategy implemented by teachers effectively fostered civic values in elementary school students. Through five key strategies—prompting questions, information exploration, discussion, value reflection, participatory projects, and teacher role models—significant improvements were seen in the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of students as young citizens. Data analysis using NVivo showed that students became more aware of their rights and responsibilities, more tolerant, and more actively participated in social activities within the school environment.

These findings emphasize the role of inquiry-based learning as an approach that not only enhances critical thinking skills but also instills democratic values and social responsibility from an early age. In practice, the success of this strategy depends heavily on the teacher's role as a facilitator and role model of civic values in the classroom.

Practically, this research encourages strengthening teacher training in implementing values-based inquiry, as well as the importance of school policy support in creating participatory and inclusive learning environments. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on action- and values-oriented citizenship education.

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