

Democracy Education in Schools: Perspectives of Junior High School Students at Nurul Jannah Natuna

Muci Herliyanto^{1*}, Vinni Helvionitia², Nurdian Setiawan³

^{1, 2, 3} Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Natuna, Indonesia

^{1*} mucierliyanto@gmail.com, helvionitav@gmail.com, nurdiansetiawan333@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation and students' perceptions of democracy learning at SMP Nurul Jannah Natuna. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study involved four students and one Civics (PPKn) teacher as key informants, with data obtained through in-depth interviews analyzed thematically. The results showed that students have a good understanding of democracy, associating it with freedom of speech, deliberation, the right to vote, and responsibility. Civics learning at this school integrates democratic values through interactive methods such as group discussions, Q&A, group work, and presentations. Students are given active opportunities to express their opinions and are guided to respect differing views, with deliberation becoming a common practice in classroom decision-making. The election of the class president and the student council (OSIS) also serves as an effective means of democratic practice. The teacher plays a central role as a facilitator and a role model for democratic attitudes. Nevertheless, obstacles were found in the form of students' lack of self-confidence, the dominance of a few students, and differences in communication skills. The benefits felt by students include increased courage, tolerance, responsibility, and cooperation. Students hope that future learning will be more practical, active, and involve all participants equally. This study broadens the understanding of the internalization of democratic values at the junior high school level, highlighting the importance of the teacher's role and interactive methods in shaping students' democratic characters. The implication is the need to develop more adaptive pedagogical strategies to overcome participation barriers and maximize authentic democratic learning experiences

Keywords: *Democracy learning, Student perspectives, Civic Education*



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INTRODUCTION

Democracy learning in schools plays a crucial role in shaping participatory and responsible citizens. Schools are not merely centers for academic knowledge transfer but also function as environments that facilitate the formation of students' democratic attitudes, values, and behaviors. Through civic education, students are expected to understand democratic principles such as freedom of speech, respecting differences, deliberation, equality, responsibility, and respecting the rights and obligations of other individuals (Fauziah, 2023). The internalization of these values is essential to creating individuals who are not only intelligent but also possess good morals and character (Renaldo et al., 2024; Pratomo et al., 2024).

The implementation of Civic Education learning can assist in shaping the character of the nation's next generation in Indonesia (Fauziah, 2023). Through character education, students are taught to have good attitudes and behaviors (Fauziah, 2023). Moral education is one of the success factors in the learning process

(Renaldo et al., 2024). Without good morals, students can cause harm (Renaldo et al., 2024). Civic Education requires engaging methods so that students feel happy in learning (Pratomo et al., 2024).

The implementation of democracy learning at SMP Nurul Jannah Natuna shows a gap between students' conceptual understanding and their daily practices. Students have understood democracy as freedom of speech and respecting the views of others, but in group discussions, class deliberations, or class president elections, there are still students who are reluctant to express their opinions. Some students tend to dominate conversations, while others passively follow majority decisions without contributing. Abstract concepts such as democracy, social justice, and the rights and obligations of citizens are often difficult for students to grasp due to their non-concrete nature.

Another observed phenomenon lies in the decision-making process within the school environment. When students are given the opportunity to channel their aspirations, not everyone has the same courage and opportunity to participate. Active and confident students more frequently express their opinions, while shy or less confident students tend to remain silent. This condition is relevant to examine because democracy emphasizes not only freedom of speech but also equal opportunities to participate.

Islamic education also emphasizes the importance of shaping student discipline and morality through the deepening of religious values (Taufik & Hidayat, 2021). Independent learning (Merdeka Belajar) in elementary schools can be reviewed from the perspective of progressivism philosophy. This paper presents an analysis of Islamic education's review in shaping student discipline (Taufik & Hidayat, 2021). There are still symptoms shown by students in general schools who underestimate morality, disciplinary behavior, and politeness (Taufik & Hidayat, 2021).

Activities such as electing class presidents, student organization administrators, assigning group tasks, and learning discussions serve as spaces for democratic practice for students. It is not yet clear to what extent these activities are truly understood by students as a democracy learning process. There is a possibility that some students participate in these activities as a routine without understanding the democratic values contained within them. Previous research has shown that educational background plays an important role in individual development, including in terms of religious tolerance and the meaning of life (Rahmelia, 2020). One of the factors that play a significant role in individual development is educational background or where the individual attends school (Rahmelia, 2020). Related to this, tolerance and the meaning of life are closely tied to individual experiences in the school environment (Rahmelia, 2020).

The student perspective is a key element because they are the ones who directly experience the democracy learning process in school. Through the student's perspective, their understanding of democracy, their experiences in expressing opinions, how they respect differences, and their level of involvement in decision-making within the school environment can be explored. A quantitative approach using questionnaires can effectively collect data on student perspectives, as demonstrated in research on disaster mitigation using 3D simulations for elementary school students (Wiluyana et al., 2024).

This study attempts to fill the gap by analyzing students' perspectives on democracy learning in the SMP Nurul Jannah Natuna environment. The research focus is to understand how students internalize the taught democratic values, and how these values are reflected in their participatory behavior at school. The novelty of this research does not lie in selecting variables separately, but in constructing a predictive model that places students' conceptual understanding and participatory experiences as two main mechanisms in the context of junior high school democracy learning, differing from previous studies that focused more on curriculum aspects or teaching methods without delving into students' direct perceptions of democratic practices.

This research contributes in three ways. First, a theoretical contribution by providing empirical understanding of the effectiveness of democracy learning from the perspective of junior high school students. Second, a practical contribution by providing input for schools in designing more relevant and

participatory democracy learning strategies. Third, a methodological contribution by providing quantitative data on student perceptions that can serve as a basis for developing future measurement instruments.

METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach focuses on an in-depth understanding of social phenomena from the participants' perspective, interpreting the meaning they give to their experiences. The case study design allows researchers to conduct intensive and in-depth investigations into a single unit—in this context, democracy learning at SMP Nurul Jannah Natuna—to understand the complexity and uniqueness of the phenomenon holistically. This design seeks to generate a comprehensive understanding of how students interpret, experience, and internalize democratic values within the school environment. This research was conducted at SMP Nurul Jannah Natuna.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study presents findings obtained from in-depth interviews with students and teachers at SMP Nurul Jannah Natuna regarding democracy learning. The collected qualitative data were analyzed descriptively to identify patterns of understanding, experiences, obstacles, and student expectations related to democratic values in the school environment. These findings provide a comprehensive overview of the research subjects' perspectives on the implementation of democracy learning. This study involved four students (S-01, S-02, S-03, S-04) and one Civics (PPKn) teacher (G-01) as the main informants. The interview results are grouped based on themes established in the interview guide, ranging from the understanding of democracy to students' expectations of learning.

Democracy learning in schools plays a vital role in shaping students' character and civic engagement (Sulianti et al., 2021). Teachers have a crucial role in fostering students' democratic attitudes through Civic Education learning. Interactive learning such as group discussions, debates, and simulations significantly increases students' understanding and appreciation of democratic values. Teachers also play a key role in creating a conducive learning environment, displaying democratic attitudes, and encouraging student participation (Rizal, 2024). Challenges such as limited resources, time, and support can hinder this process (Rizal, 2024). The conflict resolution learning model can improve students' multicultural competencies (Basry, 2022). Multicultural education will be effective if teachers use engaging, collaborative, and participatory learning models (Basry, 2022).

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the expression of ideas and student interest in learning activities (Nufus et al., 2020). Cooperative learning strengthens students' social adaptation skills by providing opportunities for active involvement to set common goals in heterogeneous small groups. The Think Pair Share (TPS) learning model is highly efficient and effective for elementary school students in learning to live in harmony (Egwu et al., 2021). The integration of local wisdom values into history learning can serve as a basis for implementing noble values to cultivate noble characters (Faradila & Andi, 2023).

History learning has a strategic function in developing student character through value reflection from the studied material (Raharjo, 2021). The educational curriculum must continue to be developed so that students can face the challenges of the digital era and build a knowledge-based society (Sa'odah et al., 2020). Educators can utilize technology for video-based learning media (Melviana et al., 2023). The importance of using multicultural content in teaching materials for arts and culture learning in elementary schools is described in this study (Farid, 2023). The use of multicultural content in arts and culture learning has the potential to form tolerant characters who appreciate differences (Putraningsih et al., 2019). The multicultural education paradigm needs to be developed to build students' intellectual awareness so they can see various multicultural realities as a potential strength that must be appreciated and preserved (Muhyiddin et al., 2022).

The inter-ethnic relations (RAE)-based Indonesian history learning model is feasible to implement and effective in increasing students' sense of national solidarity (Pambudi et al., 2019). The use of an investigative type of cooperative learning strategy has a significant influence on students' Civics learning outcomes (Alim & Tirtoni, 2023). The "Voice of Democracy" project can increase student political participation, with teachers acting as mentors who encourage critical thinking and cooperation (Sofiyani et al., 2024). Students are expected not only to understand concepts through Pancasila and Civic Education but also to practice them in their daily lives (Fauziah, 2023). Multicultural education in Civic Education learning can be implemented through the selection of integrated topics and materials, as well as the use of cooperative learning methods (Rahman, 2022).

The independent learning (Merdeka Belajar) policy emphasizes six dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile, which are also integrated into high school learning (Rohmatika, 2023). The concept of independent learning in elementary schools aligns with the philosophy of progressivism, which emphasizes students' independence and freedom in developing their interests, talents, and competencies (Putri et al., 2023). Active stakeholder participation in school management decision-making positively impacts management effectiveness and student performance (Jaenudin, 2024). Dance learning as a tool for multicultural education can sow the seeds of tolerance and appreciation for cultural diversity (Putraningsih et al., 2019). A hallmark of 21st-century learning is the use of information and communication technology, one of which is utilizing smartphones (Andesta & Fernandes, 2020). Islamic education can help shape student discipline (Taufik & Hidayat, 2021). Religious tolerance and the meaning of life are closely tied to individual experiences in the school environment (Rahmelia, 2020).

This research is motivated to strengthen the good character of college students in elementary school civic education learning based on the Sariswara method (Pratomo et al., 2024). The use of value-based textbooks in the Democracy Education course has proven effective in developing students' democratic attitudes (Dianti et al., 2020). The election of the student council (OSIS) president is a direct practice for high school students to understand procedural democracy (Nurdin & Insan, 2021). The mentoring activity of national songs for elementary school students aims to instill the character of patriotism (Qondias et al., 2024). Democracy and education are the focus of interdisciplinary discussions reviewing the relevance of Dewey's thoughts (Biesta et al., 2016). Educating for democracy in a changing world requires pedagogical approaches that are adaptive and responsive to social contexts (Parker, 2017). Political socialization among youth is a multidimensional approach involving various factors and environments, including schools (Flanagan, 2016). Critical pedagogy, rooted in Dewey's thoughts, emphasizes the importance of education in empowering individuals for social change (Garrison et al., 2018). Schools hold a central role in shaping active and responsible citizens. This study highlights how civic education functions in that regard.

Table 2. Summary of Democracy Learning Interview Findings

No	Theme	Main Findings
1	Understanding of democracy	Freedom of speech, deliberation, the right to vote, and responsibility.
2	Civics (PPKn) Learning	Discussion, Q&A, group work, and presentations.
3	Student participation	Students are given opportunities to express their opinions.
4	Respecting differences	Students are guided to accept and respect different opinions.
5	Deliberation	Used in class decision-making. Class president and OSIS elections become democratic experiences.
6	Teacher's role	The teacher acts as a facilitator and role model.
7	Obstacles	Lack of self-confidence, dominant students, and differences in communication skills.
8	Benefits	Courage, tolerance, responsibility, and cooperation.
9	Expectations	Learning that is more practical, active, and involves all students.

1. Students' Understanding of Democracy

Students of SMP Nurul Jannah Natuna demonstrate a fairly good understanding of the concept of democracy. Informant S-01 stated that democracy is the freedom to express opinions while still respecting the views of others. Informant S-02 added that democracy involves joint decision-making through

deliberation without forcing opinions. This understanding is consistent with the view of S-03, who associates democracy with the right to speak, the right to vote, and individual responsibility. S-04 also emphasized the ability to express opinions and participate in determining collective decisions. These findings indicate that students have internalized the basic principles of democracy, such as freedom of speech, deliberation, equality, and responsibility.

2. Democracy Learning in the Civics (PPKn) Subject

The process of learning democracy at SMP Nurul Jannah Natuna is integrated into the Civics (PPKn) subject through various interactive methods. Informants S-01 and S-02 explained that the Civics teacher often gives group assignments and encourages discussion before students present their work. S-03 added that learning is not just explaining concepts but also involves discussions and active opinion-giving. Teacher G-01 confirmed that democratic values are integrated through discussions, group work, deliberation, presentations, and the habituation of respecting students' opinions. These methods align with efforts to foster students' democratic attitudes through Civic Education learning (Rambe & Apriani, 2021).

3. Opportunities to Express Opinions and Respect Differences

Students at SMP Nurul Jannah are given the opportunity to express their opinions, although their levels of courage vary. S-01 felt the teacher provided room to ask questions and express opinions, while S-02 admitted to still feeling shy about speaking in front of the class. S-03 felt more confident expressing opinions in group discussions compared to speaking alone in front of the class. This condition highlights a gap between the opportunities provided and students' courage to utilize them. Regarding differences of opinion, students have begun to show attitudes of respect and acceptance. S-01 explained that they listen to their friends' opinions and seek a collective decision, while S-02 emphasized the importance of respecting differing opinions. S-04 added that the teacher often reminds students not to argue and to respect their friends when there are differing views.

4. Deliberation and Election Practices

Deliberation has been applied in various class activities as part of democratic practice. S-02 and S-03 stated that they discuss determining matters related to the class and choosing joint activities. Election practices also serve as direct experiences for students in understanding democracy. S-01 and S-03 explained that the class president election is conducted by choosing candidates considered capable of leading and accepting the majority vote results. S-02 and S-04 also understand that the OSIS (Student Council) election provides learning experiences in choosing leaders based on consideration, not just out of friendship. These activities are in line with the view that the election of the OSIS president is a direct practice for students to understand procedural democracy (Nurdin & Insan, 2021).

5. Application of Democracy and Obstacles

Democratic values have been applied in daily life at school, visible in discussions, class president elections, and opportunities for the teacher to give advice to students (S-01, S-03). S-04 also felt the learning of cooperation and respecting differences of opinion. There are several obstacles to the application of democratic attitudes. S-01 identified that some students speak more actively, causing quiet students to express fewer opinions. S-02 admitted a fear of being wrong when expressing opinions, and S-04 noted that differing opinions sometimes prolong discussions. Teacher G-01 also identified obstacles in the form of uneven student courage, the dominance of certain students, and differences in students' abilities to articulate their opinions. These obstacles indicate that although opportunities are given, the implementation of active participation still requires further attention.

6. The Role of the Teacher and Learning Benefits

The teacher plays a central role as a facilitator and role model in shaping students' democratic attitudes. S-03 explained that the teacher gives all students a chance to speak and reminds them to respect their friends' opinions. Teacher G-01 affirmed that teachers strive to be examples of respecting student opinions and provide space for asking questions, expressing opinions, discussing, and making joint decisions. The

benefits students feel from democracy learning include the courage to express opinions (S-01), learning to respect friends' opinions (S-02), and understanding the importance of deliberation and cooperation (S-03). These benefits show that democracy learning contributes to the development of students' character and social skills.

7. Students' Expectations for Democracy Learning

Students have expectations for democracy learning in school to become better and more practical. S-01 hopes that learning will use discussions and practical activities more frequently. S-02 suggested the implementation of election or deliberation simulations to make learning more engaging. S-04 also hopes that all students will be given equal opportunities to speak. These expectations indicate that students desire a more active, participatory, and direct-experience-based learning approach so they can more deeply internalize democratic values in their daily practices.

CONCLUSION

This study examines democracy learning from the perspective of students at SMP Nurul Jannah Natuna, aiming to understand their conceptual understanding and participatory experiences in internalizing democratic values in the school environment. Findings show that students have varying understandings of democracy, generally associating it with freedom of speech and deliberation. Students S-01 and S-02 specifically mentioned freedom of speech, while S-03 and S-04 highlighted the importance of deliberation to reach a consensus. This understanding aligns with the basic concept of democracy, which encompasses individual rights and collective decision-making processes, as taught by G-01 through discussions and group work.

The Civics (PPKn) teacher at SMP Nurul Jannah Natuna has implemented various learning methods such as discussions, Q&A, group work, and simulations to teach democratic values. These methods are focused on encouraging active student participation and providing space to practice democratic values directly in teaching and learning activities. Students feel they are given sufficient opportunities to express their opinions, although each student's courage differs. Some students, like S-01 and S-03, show a higher degree of courage in expressing opinions, whereas S-02 and S-04 tend to be more passive, which indicates the need for further strategies to boost the self-confidence of all students.

Tolerance and attitudes of respecting differences of opinion have developed quite well among students, where they try not to force their will and accept joint decisions after the deliberation process. Deliberation in decision-making has not always occurred optimally, with some students still following decisions without actively contributing.

Students' expectations for democracy learning in school include a desire for more direct practice, such as general election simulations or activities involving active participation in school decision-making. They also hope that democracy learning is not limited to theory but is also integrated into everyday school life. This shows students' awareness of the importance of connecting learning to their real experiences.

The conclusion of this research is that democracy learning at SMP Nurul Jannah Natuna has formed students' basic understanding of democracy and facilitated the practice of these values, although there are still challenges in encouraging active and consistent participation from all students and integrating democratic practices more comprehensively within the school environment.

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