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Community-Based Learning as a Pathway to Fostering Student Civic Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This research will reveal how the Village Community Empowerment Program/*Program Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Desa* (P2MD) is implemented as community-based learning to foster civic engagement. Community-based learning creates opportunities for real learning experiences for students and builds connections between higher education institutions and the community to address societal problems and achieve the public good. **Method:** This study is qualitative and employs a phenomenological methodology. Data collection techniques include interviews and documentation studies. The participants are students from the Multimedia Student Association of the State Polytechnic of Creative Media, implementing P2MD in 2023. **Results:** The research results reflect students' engagement as citizens in addressing societal issues to achieve the public good, focusing on the waste bank management program. This program also promotes community empowerment in a participatory manner. Students' citizenship attributes include altruism, leadership, communication, problem-solving, creativity, and collaboration. **Novelty:** This study underlines the importance of critical reflection as an integral part of the learning process. By exploring the experiences of students involved in community activities, this study provides new insights into how community-based learning can develop critical thinking skills and effective communication skills.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of education is, of course, not only to develop knowledge, attitudes, and skills but must also provide real experience for students regarding their involvement in addressing common issues to achieve the public good. Students, as an inherent part of citizens, are expected to be able to engage in social issues and positively impact the development of community life. The ideal regarding this is, of course, not only achieved through formal learning of a curricular nature but can also be facilitated through non-curricular or extra-mural activities using community-based learning. Through this learning, students carry out activities by providing services to the community that can solve societal problems and provide the public good.

On the other hand, society faces complex challenges that reflect the dynamics of contemporary life. These challenges underscore the evolving needs in education, health, the economy, and the environment. Consequently, higher education must prepare students to play an active role in a continually developing society. Education focused on cultivating social skills, critical thinking abilities, and community engagement is increasingly essential for equipping students to secure employment and navigate the complexities of societal issues.

In this context, civic engagement is closely related to the idea that citizens are integral to their community's life and can actively resolve common issues to achieve the public good. This engagement can be understood as either individual or collective, rooted in skills and knowledge, as well as values, motivation, and a commitment to effecting

positive change in society and improving quality of life (Adler & Goggin, 2005). Additionally, that engagement necessitates a network, which can be assessed through behaviors and activities to address public problems (Kirlin & Kirlin, 2002).

One means of developing civic engagement to achieve the public good in a student's role is strengthening community-based learning (CBL), which can be implemented outside the formal learning environment. Students are expected to gain academic knowledge and develop practical skills relevant to society's needs. CBL is an educational process that engages students and the community, increasing active involvement in practical knowledge, volunteerism, and reciprocal understanding (Ibrahim, 2010; Mooney & Edwards, 2001). This approach accommodates strategies for utilizing learning, developing informed citizens, and fostering societal change to address the real needs of society while achieving learning outcomes and enhancing their skills and values (Cress & Stokamer, 2021; Hamzah et al., 2023). Through CBL, the development of academic competence aligns with meeting societal needs to achieve the public good.

Several previous studies have produced findings on how CBL fosters student engagement in community life. This influence extends to academic, social, and personal development that cannot be obtained in the classroom, providing transformative experiences through projects and service to the community (Vásquez et al., 2014). Connecting universities with communities through civic engagement and community service can cultivate knowledgeable and informed citizens and create locally empowered change (Tamban et al., 2020). Participation in volunteer activities, community service, and community-based research exposes students to real-world challenges and enhances their engagement in community and citizenship (Guo-Brennan et al., 2020). Increasing civic engagement will help develop positive attitudes and skills (Carlisle et al., 2020). It encourages a deeper understanding of social realities, recognition of diverse life experiences, and the creation of functional and democratic citizens. It enables students to become catalysts for social change and contribute to achieving a safer and more sustainable society that safeguards rights and responsibilities (Bastida Jr., 2023).

In the Indonesian context, CBL aligns with the framework for providing higher education, often taking the form of community service. This approach seeks to benefit society through the application of science and technology. It embodies the principles of education, research, and community service developed by higher education institutions. One significant community-based learning activity that offers a meaningful experience for students is the Village Community Empowerment Program/*Program Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Desa* (P2MD), which targets vocational education students in Indonesia. Through P2MD, it is anticipated that students will acquire essential life skills, including proficiency in specific professions (hard skills) as well as the personal development necessary for success in their careers and society (soft skills) (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Vokasi, 2022).

P2MD, which is implemented in community life, develops two contexts: the context for students as higher education students and for society. This context enables students to foster awareness and invite contributions to development and community empowerment, helping people to help themselves while also learning valuable lessons from the community. Meanwhile, village communities are expected to discover and harness their potential to develop further and become more beneficial, ultimately contributing to a just and prosperous Indonesia (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Vokasi, 2022). The scope of this program is closely linked to sustainable development across education, health, the economy, and the environment. Thus, P2MD can be assessed as CBL related to learning programs that emphasize service to the community, provide authentic learning experiences for students, positively impact learning, and promote

community empowerment. These elements are connected to contextual and actual societal problems and the efforts to solve them to achieve the public good.

As a project and service for the community, CBL through P2MD must be designed contextually to address the community's specific needs and achieve the public good. Therefore, students are required to analyze various societal issues and provide solutions that benefit the community. In alignment with the program's objectives, which include empowering the community, achieving the public good, and addressing local challenges, this initiative also focuses on developing student skills. This research explores how students reflect on P2MD activities as forms of community-based learning and their involvement as engaged citizens. Specifically, this study provides an overview of (1) P2MD as community-based learning for fostering civic engagement and (2) the civic attributions of civic engagement developed through P2MD by students.

RESEARCH METHOD

²¹ This research is part of qualitative research. Qualitative research is designed to provide an in-depth description of a particular program, practice, or setting, encompassing complexity, context, exploration, discovery, and inductive logic. It is set in a natural context to understand social problems based on holistic and complex perspectives, using words to report the detailed views of informants (Mertens, 2010; Cresswell, 2014). The qualitative approach in this research reveals how participants perceive the implementation of CBL as a means of fostering civic engagement. The methodology employed in this research is a phenomenological study. Phenomenological studies emphasize individual subjective experiences and seek to understand perceptions and meanings related to a phenomenon or experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Mertens, 2010). Through this phenomenological approach, the researcher aimed to reveal participants' reflections on CBL conducted through P2MD activities to foster civic engagement. This reflection is intrinsically linked to the views and experiences of the selected participants, hoping to achieve results aligned with the stated objectives.

Participants in this research were students from the Multimedia Student Association of the State Polytechnic of Creative Media. These vocational higher education students participated in P2MD activities in 2023. The selection of participants was aligned with the previously determined research focus.¹⁸ The selected participants included the team leader, secretary, and media coordinator. The data collection techniques were interviews, literature, and documentation studies. Interviews aimed to elicit views and opinions from participants and could be conducted face-to-face, by telephone, or in group settings using open-ended and general⁷ unstructured questions (Cresswell, 2014). Documentation studies may involve public documents such as newspapers, papers, and office reports or private documents such as diaries, letters, and emails (Cresswell, 2014). Interviews were conducted by exploring research questions with participants, while documentation studies involved examining related documents, such as P2MD activity reports.

Data analysis in this research focuses on revealing the implementation of CBL in fostering civic engagement. Data processing and preparation stages involve classifying findings from interviews based on the source of information. Next, the researcher reads the data to construct a general understanding of the information received. During the coding stage, data organization is achieved by defining categories within predetermined boundaries. At this stage, codes that relate to strengthening civic engagement through community-based learning facilitate the analysis of findings and the drawing of conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Fostering civic engagement by P2MD as CBL

The participants stated that their program was a form of selective project learning related to ideas about addressing and resolving societal issues. This program is also an effort to empower the community to solve problems. Therefore, participants identify issues that occur in society and then propose action plans to resolve these problems. The issues chosen are based on the program's scope, namely, the coverage of aspects related to education, health, economics, and the environment. The theme chosen by the participants was waste bank management, which, in this case, was related to environmental issues, which the Multimedia Student Association of the State Polytechnic of Creative Media initiated. The activities carried out include implementing a waste bank as a waste management solution in Pulo Gebang, East Jakarta, DKI Jakarta, Indonesia.

The participants indicated that their activities were not academically related, as they were not part of the curriculum. However, they believe these activities can support their academic achievements by providing real-world experiences. Additionally, according to the policies governing higher education management in Indonesia, although these activities are non-curricular, they receive academic recognition converted into the completed learning load. This aligns with the *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* policy, which encourages students to participate in learning outside their educational unit through community service activities.

Even though the activity is non-curricular, its implementation involves accompanying lecturers who assist in formulating programs and monitoring activities. These lecturers guide participants in developing the program as an action plan, which serves as a form of facilitation by the campus. The programs are non-curricular and can be viewed as community-based learning, as they address and seek to resolve social issues within the community. This approach synchronizes educational institutions' role with the community's needs. Additionally, the program bridges formal learning activities and the practical learning experiences gained through community engagement. The participants indicated that CBL, through P2MD, supported their scientific self-development. Although they possess knowledge in the field of multimedia, they also learn how to implement this activity in a cross-disciplinary manner. Scientifically, they design media as tools for socialization and persuasion regarding the programs being executed. In addition, they learn how to engage socially and civically to address issues in their communities.

The participants identified problems during the program formulation process. This identification is tailored to the needs of the target community and the feasibility of implementing appropriate solutions. The issues identified include waste management, awareness of environmental protection, and enthusiasm for collaboration in waste management efforts. Therefore, a waste management program in the form of a waste bank has been proposed, aimed at persuading and empowering people to sort and save waste according to its category. This initiative can enhance the utility of the waste, which can later be converted into a source of income. This management approach promotes waste recycling through sorting, based on the principle of waste reduction.

One of the reasons for implementing this program is that waste management is a significant challenge faced by urban communities, including Pulo Gebang Village. Improperly managed waste can negatively impact the environment and human health, so efforts are needed to address this issue. The program will likely contribute to policies aimed at improving waste disposal sites and overall waste management for the

community. Through this waste bank scheme, the community collects waste according to the categories that have been communicated and then hands it over to the relevant officers. Waste bank officers weigh the community's waste, record the weight, and deposit the equivalent amount into the community's waste bank savings. Once the amount of waste meets the target, the officer will deliver it to the collector. This process indicates that a holistic and interconnected approach to community empowerment is being implemented, leading to a tangible impact on improving people's lives and achieving the public good.

The participants reported that this activity had a mutually positive impact on them and the community. This activity provides benefits for students by allowing them to become more involved in solving community problems while also implementing direct learning experiences. Meanwhile, for the community, this activity empowers residents to be more aware and participative in addressing issues. The mutualistic nature of these benefits illustrates how social capital emerges through civic engagement in the development of community life.

The community-based learning provided to students is tailored to address problems related to community needs while offering honest and direct learning experiences. This approach also optimizes community service by educational institutions. The participants communicated these goals, which were reflected in (1) reducing waste in the relevant area to maintain environmental cleanliness and health and to mitigate the negative impacts of waste; (2) raising public awareness about the importance of proper waste management through education; (3) encouraging public participation in recycling activities to foster environmental concern and reduce waste, ultimately contributing to a cleaner and healthier environment; and (4) prioritizing cooperation in protecting the shared environment.

The Civic Attributions of Civic Engagement Developed Through P2MD by Students

According to the participants, implementing P2MD as a CBL initiative is linked to enhancing their involvement in community life. Consequently, this program also affects students' sense of citizenship and their role as integral members of society. These attributions are associated with the characteristics and skills developed through community-based learning within the program. Specifically, these characteristics and skills include altruism, leadership, communication, problem-solving, creativity, and collaboration. It is also related to developing soft skills for students through learning. This attribution pertains to competent and compassionate citizens committed to fostering a sense of community.

Altruism is demonstrated through concern for others. In this context, students participating in the P2MD program engage in CBL to address societal problems through activities to achieve the public good, empower the community, and drive social change. As altruistic citizens, students possess valuable insights about their societal roles and positions. Altruism is also connected to interconnectedness that manifests as a sense of belonging in people's lives. Leadership is demonstrated by the ability to organize group activities. Accommodative leadership is crucial for maintaining a democratic climate and overcoming differences. In this context, students participating in the P2MD program strive to embody democratic values that recognize diversity in ideas, beliefs, or even gender. Effective leadership is essential to ensure equality within groups and broader societal participation.

Communication is carried out by conveying action plans and persuasive efforts to the community, which serves as the target for program implementation. Effective communication significantly influences the realization of program success. Internally,

within the group, communication through P2MD as CBL is implemented to ensure that all members understand each party's action plans and contributions. Communication is a key component for interacting with others, allowing for adaptation to context and managing connections. This process allows students to receive factual evaluations and authentic learning experiences. Problem-solving involves identifying and analyzing issues as well as presenting potential solutions. In this context, students participating in the P2MD program for CBL understand problems, create resolution plans, execute these plans, and review all steps taken. This approach helps determine the effectiveness and efficiency of program implementation. Additionally, solving these problems is closely related to how interconnected higher education institutions are with society.

Creativity involves the implementation of ideas and thoughts through various media, as well as motivating individuals to feel empowered and participate. In the context of the P2MD program, students engage in CBL by presenting contextual and practical solutions that address community needs. They create core media, such as waste banks, and develop supporting materials, including brochures and posters, to attract community interest. For the respondents, this creativity also represents an embodiment of knowledge in the multimedia field. Collaboration is demonstrated through the ability to work together with others across diverse backgrounds. In the P2MD program, students engage in CBL by fostering synergy and adapting their roles and responsibilities to work productively while emphasizing empathy and respect for differing perspectives. Collaboration occurs internally among group members and externally with other stakeholders, such as the community and local government. This collaborative effort helps fill gaps and ensures that the implemented programs run effectively.

Discussion

Through the CBL context, a sense of connectedness is built between learners and their roles as citizens, helping to develop various intellectual and academic skills necessary for addressing everyday problems. It is achieved through academic-based community service strategies, civic learning, environmental education, place-based education, service learning, and work-based learning (Melaville et al., 2006). This synchronization fosters a connection between universities and the community through civic engagement and services aimed at developing knowledgeable and informed citizens, ultimately creating locally empowered change (Tamban et al., 2020). It also relates to institutional partnerships with the community that serve as a fulcrum for the engagement agenda, realized as a learning strategy across the spectrum of teaching, research, and service to the community (Bowen 2010). Therefore, this program facilitates learning as a means of implementing the role of educational institutions in addressing various social issues and emphasizing social responsibility.

This approach certainly enhances scientific development, as community-based learning is inherently cross-disciplinary and involves direct engagement with the community. Integrating multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary knowledge illustrates the level of knowledge synthesis and provides examples of learning experiences (Scott et al., 2020). Through this method, community-based learning becomes a "transformative practice," as the knowledge and experience gained contribute to personal growth (Vásquez et al., 2014). Furthermore, it fosters active learning among students. Active learning promotes the development of engaged citizens through critical thinking and high-level reasoning skills, enabling them to effect change in society (Jarupongputtana et al., 2022).

This reflection helps students recognize their connection to community life, emphasizing that they are part of society. It fosters problem-solving skills to achieve the public good and empower the community. It aligns with the idea that collective civic engagement is essential for addressing common issues and promoting the public good. According to Michael Delli Carpini, civic engagement relates to social problems through individual and collective actions aimed at identifying and addressing matters of public concern (Pancer, 2015). Furthermore, effective implementation of this involvement develops according to citizens' skills and real-life community experiences (Purce, 2014). Such engagement gives students a sense of purpose as engaged citizens in the public sphere, harmonizing their development with the community's growth and the pursuit of the public good while also shaping their self-identity as members of society.

Developing civic engagement among citizens involves fostering positive characteristics such as trust, competence, connection, character, and care. These traits can be measured through indicators like community involvement, volunteerism, activism, and environmental advocacy (Kim et al., 2016). This positive engagement is closely linked to the growth of social life and enhances citizens' capacities and interactions with one another, aligning with their commitments and responsibilities as citizens. As program implementers, students gain valuable real-world experience by actively participating in problem-solving and working toward the public good.

As Putnam states, activities related to civic engagement contribute to building social capital (Adler & Goggin, 2005). It can be reflected in the relationships between individuals, social networks, and the trust and reciprocity that develop in an equitable, tolerant, and supportive manner, fostering a communal spirit (Mulyono et al., 2022). Civic engagement in developing social trust is key to social capital and is essential for fostering strong norms of reciprocity (Pancer, 2015). Social capital can take the form of social networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust to achieve the public good. It includes dimensions of close relationships within groups (bonding) and connections among individuals for integration through a network (bridging) (Putnam, 2000). As illustrated, social capital can serve as leverage in enhancing civic engagement to achieve the public good.

The participants reflected on service learning for society through higher education programs. Student service learning helps students develop a deeper understanding of real-world experiences and encourages thoughtful reflection on the social problems they encounter (Rahman et al., 2024). Through service learning, civic engagement can develop hands-on learning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, increased civic knowledge, a sense of responsibility, enhanced communication and collaboration skills, and empowerment and agency (Thelma, 2024). This program has provided benefits for students, educational institutions, and society.

The context aligns with the aim of community empowerment. The empowerment process can lead to a more community-centered transformation with community participation as the primary key to achieving this goal. It includes providing access to resources, knowledge, and skills so that community members can determine their future direction and participate actively in community development (Malta, 2023). Empowerment strategies are also related to (1) identifying community potential, (2) providing group assistance, (3) offering specialized training, (4) promoting local wisdom, and (5) assisting with facilities and infrastructure (Ishom et al., 2023). Implementational participants recognize that their program is closely tied to their roles as citizens, necessitating their involvement in the development of society and the country. Consequently, the CBL programs they engage in cannot be separated from citizenship education aimed at cultivating intelligent and responsible citizens dedicated to

community development. The objective is to prepare competent citizens by fostering civic engagement and providing active learning that connects academic education with citizenship activities, which is also concerned with developing citizen attributions.

According to the respondents, CBL provides indicators of success for educational institutions, the community, and the individuals involved regarding sustainable development in the environmental sphere. For society, this is reflected in changes in people's behavior; for educational institutions, it emphasizes partnerships with various stakeholders; and for students, it offers real experience related to the knowledge they have acquired. It demonstrates a synergy and sustainable connection through community-based learning, which is crucial for sustainable development. It aligns with research indicating that student participation is linked to higher education institutions' commitment to sustainable development. Furthermore, students in disciplines related to sustainable development play an essential role in implementing these activities (Filho et al., 2024).

Student attribution as a citizen, of course, can be developed in line with preserving civic values. Civic engagement, characterized by values, is manifested in civic attitudes and behavior (Indriyani et al., 2023). On the other hand, this engagement can develop attributions in the form of characteristics, motivations, and behaviors for shared concerns and responsibilities (Radtke, 2014). At the same time, developed citizen attributions are reflected in developing 21st-century skills. Student participants reflected these attributions as conscious, communicative, collaborative, critical thinking, problem-solving, and creative. Critical thinking concerns reasoning effectively, making judgments and decisions, and solving problems; collaborating and communicating with others clearly; creativity through thinking and working creatively by applying innovation (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The vehicle is contextual in a project-based framework (Pradana & Sundawa, 2023).

On the other hand, the relationship between CBL and the development of citizens' attributions can be described that CBL can support the development of higher-order thinking skills and enhance personal growth as a crucial aspect of being a good citizen (Alsburry et al., 2020) and fosters skills in communication, leadership, emotional intelligence, and social ethics (Bedri et al., 2017). CBL also gives learning outcomes that include empathy, personal values, awareness, self-esteem, self-confidence, social responsibility, care for others, changes in attitudes toward community involvement, a deeper understanding of social issues, the development of lifelong learning and problem-solving skills, as well as skills for action and community engagement (Rosfazila, 2019). These outcomes are undoubtedly important in developing citizen attributions about how citizens achieve the public good in social life.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: The P2MD activities carried out by students of the Multimedia Student Association State Polytechnic of Creative Media can be interpreted as CBL because the approach relates to the synchronization of higher education with society and enhances the learning experiences of students based on existing problems in society. The program also empowers communities to become more aware, caring, and participatory in their development efforts. From the student perspective, this activity represents active citizenship and a commitment to achieving the public good, positioning students as agents of citizenship. Citizenship attributes such as altruism, leadership, communication, problem-solving, creativity, and collaboration are developed in this regard. **Implication:** CBL through P2MD activities is an important learning tool in developing citizen

attributions related to civic engagement and building connections between educational institutions and society, bridging learning and hands-on experience with a nurturant effect. **Limitation:** Implementing the P2MD program as CBL to foster student civic engagement has a limitation: this research may only apply to specific contexts, methodological limitations where the reflective approach used in this study may produce subjective data, and has not yet integrated multidisciplinary perspectives in depth. **Future Research:** In the future, relevant research can be carried out in the context of designing and testing models for community empowerment and civic engagement development efforts. Besides that, it can also be done through a multidisciplinary approach.

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