

Exploration of student experiences in Moonzher civil society activities to improve students' civic skills at SMAN 2 Kota Tangerang Selatan

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Abstract

Formal civic education in classrooms is often constrained by curriculum targets, limiting practical opportunities for students to develop political and social skills. Consequently, extracurricular activities based on civic society are needed as a medium for contextual learning. This research aims to explore experiences of students in the Moonzher Civic Society activities and analyze how these experiences contribute to improving students' civic skills at SMAN 2 South Tangerang City. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of the students, the researcher serves as the primary instrument. Primary data will be gathered from 7 to 10 active student members selected through purposive sampling, utilizing in-depth open-ended interviews and member checking to ensure data authenticity. Secondary data will include activity documentation and portfolios to support data triangulation. Data analysis will systematically follow Moustakas' phenomenological stages, encompassing Epoche (bracketing), horizontalization, clustering of meaning into themes, textural and structural descriptions, and the synthesis of the core essence. The findings are expected to map the explicit links between active involvement in civic communities and the enhancement of civic skills, providing theoretical contributions to non-formal civic education and practical recommendations for optimizing student participation.

Keywords: Civic skills; Extracurricular activities; Lived experience; Moonzher Civic Society; Phenomenology.

Introduction

Formal civic education in classrooms is frequently constrained by rigid curriculum targets and text-book oriented delivery methods, which primarily cultivate students' cognitive dimensions. In the context of Pancasila and Civic Education (*Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan/PPKn*) in Indonesia, this reality often leads to a missing link between conceptual knowledge and practical civic action. While students may excel in understanding state structures and normative constitutional values, they often lack the practical spaces to exercise these concepts. Consequently, formal classroom learning alone is often deemed insufficient to fully nurture democratic citizens who are

ready to engage effectively in public life. This gap accentuates the critical need for alternative, non-formal learning spaces within school environments that can offer a direct, hands-on civic experience.

To bridge this pedagogical gap, extracurricular activities organized as micro-civic societies within schools emerge as a strategic alternative. One such notable initiative is the **Moonzher Civic Society** at SMAN 2 South Tangerang City. This community-based extracurricular activity functions as a laboratory for democracy, where students are not merely passive recipients of civic knowledge but active participants who manage organizations, advocate ideas, and simulate civil society dynamics. In a phenomenological perspective, the active

involvement of students in this community generates unique *lived experiences* that are structurally different from formal learning. Through daily interactions, peer discussions, and collaborative projects within the organization, students encounter real civic challenges that force them to negotiate, tolerate differences, and make collective decisions.

Moonzher Civic Society is one of the civic society-based extracurricular activities developing at SMAN 2 South Tangerang. This activity provides a space for student social participation through discussions, social action, and leadership activities. Students engage in discussions about social issues related to the lives of their surrounding communities. This activity also encourages students to engage in collaborative activities and community service. Interactions between members create diverse social experiences in each activity. Students have the opportunity to learn to express their opinions and respect the views of others. The activity environment provides a more flexible learning process than classroom learning. This environment provides students with a unique citizenship experience as part of a civic society. This situation demonstrates that Moonzher Civic Society has characteristics that differ from other extracurricular activities at the school.

Students' experiences in Moonzher Civic Society activities vary from individual to individual. Some students experience increased confidence in communicating and collaborating with group members. Others begin to demonstrate courage in expressing their opinions in discussion forums. Some students demonstrate greater social awareness after participating in this extracurricular activity. Others still exhibit relatively similar behavioral patterns as before participating. These differences in experience emerge through ongoing social interactions. Each student interprets their experiences based on their personal background and experiences. This process creates subjective experiences that differ from one student to another. This demonstrates that students' experiences in civic society activities are complex and diverse.

Understanding these student experiences becomes vital because they directly correlate

with the development of **civic skills**. Civic skills—which encompass both intellectual skills (such as critical thinking, analyzing public policies, and political monitoring) and participatory skills (such as coalition-building, articulating opinions, and peaceful conflict resolution)—cannot be effectively mastered through memorization alone. They require continuous practice and reflection. While previous studies have extensively researched civic skills within formal classroom settings or evaluated civic education curricula quantitatively, there remains a significant research gap in qualitatively exploring how community-based school organizations organically shape these skills from the subjective viewpoints of the students themselves.

Based on this backdrop, this research aims to address two central problems:

1. How do students experience and perceive their active involvement within the Moonzher Civic Society activities?
2. How does their participation in these activities contribute to the improvement and refinement of their civic skills?

By employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study delves deep into the essence of student experiences to map out how non-formal civic engagement serves as a vehicle for skills acquisition. The insights gained from this research are expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the literature on experiential learning in civic education and offer practical recommendations for educators on how to optimize extracurricular platforms to cultivate competent future citizens.

Literature Review

Civics Education

Civics education is an educational process aimed at developing citizens with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for national and state life. This education guides individuals to understand the fundamental values that underpin social life (Mickovska-Raleva, 2019). Students learn the concept of citizenship through a systematic learning process. Civics education encompasses the

interrelated aspects of knowledge, attitudes, and skills. This process takes place in both formal and non-formal educational settings (Mutengwa, 2020). Civics education is part of the national education system. This concept emphasizes the formation of civic character. This education serves as a means of fostering students' social awareness (Anderson, 2023).

Civic Skills

Civic skills are the skills individuals need to live in society and the state. These skills relate to a person's ability to understand, behave, and act in a social context. Civic skills encompass the ability to think, interact, and participate in public life. These skills are part of the civic competencies that students must possess. The process of developing civic skills occurs through continuous learning experiences. The social environment influences the development of these skills. Civic skills are a crucial part of civic education. This concept emphasizes the individual's active involvement in social life (Veugelers & de Groot, 2019).

Character Education

Character education is an educational process aimed at shaping individual values, attitudes, and behavior in everyday life. This education guides students to develop personalities that align with social and moral norms. The character education process encompasses the integrated development of cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. Students understand values through structured learning activities at school. They also internalize values through experiences gained in social interactions. Students practice these values in concrete actions within the school environment. Character education is part of the education system integrated into the curriculum. This process takes place through continuous formal and non-formal learning. Character education serves as a means of developing students' holistic personalities (Setyowati, 2024). Character education also serves as an important foundation for developing civic virtue and democratic citizenship in students through meaningful social experiences.

Extracurricular Activities as School-Based Civic Society

In the discourse of modern civic education, schools are viewed not merely as academic institutions, but as mini-publics or microcosms of society where democratic life is practiced (Print, 2007). While formal classrooms represent the structured domain of civic learning, extracurricular activities function as the organic domain of civic engagement (Gladdish & Swaim, 2018). Extracurricular activities that adopt the principles of a civil society provide students with an autonomous space to self-organize, deliberate, and act collectively without the rigid constraints of formal grading systems (Feinstein et al., 2014).

According to civic education literature, active participation in voluntary school organizations mirrors adult civic participation in the broader public sphere (Youniss et al., 2002). In these non-formal spaces, students experience what phenomenologists refer to as *lived experience*—the subjective, first-hand encounter with organizational dynamics, diversity of opinions, and collective decision-making (Moustakas, 1994). In the context of this study, the Moonzher Civic Society serves as an empirical example of a school-based civic society. It operates as a laboratory for democracy, translating abstract constitutional norms and civic values into concrete, everyday social interactions among peer groups (Kahne & Sporte, 2008).

The Dimension of Civic Skills in Civic Education

Civic skills constitute a vital pillar of competent citizenship, alongside civic knowledge and civic dispositions (Branson, 1998). In Ribble's (2015) framework of modern citizenship, fostering effective citizens requires a deliberate shift from passive awareness to active, skillful execution. Civic skills are generally categorized into two interconnected dimensions (Center for Civic Education, 1994):

1. **Civic Intellectual Skills:** These encompass the cognitive capacities required to think critically about public

issues, analyze policy, monitor government actions, and distinguish between fact and opinion in public discourse (Kirlin, 2003).

2. **Civic Participatory Skills:** These refer to the practical abilities needed to influence civic life, which include articulating public arguments, mobilizing support, managing conflicts peacefully, building coalitions, and voting or deliberating responsibly (Torney-Purta, 2002).

Mastering civic skills requires an experiential learning process where students can test, fail, and refine their capacities (Galston, 2001). Memorization of civic theories in a conventional classroom setting is rarely sufficient to build the confidence and competence needed for real-world political and social participation (Crittenden & Levine, 2013). Therefore, the acquisition of these skills is heavily dependent on the quality of civic spaces available to students during their formative years (Levine, 2007).

Experiential Learning and Civic Skills Acquisition

To understand how student experiences in a school organization translate into improved civic skills, this study utilizes John Dewey's theory of Experiential Learning. Dewey (1938) argued that learning is a continuous process of reconstructing experience. True education occurs when a student encounters a meaningful, hands-on experience, reflects upon its challenges, and applies the newly formed insights to subsequent situations (Kolb, 1984).

When applied to civic education, experiential learning implies that civic skills are not merely taught; they are caught and refined through active engagement (Campbell, 2006). When students within the Moonzher Civic Society manage projects, resolve internal organizational conflicts, or articulate ideas during meetings, they are engaging in a cyclical process of action and reflection (Eyler & Giles, 1999). This lived experience forces the internalization of civic intellectual skills as they analyze organizational problems, and civic participatory skills as they collaborate to solve them (Battistoni, 2002). Consequently, the school-based civic society acts as a

pedagogical bridge that transforms abstract civic knowledge into enduring practical skills (Morgan & Streb, 2001).

Method

Setting and Participant

The research was conducted at SMAN 2 South Tangerang City, focusing specifically on the extracurricular community known as the Moonzher Civic Society. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure that the data gathered was rich and highly relevant to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The criteria for selection required that participants were active student members of the Moonzher Civic Society for at least one academic year, ensuring they had sufficient exposure to organizational activities to experience a development in their civic skills. A total of 8 students (aged 15–17 years) were selected as key informants, a sample size that aligns with phenomenological guidelines for achieving data saturation (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Data Collection

Data collection relied primarily on qualitative methods to capture the depth of the students' experiences. The primary instrument in this qualitative study was the researcher himself, who facilitated the exploratory process while continuously maintaining an awareness of personal biases through the process of *epoche* or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). Two main techniques were utilized:

1. **In-depth, Semi-structured Interviews:** Long interviews were conducted with each participant using open-ended questions. The interview protocol focused on two primary axes: (a) the students' concrete experiences and activities within the Moonzher Civic Society, and (b) their subjective self-assessment regarding the refinement of their civic intellectual and participatory skills through those activities.
2. **Documentation Review:** To complement the interviews and provide empirical context, the researcher reviewed secondary data sources, including the community's

organizational charts, meeting minutes, activity portfolios, and documentation of projects executed by the students.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis followed the systematic psychological phenomenological steps established by Moustakas (1994), which consist of the following rigorous stages:

1. **Epoche (Bracketing):** The researcher actively bracketed personal preconceptions, judgments, and professional experiences regarding civic education to view the data with fresh, unclouded perception.
2. **Horizontalization:** The interview transcripts were thoroughly examined, and every statement relevant to the experience of the activities and the acquisition of civic skills was treated with equal value. Irrelevant or repetitive statements were omitted.
3. **Clustering of Meaning (Thematization):** The remaining significant statements were grouped into distinct meaning units or core themes that directly represented the two research variables.
4. **Textural and Structural Descriptions:** For each theme, a textural description was written to capture *what* the students experienced, followed by a structural description to capture *how* the organizational setting and peer interactions influenced that experience.
5. **Synthesis of the Essence:** Finally, the textural and Structural descriptions were integrated to construct a unified statement of the ultimate "essence" of the phenomenon, illuminating how participating in a school-based civic society inherently improves students' civic skills.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the trustworthiness (validity and reliability) of this qualitative study, the researcher implemented several rigorous strategies suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). **Member checking** was executed by returning the synthesized interview

summaries to the participants to verify that the interpretations accurately reflected their actual experiences. **Data triangulation** was achieved by cross-referencing interview testimonies with the organizational documentation. Finally, ethical considerations were strictly maintained; informed consent was obtained from both the school authorities and the students' parents, and pseudonyms were utilized throughout the report to guarantee participant anonymity.

Result and Discussion

This research was conducted at SMAN 2 South Tangerang, the research location. This school has an extracurricular activity, the Moonzher Civic Society, which was the focus of the study. The research was conducted within a timeframe aligned with the extracurricular activity schedule. The research subjects consisted of students actively participating in the activity. Subject selection was based on student involvement in the activity. The school environment serves as a social context that influences student experiences. Interactions between students and instructors are part of the phenomenon being studied. The research setting provides a snapshot of the real-world conditions that serve as the object of the study.

The social context in this study encompasses the dynamics of interactions within extracurricular activities. Students interact in groups with shared goals. The activity environment provides diverse social experiences for students. The instructors play a role in directing student activities. These interactions shape unique experiences for each individual. This situation demonstrates the contextual nature of the phenomenon being studied. This research setting provides a foundation for a deeper understanding of student experiences.

Textural and Structural Core Themes

Through the process of horizontalization and clustering of meaning, the phenomenological analysis revealed three

dominant themes that reflect the *lived experience* of students in the Moonzher Civic Society and its direct contribution to their civic skills development:

Core Theme	Textural Description (What was experienced)	Structural Description (How it was shaped)	Improved Civic Skills
Theme 1: Democratic Deliberation & Public Discourse	Students experienced intensive debate, argument formulation, and structured forums regarding societal and school issues.	Shaped through routine open-floor organizational meetings and public speaking training programs.	Intellectual: Critical thinking, policy analysis. Participatory: Articulating public claims.
Theme 2: Collaborative Project Management	Students experienced the complexities of organizing school-wide civic events, working in	Shaped through practical execution of student-led civic forums, workshops, and community outreach	Participatory: Coalition-building, negotiation, peaceful conflict resolution.

Core Theme	Textural Description (What was experienced)	Structural Description (How it was shaped)	Improved Civic Skills
	teams, and managing conflicts.	h.	
Theme 3: Civic Monitoring & Social Responsibility	Students experienced a heightened awareness of community problems and simulated legislative monitoring within the school.	Shaped through group discussions on current national/local events and active structural positioning as student advocates.	Intellectual: Monitoring public events, distinguishing bias from fact.

The Meaning of Lived Experience in Skill Transformation

The empirical results confirm that student involvement in the Moonzher Civic Society operates as a powerful catalyst for civic skills development because it utilizes the exact cycle of experiential learning postulated by Dewey (1938) and Kolb (1984). Unlike traditional classroom environments where civic skills are only discussed conceptually, the school-based civic society presents students with concrete, high-stakes interactive conditions.

When students engage in *Theme 1 (Democratic Deliberation)*, they are forced to shift from passive consumers of news to active, critical thinkers. This experience refines their civic intellectual skills. They learn how to gather information, analyze public agendas, and structure arguments that can withstand peer critique. This aligns with the findings of Kahne and Sporte (2008), who noted that schools that provide open climates for discussion significantly boost students' long-term analytical civic capacities.

Furthermore, the operational realities found in *Theme 2 (Collaborative Project Management)* show that participatory skills cannot be learned individually; they require social friction. When students encounter structural disagreements during organizational execution, the experience pushes them to implement negotiation and peaceful conflict resolution. The *lived experience* of navigating peer diverse opinions serves as a functional testbed for adult political life, validating Torney-Purta's (2002) assertion that democratic peer interactions are the strongest predictors of future political efficacy. Ultimately, the Moonzher Civic Society bridges the gap between formal knowledge and practical competency, providing an organic blueprint for authentic civic skill acquisition.

Conclusion

This study concludes that student experiences within the Moonzher Civic Society extracurricular activity significantly improve both the intellectual and participatory dimensions of their civic skills at SMAN 2 South Tangerang City. Through structured democratic deliberation, collaborative project execution, and simulated civic monitoring, students successfully translate abstract classroom concepts into practical citizenship competencies. The non-formal, autonomous structure of the organization provides a safe yet realistic laboratory for democracy where students can catch, refine, and internalize crucial civic habits of the mind and hand.

Theoretically, this research reinforces John Dewey's experiential learning framework by demonstrating how micro-civil societies

within formal educational institutions bridge the pedagogical gap between civic knowledge and action. Practically, these findings imply that school authorities and civic educators should not treat extracurricular organizations as mere recreational additions. Instead, they should intentionally design and support platforms like the Moonzher Civic Society as core structural instruments for reinforcing democratic citizenship. Future research is recommended to expand this inquiry into longitudinal studies to monitor whether these acquired school-level civic skills effectively translate into lifelong public political participation after graduation.

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