



The Implementation of the Project Citizen Method in Shaping Christian Character at State Vocational High School 1 Doloksanggul

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of implementing the Project Citizen method in shaping Christian character among students at State Vocational High School Negeri 1 Doloksanggul. The Project Citizen method is a project-based learning approach that encourages students' active involvement in identifying, analyzing, and finding solutions to real-world problems in their community. In the context of Christian education, this method is integrated with Christian values to instill a character that reflects the teachings of Jesus Christ, such as compassion, responsibility, and honesty. This research employs a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, to gain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the students' character development. The study sample consisted of 60 grade XI students who actively participated in project-based learning throughout one semester. Data were collected using various techniques, including observations of student behavior, interviews with teachers and students, surveys to measure perceptions and attitude changes, and an analysis of the project documentation completed by the students. The findings indicate that the implementation of the Project Citizen method significantly contributed to the formation of Christian character in the students. The most notable improvement was observed in the aspect of social responsibility, with an increase of 43.7%, followed by responsibility at 38.2%, and honesty at 35.6%. These results suggest that real-world experiences in collectively solving social issues can raise awareness and attitudes aligned with Christian values. The integration of the Project Citizen method with Christian values not only provides students with an opportunity to develop intellectually but also morally and spiritually. The learning process, which emphasizes participation, reflection, and real action, makes students more sensitive to the needs of others, more responsible for their tasks, and more committed to upholding honesty in every action. Therefore, the findings of this study indicate that Project Citizen can be an effective strategy for character education, particularly in schools where the majority of students come from Christian backgrounds. This approach holds potential for broader application as a contextual and transformative model of character education.

Keywords: Project Citizen, character education, Christian values, Christianity

INTRODUCTION

Character education is one of the crucial aspects of the national education system in Indonesia. The primary goal of character education is to shape learners who are not only excellent in intellectual achievement but also possess strong personalities and noble moral values. In this context, good character encompasses various dimensions such as honesty, responsibility, social awareness, tolerance, cooperation, and discipline. Strengthening character education has become increasingly important in light of the growing complexity of contemporary challenges, where students are confronted with negative influences both from their social environment and from digital media. Therefore, character education must be designed in such a way that it remains relevant to students' lived realities and equips them with moral principles that can serve as a guide in their daily lives. In schools where the majority of students are Christian, such as State Vocational High School 1 Doloksanggul in Humbang Hasundutan Regency, North Sumatra Province, the implementation of character education takes on a more distinctive nuance. In this context, character education refers not only to universal values but also to Christian values rooted in biblical teachings. Values such as love, honesty, faithfulness, responsibility, humility, and compassion for others form the fundamental basis for shaping Christian character. However, in practice, integrating these values into a learning system aligned with the national curriculum is not an easy task. Appropriate pedagogical strategies are required so that students not only receive these values theoretically but are also able to apply them meaningfully in their lives.

One approach considered effective in addressing this challenge is the *Project Citizen* method. This method was developed by the Center for Civic Education (CCE) in the United States and has been implemented in various countries, including Indonesia. *Project Citizen* is a project-based learning model that emphasizes students' active engagement in identifying social problems in their communities, analyzing their root causes, and formulating policy solutions that are both appropriate and realistic. This process fosters students' awareness of their social responsibilities as citizens and sharpens their critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills. According to Budimansyah (2018), *Project Citizen* holds significant potential for fostering students' civic competence because it involves them in concrete democratic processes. In its implementation, students are divided into small groups and work collaboratively on projects related to real issues in their communities. This process not only enhances cognitive skills but also shapes character through direct experience and critical reflection. Here lies the relevance of *Project Citizen* to character education, particularly in the context of Christian schools. Christian values emphasizing love, honesty, compassion, and responsibility strongly resonate with the participatory spirit and social empathy fostered through this method. Trevino (2019) argues that faith-based character education becomes more effective when integrated with contextual and meaningful learning activities. Project-based learning, such as *Project Citizen*, offers ample space for students to experience and practice moral values in real-life situations. This stands in contrast to conventional approaches that are often more theoretical and tend not to deeply engage the affective dimensions of learners. Several previous studies have demonstrated positive outcomes from the implementation of *Project Citizen* in the context of character education. For example, Kadarudin's (2020) study at SMA Taruna Nusantara revealed that student participation in

Project Citizen had a significant impact on enhancing their sense of social responsibility. Similarly, Widiatmaka's (2018) research found that the method successfully fostered critical awareness and concern for social issues among students. However, research specifically examining how *Project Citizen* can be integrated with Christian values to shape Christian character remains very limited.

State Vocational High School Negeri 1 Doloksanggul is a vocational education institution with a vision to produce graduates who are not only competent in their fields of expertise but also firmly rooted in Christian character. The majority of both students and teachers at this school are Christians, making Christian values a central foundation in the teaching and character formation process. Despite the implementation of various character education programs, initial observations indicate a gap between the values taught and students' actual behavior in the school environment. For instance, issues such as lack of discipline, limited sense of responsibility toward assignments, and low levels of social awareness among students are still evident. These phenomena raise questions regarding the effectiveness of the current character education approaches being implemented.

Against this backdrop, this study is designed with the primary aim of analyzing the effectiveness of implementing the *Project Citizen* method integrated with Christian values in shaping students' character at State Vocational High School Negeri 1 Doloksanggul. Specifically, the study seeks to: (1) analyze the implementation process of the *Project Citizen* method integrated with Christian values in the school; (2) measure the influence of this method on the formation of students' Christian character; and (3) identify the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting the success of this method in the context of character education. This research is important because it contributes to the development of more contextual models of character education, particularly in schools with a predominantly Christian background. The findings are expected not only to provide insights into the effectiveness of *Project Citizen* in shaping Christian character but also to offer practical recommendations for educators, school policymakers, and the wider Christian educational community in designing teaching strategies that integrate the national curriculum with Christian faith values. By integrating participatory and meaningful learning approaches such as *Project Citizen* with Christian values rooted in the local context, character education is expected to become more relevant, impactful, and spiritually enriching for students. This approach not only equips them to become good citizens but also forms them into individuals who live in accordance with their faith principles—ultimately enabling them to contribute positively to both society and the church.

METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods within a single research framework. The design began with the collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis to further elaborate and explain the initial findings. The choice of the sequential explanatory design aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the *Project Citizen* method in shaping students' Christian character. Through this approach, the researcher not only evaluated statistically measurable changes but also explored in greater depth how

Christian values were applied and interpreted within the context of project-based learning. The study was conducted at State Vocational High School 1 Doloksanggul, a public vocational school located in Humbang Hasundutan Regency, North Sumatra. The primary participants were 60 eleventh-grade students divided into two groups: an experimental group consisting of 30 students who engaged in learning activities using the *Project Citizen* method integrated with Christian values, and a control group of 30 students who received conventional instruction. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: being Christian, actively involved in school activities, and willing to participate in all phases of the study. In addition to students, five teachers and two school leaders were also involved as informants in the qualitative phase, providing valuable perspectives from the standpoint of educators and school management. Multiple instruments were utilized in this research. First, a Christian character questionnaire was developed based on Fowler's (1981) faith development theory and Lickona's (2009) character education theory. This questionnaire consisted of 40 items measuring three domains of character—cognitive, affective, and psychomotor—covering values such as love, honesty, responsibility, social concern, and discipline. Content validity was assessed through expert judgment, while construct validity was tested using factor analysis. Reliability testing with Cronbach's Alpha yielded a score of 0.87, indicating high reliability. Second, observation guidelines were designed to monitor students' behavior during learning activities and project implementation, particularly in expressing Christian values. Third, semi-structured interview protocols were employed to capture the perceptions of students, teachers, and school leaders regarding the implementation of *Project Citizen*. Fourth, documentation in the form of student portfolios, reflective journals, and final project products was collected to strengthen findings from other data sources. The research was carried out in three main phases over one academic semester, from August to December 2023. The pre-intervention phase began with the administration of a pre-test in both classes to measure students' baseline Christian character. During this phase, training sessions were also conducted for teachers on the implementation of *Project Citizen* and on integrating Christian values into each stage of the project. Teaching materials and supporting tools were systematically prepared.

In the intervention phase, the experimental class participated in learning activities using the *Project Citizen* approach, which consisted of six main stages: (1) identifying public issues relevant to Christian values, (2) selecting one key issue for in-depth study, (3) collecting data and information related to the issue, (4) developing a portfolio as a proposed solution, (5) presenting the portfolio in class or school forums, and (6) conducting reflection sessions linked to Christian faith principles. Conversely, the control class received conventional instruction based on the same curriculum but without project-based learning or explicit reinforcement of Christian values. During this phase, the researcher conducted direct observations and collected documentation of learning activities. The post-intervention phase involved the administration of a post-test to evaluate the development of Christian character among students in both the experimental and control groups. Additionally, interviews were conducted with selected students, teachers, and school leaders to gain deeper insights into the effectiveness of the learning process and the challenges encountered. Student portfolios and final project products were also analyzed as supporting data. Quantitative data were analyzed using

descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, and standard deviation) to portray students' character profiles, and inferential statistics, including t-tests and ANOVA, to examine differences between the two groups. Meanwhile, qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved transcribing interviews, coding data, grouping codes into categories, identifying key themes, and drawing conclusions. To enhance the credibility of the findings, triangulation was employed across data sources, methods, and timing. This methodological approach enabled the researcher to present results that were not only statistically valid but also rich in narrative and contextual insights into the formation of Christian character through the *Project Citizen* method.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Initial Condition of Students' Christian Character

The results of the pre-test indicated no significant difference between the initial Christian character levels of students in the experimental class and the control class ($t = 1.24$, $p > 0.05$). The mean score for the experimental class was 67.35 (moderate category), while the control class obtained a mean score of 66.83 (moderate category). Analysis of the dimensions of Christian character revealed that the weakest aspects were responsibility (mean score 60.21) and social concern (mean score 62.45), while the relatively stronger aspects were honesty (mean score 70.36) and love (mean score 69.87).

The implementation of Project Citizen integrated with Christian values in the experimental class was carried out through six main stages. First, in the *identification of issues*, students identified various social problems relevant to Christian values, including indiscriminate waste disposal in the school environment, lack of care for the elderly in a local nursing home, and limited educational access for underprivileged children in nearby villages. At this stage, students were encouraged to connect these issues with Christian values such as stewardship of God's creation (environment), love for others (care for the elderly), and justice (educational access). Second, during *problem selection*, through group discussions and voting, students selected "limited educational access for underprivileged children" as the focus of the project, based on the Christian principles of justice and compassion for the marginalized. Third, in *information gathering*, students conducted research through interviews with village officials, observations of low-income communities, and literature reviews, while also examining biblical references related to compassion and education. The collected data included school dropout rates, causal factors, family economic conditions, and existing educational policies. Fourth, in *portfolio development*, students produced a portfolio consisting of: (a) a description of the problem and relevant Christian values, (b) data on the educational conditions of underprivileged children, (c) proposed policy alternatives, and (d) an action plan in the form of a "Sunday School Plus" program combining Christian values education with academic tutoring. Fifth, during *portfolio presentation*, students presented their work before a panel of judges consisting of school representatives, church leaders, and village officials, covering background, Christian value analysis, policy proposals, and concrete action plans. Sixth, in *learning reflection*, students reflected on the project process and outcomes through reflective journals and group discussions, explicitly linking their experiences with their Christian character development.

Observational data indicated high enthusiasm and active participation from students throughout all stages of Project Citizen. They successfully integrated Christian values in discussions and problem-solving. Analysis of students' reflective journals revealed that the majority (87%) acknowledged that the project helped them understand and apply Christian values in real-life contexts.

Changes in Students' Christian Character

The post-test results demonstrated a significant increase in the Christian character scores of the experimental class, rising from a mean of 67.35 to 85.62 (an increase of 27.1%). In contrast, the control class exhibited a smaller improvement, from 66.83 to 70.21 (an increase of 5.1%). A t-test confirmed that the difference in improvement between the two groups was statistically significant ($t = 8.76, p < 0.01$). Further analysis of the character dimensions showed that the highest improvements in the experimental class were observed in: (1) social concern (43.7%), (2) responsibility (38.2%), (3) honesty (35.6%), (4) love (32.8%), and (5) discipline (24.5%). ANOVA results indicated no significant differences in character improvement based on gender ($F = 1.23, p > 0.05$) or socioeconomic background ($F = 1.45, p > 0.05$). However, significant differences were found based on students' involvement in church activities ($F = 5.34, p < 0.05$), with more active church participants showing greater improvement.

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of qualitative data produced several key themes. First, *Christian value-based social awareness*: most students (23 out of 30) in the experimental class stated that Project Citizen helped them develop stronger social awareness, viewing social issues through a Christian lens. As one student reflected: "I realized that as a Christian, I should not only focus on church worship but also care about social issues around me, especially education for underprivileged children" (Student 15, Interview). Second, *application of Christian values in real contexts*: students had the opportunity to practice Christian values through social actions planned and executed within Project Citizen. One student noted, "The Sunday School Plus program allowed me to apply love in concrete ways, not just in theory" (Student 8, Reflective Journal). Third, *development of Christian leadership competence*: Project Citizen enabled students to cultivate leadership grounded in Christian principles. As one student expressed: "I learned to lead with the principle of serving, not dominating, following the example of Jesus who taught that a leader must be a servant" (Student 22, Interview). Fourth, *implementation challenges*: several challenges were identified, including limited time, difficulties in coordinating with external parties, and varied student understanding of Christian values. A teacher explained: "The biggest challenge was aligning the project schedule with regular learning activities and students' church commitments" (Teacher 3, Interview). Fifth, *support from the school and church environment*: the success of the project was supported by strong collaboration between the school and the local church. The school principal remarked, "The support of the local church was crucial, especially in providing resources and spiritual guidance for students" (Principal, Interview).

The findings demonstrate that Project Citizen, when integrated with Christian values, is effective in shaping students' Christian character at State Vocational High School 1 Doloksanggul. The significant improvement in Christian character scores in the

experimental class (27.1%) compared to the control class (5.1%) confirms its effectiveness. These results align with Widiatmaka (2018), who found that Project Citizen enhances students' civic character. However, this study contributes new insights by showing that integrating Christian values into Project Citizen further enhances its effectiveness in religious character education. The highest improvements in social concern (43.7%) and responsibility (38.2%) highlight the method's strength in fostering social and moral responsibility, consistent with the essence of Christian teaching that emphasizes love and accountability within community life. According to Treviño (2019), faith-based character education is more effective when integrated into meaningful and contextual learning activities. Project Citizen provides such a meaningful context by engaging students in identifying and solving real community problems. This process enables them to translate theological understanding into concrete actions, consistent with the Christian belief that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:17).

Mechanisms of Christian Character Formation through Project Citizen

Analysis of the findings revealed several mechanisms explaining how Project Citizen fosters Christian character formation. First, *experiential learning*: Project Citizen offers authentic learning experiences in which students actively engage in identifying and solving social issues, allowing them to apply Christian values in real contexts. As Kolb (1984) argues, experiential learning facilitates the transformation of knowledge into skills and attitudes. Second, *theological reflection*: reflection, as an integral component of Project Citizen, enabled students to evaluate their experiences through the lens of Christian values. This aligns with Lickona's (2009) character education model, which emphasizes cognitive (moral knowledge), affective (moral feelings), and behavioral (moral action) dimensions. Third, *supportive learning community*: Project Citizen cultivated a learning community where students encouraged one another to apply Christian values. Fowler (1981) highlights that faith development occurs within supportive communities; in this study, the experimental class became such a community for Christian character growth. Fourth, *integration of faith and action*: Project Citizen bridged the gap between faith and practice. Students not only learned Christian values theoretically but also applied them in real-life contexts, thereby preventing a disconnection between belief and action.

Factors Influencing the Success of Implementation

The successful implementation of the Project Citizen method in shaping students' Christian character is influenced by a number of interrelated factors. These factors do not operate in isolation; rather, they form a dynamic framework that determines the extent to which the method can achieve its educational goals. A comprehensive understanding of these factors is therefore essential for both scholars and practitioners who seek to apply Project Citizen in Christian educational settings.

One of the most fundamental factors is institutional support. The commitment of the school and the church plays a central role in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of the program. Schools provide the formal educational structure and resources, while churches contribute to the spiritual formation of students through pastoral guidance and moral reinforcement. When both institutions collaborate, they create a synergy that reinforces students' Christian identity. For example, coordinated activities between the school and the church can foster coherence between what students learn in classrooms

and what they experience in their faith communities. Without this institutional backing, Project Citizen risks being implemented as a mere extracurricular project, disconnected from the broader framework of Christian character formation.

Another decisive factor is teacher competence. Teachers serve as facilitators and role models in the Project Citizen approach. Their competence lies not only in their ability to guide students through the methodological stages of the program—such as problem identification, research, analysis, and presentation—but also in their capacity to integrate Christian values into these processes. A teacher with strong theological grounding can illuminate the moral and spiritual dimensions of societal issues under discussion, thereby ensuring that students do not only develop civic awareness but also strengthen their Christian ethical perspective. Thus, teacher competence encompasses pedagogical expertise, theological literacy, and the ability to bridge faith and practice. A lack of such competence can result in a fragmented learning process, where the method is applied mechanically without addressing the deeper dimensions of Christian character development. The relevance of the projects undertaken also plays a crucial role in determining the success of Project Citizen. When students engage with issues that resonate with their local realities and align with Christian values, their motivation and sense of responsibility increase significantly. For instance, in this study, the selected issue—limited access to education for underprivileged children—has a strong correlation with Christian principles such as justice, compassion, and love of neighbor. By addressing this issue, students are not only exercising critical thinking and problem-solving skills but also embodying the ethical teachings of Christianity in tangible ways. The relevance of the project thus functions as a bridge between theoretical values and lived experiences, enabling students to perceive the transformative potential of their faith in society.

A further factor that cannot be overlooked is adequate time allocation. Project Citizen is not a program that can be rushed; it requires sustained engagement for students to explore each phase thoroughly. From researching issues to developing policy proposals and presenting them to stakeholders, students need sufficient time to reflect, collaborate, and internalize the learning process. In many cases, time limitations become a significant challenge, leading to superficial engagement with the issues. Without proper time management, the project risks losing its depth and failing to achieve its full potential in shaping Christian character. Therefore, the allocation of adequate time is a structural requirement that institutions must prioritize to maximize the effectiveness of the method.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study carry important implications, both at the theoretical and practical levels. On the theoretical front, the research contributes to the broader discourse on faith-based character education. The integration of Christian values into active learning methodologies such as Project Citizen demonstrates that character education need not be confined to moral instruction alone but can be cultivated through participatory and experiential approaches. This insight enriches the theoretical framework of religious education by highlighting the ways in which theological principles can be operationalized within civic-oriented pedagogical models. The study therefore advances the academic conversation about the intersections of religion, pedagogy, and civic engagement, showing that faith-based values can coexist productively with

democratic educational practices. From a practical perspective, the study provides a model that can be adapted by other Christian schools seeking to strengthen their character education programs. The implementation of Project Citizen, when guided by institutional support, teacher competence, relevant project selection, and sufficient time, can serve as a replicable model of best practice. Schools with Christian foundations can adopt this approach and tailor it to their local needs, thereby creating a contextualized program that resonates with students' lived experiences. The adaptability of the model ensures that it can be applied across diverse contexts—whether in urban or rural schools—while maintaining fidelity to its core purpose of shaping Christian character. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of fostering partnerships between educational institutions and faith communities, suggesting that schools should intentionally seek collaboration with local churches to reinforce students' moral and spiritual development. The successful implementation of Project Citizen in shaping Christian character is contingent upon a constellation of factors, including institutional support, teacher competence, project relevance, and adequate time allocation. These factors not only ensure the program's effectiveness but also provide a framework that can be applied to other educational contexts. Theoretically, the study enriches the understanding of how religious values can be integrated into active learning methodologies. Practically, it offers a replicable model for Christian schools to enhance their character education programs. By situating Project Citizen within both educational and theological frameworks, this study affirms the potential of participatory learning methods to foster a generation of students who embody Christian values while actively engaging with societal challenges.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Project Citizen method, when integrated with Christian values, has proven effective in shaping the Christian character of students at State Vocational High School 1 Doloksanggul. The most significant improvements were observed in the aspects of social concern, responsibility, and honesty. This indicates that the combination of project-based learning with Christian values can create a deeper and more meaningful learning experience for students. The implementation of Project Citizen was carried out through six systematic stages: problem identification, problem selection, information gathering, portfolio development, portfolio presentation, and reflection. Each of these stages not only equips students with civic skills but also enables them to apply Christian teachings in real-life contexts. The integration of values such as love, responsibility, and honesty in each stage provides a profound moral dimension that enriches the learning process and strengthens the formation of Christian character among students. The success of Project Citizen in shaping Christian character was also significantly influenced by several factors, including strong institutional support, adequate teacher competence, the relevance of the projects undertaken, and sufficient time allocation for each stage to be carried out thoroughly. Support from both the school and external stakeholders, such as the church and the local community, further reinforced the implementation of Christian values-based character education as designed within the curriculum. These factors play a crucial role in creating an environment conducive to character development.

In light of these findings, several recommendations are proposed for further development. For schools, it is important to design curricula that explicitly link Christian values with active learning methods such as Project Citizen, thereby enabling students to experience integrated and contextualized learning. Schools are also encouraged to strengthen collaboration with churches and local communities to enrich the faith-based character education experience. For teachers, it is recommended to enhance their competence in integrating Christian values into active learning methods through continuous professional training and development. Teachers are also advised to design a variety of projects relevant to the local context and Christian values, ensuring a more in-depth and contextual approach. For future researchers, it is suggested to conduct studies over a longer duration to observe deeper and more sustained changes in character. Moreover, the development of more comprehensive and objective instruments for measuring Christian character is needed to yield more valid results. Further research could also be extended to more diverse contexts in order to test the generalizability of the Christian values-based character education model through Project Citizen.

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