

Enhancing Active Citizenship and Political Literacy among Young Voters in High School

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Abstract—This research is aimed to create a model of active citizenship in order to overcome the deficit of political literacy among first time voters in high school. Employing action research as method of study, this ongoing project is involving students whose range of ages are between 16-18 years old. Through a combination of creative activities in a workshop designed to serve this purpose, political literacy of high school students as first time voters who participated in this project were shaped and enhanced. At the end of the workshop, it is sufficient to conclude that active citizenship approach applies for the model has worked well in bringing students' attention toward political issues, especially the local one, and motivate them to cast their vote in the upcoming local election. Direct experience in handling political issues and family engagement are proved to be the keys in optimizing the model to activate critical thinking, maintain their political awareness, and, in turn, to prompt their political participation.

Keywords—active citizenship; political literacy; first time voters; high school

I. INTRODUCTION

Official data released by KPU aftermath the National Elections of 2014 recorded that 30% of voter proportions were consisted of first time voters [1]. For the next General Election, about 14 millions of first time voters (7.4% of general voters) are already registered. Whilst the amount of first time voters is significant enough, studies across countries show the decline of youth motivation to cast a vote. There is a general concern about the rise of a politically 'disengaged' youth generation that is marked by its apparent disinterest in, and lack of knowledge of, matters [2].

Disinterested of voting behavior refers to a lack of critical thinking and political assessment as important aspects for active citizenship [3]. It is also a lack of political knowledge which refers to relevant information and the level of skills and understanding of civic and political affairs surrounding regional, national and global issues [4]. Aware with such problem, several initiatives is set up. One of those initiatives is an extra curriculum program called 'Sekolah Politik bagi Pemuda'. Aimed to support civic education at school, the program also tries to find suitable methods in teaching active citizenship among high school students. It also determine to reduce political apathetic attitude among them, correcting their

voting behavior, and encourage them as first time voters to cast a vote in the upcoming election of Indonesia.

The program held at March, 2018. The final results suggested several points to be discussed: (1) What are the strength and weaknesses of the active citizenship model being proposed to support civic education in high school? (2) How do students respond for the model of teaching active citizenship aims to prepare them as effective first time voters? (3) What is the effective model to support civic education in order to induce active citizenship in high school for first time voters?

A. Youth Problems: Growing Apathy in Political and Civic Affair

The poor behavior of young people in political matters is not solely Indonesia's problem. It became general concern everywhere, as noted by Moeller et.al [5]. Studies show that youth apathetic attitude toward civic and political life manifested in some traits. Not only are young people less knowledgeable about politics and less likely to consume public affairs news content than their elders but also they are less trusting of their fellow citizens, less inclined to join social organizations, to volunteer, and to vote [6,7]. These young adults also scored low in terms of political literacy [8], political knowledge [4], and political efficacy [9]. These tendencies affect active citizenship of young people at large.

Active citizenship itself is a term associated with political literacy, political awareness, and political expertise [10]. According to Crick Report, political literacy is "a set of abilities considered necessary for citizens to participate in a society's government [8]. It includes an understanding of how government works and of the important issues facing society, as well as the critical thinking skills to evaluate different points of view" or "... learning about and how to make themselves effective in public life through knowledge, skills and values" [11]. Political awareness is 'the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory' [6]. To be able engage in politics, and cast a vote, voters at least has certain level of political awareness. Without it, their vote will be meaningless, and be subjected for the absence of critical thinking. Political expertise, often also termed as political sophistication, is an advanced level of political awareness. Political expertise is a combination of political interest, knowledge and attentiveness [12].

B. *The Deficit of Political Literacy: Growing Critics on Civic Education*

The growing apathy of young people to engage in political affair, and their low level of political literacy raises questions about how political education is conducted. Political knowledge, or the-know-how about democratic system which govern the country, is delivered through civic education as compulsory subject at school system since elementary level. The aim of civic education is not only teaching the foundation system which run the country, but also forms individual to become a politically active citizen. Draws from the Crick Report published at 1998, political literacy comprises of three main aspects to teach [8]: (1) social responsibility, (2) community involvement and (3) political knowledge. It is also closely linked with political socialization [13] and political education whose main objectives are creating 'responsible citizens', 'effective learners', 'confident individuals' and 'effective contributors to society' [14].

There are critics about the failure of civic education in teaching active citizenship. Of all critics, the method of teaching and media for supporting the process are become the main concerns. According to study conducted in senior high school students of Bandung, West Java, the topic covered in civic education (namely *Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan* or *PKn*) only contributed 19.71% toward voting behavior of students. Students claimed that the material helped them to answer the final exams, but when it comes to cast a vote, those material of PKn doesn't work. Method of teaching contribution to enhancing political literacy of students is quite low (5.1%), so is the media in supporting the teaching (5.29%) [15].

Cases of political education failures at school also happen anywhere, from Ireland and Scotland [16], USA [17], Europe [9], UK and Japan [18], and Indonesia [15]. It calls immediate attention toward a new approach in political education across the school.

C. *Civic Education: Growing Concern Regarding Methods and Content of the Subject*

Teaching political knowledge is not only the task of school system or, to be specific, civic education. There are many factors related with political engagement of young people. In the systemic level, there are historical and cultural tradition. In the institutional level, there are salience of campaign and holiday voting. Meanwhile, in the individual level, more variables are spotted, ranging from family to community, from socioeconomic status to media habit [19]. Based on the map, it is not sufficient to rely political education toward school curriculum only.

School based civic education should also be enriched by other approach and methods of teaching, rather than employs classical method in imparting knowledge such as lecturing and face to face sitting in class. Pedagogical climates help student to involve in series of discussions which allow students to acquire not only civic and political knowledge but also interactive skills and critical thinking skills as the core skills of citizenship [20-22]. Another option is extra-curricular activities which give students real experience in making political decisions [23].

A good example was displayed by Han. Studying active youth organizations in Hong Kong and Singapore, Han found that, in contrast to the didactic approach in schools, an alternative, non-formal citizenship education occurred between the members of those organizations and the wider youth community, especially through the internet, which in turn fostered active youth citizenship in both societies. Another form of civic education was introduced by Norway education system. To promote democratic participation, values and attitudes of the future, Norway institutionalize a mock election process which include all upper secondary schools. In this occasion, a school debate is held, inviting youth politicians to visit the school and exposing arguments of current political issues. Since 2011, it was added by election square, a market place where students can meet and interact with party members who represent youth political wings [24].

To briefly sum up, there's many creative methods could be used to enhance civic education at school which aims to produce active and responsible citizens.

II. METHODS OF RESEARCH

This is an ongoing action research. Procedures taken are consisted of several steps. To identify topic of research, a literature review draws on related subjects was conducted. Topics being explored are political literacy, political engagement, methods of teaching political knowledge, youth as first time voters, the migrant youth in the new cultural landscape, and of course, active citizenship approach in essence and in practice. Result of literature review is followed by brainstorming sessions among workshop team to build effective model of active citizenship designed to induce political literacy and to match it with youth political issues. Addressing the reluctance of youth to participate in politics was included in the discussion and ended up in the construction of 3-days-workshop followed by series of projects.

During 8-10 March 2018, the workshop titled 'Sekolah Politik bagi Pemuda (Politik School for the Youth)' was held. Monitoring and evaluation (already planned within periods of week, a month, three months, six months, and a year) aftermath the workshop was keep on as part of important stage of this study to observe any changes among participants as implied from the workshop.

A. *Participants*

To apply the model, and to evaluate whether this model is working or not, two schools are agreed to participate: (1) Rumah Belajar Semipalar, 16 participants and (2) Pewaris Bangsa Homeschool, 8 participants. All participants are first time voters. Before the workshop is commenced, teachers of both schools were interviewed their students who will be participated in the workshop to track student's political efficacy and to understand their opinion regarding local and national politics.

To supplement the workshop, three organizations are agreed to participate as resources: (1) *Komite Pemilihan Umum Daerah (KPUD)* Kota Bandung, a local election committee; (2) *Masyarakat Anti Fitnah Indonesia (MAFINDO)*, a community dedicated to and specialized on combating hoax; and (3) The

Faculty of Communication Science of Bandung Islamic University (Unisba) whose one of its purpose is implanting digital literacy competence among society. Another important resources participated in the workshop are a few of prominent figures ranging from political activist, cultural observer and local artist supposedly to enhance student's political awareness.

III. RESULTS

Based on interviews and short questionnaires distributed before and after the workshop, there are significant changes of participant's comprehension regarding: (1) the way of political and democracy works in micro setting; (2) range of public needs and its priorities according to them; (3) major, governor, and presidential candidacy and each programs (along with vision and missions). Other results are the growing awareness of hoaxes/false information/fake news which heavily circulated during political campaign (along with methods to verify the information). All are resulted to the rising of motivation among students to advocate their needs using political vehicle. Hence, lack of motivation was disappear, more initiatives to engage in politics are shown among participants as the projects began to roll.

IV. DISCUSSION

From apathy and lack of enthusiasm toward political issues to growing awareness about local political candidacy and rising motivation to participate in the upcoming local election, the workshop has reached its objectives successfully. Receiving material regarding the role of politics as a means of power distribution to achieve nation's goal has open up participants' mind about the ability of political system to change the course of nation.

In a session with KPUD (local election committee), students expressed their frustration upon local and national politics. For them, politics is dirty and fully packed with corrupt political figures. They mentioned several legislative members who involved in cases of corruption. It is interesting that the presenter at that time, Head of KPUD, responded back by describing what politics could do to clean administrative system and liberating it from corruption. He stressed the importance of youth voters to cast their vote to establish and to maintain free corruption system and mechanisms. Voting is framed as legal way to promote good and clean politicians, and consequently, it shall remove dirty and corrupt politicians.

This idea seemed functioning and stimulate several things among participants: (1) a sense of belonging to similar group (the anti-bad-politicians group or the anti-corruption squad); (2) a feeling of importance as their rights are recognized and meaningful; and (3) a growing motivation to sign up in the upcoming local election as a means to fight for the good democratic system.

A sense of belonging to similar group marked that political literacy and active citizenship in practice are social. It is, in turn, proved that environment playing important role in political literacy and active citizenship. What kind of environment surrounding the participants, and what are the contributions of such environment toward students' political

behavior? At least, two environments around students are mentioned: family and peers.

Family is the source of values that shaped individuals. It is became the source of self-identity, and playing a substantial part in identity formation. Young first time voters are in the process of developing their political selves and identities. Finding a party to vote, or a candidate in the election is a central part of political identity formation [25]. Political stances themselves are transmitted through family. It is a part of political socializations. Substantial transmissions occurred between generations, particularly where the parental generation is interested and shows a degree of emotion [25]. As such, it is understandable if political standpoints is inherited over generations.

Further interviews to several students and their parents confirmed this. Politics became something important among students whose families are 'political' or regarding politics as essential. "Talking about politics is part of our daily life. My parent used to exchange conversation about it, although they are not always inviting me in the discussion," said Krisna, 17 years old. "I'm not really understand the local or national political situation, for me it's not really interesting. But I begin to feel uneasy when most friends of mine are completely ignoring the upcoming local election. I mean, this is a big event, first experience for us, surely you must do something to make it meaningful," admit him.

Meanwhile, Andy as Rico's father one of the participant stressed out the importance of engaging young people in politics as soon as possible. "There are lots of example in our country where people with bad reputation or ill-mannered ruling the country. Those kind of people make politics looks bad, and make people avoid politics as well. But people must understand that our ignorance also contribute to this situation. It is our ignorance that give way to people like that to be powerful. Young people have power to deter dirty politicians and remove them from the circle of ruling power, if only they use their senses before they cast a vote," explained him. Rico, his son, is an active participant. After the workshop is over, Rico and several of his classmates participate in series of discussions and planning to write a petition regarding the sluggishness of city administration in responding some issues, asking the new elected major to fulfill his campaign promises. This petition became part of student's active citizenship program succeeding the workshop.

Recent research has confirmed the significant influence of family among other variables in determining young people political behavior and their expression of active citizenship. A survey among college students in Semarang, Central Java has found that the family, peer group and the mass media has an influence simultaneously about 10.3% of their voting behavior in the Presidential Election 2014. The influence of family, peer group and the media is positive, so that if there is an increase of intensity among those three variables, its influence on voting behavior of the students will also increase. Among the three variables, family influence is proved to be the strongest [26]. This is not surprising considering the fact that in Indonesia, families are still having strong ties in individual life of its

members, even when members of family have reached the mature age.

Family is not the sole factor in the upbringing of young people to be mature as citizen. Belonging to a social class is also the key determinant of voting behavior [25]. Employing Bourdieu's concept of habitus and incorporating Giddens theory of self-reflexive project, both writers stressed out that the formation of political identity is a self-reflexive project. Here, people as political subject move from 'dependent' entity to rational entity. "However, the possible influence of social groups on first-time voters' decisions should not be ignored, and neither should the social environment." People may increase their reflexivity. But, "reflections are shaped by our habitus as well as by praxis, and we should consider the role of family and social environment in our analysis of the reflections of our informants on party choice and political identity" [25].

In this case, participants became member of certain peer group. Hence, peer group became the social environment, or the habitus where praxis of citizenship in all of its manner are took place. It is interesting that participants belong to **several** peer groups. The pattern of interaction, degree of relationship intensity, and the ties of 'brotherhood' or 'sisterhood' are different each other. Sure enough, the praxis and the nature of habitus in each participant is different. Further research are expected to explore the nature of various character of peer group as social environment in shaping and creating young voter's political behavior and political literacy.

The media became important factor in conducting active citizenship. It could broadening political engagement through its program or content, articulating public agenda to influence public policy, or mobilizing public to act [27]. Media is also responsible for constructing the political public. What is appeared at first as people or layperson, become political public through the means of 'public opinion' being delivered, or perhaps being constructed, by the media [28]. Media open up forum to broadcast shared concerns, or discussing alternative choices as described by Jurgen Habermas as 'public sphere'. Mass media in this sense become the new public sphere which replacing saloon and coffee house as the traditional public sphere. But it is not in this sense that the media has playing a significant role among participants of the workshop.

Faced with the proliferation of hoaxes among society, media became one of important sources in debunking hoaxes. Students are introduced to forms of misinformation and disinformation cloaked as hoaxes, and make use of credible media to clarify hoaxes often distributed through social media or personal chat application such as WhatsApp and Line.

Another important thing to include media in this discussion is the fact that media significant role played by media in influencing young voters' opinion. In the situation where political controversies became commodity and saleable items in media industry, it is important to supplement participants with media and digital literacy competencies. Interviews to school's administration also reveal that mass media became important information source. "Political situation is changing rapidly. We can't rely on textbook only. In order to engage students with current updates, especially regarding their status

as first time voters, mass media became important sources. Media help student to critically assess the candidates, at least to get in touch with candidates' campaign," explained Leo, one of the teacher responsible for the event. It is not only the mass media that became the sources. Students are also accessed the fanpage, website, and other site of each candidates contested in local election and evaluate each own mission, vision, and program. A lively discussion was occurred and ended up in decision to share their evaluation toward candidate's program in the form of creative infographic through Instagram @kpb.smipa.

Here, the McLuhanism adagium regarding 'media as the extension of men' are instigating. Not only that, student's activities to project their insight through social media display the ability of media to empower high school students as first time voters. The excitement resulted in this activities implies that direct experience in handling political issues is a must in order to enhance active citizenship among first time voters.

In terms of the method itself, action research is proved to be the effective one. Participation and democratic are key concepts in action research [29]. The area being investigated is the source of problem which needs to be corrected, restored, or improved through a model or other alternative solutions. To evaluate whether the model or alternative solutions are working, participation of subjects being researched is a must. By nature, action research is also directed for change [30]. It is growing from concern, and a change is needed toward subjects being concerned. Hence, the overall project is designed to produce solution that prompt the change. Action research is consisted of steps taken to record gradual changes of each steps and analyze its implications accordingly.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This research is a first part of a two-year action research intended to find effective model of active citizenship teaching to support civic education at school. In this phase, research aims to answer several questions designed to assess the active citizenship model implemented in the workshop. Current findings has suggested several conclusions. (1) The strength of active citizenship model at this research lies in the communication and information component, particularly in the aspect of media and its content in the form of text and visuals. The student participated in the workshop build a level of competency in that area to the extent that they are able now to discern misinformation, disinformation and hoaxes often found in social media, online media, even in traditional media. But speaking about the whole campaign, which is often also carried out not through the media, is different matters. Hence, it became the weaknesses of this model that still limited only on media, and has not addressed the bigger communication issues in the context of political communication and active citizenship. (2) In general, students respond positively to the workshop in various levels. In the lowest level, the positive respond resulted in the form of additional political knowledge acquired by students regarding current situation by using the media in more effective way. The most positive respond are expressed not only from additional political knowledge during the workshop, but also from motivation to participate in the election with higher critical sense. (3) Effective model to

support civic education should be able to address sociological and psychological issues in student's everyday life. It could be, perhaps, bigger challenges for first-time voters after the media and communication challenges are subdued.

Based on these conclusions, several factors should be considered for effective teaching active citizenship in order to overcome the deficit of political literacy in more sustainable manner. Those factors are (1) family, (2) environment; and (3) media as alternative source of political knowledge. More and more direct 'citizen' experiences are also needed to enhance political engagement among youth,

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