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The Influence of the Project Citizen Model on Elementary School Students' Critical Thinking Skills

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to analyze the influence of the Project Citizen model on the critical thinking skills of elementary school students. The main problem in learning Civic Education in elementary schools is the low critical thinking skills of students due to the dominance of conventional approaches that focus on one-way learning. This study uses a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design, involving two groups: an experimental class that applies the Project Citizen model and a control class that uses conventional learning. The research instrument is a test. The results of the analysis show that the average pre-test score of 50.48 increased to 74.04 in the post-test after the implementation of Project Citizen. The independent t-test showed a significance value of 0.019 <0.05, which means there is a significant influence between the implementation of the Project Citizen model on improving students' critical thinking skills. In addition, the implementation of this model also increases participation and effective communication between students. Thus, Project Citizen is proven to be effective in developing the critical thinking skills of elementary school students, and is relevant to be applied in Pancasila Education learning that emphasizes the formation of democratic and reflective characters..

1. Introduction

The diversity of student abilities in one class is a major problem with learning Citizenship Education (PKn) in elementary schools (Dermawan & Maulana, 2023)Teachers often face challenges in meeting the individual needs of each student with a unified learning approach, as each student has different understandings, learning abilities, and interests. For example, some students may find it easier to grasp abstract civic concepts, while others require a more contextual and concrete approach. Since its inception as a compulsory subject in 1975, Pancasila has been a crucial pillar of the Indonesian education system. Pancasila education aims to shape students into good and responsible citizens, from elementary school through

university. It is hoped that students will understand and apply the values embodied in the five principles of Pancasila (Damanik, 2024).

In elementary schools, civics education (PKn) is very important to build students' character and understanding of the values of Pancasila and their responsibilities as citizens.(Ni Putu Adi Utami & Dewa Bagus Sanjaya, 2025)The diversity of abilities and backgrounds of students in a class is a major issue for educators in an increasingly diverse educational environment. Each student has unique characteristics, including differences in their understanding, learning methods, and interests. Therefore, to develop existing skills in students, there needs to be interesting and creative learning so that students when learning is not monotonous but learning becomes fun and interesting for students. Thus, students can better develop existing abilities in students, especially students' critical thinking skills (Tirtoni & Hidayati, 2024).

In today's information age, critical thinking skills are a key skill students must possess from an early age. In Indonesia, primary education still tends to emphasize cognitive aspects such as memorization and mastery of material, leaving little room for the development of higher-order thinking skills. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2021 showed that only around 30% of elementary school students possess adequate critical thinking skills.(PISA, 2022)This situation demands innovation in learning strategies. One relevant approach is a project-based learning model like Project Citizen, which allows students to actively learn through exploring real-world issues in their environment.(Brummer et al., 2025).

The Project Citizen model is a development of project-based learning. Project Citizen, a project-based learning model specifically developed for civics education, is called Project Citizen. The Project Citizen learning model was first used in California in 1992 and was later developed into a national program by the Center for Civic Education (CCE) and the National Conference of State Legislatures in 1995. In Indonesia, Project Citizen is known as portfolio-based learning.(Education, 1998). Project citizen is also a problem-based instructional treatment and project to develop knowledge, critical thinking skills, skills, collaborative skills and democratic citizenship character that enables and encourages participation in government and civil society so that students have an understanding of how to take on civic responsibility (Dahliyana & Suabuana, 2018; Muzaki et al., 2022).

Project Citizen provides a means for students to engage in citizen-centered investigations into a problem and produce a product or public presentation. This step-by-step program helps shape students' attitudes toward participating with government and civil society organizations to solve problems at school or in the community. Projects help students learn to find solutions to problems step by step (Adha, 2021)The steps for implementing the citizen project model are: 1) Identifying public policy problems in your community, 2) Selecting a problem for class study, 3) Gathering informationan the problem your class will study, 4)

Developing a class portfolio, 5) Presenting your portfolio, 6) Reflecting on your learning experience (Education, 1998).

Critical thinking, which includes the ability to analyze, interpret, evaluate, summarize, and synthesize all information, and apply the results to solve problems, is important to master because it can help students effectively deal with the onslaught of information that often contains conflicting and misleading ideas (Darmawati & Mustadi, 2023).The important components of critical thinking include two things, namely analyzing, challenging assumptions for thinking and acting, and imagining, exploring alternative ways of thinking and acting (Juano & Pardjono, 2016; Luh Dian Mahayani et al., 2025). According to Thurman, critical thinking skills involve identifying and analyzing sources of information for credibility, demonstrating prior knowledge and making connections to draw conclusions. General characteristics of critical thinking include, (1) Reasoning and being suspicious, (2) Seeing situations from multiple perspectives and dimensions, (3) Being open to change and innovation, (4) Viewing experiences without prejudice, (5) Being open-minded, (6) Thinking analytically, (7) Paying attention to details (Setiawan, 2023).

The Project Citizen model is designed to empower students to play an active role in understanding and finding solutions to social problems (Rochman et al., 2016). With a collaborative and research-based approach, students are trained to think critically, analyze information, and formulate data-driven policies. This study asks the main question: "How does the Project Citizen model influence the improvement of elementary school students' critical thinking skills?" This study aims to provide a systematic review of the model's effectiveness in the context of elementary education in Indonesia.

2. Methodology

Research Design

The research carried out used a type of research with a quantitative approach, using a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental research type, namely (Sugiyono, 2013) . An example of a research design is as follows:

Table 1. Research Design

Group	Pretest	Treatment	Posts
Experiment I	O1	X1	O2
Control	O3	X2	O4

Information:
O1 : Pre-test of experimental group I
O2 : Post-test of experimental group I
O3 : Pre-test control group
O4 : Post-test control group

X1 : Treatment using a learning model*Project Citizen*
X2 : Treatment using a learning modelconventional1

The research in this journal uses a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental research type (Sugiyono, 2013)Quasi-experimental research is research used because researchers cannot control external variables that influence the conduct of the experiment. This research is conducted with the aim of observing the effects of a treatment by comparing one or more comparison groups that receive other treatments. Before the intervention, a pretest was conducted on both groups, namely the experimental group and the control group, to determine the initial condition of students' critical thinking abilities. The number of each control and experimental group in grade V elementary school studentswhich is divided into two class groups, namely class A and B, namely there is a group that is given treatment with the Project Citizen learning model as an experimental group with a total of 25 students and there is also a group that uses the conventional model as a control group with a total of 25 students.. Next, both groups participated in learning using the same material, which was carried out over six meetings.

The research instrument was used to comprehensively measure students' critical thinking skills in Pancasila Education learning, particularly in the history of Pancasila. The instrument was developed based on the need to objectively and systematically capture students' higher-order thinking skills. The instrument framework was developed by referring to a conceptual framework for critical thinking relevant to student characteristics and learning objectives. Each item in the instrument was designed to assess students' cognitive processes in understanding, analyzing, and evaluating historical information. The instrument was in the form of a descriptive test, requiring students to express reasons, arguments, and logical reasoning. The use of descriptive questions allowed researchers to obtain an in-depth picture of students' thinking processes, not just the final answers. The instrument framework was structured proportionally to cover all indicators of critical thinking skills. The instrument development also took into account the suitability between the indicators, the history of Pancasila material, and the students' level of cognitive development. Thus, the instrument used had sufficient content validity to accurately measure students' critical thinking skills. The critical thinking ability instrument framework is as follows:

Table 2. Critical thinking instrument grid

No.	Aspect	Indicator	Question items
1	Formulating the problem	Students are able to identify and formulate problems clearly and ask questions that are relevant to the topic being studied.	1.2
2	Provide facts or evidence with clear explanations	Students are able to present relevant data or information and explain the evidence used logically.	3.4
3	Provide further explanation	Students are able to connect information with relevant concepts and provide logical reasons for the results of their analysis.	5.6

4	Deciding on an action	Students are able to choose the right action based on considering evidence and provide rational reasons for their decisions.	7.8
5	Student perspective position	Students are able to appreciate the views of others and be open to new, stronger opinions or evidence.	9,10

Post-test data were analyzed using parametric statistical tests through an independent t-test to determine any significant differences between the experimental and control groups. The selection of the independent t-test was based on the research objective of comparing the average critical thinking skills of students from two different treatment groups. Before conducting the hypothesis test, the researcher first conducted a prerequisite analysis test as a first step to ensure the validity of the data. The normality test was used to determine whether the post-test data came from a normally distributed population. Next, a homogeneity of variance test was conducted to ensure that both groups had relatively similar variance characteristics. Fulfillment of these two assumptions forms the basis for the appropriate use of parametric statistical tests. If the data meets the normal and homogeneous criteria, the results of the independent t-test can be interpreted validly. This analysis allows the researcher to draw objective conclusions regarding the effect of implementing the Project Citizen learning model on students' critical thinking skills. Thus, the data analysis procedure was carried out systematically and in accordance with the principles of inferential statistics.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

The following presents pre-test and post-test data from the results of students' work on questions to obtain an overview of critical thinking skills in learning Pancasila Education on the Pancasila History material. In the experimental class consisting of 25 students, who received treatment in the form of the application of the Project Citizen learning model. The pre-test was carried out before the learning began to identify students' initial abilities in understanding and analyzing the Pancasila history material. Furthermore, the post-test was given after the entire series of learning with the Project Citizen model was completed, with the aim of measuring changes in students' critical thinking skills after participating in project-based learning. The presentation of pre-test and post-test data is used as a basis for analyzing the effectiveness of the Project Citizen model in developing students' critical thinking skills in the Pancasila Education subject, especially on the Pancasila history material, the following is a presentation of data in the form of pre-test and post-test diagrams:

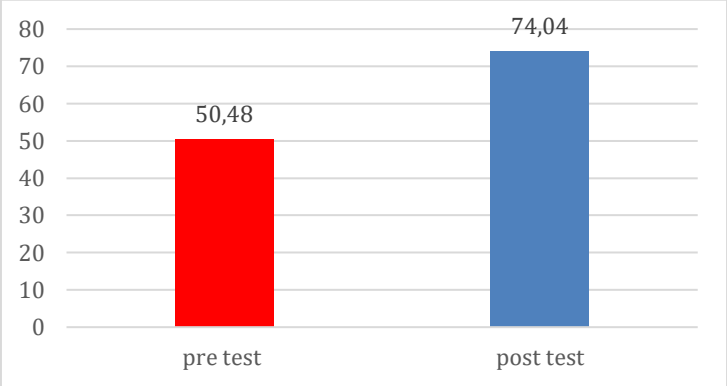

Figure 1. Diagram of pre-test and post-test of critical thinking skills

In Figure 1, we can see the pre-test and post-test results in the class implementing the Project Citizen learning model, showing a significant improvement in learning outcomes. The average pre-test score for students was 50.48, while the average post-test score increased to around 74.04. This indicates an improvement after implementing the Project Citizen model. This improvement indicates that the Project Citizen learning model is able to have a positive influence on improving student abilities. The following is before starting to carry out the independent t test, the data that has been obtained must first meet the requirements, namely the data must be normally distributed and homogeneous, after the requirements are met, the data obtained can use the independent t test using SPSS as follows:

Table 3. Results of normality and homogeneity tests

Group	Prerequisite test	Sig.	Note
Post test of experimental class	Normality test	.200c,d	Normal Distribution
	Homogeneity test	.806	Homogeneous

In Table 1, we can see the results of the normality test: the data obtained is 200 > 0.05, indicating that the data is normally distributed. For homogeneous data, the obtained is 806 > 0.05, indicating that the data is homogeneous.
Once the data obtained is normal and homogeneous, an independent t-test can be conducted to determine whether the Project Citizen model has an effect on the critical thinking skills of fifth-grade elementary school students. The data are as follows:

Table 4. independent t test

Test results	t-table	t-score	Sig (2-tailed)
Post test	2,064	-2,431	0.19

Table 2 shows that the application of the Project Citizen model has a significant influence on improving students' critical thinking skills, as indicated by a significance value of 0.019 < 0.05.So it can be said that there is an influence of the Project Citizen model on critical thinking skills.These results confirm that the Project Citizen model is effective in encouraging students to develop analytical, evaluative, and reflective thinking patterns. In the learning process, students are not

only encouraged to conceptually understand the material but are also guided to identify real-world problems, examine various alternative solutions, and develop logical and responsible arguments (Tirtoni & Hidayati, 2024).

Discussion

According to(Ennis, 1985)Critical thinking encompasses the ability to construct coherent arguments, test the validity of information, and objectively consider relevant evidence. In the context of Project Citizen, students are trained to collect data, evaluate information sources, and weigh the relevance of each piece of evidence they obtain. This process involves analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, which are key indicators of critical thinking at a higher level in the cognitive domain (Iswatiningsih, 2025). Furthermore, in Pancasila Education, critical thinking skills are crucial because they are closely related to the application of the values of democracy, justice, and deliberation. Students are encouraged to view social issues from various perspectives, skeptically assess circulating information, and develop solutions based on Pancasila values. This aligns with the goals of 21st-century education, which emphasize not only knowledge acquisition but also the development of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) so that students can actively participate in complex societal life (Nugraheni et al., 2021).

Thus, improving critical thinking skills through the Project Citizen model not only has implications for academic outcomes, but also for the formation of democratic, just, and responsible citizenship character (Slam, 2024)Students learn to become citizens capable of critically evaluating public issues, expressing opinions based on rationality, and respecting collective decisions made democratically. This aligns with the spirit of Pancasila, the foundation of the state and the Indonesian nation's philosophy of life, which places deliberation, social justice, and respect for truth as its primary principles (Cathrin, 2019). As for the initial stage of the research implementation, learning Pancasila Education on the Pancasila History material using the Project Citizen model begins with an activity to identify public issues related to the historical values of Pancasila. The teacher directs students to discuss fundamental questions such as the relevance of Pancasila as the foundation of the state to the present day and the challenges in practicing its values, not just memorizing historical events, but understanding their meaning and historical implications. This stage aims to build students' critical awareness of the position of Pancasila in national life while fostering a sense of responsibility as citizens from an early age (Adha, 2021).

After the issue is determined, students are divided into several project groups with different study focuses, for example the role of the Pancasila formulators, the dynamics of the BPUPKI session, the birth of the Jakarta Charter, and the process of establishing Pancasila on August 18, 1945. In the data collection phase, students are directed to use various learning sources, such as history books, official documents, and relevant audiovisual media. The teacher acts as a facilitator who ensures the accuracy of the information and helps students assess the credibility of the sources. This activity is an important tool in practicing critical thinking skills,

especially in selecting and evaluating historical information objectively. The next stage is data analysis and the development of alternative solutions or policy recommendations within the context of history learning. Students discuss their findings to answer key questions, such as what values can be learned from the Pancasila formulation process and how these values can be applied in school life. This process encourages students to conduct in-depth analyses of historical events, link facts to values, and develop rational, evidence-based arguments. Thus, history learning does not stop at lower-level cognitive aspects but develops higher-level thinking skills.

In the context of research data collection, critical thinking skills were measured in a structured, phased manner. A pre-test was administered before the Project Citizen model was implemented to determine students' initial abilities in understanding and analyzing the history of Pancasila. Throughout the learning process, researchers observed student activities, particularly their engagement in discussions, the quality of their arguments, and their ability to relate historical facts to Pancasila values. After the entire learning process was completed, a post-test was administered to quantitatively measure changes in students' critical thinking skills.

The final stage of Project Citizen learning concludes with a presentation of project results and a class reflection. Each group presents their findings and recommendations regarding the historical meaning of Pancasila and its implications for national life. Teacher-facilitated class discussions allow students to challenge each other's arguments and deepen their collective understanding. This reflection strengthens students' metacognitive dimensions, as they are encouraged to become aware of the thought processes they have undergone. Thus, the application of Project Citizen in learning Pancasila History has proven effective not only as a learning strategy but also as a research instrument to uncover the development of students' critical thinking skills. The following are the stages of the Project Citizen model in learning Pancasila history:

Figure 2. Stages of the Project Citizen Model in Learning Pancasila History

The Project Citizen model provides a learning experience that encourages students to think reflectively and solve problems through a scientific approach. At each stage of learning, from identifying public problems and gathering information and

analyzing data to developing policy recommendations, students are confronted with real-world situations that require critical thinking skills. For example, when students research a school environmental issue, they must identify the root cause, select relevant information, and decide on the best solution based on the evidence gathered. This process requires the application of higher-order thinking skills, as students must assess the reliability of sources, compare alternatives, and provide logical justification for their choices.

Furthermore, student interactions within project groups strengthen the metacognitive dimension of critical thinking. As students discuss, they learn to defend their opinions with rational arguments while respecting the views of others. This creates an open-minded space where every idea is examined logically and collectively. Through this group dynamic, students' ability to analyze and evaluate information naturally improves as they are required to justify their views to their peers. Thus, Project Citizen builds critical thinking skills not only individually but also socially through intellectual collaboration among students (Jayadiputra et al., 2024). Empirically, the research results showed an increase in students' average score from 50.48 in the pre-test to 74.04 in the post-test after the implementation of Project Citizen. This increase indicates that this approach is able to change the way students think from simply receiving information to analyzing and evaluating that information independently. The significance value of $0.019 < 0.05$ in the t-test strengthens evidence that the Project Citizen model contributes significantly to the development of critical thinking in elementary school students.

Furthermore, Project Citizen plays a role in fostering a culture of reflective thinking in the classroom. Teachers serve as facilitators, encouraging students to ask open-ended questions, challenge assumptions, and build conclusions based on evidence. This process helps students internalize critical thinking patterns as part of their learning habits. With this kind of habituation, critical thinking skills extend beyond academic contexts and into everyday life, enabling students to grow into individuals capable of assessing, deciding, and acting wisely when addressing social issues (Saldıray & Doğanay, 2024).

Based on the overall findings and learning process, it can be said that the Project Citizen model has a strong influence on developing elementary school students' critical thinking skills. Through an approach that emphasizes active participation, evidence-based analysis, and democratic collaboration, this model successfully creates a learning environment that fosters students' reasoning skills, evaluative abilities, and social responsibility. Thus, Project Citizen is an effective pedagogical innovation for developing critical thinking competencies while simultaneously shaping 21st-century citizenship character (Mahendra & Pali, 2024).

4. Conclusion

This research shows that the implementation of the Project Citizen model has a positive influence on the development of critical thinking skills in elementary

school students. Through a project-based approach that positions students as active participants in the learning process, this model encourages students to think analytically, reflectively, and systematically in understanding and solving various problems that occur in their environment. Students become not only recipients of information but also discoverers of knowledge through meaningful and contextual learning experiences.

In its implementation, Project Citizen provides a contextual and collaborative learning experience. Students are encouraged to identify social problems, seek relevant information, analyze various alternative solutions, and develop recommendations based on evidence. This process trains students to develop higher-order thinking skills and strengthens critical attitudes towards Pancasila Education learning. Overall, Project Citizen is an effective learning model for developing critical thinking skills starting in elementary school. Through the integration of analytical thinking activities, collaborative work, and the instillation of Pancasila values, this model is able to create an active, reflective, and life-oriented learning process. Therefore, the implementation of Project Citizen is worthy of being a strategic alternative in strengthening Pancasila Education learning that is relevant to the demands of the 21st century.

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