OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION TO PROMOTE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDONESIA

PENDIDIKAN TERBUKA DAN JARAK JAUH UNTUK MENDORONG PARTISIPASI POLITIK DI INDONESIA

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Abstract: this study empirically evaluated Universitas Terbuka students' political participation. This study used a quantitative approach with a survey research design. Data was collected through the distribution of questionnaires to Sociology Study Program students of the Universitas Terbuka in Malang. The analysis technique utilized descriptive statistics. The study results showed that the average level of student political participation is quite high. Open and distance education had the potential to strengthen the political participation of Indonesian citizens through various activities. Measuring student political participation in universities with an open and long-distance system still needs to be carried out, especially in Indonesia; therefore, the authors recommend that future researchers develop a more credible measurement tool and study it uses a more comprehensive approach.

Abstrak: studi ini secara empiris mengevaluasi partisipasi politik mahasiswa Universitas Terbuka. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain penelitian survei. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui penyebaran kuesioner kepada mahasiswa Prodi Sosiologi Universitas Terbuka Malang. Teknik analisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa rata-rata tingkat partisipasi politik mahasiswa cukup tinggi. Pendidikan terbuka dan jarak jauh berpotensi memperkuat partisipasi politik warga negara Indonesia melalui berbagai kegiatan. Pengukuran partisipasi politik mahasiswa di perguruan tinggi dengan sistem terbuka dan jarak jauh masih perlu dilakukan, khususnya di Indonesia; Oleh karena itu, penulis menyarankan agar peneliti selanjutnya mengembangkan alat ukur yang lebih kredibel dan mengkajinya dengan menggunakan pendekatan yang lebih komprehensif.

INTRODUCTION

Civil society is a prerequisite for democratic stability in a country (Long, 2007; Ray, 2012). Democracy will be threatened if there is domination by the state, so civil society is needed to balance this domination (Schubert, 2007). Civil society is considered capable of protecting and resisting state attacks while strengthening the state. Civil society actors form areas of community self-organization through networks of ideological, political, and economic power so that they are free from state domination (Adloff, 2018).

Therefore, building a civil society is a crucial thing to do in a democratic country.

When facing a strong civil society, a democratic state is not weakened but strengthened. A strong civil society is supported by citizens who are collectively active in achieving the goals of a democratic state. In other words, citizen political participation is essential in the democratic life of a country (Qian & Huo, 2017; Verba & Nie, 1972). However, political participation only grows in society by itself. Several factors influence high or low political participation.

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One factor that has been proven to influence political participation significantly is citizens' education level. The research results of Verba and Nie (1972) prove that highly educated citizens show higher political participation than citizens with low education. In other words, students who are at the higher education level should ideally have a high level of political participation because citizens with higher education are considered to be more aware and active in politics (Almond, 2000). However, research results in the last ten years do not show this.

The effect of education on political participation is relative (Campbell, 2009). The results of other studies show that education does not affect political participation but only as a proxy for building political participation (Mayer, 2011; Persson, 2015). Higher education is not a cause of political participation but rather an intermediary for fostering political participation (Kam & Palmer, 2008) because the higher education level has a vital role in developing resources that have citizenship skills and information about politics so that they can engage in political activities (Torney-Purta et al., 2015). One of the universities that contributes to building active citizens is the Universitas Terbuka.

The Universitas Terbuka is the first state university to implement a distance and open learning system in Indonesia (Wahyono & Setijadi, 2004). Open and distance learning systems have been proven to reach all levels of society and increase equitable access to higher education (Au et al., 2019; Rahmat et al., 2019). However, education with an open system and distance learning has a lost mission because they fail to provide socio-economic development to the whole society, including knowledge about participation in political activities (Paul et al., 2014). Based on this gap, the researcher aims to empirically evaluate the political participation of Universitas Terbuka students through this study.

METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey research design because it attempts to provide a quantitative description of the political participation of undergraduate Sociology Study Program students at the Universitas Terbuka in the Malang (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Sociology Study Program students, from now on referred to as respondents, were selected based on the results of previous research, which showed that higher education content, especially curriculum that develops language skills and citizenship (social science curriculum), affects shaping participation in democracy (Sunshine Hillygus, 2005). The population is 105 students. Researchers collected data by sending a survey questionnaire using *Google Forms,* which was sent via the *Whatsapp application*. Thirty-four students filled out the questionnaire.

The instruments used were a questionnaire with closed questions and a questionnaire with a Likert Scale which had been developed in previous research (Wulandari & Dayati, 2020). Closed questions consist of 4 alternative answers (a, b, c, and d) with a weighted score of 4-1. Alternative Likert Scale answers consist of agreeing (with a score of 4), quite agree (with a score of 3), less agree (with a score of 2), and disagree (with a score of 1). The questionnaire comprises three indicators: participation in voting, participation in political discussions, and activeness in forming and joining interest groups. The questionnaire was validated using content validity and construct validity. The analysis technique uses descriptive statistics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Respondents

Respondents were 34 Sociology undergraduate students at the Universitas Terbuka in Malang. The age range of the respondents is between 17-50 years. This resulted in quite diverse respondents in terms of age. Based on the World Health Organization classification, 79% of respondents fall into the youth category because they are 17-24 years (WHO, n.d.). In terms of gender, there were more female respondents than males, which reached 76%. Their educational background was differentiated into three groups, namely 15 students from high school graduates, 12 vocational high school graduates, and the rest (7 students) from *madrasah aliyah*.

As many as 90% of students in organizations state that they have been active since high school. The rest stated that they had actively participated in organizational activities since entering college. Of the 34 students, there are 62% of students who are active in organizations. In other words, 13 students do not join the organization. Students' active participation in

an organization indicates that these students contribute to political activities. Being active in an organization is a natural form of student political participation.

Level of Student Political Participation

Youth are often described as apathetic or politically uninvolved, especially concerning more conventional forms of participation (Reichert, 2021), namely participation related to voting, political discussions, campaign activities, forming and joining interest groups, as well as individual communication with officials and political and administrative. Other empirical evidence shows that while youth are *standby citizens*, two types of youth are truly passive, namely *unengaged citizens* and disillusioned citizens (Amnå & Ekman, 2014). However, research results on students of the Universitas Terbuka Sociology Study Program in Malang show otherwise.

The political participation of respondents in the youth category is included in the very high category. The average of 27 students reached 83.82%. The categorization is based on the guidelines listed in table 1 below.

Table 1 Guidelines for Analysis of Percentage Results

Percentage	Category
81–100	Very high
61–80	Tall
41–60	Enough
21–40	Low
0 – 20	Very low

(Source: Sugiyono, 2010)

The percentage calculation is based on the percentage score. The method section explains that the measurement instrument consists of 17 statements. The maximum score for each statement is 4, and the minimum score is 1. The maximum total score for measuring the level of political participation is 68, while the minimum is 17. In more detail, the distribution of levels of Student political participation can be seen in chart one.

Based on the data in Figure 1, political participation of 68% of respondents is in the very high category. The other 11 respondents are included in the high category. Political participation in question includes conventional political participation, namely participation in voting, participation in political discussions, and activeness in forming and joining interest groups, in this case, participation and role in the organizations one follows. The following presents the political participation of 27 respondents who fall into the youth category in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows that most of the youth who are respondents are rational voters. Based on student considerations in choosing candidates, 84% of youth are not fixated on similar organizational backgrounds, 86% do not use money politics as a basis for voting, and gender issues do not influence 77% of youth. This means that youth are assumed to have sufficient knowledge and information and can provide an assessment of political issues and candidates based on rational considerations (Surbakti, 1992).
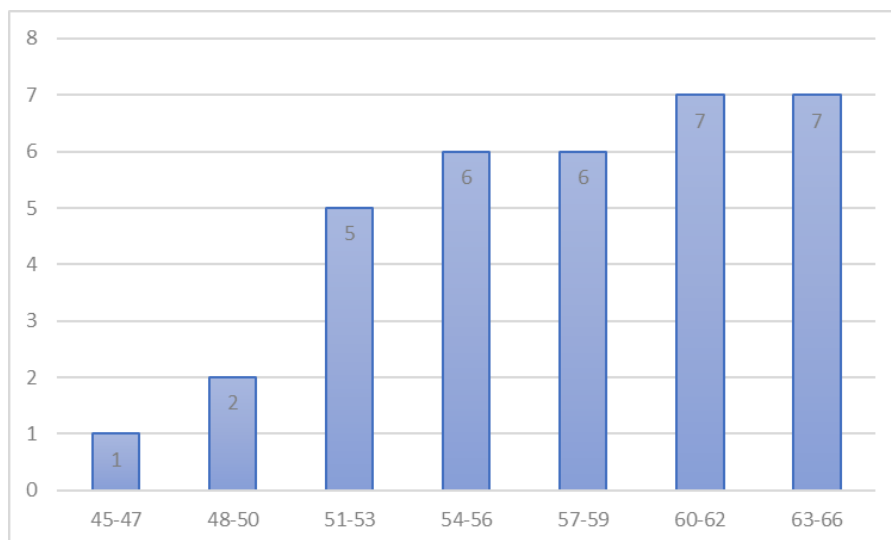

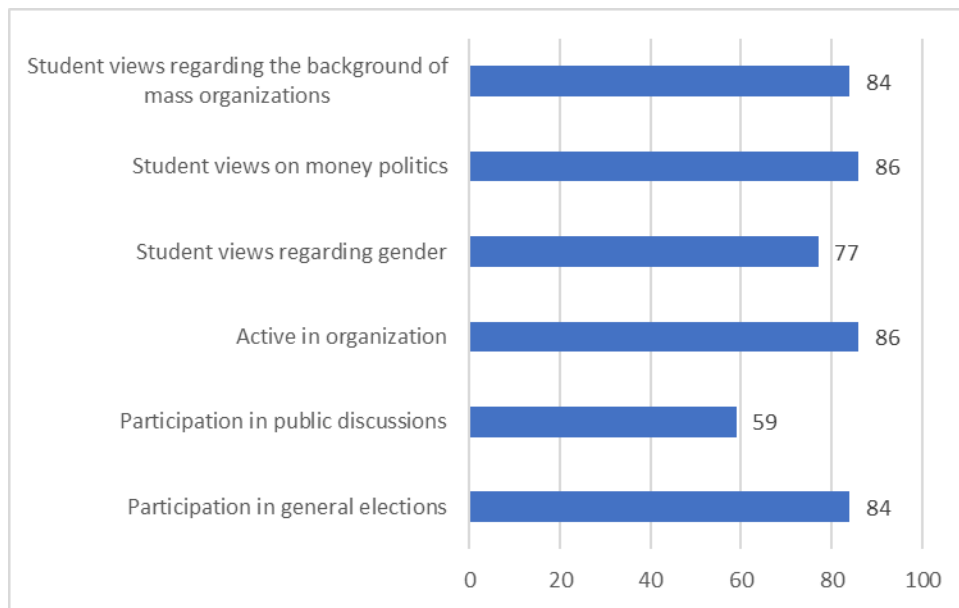**Figure 1** Distribution of Student Political Participation Levels

Figure 2 Average Value of Each Youth Political Participation Indicator

Figure 2 also shows that the average youth belongs to a very high category in organizational activities, such as being willing to be daily administrators, actively contributing to organizational activities, and having clear goals in joining organizations. In addition, the average participation of youth in general elections is 84%. In other words, the contribution of youth in participating in general election activities is categorized as very high.

The participation of youth in public discussions is in the moderate category. This gives an understanding that the intensity of students participating in public discussions is not that high, and not all students voluntarily want to participate. Thus, students are concluded to have done good work. This means that students have developed their ability to apply political knowledge and understanding related to political issues (Barrett, 2012).

Promoting Political Participation Through Open and Distance Education

Political participation as an essential dimension needs to be instilled in citizens from an early age through educational institutions. In Indonesia, efforts to instil political participation in citizens begin with implementing an educational curriculum containing Citizenship Education material. Citizenship Education is the field most related to preparing citizens who are active and responsible and have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of citizenship (Hilburn & Maguth, 2014).

Students in Indonesia are required to take Citizenship Education subjects up to the tertiary level to achieve optimal results in preparing citizens who are proactive and responsible. Students who learn about how to commit and participate in democracy in tertiary institutions will be able to transform because they can define citizenship learning as learning and developing abilities for more effective participation through the process of gaining knowledge, skills, and values through lecture activities that focus on democratic society (Saltmarsh, 2005).

Each tertiary institution's formulation in organizing learning full of Indonesian democratic values is, of course, varied. This diversity depends on the type and learning system of each tertiary institution. For example, students pursuing higher education at the Universitas Terbuka cannot intensively participate in lecture activities in class because the Universitas Terbuka implements an independent learning system. To maximize the results of independent learning, the Universitas Terbuka implements various study assistance services. Thus, the internalization of Indonesian democratic values cannot be explicitly channelled by lecturers or the campus environment to students as in conventional tertiary institutions.

Based on the observations that have been made, the Universitas Terbuka can promote political participation in a broad sense to its students through various activities. First, active participation can be stimulated during independent

learning activities using newly developed interactive teaching materials. Stimulation can be carried out intensively through *in-text activities*. Even though this activity is closely related to the field of study of each study program, this activity can be a form of habituation to being proactive. Without realizing it, if students get used to doing it, this will become part of the hidden curriculum. It would be even better (although it seems pragmatic) if this activity became part of the assessment for students while doing independent study.

Second, the Universitas Terbuka, a pioneer of open and distance higher education, can promote political participation through various learning assistance services, such as online tutorials, radio tutorials, webinar tutorials, etc. Transparency in assessment, information disclosure, and the services provided to students during the study assistance services are the driving factors for increasing student participation. However, observations show that the execution of this service is still not running optimally because not all parties are able to implement the system that has been designed. This has implications for failing to achieve the learning objectives explicitly stated in the curriculum.

Another promotion that the Universitas Terbuka can carry out is by opening training classes that can be contextually useful for the community. Training classes should be designed based on community needs with clear and measurable goals so that training participants can make a real contribution in demonstrating participation in building the nation and state. Besides a distance learning system, training classes can also be carried out through community service activities. If these classes can contextually build the needs of the social and economic life of the community, then the missing mission, as the results of the study by Paul et al. (2014), can be refuted.

CONCLUSION

Higher education students who implement an open and distance education system have very different characteristics from students in public tertiary institutions. One characteristic that stands out is the age range of very far-away students, even reaching 30 years. The study of students of various ages shows that most students have participated actively in political activities, especially conventional political participation. In universities with an open and long-distance system, political participation can be promoted through independent learning activities, study assistance services, and community service activities. The results refuted previous studies directly, stating that youth were considered apathetic and passive. Nevertheless, this study still has limitations, namely not being able to generalize the results of the research due to limited respondents, the questionnaire instrument is still limited to conventional political participation, the study is still being carried out in one time (cross-sectional), and the analysis carried out is still limited to descriptive quantitative analysis. Based on these limitations, the researcher recommends that future researchers develop a more credible political participation measurement tool and examine it using a more comprehensive approach.

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