

## **Element of Citizenship in Education System in Malaysia**

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses the element of citizenship in the education system in Malaysia. The role of citizenship is very important to establish a sovereign country, especially for a country that has many races and ethnicities such as in Malaysia. The issue of citizenship is not only exists in the country but also abroad. However, this article only includes discussions on elements of citizenship in the Malaysian education system through the subjects in the curriculum introduced such as the subjects of History, Moral Education, Islamic Studies, Economics, and Civics and Citizenship Education (PSK). The various elements of citizenship as set forth in Malaysian education system through the subjects have caused confusion about the meaning of citizenship in the context of education in Malaysia. This article also reviews previous studies relevant to the element of citizenship in the education system in Malaysia. This article focuses on and includes the element of citizenship in the education system in Malaysia. This article also discusses proposals for each of the concerned issues to improve the competence of knowledge about citizenship among students and teachers in the education system in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Citizenship, Education, Ethnicity, Competencies, Knowledge

### **Introduction**

Citizenship education is a compulsory measure for managing a plural society like Malaysia. Education plays an important role in shaping citizenship competence. Even though there are other factors that can shape students' citizenship competence, education is found to be a very dominant factor. This is because, eventually, citizenship education aims to establish competence among students. In the Malaysian context, this goal has long been applied in a variety of subjects including PSK, Moral Education, Economics, Education History and the latest in the framework of the Secondary School Standard Curriculum (KSSM) based on the six pillars and one of which is Basic Humanity. Basic humanity aims to produce citizens for the 21st century who master the knowledge and skills for conceptualizing, developing intellectual skills, appreciating the basic values of democracy and building problem-solving skills (MOE

2015). Mohd Mahzan et al. (2015) states that there are three aspects that can make someone as good citizens, namely through the educational system, knowledge of the Constitution, and concerns as a pluralistic society.

### **The issues of citizenship concept and proposals**

However, the concept of citizenship as it is understood in Malaysia is not as clear as it should be since this element of citizenship is applied in various fields. The teachers' knowledge about the real concept of citizenship is still ambiguous. Many of the teachers do not have a clear concept of citizenship. Therefore, a study which has been conducted by Mohd Mahzan et al. (2015) regarding teachers' understanding about the concept of citizenship shows that their understanding is at a moderate level. In the Malaysian context, the concept element of citizenship has been applied at a barely minimum level which is not in depth within various syllabuses such as the subjects of History, Moral Education, Islamic Education, Economy and PSK.

The real concept of citizenship is being confused about because the element of citizenship are being consolidated and combined in various subjects. Thus, it was suggested that a special test instruments should be developed to ensure that the existing teachers understand the concept. So far, no study has empirically for the overall element of citizenship in Malaysia using a special instrument to measure teachers' understanding abroad than there has been a special instrument for that purpose. It needs a study to produce a special instrument to measure teachers' understanding of science concepts in citizenship. So far, there has been no study being conducted to examine empirically the whole concept of citizenship in Malaysia by using a special instrument to measure comprehension of teachers in the country compared with the scenario abroad where there is a special instrument for that purpose to measure the teachers' understanding. Thus, a study is needed to produce a special instrument to measure Malaysian teachers' understanding of the concept of citizenship knowledge.

Although there are elements of citizenship in various subjects in school, it is incorporated only as addition of the concept while the coverage is not exhaustive and the elements of citizenship are included across the curriculum in various subjects. For examples, in the subjects of history, emphasis is given on the aspects of national history and relations with other countries as well as the practice of patriotic values (the curriculum of History, KPM 2002). Meanwhile, in the subject of Moral Education, the element of citizenship is also applied through the aspects of value, for example values related to patriotism and values related to democracy are incorporated not only in the curriculum of Moral Education but also in the curriculum of history, but the addition is not done in detail.

For example, a research on the curriculum of History by Mohd Johdi (2003) has combined the element of government system, personalities and positive values under the title of values and citizenship. Similarly, Ahamad et al. (2012) also concluded the element of citizenship in the curriculum of History under the title of the context of the implementation of values in history. In the same way, the study conducted by Yasmin et al. (2015) concerning citizenship is only focused on cultural diversity among teachers in secondary schools. Therefore, it is proposed that there should be a need to conduct a study that will incorporate the element of citizenship in the form of special test instruments.

Previous studies have examined aspects of citizenship separately, for example the study by Mohd Johdi (2003) have separated the aspects of the governance system, character and values under the title of values and citizenship while the element of citizenship should

include political, social, economic and cultural aspects. Likewise, a study conducted by Mohd Mahzan et al. (2015) has separated governance system in the context of democracy. Besides that, the study conducted by Anuar et al. (2009) has associated the concept of citizenship with loyalty and a spirit of nationalism, and Nazaruddin (2001) has associated citizenship with special status, rights, privileges and facilities for citizens. It was proposed that a study should be carried out to incorporate the aspects that have been separated by developing a more comprehensive construct of citizenship knowledge so that the findings through this construct perfectly reflect the level of citizenship knowledge and competencies among teachers. .

Also, previous studies have not reflected the real situation about the level of citizenship knowledge and competencies. Referring to a study by Mohd Johdi (2003) and (Noami 2011), it was found that the students' understanding of democracy is still at a moderate level. However, the scope of this study did not focus solely on citizenship. Although the element of democracy is one element in the concept of citizenship, understanding of democracy is only one element in the citizenship. However, the scope of this study does not entirely focus comprehensively on citizenship. Even though element of democracy is an element in the concept of citizenship, the understanding of democracy is only one element in the citizenship. Therefore, if the study shows that the understanding of democracy is at a moderate level, it does not mean that the citizenship of students is low because democracy is one of the features of citizenship. In addition, a study was carried out by Ten Dam (2011) on citizenship competence from the aspect of social work, for example, to act in a democratic manner. This shows that the study of citizenship are carried out separately based on a characteristic feature of citizenship with different samples. This does not reflect the overall concept of citizenship because the act of democracy is one of the characteristic elements of the concept of citizenship. Therefore, there should be a study that will look at the concept of citizenship as a whole, given that there are limitations to the study of citizenship as past studies have only examined the characteristics of citizenship separately with different groups.

There is a huge gap to understand the ways how the practice of teachers have applied the values of citizenship among students, as past studies that focus on the values of citizenship were geared more towards academic tests. Academic tests such as monthly test and annual examinations which are carried out at schools are being used to illustrate the application of value among students. Therefore, students who obtain high scores in these tests are considered to have a high citizenship practices; whereas, the practices should not be merely measured by academic testing, but instead in terms of practices and behaviors in all aspects, for example, how teaching aids such as textbooks are used which focus on the values of citizenship. Although there are past studies on the use of teaching aids, they do not lead to the adoption of the practices of citizenship, for example, a study carried out by Zahara and Nik Azleena (2007) which used a teaching tool for reviewing the implementation of Historic Thinking Skills (KPS). The measurement used has been more of an academic test, in which the assessment is carried out through the examination by the teacher while the practice of values is manifested through behavior. So, there is a limitation of the study which focused on the measurement of practices of citizenship. Even if it has been carried out, the focus and the context are different. Thus, it is necessary to undertake a study that will review the practice of teachers which leads to the implementation of the citizenship values in students through the process of teaching and learning, usage of textbooks and extracurricular activities.

In addition, there is still a lack of studies on the role of the cultural environment of the school in the implementation of citizenship values. Indeed, there are studies on the cultural environment of the school, but the studies have only focused on academic and extra-

curricular achievements such as the study conducted by Syed Kamaruzzaman et al. (2014) which studied on the influence of the school environment for the implementation of Physical Education and Health (CBC) and another study which is conducted by Mohd Fazli et al. (2013) on the school environment for student involvement in extra-curricular activities. Hence, it is necessary to undertake a study which will analyze factors of cultural environment of the school in implementing the values of citizenship among students.

Past studies which were conducted to measure the level of knowledge and competence of students are very limited. It is acknowledged by Mohd Mahadee and Mansor (2013) that there are still limitations in past studies about the ability of people to act as citizens of a democratic state. Therefore, there has not been a comprehensive study to assess the level of knowledge and competence of students. In fact, so far, measurement used by the school is the assessment through examinations. These examinations are also used to measure students' citizenship knowledge and competencies. However, there is yet other measurement tool which is used to measure the level of students' citizenship knowledge as a whole. Therefore, there is a need for special instrument in education to test the level of citizenship knowledge and competencies. So this study will generate special test instruments to assess the level of understanding of students in Malaysia on citizenship knowledge.

This is similar to the practices citizenship of students. A gap still exists among students about the understanding of citizenship practices. Students' practice of citizenship in schools is often measured by examinations. Measurement of the practice is carried out only through certain ceremonies performed by students. Therefore, measurement of students' practices of citizenship is found to be merely a common perception, which is to say whether the students implement it or not. There is still no real measurement of the instrument and to view student of citizenship practices. The school encourages the students to participate and involve in various events and programs with hope that the students can practice the values of citizenship through their participation. Meanwhile, previous researches on citizenship is more of a concept paper and philosophical as the study by Abdul Halim (2010) on the issue of citizenship; Zawiyah et al. (2015) on the use of the Internet and democracy in the general elections in 1988 and 2008; and a study by Mohd Mahzan et al.(2015) on democracy, decision-making skills and leisure activities of students. In fact, there has been no measurement of actual practices at school level until now. Therefore, a study is necessary to develop special instruments to meet these gaps.

It is undeniable that there are activities such as exhibitions and events such as the celebration of National Day, and students are expected to be able to participate in such activities. However, the extent to which these activities have an impact on students' practices to become competent citizens, have not been studied specifically. Indeed, there are studies on the practice of students such as managing conflict, behaving democratically, for example the one carried out by Mohd Mahzan et al. (2015). Nevertheless, the framework of competence is studied only according to the participation or involvement of students in the activities while this practice is carried out every day of their life. This is also similar to the study carried out by Mohd Fazli et al. (2013) which studied the effect of students' involvement in co-curricular activities and a study by Juliza (2014) on student involvement in extra-curricular activities to enhance their soft skills. Therefore, it is necessary to begin a study that will look at practices through instruments to be developed in order to investigate the citizenship practices among students.

### Conclusion

The variety of element of citizenship in the education system in Malaysia which is delivered through a variety of subjects can lead to confusion among the public at large. The potential confusion about the concept of citizenship may cause the level of citizenship knowledge and competencies to be at a low level in the society in Malaysia. Thus, the study should be carried out by taking into account the diversity of the element of citizenship that is present in each subject in the Malaysian education system. This study is important to realize that the concept of citizenship is the result of a combination of such diversity. Besides that, an instrument which can be used to measure the level of citizenship knowledge and competencies should be established by taking into account the element of citizenship in the education system in Malaysia.

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