

Election Simulation as a Civic Education Approach: A Case Study at Seri Puteri School, Cyberjaya, Selangor

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of election simulation as an experiential learning approach in enhancing civic and democratic education among secondary school students in Malaysia. The programme, titled “Democracy Literacy: From the Classroom to the Ballot Box”, was designed to strengthen students’ understanding of democratic governance, electoral processes, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens within a democratic society. Recognising the importance of cultivating informed and engaged future voters, the programme sought to provide students with practical exposure to electoral procedures through active participation rather than conventional classroom instruction. The programme was implemented at Seri Puteri School, Cyberjaya, Selangor, and involved a series of structured educational activities, including electoral briefings, civic awareness sessions, interactive discussions, and a comprehensive mock election that closely replicated the procedures used in Malaysian general elections. By simulating the voting process, students were able to experience first-hand the mechanics of elections, voter registration, ballot casting, vote counting, and the announcement of results. A mixed-methods case study design was employed to evaluate the programme’s impact. Data were collected from 96 student participants through structured feedback questionnaires and qualitative reflections. Quantitative findings revealed that more than 88% of participants reported an improved understanding of democratic principles and electoral procedures following the programme. Students also expressed heightened interest in political participation and demonstrated greater awareness of the significance of voting in shaping democratic governance. Qualitative responses further highlighted the engaging, interactive, and practical nature of the simulation experience. The findings suggest that election simulation serves as an effective pedagogical tool for promoting political literacy, civic responsibility, and democratic engagement among young people. Such initiatives can contribute to the development of informed, responsible, and active citizens who are better prepared to participate meaningfully in democratic life.

Keywords: Civic education, Election simulation, Democratic awareness, Experiential learning, Youth engagement

INTRODUCTION

Civic education is a cornerstone of democratic development, fostering individuals who are aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens and who are actively engaged in the governance of their societies (Zakiah et al., 2024). In the context of Malaysia’s evolving democratic landscape, the participation of youth in electoral processes has become increasingly critical (Hassan et al., 2021). The lowering of the voting age to 18 years through the constitutional amendment known as Undi18 has underscored the urgency of equipping young Malaysians with adequate knowledge, values and skills related to democratic participation (Nathen et al., 2021). However, studies and observations have revealed that civic literacy among Malaysian youth remains limited, with many lacking a comprehensive understanding of democratic institutions, electoral mechanisms and the implications of their civic roles (Hassan et al., 2020; Ting & Ahmad, 2021).

Traditional classroom-based civic education, while essential, often falls short in engaging students meaningfully or connecting abstract political concepts with real-life applications (Halverson et al., 2024). As such, there is a growing recognition of the need for more innovative and experiential pedagogical strategies to enhance civic learning (Alenezi & Alanazi, 2024). Experiential learning, particularly through simulation-based activities, allows students to immerse themselves in realistic civic scenarios and engage actively with the democratic process (Ariya et al., 2025). By participating in structured simulations of elections, students are able to better grasp the intricacies of voter registration, campaigning, polling procedures and vote counting (Barz et al., 2024). This approach not only improves cognitive understanding but also promotes affective outcomes such as increased motivation, interest and a sense of responsibility toward civic matters (Afzal et al., 2025).

In light of this, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) through the Department of Law, Centre for Foundation Studies in Law, in collaboration with the Election Commission of Malaysia, initiated a community-based programme titled “Democracy Literacy: From the Classroom to the Ballot Box” at Seri Puteri School, Cyberjaya, Selangor, Malaysia. This programme aimed to provide secondary school students with early exposure to the democratic process through a series of structured activities, including briefings, question-and-answer sessions and a comprehensive mock election. The participants, primarily Form Five students, engaged directly in the election process by taking on roles as candidates, campaign teams and voters. They were guided through each stage of the election cycle, simulating a genuine polling experience that was both informative and enjoyable.

The integration of this programme into a community service framework reflects the university’s commitment to outreach and education beyond the boundaries of higher education. It aligns with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), both of which emphasize inclusive, participatory and accountable institutions. Moreover, this initiative demonstrates the potential of inter-agency collaboration in delivering meaningful educational interventions at the grassroots level.

This article presents a case study of the implementation and impact of the Celik Demokrasi programme. Specifically, it examines the effectiveness of election simulation as a tool for civic education and evaluates students’ responses to the programme. Through qualitative and quantitative feedback gathered from participants, the study aims to assess the extent to which such simulations can enhance political literacy, foster democratic values and prepare young Malaysians to become responsible citizens and future voters.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Civic education has long been regarded as a cornerstone of democratic societies, playing a crucial role in shaping citizens who are informed, responsible and actively engaged in civic and political life (Maulana & Milanti, 2023). It involves more than the transmission of political knowledge. It aims to instil civic values, foster critical thinking and encourage participation in democratic processes (Halverson et al., 2024). Scholars have consistently argued that the quality of civic education determines the strength and sustainability of democratic institutions, particularly in pluralistic societies where diverse perspectives must coexist and be negotiated through participatory means (Alscher et al., 2022; Thelma, 2024).

In the 21st century, civic education faces new challenges, particularly in addressing political apathy, misinformation and disengagement among youth (Schmitt et al., 2024). Traditional methods of delivering civic content, often characterised by rote learning and textbook-based instruction, are increasingly viewed as inadequate for developing the skills and dispositions necessary for effective democratic participation (Law & Atkinson, 2021). As a result, there has been a pedagogical shift toward more interactive and experiential forms of civic learning, including project-based learning, service learning and simulations (Alscher et al., 2022; Halverson et al., 2024).

Among these approaches, election simulation has emerged as a particularly impactful method of bridging the gap between civic knowledge and civic action (Ariya et al., 2025). Election simulation involves recreating the electoral process in a controlled, educational setting where students assume various roles such as voters,

candidates, election officers and campaign team members (Jafarkhani et al., 2024). This method allows participants to engage directly with the procedural and substantive aspects of democratic elections (Barz et al., 2024). Mock elections can serve as a springboard for political socialisation, encouraging discussions on political issues both in and outside the classroom and fostering a sense of agency among young people (Lundberg, 2024).

A growing body of research supports the effectiveness of mock elections in enhancing political efficacy, civic knowledge and voter readiness. Students exposed to simulations were more likely to express interest in future political participation and to follow political news (Kiess, 2021). Likewise, students who participated in simulations reported greater confidence in their ability to vote and a stronger understanding of how electoral systems function (Finnbogadóttir & Önnudóttir, 2022). These findings are supported by Lundberg (2024), who demonstrated that students involved in civic learning experiences, including simulations, exhibited higher levels of civic commitment, tolerance and critical thinking (Lundberg, 2024).

The theoretical foundation for election simulation is grounded in experiential learning theory. This approach, first introduced by American psychologist David A. Kolb (1939), draws on the foundational theories of Dewey (1859), Lewin (1890) and Piaget (1896) (Valentine & Cheney, 2001). According to Kolb's theory of experiential learning, effective learning occurs when students engage in a cyclical process that includes concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Simulations offer an opportunity for this cycle, enabling students to encounter real-world situations, reflect on these experiences, conceptualize their understanding and apply their knowledge in a practical context.

In education, Kolb's experiential learning cycle is demonstrated as simulations provide realistic scenarios that serve as vital concrete experiences. The integration of reflective observation and abstract conceptualization helps link theoretical knowledge with hands-on experiences. Through active experimentation, learners can test and apply new skills in simulations or actual settings, completing the learning cycle. This method significantly enhances learning and preparedness (Wijnen-Meijer et al., 2022). The shift toward individual-centered processes further emphasizes the significance of experiential learning (Salimon, 2022), with its applicability extending to fields such as mathematics, where it aids in understanding complex concepts (Nurcahyandi & Purwaningrum, 2022). Thus, Kolb's cycle highlights the value of using simulations to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, thereby improving learning outcomes.

From a civic development perspective, the role of schools in promoting democratic values cannot be overstated. The most effective civic education programs are those that combine classroom instruction with participatory practices. These include student councils, classroom debates, service learning projects and simulations (Halverson et al., 2024). The study further notes that students exposed to such experiences are more likely to vote, volunteer and express tolerance toward differing views in adulthood (Alenezi & Alanazi, 2024). In the Malaysian context, civic education has traditionally been embedded in subjects such as Pendidikan Sivik dan Kewarganegaraan and Sejarah (Tie & Chua, 2010). However, several studies have raised concerns about the limitations of civic instruction in Malaysia, especially in terms of delivery methods and student engagement. Malaysian civic education tends to emphasise compliance and memorisation rather than critical engagement or participatory practice (Saat, 2023). While curriculum content is comprehensive, its implementation is constrained by a lack of teacher training, insufficient resources and low student motivation (Rozali et al., 2023; Zulkifli et al., 2022).

The introduction of Undi18 and automatic voter registration in Malaysia has added urgency to the need for effective civic education (Ahmad & Zain, 2021). Young Malaysians now have the right to vote upon turning 18, making it imperative for schools to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary for informed participation (Allam et al., 2022). However, awareness and readiness remain low among secondary school students (Zulkifli et al., 2022). A study by Merdeka Center (2021) revealed that many Malaysian youths are unaware of basic electoral procedures and are uncertain about the importance of voting. This suggests that traditional civic education may not be sufficient to prepare students for their new responsibilities as voters (Nathen et al., 2021).

Against this backdrop, mock elections and similar simulation-based activities offer a practical solution (Halverson et al., 2024). By allowing students to experience the voting process in a structured environment, educators can demystify electoral systems and make democratic participation more tangible (Barz et al., 2024). Moreover, these simulations can be customised to reflect Malaysia's multicultural society, political pluralism and electoral regulations, thus making the learning experience locally relevant. Several universities and civil society organisations have begun incorporating election simulations into their outreach programmes (Lundberg, 2024). However, such initiatives are still sporadic and lack rigorous evaluation (Brew, 2024). There is a clear need for empirical studies that assess the impact of simulation-based civic education in schools and universities in all countries, including Malaysia. Such studies would help inform national education policy and support the integration of experiential learning into the civic curriculum.

The effectiveness of civic education has been extensively studied, with research indicating that comprehensive civic education programs can significantly enhance political knowledge, civic engagement and democratic values among students (Kiess, 2021). The transformation of civic education towards interactive and experiential learning methodologies aligns with the broader educational paradigm shift of the 21st century, which prioritizes active learning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Halverson et al., 2024). Educational researchers advocate for the integration of active learning strategies, such as simulations, debates and community projects, to foster a more profound and enduring comprehension of civic concepts among students (Bhuttah et al., 2024).

John Dewey's experiential learning theory emphasizes the importance of learning through experience, arguing that knowledge is best acquired when students are actively involved in the learning process (Chadjipadelis et al., 2020). Mock elections have been recognized as a valuable tool for civic education, providing students with hands-on experience in the electoral process and fostering a deeper understanding of democratic principles (Yusri & Amrizal, 2019). Through active participation in these simulations, students develop essential skills in critical analysis, persuasive communication and collaborative problem-solving, all of which are vital for effective civic engagement and responsible citizenship (Yildiz et al., 2024).

In summary, the literature indicates that experiential civic education, particularly through election simulation, is a promising approach to fostering democratic awareness and engagement among youth. While widely practiced in other countries, its implementation in Malaysia is still developing. This study aims to contribute to the limited but growing body of local research by presenting a case study of a school-based election simulation programme implemented in partnership with a university and a government agency. It explores the pedagogical value, student perceptions and broader implications of using election simulation as a tool for civic education in the Malaysian context.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a case study approach to explore the effectiveness of election simulation as a pedagogical tool in civic education among secondary school students. The programme "Democracy Literacy: From the Classroom to the Ballot Box" served as the research setting, which was jointly organised by the Centre for Foundation Studies in Law, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and the Election Commission of Malaysia. The programme was conducted on 15 March 2025 at Seri Puteri School, Cyberjaya, involving a total of 187 participants, comprising 177 Form Five students and 10 teachers. The case study method was chosen to provide an in-depth examination of the programme's design, implementation and impact on student participants. A combination of quantitative and qualitative data was collected to assess the extent to which the election simulation enhanced students' understanding of democratic processes and their roles as future voters.

Programme Design and Implementation

The programme was divided into four main sessions, each aimed at providing students with a hands-on understanding of the electoral process in Malaysia. It began with a detailed briefing by SPR officers, who explained the structure and key features of the Malaysian electoral system. This was followed by an interactive question-and-answer session, allowing students to engage with the facilitators and seek clarification on various electoral matters. The highlight of the programme was a full-scale mock election, in which students took part

in every stage of the process, including voter registration, campaigning, voting and counting ballots. The final session featured a presentation on civic responsibility, encouraging students to reflect on the importance of active participation in democratic processes. Designed to closely resemble actual election practices, the programme promoted experiential and participatory learning throughout. This experiential and participatory structure was intentionally crafted to mirror authentic election practices, thereby enabling students to learn not only by observing but by directly engaging in each step of the democratic process.

Data Collection

The primary data source was a structured feedback form distributed to students at the end of the programme. The form was administered through an online platform using QR code access and a total of 96 valid responses were received. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections: (1) achievement of programme objectives, (2) pre-assessment and post-assessment of the SPR briefing session and (3) pre- and post-assessment of the election simulation activity. Each item used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). In addition to quantitative ratings, open-ended feedback was collected from participants to capture qualitative insights into their experiences and perceptions of the programme. Observational notes from the organisers and facilitators were also used to support the interpretation of results.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and measure changes in students' self-reported understanding before and after participation in the simulation. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to determine the level of impact across various programme components. Comparison between pre- and post-scores allowed for assessment of knowledge gain and changes in civic attitudes. Qualitative responses were analysed thematically to identify recurring themes, such as student engagement, perceived relevance and suggestions for improvement. This triangulation of data sources aimed to enhance the reliability and richness of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the programme and completion of the feedback form were entirely voluntary. Students were informed of the purpose of the data collection and no personally identifiable information was recorded. The study complied with ethical standards for educational research and was conducted in collaboration with the school and relevant authorities.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the programme, analysed based on student feedback from 96 respondents. The discussion is structured around four key areas, each supported by a corresponding chart and connected to existing literature on civic education and experiential learning.

Clarity of Programme Objectives

The clarity of the programme's objectives played a crucial role in shaping students' engagement and overall learning experience. Based on Chart 1, an overwhelming 88.5% of student respondents rated the clarity of objectives with the highest score (5), while another 9.4% gave a score of 4, indicating that the vast majority of participants found the programme's goals to be well-communicated and easy to understand. Only a minimal 2.1% assigned lower ratings, suggesting a high level of satisfaction with how the programme's purpose was conveyed.

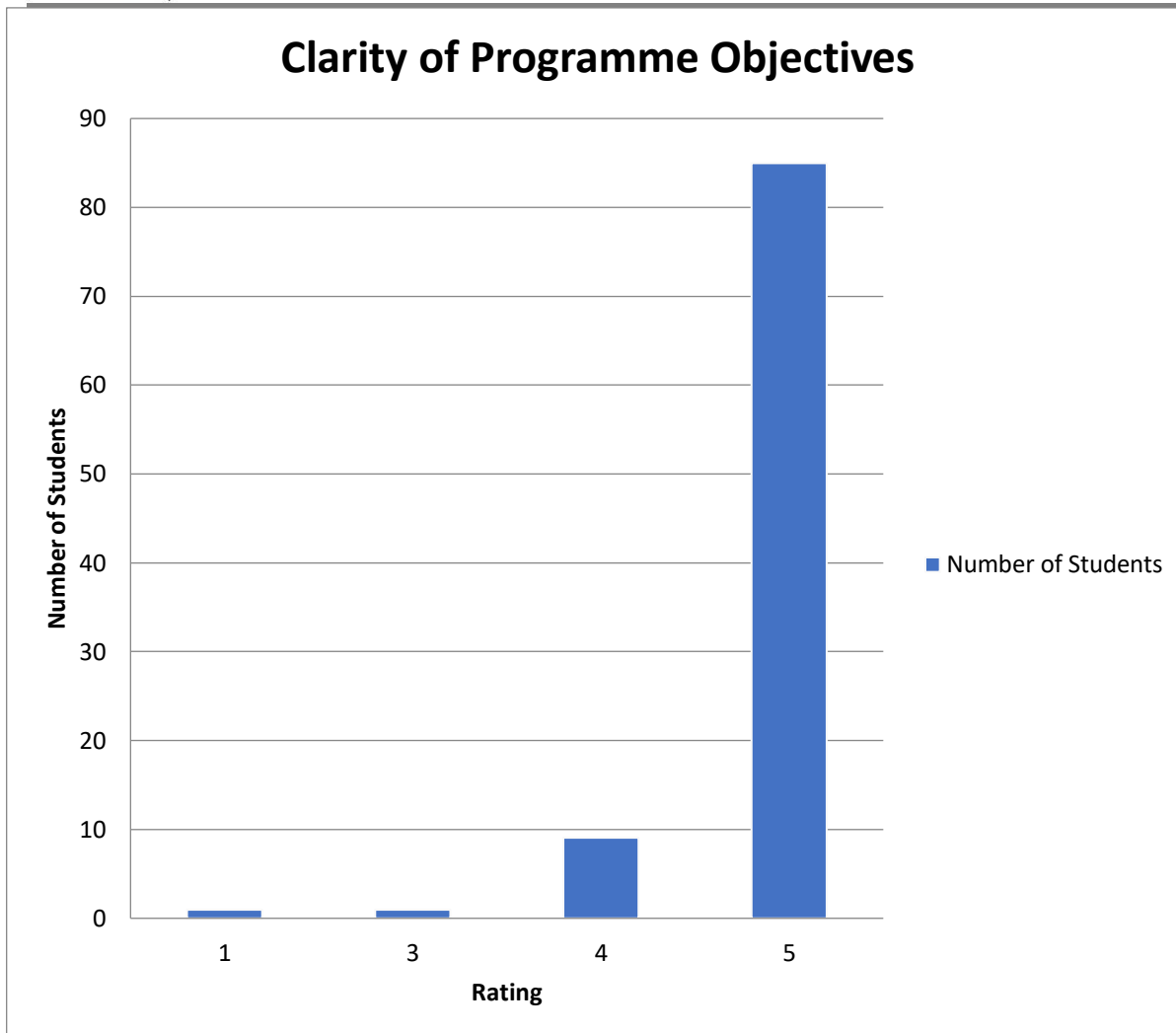


Chart 1: Student Feedback on the Clarity of Programme Objectives

This outcome aligns with the broader literature on civic education, which highlights the importance of well-defined educational objectives in fostering student engagement and comprehension. As noted by Halverson et al. (2024) and Alenezi & Alanazi (2024), effective civic education requires not only relevant content but also a structured pedagogical approach that clearly communicates the purpose and expected outcomes to learners. In this programme, the combination of informative briefings, hands-on simulation and interactive discussions created a cohesive and goal-oriented learning environment. The structured progression of activities mirrored the principles of experiential learning as outlined by Kolb's model, which guide students through a logical sequence of experience, reflection, conceptualisation and application (Wijnen-Meijer et al., 2022; Salimon, 2022).

By providing a clear and consistent narrative throughout the programme, the organisers ensured that students were not only aware of the educational intent but were also able to engage meaningfully at each stage of the learning cycle. This clarity likely contributed to their heightened motivation, focus and ability to internalise key concepts related to democratic participation

Achievement of Programme Objectives

As shown in Chart 2, the programme was notably successful in achieving its intended educational outcomes. A total of 88.5% of student respondents rated the objectives as fully achieved (score 5), while an additional 10.4% indicated they were mostly achieved (score 4). Only 1% of students provided lower ratings, suggesting that the content, structure and delivery of the programme were effectively aligned with its civic education goals.

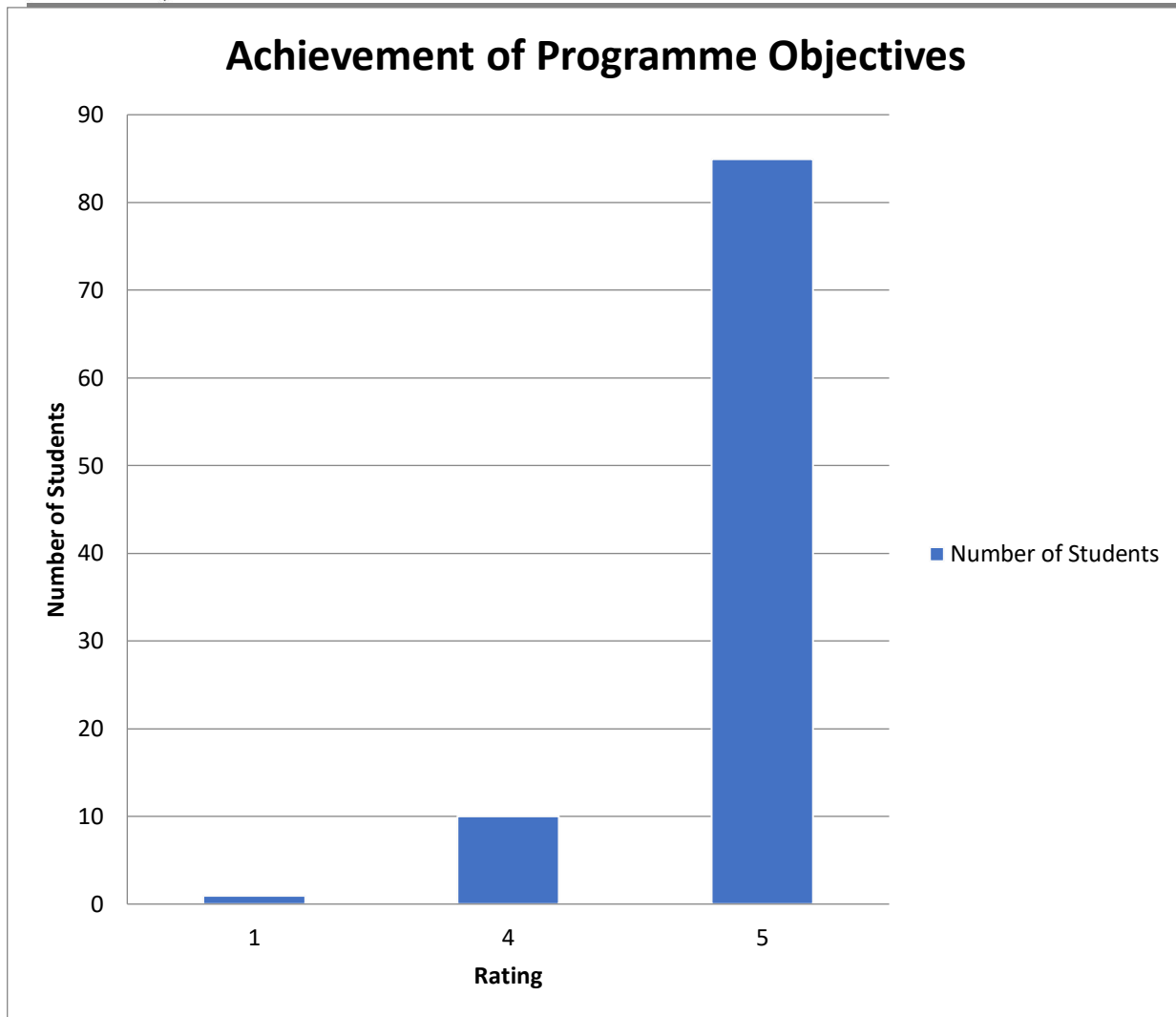


Chart 2: Student Feedback on the Achievement of Programme Objectives

These findings resonate with the principles outlined in Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory, which underpins much of the pedagogical framework for civic simulations. As discussed by Wijnen-Meijer et al. (2022), experiential learning occurs when students are immersed in realistic scenarios that integrate abstract knowledge with practical action. The mock election component of the programme provided such an opportunity, allowing students to take on roles, make decisions and navigate a simulated electoral process. This cycle of experience, reflection and active experimentation mirrors the structure of effective civic education strategies emphasised by Halverson et al. (2024) and Ariya et al. (2025), who advocate for participatory learning models that go beyond rote memorisation.

Moreover, the programme addressed common limitations of traditional civic instruction in Malaysia, such as low student engagement and limited real-world application (Zulkifli et al., 2022). By placing students at the centre of the learning experience and enabling them to enact the democratic process, the programme not only enhanced knowledge acquisition but also fostered a deeper sense of civic responsibility and readiness. This aligns with the broader literature supporting simulation-based civic education as a means of building both cognitive and affective learning outcomes (Barz et al., 2024; Lundberg, 2024).

Benefits of the Programme

Chart 3 highlights students’ overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the programme’s benefits. A substantial 87.5% of respondents rated the programme at the highest level of benefits (score 5), while an additional 10.4% rated it as useful (score 4). Only 2% assigned lower scores, indicating that nearly all participants found the programme to be highly relevant and beneficial to their understanding of civic matters.

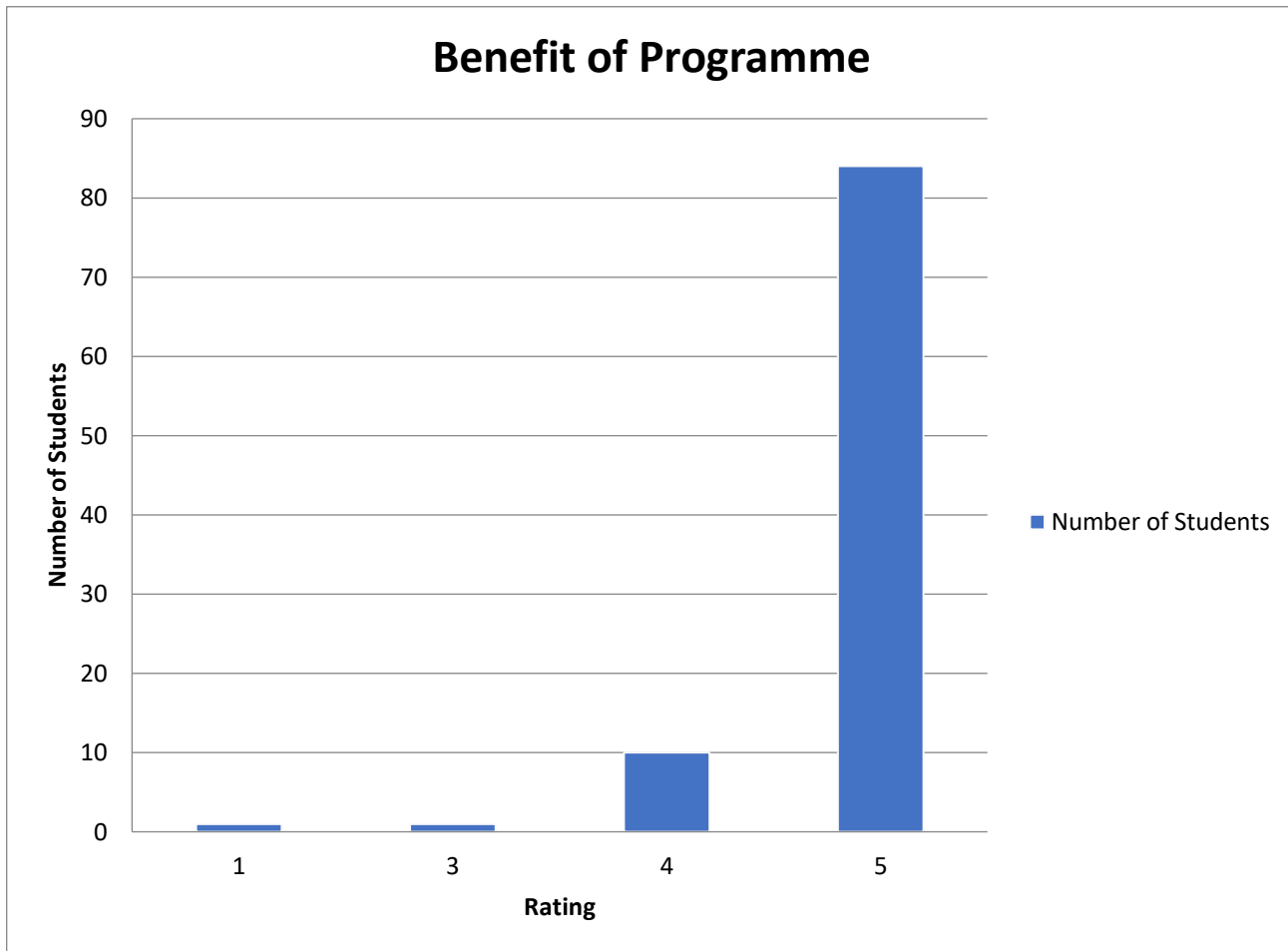


Chart 3: Student Feedback on the Benefits of the Programme

This finding aligns with existing literature that emphasises the importance of experiential learning in making civic education meaningful and relatable for students. As noted by Halverson et al. (2024), conventional approaches to civic instruction often fail to generate engagement because they rely heavily on abstract content and rote learning. By contrast, simulation-based learning provides a practical, immersive environment where students can experience the workings of democracy firsthand. This hands-on method enhances both knowledge and motivation, bridging the gap between civic theory and lived experience (Ariya et al., 2025; Barz et al., 2024).

Furthermore, this result affirms concerns raised in the Malaysian context, where traditional civic education has been criticised for its lack of practical application and student engagement (Zulkifli et al., 2022). The high benefit ratings demonstrate that students perceived the election simulation not merely as an academic exercise, but as a valuable and relevant experience that connected directly to their roles as future voters. This supports the broader call for civic education reforms that incorporate more participatory, experiential approaches, particularly in light of new civic responsibilities introduced under Undi18 (Ahmad & Zain, 2021; Allam et al., 2022).

Overall Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction with the Celik Demokrasi programme was notably high. As illustrated in Chart 4, 88.5% of participants awarded the maximum satisfaction score, while a further 9.4% provided the second-highest rating, leaving only a small fraction assigning lower scores. This overwhelmingly positive response indicates that the programme was not only informative but also engaging and enjoyable, reflecting the success of its design and delivery.

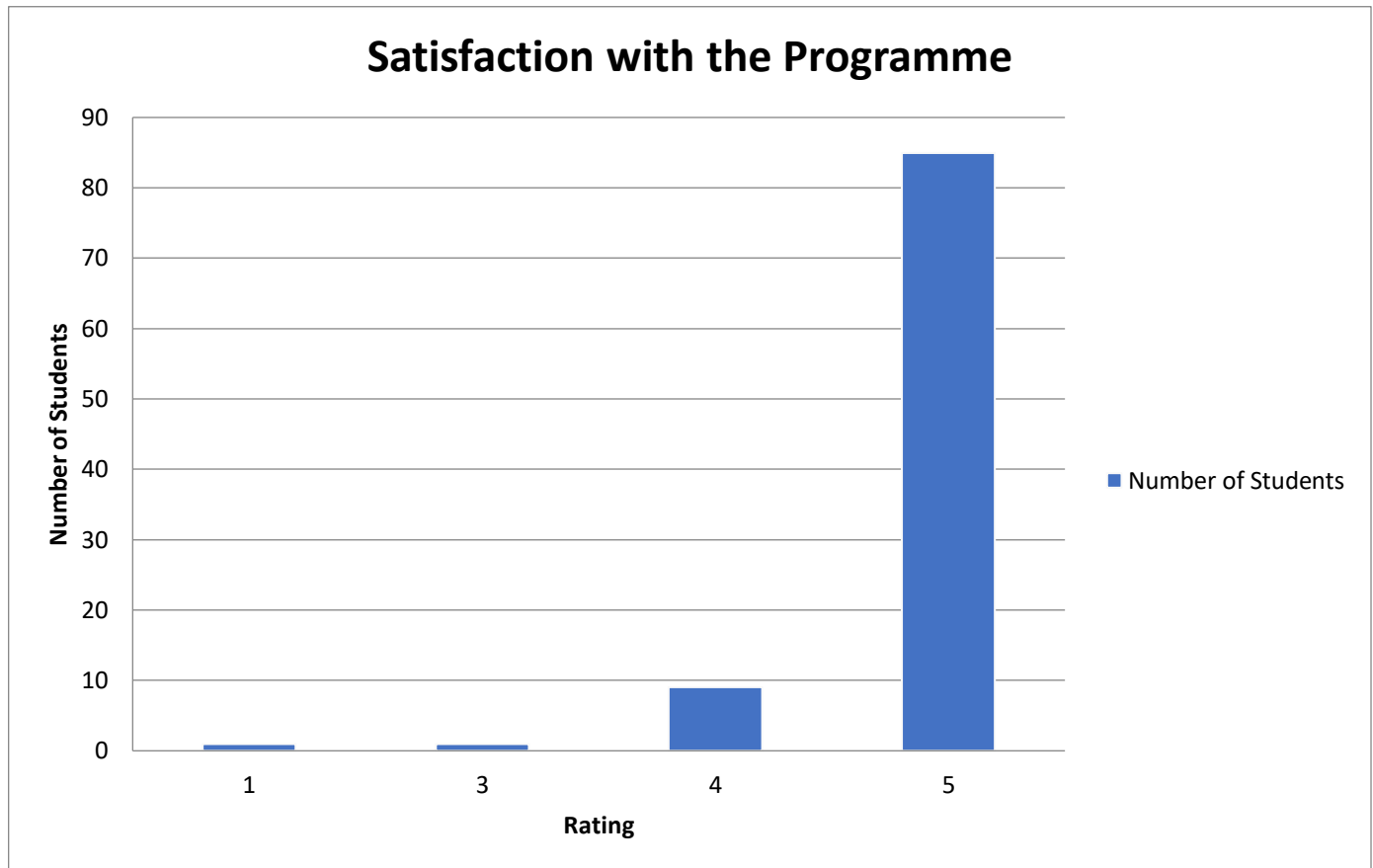


Chart 4: Student Satisfaction with the Programme

This result reinforces the arguments presented by Halverson et al. (2024) and Alenezi & Alanazi (2024), who emphasize that civic education must be both relevant and engaging in order to produce meaningful learning outcomes. The programme’s success in achieving high levels of student satisfaction can be attributed to its combination of expert-led instruction through the SPR briefing and its immersive mock election component, which allowed students to actively participate in a realistic simulation of democratic processes. As noted by Ariya et al. (2025), simulation-based approaches offer students the opportunity to internalise civic knowledge more effectively than passive forms of instruction.

In the Malaysian context, where civic education has traditionally been perceived as abstract and exam-oriented (Zulkifli et al., 2022), this programme stands out as a model for participatory learning that is both pedagogically sound and contextually relevant. The high satisfaction levels also suggest the potential for experiential civic education to foster lasting interest and confidence in political engagement—an essential step in preparing students to take on their roles as active citizens, particularly in light of the responsibilities introduced by the Undi18 policy (Ahmad & Zain, 2021; Allam et al., 2022).

SUMMARY

Together, these four areas reflect the programme’s effectiveness in delivering impactful civic education. The overwhelmingly positive student responses demonstrate that combining clear objectives, experiential learning and participatory simulation can significantly enhance democratic understanding. Furthermore, the results align closely with contemporary civic education literature, providing empirical support for the use of election simulations in secondary school settings.

This case study contributes to a growing body of research that advocates for civic education to be more interactive, applied and student-centred. It also offers a model of collaboration between higher education institutions, government agencies and schools in developing high-impact educational programmes that align

with Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation and outcomes of the programme, an experiential civic education initiative targeting secondary school students in Malaysia. By combining expert-led briefings, interactive discussions and a full-scale election simulation, the programme effectively transformed abstract civic knowledge into hands-on learning experiences. The findings revealed exceptionally strong student responses in four main areas: clarity of objectives, achievement of learning goals, perceived benefits and overall satisfaction. Over 88 percent of respondents gave the highest rating in each category, reflecting the programme's ability to engage students meaningfully and enhance both their understanding and appreciation of democratic processes. This level of positive response is especially significant within the Malaysian context, where civic education has often been limited to theoretical and exam-focused approaches.

What sets this study apart is its application of a realistic election simulation that mirrors Malaysia's electoral framework, making the learning experience contextually relevant and impactful. Unlike conventional civic education models, this programme placed students in active roles, allowing them to participate as voters, candidates and campaigners. This alignment with experiential learning theory, particularly Kolb's learning cycle, allowed students to move through the stages of experiencing, reflecting, conceptualising and applying their knowledge in a real-world setting. The partnership between Universiti Teknologi MARA and the Election Commission of Malaysia also highlights the potential of inter-agency collaboration in delivering civic education at the grassroots level.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of such programmes on students' civic attitudes, political participation and voting behaviour. Longitudinal studies could provide insight into whether this form of education leads to sustained engagement beyond the classroom. Comparative research across different types of schools or regions may also help identify best practices and challenges in implementation. In addition, integrating digital components or gamification could further enhance accessibility and interactivity for future cohorts. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that experiential civic education, when grounded in local electoral realities and delivered through participatory methods, can significantly improve students' political literacy and democratic engagement. This approach offers a promising direction for strengthening Malaysia's civic education framework in the era of Undi18 and beyond.

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