



**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT
IN TERTIARY EDUCATION CONTEXT**

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Keywords	Abstract
<p><i>Keywords: democracy, classroom management, democratic classroom, tertiary education.</i></p>	<p>This study focused on university students' perceptions on democratic classroom management. This research investigated the effectiveness of democratic classroom management. The population of this study were the fifth semester students of class C1 of Muhammadiyah University of North Sumatera majoring in Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD). They consisted of 35 students. This research was conducted with qualitative method. The writer used questionnaire as the instrument of interview. The research findings indicated some important things. To begin with, students responded positive about democratic classroom management practices that have been implemented in the classroom for about 9 meetings. It means, the teacher has successfully practiced the democratic classroom management in her class. Next, knowing democratic classroom management helps university students to be more courageous, active and responsible for their own learning. They can express their ideas and opinions without being afraid to be judged. Lastly, for teachers, the student survey provides information to evaluate their own teaching practices, to improve the democratic classroom management style.</p>

	Developing a democratic classroom management requires significant and consistent effort and in the joint work of teachers and active students through all stages of the teaching-learning process.
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INTRODUCTION

As we enter a new century and millenium, we might expect to find innovation and reformation in pedagogy. Time by time our education system has shifted from the traditional perspective to modern perspective. Today, we no longer see our students as object, instead as the subject of learning. We have to encourage them to be more active in the learning process. Students should be given an opportunity to express their ideas and opinions. As teachers, we should embody freedom-based education or democracy in our class. Teachers must provide opportunities for students to experience autonomy, freedom, and choice in what is studied, when, and how.

Russell (2001) explains the purpose of education as giving ideas about the value of things apart from domination, and encouraging an integration of citizenship with freedom and individual creativity. In tertiary education (university level), democratic classroom can be achieved by creating safe, inclusive learning environments, where students actively practice democratic values, understand their rights, and take responsibility for their own learning. In line with this issue, university students have important roles to be involved in decision-making processes with regard to the classroom learning environment. Teachers are able to communicate beliefs, values, and expectations to students, make space for students' diverse voices, opinions, and perspectives. In addition, creating democratic classroom enables teacher to evaluate her teaching progress through student feedback survey.

Proponents of democratic and freedom-based education argued that with autonomy and choice, people experience a much-different, much better form of education than that offered by the conventional, hierarchical, more-coercive education system present in most public schools. they argued that a democratic education promises much more meaningful learning. If people have choice and freedom to study what interests them, then they become more deeply engaged in, and thus less alienated from, their learning. More engagement leads to better

retention and better critical reflection and analysis (Morrison, 2008). Proponents of democratic education further believed that people who are given freedom and choice ultimately become better democratic citizens because they have learned to negotiate with others, identify obstacles, and know themselves.

There are some challenges to instituting democratic practices in classrooms and schools: students, teachers and the institution as a whole. Students are immature developing beings; they can't make all the decisions about their education because they simply and literally don't know any better. Most students are accustomed to being told what to do and to acting passively in the classroom; they are viewed, and may view themselves, as safe-deposit boxes waiting for deposits of knowledge to fill them (Freire 1970). Obviously, to meet this challenge, the teacher must practice democratic leadership in the classroom. The school and institutions have the authority and responsibility to guide the students on the path of basic ideals of democracy in learning.

This study is aimed to develop an understanding about the concept and characteristics of democratic classroom management and to investigate the application of democratic classroom management particularly in tertiary education (university level) through students' perceptions on it. This research was carried out to 35 students of class C-1 majoring in Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) Department of Muhammadiyah University of North Sumatera. The writer is teaching them "Bilingual learning at lower grade level" course this semester. The study was considered appropriate for them since they have experienced learning at least 2 years in tertiary education. There were 35 questionnaires distributed to find out students' perceptions towards teacher's teaching performances in terms of democratic classroom management in the classroom.

Through this study, it is expected that knowing democratic classroom management helps university students to be more courageous, active and responsible for their own learning. The university students can also learn how to develop their communication skills and critical thinking to achieve the learning goals since those skills also belong to the 4C elements of 21st-century skills side by side with collaboration and creativity skills that help students keep up with the today's modern markets. For teachers, the student survey provides information to evaluate their own teaching practices, to develop the implementation of democratic classroom management in their respective classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

We may be familiar with the term “democracy” in politics that derived from Greek and consisted of two words namely *demos* (public) and *kratos* (power) (Çiftyürek, 2007). Democracy is defined as a form of government where the decisions and desires of the people themselves direct authority. The majority of minorities have the right to speak; people are allowed to use their right and freedom. Also, it is described as a form of government based on sovereignty of the people (Doğan, 2005). Meanwhile, democracy in education begins in the classroom. The classroom is a very important place in gaining an understanding of democracy because all educational activities are performed there (Cruickshank, Jenkins, & Metcalf, 2003 as cited in Köse, 2009). The democratic classroom should be understood as a place where a total development of the student’s personality is achieved, a place where the processes of humanization, personalization and socialization are taking place (Kocoska, 2009). Students’ differences must be recognized, admitted and respected. Thus, teacher thereby play a significant role since they guide students through their teaching and teaching style. Democratic classroom requires significant effort in the joint work of teachers and active students through all stages of the teaching process.

According to Wraga (1998), democratic leadership in the classroom is a matter of exercising educational authority over students in ways that are consistent with basic ideals of democracy. A teacher with a democratic classroom leadership style encourages students’ involvement in the process of making agreed decisions and behaviors. He establishes high control and involvement, sets limits, and controls pupils, but at the same time there is a sense of satisfaction among them for having performed a task. Unlike an authoritarian teacher, a democratic teacher always strives to achieve cooperation, reciprocity, equality with pupils and leads them to active learning at all times. In teaching, he uses the dialogical method and explains his decisions and expresses his opinion. He encourages pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem by exchanging collaborative and competitive social strategies [M. Vasilj and S. Kovačević, 2010).

However, being a democratic teacher and making classroom democratic will not happen overnight. Instead, it takes ongoing commitment, confidence, courage, effort and consistency to achieve it. A teacher must possess a basic knowledge about classroom management style. According to Staničić (2011), the term classroom management refers to the harmonization of all available resources to achieve the goals of an educational institution or school. It forms the backbone of activities in the institution itself, and its purpose is the successful achievement of educational goals with great teacher autonomy. Meanwhile, the definition of style starts from

the way a teacher behaves, which includes personality qualities and behaviors that determine his teaching style, which influences pupils and their learning (Grasha 2021). According to Cowley (2006), the advantages of the democratic style are that students automatically follow boundaries when they learn them and thus learn about appropriate behavior. The class is mostly disciplined and studious, the style is more relaxed and comfortable for everyone, there are less opportunities for conflict and more opportunities for creative and research work. Democratic classroom provides chances for students to express their ideas, opinion about the quality of the teaching-learning process. Teachers allow students to make meaning of their learning process through their honest perceptions. Through an active involvement of the student in the study, the student acquires the skills to know and understands the purpose of his activity and gains experience in further independent acquisition of knowledge which is linked to the development of adequate abilities and sense of respect from the teacher.

METHOD

The research was conducted to investigate university students' perceptions on democratic classroom management. This study was carried out with qualitative approach. The study group was determined using the convenience sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods used in qualitative research. The instrument used interviews with semi-structured questions. There were totally 35 students of class C-1 majoring in Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) Department of Muhammadiyah University of North Sumatera as the sample of the study. The researcher distributed the questionnaires after the class has completed 9 regular meetings in the classroom. The students were collected in one class. After the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the students, the writer gave some instructions to guide them answering the questionnaires.

The students were requested to tick the best answer in their honest opinion. Each questionnaire consisted of 5 questions. Data were analyzed using content analysis techniques and frequency values were also provided using tables. Like typical qualitative data collection, the questionnaires were distributed to the participants, then, the data were collected, next, the data were classified and finally, the data would be analyzed or interpreted based on each criterion. It is in accordance with Creswell (2014), he described that the process of qualitative research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. To calculate the degrees of response, and the intensity of response, a rating-scale was used. Students were requested to

complete the questionnaire by placing a tick in one space only, for instance: 1= never, 2 = rarely, 3= sometimes and 4= always. Below are samples of question of student feedback survey toward teacher's democratic classroom management style:

Questionnaire

Instruction: Tick (√) the most appropriate answer in your opinion!

No.	Questions	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
1.	My lecturer explains difficult things clearly.				
2.	My lecturer has several good ways to explain each topic that we discuss in the class.				
3.	My lecturer makes learning enjoyable.				
4.	My lecturer gives us time to share/explain our ideas or thoughts.				
5.	My lecturer appreciates my ideas and opinion.				

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data, the researcher found some findings as shown by the following tables:

Table 1: Statement 1

No	Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
1.	My lecturer has several good ways to explain each topic	0	0	3	32

The data was initiated with the statement *My lecturer has several good ways to explain each topic*. Students were free to respond the statement based on their experiences in learning process. There were 32 (91.4%) students who responded “always” and 3 (8.6%) students ticked “sometimes”, meanwhile there is no response for “never” and “rarely”. Regarding to this finding, it proved that the teacher performed well to make a creative, clear and understandable explanation for each topic.

Table 2: Statement 2

No	Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
2.	My lecturer explains difficult things clearly	0	1	4	30

Table 2 above showed there were 30 (85.8%) students agreed that the lecturer always explains difficult things clearly. Meanwhile, there were 4 (11.4%) students ticked “sometimes” the teacher explained difficult things clearly, and 1 (2.8%) student responded that the teacher rarely explained difficult things clearly. It was totally contrast to 30 students who reckoned that the teacher has explained difficult things clearly. In this point, the lecturer would simplify her language or she would translate her lecture in Bahasa Indonesia if she found that the students did not understand. First, she would ask the students whether they understood her words or not. Since the students were not really familiar with English, sometimes the lecturer translated the difficult vocabulary in Bahasa Indonesia. Then, if the students nodded, it gives a sign to lecturer that her illustration has been clear enough to the students.

Table 3: Statement 3

No	Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
3.	My lecturer makes learning enjoyable.	0	0	10	25

Table 3 indicated that they were two sides of students who had different opinions. The first 10 (28.6%) students considered that sometimes the lecturer makes learning enjoyable and sometimes it might be too monotoneous for them. In contrast, there were 25 (71.4%) students enjoyed the learning process. Teaching tertiary level of students were different from teaching primary level students. University level students have had exposure of learning for years, they can value the learning process more critically compared to what they have experienced in their previous years of study. Moreover, we know that different student learns in different ways, they have their respective learning style and sometimes as teachers, we cannot accommodate all of these learning style. We cannot satisfy them in terms of the individual learning experience. However, indeed as teachers we need to be open for constructive comments from our students too. We can evaluate fairly our approach or method of teaching so far, update it or offer some fun activities as alternatives or we can also make use of the advancement of technology in our class to make the learning activities more lively, more joyful and more

interactive. Most importantly, teachers and students should cooperate to create a stress-free classroom environment.

Table 4: Statement 4

No	Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
4.	My lecturer gives us time to explain our ideas or opinions	0	0	2	33

Table 4 represented the percentage gap in responding the statement about the openness of the teacher for students' ideas or opinions. There were 33 (94.3%) students experienced democratic classroom environment which allowed students to explain their ideas or opinions. Meanwhile, there were 2 (5.7%) students who responded "sometimes". The teacher encouraged students to communicate their ideas, thoughts or opinion regarding the topic was being discussed, even though sometimes students' opinions were irrelevant to the topic, but the teacher still appreciated and gave the students insight and feedback later. It was intentionally done to make students more confident in public speaking and improve students' language fluency in speaking English.

Table 5: Statement 5

No	Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
5.	My lecturer appreciates my ideas and opinions	0	0	1	34

Table 5 indicated individual experience toward teacher's appreciation on student's ideas and opinions. There were 34 (97.14%) students or most students ticked that their teacher always appreciated their ideas or opinions. However, there was 1 (2.86%) student who did not take it as an absolute justification. The student tended to give a more careful answer by ticking "sometimes" column. Indeed, it was permissible, the response could be subjective, it depended on each student's experience on teacher's democratic classroom management in the learning process. However, developing personalities need strong and secure environment in order to flourish in education. Teachers can raise self-esteem and make every single student in their class get most out of education by feeling valued as an individual and one way foster it is by appreciating every individual's voice in our classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

Teaching democracy begins in the classroom. Democratic leadership in the classroom means exercising instructional authority over students in a manner consistent with basic democratic ideals. The democratic classroom also promotes the student's critical thinking, which means to be curious, to study ideas, to set aims, to use researches, to look for alternatives, to take a responsibility, rationally to defend someone's belief, to be open toward new ideas. That is why every educational institution's responsibility should be the immediate activities during the educational process, which would prepare the student for the challenges of today's and tomorrow's development in a democratic society. Thus, the responsibility of the teacher to carry out lessons which promotes democratic classroom management is pivotal. Teachers are able to communicate beliefs, values, and expectations to students, make space for students' diverse voices, opinions, and perspectives.

In order to get used to democratic ways of thinking and behaving, students must practice them continuously during their learning. The daily interactions between teacher and student can have a profound effect on the formation of attitudes and habits that are essential for democratic citizenship. However, if education is to be compatible with democratic ideals, classroom experiences must embody the ideals of democracy as much as possible.

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