



Bridging Knowledge and Fear: Citizen Science in Enhancing Herpetofauna Literacy, Identification Skills, and Reduced Fear

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Abstract: Species literacy and species identification skills are important to protect diversity and are issues in Sustainable Development Education. Fear of animals, especially herpetofauna, makes students avoid them and makes it difficult to study them. Based to the literature study, citizen science has the potential to solve this problem. This study aims to determine the impact of citizen science on species literacy, species identification skill, and fear of herpetofauna. This study included 44 biology education students from PGRI Silampari University who were studying Vertebrate Zoology classes. The data on species literacy was obtained using essay questions. Reports provided information on species identification skills. A questionnaire was used to collect fear data on the herpetofauna. The instrument used was declared valid and reliable. Species identification ability data was analyzed based on species resulting from citizen science activities. Species literacy data were analyzed descriptively and using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test. Literacy increase data is calculated using the N-Gain Score. The results obtained show that 1) Species literacy data after the Wilcoxon test obtained sig. <0.05. The N-gain analysis obtained was 0.72 in the high category. 2) The herpetofauna identification data was 71.23%, indicating that students skills are passable in identifying species. The results of citizen Science activities showed that a maximum of 17 species were caught and a minimum of 6 species; 3) The Wilcoxon test revealed a significant difference in fear of herpetofauna (sig. < 0.05). Therefore, it can be concluded that Citizen Science significantly increases students' species literacy, identification abilities and reducing students' fear of herpetofauna.

Keywords: citizen science, species literacy, species identification skill, herpetofauna.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid environmental changes caused by human activity affect biodiversity around the world (Jurumai et al., 2023; Rêgo et al., 2018; Ukaogo et al., 2020). Herpetofauna is a type of biodiversity that can be an indicator of ecology and biodiversity (Amarasinghe et al., 2021; Saber et al., 2017; Samitra & Rozi, 2020). However, herpetofauna research is often hampered by the lack of data and understanding between the public and scientists (Teixido et al., 2021; Vergara-Rios et al., 2021). Conservation efforts of Herpetofauna can be improved through knowledge or literacy of the species.

Species literacy is an essential ability for individuals to recognize and understand species (Hooykaas et al., 2019). Efforts to increase species literacy are also a key issue in Sustainable Development Education (ESD) (Härtel et al., 2023; Lindemann-Matthies et al., 2024). Species knowledge can be improved by improving species identification skills (Aldhebani, 2018; Zukmadini et al., 2024). Therefore, students should develop knowledge and identification skills. One is through the application of citizen science.

Citizen science is a new trend in which people can collaborate in scientific research, regardless of their scientific backgrounds (Astuti & Rahayuningsih, 2022; Callaghan et al., 2019; Hamdiah et al., 2024). Citizen science refers to the active participation of citizens in the scientific data collection process, enabling the collection of information to be broader and the distribution of data more efficiently (Bonney et al., 2016; Brown &

Williams, 2019; Phillips et al., 2019). Citizen science is not only linked to data acquisition and reporting, but also to the collaboration of knowledge and skills related to scientific research (Boone et al., 2024; Pocock et al., 2017; Voigt-Heucke et al., 2024). Furthermore, citizens' science can increase species literacy and species identification abilities through activities that come into contact with objects (Backstrom et al., 2024; Eugenio-Gozalbo et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2021; Soria Aguirre & Tormáné Kovács, 2023; Willi et al., 2019).

One factor that may hinder species literacy is the fear of herpetophobia (da Silva et al., 2021; Reynolds et al., 2018). Fear is often based on myths or ignorance, reducing the ability of students to identify species (Mutya & Inocian, 2024; Pandey et al., 2016). As a result, many students feel hesitant or anxious when they deal with herpetofauna, although they play an important role in the ecosystem.

The importance of improve species literacy and reducing prospective biology teacher students' fear of herpetofauna is a strategic step toward developing a generation of educators who are environmentally aware and support conservation initiatives. As future educators, biology students have a key role in transferring scientific knowledge and forming students' positive attitudes towards herpetofauna. This was confirmed by a statement from Zukmadini et al. (2024) and Skarstein & Skarstein (2020) species literacy and species identification skills will have a significant impact on the success of teaching and conservation of the species.

We conducted a search via Publish or Perish using the Google Scholar database. The results of studies on the influence of citizen science on species knowledge have been conducted on insect observations (Aripin et al., 2022; Paradise & Bartkovich, 2021; Perry et al., 2021) and bird (Backstrom et al., 2024). Based on past research, we discovered a gap that citizen science is used for insect and bird taxonomy, while herpetofauna has not yet been implemented. Apart from that, the impact of citizen science on reducing fear has not been studied. In this study, citizen science is expected to increase species literacy and reduce students' fear of herpetofauna.

This paper discusses the impact of citizen science on student literacy and the identification skills of species of herpetofauna that have not been studied. This study aims to determine the influence of citizen science on student literacy, species identification, and fear of herpetofauna.

▪ METHOD

Participans

The population in this study consisted of 44 Biology students from Universitas PGRI Silampari who joined in the Vertebrate Zoology course during the academic year 2023/2024. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, so that all populations became samples.

Research Design and Procedures

The research used is pre-experimental, with a one-group pretest-posttest design. The research stages in figure 1. This study does not require a control group, thus the experimental class got intervention using differentiated learning techniques (Ningsih et al., 2024).

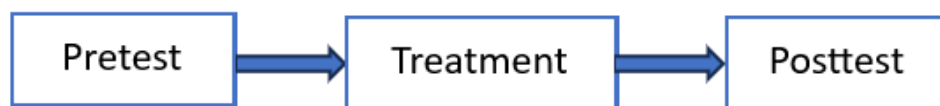


Figure 1. One-group pretest-posttest research design

The research technique consists of three stages: preparing and implementation. The preparing step comprises developing learning tools and learning scenarios based on citizen science. Creating instruments for pretests and post-tests to assess species literacy and fear of herpetofauna. In the implementation step, a pretest is used to determine initial abilities. Before beginning citizen science, students are given instruction learn to identify and search for herpetofauna. Small teams create citizen science initiatives. After searching for herpetofauna, students write a report and then give a posttest.

Instruments

Species literacy data was obtained using essay with a framework adapted from Hooykaas et al. (2022) and Mammola et al. (2023). The 10 species listed in the question come from the research results of Samitra & Rozi (2020) and Rozi & Samitra (2020), to adapt to the local herpetofauna found. Species identification skill data based on species analysis resulting from citizen science activities. Data on fear of herpetofauna were obtained using a questionnaire with a framework adapted from (Tomažič et al., 2017). The instruments used have been tested for validity and reliability. The essay instrument was declared valid (sig. < 0.05) with a reliability of 0.71. The questionnaire instrument was declared valid (sig. < 0.05) with a reliability of 0.73.

Data Analysis

Species literacy data obtained will be analysed using SPSS 25.0. Prerequisite tests will be used to assess species literacy data. If the data is normal and homogeneous, the t-test will be used, and if it is not normal and homogeneous, the Wilcoxon signed rank test will be applied. Additionally, increased literacy calculated by the N-Gain Score. Species identification ability data were analyzed descriptively.

▪ RESULT AND DISSCUSSION

Citizen Science Towards Species Literacy

Table 1 shows that citizen science has an overall increase in literacy of 0.72 in the high category. High category increases occurred in aspects of binomial nomenclature, local names, useful and harmful for humans. Meanwhile, diet and conservation status are sufficient category and the habitat aspect is low category.

The results of the prerequisite test using pretest and posttest data were not normal and homogeneous (sig. < 0.05), so the species literacy data was analyzed by the Wilcoxon test. The results of the Wilcoxon test analysis are in table 2. There are differences in students' species literacy between pretest and posttest. Therefore, it can be concluded that citizen science significantly increases students' herpetofauna species literacy. These results are in line with research by Aripin et al. (2022) and Christ et al. (2022) that citizen science increases species literacy.

The increase in the results of the analysis of the citizen science pre-posttest is due to the experience of students with direct learning with subjek material. This active involvement encourages students to understand scientific concepts better and develop literacy (Listiawan et al., 2023). This was reinforced by Aripin et al. (2022) and Brandt et al. (2022) Citizen science improves species literacy by actively involving people in hands-on projects that increase their understanding. Citizen science improves the literacy of species by actively involving people in project-based learning. In addition, students read several references when identifying herpetofauna. These references help students understand the natural phenomena around them and enhance their understanding of species (Samitra & Widiya, 2024).

Table 1. Student species literacy N-Gain data

Aspect	N-Gain	Category
Binomial nomenclature	0.79	High
Local names	0.95	High
Habitat	0.29	Low
Diet	0.61	Sufficient
Conservation status	0.51	Sufficient
Useful for humans	0.77	High
Harmful for humans	0.89	High
Mean	0.72	High

Table 2. Results of wilcoxon analysis of species literacy data

Z	-5.777
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

According to Coracero et al. (2022) dan Katili et al. (2021), increasing student literacy has an important impact on their ability to recognize the diversity of species and to preserve them wherever they are. Furthermore, species literacy is something that must be acquired because it allows them to solve environmental problems, to have a firm perspective, and to be very sensitive to making scientific decisions (Fajri et al., 2023; Katili et al., 2021). Therefore, in order to create a literacy society, literacy culture in higher education must be improved.

Table 1 shows that the habitat aspect received a low category. This is because students have prior understanding of the habitat. They learned about herpetofauna in elementary school, where it was covered extensively. A variety of strategies have been used to teach herpetofauna species, including augmented reality media and outdoor (Photo, 2024; Winarni & Purwandari, 2019).

According to Figure 2, 52% of students successfully answered the conservation aspect. This indicates that students have a limited understanding of each animal's conservation status. These findings are especially concerning because comprehending conservation is critical in conservation efforts. Understanding conservation is crucial for prospective teachers, as it equips them to foster environmental literacy and promote sustainable practices among their future students (Aydın & Keleş, 2021; Fakhriyah et al., 2024; Kipasika, 2023).

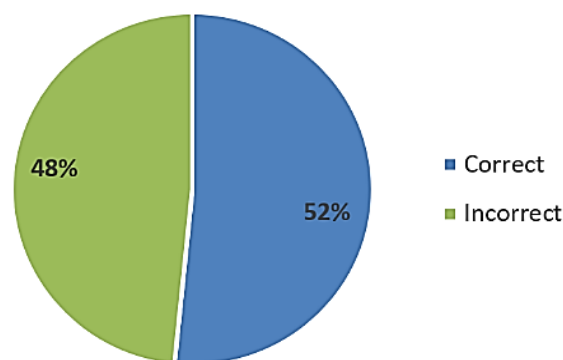


Figure 2. Percentage of student responses to conservation aspects

Citizen Science on Species Identification Skill

Table 3 shows an identification accuracy of 71.23%, this shows that students' skills are quite good at identifying herpetofauna species. The results of citizen science activities showed that a maximum of 17 species were caught and a minimum of 6 species. These results are in line with research by Aripin (2023) and Perry et al. (2021) that citizen science improved species identification skills.

In Citizen Science, students carry out activities to search for and identify species. This direct experience encourages students to increase their taxonomic knowledge and experience in identification (Aripin, 2023; Farr et al., 2023). Students' skills in identifying herpetofauna species are quite good because students already have the awareness to prevent the reduction or loss of biodiversity in an area.

The ability to identify species is vital for successful decision-making in biodiversity protection (Hooykaas et al., 2019). Apart from that, this capability can help in monitoring environmental health, mitigating biodiversity loss caused by human activity and climate change, and averting harmful circumstances (Tivarekar & Virani, 2017). Therefore, prospective biology teacher students need good identification skills so that these abilities can be conveyed to students.

Table 3. Species identification skill data

Species minimum	Species maximum	Average Species identified	% identification accuracy
5	14	8.15	71.23

Citizen Science on the Fear of Herpetofauna

Figure 3 shows the change in the number of students at each level of fear between pretest and posttest. The increase occurred in the not afraid and slightly afraid categories. Meanwhile, the decline occurred in the categories of fear and very fear. The results of the prerequisite test using pretest and posttest data were not normal and homogeneous (sig. <0.05), so the species literacy data was analyzed by the Wilcoxon test. The results of the Wilcoxon test analysis are in table 4. There are differences in students' fear of herpetofauna between the pretest and posttest. Therefore, it can be concluded that citizen science has significantly reduced students' fear of herpetofauna.

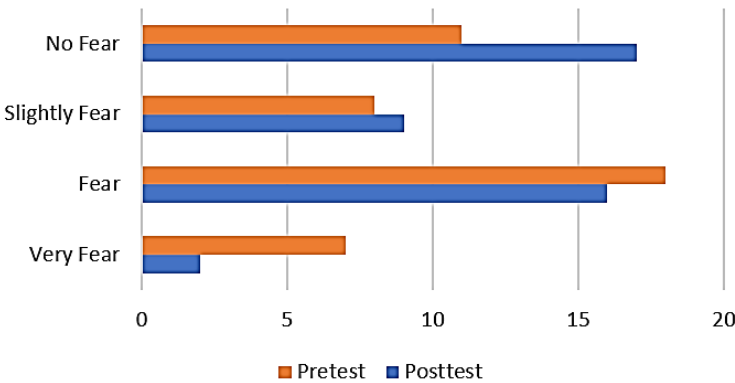


Figure 3. Data on student fear of herpetofauna

Table 4. Results of wilcoxon analysis of fear data in herpetofauna

Z	-3.217
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001

Students' fear of herpetofauna decreased because citizen science was able to understand animal behavior. Student involvement in contextual matters around them has an impact on behavior (Monica et al., 2024). This was confirmed by Teel et al. (2022), citizen science influences perceptions, behaviors towards wildlife and reduces fear. Student teachers need to have good knowledge and perspective on herpetofauna. This knowledge and perspective can be transmitted to students through learning. Students need to acquire basic knowledge about herpetofauna, so that later attitudes of fear and disgust disappear and change to friendly attitudes (Suryanda et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that citizen science has a positive impact on increasing species literacy, species identification skills and reducing students' fear of herpetofauna. The findings of this study contribute to the advancement of educational theory, including learning methodologies, species literacy, and student abilities. Besides from it, citizen science approaches can be used in middle school biology classes; this application serves as a platform for students to learn about the biodiversity in their surroundings. Future study may investigate such uses of experimental methods with control groups or the application of citizen science at different educational levels, such as in middle school.

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