

FOSTERING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN CIVIC EDUCATION:INSIGHTS FROM SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NAKONDE DISTRICT,ZAMBIA.

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Abstract

This study investigated how experiential learning strategies in Civic Education foster active citizenship among learners in four selected secondary schools in Nakonde District, Zambia. Drawing on a qualitative descriptive case study design within an interpretivist paradigm, the study involved 32 participants comprising eight Civic Education teachers and twenty-four Grade 12 learners. Data were generated through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions and were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that experiential learning strategies contribute significantly to the development of active citizenship competencies by deepening learners' civic awareness and understanding, enhancing essential civic skills and cultivating civic dispositions such as environmental stewardship. However, variations in implementation intensity influence the depth of active citizenship formation across schools. The study concludes that experiential learning strategies transform Civic Education from knowledge transmission to competence-based civic formation. Its transformative potential, however, depends on structured integration, institutional support, and sustained opportunities for reflective civic engagement. By providing context-specific evidence from a resource-constrained rural setting, the study contributes to scholarship on experiential civic education. Recommendations include institutionalising systematic experiential learning frameworks and the strengthening of school-community partnerships to enhance authentic civic participation.

Keywords: Active Citizenship, Civic Education, Competency-based Curriculum, Experiential Learning, Zambia

1. Introduction

Globally, Civic Education has been repositioned as a central instrument for nurturing democratic participation, social responsibility, and sustainable development. As education remains a key driver of national progress, systems worldwide are increasingly challenged to move beyond content transmission toward competence-oriented civic formation. International frameworks such as UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education agenda emphasise the need to cultivate not only civic knowledge, but also the skills, values, and dispositions necessary for active democratic participation (UNESCO, 2015). Similarly, Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.7 mandates education systems to equip learners with the competencies required to advance sustainable development, uphold human rights, promote peace, and foster global citizenship (United Nations, 2015). This global policy direction reflects a transformative vision of Civic Education one that extends beyond transmission of content toward cultivating learners' capacities for critical reflection, ethical judgment, and meaningful participation in civic and social life.

Within this context, experiential learning pedagogies have emerged as a critical dimension in reshaping contemporary Civic Education due to their capacity to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Rooted in constructivist traditions, experiential learning enable learners to construct meaning through engagement, reflection, and application (Kolb, 2015). In Civic Education, this approach is particularly significant because active citizenship understood as the demonstration of knowledge, participatory skills, democratic dispositions, and socially responsible action (Folorunsho, 2023) cannot be cultivated through passive reception of information. Rather, it requires lived engagement with civic processes and social realities (Browne, 2013), a position increasingly supported by recent studies highlighting the role of participatory and learner-centred pedagogies in fostering civic competencies (Hoskins and Janmaat, 2019). Ideally, there is a need to adopt transformative pedagogies capable of enhancing civic competences.

Experiential learning strategies (ELS) that include debates, service learning, field trips, role playing and simulations that emphasise learning through experience or action (Azeez and Aboobaker, 2024) are widely recognised as effective tools for cultivating civic competencies as they provide learners with opportunities to interact with civic realities rather than merely learning about them. ELS such as collaborative learning and

participatory learning encourage learners to share their perspectives and experiences, enhancing their understanding of civic concepts (Chanda, 2024; Mainde, Mpolomoka and Mwansa, 2022).

Experiential learning strategies offer a better way to allow learners develop competencies needed for active citizenship; however, scholars caution that effective implementation of ELS often requires substantial institutional support, teacher preparedness and adequate resources (Owen, 2024). This explains a critical gap in the literature; with limited research on the adoption of ELS in resource-constrained contexts like Zambia. Studies by Moonga (2018), Kabombwe and Mulenga (2019), Muleya, Magasu and Mweemba (2020), Magasu (2021), Kasongo, Mwansa and Chola (2022), Kaumba (2023), and Chanda (2024) consistently report that Civic Education in Zambia is predominantly classroom-based, with limited opportunities for learners to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world civic issues.

The existing literature provides evidence on how experiential learning strategies foster active citizenship. However, much of the documented success of ELS originates from relatively well-resourced educational contexts, leaving limited insight into how experiential learning strategies operate within resource-constrained settings. While previous studies in Zambia have highlighted limited implementation of ELS, there remains insufficient empirical evidence detailing how experiential learning strategies shape the development of active citizenship among learners. This leaves a contextual and analytical gap regarding the extent to which experiential learning strategies foster active citizenship within particular local contexts.

Therefore, this study investigated how experiential learning strategies in Civic Education foster active citizenship among learners in four selected secondary schools in Nakonde District, Zambia. By examining how experiential learning strategies operate within resource-constrained settings, the study sought to generate context-specific evidence to inform policy implementation, teacher professional development, and institutional support structures.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite formal policy endorsement of Competency-based Civic Education in Zambia, empirical evidence indicates a persistent gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities. Studies suggest that the school system has been more theoretical than practical over the years (Moonga, 2018; Kabombwe and Mulenga, 2019; Muleya et al., 2020; Magasu, 2021).

Although experiential pedagogies are widely recognised as effective approaches for developing civic competencies, it remains unclear how these strategies foster active citizenship competencies among learners in resource-constrained contexts such as Zambian settings. Without such evidence, Civic Education risks remaining largely content-driven rather than transformative, thereby undermining its broader goal of nurturing active citizenship. Therefore, this study investigated how experiential learning strategies in Civic Education foster active citizenship among learners in four selected secondary schools in Nakonde District, Zambia.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (2015), which conceptualises learning as a cyclical process involving four interrelated stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. This framework views learning not as passive acquisition of information, but as an active process through which knowledge is constructed through experience.

The foundations of experiential learning are rooted in the works of several influential scholars who shaped educational thought and human development. Thinkers such as William James, John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Kurt Lewin, and Paulo Freire made significant contributions to the evolution of experiential approaches to learning. Building on these intellectual traditions, Kolb (1984; 2015) developed his experiential learning model particularly drawing from Lewin's theory of action research and experiential processes. Lewin argued that effective learning occurs when individuals confront a tension between their immediate concrete experiences and subsequent reflective analysis. His learning cycle comprising action, reflection, generation, and testing strongly influenced Kolb's formation of experiential learning.

Kolb (1984; 2015) defines experiential learning as a process in which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Central to this perspective is the connection between classroom learning and real-life application. Education, therefore, should not remain confined to abstract academic concepts but should translate theory into practical realities that learners encounter in their social and civic lives. ELT is particularly relevant to Civic Education because active citizenship demands more than the acquisition of civic knowledge; it requires the development of participatory competence and responsible civic action. Civic competence is cultivated

when learners engage in authentic civic experiences, reflect critically on those experiences, internalise conceptual insights, and apply their understanding to new and evolving contexts (Guilfoile and Delander, 2014; Kolb, 2015).

Thus, this theoretical framework enabled the study to move beyond examining whether experiential strategies were merely employed. Instead, it facilitated an analysis of how these strategies support learners' progression through experiential learning cycle and how such progression contributes to the formation of civic competencies needed for active citizenship.

4. Literature Review

5. Conceptualising Active Citizenship

Active citizenship is fundamental to the sustainability of democratic societies because democracy depends not only on institutions but also on the active engagement of informed and responsible citizens. Participation in civic life is not automatic; it requires individuals who possess the knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions necessary to contribute constructively to public affairs. Folurunsho (2023) defines active citizenship as the demonstration of civic competencies and actions that contribute to the development and maintenance of a democratic society. Active citizenship extends beyond electoral participation to include deliberate engagement, advocacy for just laws and policies, accountability practices, fulfillment of civic duties such as tax compliance, and participation in community initiatives that advance the common good (Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, 2017). An active citizen, therefore, is not merely one who affirms democratic ideals in principle, but one who is willing and capable of translating those ideas into practice.

Within educational discourse, active citizenship represents the central outcome of Civic Education, integrating cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions of civic competence. It encompasses the capacity to apply civic knowledge critically, exercise participatory and deliberative skills, and embody democratic dispositions such as responsibility, tolerance, social justice orientation, and environmental stewardship. In this study, active citizenship is conceptualised as the learners' demonstrated and internalised ability to engage responsibly in civic processes, contribute to community development, and translate civic understanding into reflective and participatory action. This multidimensional framing provides the analytical basis for examining how experiential learning strategies facilitate civic competence formation in secondary school contexts

6. Experiential Learning and Civic Competence Development

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) posits that learning occurs through the transformation of experience into knowledge, skills, and meaning (Kolb, 2015). Within the civic education context, this theoretical orientation is particularly significant because active citizenship requires not only the acquisition of civic knowledge but also the development of participatory skills and democratic dispositions (Hoskins and Janmaat, 2019). Experiential pedagogies therefore reposition Civic Education from teacher-centred transmission toward learner-centred engagement, enabling learners to construct meaning through interaction, reflection, and application to socially situated contexts.

Empirical scholarship consistently demonstrates that experiential learning supports the integrated development of civic competence. Strategies such as field visits, project-based learning, role playing and simulations, service learning and structured debates create opportunities for learners to engage with real-world civic issues, thereby strengthening civic understanding, participatory capacity, and value formation simultaneously (Mainde and Chola, 2020; Almazroui, 2023). For example, Cheron and Macharia (2025)' study demonstrate that student-led civic activities in Kenya enhance learners' understanding of democratic processes by bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical engagement. Similarly, Chan and Leung (2019) in Asia found that experiential learning grounded in community interaction promotes empathy and perspective-taking, reinforcing both cognitive and affective dimensions of citizenship. In another context, Kalekin-Fishman and Hagoel (2023) found that structured opportunities for learners to voice concerns, deliberate on community issues, and implement solutions foster participatory skills, collaborative decision-making abilities, and a stronger sense of civic responsibility. Collectively, these studies suggest that civic competence is not developed in discrete domains but emerges through integrated and reflective participation in authentic civic contexts.

Importantly, experiential learning does not merely expose learners to civic realities, it facilitates iterative cycle of engagement and reflection through which competence is consolidated. In line with Kolb's (2015) framework, learners move from concrete experience to reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. This cyclical process enable learners to critically interpret experiences, internalise civic concepts, and apply them to new situations, thereby strengthening both analytical capacity and civic agency.

However, the effectiveness of experiential pedagogies is contingent upon systematic and sustained implementation. Scholars caution that without institutional support, adequate resources, and sustained professional development, experiential learning risks becoming fragmented and episodic rather than transformative (Owen, 2024). This explains why much of the documented success of experiential approaches is concentrated in relatively well-resourced educational contexts. In contrast, in many Sub-Saharan African settings, structural constraints including examination-oriented systems and limited instructional resources continue to mediate the adoption and impact of learner-centred pedagogies (Pacho, 2019; Alemnge and Andongaba, 2021; Folorunsho, 2023).

Within Zambia, existing studies consistently indicate that Civic Education has historically leaned toward theoretical instruction despite curriculum reforms advocating for learner-centred methodologies (Moonga, 2018; Kabombwe and Mulenga, 2019; Muleya et al., 2020; Magasu, 2021; Kasongo et al., 2022; Kaumba, 2023; Chanda, 2024). While these studies acknowledge the importance of participatory and learner-centred pedagogies, they primarily focus on curriculum implementation challenges and teacher perceptions, with limited empirical evidence detailing specific experiential learning strategies employed and their contribution to active citizenship competencies. Furthermore, district-level realities, particularly in rural settings, remain underexplored.

7. Identified Gap

Although global scholarship provides strong theoretical and empirical justification for experiential learning as a catalyst for active citizenship, context-specific evidence from resource-constrained secondary school environments remains limited. In Zambia specifically, research has highlighted the need for participatory pedagogy but has not adequately detailed specific experiential learning strategies employed and their contribution to active citizenship competencies. Moreover, rural districts such as Nakonde remain underrepresented in the literature.

This study addresses this gap by investigating how experiential learning strategies in Civic Education foster active citizenship among learners in four selected secondary schools in Nakonde District, Zambia. By focusing on civic outcomes rather than solely on pedagogical adoption, the study contributes empirical insights into the mechanisms through which experiential learning mediates civic competence development within resource-constrained educational settings.

8. Method

8.1 Research Paradigm

This study was anchored within the interpretivist research paradigm which assumes that social reality is socially constructed and that meaning is derived from participants' lived experiences and contextual interpretations (Williams, 2024). Given that the study sought to understand how experiential learning strategies foster active citizenship within specific school environments, an interpretivist orientation was appropriate as it enabled in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations within their natural settings.

8.2 Research Approach and Design

The study adopted a qualitative research approach using a descriptive case study design. It was considered suitable because the study aimed to generate rich, contextualised insights into the process through which experiential learning strategies contribute to civic competence development. The descriptive case study design allowed for detailed examination of experiential learning practices within real-life school contexts (Zainal, 2007). By focusing on multiple cases (four secondary schools), the design facilitated comparative insights while maintaining contextual depth.

8.3 Study Site and Participants

The study was conducted in Nakonde District, Zambia, involving four purposively selected secondary schools, coded as Schools A, B, C, and D to ensure anonymity. A total of 32 participants took part in this study, comprising: eight trained Civic Education teachers and twenty-four Grade 12 learners. The inclusion of both teachers and learners enabled triangulation of perspectives on classroom practice. Purposive sampling was employed to select Civic Education teachers based on subject specialisation and direct involvement in teaching Grade 12 classes (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). Homogeneous sampling was used to select learners for focus group discussions to ensure participants shared similar academic and experiential backgrounds (Omona, 2013). Each school, contributed six learners, forming one focus group per school.

8.4 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Data were generated through three complementary methods to enhance methodological triangulation. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with the eight Civic Education teachers using an interview guide. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility to probe participants' experiences while ensuring alignment with the study objectives (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). This method facilitated in-depth exploration of teachers' perspectives regarding experiential learning practices and their perceived contribution to active citizenship development.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with learners using a focus group discussion guide. FGDs were considered appropriate for eliciting shared experiences and facilitating interactive dialogue among participants, thereby enabling the exploration of collective meanings and diverse perspectives regarding how experiential learning in Civic Education prepares them for active citizenship (Denscombe, 2007). This method allowed learners reflect collaboratively on their civic learning experiences and articulate how such engagements influenced their civic awareness, skills, and dispositions.

Classroom observations were conducted using an observation checklist as an instrument to verify the application of experiential learning strategies during Civic Education lessons, allowing documentation of teaching practices directly rather than relying solely on self-reported accounts (Howitt, 2019). The checklist captured indicators related to real-world integration, learner-centred pedagogies, promotion of active citizenship competencies, teacher facilitation practices and contextual challenges affecting experiential learning implementation.

8.5 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following systematic procedures of coding, categorisation, and theme development (Salleha, Abdullah and Vicziany, 2017). Transcribed data from interviews, focus group discussions, and observation notes were carefully reviewed to identify recurring patterns related to civic competence development. Codes were inductively generated and subsequently organised into broader themes aligned with the study objectives. Findings were presented thematically and supported with verbatim excerpts from participants to preserve authenticity and analytical credibility.

8.6 Trustworthiness

To enhance trustworthiness, the study adhered to the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as proposed by (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation by combining interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations to cross-verify emerging findings (Creswell and Poth, 2018), and prolonged engagement in the field. Transferability was supported through thick description of research context and participants (Shenton, 2004). Dependability was ensured by maintaining a clear audit trail of data collection and analysis procedures (Nowell, Norris, White and Moules, 2017). Confirmability was enhanced through careful documentation of analytical decisions and inclusion of direct participant quotations (Morrow, 2005).

8.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed. Ethical approval was obtained from appropriate institutional authorisation prior to data collection. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Mulungushi University Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the District Education Board Secretary in Nakonde District. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and provided voluntary consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured by coding schools and participants and securely storing all research data.

9. Findings

Data were collected through individual interviews with eight Civic Education teachers, four focus group discussions (one per school with six Grade 12 learners each), and four classroom observations (one lesson observation per school). Thematic analysis established three major themes regarding how experiential learning strategies foster active citizenship: experiential learning strategies deepen civic awareness and understanding, experiential learning strategies enhance skills needed for active citizenship and experiential learning strategies cultivate civic dispositions among learners.

9.1 Theme 1: Experiential Learning Strategies Deepen Civic Awareness and Understanding

Regarding this theme, participants indicated that experiential learning strategies enable learners to develop a deeper understanding of civic institutions, legal processes, and community issues. Teachers reported that practical activities allowed learners to relate classroom knowledge to real-life situations. One teacher explained:

“They are able to relate what we teach with what is happening in society”.

Another teacher noted that learners developed the ability to recognise problems in their communities and propose possible solutions. T8 stated:

“Through discussions, learners identify problems in their communities and think of how they can help.”

These views were reechoed by learners who expressed that experiential activities helped them clarify their roles, rights and responsibilities. One learner in FGD3 stated:

“The activities have been showing us what we are supposed to do as citizens.”

Another learner in FGD2 reflected on the field-trip to the court, describing how the experience deepened her understanding of the legal system:

“...It helped us understand what we learn in class about the legal system.”

However, lesson observations revealed that opportunities for learners to demonstrate and deepen civic awareness and understanding varied across the selected schools. In Schools C and D, learner participation was largely limited to responding to few teacher-directed questions. In contrast, learners in School B were given opportunities to independently identify community issues and propose solutions.

4.2 Theme 2: Experiential Learning Strategies Enhance Civic Skills needed for Active Citizenship

In line with this theme, the findings indicated that experiential learning strategies foster essential civic competencies that enable learners to participate effectively, express their views, and engage meaningfully in civic matters. The participants indicated that experiential learning strategies enhance skills needed for active citizenship among learners. T2 expressed that:

“Through group work, we are able to see them become open...open to ideas and also be able to give different presentations without fear. It's also helping them to be able to express themselves. Meaning the freedom of speech is now being expressed.”

Another teacher described improvements in collaboration, research ability, and speaking skills, T8 expressed:

“They're able to research. Collaboration is also there. The other skill that I've noticed is that they're able to speak out.”

These insights were reechoed by learners who reported improvements in confidence and communication: A learner from FGD2 stated:

“Because of the debates, I am now confident to speak and I can communicate with anyone.”

The lesson observations reinforced these findings, showing that in School B where the integration of experiential learning strategies was relatively stronger, learners demonstrated higher levels of critical thinking, analytical and collaborative skills through presentations and question and answer sessions.

9.2 Theme 3: Experiential Learning Strategies Cultivate Civic Dispositions among Learners

The study found that experiential learning strategies cultivate civic dispositions needed for active citizenship by promoting values and orientations that guide learners to act responsibly and ethically in society. These include respect for the rule of law, environmental stewardship and assertiveness. Teachers noted that real-life engagement, such as field trips to courts allowed learners to understand the consequences of actions and the importance of responsible citizenship. T6 expressed:

“... The court experience allowed learners to witness how a suspect is handled, the way a trial is carried out... So that makes them act responsibly to avoid being in conflict with the Law.”

T3 described how experiential activities shaped learners' responsible expression of their rights:

“...A child who feels she is disadvantaged... will speak out in a manner that does not demean anyone, and for us that is civic responsibility..”

Learners reiterated these views, linking participation to personal responsibility. One learner in FGD2 shared:

“Participating in Environmental Day...planting trees and cleaning the school has helped me maintain a garden and understand the importance of water.”

Overall, the findings indicate that when effectively integrated, experiential learning strategies significantly contribute to fostering active citizenship by deepening civic awareness and understanding, enhancing essential civic skills, and cultivating civic dispositions among learners. School B that implements experiential learning strategies more consistently showed greater learner engagement and deeper development of active citizenship attributes.

10. Discussion

This study sought to describe how experiential learning strategies in civic education foster active citizenship among learners in four selected secondary schools in Nakonde District, Zambia. The findings revealed that when intentionally and consistently integrated, experiential pedagogies function as transformative mechanisms for civic competence development. Interpreted through Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and situated within existing

scholarship, the results reveal that ELS foster active citizenship by deepening civic awareness, enhancing participatory skills, and cultivating civic dispositions. However, uneven implementation of ELS across schools moderates the depth of these outcomes.

10.1 Experiential Learning and Deepening of Civic Awareness

The findings indicated that experiential learning strategies significantly deepen learners' civic awareness and understanding. Activities such as court visits, environmental initiatives, and drama enable learners to interrogate civic processes in practice rather than merely study them. In doing so, experiential engagement reduces the abstraction that often characterises Civic Education in exam-driven contexts. This finding resonates with Almazroui (2023) and Cheron and Macharia (2025), who argued that experiential civic activities bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world democratic engagement. Comparable findings have been reported in Asian school contexts, where experiential learning grounded in real-life engagement enhances learners' empathy and understanding of social issues (Chan and Leung, 2019).

More importantly, the findings illustrate how experiential learning operationalise Kolb's experiential cycle. Learners progressed from concrete civic exposure to reflective interpretation and conceptual internalisation. They did not merely witness governance structures; they reflected on legal accountability, civic responsibility, and institutional roles. This supports Kolb's (2015) assertion that meaningful learning emerges through iterative processes of experience, reflection, and application. The comparatively stronger civic awareness observed in School B suggests that consistent experiential exposure enhances learner's capacity to analyse societal issues critically and propose informed responses.

A key analytical contribution emerging from this study is the localisation of civic understanding. Learners anchored civic knowledge within familiar social spaces such as their school and immediate community. This localisation reframes active citizenship not as distant national engagement but as situated social responsibility. In contexts where Civic Education is often reduced to theoretical content mastery, such contextual anchoring represents a significant pedagogical shift toward lived citizenship formation.

10.2 Experiential Learning and Development of Participatory Skills

The study further revealed that ELS enhance participatory and deliberative skills essential for active citizenship, including communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and confidence in public expression. Structured debates, presentations and problem-solving tasks function as democratic rehearsal spaces in which learners practice articulating viewpoints, negotiating differences, and engaging in reasoned dialogue. These findings align with Mainde and Chola (2020), Owen (2024) and Perko and Mendiweso-Bendek (2019), who contend that experiential pedagogies cultivate analytical and participatory capacities required for democratic engagement. Similarly, Kalekin-Fishman and Hagoel (2023) found that when learners actively practice citizenship through articulating concerns, engaging in group decision-making, and implementing collective actions they develop stronger participatory competencies and collaborative skills.

Crucially, skill development emerges through sustained engagement rather than isolated interventions. In line with Kolb's framework, repeated experiential cycles enable learners to refine analytical reasoning and collaborative competence. The classroom thus functions as a preparatory civic space where democratic practices are rehearsed in structured environments before broader societal participation. This reinforces the argument that civic skills are constructed through guided participation rather than transmitted through lecture-based instruction.

However, inconsistent implementation of ELS across the selected schools result in uneven opportunities for skill development. Where experiential strategies were more systematically embedded, learners demonstrated higher levels of engagement and critical analysis. This confirms that the transformative potential of experiential pedagogies depends not merely on their presence but on their deliberate and sustained integration within instructional practice.

10.3 Experiential Learning and the Cultivation of Civic Dispositions

Beyond cognitive and skill-based outcomes, the findings revealed that experiential learning strategies cultivate civic dispositions central to active citizenship, including respect for the rule of law, environmental stewardship, accountability, and social responsibility. Exposure to court proceedings were reported to reinforce awareness of legal consequences and ethical responsibility, while participation in environmental activities nurture ecological consciousness. These findings align with Folorunsho (2023) and Halverson et al. (2024), who argue that experiential engagement facilitates the internalisation of democratic values; this study further shows that such internalisation is strengthened through direct exposure to real-life civic contexts and reflective processing.

The findings further suggest that experiential learning fosters moral reasoning by positioning learners within structured civic dilemmas. Rather than passively receiving normative prescriptions, learners engage in reflection

on lawful behaviour, justice, and sustainability. Experiential participation thus contributes to civic identity formation by shaping how learners perceive their responsibilities within democratic society.

However, uneven implementation of ELS limits opportunities for consistent disposition formation, indicating that sustained experiential reinforcement is necessary.

11. Novel Contributions

This study contributes to literature in three ways. First, it provides context-specific empirical evidence from a rural Zambian district, addressing the underrepresentation of resource-constrained educational settings in experiential civic education research. Second, it demonstrates how experiential learning operationalises Kolb's experiential cycle in fostering multidimensional civic competence encompassing awareness, skills, and dispositions. Third, it introduces the analytical concept of localised civic internalisation, highlighting how learners construct active citizenship within proximate social contexts.

12. Implications for Policy and Practice

These findings underscore the need for institutionalising structured experiential learning within Civic Education to ensure equitable civic competence development. Curriculum implementation frameworks should explicitly mandate, resource and monitor experiential pedagogies rather than treat them as supplementary enhancements.

Furthermore, assessment frameworks should incorporate experiential components that evaluate civic skills, participation, and dispositions alongside theoretical knowledge. Integrating project-based assessments, and community engagement portfolios, and structured reflection tasks would reinforce competence-based civic formation and reduce overreliance on examination-driven recall.

Finally, schools should strengthen partnerships with community institutions, local governance structures, and civil society organisations to create sustained opportunities for authentic civic engagement. Such partnerships would enable learners to translate classroom-based experiential learning into meaningful civic action, thereby consolidating active citizenship beyond the school environment.

13. Conclusion

The study examined how ELS in Civic Education foster active citizenship among learners in selected secondary schools in Nakonde District, Zambia. The findings demonstrate that when intentionally and systematically integrated, experiential pedagogies function as transformative mechanisms for civic competence development. By deepening civic awareness, enhancing participatory skills, and cultivating democratic dispositions, ELS reposition Civic Education from knowledge transmission toward competence-based civic formation.

However, the study also reveals that the transformative potential of experiential learning is contingent upon sustained, deliberate, and structured implementation. In contexts where integration was inconsistent, opportunities for learners to transition from civic awareness to meaningful civic engagement remained uneven. This suggests that experiential learning is not inherently transformative; its impact depends on institutional commitment, pedagogical intentionality, and continuity of practice.

Importantly, this study contributes context-specific empirical evidence from a resource-constrained rural setting and advances the analytical insights of localised civic internalisation, illustrating how learners anchor active citizenship within familiar community and school spaces. These findings underscore the imperative of embedding structured experiential frameworks within Civic Education to nurture reflective, responsible, and democratically engaged citizens capable of contributing to sustainable community development.

14. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. The Ministry of Education (MOE) should institutionalise clear national guidelines for systematic integration of experiential learning strategies in Civic Education.
2. Schools should receive dedicated financial and logistical support to implement structured experiential activities such as field visits, simulations, and community-based projects.
3. Schools should strengthen sustained partnerships with local institutions, governance structures, and civil society organisation to provide learners with authentic civic engagement. Such collaborations would enable learners to translate classroom-based civic learning into practical civic action within their communities.
4. Civic Education assessment frameworks should incorporate experiential and performance-based components that evaluate civic skills, participation, and dispositions alongside theoretical

knowledge. Integrating project-based assessments, reflective portfolios, and community engagement documentation would reinforce competence-based civic formation and reduce overreliance on examination-driven recall.

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