Effective Pedagogical Principles in Teaching Civic Education: A Case Study of Higher Learning Institutions in Zambia

**Abstract**

The pedagogical principles employed in Civic Education instruction in higher learning institutions in Zambia have the potential to improve learning outcomes. The main objective of this article was to explore the pedagogical principles employed by educators in selected higher learning institutions and to establish the challenges faced by educators in implementing the pedagogical principles in the selected higher learning Institutions. The study relied on Sherry Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation model and the transformative learning theory**.** The study was qualitative and employed a qualitative multiple-case study design. This qualitative study employed a multiple-case design involving three selected higher learning institutions in Zambia, using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to collect data from 5 educators and 32 students. The study was significant in that it was hoped that there would be the generation of new knowledge on pedagogical principles of civic education, and by filling a gap in understanding how the pedagogical principles might be useful in the teaching of civic education and the relationship between pedagogy and civic participation in the Zambian context through the insights that would be gained in the study. The Findings of the study showed that certain teaching methods such as lecture method, service learning projects, debate, discussions, brainstorming, and role-play were the commonly used pedagogical principles employed in the selected higher learning institutions in Zambia. Additionally, the study established that the lack of employment of other modern pedagogical principles in civic education by educators was hindered by a lack of material resources, money, time, curriculum review, and administrative support to carry out effective interactive and service-learning activities. The study also recommended that educators should adopt modern principles of civic education, and conduct continuous staff development programs, Institutions should allocate more funds for student activities, there should be constant curricula reviews and institutions should strengthen partnerships with civic associations and community organizations.

**Keywords:** *Civic Education, Pedagogical Principles, Civic Participation, Higher Learning Institutions*

**Introduction**

Civic education is essential in democratic societies and is widely recognized for its basic importance in empowering students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that stimulate their interest in participating in their nation's civic and political affairs (Mainde & Chola, 2020). The importance of civic education is vital in Zambia's dynamic democracy and diverse sociopolitical background. Civic education plays a vital role in Zambia’s high learning institutions In Zambian higher learning institutions in developing informed students and cultivating in them attitudes and behaviors needed for their active involvement in the development of their community and active involvement in the democratic process (Muleya, 2018). However, despite its significance, there is a limited understanding of which methods are commonly employed to encourage student civic participation and what challenges educators face in employing the pedagogical principles in the selected higher learning institutions in Zambia. Existing research offers little direction on the best approaches to encourage students to get involved in civic activities (Chanda, 2024). The absence of practical information on effective teaching methods for civic education hinders the promotion of student civic participation in Zambia. Higher learning institutions find it difficult to employ strategies that encourage student civic participation because of insufficient research on the pedagogical principles that can effectively foster civic engagement among students (Mwape & Chisanga, 2021).

By identifying the pedagogical principles currently employed in the teaching of civic education in selected higher learning institutions, this study’s aim was to narrow this gap**.** Furthermore, the study sought to critically assess the challenges faced by educators in implementing these pedagogical principles that could be effective in promoting student civic participation.

The various levels of student civic participation are in most cases affected by the educational structures put in place and the pedagogical principles employed by educators in higher learning institutions. Various levels of youth participation in civic activities in Zambia, which in most cases have been influenced by educational structures and strategies used,serve as areason for carrying out this study ( Mufalo, 2021).The study provided useful information that if implemented, could help institutional managers, curriculum designers, educators, and policy makers to increase student civic initiatives.

The study underscores the significance of student civic participation and active learning in higher learning institutions, bringing into line with global educational trends and as supported by UNESCO (2021). Toukan (2018) asserts that, “it is essential for all students to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to advance sustainable development, highlighting global citizenship, human rights, gender equality, and the value of cultural diversity”.

**Review of the literature**

The literature reviewed examined the theoretical basics and recent strategies of civic education, with a specific stress, on transformative learning theory and Sherry Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of citizen participation, as they apply to the higher learning institutions in Zambia. The transformative learning theory, introduced by Jack Mezirow in the late 1970’s, places of interest the importance of critical reflection and dialogue in reforming beliefs and expectations. This theory is particularly important to adult education, as it inspires learners to analyze their past experiences and include new viewpoints in their understanding of issues. Sherry Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation highlights various levels of citizen participation in decision-making processes, emphasizing the need for reliable involvement and redistribution of power to encourage significant civic involvement. This is essential for cultivating informed and responsible citizens (Kinsella et al., 2024). Various pedagogical principles are employed by educators in higher learning institutions in Zambia to encourage students to think critically, analyze issues, and participate actively in civic activities. Some of these pedagogical principles include interactive teaching techniques such as discussions, brainstorming, debate, and group work, which are critical for encouraging student civic participation in various civic activities**.** Guilfoil et al (2016) observed that in the learner-centered method of instruction, learners share what they learn in various ways such as through presentations, debate, facilitated panel discussions, and dramatization. However, in civic education lessons, this entails that the teacher designs learning activities that take into consideration students’ interests, experiences, and backgrounds. This view was supported by Denny (2024) who argued that involving learners in the learning process changes the way students learn from being passive consumers of knowledge to active participants through the use of discussions and other activities that reflect actual civic activities. Learner-centeredness is very effective in teaching and learning civic education in that it helps to develop learners who are confident, critical, and can analyze issues without fear thereby encouraging them to participate in their communities. Furthermore, other pedagogical principles like service learning projects and role play are integrated into the curriculum and employed in some institutions. Service learning projects help link what is taught in the classroom to students with their community thereby giving students a practical basis for relating their knowledge in real world civic situations. As Chitondo (2022) noted, Educators should involve students in service- and project-based learning, as well as youth governance**.** Nevertheless, the efficiency of these teaching methods differ considerably across institutions, and is in most cases affected by many factors such as staff experience, availability of resources, and the general commitment to promoting student civic participation. There is a noticeable gap between the educational goals and their real presentation, even when it is a well-known fact that active participation in civic education has a solid academic back-up. . According to Schulz (2024), real student participation usually lacks educational goals for undertaking their activities. This deficiency is time and again as a result of issues like inadequate institutional support, insufficient teacher training, and teacher training, and mismatch between teaching strategies and educational objectives **(**Schulz, 2024). According to the study, the pedagogical principles employed in civic education need to be reexamined and enhanced. Schulz (2024) observed that increasing experiential learning opportunities that are strictly associated with actual civic activities could significantly encourage student participation and retention of knowledge among students. Ultimately, these strategies could ensure that civic education is not only theoretically but practically stimulating and that would promote more engaged and knowledgeable students. .

Even thoughthe traditional methodprovides a practical theoretical background for civic education, pedagogical changes are necessary to improve the connection between academic learning and real world civic engagement. Refining these teaching strategies is critical to Zambia’s effective production of citizens who are knowledgeable and engaged. As Eyler, et al (2001) in Magasu et al (2020) observed that the best pedagogy in the teaching of civic education should include a combination of classroom instruction through which learners gain the necessary foundational and professional skills, and experience and action on genuine community needs. This would eventually develop the larger objectives of advancing the society and democratic engagement

**Methodology**

The study’s objectives was to addressthe gap in the Zambian educational research thereby contributing to the international dialogue on how to promote education for democratic citizenship. This could be realized by providinginformation that may advance the democratic engagement of future leaders and citizens in Zambia and outside. The study sought to encourage participation, knowledge acquisition, and accountability of students and educators by exploring and improving the pedagogical principles of civic education within the institutions in Zambia.

This study was qualitative and used a qualitative multiple-case study design. A multiple case study is when a study includes more than one single case. The researcher studies multiple cases to understand the differences and similarities between the cases. The advantage of multiple case studies is that the researcher can analyze data both within each situation and across situations (Yin, 2003).In this way, the researcher can clarify whether the findings were valuable or not. When the case studies are compared to each other the researcher is also able to provide the literature with an important influence from the contrasts and similarities (Vannoni, 2014). The significant advantage of using multiple-case design in this study lies in cross-case analysis. A multiple-case research design shifts the focus from understanding a single case to the differences and similarities between cases. Thus, it is more than conducting more case studies (second, third, etc.). (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2024). The objectives of this study were; to explore the pedagogical principles employed by educators in selected higher learning institutions, and to establish the challenges faced by the educators in implementing the pedagogical principles in the selected higher learning Institutions in Zambia. The study was conducted in three selected higher learning institutions in Zambia namely; University U, K, and M. The target population was third and fourth-year students and educators of civic education in the selected higher learning in Purposive sampling was used to choose the participants, with an emphasis on educators of civic education, and students who were enrolled in Civic Education programs. Semi-structured interviews were used to generate data from the five educators from the three selected higher learning institutions while 32 students of civic education were subjected to Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), thus, 4 FGDs, comprising 8 members were used to generate data. Giving a total of 37 participants. Triangulation of data sources was done through focus group discussions, interviews, and document analysis, this was done to avoid potential biases. Theme analysis was used to analyze the data.

**Result:**

One of the objectives of the study was to identify the pedagogical principles of civic education employed in the selected higher learning institutions in Zambia. The study found out the following:

*Effective pedagogical principles*

According to the study, interactive teaching strategies were essential in civic education. These included debate, discussions, and brainstorming. These techniques promoted critical thinking and active participation of students in selected higher learning institutions in Zambia. According to the educators were described using acronyms L to indicate lecturer and the initial of the institution they were coming from in parenthesis. For example L1 (U), L2 (K), L3 (M), L4 (K), and L5 (U) (Marked in text like L1-5). These approaches enabled students to interact more thoroughly with civic ideas and concerns thereby improving their understanding and interest in taking part in civic life. L 2(K) said, "*We employ active learning methods such as discussions to prepare students for critical thinking and analysis. This prepares students to engage actively with institutions of government and community leaders."*

L 1(U) explained that *“mainly I use lecture method to lecture my students in class, I can’t use learner-centered methods in class due to time to cover the content, unless when I teaching a methodology course where students have to learn the teaching methods and apply them in class*.

Another finding of the study on pedagogical principles was the use of service learning. This method gives students the chance to apply what they have learnt in the classroom to real-world situations by combining academic study with community work. This approach was said to be effective in that it helped to close the gap between academic knowledge from civic education and real-world application, thereby increasing students' civic participation and responsibilities. One student in a focus group discussion had this to say*, civic education widens the way we look at issues, it makes us more sensitive to the needs of others.* *As a result, as students, we join organizations that identify vulnerable people in the community and we make various monetary and material contributions to assist them.* Another student had this to say "*During our action projects, we deal with real community issues, which makes the theoretical lessons from class much more real and impactful”.*

However, one L 3 (M) was of the view that “we *fail to employ experiential methods such as service learning due to a lack of finance, time constraints, and student disinterest, the management does not see the need to fund such activities, especially since students still graduate using traditional methods*, *Some of these methods require resources like money and time, so i use methods that are convenient to cover the content*

Another L 1(U) noted that, *in the past i used to take my students to the communities to implement what they had learned in the classroom such as helping to clean the environment clean, but nowadays students are relaxed and not eager to do that without any incentive. Students have become tough to volunteer to work.*

The study further established that incorporating case studies and real-world examples into the curriculum could significantly increase civic education's importance. Students could gain a deeper understanding of the difficulties of civic involvement and government by studying real-world civic issues and situations.

*Challenges in Implementing Effective Pedagogical Principles*

Another objective of the study was to establish the challenges faced by educators of civic education in employing the pedagogical principles of civic education in selected higher learning institutions in Zambia. The study identified three main challenges in the effective implementation of pedagogical principles. The three challenges could be categorized as (i) Institutional support challenge, (ii) training challenge, and curriculum inadequacies.

*1. Institutional support challenge*

The study identified the lack of institutional support as a challenge in the effective implementation of pedagogical principles. Lack of sufficient resources was one of the main issues established by the study. The educators revealed there was a lack of resources, time, and administrative support to carry out effective interactive and service-learning activities. As one L3 (M) noted because *experiential methods require students to go out and so there is a need for proper guidelines on how the students are monitored and how the linkages and partnerships are done…monitoring requires money and our university doesn’t budget for it.* Such limitations restrict the ability to fully engage students in comprehensive civic learning experiences.

*2. Curriculum inadequacies*

Curriculum inadequacies was identified as another challenge in the implementing of pedagogical principles of civic education. The study revealed that the civic education curriculum was not flexible and was outdated in some institutions. One L 2 (K) noted that *yes, the principles are there but the curriculum is congested and outdated because it has not been reviewed for some time now to include the emerging principles.*

*3. Training Challenge*

Additionally, findings of the study revealed that not all educators had the necessary training to successfully use these pedagogical approaches, highlighting the need for ongoing staff development. Opportunities for professional development that concentrated on the most recent methodologies in civic education were essential for improving educators' skills and pedagogy. Another L 4(K) had this to say, *the current pedagogical principles are good, however, there is need for us lectures to have continuous professional development programs which we rarely have so that we know what is obtaining out there in the field of civic education.*

The results of the study highlight how important pedagogical principles were to increasing students' civic participation in Zambian higher education institutions. Educators of civic education could greatly increase students' involvement in civic activities by implementing interactive teaching strategies, incorporating service learning, and using case studies. To enhance the effectiveness of these educational approaches, however, it was vital to overcome resource limits, curricular constraints, and ensure ongoing staff development.

With regards to students views on the pedagogical principles employed by lecturers of civic education, the study found that following as the commonly used pedagogies in teaching civic education. One Student in FGD 1 had this to say, *“Our lecturers emphasize participatory learning. They encourage open discussions and debates on civic issues, allowing us to express our views freely”.* Another student from FGD 2 noted the use of lecture method as being common. The student remarked as follows, “*Our lecturers mostly use lecture method although sometimes they ask thought provoking questions which enable us to engage in discussions to help us understand concepts clearer*”. The other student noted group discussion as being commonly used. The student noted, *“Group discussions and presentations are common, especially when analyzing real life situations”.*

The other student from FGD 3 highlighted the use of active pedagogical methods in teaching. The student had the following to say, “*Our lecturers use interactive method, where as students we actively contribute rather than passively listen in class”.*

**Discussion**

The findings of this study underscored the importance of incorporating experiential learning into civic education to enhance student participation and knowledge acquisition. Two interactive approaches that have been demonstrated to be effective in facilitating students' comprehension and engagement in civic activities are project-based learning and service learning. These techniques allow students to apply their academic knowledge in practical situations, thereby establishing a stimulating and instructive relationship with the external environment. Interactive learning approaches are encouraged by some education policies in Zambia such as the 2013 Zambia educational curriculum framework (ZECF), which emphasizes the need for teachers and educators to use methods that promote active learners participation and interaction (MoE, 2013). Additionally, the 2023 Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (MoE, 2024) competence-based curriculum emphasizes what learners are expected to do as opposed to what they are expected to know. These acquired competencies can be applied to various situations and would act as a catalyst for value addition in many situations. Some of these competencies include analytical thinking, citizenship, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving among others

Adams and Wilson (2018) noted that constructivist methods, which prioritize experiential learning, can substantially enhance student engagement and knowledge acquisition. This is corroborated by Manning-Ouellette and Hemer (2019), who emphasized that service learning initiatives in civic education programs helped Students link the knowledge gap between theory and practice, thereby enhancing their civic skills and sense of civic duty. Wurdinger and Allison (2017)**)** discussion of experiential learning is in line with these teaching strategies.

This would promote student’s transformative educational experiences and motivate them to apply what they had learned in significant ways. The study's use of the transformative learning theory shows a close observance of the theoretical foundations which emphasizes critical reflection and dialogue in reshaping students' perspectives and assumptions. These pedagogical approaches are the most successful, such as service learning and interactive teaching techniques, which involve students in real-world civic participation rather than imparting academic information. By encouraging students to critically reflect on their experiences and engage in meaningful discussions, educators can help students develop a deeper understanding of civic issues and their roles as active citizens. These techniques highlight the vital role that interactive and experiential learning plays in improving civic education results by encouraging students to engage in civic life and to get a deeper understanding of the subject.

Given these benefits associated with civic education pedagogies, Policymakers must encourage the integration of civic education into all academic fields for students to receive a thorough introduction to civic education. Carter (2021) emphasizes the importance of legislative changes that support various initiatives aimed at enhancing civic involvement, along with ensuring adequate funding and resources for civic education. Additionally, Teixeira and Klemenčič (2021) point out that institutional support is vital, highlighting the significant role of university administration in the success of civic education initiatives. They argue that the commitment of educational institutions is essential for effectively implementing civic education programs. While project-based and service learning significantly contribute to students' civic engagement, the findings revealed that lecture method, brainstorming and discussions are still the most commonly used teaching methods among lecturers in the selected higher learning institutions in Zambia. Therefore, it is crucial to organize professional development sessions to train educators on integrating contemporary pedagogical strategies, such as Team Games Tournament (TGT), Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), and the Student Team Achievement Division (STAD) cooperative learning models. The study concludes that universities can significantly enhance student civic participation by adopting policies that promote multidisciplinary approaches and by providing the necessary resources for Civic Education. There was also a need to strengthen professional development programs for civic education educators to facilitate the exchange of knowledge on modern teaching principles. Ultimately, this strategic focus would equip students to become responsible, informed citizens capable of actively engaging in democratic processes and contributing to societal development.

**Conclusion**

While the current teaching methods employed in civic education in selected higher learning institutions in Zambia lay a foundational basis for engaging students in civic activities, there was significant room for improvement. This could be done by incorporating more interactive, participatory, and hands-on learning approaches so that students are prepared for active citizenship, this study emphasized the value of real-world applications and effective teaching methods in nurturing informed and engaged citizens. Research indicates that teaching involving service learning, project-based initiatives, and practical problem-solving tasks are particularly effective in enhancing students' awareness of and participation in civic responsibilities. The study also identified several challenges to successfully implementing these strategies such as the over-reliance on traditional academic success of students over comprehensive civic education. The study recommended that policymakers reconsider curriculum design, Higher learning institutions should allocate more funds for student civic activities, increase staff development programs, and the frequency of curriculum reviews. This requires adopting the best practices for curriculum review. For instance, Hactic, 2009 in Dumbuya (2024) suggested continuously refining curricula based on evidence, that educational institutions could improve student performance and retention in educational institutions. Additionally, Munna & Kalam (2021) noted that many countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Australia have engaged in curriculum reforms that emphasized and incorporated competencies into the vision and design of their curriculum reform since the 1960s with many more countries joining this trend recently.

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