

CONTEXTUALISING SERVICE LEARNING MODEL IN CIVIC EDUCATION TEACHER PROGRAMMES IN ZAMBIA

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Abstract

This research focused on incorporating the four elements of service learning which are; reciprocity, reflection, integration, and diversity into the instruction and learning of Civic Education teacher programs in Zambia. The study confirmed the significance of these four elements in the teaching and learning of Civic Education teacher programs in Zambia, although they are currently lacking. It is recommended that the curriculum for Civic Education courses offered in colleges and universities in Zambia be revised to include service learning in the teaching and learning methods, as guided by the four components of service learning. There is also a need to regularly assess the methods used to teach Civic Education to ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in governance, advocate for social justice, and contribute to the development of their communities, civic agency, and community engagement.

Keywords: Civic Education, Teaching, learning, Service learning, Teacher Programmes.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, Zambia has acknowledged the crucial role of civic education in advancing active citizenship, social accountability, and democratic engagement. Civic education is vital for helping students grasp their rights and duties in a democratic society (Magasu, et al., 2020). It provides individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to participate in governance, advocate for social justice, and contribute to the progress of their communities. Despite its significance, the teaching of civic education in Zambia has historically been based on theoretical frameworks, offering limited opportunities for students to apply their learning in real-life situations. Muleya (2019) argued that the difficulty of translating civic education theory into practical action has underscored the need for innovative approaches to teacher training, especially in Civic Education programs such as service learning. Teacher education institutions play a critical role in shaping the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of future educators, and there is a growing

consensus that student teachers must be better prepared to promote active citizenship and community engagement among their students. In this regard, the four components of service learning - reciprocity, reflection, integration, and diversity - have emerged as a potent pedagogical model that can bridge the gap between theory and practice in Civic Education teacher programs. This study adapted the four components of service learning to the Zambian Civic Education teacher programs. Zambia requires a teacher education program that addresses the disparity between theory and practice (Magasu, et al., 2020) even as it promotes democracy, civic, and social responsibility. The study explored how the Civic Education teacher programs in Zambia can draw from the service learning model in preparing skilled individuals to apply both the theory and practice of the subject in society.

The significance of civic education has been increasingly acknowledged by scholars such as Mainde et al. (2022), Muleya (2015; 2019), and Magasu et al. (2020), emphasizing its role in imparting civic knowledge, skills, values, and fostering active citizenship, social responsibility, and democratic engagement among individuals. However, the current Civic Education teacher programs in Zambia face limitations in equipping teachers to effectively translate these civic education goals into tangible outcomes. Traditionally, Zambian schools have focused on imparting theoretical knowledge about governance, rights, and responsibilities through civic education, but have lacked practical applications of this knowledge in real-world contexts.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There is a pressing need for innovative approaches in teacher preparation programs to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and to promote active participation and social responsibility among students. One potential approach involves integrating service learning components such as reciprocity, reflection, integration, and diversity into Civic Education teacher programs, wherein student teachers engage in community-based service projects directly aligned with their academic learning and civic education objectives. The three thematic areas of knowledge, skills, and dispositions in Civic Education align with the service learning components of reciprocity, reflection, integration, and diversity (Chola, 2016). Despite this alignment, it remains unclear how Civic Education teaching and learning in Zambia integrates the service learning components of reciprocity, reflection, integration, and diversity to prepare students for practical learning in the present and future. The incorporation of the service learning dimension enables students to leverage their knowledge, skills, and character attributes for success in lifelong learning environments.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICE LEARNING MODEL

The innovative pedagogical approach of the service learning model integrates community service, academic learning, and structured reflection to promote civic responsibility, enhance academic knowledge, and foster personal and professional growth. According to Claes (2022), elements such as reciprocity, reflection, integration, and diversity in service learning are crucial for encouraging praxis in teaching Civic Education. For Muleya (2019) adopting the service learning model in Zambia's Civic Education teacher programs offers a transformative opportunity to connect theoretical civic education with practical, community-based civic engagement. This approach

significantly improves the preparedness of future teachers to instill active citizenship, social responsibility, and democratic participation in students.

2.1 Reciprocity

Reciprocity has emerged as a significant concept in the context of service learning. Pacho (2019) emphasizes the importance of both reflection and reciprocity in service learning. Similarly, Zentner (2020) includes reciprocity as one of the ten essential principles for effective service learning in teacher education, asserting that collaboration among teacher education programs, schools, and the community should be characterized by reciprocity and mutual respect. This kind of reciprocity necessitates regular communication among service learning partners regarding project needs, development, implementation, and evaluation, clearly defined roles and responsibilities of partners, and a shared vision of outcomes. It is essential for the service and learning experiences to be beneficial and valuable for both the student and the community, emphasizing reciprocity between the server and those served.

Maindy (2022) perceives Civic Education lessons as having numerous benefits, including encouraging students to internalize knowledge and engage with communities as active citizens, as opposed to trying to indoctrinate them solely for the instrumental value of Civic Education. These strategies are crucial in the Zambian context to ensure that governance institutions actively create service learning opportunities for pre-service teachers. Reciprocity in service learning often fosters reciprocal relationships among professionals across community agencies responsible for establishing service learning partnerships, rather than focusing solely on the individuals providing and receiving service. As for Zentner (2020), in a Service Learning experience, each participant acts as a server and as one served, as a caregiver and care acquirer, and as a contributor and one who is contributed to. Both learning and teaching in a Service Learning relationship are responsibilities for each partner in the relationship.

2.2 Reflection

Service learning sets itself apart from volunteerism through its emphasis on reflection and assessment of experiential learning, rather than just engaging in service activities (Coelho & Menezes, 2021). Through reflection, educators can evaluate the practical learning that takes place when students participate in service activities and integrate this firsthand information with formal knowledge obtained in the classroom.

Engaging in reflective practice within service learning involves critically analyzing emotional responses to service activities in relation to the course content and learning objectives (Coelho & Menezes, 2021). It is crucial to incorporate structured reflection into Civic Education Teacher Programmes to facilitate a deeper comprehension of course subject matter beyond the traditional classroom setting. Reflection fosters interpersonal communication, problem-solving skills, self-awareness, civic responsibility, and a sense of belonging. Thoughtful and systematic reflection on experiences maximizes the benefits of service learning. Within the context of civic education, reflection encourages introspection into various aspects of students' lives. Reflection is the vital process that connects service and academic learning objectives. Different dimensions of reflection include group discussions, addressing community needs through assignments, and making

presentations. The Education Curriculum Framework (2013) in Zambia aligns with this emphasis by focusing on curriculum competencies that learners should acquire, including the ability to contemplate the real-world applications of classroom instruction in society.

2.3 Integration

Service learning activities are directly related to the student's academic learning objectives in order to strengthen student's critical thinking. Pacho (2019) argue that Service learning projects complement academic instruction and make lessons fun and accessible for even the most disengaged students. In successful projects, educators guide students in brainstorming and developing new projects or assist them in adapting service learning lesson plans to meet needs in the local community. In addition, Muleya (2019) highlighted the importance of the integration of service learning in Civic Education teacher education as a powerful strategy for preparing future teachers. Service learning combines community service with reflective learning and apply theoretical knowledge to real-world settings. O'Dowd (2020) asserts that, this integration is highly beneficial in the context of teacher education even though not properly integrated at the moment in Civic Education teacher programmes. Service learning allows pre-service teachers to apply pedagogical theories in actual educational settings. For example, they might work in under-resourced schools, tutoring students or assisting teachers, providing valuable hands-on experience. They can engage with communities and learn about the challenges that affect education, such as poverty, language barriers, and access to resources. By working directly with communities, future teachers develop ethical sensitivities, better understanding the broader impact of education and their role as educators.

2.4 Diversity

Diversity is considered a crucial aspect of service learning in teacher education by scholars like Battistoni (2017) and Altman (2019), as it enriches the training of future educators to effectively navigate diverse educational settings. The integration of service learning with a focus on diversity equips student teachers with hands-on experience in addressing the distinct needs of students from varied cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and ability backgrounds. According to Mainde et al. (2022), this approach cultivates cultural competency, empathy, and an awareness of social justice, essential qualities for educators in today's classrooms.

Pais and Costa (2020) asserted that modern classrooms often comprise students from different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, as well as those with diverse learning requirements. It is imperative for student teachers to be equipped to teach in such environments, and service learning offers direct exposure to these diverse student populations. Through service learning, student teachers practice culturally responsive teaching by engaging with students from diverse backgrounds, which helps them learn how to tailor instructional approaches and materials to be inclusive and supportive of all students, irrespective of their background (Coelho and Menezes, 2021). Service learning that emphasizes diversity underscores the role of teachers in advocating for social justice and educational equity. Student teachers are exposed to the discrepancies in educational opportunities and resources and are encouraged to contemplate how they can contribute to a more equitable education system. There is a focus on involving a wide

spectrum of students engaging in diverse settings and with diverse populations within the community. Service learning assists students in overcoming stereotypes and fears, as well as in developing skills as multicultural community participants.

3.0 Service Learning Model in Civic Education Teacher Programmes in Zambia

Since 2007, universities and colleges of education in Zambia have implemented Civic Education teacher programmes to equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values for active participation in the community and democratic processes (Muleya, 2015). The goal of the Civic Education Teacher Programmes in Zambia is to enhance students' abilities and practices, enabling them to effectively apply their knowledge within the community.

To foster the development of democratic and civically engaged citizens, it is crucial for Civic Education teaching and learning to be connected to the four components of the service learning model: reciprocity, reflection, integration, and diversity. Pacho (2019) emphasizes that the teaching methods utilized are vital tools for improving the effectiveness of Civic Education teaching and learning. Experiential teaching methods such as service learning have been shown to yield more enduring results compared to traditional classroom-based methods (Dewantara, et al., 2019). Service learning encourages students to apply their acquired knowledge and foundational skills in practical activities within society. According to Resch and Schritteser (2023), any service learning model promotes practical experience, civic engagement, exposure to diverse communities, and reflective practice, all of which are interconnected in nurturing students with practical attributes. However, the integration and application of service learning as a pedagogical model in Zambian Civic Education teacher programmes is currently limited.

Practical experience entails a hands-on, applied approach for students to utilize their classroom knowledge to address real-world problems, fostering skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and civic responsibility (Tryggvason, 2018). This practical experience demands that students apply the concepts, tools, experiences, and topics of the subject in their daily lives and when confronting anticipated or unforeseen challenges in the future. In Zambian universities and colleges of education, Civic Education has specified expected outcomes and competencies. The knowledge acquired and the teaching methods employed in the classrooms influence students' theoretical and practical skills necessary for real-life situations (Sibbett, 2022). However, the Civic Education teacher education programmes in Zambia lack practical experience. Graduates in Civic Education often have minimal to no experience in applying theoretical knowledge to real-world civic issues. The existing curriculum is largely centered on classroom-based learning, providing limited opportunities for student teachers to actively engage with the communities they aim to serve.

According to Singh (2019), civic engagement nurtures responsible and active citizenship. Service learning offers students the chance to apply their academic skills in ways that benefit the community, while also fostering deeper involvement in civic life. Both aspects are vital for developing the knowledge, skills, and values required for individuals to contribute to the collective good and become informed, engaged citizens. Nonetheless, there is insufficient emphasis on civic engagement within the civic education teacher programmes in Zambia. The conventional focus on rote learning and theoretical comprehension of civic topics does not adequately prepare teachers to inspire active civic participation and community involvement among future educators.

The opportunity to engage with populations from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and demographic backgrounds, as noted by Altman (2019), is highly valuable for students. It not only enriches their educational experiences but also fosters understanding, empathy, and the development of skills required for functioning in an increasingly globalized world. Effective communication, collaboration, and problem-solving across cultural and social differences are necessary when working with diverse communities. According to Resch and Schritteser (2023), service learning facilitates the development of these skills by immersing students in environments where they must navigate diverse perspectives and work towards common objectives. For example, students involved in a community development project in a multicultural neighborhood would need to learn how to negotiate and respect the varying needs and expectations of different groups. In the structure and delivery of Civic Education Teacher programs in universities and colleges of education in Zambia, there is minimal exposure to diverse communities. Student teachers often lack exposure to diverse social, cultural, and economic contexts, which is crucial for understanding the distinct challenges faced by various communities in Zambia. Without this exposure, they may find it challenging to relate civic education to the real-life experiences of their students.

Magasu (2020) established that reflective practice is essential in the teaching of Civic Education, just as it is an integral part of service learning. It enables students to critically analyze their experiences, draw connections between academic content and real-world applications, and promote personal growth. In the context of Civic education, reflection helps students comprehend how their academic knowledge applies to real-world situations, recognize the personal, social, and ethical implications of their actions, challenge their assumptions and biases, gain new perspectives on diversity and community issues, and identify areas for personal and professional growth. However, this component of service learning appears to be missing in the Civic Education teacher programs. The absence of reflective practices in Civic Education teacher programs impacts students' application of theory and practice. The lack of structured reflection within teacher programs diminishes the potential for teacher candidates to critically assess their role in promoting civic-mindedness and social responsibility in their students.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Advocating for the implementation of the service learning model in teacher training programs for Civic Education in Zambia is a significant move to better prepare future educators in promoting active citizenship and civic responsibility in their learners. By combining community service with academic learning and reflection, service learning closes the gap between theory and practice, enabling prospective teachers to actively engage with the communities they will be serving. This not only improves the effectiveness of civic education but also contributes to broader objectives such as social justice, democracy, and national development in Zambia.

4.1 Recommendations

The study recommends the following due to the importance of four elements of the service learning model in Civic Education Teacher Education.

- The study suggests that the Civic Education curriculum offered in colleges and universities in Zambia should be reviewed to include service learning in the teaching and learning methods, in accordance with the four components of service learning.
- Regular assessment of the effectiveness of teaching methods in Civic Education is necessary to ensure that students acquire the knowledge and skills required to participate in governance, advocate for social justice, and contribute to the development of their communities, as well as to encourage civic engagement and voluntary community involvement, which are fundamental principles of service learning.

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