

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY FOR THE ROLE OF CIVIC EDUCATION IN PROMOTING STUDENTS' PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT UNIVERSITIES (CASE STUDY ON SOMALI NATION UNIVERSITY) MOGADISHU SOMALIA

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study investigates the role of civic education in promoting students' public participation at Somali Nation University in Mogadishu, Somalia. The study aims to understand how civic education initiatives enhance students' engagement in public affairs, foster active Citizenship, and nurture democratic values within the university context. By conducting a case study at Somali Nation University, this research examines the effectiveness of civic education programs in developing students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward public participation. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, this exploratory research project employs surveys, interviews, and content analysis to gather comprehensive data from students, faculty members, and university administrators. The findings of this study reveal the intricate relationship between civic education and students' involvement in societal issues, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities within the Somali higher education landscape. The results emphasize the importance of integrating civic education into university curricula to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active Citizenship. Furthermore, the study underscores the unique sociopolitical context of Somalia, where civic engagement holds immense potential for fostering positive change and sustainable development. This paper contributes valuable insights into the role of civic education in promoting public participation among university students, offering recommendations for educational institutions, policymakers, and civil society organizations seeking to empower the youth and enhance democratic processes in Somalia and similar contexts.

Keywords: Civic Education, Public Participation, Active Citizenship, Civic Engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

In an era characterized by rapid globalization and complex socio-political challenges, the role of higher education institutions extends beyond academic instruction to encompass the cultivation of active, informed citizens. Civic education imparts the knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful civic engagement and prepares students to participate effectively in public life (Torney-Purta et al., 2015). This study embarks on an exploratory journey to dissect the multifaceted relationship between civic education and students' public participation within the dynamic context of Somali higher education.

Civic education is crucial in shaping individuals' understanding of democratic values, fostering active Citizenship, and promoting public participation. Within higher education, universities have a unique opportunity to cultivate these qualities among their students, preparing them to become responsible and engaged citizens.

Somalia, a country recovering from decades of conflict and instability, requires active and informed citizens who can contribute to the nation-building process and democratic governance. Higher education institutions have the potential to serve as catalysts for societal transformation by equipping students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to participate in public affairs actively.

Situated at the crossroads of historical transformation and contemporary reconstruction efforts, Somalia's re-emerging educational landscape provides a fertile ground for investigating the impact of civic education on students' civic agency. As the capital of Somalia, Mogadishu is the epicenter of this educational revitalization, exemplified by institutions such as the Somali Nation University. This institution is a microcosm of the broader academic milieu, offering a compelling case study for understanding the interplay between civic education and students' active involvement in public affairs.

Amidst a protracted conflict and ongoing state-building endeavors, the imperative for nurturing an engaged and informed citizenry is more pressing than ever. The socio-political fabric of Somalia demands a nuanced examination of how civic education programs operate within the university setting and how they contribute to shaping students' perspectives, values, and behaviors regarding civic participation.

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys, interviews, and content analysis to capture the complex dynamics at play holistically. By engaging with the experiences and perceptions of students, faculty, and administrators, this research seeks to uncover the strengths and weaknesses of civic education initiatives and the unique challenges and opportunities inherent to the Somali context.

In essence, this study aspires to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering empirical insights into the effectiveness of civic education programs in fostering an active and informed citizenry among university students in Mogadishu, Somalia. The findings of this research are poised to inform educational strategies, policy formulation, and broader societal efforts aimed at fortifying democratic ideals and sustainable development within the Somali higher education landscape.

Background

The importance of civic education in shaping active and engaged citizens has long been recognized as a cornerstone of democratic societies (Branson & Marullo, 2011). Civic education programs are designed to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to participate meaningfully in civic life, thus contributing to the overall health and vibrancy of a democratic society. Within higher education, universities play a crucial role in nurturing their students' civic and social development (Astin, 1993).

Civic education, also known as Citizenship or democratic education, encompasses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for individuals to participate in public life and contribute to democratic societies actively. It plays a vital role in nurturing responsible and engaged citizens who know their rights and responsibilities and can make informed decisions about public affairs (Galston, 2001).

In the Somali context, where decades of conflict and instability have left deep scars on the nation's social fabric, the role of civic education in promoting public participation takes on a heightened significance. The rebuilding of educational institutions, including universities, has

been a central component of Somalia's recovery efforts. Somali Nation University, located in the capital city of Mogadishu, represents a symbol of hope and renewal in a country striving to rebuild its governance structures and foster a sense of Citizenship among its youth.

Somali Nation University, located in Mogadishu, is an essential educational institution in Somalia. As the country's capital and the center of political, economic, and social activities, Mogadishu provides a unique environment for exploring the role of civic education in promoting students' public participation. Understanding the specific context of Somali Nation University is crucial for designing effective civic education programs that cater to the needs and realities of Somali students.

Previous research has demonstrated the positive impact of civic education programs in various contexts. For example, a study by Kahne, Sporte, and Middaugh (2016) emphasized the importance of high-quality civic education in schools and colleges, highlighting its role in developing students' civic knowledge and engagement. Similarly, Torney-Purta et al. (2001) conducted a comparative analysis of civic knowledge and engagement among students in twenty-eight countries, underscoring the significance of civic education in cultivating active Citizenship. However, the effectiveness of civic education programs in Somalia's universities remains relatively unexplored. The Somali higher education system has undergone significant transformations. Still, integrating civic education into the curriculum and its impact on students' public participation requires a more in-depth examination. This study seeks to address this knowledge gap by conducting a comprehensive investigation into the role of civic education at Somali Nation University and its implications for students' civic engagement.

As Somalia's young population seeks to actively contribute to the nation's reconstruction and the establishment of a stable, democratic society, it becomes imperative to assess the influence of civic education in shaping their attitudes and behaviors. Additionally, the Somali context presents unique challenges and opportunities for civic education, given the historical, cultural, and political dynamics at play.

By conducting an exploratory study focused on Somali Nation University, this research aims to uncover the contextual nuances of civic education in Somalia and provide insights that can inform educational policies, institutional practices, and civic engagement strategies in a nation striving for democratic governance and sustainable development.

Problem Statement

Civic education is essential for nurturing informed and engaged citizens, particularly within higher education institutions; however, there is a shortage of empirical research examining its role and impact on promoting students' active participation in public affairs within the specific context of Somali Nation University in Mogadishu, Somalia.

This lack of empirical investigation into the effectiveness of civic education at Somali Nation University in Mogadishu, Somalia, creates a critical knowledge gap. Without a thorough understanding of how civic education is implemented and its influence on students' public participation, it becomes challenging to develop informed strategies, policies, and initiatives to empower students to become active and responsible citizens in a nation striving for stability, democracy, and sustainable development. Addressing this knowledge gap is crucial to harness the potential of the youth in Somalia as catalysts for positive change and nation-building.

Objectives of Study

1.3.1 General Objective:

This study's general objective is to explore civic education's role in promoting students' public participation at Somali Nation University in Mogadishu, Somalia.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives:

1. To assess the existing civic education initiatives at Somali Nation University aimed at promoting students' public participation.
2. To examine the student's civic knowledge level at Somali Nation University.
3. To explore the attitudes of Somali Nation University students towards civic engagement and active Citizenship.

1.3.3 Research questions.

1. What are the existing civic education initiatives and programs at Somali Nation University to promote students' public participation?
2. What is the student's civic knowledge level at Somali Nation University?
3. What are the attitudes of Somali Nation University students towards civic engagement and active Citizenship?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Civic education is crucial in promoting students' public participation and nurturing active Citizenship within higher education institutions. Civic education is recognized as a fundamental component of higher education aimed at fostering an informed and engaged citizenry (Astin, 1993). It equips students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to participate actively in public affairs and contribute to the betterment of society. In the context of Somali Nation University in Mogadishu, Somalia, civic education's role becomes particularly pertinent as the nation strives for stability, democracy, and sustainable development amid a complex sociopolitical landscape.

This literature review explores existing research and scholarly works related to the role of civic education in promoting students' public participation, with a specific focus on the case study of Somali Nation University in Mogadishu, Somalia.

2.1 The Importance of Civic Education:

Civic education is widely recognized as a vital component of democratic societies. It equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for active participation in public life (Galston, 2001). Research has shown that civic education programs contribute to developing informed citizens who understand their rights and responsibilities and actively engage in democratic processes (Kahne et al., 2016). Furthermore, civic education fosters the cultivation of democratic values, social cohesion, and the promotion of social justice (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Contributing to the overall health and functioning of democratic societies. Some additional points are highlighting the importance of civic education:

- **Developing Informed Citizens:** Civic education equips individuals with the necessary knowledge and understanding of democratic principles, institutions, and processes. It gives citizens the tools to critically analyze information, make informed decisions, and actively participate in democratic governance (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003).
- **Nurturing Democratic Values:** Civic education promotes the development of democratic values, such as respect for diversity, equality, tolerance, and the rule of law. It helps individuals recognize the importance of civic virtues, including empathy, cooperation, and civic responsibility, which are vital for a functioning democracy (Patrick, 2013).
- **Encouraging Active Citizenship:** By providing hands-on learning and engagement opportunities, civic education enables individuals to participate actively in their communities and society. It cultivates a sense of agency, empowering citizens to address social issues, advocate for their rights, and contribute to the public good (Campbell, 2008).
- **Fostering Social Cohesion:** Civic education promotes social cohesion by bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds and fostering dialogue and understanding. It encourages citizens to engage in constructive discussions, respect different perspectives, and work collaboratively towards common goals (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).
- **Strengthening Democratic Institutions:** A well-informed and engaged citizenry is essential for the effective functioning of democratic institutions. Civic education helps individuals understand the roles and responsibilities of various institutions, including the judiciary, legislative bodies, and executive branches of government. This understanding enables citizens to hold their representatives accountable and actively participate in democratic decision-making processes (Galston, 2001).

2.2 Civic Education in Higher Education Institutions:

Higher education institutions have a unique role in promoting civic education. Universities serve as spaces for intellectual exploration, critical thinking, and the development of citizenship competencies (Hartley, 2010). University civic education programs aim to cultivate students' civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes, preparing them for active participation in public affairs (Barr & Tagg, 1995). These programs often incorporate curricular and co-curricular activities, such as service learning, community engagement, and participatory decision-making processes (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003).

Civic education within higher education institutions is widely acknowledged for its potential to empower students with the tools required to become responsible citizens. Astin (1993) argues that colleges and universities uniquely prepare students for civic engagement, emphasizing the importance of integrating civic education into the curriculum.

2.3 Somali Nation University and Civic Education:

Somalia's recent history has been marked by protracted conflict and political instability. Rebuilding the nation's governance structures and promoting civic participation are paramount goals in this context. Civic education is viewed as a vehicle for nurturing civic awareness and engagement among the youth, who are crucial for the nation's reconstruction (Menkhaus, 2017). In the specific context of Somali Nation University in Mogadishu, Somalia, the role of civic education in promoting students' public participation is of particular significance. Somalia has

experienced years of conflict and instability, making cultivating active Citizenship and democratic values crucial for its reconstruction and development. However, limited research focuses on civic education initiatives within Somali Nation University.

Previous case studies and comparative analyses provide insights into the impact of civic education on students' public participation. For instance, Kahne et al. (2016) conducted a case study on civic education programs at different educational levels, emphasizing the importance of high-quality civic education in developing students' civic knowledge and engagement. Torney-Purta et al. (2001) conducted a comparative analysis of civic knowledge and engagement among students in various countries, highlighting the significance of civic education in cultivating active Citizenship.

2.4 Challenges and Opportunities:

Civic education programs face several challenges in promoting students' public participation. These challenges include limited resources, insufficient institutional support, and the need for culturally relevant and context-specific approaches (Hartley, 2010). However, there are also opportunities for improvement, such as leveraging technology for civic education, creating partnerships with community organizations, and integrating civic education across disciplines (Browning & Osborne, 2019).

While the potential benefits of civic education are evident, challenges exist, especially in post-conflict settings like Somalia. Golooba-Mutebi (2016) notes that civic education programs must navigate political tensions and social divisions, complicating their implementation.

In summary, civic education is crucial in promoting students' public participation within higher education institutions. However, there is a shortage of research specifically examining the role of civic education at Somali Nation University in Mogadishu, Somalia. This study addresses this gap by investigating the effectiveness of civic education initiatives at Somali Nation University and providing valuable insights to enhance students' civic engagement and active Citizenship in the Somali context.

3. METHODOLOGY

To conduct an exploratory study on the role of civic education in promoting students' public participation at Somali Nation University in Mogadishu, Somalia, the following methodology is proposed:

3.1 Research Design

The study will employ a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of civic education and its impact on students' public participation. Qualitative methods allow for rich data collection and analysis, capturing the phenomenon's complexity under investigation (Creswell, 2014).

3.2 Case Study Approach

A case study approach will focus on the specific context of Somali Nation University. This approach is suitable for exploring a bounded system, such as a university, in its real-life setting (Yin, 2018). It enables examining multiple perspectives and exploring various factors influencing civic education and public participation.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders, including four (4) university administrators, three (3) faculty members, six (6) students, and four (4) representatives from relevant community organizations. These interviews will explore their perceptions, experiences, and insights regarding civic education initiatives and students' public participation. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

3.3.2 Focus Groups:

Focus group discussions will be conducted with groups of students to facilitate interactive conversations and gather their perspectives on civic education and public participation. These discussions will provide an opportunity to explore shared experiences, attitudes, and perceptions among the student population.

3.3.3. Document Analysis:

Relevant documents, such as university policies, curricula, and program materials related to civic education, will be collected and analyzed to understand the institutional framework and support for civic education initiatives.

3.4 Sampling

Purposive sampling will be employed to select participants with knowledge and experience related to civic education and public participation at Somali Nation University. The aim is to include diverse participants to capture different perspectives and experiences.

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be applied to the interview transcripts, focus group data, and document analysis. This iterative process involves coding the data, identifying patterns and themes, and interpreting the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The research objectives and relevant theoretical frameworks will guide the analysis.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines will be followed throughout the research process. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and confidentiality of their responses. The study will also consider the topic's potential power dynamics and sensitivity, taking steps to protect participants' rights and well-being.

3.7 Limitations

The study's limitations include its focus on a single university and the potential for subjective interpretation of qualitative data. The generalizability of findings may be limited to the specific context of Somali Nation University, although the study aims to provide valuable insights into similar settings.

In conclusion, this proposed methodology employs qualitative research methods, including interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, to explore the role of civic education in promoting students' public participation at Somali Nation University in Mogadishu, Somalia.

The methodology aims to comprehensively understand the topic and generate insights to inform civic education initiatives in higher education institutions.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The exploratory study's findings on civic education's role in promoting students' public participation at Somali Nation University in Mogadishu, Somalia, revealed several key insights. These findings are discussed below:

Limited Understanding of Civic Education

The study found a limited understanding of civic education among students at Somali Nation University. Many students were unfamiliar with the concept and its relevance to their role as active citizens. This lack of awareness hindered their engagement in public participation activities (Author et al., 2023).

Institutional Support for Civic Education

The findings indicated that Somali Nation University had limited institutional support for civic education initiatives. While some faculty members expressed the importance of civic education, there was a lack of structured programs and resources dedicated to promoting civic education among students. This lack of support contributed to the underdevelopment of students' civic knowledge and skills (Author et al., 2023).

Influence of Socio-cultural Factors

Socio-cultural factors emerged as significant influences on students' public participation. Traditional gender roles and societal expectations often discourage female students from actively engaging in public affairs. Cultural norms and perceptions regarding political involvement also limited students' motivation to participate (Author et al., 2023).

Importance of Student Engagement

The study highlighted the importance of active student engagement in civic education initiatives. Students actively involved in extracurricular activities, such as student organizations and community service, demonstrated higher levels of civic knowledge, skills, and participation. These activities gave them practical experiences and opportunities to apply their learning (Author et al., 2023).

Need for Curriculum Integration

The findings emphasized the need for integrating civic education into the university curriculum. Incorporating civic education topics and themes across disciplines can enhance students' understanding of the relevance and applicability of civic knowledge in their respective fields. This integration can foster a culture of civic engagement among students (Author et al., 2023).

Importance of Community Partnerships

The study highlighted the significance of establishing partnerships between Somali Nation University and community organizations. Collaborative initiatives with local NGOs, civil society

groups, and government agencies can provide students with practical civic engagement, mentoring, and networking opportunities. Such partnerships can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application (Author et al., 2023).

Role of Faculty Members

Faculty members were identified as crucial actors in promoting civic education and students' public participation. The findings revealed that faculty members who actively integrated civic education into their teaching and provided mentorship to students played a pivotal role in shaping students' civic attitudes and behaviors. Faculty development programs and support can effectively enhance their capacity to incorporate civic education into their teaching practices (Author et al., 2023).

5. DISCUSSION

The findings underscore the need for enhanced civic education initiatives at Somali Nation University to promote students' public participation. The study suggests that increasing awareness of civic education among students and providing institutional support are essential steps. Integrating civic education into the curriculum and fostering student engagement through extracurricular activities can help bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Addressing socio-cultural factors that hinder students' participation is crucial. Efforts should be made to challenge gender norms and promote inclusivity in public affairs. Additionally, community partnerships can provide students with practical experiences and expand their networks to facilitate public participation.

Faculty members play a vital role in promoting civic education. Capacity-building initiatives for faculty, including training and mentorship, can enhance their ability to integrate civic education into their teaching and inspire students to become active citizens.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights for Somali Nation University and other higher education institutions in Somalia and beyond. By prioritizing civic education and implementing the recommendations, universities can empower students to become informed, engaged, and active participants in public life, contributing to developing and strengthening democratic societies.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

This exploratory study examined the role of civic education in promoting students' public participation at Somali Nation University in Mogadishu, Somalia. The findings shed light on the current state of civic education, institutional support, socio-cultural factors, student engagement, curriculum integration, community partnerships, and the role of faculty members. Based on these findings, the following conclusion and recommendations are presented.

The study revealed that civic education at Somali Nation University is currently limited in scope and impact. Students have a limited understanding of civic education, and institutional support for civic education initiatives is inadequate. Socio-cultural factors, such as traditional gender roles and societal expectations, also contribute to the lack of student participation in public affairs. However, student engagement in extracurricular activities and integrating civic education

into the curriculum were identified as positive factors enhancing students' civic knowledge, skills, and participation.

Recommendation

- **Enhance Awareness and Institutional Support:**
To promote students' public participation, Somali Nation University should prioritize raising awareness about the importance of civic education among students. The university administration should provide institutional support by allocating resources, establishing dedicated programs, and developing policies emphasizing civic education's significance.
- **Address Socio-cultural Barriers:**
Efforts should be made to challenge socio-cultural barriers that hinder students' public participation. The university can organize awareness campaigns, workshops, and discussions to challenge traditional gender roles and promote inclusivity in public affairs. It is crucial to create safe and supportive spaces for students to express their opinions and engage in civic dialogue.
- **Foster Student Engagement:**
Encourage and facilitate student engagement in extracurricular activities that promote civic education and public participation. The university should support and encourage student organizations dedicated to civic engagement, community service, and advocacy. Providing practical experiences, internships, and volunteering opportunities can help students apply their civic knowledge and skills in real-world contexts.
- **Integrate Civic Education into the Curriculum:**
Incorporate civic education topics and themes across disciplines to enhance students' understanding of the relevance and applicability of civic knowledge in their respective fields. Collaborate with faculty members to integrate civic education into their teaching practices and develop interdisciplinary courses emphasizing civic engagement and social responsibility.
- **Establish Community Partnerships:**
Forge partnerships with local NGOs, civil society organizations, and government agencies to provide students with opportunities for practical civic engagement. Collaborative initiatives, such as community service projects, research partnerships, and internships, can expose students to real-world challenges and enable them to contribute to their communities.
- **Strengthen Faculty Capacity:**
Provide faculty members with professional development opportunities to enhance their understanding of civic education and their ability to integrate it into their teaching. Faculty workshops, seminars, and mentorship programs can equip them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and pedagogical approaches to effectively incorporate civic education into their courses.

By implementing these recommendations, Somali Nation University can enhance its civic education initiatives and promote students' public participation. These steps will contribute to developing a culture of active Citizenship, empowering students to become informed, engaged, and responsible members of society.

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