



Experiencing and Learning in the Community: A Qualitative Study of the "1.5km Experiential Learning Circle" in Hong Kong

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Abstract

This study explores how the "1.5km Experiential Learning Circle" (ELC) in Hong Kong enhances student engagement and fosters stronger connections with the local community. The ELC encourages students to actively learn by experiencing real-world locations within a 1.5km radius of their schools, including nearby businesses, cultural landmarks, historical sites, government premises, and natural sites. Teachers support this process by identifying local issues and leveraging community resources to enhance learning, including encouraging students to address social challenges and collaborate with external organizations to assist those in need. Through interviews and observations with students, teachers, and community members, this qualitative research investigates how the ELC enhances students' learning performance, motivation, and attitudes while fostering social responsibility and community engagement. Teachers observed that students became more eager to apply classroom knowledge to real-life contexts through activities like analyzing local businesses, engaging with elders, and solving community issues. Students noted these experiences deepened their understanding, boosted motivation, and enhanced critical thinking. This study highlights the potential of the ELC as a model for experiential learning in urban communities, offering valuable insights for educators looking to create more practical and community-centered learning experiences.

Keywords: service learning, experiential learning, community-based learning

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Traditional teaching methods, centered on rote memorization and examination preparation, are often seen as the foundation of academic achievement. However, these methods have been criticized for their inability to cultivate critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, which are indispensable in today's fast-changing world (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Misrahayu et al., 2024). By focusing primarily on knowledge transfer, traditional classrooms often suppress

creativity, overlook students' untapped potential, and fail to connect learning to real-world situations, limiting opportunities for deeper engagement and skill development (Hu, 2024). While effective for short-term knowledge retention, these approaches fall short in preparing students to adapt to the demands of the 21st century (Pawlak & Moustafa, 2023).

To address the limitations of traditional education, integrating experiential and community-based learning provides a compelling solution. Traditional classrooms, often focused on standardized testing and theoretical knowledge, overlook the importance of applying learning in real-world contexts, suppressing creativity and limiting students' holistic development. Experiential learning, a learner-centered approach where students actively engage in scenarios and reflect on direct experiences to enhance knowledge and skills (Yao, 2023), bridges this gap by transforming students into active stakeholders in their learning. By engaging with the community, students connect academic content to practical situations, fostering essential skills like confidence, critical thinking, and collaboration (Crawford, 2001; Bouillion & Gomez, 2001). The 1.5km Experiential Learning Circle (ELC) expands on these concepts, offering a structured framework that leverages community resources within a 1.5km radius of schools. Through curriculum design, interdisciplinary collaboration, and partnerships with local businesses and organizations, the ELC transforms education into a dynamic blend of community service and academic exploration, inviting community members and organizations to learn alongside students (Lau, 2024b). This approach exposes students to diverse perspectives, enables them to solve real-world problems, and equips them with practical knowledge and adaptability for the challenges of the modern world.

The framework integrates contextual learning, community perspectives, and the transfer of experience to knowledge, creating a holistic approach to education. At CCC Tam Lee Lai Fun Memorial Secondary School, the ELC incorporates real-world contexts within a 1.5km radius, engaging students in activities such as air quality monitoring, river water analysis, and community-based problem-solving. These activities link theoretical concepts with observable phenomena in the environment, exemplified by air pollution monitoring on the Tuen Mun Expressway, which bridges science and geography with practical environmental concerns. From a community perspective, the school acts as a connector, fostering collaboration with local businesses, non-government organizations, and government premises to address societal issues. This approach allows students to view the community as both a learning resource and a focus for improving societal well-being, as seen in humanities projects tackling issues like urban planning and market structure analysis. Furthermore, the framework emphasizes the transfer of experience to knowledge by promoting reflective practices, enabling students to transform hands-on experiences into critical academic insights. For instance, economics case studies on local businesses blend theoretical concepts with real-world applications, demonstrating the interdisciplinary collaboration central to the ELC.

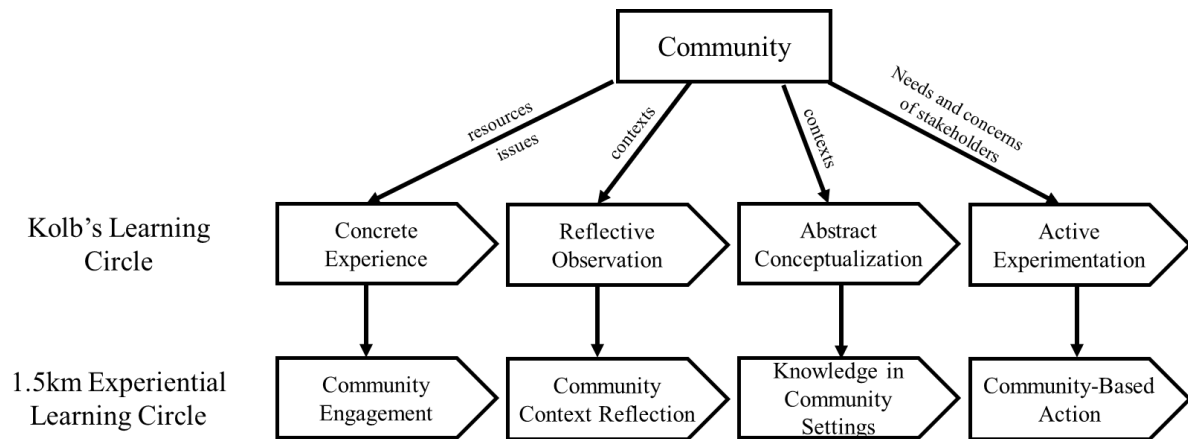


Figure 1. Adaptation of Kolb's Learning Cycle in the 1.5km Experiential Learning Circle

Source: Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

The ELC, as shown in Figure 1, enhances Kolb's Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984) by embedding community-focused elements into each stage. Concrete Experience is redefined as Community Engagement, where learners actively engage with the community, utilizing its resources and issues as learning topics while addressing challenges to foster emotional connections and relevance. Reflective Observation becomes Community Context Reflection, promoting critical analysis of experiences within the community's social, cultural, and environmental contexts. Abstract Conceptualization evolves into Knowledge in Community Settings, integrating reflections with theoretical frameworks to contextualize academic learning through the community lens. Finally, Active Experimentation transforms into Community-Based Action, where learners develop and implement solutions that meet the needs and concerns of stakeholders, reinforcing learning through meaningful engagement. This evolution transforms Kolb's cycle into a socially impactful framework that cultivates critical thinking, empathy, and civic responsibility. Furthermore, the cycle is dynamic and iterative; Community-Based Action often leads to new Concrete Experiences through ongoing engagement, thereby allowing the cycle to recycle itself. This continuous loop enables learners to build upon prior experiences, deepening their understanding and sustaining long-term community impact.

This study aims to explore the impact of the ELC on students' learning motivation and attitudes, learning performance, and community engagement in Hong Kong schools. By examining how this innovative educational framework influences students' enthusiasm for learning, interpersonal development, and sense of social responsibility, the research seeks to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how experiential learning activities enhance personal growth. It also evaluates the broader implications of the ELC in fostering collaborative educational practices and promoting holistic student development within the local context.

1.2. Problem Statement

In the context of Hong Kong's education system, the needs of students are increasingly shaped by their immediate surroundings and familiar environments. Administrators must develop effective management skills to assess school performance and allocate resources while addressing the diverse needs of students and stakeholders. Traditional educational assessments largely focus on academic outcomes, overlooking the broader social impacts of schools within their communities. This research, centered on the "1.5km Experiential Learning Circle," aims to address this gap by exploring how integrating experiential learning activities can enhance

students' academic performance and social responsibility. By examining the interplay between educational and community factors, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating the effectiveness of community-engaged learning in fostering both cognitive and social development.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to reshape the evaluation of educational practices in Hong Kong by emphasizing the social and academic impacts of the ELC. The findings will inform educators and policymakers about the importance of integrating experiential learning into curricula, highlighting its role in enhancing student engagement and fostering community engagement.

The study provides valuable insights into how the ELC serves as a model for effective pedagogical practice. By demonstrating the integration of educational objectives with community engagement, the research offers practical examples that other institutions can adopt to strengthen connections between students and their local environments.

Furthermore, the findings contribute to policy discussions regarding the support and evaluation of educational initiatives in Hong Kong. By emphasizing the broader societal contributions of the ELC, this research encourages policymakers to develop targeted initiatives that recognize and reward innovative pedagogical approaches. This may involve revising assessment frameworks to incorporate indicators that reflect the social and experiential dimensions of learning.

Through detailed qualitative insights, the study reveals both successes and challenges experienced with the ELC model. These insights will guide other educators in balancing educational goals with community contexts, ultimately creating a more significant long-term impact on student learning and community development.

In conclusion, this research advocates for a reevaluation of assessment methods in education, proposing a framework that encompasses both educational and social impact dimensions. By doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of the role of experiential learning in fostering holistic student development and informs potential policy reforms aimed at enhancing educational practices in Hong Kong.

1.4. Research Questions

1. How does the ELC influence students' learning performance?
2. In what ways does the ELC impact students' learning motivation and attitude?
3. How does the ELC foster students' sense of social responsibility and community engagement?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design and Participants

This study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the impact of the ELC on students' learning motivation, attitudes, and **community engagement**. The participants included five secondary school teachers and 30 students from Secondary Three and Secondary Five levels in Hong Kong. These participants were selected based on their involvement in ELC activities and their availability for interviews. As noted by Patton (2002), effective qualitative interviewing can be enhanced through thoughtful and focused questions, allowing for deeper insights into participants' experiences.

Prior to the study, the participants were contacted through the school administration, ensuring that all individuals voluntarily agreed to participate. The decision to include both Secondary Three and Secondary Five students allowed for a comparative analysis of perspectives across different academic levels. Teachers were included to provide insights into the pedagogical approaches and observations of student behaviors during ELC activities. All participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in accordance with ethical research standards.

Observations and learning documents, such as students' worksheets and activity records, were collected to triangulate data and gain a comprehensive understanding of the learning processes and outcomes associated with the ELC. These materials were selected for their value in providing evidence of students' engagement with the activities and the integration of theoretical concepts into practical applications. By observing students' behavior and interactions during activities, the researcher could directly witness how students applied learned concepts in real-world contexts, thus providing insights into their learning experiences. Similarly, documents like worksheets and activity records allowed researchers to analyze how students reflected on and processed these experiences, offering concrete evidence of their learning outcomes. Chatman (1992) further elaborated on ethnography as a method that allows researchers to gain an insider's view through observation and participation in social settings, revealing reality as lived by members of those settings. Merriam (1988) also emphasized that documents of all types can help researchers uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem. These combined sources of data provided a holistic view of the students' learning, reinforcing the reliability and depth of the findings.

2.2. Population and Sampling

Data collection was carried out using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Open-ended questions in the semi-structured interview protocol elicited detailed responses about participants' ELC experiences.

The interviews focused on four thematic blocks: students' learning motivation and attitudes toward the ELC, the development of social skills through ELC activities, challenges faced during the implementation of ELC initiatives, and suggestions for improving the integration of ELC into the curriculum.

In addition to interviews, observations of ELC activities were conducted to capture the interactions between students, teachers, and community members. Researchers documented key moments that highlighted students' engagement and collaboration. Learning documents, including worksheets, reflective journals, and project reports, were analyzed to assess the transfer of knowledge and practical skills acquired through ELC activities. Audio recordings of interviews and observations were made with prior consent from participants to ensure accurate data collection.

2.3. Data Processing and Analysis

The data collection process involved three main stages: interviews, observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with teachers and in small groups with students. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure an accurate representation of participants' responses. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time without consequence (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Second, researcher observed selected ELC activities to gather real-time data on student interactions and engagement. These observations were documented in field notes, focusing on the behavioral and social dynamics during the activities.

Third, learning documents were collected from students at the end of each ELC activity. These documents were reviewed to identify patterns in student learning and the application of concepts covered during the activities. A coding matrix was developed to organize and categorize the data from interviews, observations, and documents. The coding process was validated through expert triangulation, ensuring the reliability of the findings.

Finally, data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, supported by the AQUAD qualitative analysis software. Emerging codes were grouped into categories that aligned with the research objectives, and the frequency of each code was calculated to quantify the qualitative data. Participants were anonymized using alphanumeric codes (e.g., T1 for teachers, S1 for students) to protect their identities and maintain ethical standards.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Research Question 1

The integration of experiential learning activities within the 1.5km Experiential Learning Circle has provided students with unique opportunities to connect academic knowledge with real-life applications. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of subjects, enhances engagement, and cultivates critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Both students and teachers highlighted the transformative impact of these activities on learning performance.

A Secondary Five student (S1) described how applying economic knowledge to real-life situations increased their interest in learning:

By applying the knowledge of economics to real-life situations, I can better understand my surroundings, integrate what I learn into daily life, and increase my interest in learning.

Another Secondary Five student (S2) reflected on how experiential learning deepened their grasp of economic concepts:

Through the learning activities, I recognized how economic concepts impact the community and the market, deepening my understanding of economics.

Hands-on activities also cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as shared by a Secondary Three student (S3):

These practices allowed me to master economic concepts more deeply and cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Teachers highlighted the role of external collaborations in enriching both teaching and learning experiences. A teacher (T1) noted:

External organizations often provide valuable expertise. They are pressure groups with long-term experience in specific topics. When collaborating with the school, these experts lead activities and share insights. Teachers, especially new ones, benefit from these partnerships as they gain experience in outdoor and experiential learning. Working together on these activities contributes to teaching growth.

The community-based nature of the activities strengthens students' engagement and outcome quality. Another teacher (T2) shared:

If we conducted these activities solely within Chinese language or Humanities classes, students might not feel as connected to the community. Activities like the 'Food Guide in Hung Kiu,' conducted with elders, train students to understand the community deeply. They explore neighborhoods, conduct interviews, and document findings. This

engagement results in higher-quality outcomes than traditional classroom activities. Students invest more effort and thought into planning and execution, moving beyond a prescribed framework.

Teachers emphasized the value of integrating local contexts into teaching materials and activities. A teacher (T3) observed:

The homework assignments are designed with local contexts, enabling students to answer questions within their experiences. Their responses reflect the observations and interactions they had during visits to the elderly, making their learning more relevant and impactful.

Another teacher (T4) highlighted the use of community components in learning activities to engage students:

We have a reading class where students watch videos about social issues with thoughtfully designed questions tailored to the local context. We also invite the elderly to join the class, watch the videos together, and discuss the issues with the students. This collaboration fosters engagement and meaningful interaction.

The ELC enhances student engagement and performance by connecting classroom concepts to real-world applications. Activities like monitoring air pollution or analyzing local businesses make learning tangible and relevant, increasing student interest and comprehension. Immersive interactions within the community foster active participation and a deeper connection to their environment, further motivating students. This framework promotes critical thinking and problem-solving as students transform hands-on experiences into structured knowledge. While this approach effectively boosts engagement and performance, balancing experiential learning with traditional methods can ensure academic rigor while maintaining its transformative impact.

3.2. Research Question 2

Understanding how the ELC impacts students' learning motivation and attitudes is vital in assessing its effectiveness as an educational framework. This research explores how engaging, hands-on learning activities offered by the ELC reshape students' perspectives on education. By incorporating community-based and intergenerational learning experiences, the ELC provides opportunities for students to connect academic concepts with real-life contexts. This section delves into students' and teachers' reflections, highlighting how these activities enhance motivation, deepen engagement, and foster a positive attitude toward learning while addressing potential challenges in balancing experiential learning with traditional exam preparation.

Community learning activities are engaging alternatives to traditional study methods for some students. A Secondary Five student (S4) shared:

I think community learning activities suit me because I would fall asleep while reading textbooks.

Intergenerational interaction in community learning activities enhances motivation and creates engaging class dynamics. A Secondary Three student (S5) expressed her support:

The involvement of elderly individuals in class is beneficial. My motivation for learning in class would be greater; for example, we might ask them questions or hope to get some answers or have discussions with them. It could increase my motivation for learning and give me more confidence in learning. I usually find classes a bit boring, but with the elderly present, there's more interaction and it feels more interesting.

Hands-on experiences make abstract academic concepts more relatable and engaging for students. A student (S6) reflected:

Hung Kiu's air pollution, to enhance our interest in studying economics. These experiences showed us how economics is deeply rooted in life, yet we never had the opportunity to personally experience it. Even the richest text cannot compare to hands-on learning. I hope this issue can be improved.

Community-based learning fosters deeper understanding and lasting engagement compared to traditional lectures. A teacher (T2) observed:

My students explore and research community issues on their own. It is not like the usual classroom lectures, which may be one-way interaction. These types of (community) activities often combine not only knowledge but also practical learning activities, taking them out of the classroom to understand community issues. Actually, their response was very good. They could understand more about their own community, and their memories are deeper, and their involvement.

The presence of elders in class encourages student enthusiasm and active participation. A teacher (T3) noted:

When elders participate in classroom activities with students, students' enthusiasm and initiative are usually stronger compared to regular classes because they might actively seek to understand why the elders are involved and what difference it makes. Also, there might be a higher level of engagement in the classroom discussions.

While experiential learning is engaging and beneficial for unfamiliar topics, some students prioritize traditional methods for exam preparation. A Secondary Five student (S7) discussed the benefits and challenges:

Finding information during investigations can be challenging, but it's helpful for unfamiliar topics. Hands-on experiential activities are interesting, though I think practicing DSE(Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination) past papers is better for exam preparation.

Some students are primarily motivated by the goal of excelling in exams, which shapes their approach to learning. A Secondary Five student (S8) explained:

I think practicing past papers is essential for achieving good grades. Although experiential activities are fun and insightful, they might not directly prepare us for exams. Similarly, another student reflected: The time spent on hands-on activities could be used for revision, which is more aligned with my academic goals.

The ELC significantly enhances students' learning motivation and attitudes by fostering meaningful, hands-on learning experiences. From a contextual learning perspective, activities rooted in real-life scenarios provide students with authentic learning opportunities that make academic concepts more relevant and engaging. This relevance sparks curiosity and encourages active participation, leading to a more positive attitude toward learning. From a community perspective, the inclusion of intergenerational interactions brings diversity and dynamism into the classroom, creating a more interactive and stimulating learning environment that motivates students to engage more deeply. Furthermore, the transfer of experience to knowledge through experiential activities helps students internalize what they learn, building confidence and a lasting enthusiasm for education. These positive impacts highlight the ELC's ability to reshape learning attitudes, even as students navigate the balance between experiential methods and traditional exam preparation. However, while experiential learning is impactful, some students remain driven by examination goals, emphasizing the importance of traditional study methods.

For these students, practicing past papers and focusing on exam preparation remains central to their motivation and academic priorities. The critical challenge is that needs to balance innovative experiential learning approaches with conventional methods to ensure all students' needs and goals are met.

3.3. Research Question 3

The 1.5km Experiential Learning Circle provides students with unique opportunities to explore and connect with their surrounding community, fostering a deeper sense of social responsibility and engagement. By integrating real-world experiences into their learning, students gain insights into issues they may otherwise overlook and develop a stronger connection to their environment.

A student (S9) reflected on how the activities helped them uncover local issues:

I learned things I usually wouldn't know about Hung Kiu, such as the issues at Hung Kiu Bus Stop.

Experiential learning also allows students to develop emotional connections to their community, enhancing their understanding and empathy. A Secondary Five student (S10) emphasized its importance:

Reading in books will not give you much feeling, but after experiencing it yourself, you will have more emotions, experiences, so you will have more resonance.

The program's design encourages active interaction with community members, enriching students' experiences and promoting engagement. A Secondary Three student (S11), expressed her enthusiasm:

I hope there could be more of these activities, so we can reach out to more people in the community, whom we can't meet at other schools.

Teachers (T2) also recognize the program's role in deepening students' community understanding. One teacher reflected on the impact of activities such as the "Food guide in Hung Kiu":

Different activities expose them to the community, like 'Food guide in Hung Kiu.' Students mentioned that their usual visits to restaurants in Hung Kiu were only for eating and did not involve interacting with the owner or understanding the story behind the operation. But through these activities, they get to explore and ask questions actively. They truly get to know the community, rather than just being transient visitors or customers.

Moreover, the program instills a sense of responsibility and encourages students to consider how they can contribute to their community. A teacher (T1) highlighted the transformative impact of these activities:

If there is no teaching or practical learning related to community issues, they might not really pay attention to their own community. That is, their understanding of the community deepens, and it may further lead to their caring for the community. It's obvious that with these types of activities, their depth of learning, emotional changes, or their interactions with community members bring about changes in their values. They will perhaps think about problems from a different perspective, care about the community, or even actively contribute.

The ELC fosters students' sense of social responsibility and community engagement by immersing them in meaningful, real-life activities that encourage active interaction with their

surroundings. Through contextual learning, students are no longer confined to abstract concepts in classrooms but instead connect theories to practical, community-based scenarios. For instance, activities encourage students to actively explore their neighborhood, transforming ordinary places into rich sources of learning. From the community perspective, the program bridges the gap between students and their environment, promoting a deeper understanding of local issues and enabling students to develop empathy through direct engagement with community members. Additionally, the program emphasizes the transfer of experience to knowledge, as students convert their observations and interactions into insights that resonate emotionally and cognitively. This experiential process instills lasting lessons that reading alone cannot achieve. Teachers observe profound changes in students' values and attitudes as they transition from passive participants to active contributors who are equipped to think critically about their community and consider ways to make a positive impact.

4. Discussion of Results

4.1. Key Findings

This experiential learning model integrates community-focused elements into Kolb's Learning Cycle and encourages students to think from the viewpoint of community members. Homeworks are designed to help students tackle local issues—like planning a green space or improving community welfare—by stepping into the role of local residents, civic leaders, or environmental advocates. The ELC framework significantly influences students' learning performance, motivation, attitudes, and their sense of social responsibility and community engagement. Below are detailed responses to the three research questions based on the framework's implementation and outcomes.

The ELC significantly enhances students' learning performance by bridging theoretical concepts with practical applications. This holistic framework integrates contextual learning, community perspectives, and the transfer of experience to knowledge. By engaging with real-life community issues, students find their studies more relevant, which increases their interest, comprehension, and ability to master content. Qualitative interviews reveal that applying economic concepts to real-world situations improves students' understanding of community dynamics and fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Teachers also highlighted that external collaborations and community-based activities enrich learning experiences, helping students form deeper connections with their surroundings and elevating the overall quality of their academic outcomes.

The integration of local contexts into teaching materials and projects, such as neighborhood explorations and interactions with elders, has been instrumental in improving student performance. This approach aligns with research by Maftuh (2023), who emphasized that situating knowledge within familiar contexts enhances understanding, and Oliva (2004), who stressed the importance of effective learning strategies to engage students. As Montrose (2008) noted, experiential learning enables students to transcend the memory of a situation by analyzing, theorizing, and applying their experiences, ultimately leading to better understanding and improved academic results. By transforming practical experiences, especially those rooted in their own communities, into structured intellectual understanding, the ELC fosters a deeper mastery of subject matter while enhancing critical thinking, active learning, and problem-solving capabilities.

The ELC positively impacts students' motivation and attitudes by fostering a dynamic and engaging learning environment. By integrating community perspectives and collaborating with local organizations, the ELC enhances students' interest in their studies. Interactions with

community members, particularly elders, make the learning experience more relatable and boost motivation. Students reported that community-based and intergenerational activities provided real-world connections to academic concepts, sparking curiosity and encouraging active participation. Hands-on experiences, such as engaging with local issues and interacting with elders, made learning more engaging and relevant, helping students feel more confident and develop a deeper connection to their community. Learning within the local context, where students relate knowledge to their own experiences, increases motivation and demonstrates the relevance of knowledge in everyday life (Maftuh, 2023). The Expectancy Theory explains how a student's anticipation of positive outcomes influences their motivation and performance, as they expect that involvement in learning activities will improve their quality of learning (Che, Vajjhala & Strang, 2021). This correlation between student involvement and desired outcomes reflects a student's motivation and attitude. Motivation, as an essential component of success and wellbeing, drives self-awareness and goal-oriented behavior, influencing both learning and educational achievement (Gelona, 2011; Kosgeroglu et al., 2009; Kong, 2021). Motivation in the classroom is influenced by factors such as the learner, educator, course content, teaching method, and learning environment (D'Souza & Maheshwari, 2010). Addressing key student needs is vital for building motivation. Content that fosters connection through cooperative activities and community engagement helps shape students' needs, perceptions of their classes, and boosts their motivation to learn (Williams & Williams, 2011). The ELC enhances motivation by aligning with these principles, offering real-world, hands-on experiences that increase students' anticipation of positive outcomes. By engaging students in community-based learning activities, the ELC fosters active participation, helping students internalize knowledge and see the impact of their learning on real-world challenges. Despite this, the overall impact of the ELC on students' attitudes toward learning was positive, suggesting that experiential learning provides a valuable complement to traditional methods. The challenge remains to balance these innovative learning approaches with the need for exam preparation to meet the diverse academic goals of all students.

The ELC positions the school as a bridge between students and their local environment, fostering a sense of social responsibility and community engagement. By participating in experiential learning activities, students gain direct exposure to real-world challenges, enhancing their understanding and engagement. Through concrete experiences rooted in the community, reflective analysis of contextual factors, and active solutions to real-world problems, the ELC empowers students to connect academic learning with meaningful societal contributions (Kolb, 1984; Lau, 2024b). These projects, which address societal issues, help students recognize their community as both a valuable learning resource and a focus for meaningful improvement. This engagement cultivates empathy and a desire to contribute positively to societal well-being. The findings from the ELC reveal significant impacts on students, including enhanced understanding of local issues, emotional resonance, development of social responsibility, skill acquisition, and a shift from passive learners to active citizens. Students reported gaining deeper insights into community challenges and discovering unknown local stories through activities, which fostered stronger emotional connections compared to textbook-based learning. Teachers observed that these activities instilled a sense of responsibility, encouraging students to think critically about their roles in societal improvement while developing essential life skills such as empathy, problem-solving, and logical reasoning. These findings align with Guo et al. (2016), who emphasize that experiential learning bridges classroom knowledge with real-world applications, empowering students to address societal needs and actively engage in their communities. Kong (2021) further supports this by highlighting how experiential learning fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and meaningful engagement with learning contexts. By redefining Kolb's Learning Cycle stages,

the ELC transforms experiential learning into a socially impactful framework, fostering empathy, civic engagement, and a deeper sense of purpose.

5. Conclusion

This paper examines the potential to transform education by bridging theoretical knowledge with real-world applications. This research highlights the ELC's ability to enhance students' learning performance, motivation, and attitudes while fostering social responsibility and community engagement. By situating education within local contexts, the ELC creates meaningful and engaging experiences that empower students to apply classroom knowledge to practical scenarios, develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and form emotional connections to their communities. These activities not only improve academic outcomes but they also promote empathy, civic engagement, and a deeper understanding of societal challenges. However, the findings underscore the need to balance experiential learning with traditional methods to meet diverse academic goals, particularly for students focused on examination preparation. Integrating these approaches can maximize the benefits of the ELC while maintaining academic rigor.

The implications of the ELC extend to curriculum design, policy, and pedagogy. As a model for integrating experiential, community-based learning into curricula, the ELC allows students to connect academic content with their immediate surroundings and societal issues, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and the use of local resources to enrich learning experiences. Policymakers are encouraged to revise assessment frameworks to include indicators that reflect experiential, social, and emotional learning outcomes, supporting and incentivizing innovative educational approaches. For educators, the ELC underscores the importance of teacher training programs that focus on community-based and experiential strategies, equipping them to facilitate such activities effectively. By fostering motivation, engagement, and a sense of responsibility, the ELC prepares students for active citizenship, equipping them with the skills and values needed to address real-world challenges with confidence and creativity. Additionally, the ELC offers a scalable framework for schools, adaptable to different cultural and educational contexts, making it a valuable model for reimagining education to be more inclusive, relevant, and impactful for students and their communities.

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