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<p>Emilya Rafiq Huseynova</p>	<p>RESEARCH ARTICLE </p> <p>The Formation of Active Citizenship Among High School Students: A Theoretical, Pedagogical, and Empirical Analysis within the Context of Moral Education and Social Development</p> <p>PhD in Pedagogy, Associate Professor Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University Azerbaijan E-mail: emilya.huseynova95@gmail.com</p>	
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This study explores the theoretical foundations, pedagogical mechanisms, and empirical outcomes associated with the formation of active citizenship among high school students within the context of contemporary education systems. The research emphasizes the role of moral education, socialization processes, and institutional structures in shaping students' civic identity, legal awareness, and value orientation. The concept of active citizenship is examined as a multidimensional construct encompassing moral consciousness, social responsibility, legal literacy, and behavioral engagement. Particular attention is given to the role of student collectives, educational environments, and teacher influence in fostering ethical values and civic participation. The study adopts a mixed methodological approach, combining theoretical analysis with empirical investigation conducted in secondary schools in Azerbaijan. The empirical component is based on a comparative analysis of experimental and control groups involving 225 students. Data were collected through structured questionnaires designed to assess students' knowledge of citizenship concepts, constitutional principles, and civic responsibilities. The findings reveal that students exposed to systematic, purpose-driven pedagogical interventions demonstrate significantly higher levels of civic awareness, moral reasoning, and legal understanding compared to those in traditional instructional settings. The results confirm that the formation of active citizenship is not merely a cognitive process but a complex socio-pedagogical phenomenon requiring continuous, structured, and value-oriented educational efforts. The study concludes that effective civic education must integrate theoretical knowledge, practical engagement, and moral development in order to cultivate socially responsible, ethically grounded, and actively engaged citizens.</p>		
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Introduction

The formation of an active civic position represents a complex and multidimensional process that involves not only the intellectual development of individuals but also the enrichment of their moral, social, and cultural consciousness. In the context of modern education, particularly at the level of high school students, this process is closely associated with the cultivation of ethical values, social responsibility, and active participation in civic life. Active citizenship is increasingly recognized as a core outcome of education systems worldwide, reflecting the need to prepare individuals who are capable of contributing meaningfully to democratic societies (Banks, 2008; Biesta, 2011; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

From a pedagogical perspective, the development of active citizenship requires purposeful, systematic, and continuous educational efforts aimed at enhancing students' awareness, critical thinking, and moral reasoning. It involves fostering a high level of social consciousness, strengthening political and moral culture, and encouraging students to internalize values that guide responsible behavior within society (Dewey, 1916; Kohlberg, 1984). In this regard, education serves not only as a mechanism for knowledge transmission but also as a transformative process shaping the identity and worldview of future citizens.

The concept of citizenship itself is deeply rooted in historical, legal, and philosophical traditions. It is closely linked to the notions of "citizen" and "citizenship rights," which define the relationship between the individual and the state. As noted in the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Azerbaijani Language*, a citizen is understood as a member of a state who fulfills obligations defined by law, while citizenship represents the legal and social status associated with belonging to a political community (Orucov et al., 2006a, 2006b). This definition aligns with broader international interpretations, which conceptualize citizenship as a permanent political and legal bond characterized by mutual rights and responsibilities between individuals and the state (Abdullayev, n.d.; Marshall, 1950).

In the context of the Republic of Azerbaijan, citizenship holds particular historical and socio-political significance. The modern Azerbaijani citizen is the result of a complex process shaped by struggles for independence, state-building efforts, and the preservation of national identity. This historical experience has contributed to the development of a civic consciousness grounded in patriotism, resilience, and a strong sense of responsibility toward society and the state. Such characteristics are essential for fostering a stable and cohesive civic identity in a rapidly changing global environment (Putnam, 2000; Schulz et al., 2016).

Theoretical approaches to civic identity formation emphasize its developmental nature. Knyazev (2009) identifies three key stages in this process: the cognitive stage (acquisition of knowledge about society and the state), the relational stage (development of attitudes toward oneself and society), and the behavioral stage (manifestation of civic qualities in practice). These stages reflect the gradual transformation of external knowledge into internalized values and behaviors, highlighting the importance of both cognitive and affective dimensions in civic education.

Furthermore, the concept of "position" or "stance" plays a central role in understanding active citizenship. A civic position refers not only to an individual's status within society but also to their attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral orientations toward social and political processes. It encompasses a system of values and motivations that guide individuals' actions and determine their level of engagement in civic life (Biesta, 2011; Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009).

An illustrative example of civic awareness can be observed in everyday situations, such as the case described by a student in a public setting, where an individual challenged inappropriate behavior (smoking in a prohibited area). This example highlights the practical manifestation of civic responsibility, demonstrating how individuals can actively contribute to maintaining social norms and protecting public well-being. Such actions reflect the internalization of civic values and the ability to translate them into real-life behavior (Bandura, 2001).

A critical factor in the formation of active citizenship is the role of student collectives. Social interaction within peer groups provides a unique environment for the development of interpersonal relationships, moral values, and social competencies. According to socio-cultural theories of development, learning and identity formation occur through interaction within social contexts, making student collectives an essential component of civic education (Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The psychological climate and moral atmosphere within these collectives significantly influence students' development. A supportive and ethically grounded environment fosters the emergence of socially responsible individuals, while negative environments may hinder moral growth and civic engagement. Therefore, the organization and management of student collectives should be considered a strategic priority in educational institutions aiming to promote active citizenship (Ahmadov, 2025).

The formation of an active civic position among high school students is also closely linked to the quality of educational processes within schools. Effective civic education requires a scientifically grounded approach that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical experience. It involves the creation of educational systems that encourage participation, critical reflection, and value-based learning (Kerr, 1999; Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Moral education, as a fundamental component of civic education, plays a central role in this process. It is increasingly characterized by elements of scientific management, including planning, monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement. The effectiveness of moral education depends on the clarity of its objectives, the appropriateness of pedagogical methods, and the alignment between institutional goals and educational practices (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009).

In contemporary pedagogical discourse, the development of a new type of personality—characterized by creativity, independence, initiative, and social activity—is considered essential. These qualities are directly linked to the individual's ability to engage in socially meaningful actions and to contribute to the development of democratic societies. Consequently,

the formation of active citizenship should be understood as a holistic process that integrates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of personality development (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Moreover, the comprehensive and harmonious development of students is an objective necessity in the context of modern societal transformations. As Azerbaijan continues to strengthen its position in the global arena, the demand for well-educated, morally grounded, and socially responsible citizens becomes increasingly important. This reflects broader global trends emphasizing the role of education in promoting sustainable development, social cohesion, and democratic participation (Banks, 2008; OECD, 2018).

A key characteristic of an active citizen is a strong moral conviction combined with a deep sense of responsibility toward society. Such individuals demonstrate high levels of ethical awareness, commitment to the common good, and readiness to act in accordance with moral and legal norms. Active citizenship thus represents a systemic quality of personality, encompassing values, motivations, and behaviors oriented toward societal needs and collective well-being (Putnam, 2000).

Internalized moral principles serve as a driving force for socially responsible behavior. When reflected in students' actions, these principles enable them to act as role models, demonstrating honesty, integrity, responsibility, and respect for others. This not only enriches their personal lives but also contributes to the broader social and cultural development of society.

Finally, the role of teachers in this process cannot be overstated (Ahmadov, 2025). Educators serve as key agents in the formation of civic identity, acting as role models and facilitators of learning. Their personal qualities, professional competence, and ability to establish authority and trust significantly influence students' development of active citizenship. Therefore, teacher training and professional development should prioritize the cultivation of competencies related to civic education and moral leadership (Biesta, 2011).

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-method research design, integrating qualitative theoretical analysis with quantitative empirical investigation.

The empirical research was conducted in several secondary schools located in Baku and Ganja, involving a total of 225 high school students, divided into:

- Experimental group (n = 113)
- Control group (n = 112)

Data Collection

A structured questionnaire consisting of 15 questions was administered to assess:

- Knowledge of citizenship concepts
- Understanding of constitutional and legal frameworks
- Awareness of civic duties and responsibilities
- Moral and value-based orientations

Research Instruments

The questionnaire was designed based on:

- National legal documents (Constitution, Citizenship Law)
- Pedagogical frameworks of civic education
- International models of citizenship competence

Procedure

- Experimental groups were exposed to systematic, targeted pedagogical interventions, including discussions, value-based education, and applied civic learning.
- Control groups followed traditional instructional methods without structured intervention.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using:

- Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage distribution)
- Comparative analysis (experimental vs control groups)
- Interpretative pedagogical analysis

Discussion

From the perspective of evaluating civic maturity, a high level of moral conviction is reflected not only in an individual's understanding of ethical principles but also in their ability to interpret moral dilemmas, make responsible decisions, and act in accordance with socially accepted norms. In this regard, civic competence should be understood as a dynamic

integration of knowledge, values, and behavior, rather than a purely cognitive construct (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

The findings of this study emphasize that students' moral well-being is a central component of active citizenship formation. Moral well-being encompasses not only educational attainment but also the ability to resist negative social influences, adhere to legal norms, and engage in socially responsible behavior. This aligns with Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development, which suggests that higher stages of moral reasoning are characterized by principled thinking and a commitment to universal ethical standards (Ahmadov, 2025).

It is therefore not surprising that moral education occupies a central position not only within formal educational institutions but also within broader social structures, including families, community organizations, and legal systems. Civic development is inherently a socio-ecological process influenced by multiple layers of interaction, as emphasized in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. The integration of these influences is essential for fostering a coherent and stable civic identity among young individuals.

The prevention of antisocial behavior among youth represents another critical dimension of civic education. Early identification of risk factors, combined with targeted pedagogical interventions, can significantly reduce the likelihood of deviant behavior and promote positive social engagement. Research in social learning theory highlights that behavior is shaped through observation, imitation, and reinforcement, underscoring the importance of role models and structured environments in guiding student behavior (Bandura, 2001).

In this context, individualized educational work plays a crucial role. By addressing the specific needs, motivations, and circumstances of students, educators can guide them toward constructive behavior and foster respect for legal institutions and societal norms. Such approaches are consistent with contemporary models of inclusive and student-centered education, which emphasize personalization and adaptability in teaching practices (Biesta, 2011).

Moreover, the findings highlight the importance of coordinated efforts among key social institutions—particularly the family, school, and community—in shaping students' civic identity. This reflects a growing consensus in the literature that effective civic education requires a holistic approach, integrating formal, non-formal, and informal learning environments (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Schulz et al., 2016).

Moral Development and Civic Identity Formation

The results further demonstrate that the formation of active citizenship is closely linked to the development of students' moral autonomy, critical thinking, and self-regulation. Students must be equipped with the ability to independently acquire knowledge, navigate complex information environments, and critically evaluate their own behavior in relation to societal norms. These competencies are essential for functioning effectively in modern, information-rich societies (OECD, 2018).

Importantly, civic identity should not be reduced to theoretical knowledge of legal concepts. Rather, it represents a deeply internalized system of values and beliefs that guides behavior across various contexts. As Dewey (1916) argued, education must be grounded in experience and practice, enabling individuals to actively participate in democratic life rather than passively absorb information.

The study confirms that moral behavior in everyday situations serves as a reliable indicator of civic maturity. Students who demonstrate consistency between their values and actions—exhibiting honesty, responsibility, and respect for others—are more likely to possess a stable and well-developed civic identity. This supports the argument that moral development and civic engagement are intrinsically interconnected processes (Putnam, 2000).

However, the findings also reveal that awareness of moral norms alone is insufficient. Without active engagement and practical application, moral knowledge remains superficial and fails to translate into behavior. This underscores the importance of experiential learning approaches, which provide students with opportunities to practice civic skills and internalize ethical values (Kolb, 1984; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Literature Review

The concept of active citizenship has become a central focus in contemporary educational research, reflecting broader societal transformations associated with globalization, democratization, and the increasing complexity of social and political life. Active citizenship is commonly defined as a multidimensional construct that encompasses knowledge, values, attitudes, and behaviors enabling individuals to participate effectively and responsibly in civic life (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009; Schulz et al., 2016).

Theoretical Foundations of Citizenship and Civic Education

The philosophical roots of citizenship education can be traced back to classical and modern thinkers who emphasized the role of education in preparing individuals for participation in public life. Dewey (1916) argued that education is inherently linked to democracy, highlighting the importance of experiential learning and active participation in shaping responsible

citizens. Similarly, Marshall (1950) conceptualized citizenship as a status that guarantees civil, political, and social rights, forming the foundation of modern democratic societies.

In contemporary scholarship, citizenship is increasingly viewed as a dynamic and evolving concept influenced by social, cultural, and political contexts. Banks (2008) emphasizes the role of multicultural education in fostering inclusive citizenship, arguing that individuals must develop the capacity to function within diverse societies. Biesta (2011) further expands this perspective by highlighting the importance of democratic subjectivity, suggesting that citizenship education should focus not only on knowledge acquisition but also on the development of critical thinking and agency.

Moreover, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) propose a widely recognized framework distinguishing three types of citizens: the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen, and the justice-oriented citizen. This typology underscores the importance of moving beyond passive forms of citizenship toward more active and socially engaged forms of participation.

Moral Development and Civic Identity Formation

A significant body of literature highlights the close relationship between moral development and the formation of civic identity. Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development suggests that individuals progress through stages of moral reasoning, with higher stages characterized by principled thinking and commitment to universal ethical values. This framework has been widely applied in civic education research to explain how individuals develop a sense of justice, responsibility, and ethical behavior.

Similarly, Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory emphasizes the role of observational learning, self-regulation, and social interaction in shaping behavior. According to this perspective, individuals acquire civic values and behaviors through interaction with role models, including teachers, peers, and community members.

From a socio-cultural perspective, Vygotsky (1978) argues that cognitive and moral development occur through social interaction and participation in culturally meaningful activities. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory further supports this view by emphasizing that individual development is influenced by multiple layers of environmental interaction, including family, school, and broader societal structures.

These theoretical frameworks collectively suggest that the formation of active citizenship is not an isolated process but rather a socially embedded phenomenon shaped by interaction, experience, and contextual factors.

Empirical Studies on Civic Education

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that structured civic education programs have a significant impact on students' civic knowledge, attitudes, and participation. Large-scale international studies, such as the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), provide strong evidence that students who receive high-quality civic education exhibit higher levels of political knowledge, trust in institutions, and willingness to participate in civic activities (Schulz et al., 2016; Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Kerr (1999) highlights that effective citizenship education requires a balance between knowledge-based instruction and participatory learning approaches. Similarly, Hoskins and Mascherini (2009) propose composite indicators for measuring active citizenship, emphasizing the importance of integrating cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal dimensions.

Putnam (2000) underscores the role of social capital in fostering civic engagement, arguing that participation in social networks and community activities contributes to the development of trust, cooperation, and civic responsibility. These findings suggest that civic education should not be limited to classroom instruction but should also include opportunities for social interaction and community involvement.

Pedagogical Approaches to Active Citizenship Formation

The literature identifies several pedagogical approaches that are particularly effective in promoting active citizenship. Experiential learning, as conceptualized by Kolb (1984), emphasizes the importance of learning through experience, reflection, and active engagement. This approach is widely recognized as a key strategy for developing civic competence, as it allows students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts.

Hattie (2009) highlights the critical role of teacher effectiveness in influencing student outcomes, including the development of civic values and behaviors. Teachers who create supportive learning environments, encourage critical thinking, and model ethical behavior are more likely to foster active citizenship among students.

In addition, contemporary educational frameworks emphasize the importance of global competence and intercultural understanding. The OECD (2018) framework for global competence highlights the need for students to develop the ability to analyze global issues, understand diverse perspectives, and engage in responsible action.

Civic Education in National Contexts

In the context of post-Soviet and transitional societies, including Azerbaijan, civic education plays a particularly important role in supporting democratic development and social cohesion. Studies conducted in similar contexts emphasize the need to strengthen legal literacy, promote democratic values, and encourage active participation among young people (Knyazev, 2009; Miroshina, 2009).

National legal frameworks, such as the Constitution and citizenship laws, provide the foundation for civic education by defining the rights and responsibilities of citizens. However, research suggests that legal knowledge alone is insufficient for developing active citizenship; it must be complemented by value-based education and practical engagement (Abdullayev, n.d.).

Research Gap and Contribution of the Study

Despite the extensive body of literature on civic education, several gaps remain. First, many studies focus primarily on theoretical or large-scale international assessments, with limited attention to context-specific empirical research. Second, there is a need for studies that integrate theoretical, pedagogical, and empirical perspectives in a single framework.

The present study addresses these gaps by:

- Providing a comprehensive analysis of active citizenship formation within the Azerbaijani educational context;
- Combining theoretical insights with empirical data from experimental and control groups;
- Demonstrating the effectiveness of structured pedagogical interventions in enhancing civic competence.

Thus, this research contributes to the existing literature by offering both theoretical and practical insights into the development of active citizenship among high school students, highlighting the importance of integrated, systematic, and value-oriented educational approaches.

Motivation, Values, and Behavioral Transformation

A key contribution of this study lies in highlighting the role of motivation in transforming moral knowledge into active behavior. The transition from “understood motives” to “effective motives” represents a critical stage in the development of civic competence. Students must not only understand ethical principles but also be motivated to act upon them in real-life situations (Hamidova, 2025).

This transformation is closely linked to the development of moral needs, which serve as internal drivers of behavior. When moral needs are sufficiently developed, individuals are more likely to engage in socially beneficial actions and demonstrate a commitment to the common good. This perspective is supported by self-determination theory, which emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation in shaping behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of integrating professional and moral dimensions of personality. The ability to combine technical competence with ethical responsibility is increasingly recognized as a key requirement for modern citizens, particularly in the context of global challenges and rapid social change (Biesta, 2011).

Psychological Foundations of Active Citizenship

The formation of active citizenship cannot be fully understood without considering its psychological foundations. The study demonstrates that civic identity is closely linked to self-awareness, self-regulation, and personal reflection. These processes enable individuals to evaluate their own behavior, set goals, and adapt to changing circumstances (Ahmadov, 2025).

The concept of self-assessment plays a particularly important role in this context. As noted by Bayramov and Alizade (2007), individuals must develop the ability to critically evaluate their own actions and motivations in order to achieve moral growth. This aligns with broader psychological theories emphasizing the role of metacognition and self-reflection in learning and development (Zimmerman, 2002).

The importance of motivation and intention is also highlighted by the observation that identical actions may have different meanings depending on underlying motives. This reinforces the idea that behavior cannot be fully understood without considering the psychological processes that drive it (Bandura, 2001).

Pavlov’s characterization of the human being as a “self-regulating and self-improving system” further underscores the potential for personal development and transformation. This perspective highlights the importance of creating educational environments that support autonomy, self-regulation, and continuous learning.

Pedagogical Implications and Practical Applications

The experimental component of the study provides strong evidence for the effectiveness of structured pedagogical interventions in fostering active citizenship. The use of diverse teaching methods—including persuasion, habituation, stimulation, evaluation, and teacher modeling—proved to be particularly effective in enhancing students' civic competence.

These findings are consistent with contemporary educational research emphasizing the importance of active learning, collaborative engagement, and teacher influence in shaping student outcomes (Hattie, 2009). In particular, the role of the teacher as a role model is critical, as students are more likely to adopt values and behaviors that are consistently demonstrated by educators (Hamidova, 2025).

The study also highlights the importance of continuous assessment and monitoring in civic education. The use of diagnostic tools, evaluation frameworks, and feedback mechanisms enables educators to track students' progress and adjust instructional strategies accordingly.

Criteria for Evaluating Active Citizenship

In line with Miroshina's (2009) framework, the formation of active citizenship can be evaluated across three key dimensions:

1. **Behavioral (Activity-Based) Criterion**
Reflects students' participation in social activities, initiative, and engagement in civic processes (Torrey-Purta et al., 2001).
2. **Emotional-Value Criterion**
Captures attitudes toward civic duties, ethical sensitivity, and commitment to social values (Schulz et al., 2016).
3. **Volitional (Motivational) Criterion**
Represents self-regulation, discipline, and the ability to act in accordance with moral principles (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

These criteria provide a comprehensive framework for assessing civic competence and can be used to guide both research and practice in civic education.

Research Instrument and Data Collection

In order to determine the level of development of active citizenship among high school students and to assess their knowledge and competencies in this field, a structured set of questions was administered. These questions were designed to evaluate students' understanding of citizenship, legal awareness, and civic responsibility.

The questionnaire included the following key items:

1. What can you say about the historical development of the concept of citizenship?
2. How do you understand the concept of citizenship rights in Azerbaijan?
3. Can a citizen of Azerbaijan be deprived of citizenship?
4. According to the Constitution, who is considered a citizen of the Republic of Azerbaijan?
5. What are the principles of Azerbaijani citizenship?
6. What does civic duty mean to you?
7. What are the four main grounds for acquiring citizenship according to the law?
8. Which law regulates Azerbaijani citizenship?
9. According to Article V of the Law on Citizenship, who is considered a citizen of Azerbaijan?
10. What is the principle of single citizenship?
11. Why do small states often reject dual citizenship?
12. What is the principle of equal citizenship?
13. What does the principle of state protection of citizens abroad imply?
14. According to the law, how is Azerbaijani citizenship acquired?
15. What are the main methods of acquiring citizenship?

Results and Comparative Analysis

The responses obtained from students were categorized into three levels: high, medium, and low, and were compared between experimental and control groups. A total of 113 students from experimental classes and 112 students from control classes participated in the study.

The results clearly demonstrate that students in experimental groups consistently outperformed those in control groups across almost all indicators.

For example:

- In response to the question regarding the historical development of citizenship, 79 students in the experimental group provided satisfactory answers, compared to 58 students in the control group.
- Regarding the understanding of citizenship rights, 75 students in the experimental group demonstrated correct knowledge, compared to 64 students in the control group.
- Similar trends were observed across other questions, including knowledge of constitutional provisions, principles of citizenship, and legal frameworks.

These findings indicate that systematic and targeted pedagogical interventions significantly improve students' civic awareness and understanding.

Interpretation of Key Findings

The analysis of responses reveals several important insights:

First, students who participated in structured and purposeful educational activities (experimental groups) demonstrated a higher level of conceptual understanding, legal awareness, and civic responsibility. Their ability to provide accurate and complete answers suggests that exposure to well-designed educational interventions plays a crucial role in developing active citizenship.

Second, students in control groups, although possessing some basic knowledge, often demonstrated partial or insufficient understanding of key concepts. This highlights the limitations of traditional or less structured teaching approaches in fostering deep civic competence.

Third, the results confirm that knowledge of citizenship is not merely theoretical but requires systematic reinforcement through educational practice. Students who actively engage in discussions, practical activities, and value-based learning environments are more likely to internalize civic principles and demonstrate them in behavior.

Correct Conceptual Interpretations

The correct responses expected from students include the following key ideas:

- Citizenship as a concept originated in ancient Greece (Athens) and Rome, where it was associated with free individuals and political participation.
- In the Middle Ages, the concept evolved into "subjecthood," later re-emerging during bourgeois revolutions.
- Citizenship represents a permanent legal relationship between the individual and the state, characterized by mutual rights and obligations.
- Foreigners and stateless persons possess only temporary legal connections, while citizens maintain a permanent political and legal bond with the state.

Furthermore, the concept of citizenship rights in Azerbaijan is defined by the Constitution, particularly Article 52, which establishes that a citizen is a person who has a legal and political connection with the state and possesses mutual rights and responsibilities.

Overall, the findings confirm that the hypothesis of the study is valid: systematic, purposeful, and continuous educational efforts significantly contribute to the development of an active civic position among high school students.

The higher performance of experimental groups demonstrates that structured pedagogical approaches—integrating theoretical knowledge with practical application—are essential for fostering civic competence.

Thus, the formation of active citizenship should be regarded as a strategic objective of modern education systems, requiring not only curriculum development but also the implementation of innovative teaching methods, value-based education, and continuous assessment mechanisms.

Analysis of Students' Responses on Citizenship Concepts and Legal Awareness (Expanded Translation)

Question 3: Can a citizen of Azerbaijan be deprived of citizenship?

The analysis of students' responses to this question revealed notable differences between experimental and control groups.

- **Experimental groups:**
 - 71 students provided correct answers
 - 36 students gave partially satisfactory responses
 - 6 students experienced difficulty responding
- **Control groups:**
 - 61 students provided correct answers
 - 34 students gave partially satisfactory responses
 - 17 students were unable to provide satisfactory answers

The correct response is grounded in Article 53 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which guarantees that:

- A citizen of Azerbaijan cannot, under any circumstances, be deprived of citizenship;
- A citizen cannot be expelled from the country or extradited to a foreign state.

This constitutional provision reflects fundamental principles of human rights and legal protection, reinforcing the permanence and inviolability of citizenship as a legal status.

Question 4: Who is considered a citizen of the Republic of Azerbaijan according to the Constitution?

- **Experimental groups:**
 - 77 correct responses
 - 33 partially correct responses
 - 3 insufficient responses
- **Control groups:**
 - 63 correct responses
 - 36 partially correct responses
 - 13 insufficient responses

The correct interpretation is provided in Article 52 of the Constitution and Article 1 of the Law on Citizenship of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1998), which define a citizen as: *A person who belongs to the Azerbaijani state and maintains a political and legal connection with it, including mutual rights and obligations.*

This definition highlights the dual nature of citizenship as both a legal status and a socio-political bond between the individual and the state.

Question 5: What are the principles of Azerbaijani citizenship?

- **Experimental groups:**
 - 74 correct responses
 - 37 partially satisfactory responses
 - 2 insufficient responses
- **Control groups:**
 - 61 correct responses
 - 31 partially satisfactory responses
 - 20 insufficient responses

The principles of citizenship in Azerbaijan include:

1. The principle of self-determination of citizenship – individuals have the right to determine their citizenship and may renounce it voluntarily;
2. The principle of single citizenship – the state recognizes only one citizenship for its citizens;
3. The principle of equality of citizenship – all citizens are equal regardless of how citizenship was acquired;
4. The principle of non-deprivation of citizenship – citizens cannot be arbitrarily deprived of citizenship;
5. The principle of non-expulsion and non-extradition – citizens cannot be expelled or transferred to foreign states;
6. The principle of state protection of citizens abroad – the state ensures the protection of its citizens beyond national borders;
7. The principle of retention of citizenship – citizenship is preserved unless voluntarily renounced or legally terminated;
8. The principle of the supremacy of international norms – international legal standards play a significant role in regulating citizenship issues.

These principles form the legal and ethical foundation of citizenship policy in Azerbaijan and contribute to the development of a stable civic identity among individuals.

Question 8: Which law regulates Azerbaijani citizenship?

- Experimental groups:
 - 82 correct responses
 - 31 partially correct responses
 - 0 incorrect responses
- Control groups:
 - 74 correct responses
 - 31 partially correct responses
 - 7 incorrect responses

The correct answer is the Law on Citizenship of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which serves as the primary legislative framework governing citizenship acquisition, termination, and legal status.

Question 11: Why do smaller states often reject dual citizenship?

- Experimental groups:
 - 77 correct responses
 - 30 partially correct responses
 - 6 insufficient responses
- Control groups:
 - 69 correct responses
 - 30 partially correct responses
 - 13 insufficient responses

The correct explanation is that smaller states may be concerned that dual citizenship could allow larger and more powerful states to interfere in their internal affairs. This reflects geopolitical considerations and the desire to maintain national sovereignty and political independence.

Question 13: What does the principle of state protection of citizens abroad imply?

- Experimental groups:
 - 73 correct responses
 - 32 partially correct responses
 - 8 insufficient responses
- Control groups:

- 61 correct responses
- 37 partially correct responses
- 14 insufficient responses

The correct interpretation suggests that this principle often has a partially formal character. In practice, only powerful states can fully ensure the protection of their citizens abroad, whereas smaller states may face limitations in providing effective support to their nationals residing in foreign countries.

Question 15: What are the main methods of acquiring citizenship?

- Experimental groups:
 - 85 correct responses
 - 26 partially correct responses
 - 2 insufficient responses
- Control groups:
 - 72 correct responses
 - 30 partially correct responses
 - 10 insufficient responses

The acquisition of citizenship includes several key mechanisms:

1. Filiations (Citizenship by Birth)

This includes two fundamental principles:

- **Ius sanguinis (right of blood):** Citizenship is determined by the nationality of one's parents. This principle, inherited from Roman law, is dominant in many European countries and is also applied in Azerbaijan.
- **Ius soli (right of soil):** Citizenship is determined by the place of birth.

2. Naturalization

Citizenship acquired through an individual's application, subject to certain conditions, including:

- Continuous residence in Azerbaijan for at least five years;
- Proficiency in the Azerbaijani language;
- Alignment with the interests of the Azerbaijani state.

3. Option (Choice of Citizenship)

This occurs in cases of dual citizenship, where an individual selects one nationality.

4. Transfer (Territorial Changes)

Citizenship is determined when territories are transferred from one state to another, affecting the population residing in those areas.

5. Reinstatement (Reintegration)

Citizenship may be restored to individuals who have previously lost it. Unlike naturalization, which grants new citizenship, reintegration restores previously held citizenship.

The results clearly demonstrate that students in experimental groups possess a significantly higher level of legal awareness and conceptual understanding of citizenship compared to those in control groups. This confirms that structured, systematic, and pedagogically guided instruction plays a critical role in developing civic competence.

Moreover, the findings highlight that citizenship education must extend beyond theoretical knowledge, incorporating legal literacy, critical thinking, and value-based learning. Only through such an integrated approach can students develop a stable and active civic position that is reflected not only in their knowledge but also in their behavior and social participation.

Table 1. Distribution of Students' Responses by Level (Experimental vs Control Groups)

No.	Research Question	Experimental Group (High)	Control Group (High)	Experimental Group (Medium)	Control Group (Medium)	Experimental Group (Low)	Control Group (Low)
1	Historical concept of citizenship	79	58	31	43	3	11
2	Citizenship rights in Azerbaijan	75	64	33	34	5	14
3	Deprivation of citizenship	71	61	36	34	6	17
4	Definition of citizenship (Constitution)	77	63	33	36	3	13
5	Principles of citizenship	74	61	37	31	2	20
6	Understanding civic duty	81	72	31	31	1	9
7	Legal grounds for citizenship acquisition	72	60	38	40	3	12
8	Citizenship law	82	74	31	31	0	7
9	Legal definition (Article V)	84	73	27	28	2	11
10	Principle of single citizenship	80	71	32	26	1	15
11	Dual citizenship issue	77	69	30	30	6	13
12	Principle of equal citizenship	82	72	31	31	0	9
13	Protection of citizens abroad	73	61	32	37	8	14
14	Citizenship acquisition rules	83	70	30	24	0	18
15	Methods of acquiring citizenship	85	72	26	30	2	10

Note:

Total participants: Experimental group (n = 113), Control group (n = 112)

Table 2. Comparative Performance (%) of Experimental and Control Groups

Level	Experimental Group (%)	Control Group (%)
High	68-75% (average range)	55-65% (average range)
Medium	23-30%	25-35%
Low	1-7%	10-20%

Interpretation:

The experimental group consistently demonstrates a higher proportion of high-level responses and a lower proportion of low-level responses compared to the control group.

Table 3. Summary of Key Findings

Indicator	Experimental Group	Control Group	Interpretation
Conceptual understanding	High	Moderate	Better theoretical comprehension in experimental group
Legal awareness	Strong	متوسط	Experimental group shows stronger legal knowledge
Civic responsibility	High	Moderate	More developed civic attitudes
Critical thinking	Higher	Lower	Better analytical responses observed
Incorrect responses	Minimal	Noticeable	Indicates effectiveness of intervention

Table 4. Criteria for Assessing Active Citizenship (Adapted from Miroshina)

Criterion	Indicators	Description
Behavioral (Activity)	Participation, initiative, engagement	Involvement in social and civic activities
Emotional-Value	Attitudes, responsibility, intolerance to unethical behavior	Value-based orientation toward society
Volitional	Self-regulation, discipline, responsibility	Ability to act according to moral norms

Table 5. Methods Used in the Experimental Study

Method Type	Description
Persuasion Methods	Influencing students' thinking and awareness
Behavioral Methods	Structuring moral behavior through practice
Stimulation Methods	Encouragement and disciplinary approaches
Evaluation Methods	Monitoring, self-control, assessment
Teacher Modeling	Role-model behavior of educators

Students' Interpretations of Civic Duty and Legal Awareness: Analytical Discussion

The analysis of students' interpretations of civic duty and legal awareness provides important insights into the formation of civic identity among high school learners. The comparative data presented in Tables 2–4 demonstrate clear differences between experimental and control groups, confirming the effectiveness of structured pedagogical interventions in enhancing civic competence. These findings align with international research emphasizing that civic knowledge and engagement are significantly influenced by the quality of educational experiences and instructional design (Schulz et al., 2016; Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Students' Understanding of Civic Duty

In response to the question *“What is your civic duty? How do you understand it?”*, students articulated a range of perspectives that reflect both moral awareness and value-based reasoning. Their responses indicate that civic duty is primarily perceived as a deep emotional, ethical, and social connection between the individual and their homeland.

Students emphasized that civic responsibility begins with a sense of belonging and identity, linking personal development with national values and collective well-being. This perception corresponds with the concept of “personally responsible citizenship,” which emphasizes moral character, ethical conduct, and adherence to social norms (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Furthermore, students associated civic duty with exemplary behavior, suggesting that a true citizen should act as a role model within society. This reflects the social learning perspective, according to which individuals internalize values and behaviors through observation and interaction with others (Bandura, 2001). The emphasis on personal responsibility and moral integrity also aligns with Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development, where higher stages involve principled reasoning and commitment to ethical standards.

Notably, students highlighted patriotism as a central component of civic duty, emphasizing loyalty to the homeland and readiness to defend national independence. While such perspectives reflect the socio-cultural and historical context of Azerbaijan, they also resonate with broader theoretical frameworks that view civic identity as a combination of national belonging and democratic participation (Banks, 2008; Putnam, 2000).

The responses of students in experimental groups suggest a deeper level of internalization of civic values. Their answers go beyond abstract definitions and demonstrate an integration of moral, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of citizenship. This supports the argument that effective civic education must address not only knowledge acquisition but also value formation and identity development (Biesta, 2011).

Understanding of Legal Foundations of Citizenship

Students' responses regarding the legal grounds for acquiring citizenship reveal a structured and relatively comprehensive understanding of legal principles. The identification of key mechanisms—such as citizenship by birth, naturalization, and international agreements—indicates a solid level of legal literacy among students.

This finding is particularly significant, as legal knowledge is considered a fundamental component of civic competence. According to international assessments such as ICCS, students who demonstrate higher levels of civic knowledge are more likely to engage in civic and political activities (Schulz et al., 2016).

Moreover, the ability to understand legal frameworks reflects the development of critical thinking and analytical skills, which are essential for active participation in democratic societies (Kerr, 1999). The results suggest that structured pedagogical interventions can effectively enhance students' understanding of complex legal concepts and their practical implications.

Interpretation of Citizenship Law and Historical Context

Students' interpretations of Article V of the Law on Citizenship demonstrate an awareness of the historical and legal processes underlying citizenship formation in Azerbaijan. Their recognition of categories such as registered citizens, stateless persons, and refugees reflects an understanding of the socio-political transformations that have shaped the modern Azerbaijani state.

This historical awareness is an important dimension of civic education, as it enables students to contextualize legal concepts within broader social and political developments. Research indicates that historical consciousness plays a crucial role in fostering civic identity and democratic engagement (Banks, 2008).

Understanding of Key Citizenship Principles

Students also demonstrated a clear understanding of fundamental citizenship principles, including single citizenship, equality of citizenship, and procedures for acquiring citizenship.

The principle of single citizenship, as interpreted by students, reflects the sovereignty of the state in defining legal obligations, while also acknowledging the complexities of globalization and transnational identities. Similarly, the principle of equal citizenship highlights the importance of legal equality and non-discrimination, which are core values of democratic societies (Marshall, 1950).

The accurate interpretation of these principles indicates that students in the experimental groups have developed not only knowledge but also an appreciation of the normative foundations of citizenship. This supports the view that civic education should emphasize both legal literacy and value-based understanding (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009).

General Findings and Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of systematic, purposeful, and well-structured pedagogical interventions in fostering active citizenship among high school students. Students in experimental groups demonstrated significantly higher levels of knowledge, understanding, and engagement compared to their counterparts in control groups.

These results are consistent with international research showing that interactive, participatory, and value-oriented teaching methods are more effective than traditional approaches in promoting civic competence (Hattie, 2009; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

The study also highlights the importance of integrating classroom instruction with extracurricular activities, as this combination provides students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts. Experiential learning approaches have been shown to enhance both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning, leading to more meaningful and lasting outcomes (Kolb, 1984).

The results of the experimental study confirm the validity of the research hypothesis and demonstrate that the level of formation of active citizenship among high school students can be significantly improved through targeted educational interventions.

The study shows that:

- Purposeful and systematic pedagogical work enhances students' civic awareness and legal literacy;
- Continuous engagement in value-based educational activities fosters the internalization of moral and civic principles;
- Integrated approaches combining theoretical knowledge with practical application are essential for developing active and responsible citizens.

In conclusion, the formation of active citizenship should be regarded as a central objective of modern education systems. Achieving this goal requires the implementation of scientifically grounded, comprehensive, and student-centered educational strategies that address the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of civic development (Biesta, 2011; Schulz et al., 2016).

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the theoretical foundations, pedagogical conditions, and empirical outcomes associated with the formation of active citizenship among high school students. The findings provide strong evidence that active citizenship is a multidimensional construct encompassing moral development, legal awareness, social responsibility, and behavioral engagement. It cannot be reduced to the mere acquisition of knowledge; rather, it represents the integration of cognitive, emotional, and volitional components within the structure of personality (Biesta, 2011; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

The empirical results clearly demonstrate that students exposed to systematic, purposeful, and value-oriented pedagogical interventions exhibit significantly higher levels of civic competence compared to those in traditional instructional environments. In particular, students in experimental groups showed greater accuracy in understanding legal concepts, stronger moral reasoning, and a more developed sense of civic duty. These findings are consistent with international research indicating that structured civic education programs contribute to the development of informed, responsible, and active citizens (Schulz et al., 2016; Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

A key conclusion of the study is that the formation of active citizenship requires a holistic educational approach. Effective civic education must integrate:

- Cognitive components, including knowledge of legal frameworks, constitutional principles, and socio-political systems;
- Affective components, such as values, attitudes, and emotional attachment to society and الوطن (homeland);
- Behavioral components, reflected in active participation, responsible decision-making, and socially oriented actions.

This integrated model aligns with contemporary theoretical frameworks that emphasize the importance of experiential learning, social interaction, and reflective practice in the development of civic identity (Dewey, 1916; Kolb, 1984).

The study also highlights the critical role of the educational environment in shaping civic outcomes. Student collectives, classroom climate, and teacher influence emerge as key factors in fostering moral values and civic engagement. Teachers, in particular, function not only as knowledge transmitters but also as role models and facilitators of value formation. Their professional competence, ethical behavior, and ability to create supportive learning environments significantly influence students' development of active citizenship (Hattie, 2009).

Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of early prevention and intervention in addressing antisocial behavior among youth. The development of civic competence is closely linked to moral stability, self-regulation, and the internalization of social norms. Educational systems must therefore incorporate strategies aimed at identifying risk factors, promoting positive social behavior, and supporting students' moral and psychological development (Bandura, 2001; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Another important conclusion concerns the role of legal literacy in civic education. Students who possess a clear understanding of citizenship laws, rights, and responsibilities are better equipped to navigate complex social realities and participate actively in civic life. This highlights the need for integrating legal education into school curricula as a fundamental component of civic competence (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009).

Overall, the study confirms that the formation of active citizenship is a continuous, dynamic, and socially embedded process. It requires coordinated efforts among educational institutions, families, and the broader community to create environments conducive to moral development and civic engagement.

In practical terms, the results suggest several implications for educational policy and practice:

- The need to design and implement structured civic education programs based on scientific and pedagogical principles;
- The importance of integrating theoretical knowledge with practical activities, including discussions, projects, and community engagement;
- The necessity of developing teacher competencies in civic and moral education;
- The value of using monitoring and assessment tools to evaluate students' civic development and adjust instructional strategies accordingly.

In conclusion, active citizenship should be regarded as a central goal of modern education systems. In the context of Azerbaijan's ongoing social and educational transformation, fostering active, responsible, and ethically grounded citizens is of strategic importance. The results of this study demonstrate that such outcomes are achievable through systematic, well-organized, and scientifically grounded educational efforts that address the full spectrum of human development.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Due to ethical considerations and the protection of participants' anonymity, the raw data are not publicly accessible. Aggregated data used for analysis are included within the article.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards in educational research. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study prior to data collection.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and, where applicable, from school authorities. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were strictly maintained throughout the research process. No personal or identifying information was collected or disclosed.

The study did not involve any form of psychological, physical, or social harm to participants. All procedures complied with general principles of research ethics, including respect for persons, beneficence, and integrity in data handling and reporting.

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The author declares that artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely for language editing, translation, and formatting purposes to improve the clarity and academic quality of the manuscript.

All conceptual development, data analysis, interpretation of results, and final conclusions were carried out independently by the author. The author assumes full responsibility for the content, accuracy, and originality of the work.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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