Training Experiential Education Facilitators in Uganda: How Their Competences are Developed

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Abstract

This paper analyses the development of experiential education competencies among Community Empowerment Group Facilitators (CEG-Fs) in Uganda's Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation (ICOLEW) programme. The study adopted a qualitative case study design, with data collected through interviews with CEG-Fs' trainers and focus group discussions with CEG-Fs from the four ICOLEW pilot districts: Iganga, Mpigi, Namayingo, and Nwoya. The findings reveal a recursive developmental cycle, initiated by readiness through reflective workshops, which successively link into planning and active application. This process culminates in a reflection phase that acts not as an endpoint but as a reconstructive link back to readiness, ensuring a continuous loop of competency development. The study concludes that facilitators' competency development is a recursive developmental cycle in which reflection serves as both an outcome and a catalyst for future development. The study underscores the need for sustained, reflective professional development to help teachers reconceptualise parental engagement beyond material and event-based approaches.

Keywords: *experiential education; experiential education competencies; experiential facilitator training; reflection loop, lifelong learning*

DOI: *https://dx.doi.org/10.56279/ped.v43.special.i3.6*

1. Introduction

Professionalising adult educators has, of late, become a subject of concern among scholars and practitioners in Uganda and elsewhere. The lack of standardised adult education training for practitioners entering the field from diverse work backgrounds remains a critical concern. This systemic gap explains why recent studies, ranging from the USA (Ghimire et al., 2023) and Europe (Ezurike, 2025;

Zagir & Mandel, 2020) to Asia (Egetenmeyer, 2019) and Uganda (Nuwagaba et al., 2021), consistently advocate for the formal professionalisation of adult education and learning. The overriding justification across all the cited studies is that professionalisation is more essential for realising the learning outcomes of adult education programmes. However, DVV International (2021) highlights two other concerns: a shortage of qualified facilitators and a lack of institutions to train them. Thus, there is an urgent need to examine how educators in nonformal settings develop the competencies required to facilitate effective learning within their work contexts.

According to Vitello (2021), a professional's qualifications and knowledge base directly define the competencies required to perform their role effectively. This may equally apply to adult educators whose roles define them as facilitators. As described by Kolb and Kolb (2018), the facilitator's role from an experiential perspective is to help learners connect with their personal experience and reflect on it. Deltuva and Taylor (2010) argue that the facilitator's role and competencies are central to assessing the quality of adult education programmes. This implies that the management of any adult learning programmes must pay close attention to facilitators' competencies and, equally, to strategies for developing those who are found to have inadequacies. Community education programmes such as Uganda's ICOLEW adapt pedagogical frameworks noted by some scholars (DVV, 2020; Sumani et al., 2023) to be anchored on active, problem-based, and reflective learning. Scholars (Kranzow et al., 2018; Sanderson, 2020; Sumani et al., 2023) note that these action-oriented approaches require regular competency development for facilitators to deliver across the diverse participant contexts. Kolb et al. (2014) argue that the central role of the facilitator in experiential learning is to enable guided reflection: participants reflect on their actions and outcomes to gain deeper insights that reinforce learning. Therefore, unlike conventional pedagogical methods, experiential education centres on hands-on training activities and adopts approaches that facilitate reflection (Marshall et al., 2022).

Much of the research in experiential education (Bell & Bell, 2020; Deltuva & Taylor, 2010; Gencel et al., 2021; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Kranzow et al., 2018) highlights the role of the trainer in the experiential learning process. Others focus on the experiential learner in terms of creating space for learning (Wright & Dean, 2019) or assessment criteria (Heinrich & Green, 2020there is a significant need for process learning theory with a practice-driven model. Scholars have only begun to explore the enhanced learning that often emerges from educative experiences designed with the fullness of experiential learning theory—designing with context, meaning-making, and assessment equal to the

learning. Purpose: Through the lens of scholar-practitioner reflective inquiry, we propose a remixed approach to designing experiential learning. By shifting approaches to experiential education (EE; Quesada et al., 2020; Voehl, 2018). While the cited studies provide valuable insights, there is a dearth of studies offering a structured, explicit, step-by-step framework for developing the competencies of experiential facilitators. The direct consequences of this are reflected in ethical concerns by scholars (Sanderson, 2020; Wright & Dean, 2019) who question the delivery of adult learning guided by experiential learning principles. These critics advocate a framework of minimum standards for developing the competencies of experiential educators, yet to date, none exists. This paper attempts to fill this empirical gap by describing the process of developing experiential education competencies among community empowerment group facilitators (CEG-Fs) in Uganda.

2. The Ugandan Context: Setting the Scene

The Ugandan Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) piloted the Integrated Community Learning for Wealth Creation (ICOLEW) Programme in four districts of Iganga, Mpigi, Namayingo, and Nwoya in 2016, and two more, Mityana and Rukungiri, were added in 2020. ICOLEW is a successor to the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) programme, implemented from the early 2000s to 2015. Unlike FAL, the ICOLEW programme offers community-based adult learning and education with the main aim of improving literacy, skills development, and wealth creation (MGLSD, 2020). As such, ICOLEW is built on five pillars: literacy and numeracy skills enhancement, village savings and loans association promotion, livelihood skills training, business skills training, and community development (MGLSD, 2020).

Community-level implementation of ICOLEW relies on volunteer CEG-Fs who must have a minimum qualification of a Uganda Certificate of Education (MGLSD, 2020). The CEG-Fs are recruited from communities and later given short-term training lasting between two and three weeks, before they are deployed to facilitate learning among adults in the communities (Nuwagaba et al., 2021). Justifiably, such facilitators ought to possess particular competencies, given the nature of their work. For example, the ICOLEW programme operational guides highlight experiential learning as a key principle for implementing learning at community learning centres (DVV, 2020; MGLSD, 2020). Given that ICOLEW leverages non-professional volunteers to deliver learning anchored on experiential learning principles, the efficacy of their preparatory training is of critical concern, as it directly affects their competencies in delivering learning that meets the complex demands of adult learners.

3. Literature Review

The literature reviewed here provides an exposition of experiential facilitator competences and their development. An overview of general adult education and experiential facilitator competencies is provided, followed by a review of the literature on the development of these competencies. The examination of general adult education professionals' competencies helps to enhance the understanding of experiential facilitator competencies, given the symbiotic link between adult education and experiential education (Kolb et al., 2014).

3.1. Competencies of Adult Educator Professionals

Competencies are unique to a particular profession because they define a blend of technical knowledge, role-specific attributes, and industry-driven standards tied to achieving the profession's high-value outcomes. Vitello et al. (2021, p.4) offer a broader definition of competence as 'the ability to integrate and apply contextually-appropriate knowledge, skills and psychosocial factors like beliefs, attitudes, values and motivations to consistently perform successfully within a specified domain'. Several frameworks exist to articulate the competencies of adult education and learning professionals. Buiskool et al. (2010) identify about twenty competencies segmented in seven generics (those that are relevant for carrying out all activities in the adult learning sector), seven specifics (on abilities possessed by the facilitator), and five that are supportive to the learning process, more linked to administrative and managerial functions.

Wahlgren (2016) group responses from scholars who have attempted to answer the question of the characteristics of professionals who can help adults learn from Europe and elsewhere. They depict the qualities of a qualified adult educator as one who can: i) communicate the subject content in an inspiring manner, ii) relate to the students' preconditions taken in a broad sense, iii) create a constructive learning environment, and iv) reflect on one's own experiences to improve performance constantly. Zagir and Mandel's (2020) study on five prominent European research projects conducted between 2004 and 2011, specifically on adult learning facilitators' competences, expands the list of competences. Their list aligns with the four thematic areas of competences outlined by Wahlgren (2016). Zagir and Mandel's study concludes that the common competencies highlighted in all the reviewed studies include:

> The teaching role and subject knowledge; knowledge and skills on teaching-learning methods; knowledge and skills on learning assessment and evaluation; planning and designing programmes; motivating adult learners; personal competence; professional

> development competence; communication and group management; needs analysis; and knowledge about adult development (Zagir & Mandel, 2020, p.170).

DVV International (2021) in the curriculum, globALE presents a basic competence framework for training adult educators worldwide, built on four generic principles: competency orientation, action orientation, learner orientation, and sustainability of learning and flexibility. As a result, DVV International presents five modules as core thematic and content areas with learning outcomes defined as competencies that all adult educators should possess, regardless of the geographical, institutional, or domain-specific context in which they work. The analytical synthesis of the literature reveals that the term 'competence' differs in content and meaning. The conceptualisation depends on the facilitator's working context. Given that all the cited studies offer a conceptual understanding of competencies from the European perspective, a contextual understanding from the African perspective is inevitable, as education and workforce skills ought to be relevant to the socioeconomic realities, cultural values, and specific learning challenges and contexts. The competences analysed in this paper relate to the demands, principles, and activities of the programme under implementation (ICOLEW), whose design and implementation, as noted earlier, are anchored on experiential learning principles.

3.2 Facilitators' Experiential Education Competencies

The concept of experiential facilitator is rooted in the experiential learning theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2014). Proponents of experiential learning theory contend that learning often follows unconventional, predetermined learning activities, thus creating an intricate role for the facilitator (Gencel et al., 2021; Kolb et al., 2014; Kolb & Kolb, 2018). Kolb and Kolb (2017) observe that the facilitator goes beyond merely preparing experiential learning activities that meet the learning outcomes to assessing practical conditions such as space, time, and technology to achieve the outcomes, while also considering the learning styles of the participants. Kolb and Kolb (2018) construe the facilitator's immense and extraordinary role as facilitator, coach, subject expert, and standard setter/evaluator. Such an educator is assumed to possess a developed competency in systematic reflection on their own practice, learning, and development, so that they are able integrate the findings of that reflection in their educational practices. In essence, the educator engages in dual-perspective reflection: viewing their practice as an immediate methodological activity and as their long-term role of community and sector development agents.

While several frameworks exist regarding facilitators' experiential competencies,

we find those models developed by Andrew (2025) and Gencel et al. (2021) most suitable. Their frameworks are more comprehensive and consistent with both existing broad adult educator competencies (Buiskool et al., 2010; DVV International, 2021) and the theoretical underpinning of this study. Gencel et al. (2021) developed a dual-component rubric for experiential educators, underscoring the inevitability of creating a supportive learning space characterised by learner-centred, reflective, and conversational learning as the first core competency. The second component outlines the educator's role as a facilitator, coach, subject expert, and evaluator/standard-setter. The rubric was found relevant because it provides comprehensive criteria for assessing each sub-component.

Andrew (2025) presents a seven-strategy framework construed as experiential learning competence domains. The first one is *engaging for impact,* focusing on developing individuals into influential communicators and connectors. The listed parameters for achieving this resonate with the experiential facilitator roles criteria highlighted by Gencel et al. (2021). The second is *navigating success,* which emphasises developing learners with a broad range of competencies to help them overcome challenges and adapt to changing circumstances. A critical look at the parameters for the foregoing competence suggests their consistency with the supportive learning competencies for adult educator professionals by Buiskool et al.(2010). The third is *wellness,* which Andrew (2025) describes as having parameters for measuring emotional, financial, and personal wellness. The fourth is *culture and value,* both aimed at developing not only compassionate but also culturally intelligent educators committed to building a harmonious society. The fifth is *sense-making,* aimed at equipping individuals with competencies for approaching problems analytically with critical thinking skills and the ability to synthesise information effectively. The sixth is *technology and digital literacy*, aimed at developing one's essential skills for navigating the digital landscape. Lastly, the *lifelong learning* competencies aim to enable learners to assume responsibility for self-directed learning in their professional and career development. Andrew's experiential competency framework was found relevant for interpreting and analysing findings on the process of developing experiential education competencies among community empowerment facilitators in Uganda. The framework is comprehensive, offering steps, strategies, and criteria to guide the development of facilitators' competencies across all seven competence areas.

The dominant narrative, running as a red thread through the two frameworks cited above, is that facilitators of learning programmes that espouse experiential

learning principles ought to have had sufficient prior preparation before instructing experiential learning activities. What is unclear, however, is how the facilitators develop the experiential education competencies needed to deliver effectively. In essence, the cited frameworks successfully conceptualise and describe the desired state (required competency/standard), but offer limited insights into the processes through which the competencies are developed. Nonetheless, the competency frameworks were relevant, for example, in interpreting findings on the essential competences of CEG-Fs.

3.3 Experiential Facilitator Training

The contribution of experiential learning to professional educator competency development is often noted for supporting learners' active engagement and for providing learners with an opportunity to experience the real-life application of a particular theory or skill in different contexts (Nakelet et al., 2017; Shore & Dinning, 2023). A literature review presents some experiential learning-based educator professional competency models. Among such studies, four with frameworks that directly connect educators' training phases to experiential learning are as follows.

Stocker et al. (2014) propose an ideal simulated training cycle: concrete experience scenario – reflective observation/abstract conceptualisation debriefing – active experimentation scenario. Matsuo et al. (2015) propose a framework highlighting five facilitators for developing experiential competency skills. They are sequenced as: challenging tasks, critical reflections, enjoyment, learning orientation, and development networks. Wang and Zorek (2016) present a four-stage, processual development cycle: analysis of strengths and weaknesses, active interprofessional experience (IPE), reflexive and peer synthesis, and collaborative recalibration. In essence, the recursive, individualised, experiential educator competency development process is initiated with an interprofessional experiential education (IEE) plan, which serves as a baseline analysis of the person's strengths and weaknesses. This is followed by active participation in an interprofessional education (IPE) experience, a form of clinical immersion in practice. Then the post-experience analytics with peers acts as a catalyst for iterative plan refinement. Although the four-stage processual development cycle originated from a systematic literature review, its structural framework provides a foundational template for developing experiential facilitator models within empirical study contexts.

While all the cited frameworks offer valuable insights, some (Stocker et al., 2014; Matsuo, 2015) are conceptual or theoretical rather than empirically validated models. Even those that are empirically validated (Wang & Zorek, 2016) were

based on formal learning contexts. The dearth of empirically validated models from nonformal learning contexts then becomes a major concern for studies on experiential learning. Indeed, Saikrishna (2025) acknowledges this concern, recommending that future scholars conduct qualitative, longitudinal empirical studies to validate some of the proposed frameworks in the existing literature.

4. Methodology

4.1 Study Design

The major assumption of the study was that ICOLEW CEG-Fs' preparations for the tasks ought to be informed by experiential learning principles, for which proper investigation required a case study design and a qualitative approach underpinned by an interpretive philosophy. Experiential learning aligns well with interpretivism because the outcomes of the learning process are varied and often unpredictable, and learners play a pivotal role in assessing their learning (Voehl, 2018). Understanding such a process requires an interpretivist philosophy to guide investigations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). The study purposively selected four districts: Iganga, Mpigi, Namayongo, and Nwoya, which have piloted the ICOLEW programme since its inception in 2016. The contextual heterogeneity across these different districts necessitated a qualitative case study design to facilitate a lucid exploration of the diverse socioeconomic factors influencing programme implementation. This multi-site approach offers a robust framework for analysing how the CEG-Fs' competencies are enhanced by trainers not only during content design but also during active immersion in practice.

4.2 Study Population and Sample

Data were collected from trainers and CEG-Fs from the four districts. Typical purposeful sampling techniques were used to reach the targeted participants. The typicality of the participants was determined by their extent of experience in working with CEG-Fs. MGLSD (2020) indicates that the staffing for the ICOLEW had 16 designated district trainers across the four districts, with a further eight trainers deployed across the pilot sub-counties. ICOLEW implementation guidelines (MGLSD, 2020) indicate that at the pilot stage, 10 CEG-Fs from each pilot sub-county were trained and deployed to manage at least 30 community empowerment groups in that sub-county. Considering the foregoing facts, the targeted population was summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Total Population of Participants

Category	Number
District Trainers (4 per district)	16
Sub-county-based trainers	08
CEG Facilitators (20 per district)	80
Total	**104**

Due to institutional staffing constraints and high attrition rates within CEG-Fs, the realised sample size (n=81) fell short of the initial projection (n=104). The resulting distribution included 17 trainers and 64 CEG-Fs. Despite these limitations, exhaustive access was maintained for all the eligible participants, ensuring 100% participation rate among the targeted population.

4.3 Data Collection

Interviews were conducted with the 17 trainers, and eight focus group discussions (FGDs) were held for CEG-Fs. We conducted FGDs with eight participants per group at the ICOLEW learning centre in each sub-county within the pilot districts. The CEG-Fs in their respective FGDs shared how trainers prepare them for experiential education. Interviews for trainers focused on: i) process and strategies for developing experiential education competencies of the CEG-Fs, ii) the essential experiential competencies they consider before recruitment of CEG-Fs, and iii) the CEG-Fs' competency inadequacies. The aforementioned two methods were triangulated with document reviews. The documents reviewed included ICOLEW implementation guidelines, training materials from district trainers, reports from programme evaluation meetings organised at both district and sub-county levels, instructional materials developed by both trainers and facilitators, and trainees' notebooks.

4.4 Data Analysis

The analysis adopted the rigorous six-step procedure outlined by Naeem et al. (2024) for developing conceptual models in qualitative research. The analysis commenced with the verbatim transcription of the seventeen interviews and eight FGDs. Since all sessions were conducted in English, the first author conducted all transcriptions before sharing them with co-authors to foster collective familiarity with the data. Secondly, the first and second authors individually did the initial open coding before meeting as a research team to compare notes. A total of 142 keywords emerged from this process. The 142 keywords were later mapped into 16 codes related to the competence development process

and five related to essential competencies of an experiential educator. Thirdly, the codes were re-evaluated to arrive at broader and more specific themes. For instance, prospects, plans, and future-focused applications were merged into a single theme of reflective action. This was reflective coding, informed by key concepts from the literature on experiential learning and competency development. Fourthly, refining themes generated at the third stage was done to determine how coherent patterns were supported by data. Fifthly, the themes are defined. For instance, what reflective training workshops and collective content design mean. Their presentation is supplemented with direct quotes from the data to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Finally, a conceptual model was developed (see Fig. 4).

4.5 Ethical Protocols

As noted earlier, while setting the scene, this paper analyses findings from the larger research project, whose data were collected between September 2024 and January 2025. Before commencement, the proposal went through several ethical reviews by accredited research ethics committees. Besides, the presentation of findings with direct quotes has been coded, while referring to the respective participant interview excerpt.

5. Findings

Before presenting the findings, experiential education competency profiles of trainers are provided in Table 2. The findings are under two main themes: a framework for developing experiential education competencies among CEG-Fs and essential competencies of CEG-Fs.

5.1 Experiential Education Competence Profiles for the Trainers of CEG-Fs

As reflected in Table 2, the profiling considered two areas: (i) professional qualifications in adult education and learning, and (ii)work-based experience, in terms of the number of years in the field. Through professional development and work-based learning, individuals have opportunities not only to gain confidence but also to develop skills and a better understanding of the ethos that guides practices in that field.

Table 2

Experiential Education Competence Profiles for the Trainers

Aspects	Frequency	Percentage
Professional Competency in Adult education and learning		
Degree or diploma in Adult Education	02	11.8
Certificate in Adult Education and Learning	02	11.8
Short – Competence-based Training in Adult education and learning	07	41.2
None of the above	06	35.2
Work-based Experience in Education Provisions in Years		
Below 5 years	03	17.6
6-10 years	07	41.2
11 years and above	07	41.2

Findings in Table 2 indicate that six (35.2%) of the 17 trainers did not hold any professional qualifications in adult education and learning. Although the focus of the current study was not on the trainers' competencies, these findings suggest that these trainers may be operating with limited knowledge of integrating experiential learning principles into training for adult learners' facilitators, a key component for adults to connect theory to practice.

5.2 A Framework for Developing Experiential Education Competencies Among CEG-Fs

The thematic analysis of findings revealed a five-stage process of experiential competency development for CEG-Fs. These were reflective training workshops, collaborative learning and content design, active experimentation, a supportive environment, and practical reflection.

5.2.1 Reflective Training Workshop

The findings depicted reflective training workshops as readiness activities. It is evident from document review and interviews that these activities involved convening recruited CEG-Fs at a central location within the pilot district to receive either initial or intervention-based training. The initial training was for newly recruited facilitators, and the intervention-based training was for those practising. The findings reveal that initial training was concerned with roles of the facilitator and skills of conducting situation analysis as demonstrated by the interview, where one of the trainers noted that, 'the training contents are developed from the needs assessment training needs, so by the time we train, we have had thorough discussions with colleagues during the planning stage'.

On the other hand, the intervention-based reflective workshops are organised quarterly, and learning units are generated from the support monitoring mechanisms, as demonstrated with Trainer TNW1 interview transcript:

> Refresher training usually follows identification of a training need, especially during our regular monitoring and visits to their community empowerment groups, where much of the learning takes place. For example, if the issue is not following adult learning principles while facilitating learning, then we would conduct practical sessions on that. We can give one a topic and ask them to train us. Here, we monitor how the person upholds the principles of adult learning when instructing. We remind them not to mind us being their trainers, because if we don't debrief, they may feel timid and think we are too experienced to be trained by them.

Analysis of the findings from reflective training workshops reveals a four-stage reflective action loop that bridges the gap between prior understanding and action, as illustrated in Figure 1.

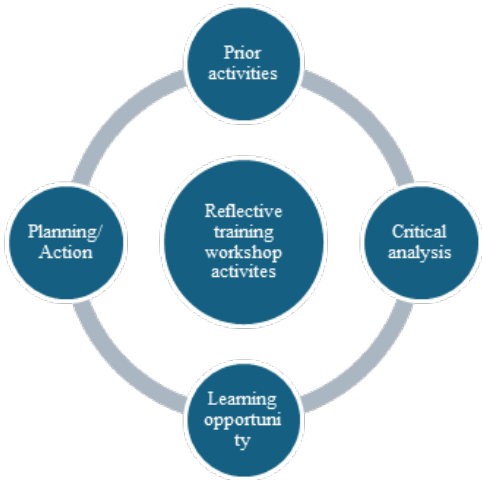


Figure 1: *The Reflective Action Loop for Training Workshops*

*Source***:** Research Raw Data

Initially, training workshops immerse participants in their current experience, where they discuss their daily tasks (understanding their experience). Participants then link theory and practice, critically evaluating their prior experience against existing knowledge (critical analysis). This then presents them with a learning opportunity where participants discuss how they can translate new knowledge into their specific roles. The process culminates in the development of action

plans for future, evidence-based improvements.

5.2.2 Collaborative Learning and Content Designing

Findings from the interviews and focus group discussions revealed a proactive approach to content design, frequently referred to by participants as learning units. The reason for adopting such an approach was primarily to achieve participatory learning for action. The interview excerpt from trainer TNA3, anonymised, is illustrative of the narrative repeatedly provided by others from all four districts on the issue.

> The materials development process brings the facilitators on board. The subject matter specialists and facilitators work together to design the materials that are then used to train them. During development, their involvement is to enhance their experiences. Remember, the materials are again generated from the situational analysis reports that the facilitators generated and brought to the district coordinator. The involvement is a crucial strategic attempt to immerse the CEG-Fs in the content they will use to train the community members.

Findings from the focus group discussions were consistent with those from the interviews. It was, for example, observed by FGD2IG participants that:

> We keep telling the trainers our challenges, and they come in to help. They trained us in conducting a situational analysis. We then went out to do it, and our reports had issues. They used our materials to identify issues, helping us understand what to do next. There was a situation where we were taken to peers, and we learn to develop the materials together. This has helped in doing the tasks effectively.

Consistently, the findings from content reviews demonstrate that the trainers adopt a participatory approach in building the facilitators' competency. It is noticed that CEG-Fs were part of the data collection, needs assessment, analysis, prioritisation, and action, which informed the thematisation of learning units. The process starts with CEG-Fs conducting meetings to identify the issue or community-prioritised problem, such as low crop yield, as demonstrated in Figure 2, captured during document reviews.

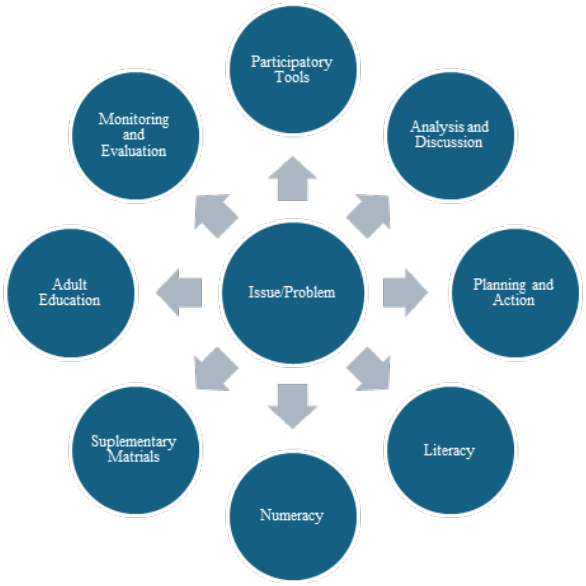


Figure 2: *ICOLEW learning cycle adopted from (MGLSD, 2020, p.36)*

The findings indicate that the generation of learning units signals a shift towards participatory co-design of learning content. By adopting such a model, the training process guarantees that the training materials are rooted in the lived realities of the trainees. In essence, the model may achieve two goals: validating the situation analysis data and offering an opportunity for facilitators to immerse themselves in an environment that sharpens facilitators' preparation for complexities in future implementation of the learning activities – community-learning-centre-based action.

5.2.3 Creating a Supportive Environment

Findings from the interviews revealed a seemingly dominant strategy of support monitoring, a post-training activity. The trainers used these avenues for co-facilitation and to build the confidence of the CEG-Fs. Trainer TNW1 interview transcript that may be illustrative of many others with a similar approach was as follows:

> We regularly visit them in classes and instantly correct them. We don't confront them, but after the sessions, we have a one-on-one discussion. Sometimes, we prepare the facilitators and participants to expect our input. In that way, when a facilitator makes a mistake, and I come in, the participants don't easily see it as a corrective measure but rather think we are co-facilitating their learning.

The above quote also highlights the importance of feedback and co-facilitation in developing facilitators' experiential education competencies. Moreover, the feedback approach signals a shift from conventional support supervision to a collaborative mentorship model. For instance, the new model supports supervision that embeds real-time corrective measures while preserving the psychological safety of trainees. Other instances of creating a supportive environment while building facilitators' competencies included incentivising the ICOLEW activities. This included integrating ICOLEW learning activities with other government development programmes, with small facilitation provided to CEG-Fs. This was done as a motivation strategy for CEG-Fs, as demonstrated in the interview with Trainer TNA1, who noted that:

> We have encouraged the formation of associations for all CEG-Fs in each ICOLEW sub-county. This has helped in linking them to development programmes. For example, we have ensured they are lead facilitators in PDM, CDD, the youth livelihood fund, and even the women's fund. These have created more learning opportunities for them in executing their duties. The little allowances they receive motivate them to integrate learning and also promote the knowledge sharing bout ICOLEW programme activities. For instance, the SACCOS under ICOLEW promote PDM SACCOS. The learning activities under the savings groups focus on the activities community members are engaged in, thereby building the capacity of the CEG-Fs.

In essence, placing the CEG-Fs in a lead role in other community development programmes may not only be an incentive but also an opportunity for experiential learning. The practical implication is that avenues for continuous competency building are enhanced because the roles place facilitators in immediate application of skills, as was lucidly indicated in the management of SACCO activities. The findings also show a creative way to promote post-learning activities that are life-changing for participants, offering intrinsic motivation for learning through the CEG-Fs.

5.2.4 Reflective Practices

These are practice-based evaluations of the competence developed. These practices were guided by maintaining reflection journals for both CEG-Fs and trainers. Document reviews revealed that this was a form of assessment of learning. As an example, the reflection journal included the following question: What key point*s were taught during this session? What didn't I know before the session? What did I discover after the session? What do I need further clarification/guidance on? How do I apply what I have learned today?* The

reflection journal was corroborated by interviews and focus group discussions. During interviews, for instance, Trainer TNA5 noted:

> Some lessons are conducted at the community learning centre here. I participate to see how teaching and learning take place. After that, we sit with the CEG-F to reflect on the process, including what we learned. How can we take it to another level? It is a good and interesting process. Almost every activity is a learning opportunity for us.

The trainers' cited experience was corroborated by the focus group discussion anonymised as *FDG2NW,* where excerpts of the discussions were as follows:

> We always have good learning scenarios with our trainers. In case studies, for example, we share our testimonies from the projects we work on with our learners, and they listen. They often appreciate what we do. One day, our CDO said, "I am lucky to learn from you guys." You have done more than I. In our next month's meeting, I request that you use this scenario to let your colleagues know that this approach works.

The synthesis of the findings reveals a continuous, sequential pattern of learn-reflect-apply, illustrated in Figure 3. It starts with strategic hindsight, using past experiences to set expectations and reduce future difficulties. It progresses through the post-experience re-conceptualisation and culminates in future-focused application. In essence, the prior experiences are catalysts for professional competency development.

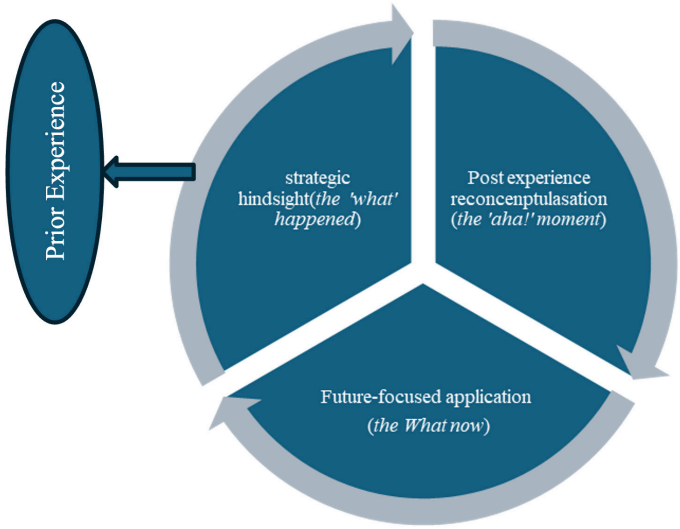


Figure 3: *The CEG-F Reflective Competence Development Cycle*
*Source***:** Research Raw Data

5.3 Essential Competencies of CEG-Fs

The analysis of the findings on the essential competences used a focused thematic analysis strategy, aligning emerging categories with the concepts in the literature and the experiential learning competence framework. As a result, three main themes emerged, namely interpersonal effectiveness, communication, and prior experience with adult education and learning.

5.3.1 Interpersonal Effectiveness

It was repeatedly noted from the interviews and focus group discussions that the recruitment process would involve the community members and their leaders. It was corroborated with the ICOLEW implementation guidelines noted during the document review. The process starts with the district team sharing the qualities of the desired CEG-F, and the community members then forward three names for consideration. The qualities mentioned during interviews and FGDs, as well as those stipulated in the implementation guidelines, resonated with the interpersonal effectiveness competencies listed in the experiential learning competence framework. For instance, participants repeatedly mentioned one's residence in the area as a qualification for recruitment into CEG-F. Trainer TNW1, for instance, observed that 'we give opportunities to residents of that area who understand the community members, what they do, what they want, and so on, which always forms the basis of their training activities they organise later'. Consistently, trainer TNA1 also noted that 'we want an active member of the community, with some already existing projects that can make others learn from'.

Based on the findings, interpersonal effectiveness was understood to include aspects that demonstrated a good relationship with others. Moreover, for community residence, it requires the contribution one makes to encouraging lifelong learning. Other reasons for preferring the residents related to their ability to easily understand the learning needs, the learning contexts, and how their fellows prefer to learn, as illustrated in an interview with Trainer TNA5, who said:

> We recruit someone with good discipline and who relates well with other community members, since they have to offer opportunities for others to learn. We task community members with assessing their interaction style, commitment to work, what they do for a living, and their willingness to support others voluntarily.

The interview findings were corroborated by focus group discussion sentiment, as reflected in the excerpt from FGD1IG: 'the community is seeing value in

us as we now give back to the community that educated us'. It can be noted that interpersonal effectiveness emphasises discipline and wellness in the community member who would be appointed as a facilitator, and perhaps who was initially working with communities and appreciates adult learning as a process that requires patience.

5.3.2 Communication

Three key aspects of communication competencies emerged from interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews. The first one was the consideration of the basic formal education achievements of the desired CEG-F. A minimum qualification of Ordinary Level, certified by the Uganda National Certificate of Education, was essential. Based on the findings, this was done on the assumption that one with such an educational qualification would be competent in reading and writing in English and the local language. Although instruction is in the local language, reporting would be in English. Thus, the emphasis is on communication competencies in both languages. For example, one of the participants stated that 'the facilitator should be at senior four, and for this, we believe this person has developed better reading and writing skills to be used in contextualising the training and learning activities of the learners at the community level'.

5.3.3 Prior Experience with Adult Learning and Education

Findings from interviews and FGDs revealed that consideration of previous experience in facilitating other adult learning programmes was key to recruiting CEG-Fs. Such experience was expected to have been acquired, for example, if a person was a functional adult literacy (FAL) instructor, a village health trainer, and/ or participated in any known community mobilisation endeavours. The reasons for considering prior experience were primarily two: the ability to deliver following adult learning principles and a volunteerism spirit, as demonstrated in the interview with Trainer TNA4, who noted that:

> Being a former FAL instructor was an added advantage. We believe such a person already has experience with how adults learn. They have patience, since the programme outcomes may not be instant. They also value volunteerism. So, they are known for not exerting much pressure on stakeholders regarding remuneration demands, but rather for valuing the services rendered.

Prior experience is not only recognised as a starting point for learning but also a crucial component of the learning process itself. The opportunity it offers in facilitators' competence development is in connecting what they already

know to the likely outcomes of the learning process they actively lead, which is a key facilitator of reflective practices.

6. Discussion of Findings

This paper aimed to examine the process of developing experiential competences of the CEG-Fs of Uganda's ICOLEW programme. The findings revealed that the process involves a phased yet continuous series of activities for readiness, planning, learning, applying, and reflecting, as illustrated in Figure 4. To succeed in this, some competencies are regarded as essential, including interpersonal effectiveness, communication, and cultural and value engagement. The discussion takes a critical reflection on the foregoing issues. Based on the findings, the process was perceived to start with the reflective training workshops as preparatory activities. The learning activities followed a four-stage process (prior experience, critical analysis, learning, action for improvement) that CEG-Fs go through to develop their competencies. This process does not seem to be unique to Ugandan CEG-F. However, it is consistent with Schön's notion of the three-phase reflective practice: reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and Tan's (2020) *Daoist* interpretation of creating new understanding/knowledge. This process also resonates with the four stages of continuous learning under the experiential learning cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2018).

Although the findings are consistent with established frameworks by Kolb and Kolb (2018), critics such as Heinrich and Green (2020) and Tan (2020) argue that these frameworks primarily focus on individual cognition and ignore the social and collaborative perspectives of learning. Indeed, as can be seen in the professional training of CEG-Fs in Uganda, their learning and development of experiential education competencies seems to be a distributed process that occurs within communities of practice rather than in isolated reflection. Despite the criticism, the practical implications of the findings suggest the potential of reflective training workshops to foster continuous learning and skills development among CEG-Fs, thereby developing their lifelong learning competencies outlined in the experiential learning competence framework (Andrew, 2025). The findings, therefore, illuminate the relevance of reflective-practice-based training in facilitating the development of lifelong learning competencies recognised as personal competencies for adult education and learning professionals (Buiskool et al., 2010; Zagir & Mandel, 2020) and for competent experiential facilitators (Andrew, 2025).

The findings repeatedly highlight the reflective practices throughout the different phases of training the experiential facilitators. Moreover, the practice is for both trainers and trainees, thus demonstrating the importance of providing

space for reflective practices in competence building for both personal and team professional development. The findings are consistent with Marshall et al. (2022, p.484), who argue that "reflective practice is an inherently personal and relational process, occurring privately within people, and publicly, between people". They are also consistent with the first set of competences in Gencel et al. (2021), as outlined in the rubric for measuring experiential education training, especially regarding what they term a conversational learning space. On the contrary, emphasising the recurrent use and importance of reflective practices for both trainers and trainees may raise practical and institutional limitations. Practically, reflective practices are inherently internal and personal (Marshall et al., 2022). In essence, they may lead to self-confirmation bias rather than competence-building. Institutionally, issues of power dynamics may arise. For instance, there may be unclear role boundaries between the trainer and trainees regarding who has the final say on content, especially if the trainees also serve as assessors of the trainer. Despite the limitations, the study specifically elucidates practical scenarios for enriching the conversational learning space between teams, that is, peers, the more experienced, and novices..

The findings on collaborative content design revealed that the starting point is an issue or community problem, and that the planning of learning follows a problem-based learning process. This not only demonstrates a participatory approach to building the facilitators' competency but also validates previous studies (Association for Experiential Education, 2025; Sumani et al., 2023) that underscore problem-based learning as a methodology of experiential education. The point of divergence between the current study and the previous one is the emphasis on how problem-based learning through collaborative content design builds the experiential competencies of the CEG-Fs. At the application phase of the competence development, the findings emphasise the importance of a supportive environment. This is not new but rather a regular catechism by scholars of experiential learning. Proponents (Kolb & Kolb, 2017) and advocates (Gencel et al., 2021) of experiential learning underscore the importance of a conducive learning space or a constructive learning environment (Wahlgren, 2016). This study, therefore, introduces a novel dimension to pedagogical practice: the systematic integration of participatory, respect-based feedback processes. This dimension is noted to prioritise learner motivation and mutual respect as primary mechanisms for nurturing a supportive learning environment, as corroborated by the participants' testimonies.

The findings on perceived essential competencies for recruiting CEG-Fs have a limited scope, focusing on the experiential education competencies of the

facilitator. Out of the seven competency areas suggested by Andrew (2025), only three: interpersonal effectiveness, communication, and cultural and values engagement, are considered essential in the recruitment and development of competent community empowerment facilitators. This, as noted further in the findings, perhaps had a bearing on competence inadequacies in sense-making, technology, and digital literacy, as well as communication competencies. The supposition is that if there were no deliberate efforts to build digital literacy and sense-making competencies, it would not be surprising if participants expressed inadequacies in these areas.

7. Emerging Framework on Competency Development Process

The five-phased, cyclic, and continuous stages of CEG-F competence development present an emerging model, as illustrated in Figure 4.

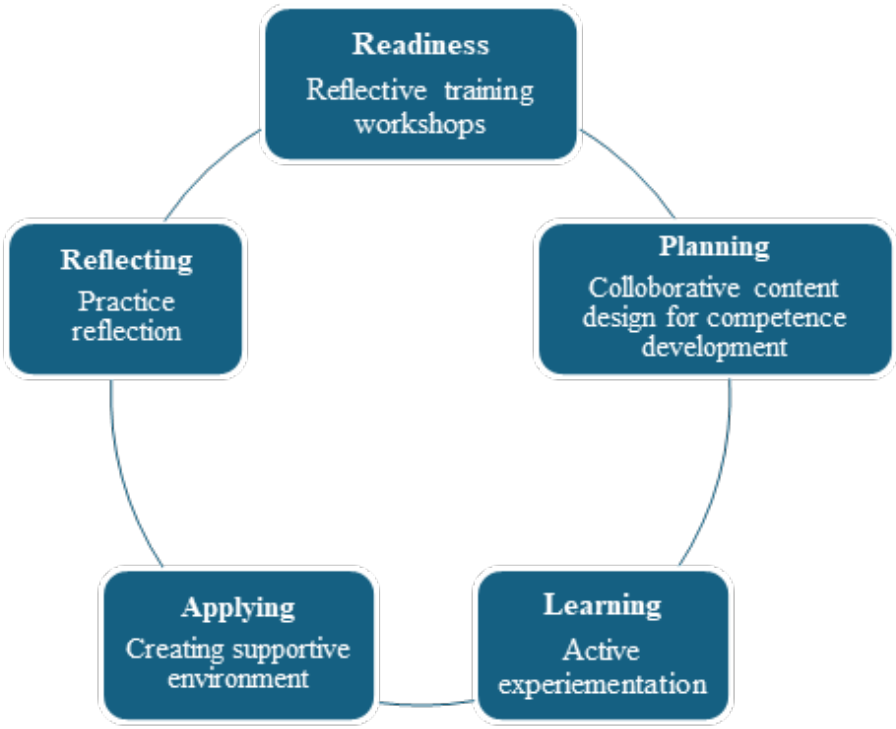


Figure 4: *Process of Experiential Education Competences Development*

Based on the findings (illustrated in Figure 4), it can be deduced that competence is a product while competence development is a process. Findings also suggest the existence of external actors who offer support, such as access to resources and ideas, for competency development. It can be noted that, whereas the competence development process follows a certain pattern, each stage

provides new experiences for the facilitators and opportunities for planning future actions. Moreover, an environment where both trainers and facilitators (trainees) engage in mutual reflection (a conversational learning space) is a catalyst for the development of experiential education competencies at the individual and team levels.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

The fundamental question raised at the beginning of this paper was: *How are the competent experiential facilitators prepared?* Based on the findings and the suggested implications, the following conclusions are drawn. Firstly, reflective training workshops are essential preparatory activities that foster the development of facilitators' experiential education competency. They trigger a learning loop that moves from prior experience to critical analysis, creating an opportunity for learning and action. Thus, validating Kolb's experiential learning cycle. This implies that, although the experiential learning framework is a learning model, it may also apply to competency development. Moreover, its individualistic approach to developing competencies may not make it obsolete, but rather should be extended to integrate social learning perspectives, which align with the communities-of-practice model of experiential education educator competencies, as evidenced by participants' testimonies of their competency development process. Based on this observation, we recommend that reflective training workshops be conducted more regularly and organised over a reasonable period. At all stages, the findings underscore the importance of reflective practice as a cornerstone for experiential competency development for both facilitators and trainers. For practice purposes, it further highlights the importance of a conversational learning space in professional development. This leads to the recommendation that institutions that train facilitators should formally integrate conversational learning spaces into such programmes.

Secondly, the training only considers three competency areas of interpersonal effectiveness, communication, and cultural and values engagement as most essential in the recruitment of CEG-Fs. Yet CEG-Fs demonstrated competency gaps in sense-making, technology, and digital literacy, in addition to communication competencies. The study recommends that trainers and planners familiarise themselves with various competence frameworks and deliberately integrate them into the design of training content to develop competent professional community empowerment facilitators. Thirdly, as previously stated, there was a gap in the literature and practice related to the lack of a structured model for developing experiential facilitators' competencies. The findings of this study now offer a framework (Fig. 4) with the potential to fill this knowledge

gap. The model adds to the current knowledge of the role of the experiential facilitator in delivering experiential learning effectively. Despite its Western research origins and a formal adult learning focus, the experiential learning framework appears effective in developing competencies among educators in non-formal adult education programmes. This suggests that the crossing cuts across intercultural and interprofessional diversity in the learning theory.

However, a notable limitation of this study is the exclusion of items for data collection specifically addressing the competencies in assessing experiential learning. Future studies may consider this, given the novelty and complexity of approaches to assessing experiential learning.

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