



EXPERIENTIAL AND GAME-BASED LEARNING FOR TEACHING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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Abstract:

This study explores the implementation of an experiential and game-based teaching intervention designed to support primary school students' understanding of freedom of expression through collaborative, student-centered learning activities. The study employed a qualitative action research design involving twenty-one (n = 21) sixth-grade students attending a public primary school in Greece. Data were collected through classroom observations, teacher field notes, and students' written reflections and were analyzed in relation to the study's three research questions. The findings indicate that students experienced the intervention as engaging, meaningful, and participatory, while gradually developing a broader understanding of freedom of expression not only as an individual right but also as a democratic practice grounded in respect, empathy, active listening, and responsibility towards others. Through collaborative discussions, game-based activities, role-play, and reflective tasks, students connected abstract democratic concepts with authentic classroom experiences, negotiated different perspectives, and participated actively in democratic dialogue. The study contributes to the growing literature on experiential and game-based learning by demonstrating their potential to support democratic education through meaningful classroom interaction. The findings also suggest that democratic values may be taught more effectively when students experience them through participation, collaboration, and reflection rather than through direct instruction alone.

Keywords: experiential learning; game-based learning; primary education; democratic education; action research

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1. Introduction

Experiential learning has long been recognized as a student-centered pedagogical approach in which knowledge is constructed through direct experience, active participation, reflection, and interaction with the social environment (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984). Rather than viewing learning as the passive transmission of information, experiential learning encourages learners to actively engage with authentic situations, connect new knowledge with prior experiences, and construct meaning through inquiry and reflection, an approach that continues to be supported by contemporary educational research (Yim *et al.*, 2025).

Reflection is central to this process, enabling learners to transform experience into meaningful knowledge while fostering critical thinking, self-regulation, and informed decision-making (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Facione, 2011). Beyond promoting academic achievement, experiential learning has increasingly been recognized as an effective approach for democratic education because it enables students to explore complex social values through participation, dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving (Freire, 1970). Among these democratic values, freedom of expression occupies a particularly important place in primary education. As a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of democratic societies, freedom of expression enables individuals to communicate ideas, share opinions, and participate actively in social life. However, within educational settings, freedom of expression cannot be understood merely as the individual right to speak. Rather, it is closely connected with listening to others, respecting diverse perspectives, demonstrating empathy, and assuming responsibility for one's own words and actions. Developing these dispositions from an early age contributes to the formation of democratic citizens who are able to participate constructively in dialogue while recognizing both their own rights and the rights of others (Freire, 1970; Vavitsas, 2022). Consequently, classroom practices that enable students to experience democratic participation through collaboration and shared decision-making, rather than simply learn about democratic principles as abstract concepts, are increasingly viewed as essential components of citizenship education.

One instructional approach that naturally operationalizes experiential learning is game-based learning. Increasingly recognized as an effective pedagogical approach in primary education, game-based learning provides meaningful learning experiences in which children actively develop understanding through exploration, experimentation, collaboration, and reflection (Brock *et al.*, 2009; Güler & Özsoy, 2018). Rather than functioning solely as a motivational strategy, educational games create social learning contexts that encourage students to negotiate meaning, solve problems collaboratively, communicate effectively, and participate actively in shared learning processes. Within such environments, children do not simply acquire knowledge; they also learn to cooperate with peers, consider alternative viewpoints, negotiate shared rules, and experience democratic participation through everyday classroom interaction.

The effectiveness of game-based learning, however, depends not only on the design of the activities but also on the teacher's role in shaping the learning environment. Teachers assume the role of facilitators who guide inquiry, encourage autonomy, and create inclusive classroom climates where every learner feels safe to contribute and express ideas (Cothran *et al.*, 2010; Webster *et al.*, 2020). Recent evidence further suggests that purposeful teacher scaffolding is essential for supporting students' engagement, collaboration, and knowledge construction throughout game-based learning activities (Sun *et al.*, 2023).

The educational value of experiential and game-based learning is closely associated with constructivist and sociocultural perspectives on learning. According to Vygotsky (1978), knowledge is constructed through social interaction, dialogue, and collaboration within meaningful cultural contexts. Learning therefore occurs most effectively when students actively participate in shared activities and receive appropriate support from teachers or peers within the Zone of Proximal Development. From this perspective, play represents far more than recreational activity; it provides opportunities for children to experiment with ideas, negotiate social roles, solve problems, and internalise social and cultural norms. Recent research on game-based learning in primary education continues to support these principles, highlighting the importance of teacher scaffolding, collaborative interaction, and guided participation in promoting meaningful learning experiences (Guan *et al.*, 2024; Sun *et al.*, 2023). Such experiences promote cognitive development while simultaneously strengthening communication, cooperation, perspective-taking, reflective thinking, and students' sense of agency, all of which are fundamental to democratic participation.

Drama pedagogy and role-play further enrich experiential and game-based learning by enabling students to engage cognitively, emotionally, and socially with meaningful situations. Through dramatization, learners move beyond discussing abstract concepts to experiencing them from multiple perspectives. Assuming different social roles allows children to examine the consequences of their decisions, recognize others' emotions, and reflect critically on issues such as inclusion, exclusion, fairness, disagreement, and respectful communication (Boal, 1995; Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). Contemporary empirical research further suggests that perspective-taking constitutes a central mechanism through which drama pedagogy supports socio-emotional development, enabling children to understand others' emotions, motivations, and viewpoints while strengthening interpersonal awareness (Celume & Zenasni, 2022). Such activities promote empathy, emotional awareness, and reflective dialogue, while creating safe opportunities for students to experiment with alternative ways of responding to interpersonal challenges. These characteristics make drama-based approaches particularly appropriate for teaching democratic values at primary school. In line with this perspective, recent educational research increasingly advocates holistic pedagogical approaches that integrate experiential learning, game-based learning, collaborative inquiry, and drama-based activities to promote students' cognitive, social, emotional, and ethical development thereby creating learning environments that support democratic

participation and inclusive classroom interaction. (Egbai *et al.*, 2025; Miller & Lindt, 2021; Vázquez-Uscanga *et al.*, 2025).

Although experiential and game-based learning have consistently been associated with improvements in students' engagement, motivation, collaboration, and academic achievement, considerably less attention has been devoted to the contribution of these approaches to democratic education and, more specifically, to children's understanding of freedom of expression as both a fundamental right and a social responsibility. Furthermore, relatively few classroom-based action research studies have examined how these pedagogical approaches operate in authentic primary school settings where democratic values are experienced through dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, role-play, and reflection.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the implementation of an experiential and game-based teaching intervention designed to support primary school students' understanding of freedom of expression through collaborative discussion, drama-based role-play, and reflective activities within the context of an action research study. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How did the primary school students experience the activities related to the concept of freedom of expression?

RQ2: In what ways does participation in collaborative discussions and role-play activities influence students' awareness of respectful communication and democratic dialogue?

RQ3: How do students reflect upon the relationship between freedom of expression, empathy, and responsibility toward others following the teaching intervention?

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative action research design to explore how an experiential and game-based intervention supported primary school students' understanding of freedom of expression. Action research involves iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, enabling systematic inquiry into classroom practice and supporting its continuous improvement. Data generated through these cycles informed ongoing reflection on both teaching processes and student learning outcomes (Clark *et al.*, 2020).

2.2 Participants

The participants were twenty-one sixth-grade students (11–12 years old), including nine boys and twelve girls, attending a public primary school in Greece. The study was conducted with one intact classroom selected through convenience sampling and took place during regular school instruction. The intervention was implemented within the regular curriculum, primarily through the subjects of Social and Political Education and

Skills Workshops. In addition, it incorporated interdisciplinary learning activities drawing on Language, Drama Education, and Physical Education, reflecting a cross-curricular instructional approach designed to support students' cognitive, social, and emotional development. Ethical principles guiding educational research were followed throughout the study. Permission for the implementation of the intervention was obtained from the school administration. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed that the activities formed part of a teaching intervention designed to improve classroom learning. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout data collection and reporting. No identifying information was recorded in students' written reflections or observational notes. The study complied with the ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and protection of participants' well-being.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through classroom observation, students' written reflections, and teacher field notes gathered during and after the implementation of the intervention. These qualitative data sources captured students' participation, emotional engagement, interaction patterns, collaboration, and reflective responses throughout the activities.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Recurring patterns related to students' understanding of freedom of expression, respectful communication, and democratic dialogue were identified and categorized. The analysis was iterative and informed by continuous comparison across observational notes, written reflections, and classroom interactions.

2.5 Instructional Approach

The instructional approach was grounded in game-based learning, integrating experiential learning with elements of drama pedagogy and inquiry-based instruction. Play functioned as a central pedagogical tool through structured educational activities designed to promote participation, creativity, collaboration, and deeper understanding. This approach promoted a safe and supportive learning environment in which students could express themselves freely, experiment with ideas, and engage critically with social concepts without fear of failure (Ray, 2022). The intervention adopted a student-centered orientation, with the teacher acting as a facilitator. Students were encouraged to explore ideas, engage in dialogue, express opinions, and negotiate meaning collaboratively, supporting the internalization of democratic values (Freire, 1970). Drama-based activities further enhanced the experiential dimension of learning by engaging students cognitively, emotionally, and physically, allowing them to explore social roles in a safe and reflective environment (Papadopoulos, 2010).

2.6 Trustworthiness of the Study

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. Data triangulation was achieved during and after the implementation of the intervention, through the use of multiple qualitative sources, including classroom observations, teacher field notes, and students' written reflections. Continuous reflection throughout the action research cycle supported the consistency of interpretations. In addition, the convergence of findings across different data sources strengthened the credibility of the results.

2.7 Materials

The materials used during the intervention included printed images, scenario cards, poster paper, scissors, a computer, and a projector.

2.8 Objectives of the Intervention

The intervention aimed to foster students' understanding of freedom of expression as a fundamental democratic value through experiential and game-based learning. It sought to help students recognize that freedom of expression involves both rights and responsibilities. More specifically, the intervention supported the development of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, empathy, and social interaction skills through dialogue, reflection, and cooperative learning activities. These objectives were grounded in experiential learning theory (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984).

3. Procedure

The study was conducted over a three-week period. During the first week, students explored the broader concept of democracy through the Social and Political Education curriculum, specifically within the unit *The European Union and the Individual*. This preparatory phase consisted of the regularly scheduled weekly lesson allocated to the subject and provided the conceptual foundation for the subsequent intervention. During the second week, the experiential and game-based intervention was implemented over two teaching periods, comprising one Social and Political Education lesson and one Skills Workshops lesson. This first phase of the intervention focused on inquiry-based exploration, collaborative discussion, role-play, and reflection. The second phase of the intervention was implemented during the third week through one Skills Workshops lesson focused on reflective consolidation and evaluation of students' learning experiences. This phase aimed to assess students' understanding of the concepts explored and to encourage further reflection on the issues addressed throughout the intervention.

The intervention (phase 1, second week) began with an image-based inquiry activity designed to activate prior experiences and stimulate emotional engagement. Students analyzed contrasting social scenarios and reflected on emotions, fairness, and respectful communication.

In the main phase, students engaged in collaborative discussion and role-play activities exploring authentic school-based scenarios involving freedom of expression. They examined issues of fairness, respect, and communication, and enacted both respectful and disrespectful behaviors.

The intervention concluded with reflective activities, including the *“idea tree”*, and *“idea box (phase 2, third week)”*, which supported metacognitive reflection and consolidation of learning. Formative assessment was integrated throughout the intervention through systematic observation and guiding questions assessing students’ participation and understanding.

3.1 Detailed Presentation of the Activities

Phase 1: Exploring Freedom of Expression through Inquiry, Role-Play, and Reflection (90 minutes)

a. Image-Based Inquiry

At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher presented two images depicting contrasting classroom communication scenarios: one showing a child speaking while peers listened attentively, and another showing a child being ignored or laughed at. Students responded to guided questions such as *“What do you see?”*, *“How does each child feel?”*, and *“How would you feel in a similar situation?”*.

The teacher then introduced the prompt *“Freedom of Expression means...”* and students contributed ideas, which were visually recorded on the board in *“thought bubbles”*. The activity concluded with a guided statement: *“We all have the right to speak, but how can we do so respectfully?”* which framed the subsequent learning process.

b. Group Discussion

Students worked in groups of four, with each group receiving a card describing a scenario involving issues of fairness, inclusion, and communication:

- a) a child expresses an opinion in class, and others laugh,
- b) a child wants to play a different game but is ignored,
- c) a child disagrees with a friend about whether a rule is fair.

Groups discussed guiding questions focusing on interpretation of the situation, evaluation of fairness, and possible resolution strategies (*“What happened in this situation?”*, *“Was the behavior fair or unfair?”*, *“How could the problem be resolved?”*). Each group then shared its conclusions with the class, promoting whole-class dialogue.

c. Role-Play

Students were divided into two groups and engaged in role-play activities based on contrasting behavioral models. One group enacted a scenario involving exclusion or disrespectful communication, while the other reenacted the same situations using respectful dialogue, active listening, and inclusion. Following each enactment, students reflected on differences between the two versions and discussed preferred communication practices. The activity concluded with the co-construction of three

classroom communication norms: listening to others, avoiding interruption, and respecting differing opinions.

d. Reflection and Closure

To conclude the intervention, the teacher wrote the sentence *"Everyone has the right to speak, but..."* on the board. Students were then asked to complete the sentence individually on small pieces of paper using their own ideas and reflections.

A designated classroom area was used to create an *"idea tree."* After completing their statements, students placed their responses on the tree, and the class discussed the ideas collectively. These responses could subsequently be revisited in future lessons in order to reinforce students' understanding and connect the topic with broader thematic areas.

Phase 2: Reflective Consolidation and Evaluation of Students' Learning Experiences (45 minutes)

a. Collaborative Storytelling

Working in newly formed groups, students were asked to create a story with a beginning, middle, and end. In the beginning of the story, characters demonstrated disrespectful behavior and restricted another person's freedom of expression. In the middle, a turning point occurred, while in the end the conflict was resolved through dialogue, empathy, and respectful communication.

b. Reflective Responses ("Idea Box")

Students wrote key ideas or takeaways from the lesson and placed them in an *"idea box."* Selected responses were read aloud by the teacher to reinforce shared learning. Alternatively, students responded to the prompt: *"How would you explain this lesson to an absent classmate?"*

c. Written Student Feedback

Students provided brief written reflections on their learning experience, including what they learned, what they enjoyed, and any aspects they found less engaging. These responses contributed to the overall reflective evaluation of the intervention.

4. Results

The findings indicate that students experienced the intervention positively, demonstrating high levels of engagement, emotional involvement, and active participation throughout the learning process. Evidence from classroom observations, teacher field notes, and students' written reflections consistently showed that the intervention created an inclusive learning environment in which students felt encouraged to express their ideas, collaborate with their peers, and participate actively in classroom activities.

4.1 Students' Experiences of the Intervention (RQ1)

Students' engagement became evident from the beginning of the intervention. Classroom observations showed that most students identified contrasting emotions in the images during the introductory image-based inquiry activity and connected them to personal school experiences. Students interpreted the situations from multiple perspectives during the guided discussion that followed. When asked to complete the phrase "Freedom of expression means...", students provided responses such as *"everyone can speak," "we listen to each other,"* and *"we can say our opinion without being laughed at."* Students described freedom of expression as participation, respectful communication, and emotional safety within the classroom.

Students' active participation continued throughout the collaborative group discussions. Teacher field notes indicated that students worked cooperatively, exchanged ideas respectfully, and demonstrated a willingness to consider alternative viewpoints while discussing authentic classroom scenarios involving disagreement, exclusion, and fairness. Rather than merely identifying inappropriate behaviors, students proposed constructive solutions based on dialogue, empathy, and mutual respect. For example, one group concluded that *"laughing at someone makes them afraid to speak again,"* while another suggested that *"everyone should have a turn to explain what they think before others disagree."* Such responses illustrated students' increasing engagement with the activities and their willingness to participate in collaborative meaning-making.

Classroom observations and teacher field notes consistently indicated particularly high levels of participation during the role-play activities. By dramatizing both negative and positive forms of behavior, students were able to experience the consequences of exclusion, mockery, interruption, and respectful communication. Classroom observations showed that students became fully engaged while enacting both respectful and disrespectful communication scenarios. Observing students actively compared the contrasting performances and openly discussed the emotions experienced by the characters. Several students commented that the "negative version" of the scene felt *"uncomfortable"* and *"unfair,"* whereas the "positive version" was characterized as *"calmer," "friendlier,"* and *"fairer."* Teacher field notes further indicated that students who were usually reluctant to participate during conventional classroom discussions became noticeably more involved during the dramatization activities.

Students' written reflections further illustrated evidence of their positive learning experience. At the conclusion of the intervention, many students completed the sentence *"Everyone has the right to speak, but..."*, expressing ideas such as *"we must listen to others," "everyone deserves respect,"* and *"we should not offend others."* Their reflections also revealed positive attitudes towards the learning process itself. Several students described the activities as *"fun"* and *"interesting,"* while others commented that they *"made us think."* Students explained that they particularly enjoyed the opportunity to work collaboratively and to understand how other people might feel in different situations.

Overall, evidence from the three qualitative data sources indicates that students experienced the intervention as engaging, meaningful, and participatory.

4.2 Students' Development of Respectful Communication and Democratic Dialogue (RQ2)

Students demonstrated a gradual development of respectful communication and democratic dialogue throughout the intervention. Classroom observations and teacher field notes showed that, during collaborative discussions, students increasingly listened to one another, considered alternative viewpoints, and expressed disagreement in constructive ways. Rather than simply identifying inappropriate behaviors, they proposed solutions based on dialogue, empathy, fairness, and mutual respect.

Evidence of this development became particularly visible during the role-play activities.

By enacting contrasting scenarios of respectful and disrespectful communication, students were able to compare the consequences of different forms of interaction and reflect on their impact on classroom relationships. During one role-play scenario in which a student's opinion was ignored, several observers described the situation as *"uncomfortable"* and *"unfair."* After the positive reenactment, one student commented that *"listening means respecting the other person,"* while others emphasized that *"everyone should have a turn to explain what they think before others disagree."*

Teacher field notes further indicated that students gradually adopted more respectful ways of interacting during the activities. They interrupted each other less frequently, demonstrated greater willingness to listen before responding, and increasingly justified their opinions through dialogue rather than confrontation. Students also distinguished more clearly between disagreeing with an opinion and disrespecting the person expressing it.

Overall, the findings indicate that the intervention supported the development of democratic dialogue by encouraging students to communicate respectfully, listen actively, and negotiate different perspectives within a collaborative classroom environment.

4.3 Students' Understanding of Freedom of Expression as a Democratic Value (RQ3)

Students' written reflections and collaborative storytelling demonstrated an increasingly sophisticated understanding of freedom of expression as both a democratic right and a shared responsibility. Their responses suggested that students moved beyond viewing freedom of expression simply as the opportunity to speak, recognizing that it also requires listening to others, showing empathy, and communicating respectfully.

This understanding became evident in the reflective activity in which students completed the sentence *"Everyone has the right to speak, but..."*. Many responses highlighted ideas such as *"we must listen to others,"* *"everyone deserves respect,"* and *"we should not offend others."* These reflections indicated that students associated freedom of expression with responsibility towards others rather than unrestricted self-expression.

Students' collaborative stories provided further evidence of this conceptual development. In most narratives, conflicts caused by exclusion, mockery, or disrespectful communication were resolved through dialogue, cooperation, empathy, and mutual understanding. Rather than presenting conflict as a situation with winners and losers, students proposed solutions based on listening, respect, and collective problem-solving. Across the different sources of qualitative data, students consistently portrayed freedom of expression as a democratic value that combines individual rights with responsibility towards others. Their reflections suggest that the intervention enabled them to connect abstract democratic principles with everyday interpersonal interactions in the classroom.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that the integration of experiential learning, game-based learning, and drama pedagogy can support primary school students in understanding freedom of expression not merely as an individual right, but as a democratic practice grounded in respect, empathy, active listening, and responsibility towards others. Rather than treating freedom of expression as an abstract civic concept, the intervention enabled students to experience it through authentic social interactions in which expressing one's own opinion became inseparable from listening to others, negotiating different perspectives, and participating respectfully in collective dialogue. Across the different phases of the intervention, students gradually moved beyond viewing freedom of expression simply as the opportunity to speak, developing a more relational understanding in which individual rights were consistently connected with respect for the rights, dignity, and participation of others. In this sense, freedom of expression was experienced not as isolated knowledge to be acquired, but as a democratic practice enacted through collaboration, dialogue, and shared classroom experiences. These findings are consistent with experiential (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984), sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978), and critical pedagogical perspectives (Freire, 1970), which emphasize that democratic understanding develops through participation, dialogue, and shared experience.

One possible explanation for these findings lies in the way the intervention transformed democratic concepts into lived classroom experiences. The experiential and game-based design of the intervention created an engaging and emotionally safe learning context in which students were willing to experiment with different perspectives, negotiate ideas, and participate actively in collaborative dialogue. Instead of introducing freedom of expression as a concept to be memorized, the learning activities encouraged students to explore its meaning through authentic situations that enabled them to express opinions, listen to different perspectives, negotiate disagreements, and reflect on the consequences of their interactions. This experiential process appears to have enabled students to construct meaning collaboratively by connecting new knowledge with their own experiences and everyday classroom relationships. Such an interpretation is consistent with experiential learning theory (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984), which emphasizes

that meaningful learning emerges through active engagement, experience, and reflection, as well as with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective, which views knowledge as being co-constructed through dialogue and social interaction. This interpretation is further supported by recent research highlighting that meaningful learning within game-based environments depends on purposeful teacher scaffolding, collaborative interaction, and guided participation (Guan *et al.*, 2024; Sun *et al.*, 2023). Rather than acquiring democratic values through direct instruction, students appeared to develop their understanding by actively participating in democratic practices within the classroom itself.

The findings also highlight the importance of creating classroom environments in which students' voices are not merely encouraged but meaningfully integrated into democratic dialogue. Throughout the intervention, freedom of expression was experienced not simply as the right to speak, but as the ability to express ideas, listen attentively to others, negotiate different perspectives, and participate respectfully in shared decision-making. Students' reflections suggest that they gradually distinguished between expressing disagreement and showing disrespect, recognizing that democratic dialogue requires both the confidence to voice one's own opinion and the willingness to value the perspectives of others. This interpretation resonates with Freire's (1970) conception of dialogue as a reciprocal process through which learners construct knowledge, develop critical consciousness, and participate actively in democratic life. From this perspective, students' voice extends beyond opportunities for individual expression; it becomes a form of democratic participation through which every learner contributes to the collective construction of meaning within the classroom community. This perspective also helps to clarify the broader contribution of the present study. While previous research has largely examined experiential and game-based learning as pedagogical approaches for enhancing student engagement and motivation, considerably less attention has been devoted to understanding how these approaches support the development of democratic understanding within authentic primary classroom contexts. The present findings help address this gap by demonstrating how experiential and game-based pedagogies can foster students' understanding of freedom of expression through dialogue, collaborative inquiry, and shared classroom experiences. These findings have practical implications for primary education, suggesting that democratic values may be taught more effectively when they are embedded within everyday classroom interaction rather than presented solely as theoretical concepts. Creating learning environments in which students feel safe to express their views, listen respectfully to others, and negotiate different perspectives may contribute to more inclusive and collaborative classroom communities. This interpretation is consistent with recent evidence indicating that collaborative learning environments strengthen students' communication, critical thinking, and active participation by engaging them in shared learning processes (Mugabekazi *et al.*, 2025).

Taken together, these findings suggest that experiential and game-based pedagogies may contribute not only to students' understanding of freedom of expression

but also to the broader development of democratic competences that support inclusive participation and respectful coexistence in primary school classrooms. Importantly, students did not engage only at a cognitive level but also emotionally, suggesting that emotional engagement may constitute a key mechanism through which experiential and game-based pedagogies foster democratic understanding in primary education.

6. Limitations and Recommendations

The present study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the intervention was implemented in a single primary school classroom involving a relatively small number of participants, which limits the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. Second, the study examined students' experiences immediately following a short-term intervention; therefore, it cannot determine whether the observed changes in students' understanding of freedom of expression and democratic dialogue would be sustained over time. Finally, the findings are based on qualitative data collected through classroom observations, teacher field notes, and students' written reflections. Although the triangulation of multiple data sources enhanced the credibility of the findings, future research could combine qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the long-term impact of experiential and game-based pedagogies on students' democratic competences across different educational settings.

7. Conclusion

The present study suggests that the integration of experiential learning, game-based learning, and drama pedagogy can support primary school students in experiencing freedom of expression as a democratic practice rather than merely understanding it as a theoretical civic right. By engaging in collaborative inquiry, role-play, and reflective activities, students gradually came to associate freedom of expression with active listening, empathy, respect for different perspectives, and shared responsibility within the classroom community. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on experiential and game-based pedagogies by demonstrating their potential not only to enhance student engagement but also to foster democratic understanding through authentic classroom interaction. More broadly, the study highlights the importance of creating learning environments in which democratic values are experienced through everyday participation, dialogue, and collaboration. Supporting students' voices in such environments may contribute to the development of inclusive classroom communities in which children learn that freedom of expression is inseparable from respect for the rights and dignity of others.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Antigoni Livadi is a primary education teacher and a graduate of the Department of Primary Education at the University of Ioannina, Greece. She has also pursued studies in drama and has experience in artistic and creative learning environments, enriching her educational approach through the integration of arts and performance. Her academic and professional interests focus on experiential and game-based learning, innovative teaching practices, and active learning in primary education. She also has a strong interest in intercultural education and research, promoting inclusive, collaborative, and culturally responsive learning environments that foster students' cognitive, social, and emotional development.

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