

# Views of School Administrators on Civic Education as a Compulsory Subject in Selected Secondary Schools of Kabwe District, Zambia

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**Abstract:** The aim of this research was to explore the views of school administrators on Civic Education as a compulsory subject in selected secondary schools of Kabwe District in Zambia. Methodologically, the study took the qualitative approach. This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants. Data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires and interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. The key findings were that most of the school administrators were in support of Civic Education as a compulsory subject because it gave learners the knowledge on political process and governance system. Civic Education helped learners acquire values commonly accepted by society which facilitated interpersonal relationships and social integration through the creation of awareness for respect, promotion of democracy and human rights. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others that Civic Education should be supported as a compulsory subject by school administrators in secondary schools to actualize the goal of education in Zambia.

## I. BACKGROUND

Civic Education is one of the popular subjects in secondary schools in Zambia. It is a compulsory subject in all the curriculum path ways in Zambian schools (MOGE: 2013). It is expected that through the introduction of Civic Education learners could acquire knowledge and skills that would not only help them with the school life but also with problem solving skills in the communities where these learners come from. This view was also acknowledged by Muleya (2015); Magasu, Muleya and Mweemba (2020a); Magasu (2021); who observed that Civic Education provided opportunities to learners with various skills required to shape their communities.

Civic Education has been found to be fundamental in the transmission of democratic principles and values Biesta (2011); Magasu (2021). Zambia like many other countries has also recognized the significance of Civic Education in preparing democratic citizenship, in order to have Civic Education taught in schools, the Zambian government has made it a compulsory subject at secondary school level. This entails that Civic Education should be designed in a manner that equips the learners with a wide body of necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes required in the community (CDC, 2012). As an important variable in developing a citizen, school administrators should be well informed and

equipped with Civic Education knowledge, values and skills so that they can effectively motivate and encourage the learners.

In the words of Ryan (2015), Civic Education is perceived as a fast-rate instrument for raising civic awareness among the citizens and this gives them an opportunity to cross-examine a variety of challenging and controversial social issues and this can only happen when they have acquired the knowledge to have a deeper understanding things issues confronting society. Halstead and Pike (2008) states that, Civic Education has been taken as a core subject in some western societies such as England which has dedicated 5% of secondary school time to it since 2002. This is an acknowledgement of how Civic Education has become so central and valuable to such communities. Mutch (2005) cited in Sakala (2016) supports the argument by adding that, Civic Education is a means of producing informed, committed, active and democratic citizens. Therefore, Civic Education is the basis for producing citizens who were loyal, accountable, independent, energetic and critical. However it is not clear how Civic Education as a compulsory subject is perceived by the school administrators, this motivated the researcher to explore the views of school administrators towards Civic Education as a compulsory subject in selected secondary schools of Kabwe District of Zambia.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Civic Education has been premised as the basis for producing informed, committed and active citizens (Halstead and Pike, 2008; Magasu, 2021) and has been made a compulsory subject in countries such as England and Zambia. It is expected that through Civic Education, learners can acquire civic knowledge, skills and values. Magasu, Muleya and Mweemba (2020b) added that Civic Education is important in that it creates opportunities and possibilities among the general citizenry to learn how they ought to relate with one another as well as respecting divergent views and supporting each other whenever need arises in the community. However, some teachers have argued that the introduction of Civic Education in secondary schools in Zambia has made learners unruly. The awareness of human rights has made some learners uncontrollable and teachers have been challenged in disciplining ailing learners for fear of violating their rights

(Mainde and Chola, 2020). This motivated the researcher to explore the views of school administrators towards Civic Education as a compulsory subject in selected secondary schools of Kabwe District of Zambia.

### III. METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the study used qualitative research approach, the paradigm which was employed in the study was interpretivism. The researcher also looked at the views held by officials from DEBS, Head teachers, Deputy Head teachers, HODS, and teachers, of which the sample included 4 head teachers, 4 deputy head teachers 4 HODS, 16 teachers and 3 officials from DEBS office making the total sample size of 31 participants. This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. A purposive sampling technique was used. Data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires and interviews then it was analysed using thematic analysis.

### IV. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This section tabulates the Participants' views and understanding of the concept of Civic Education as a compulsory subject in secondary schools. The research question was:

What are the views of school administrators on Civic Education as a compulsory subject in selected secondary schools?

To answer this question, the researcher begun by seeking their understanding of Civic Education as a subject taught at secondary school. One of the participants indicated that;

“For me madam I would define Civic Education as the subject which deals with political, social, economic and cultural affairs”.

Another participant indicated that;

“As for me I would define Civic Education as a dynamic subject that covers real issues of a society and these include among others: political, social, cultural and economic aspects of people and their way of living”

Furthermore, one participant from the District Education Board Secretary's Office (DEBS) had this to say;

“For me madam I would say that Civic Education is the education that provides awareness of the public in civic matters such as governance, politics, work culture, human rights and social-economic activities”.

A Head of Department (HOD) defined Civic Education as a subject which deals with political, social, economic and cultural affairs.

Another HOD defined Civic Education as;

“Civic Education is the acquisition of knowledge about a constitution and the basic democratic

institutions and regulations that citizens should follow in given country”.

Another HOD lamented that;

“To me, I feel Civic Education is a subject that cuts across other subjects”.

On the views of Civic Education as a compulsory subject, one head teacher asserted that;

“I perceive Civic Education as a subject that creates awareness of the need for respect, promotion for democracy, human rights and freedoms. The only challenge is on the topic human rights where they feel children are taught to do what they want.”

Another head teacher had this to say,

“It creates awareness and understanding of the political process. They encourage everyone to have the knowledge on the same subject, especially where decision making is concerned”.

Another head teacher expressed the following views:

“I perceive Civic Education as a living subject, progressive and appreciation of good governance”.

“It is a good subject because it makes pupils to have knowledge of governance issues as well as their wellbeing in the society”.

Another participants further added that;

“I think Civic Education is a nice subject because it helps man to know about his environment and also helps in the way people relate to one another”.

On the contrary, some school administrators seemed not to be in support of Civic Education as a compulsory subject. In this regard three themes emerged; a subject that was not necessary, a subject that was politically inclined and a subject which was merely a passing subject.

#### *i. A subject that was not necessary*

Four (2) participants perceived civic education as a subject that was not necessary and that it had no value in the day to day life of the citizens. The participant further added that the department of social sciences in secondary schools would either teach it or not depending on the availability of teachers in a school at that particular time despite the subject being compulsory.

#### *ii. A Passing Subject*

Two (2) participants viewed Civic Education as an easy subject. Teachers would advise pupils to choose civic education if they wanted to do well and have good marks. This is what one Head of Department said:

“The pass rate in Civic Education was high at grade 12. It is an easy subject”

### iii. Politically Inclined

Two (2) participants from DEBS office perceived Civic education as a subject which was politically inclined. They explained that the subject dealt with current affairs and that it just encouraged pupils to concentrate on their human rights and not them being responsible. This is what was said by one participant:

“School administrators were a bit skeptical with the subject because it opened the eyes of the learners in that, they questioned administrators on the way the school was being run”

When asked if they had anything else to add, most of the participants stressed that Civic Education was a good subject and it had to be made compulsory from Grade 7 to the highest level of education because it looked at things that affected human beings in the society and the country at large.

## V. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

From the findings presented in this study, it was clear that Civic Education could influence the acquisition of political knowledge both directly and indirectly. People could gain knowledge on governance through Civic Education in the classroom and some may retain it over the long term. Particular events, such as taking part in the governance system of a particular school and public policy controversy, may stimulate pupils to recall relevant political facts that were learned in class. This view was consistent with the Zambia Civic Education Association (2004) which argued that, allowing pupils to participate in the governance of schools was their right. It was against this back ground that pupils should be adequately prepared so that they took decisive decisions in life that were centered on democratic values.

Apart from enabling learners to participate in school governance, the study further revealed that, Civic Education had the ability to stimulate interest in political affairs, create a lasting sense of civic duty and encouraging an orientation towards political life that compelled people to be attentive to politics. Thus, Civic Education may be responsible for placing people to encounter and be open to information about the political world long after they leave the classroom. This view was also supported by Muleya, (2015) who asserted that Civic Education is becoming one of the significant areas of study in the school curricula in different countries and it plays an important role in the political development of the pupils. Niemi and Junn (1998) also added that, Civic Education helped to produce and enrich a political knowledgeable citizenry and educates and inspires individuals to be responsible and devoted to the production of good government and the legitimacy of the democratic regime.

Biesta (2011) further asserted that Civic Education leads to a positive school climate. High-quality civic learning teaches the importance of community both within the school

premises and the community at large, it also creates problem solving, encourages teamwork and the importance of diversity. The above view was also in agreement with Magasu et al (2020) who asserted that, Civic Education was important in that it created opportunities and possibilities among the general citizenry to learn how they should relate with one another as well as respecting divergent views and supporting each other whenever need arose in the community. By implication, Civic Education equipped learners with knowledge and skills on fairness and justice, tolerance, respect for individual opinion, respect for the rule of law and fundamental human rights. Furthermore, Civic Education empowered learners to be well informed and play active roles as citizens. This enabled them to protect and support democracy and its processes in order to build a better future and country, every citizen must be involved in every part of the governance process.

This study further revealed that, teachers unanimously understand that the purpose of Civic Education goes beyond transmitting a set of key details about the systems of our nation and their processes; it must also instill the values and skills needed for informed and engaged citizenship. In the words, schools were expected to deal with all learners through Civic Education in such a way as to motivate them and enable them to play their parts as informed, responsible, committed, and effective members of a modern democratic political system.

In this context it is easy to understand why improvement of pupils' behavior is considered the main objective of Civic Education classes for the majority of participants. Relevance given to Civic Education classes could also be perceived through their perception of this subject as an open environment that gives opportunities to learners to talk about issues of their interest.

It was established in the study that, Civic Education created a significant position for the individual within society and provides equal opportunity for learners to realize knowledge, skills and abilities through different specialization and skilled channels. This was also acknowledged by USAID study in 2002 which revealed that Civic Education programs have massive and positive impact on learners in comprehending and practicing key aspects of democratic behaviors and attitudes. This was also supported by Muleya (2015) who argued that Civic Education helped learners to know and identify public policy and increases their political participation through exploring and studying local problems.

From the findings presented in this study, it has been discovered that Civic Education is not only essential to an effective democracy, it also helps in career preparation. Such education is critical preparation for the learner's role as a useful individual who will be grounded in positive attitudes toward work and the law and the ability to work cooperatively with others, especially those from diverse backgrounds, positive work culture, attitude toward obeying

the law and engaging in discussions leading to effective civic action in the community (ZCEA, 2004). Some of the very skills and dispositions desired in 21st century workers are also some of those that prepare competent citizens.

The findings further revealed that, for a nation to lessen risks posed by the dynamic societies and economies, Civic Education should be recognized as a curriculum in all levels of schools. It should be used as a tool to increase effective participation in society and also increase political awareness. With skills and knowledge acquired in class, learners grow into better citizens with capacities to support and protect democracy and understand the roles of different organs, their rights and responsibilities.

The school curriculum should be analyzed in a way that fosters a better understanding of fairness and participation through integrated ways. This seems to be the case with Civic Education. It should ensure the importance of Civic Education is relevant and recognized by learners and teachers. The lessons in class should encourage the learners to talk of stories they witness in their societies in order to find best methods of solving issues in their societies. CCE (1994), also acknowledges that, there is a strong correlation between conditions for effective learning and these standards. The mentioned environment is also the best place for school administrators, policy makers and teachers to exercise the principles of democracy in practice and link them into learners' everyday life. Nevertheless, learners should not only be taught the basics of knowledge of their democratic systems, but also made to understand the historical and social background about the system.

From the foregoing discussion, this study should motivate school administrator to advocate for use active teaching methods in Civic Education by teachers and this enables the pupils to develop interest in the subject and it also enables to Civic Education learners to take part or participate in the governance system at school level and also at the national level and this in turn would make their school administrators happy as a result, their perception towards Civic Education maybe changed.

The findings established that most of the school administrators have a positive view of Civic Education, as their opinions are generally consistent with the positive statements obtained from interviews. We can associate this concept of Civic Education with the fact that more than 80% of the participants were in support of Civic Education as it is being regarded as a compulsory subject. There is also evidence of an excessive domination of Civic Education spaces and times on school life matters over other important activities for effective implementation of Civic Education goals. Civic Education is considered a very useful area because its contribution is recognized as effective for the regulation of the problems of authority, discipline and in some cases, of learning. On the other hand, the development of this compulsory subject does not generally follow a strategy of

citizenship education in its various aspects and is very conditioned by class management demands they would continue to attend lesson even if this subject were no longer compulsory.

Civic Education ought to take the center stage in our Zambian school curriculum this is to ensure that the citizens especially those who complete school are aware of their roles and duties in society. Civic Education would also help Zambian citizens to make positive contributions to the affairs of the state, having mentioned this in an interview, one would say that Civic Education is a good subject which has to be handled with importance.

From the findings presented in this study, it has been discovered that, support from school administrators is needed in order to enhance the teaching of Civic Education in secondary schools. In speaking with teachers involved in the study, we learnt that they need one thing from their administrators and school boards and that is support. Occasionally, it is financial support for professional conferences, field trips, technology or materials. More often, it is support to pursue programs that engage learners in civic action in the community. It is support when the teachers try new teaching methods or assessments. It is support when the students' activities stimulate community interest or, even questioning. Administrators and school board members who understand the need for informed and responsible citizens will educate themselves about the importance of having civic dispositions and they will be prepared to offer support to their teachers.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the general picture was that school administrators were in support and welcomed the introduction of Civic Education as a compulsory subject in secondary schools in Zambia. The administrators viewed Civic Education as a subject that promoted democracy and civic engagement. It equipped the learners with relevant knowledge, skills and values. Furthermore, school administrators viewed Civic Education as a subject that guided and inspired learners to their responsibilities and human rights as they interacted with one another and government institutions.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following are the recommendations;

- ✓ School administrators should support Civic Education as a compulsory subject to actualize the goals of education in Zambia and among them, to serve individual, social and economic wellbeing and to enhance the quality of life for all.
- ✓ Civic education should be taught at the early grades when children are still young hence it should be

made a compulsory subject from Grade 7 to secondary school level.

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