Civic Education: A Panacea for Moral Decadence among Learners in Secondary Schools of Lusaka Province in Zambia

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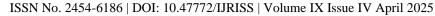
ABSTRACT

This study explored the potential of Civic Education as a solution to moral decadence among secondary school learners in Lusaka Province, Zambia. Grounded in Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, the research examined how individuals progress from basic obedience to complex moral reasoning. The increasing indiscipline and unethical behavior among students have raised serious concerns among parents, teachers, school administrators, and government authorities. Using purposive sampling, 77 participants were selected, and data were thematically analyzed based on the study's objectives. The findings revealed that although Civic Education is not always effectively taught, it holds significant potential to address moral decline. When implemented properly, the subject can promote ethical behavior, foster moral development, and encourage students to become responsible and informed citizens. Furthermore, the study found that Civic Education serves as a motivational tool that encourages learners to adopt positive values and actively participate in society. It was also observed that Civic Education strengthens students' self-esteem and moral consciousness, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to engage responsibly in civic life. Based on these findings, the study recommends stronger collaboration between schools and parents to raise awareness of the dangers of moral decadence and prioritize support for learners displaying deviant behavior. It also calls on the Ministry of Education to conduct regular workshops and training programs for Civic Education teachers. Such initiatives would enhance teachers' skills and improve the effectiveness of Civic Education as a means of fostering moral growth among learners.

Keywords: Civic Education, Morals, Values, Moral Decadence, Moral Education, Zambia

BACKGROUND

It should be noted that this article is based on one of the objectives of my doctoral thesis and therefore the information that is provided for in the article is coming from the evidence that the participants provided during the study. Moral values in secondary schools of Lusaka Province are in a state of collapse where examination malpractices, drug abuse, indecent dressing, lack of respect for authority, promiscuity and many others are exhibited by the students. According to Phiri (2016), there has been an increase of pupil indiscipline in secondary school from the time corporal punishment was abolished in 2003. Phiri (2016), cites rising cases of vandalism, bullying, absconding from classes, drug abuse, promiscuity, abusive language and indecent dressing. It is believed that Civic Education which has problem- solving approaches, if properly taught could go a long way to promote the acquisition of moral values among students and eventually reduce moral decadence. In the meantime, tackling moral decadence necessitates initiatives that support moral consciousness, moral conduct, and character development among learners. By teaching responsible citizenship, moral reasoning, and the installation of values, Civic Education can help combat these immoral activities among learners.

Magasu, Muleya Mweemba (2020), and others have noted that Civic Education is a subject that has attracted significant interest among scholars in the 21st Century. In this article we argue that a variety of teaching methods should be embraced in the teaching of Civic Education in secondary schools if its full contribution to the education sector is to be appreciated. For example, Akinola (2011) stressed further that effective Civic Education is needed to build responsible citizens among the youth. In order to address significant social concerns facing the learners in secondary schools, Civic Education was introduced and the subject made compulsory in order to combat moral decay among secondary school learners. Its importance and efficacy in fostering moral rectitude,

ethical principles and responsible citizenship have been emphasized by earlier research (Jekayinfa, Mofoluwawo, & Oladiran. (2011), Okwenu & Anyacho, 2005). Civic Education is also required to develop in learners those values and skills that will make learners to be responsible in life. In the light of the facts stated above, Adatrow & Omiyefa (2011) advocated for the inculcation of the right kind of values through effective Civic Education. Social- cultural values, civic virtues have faded away among the learners and as such, they imbibe and exhibit all forms of immorality. Civic Education which is the education that is concerned with the study of rights and duties of the citizens.

Additionally, Agu (2010) notes that it is necessary to visit the process of inculcation of Civic or Citizenship Education in primary and secondary schools in the face of the lost positive values in the human environment which have taken a worrisome dimension and if care is not taken, the long-term effects of moral decadence on the entire human race will be more injurious. Moreover, Civic Education, imparts societal ideas which contribute to the sense of value among the learners. Our Schools need learners whose social values are seen as measures of goodness or desirability. However, in ensuring that Civic Education promotes moral values among learners in secondary schools, the mode of instruction needs to be changed from the traditional talk – and – chalk teacher – centred than student – oriented activities and technique of teaching, while education strategies in Civic Education or learning should not focus solely on the academic achievements of the learners.

In other words, Civic Education is a subject that has the capacity to produce responsible citizens who will be conscious of the need for moral uprightness which is an important element in life. We also can argue that among the subjects that are specifically designed to reintegrate and re – orient individuals is Civic Education. Therefore, it can be said that Civic Education provides an important possibility for the inculcation of moral values in learners in secondary schools in Zambia. This is in line with the revised curriculum of 2013 and the civic education curriculum where teachers have been encouraged to use student learner- centred methods that can enhance the development of moral values in learners. The study also found out that moral values are essential needs of individuals, family and the society. They can be rated as the embodiment of good traits such as responsibility, reliability, honesty, obedience, faithfulness, trustfulness, decadency plus discipline. We can argue that values are positive ways of life of people that promote their qualities as individuals. Scholars such as Nackpodia (2010) notes that values are those aspects of cultural practices that are cherished with high esteem in the society. Ezegbe (2012) argues that values are the attitudes an individual or the society holds with respect to worth or desirability. In the same vein, Okafor (2004) describes values as what determines a whole lot of conducts, attitudes and predispositions of human being. The implication of this is that, Civic Education equips the individuals with the knowledge, understanding and skills to play active roles in the society and enable to have citizens who are morally and socially responsible. In his study, Olayiwola (2013) submitted that values can be good or bad depending on what the society cares about. What this means is that values that are good in one society could be bad values in another. For schools to have learners who are morally upright, there is need to have Civic Education which is actively taught. A good education is one that does not only produce learners who are academically intelligent but also morally intelligent. Students are said to be moral if they have moral awareness, that is, they can judge good from bad things.

Essentially, the outcome-based learning adopted in the revised curriculum authenticates Civic Education as a subject that can redirect the story of immoral learners in secondary schools in Zambia. If students of Civic Education are not motivated to take part in the learning process, Civic Education will not be appreciated as such its role to inculcate moral values in learners will be lacking. What will be prominent in our secondary schools in Zambia will be learners who will be irresponsible in life. So, in assessing Civic dispositions in the classroom, teachers should ascertain how far learners have learnt and are capable of exhibiting civic values. It is from this background that the study has been done to explore Civic Education's potential as a panacea for moral decadence among learners in secondary schools of Lusaka province in Zambia.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Kohlberg's (1975) theory of moral development, which explores how individuals— particularly children—develop ethical reasoning and a sense of morality. Kohlberg outlines six progressive stages of moral development, beginning with obedience to authority and evolving toward a principled understanding based on social contracts, individual rights, and universal ethical principles. Central to his theory

is the notion that moral development is a lifelong process through which individuals learn to distinguish right from wrong and apply moral reasoning in complex social contexts.

Okwenu and Anyacho (2005) affirm this perspective, suggesting that Civic Education serves as a viable platform for nurturing moral values. Through structured learning, learners acquire the beliefs, habits, and attitudes esteemed by society, equipping them to function as responsible and effective citizens. Civic Education, therefore, is not merely informative but transformative, fostering the moral and civic capacities of young learners.

As learners progress through moral development, Civic Education plays a vital role in equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to participate meaningfully in democratic society. The Citizenship Education Foundation (2012) emphasizes the need for active, participatory methods—such as discussion and role-play—to effectively instill these values.

Given its alignment with the principles of Kohlberg's theory, this framework supports the integration of learner-centred approaches in teaching Civic Education, particularly in secondary schools. Akinola (2011) further argues that effective Civic Education cultivates critical thinking and nurtures responsible citizenship. It develops the essential traits—morals, knowledge, skills, and societal values—that are expected of engaged, ethical citizens.

In sum, the theory of moral development provides a solid foundation for understanding how Civic Education can shape learners into morally responsible, critically engaged, and socially conscious individuals.

METHODOLOGY

This study involved 77 participants from four purposively selected secondary schools in Lusaka Province—Schools A, B, C, and D—chosen for their historical significance as early implementers of Civic Education in Zambia. Among the participants were 40 pupils, 20 Civic Education teachers, 4 head teachers, 12 parents, and 1 official from the Zambia Civic Education Association (ZCEA). The sample comprised 41 males and 36 females. A qualitative, descriptive case study design guided the research. Participants were identified using purposive sampling techniques to ensure relevance and depth of insight. Data collection tools included interview guides for teachers, head teachers, parents, and the ZCEA official, while focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with pupils. Audio recordings and transcripts were carefully reviewed to gain a comprehensive understanding.

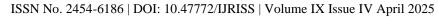### Coding Process and Thematic Development

Thematic analysis was undertaken following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. After transcription, data familiarization was conducted, followed by systematic coding using NVivo software. Codes were then grouped into categories reflecting recurring ideas, which were subsequently refined into overarching themes such as: Civic Education and Character Formation, Curricular Constraints, and Stakeholder Roles. This iterative approach ensured conceptual clarity and thematic saturation.

Ethical Protocols

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Zambia's Institutional Review Board. Informed consent was secured from all participants, with particular care for student participants by obtaining additional consent from guardians. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured by using coded identifiers. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings on the exploration of the potential of Civic Education as a panacea for moral decadence among learners in Secondary Schools in Zambia. The information has been presented using verbatim transcriptions derived from interviews and FGDs, and in line with the research objectives. Application of Civic Education as a panacea for moral decadence in learners. How is Civic Education a panacea for moral decadence among learners in Secondary Schools in Zambia?

Civic Education as a Foundation for Moral Development

Participants consistently emphasized that Civic Education plays a critical role in shaping the moral compass of learners. One teacher remarked:

> "Civic Education equips learners with the moral compass they need. It's not just about passing exams—it's about forming character." (Teacher, School A)

This aligns with Kohlberg's (1975) theory of moral development, which posits that education can guide individuals through stages of moral reasoning, moving from obedience to internalized principles of justice and rights. By fostering this progression, Civic Education helps learners develop into morally conscious citizens.

Similarly, a parent noted:

> "Those who take Civic Education seriously behave differently at home—they're more respectful, more thoughtful." (Parent, School C)

This supports Okwenu and Anyacho's (2005) assertion that Civic Education helps in developing learners' values and attitudes cherished by society.

Learner-Centred Instruction and Value Acquisition

Multiple participants stressed the importance of participatory teaching methods for effective value transmission. For instance:

> "We need to rethink our methods. Learners must be at the centre. Discussions, scenarios, and role plays make them connect with the values personally." (Teacher, School C)

This view resonates with the Citizenship Education Foundation (2012), which recommends active learning strategies in Civic Education, such as role-play and group discussions, to foster deeper moral engagement. These approaches are known to enhance learners' critical thinking and empathy (Banks, 2008).

> "In Civic Education, we learn about respect, rights, and responsibilities... It helps us think before we act." (Pupil, School B)

Such reflections affirm Butts' (1988) proposition that moral and civic education should not only impart knowledge but also instill desirable traits.

Civic Education as a Response to Moral Decadence

Participants across categories expressed concern over rising moral indiscipline in schools:

> "Discipline issues are on the rise because we've moved away from moral grounding. Civic Education is our best bet now." (Head Teacher, School B)

The teacher's insight echoes Magasu (2020), who warns that producing academically competent but morally deficient students risks the future of any nation. This concern is also evident in the observation by a parent:

> "We entrust schools with our children's future—not just academically, but morally too." (Parent, School A)

Research supports this concern. Moral decadence, if unchecked, can lead to a breakdown of societal cohesion (Durkheim, 1956). Civic Education, when properly delivered, is capable of curbing such trends by nurturing socially responsible and ethical citizens (Akinola, 2011).

Institutional and Curriculum Challenges

Despite its potential, several participants highlighted challenges in the current implementation of Civic

Education:

> "Moral values are often sidelined due to exam pressure. We need space and support to make value education a central focus again." (Civic Education Teacher, School D)

> "Civic Education is taught for the purpose of exam excellence. Moral values are mentioned briefly, if at all." (Teacher, School C)

These concerns reflect structural limitations within the curriculum. As noted by Magasu (2020), the emphasis on certification over character education undermines the moral purpose of schooling. An overloaded curriculum limits the effective teaching of values, thereby weakening Civic Education's transformative power.

Empowerment and Personal Growth

Learners themselves testified to the liberating and empowering nature of Civic Education:

> "I used to think Civic Education was boring, but now I see it helps us understand life better… it's about how to live right." (Pupil, School D)

> "Civic Education gives learners opportunities to use acquired social and moral insights to make appropriate decisions in a rapidly changing society." (Focus Group Summary)

This perspective supports the idea that Civic Education facilitates the holistic development of learners—not just intellectually, but morally and socially (UNESCO, 2015). It also aligns with the goals of education for sustainable development, which emphasizes values such as respect, responsibility, and civic engagement.

DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Civic Education is more than a curriculum subject—it is a transformative force with the potential to reshape individuals and, by extension, societies. As Okwenu and Anyacho (2005) observe, Civic Education instills in learners the ideas, habits, beliefs, and attitudes cherished by society, nurturing them to become responsible, effective, and engaged citizens. This form of education is both moral and practical, equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, and values required to make ethical decisions, participate meaningfully in civic life, and uphold the integrity of democratic processes.

Recent global discourse echoes this position. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) distinguish between three types of citizenship that Civic Education should promote: personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented. The most impactful Civic Education, they argue, is one that prepares learners not only to follow rules but also to engage critically with societal issues and challenge injustice when necessary.

Essentially, Civic Education is not limited to cognitive development; it is a life-shaping discipline that cultivates societal norms, critical reflection, and civic virtues. As Muleya (2015) contends, Civic Education should not merely transmit knowledge but must also encourage learners to engage with real-life societal issues. Teaching that lacks community relevance or moral introspection, he argues, fails to serve the transformative goals of Civic Education. Thus, educators must adopt reflective, learner-centred pedagogies that go beyond rote learning and theoretical abstraction. By engaging learners in discussions, inquiry, and scenario-based problem-solving, Civic Education becomes a platform for character development and moral reasoning (Grunshka, McLeod, & Reynolds, 2005).

This aligns with UNESCO's (2015) advocacy for Global Citizenship Education (GCED), which promotes a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity. GCED stresses values like empathy, solidarity, and respect for diversity—key components of moral education.

However, the study established that current pedagogical approaches to Civic Education in Zambia's secondary schools are largely theoretical and teacher-centred. Moral instruction is often superficial, confined to textbook definitions rather than critical, context-based engagement. The lack of practical and affective teaching

strategies—such as value clarification, cooperative learning, role-plays, and the use of multimedia tools—limits the potential of Civic Education to serve as an incubator for ethical and socially responsible behaviour. As Banks (2017) affirms, without culturally responsive and interactive teaching, Civic Education risks becoming irrelevant in the lives of learners.

Nonetheless, the ideal of Civic Education remains clear: to produce morally upright and socially responsible learners. Shetu (2011) notes that Civic Education fosters knowledge, responsibility, and civic competence, allowing learners to participate ethically and meaningfully in national development. Similarly, Ekwonwa (2010) and Akinola (2011) argue that the subject cultivates values aligned with national goals, empowering learners to confront and resolve societal challenges.

Torney-Purta et al. (2011), through findings from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), confirmed that students exposed to participatory and values-based Civic Education were more likely to express trust in democratic institutions and resist antisocial behaviours. This underscores the critical role that Civic Education plays in safeguarding against moral collapse, encouraging learners to reject vices such as drug abuse, academic dishonesty, and gender-based violence.

According to Oyawale (2012), Civic Education fosters patriotism, social cohesion, and ethical awareness by helping learners contextualize their identities within a broader social and political landscape. Through such awareness, students learn to recognize their rights, fulfill their responsibilities, and build a sense of solidarity with others. Moreover, the curriculum promotes core ethical principles—honesty, respect, diligence, and fairness—that are foundational to moral character and social trust (Adesina & Adeyemi, 2008; Mangal & Mangal, 2011).

The findings of this study suggest that Civic Education in Zambia has arrived at a critical juncture—an era marked by increasing moral relativism and erosion of traditional values. When well taught, the subject has the capacity to redirect learners' moral compass and cultivate responsible citizenship. Indeed, education must be both intellectually enriching and morally instructive. As Grandiner (2002) reminds us, moral values are the backbone of holistic education, providing the ethical lens through which learners distinguish right from wrong and navigate complex social environments.

From the FGDs conducted, it emerged that students exposed to value-oriented Civic Education become more confident, compassionate, and critically aware. These students are better positioned to resist negative peer pressure, engage constructively with others, and contribute positively to the social fabric. Moral values not only shape individual behaviour but also influence how students relate to their peers, teachers, and the wider community. Without exposure to effective Civic Education, learners are unlikely to develop the sense of agency needed for responsible decision-making (Magasu, 2020; Muleya, 2019).

Furthermore, schools must collaborate with families and community organizations to foster holistic moral development. The school, alongside the home, remains a critical arena for shaping the moral and emotional well-being of learners. Hamre and Pianta (2001) emphasize that quality teacher-student relationships significantly impact both academic and socio-emotional outcomes. This is reinforced by Goleman (2019), who links emotional intelligence to moral behaviour, social awareness, and academic achievement. Thus, Civic Education—when integrated with emotional learning—can enhance not only moral awareness but also learners' personal efficacy and academic resilience.

Despite the presence of subjects such as Religious Education and Guidance and Counselling, moral decadence continues to rise in Zambian schools, manifesting in drug abuse, promiscuity, cheating, and violence. This suggests a pedagogical and systemic failure in moral instruction. It is within this context that this study explored Civic Education's potential as a moral corrective, particularly in secondary schools across Lusaka Province.

Falade and Adelekan (2010) argue that introducing Civic Education can strengthen national values and prepare students to contribute meaningfully to society. The Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (2013) also recognizes Civic Education as a critical subject for promoting critical thinking, ethical conduct, and participatory citizenship. Through it, students learn to understand and analyse the consequences of immoral behaviours and are guided toward ethical alternatives.

The Novelty of the Study

What sets this study apart is its contextual grounding and practical emphasis. While many studies on moral education have focused on abstract ideals or philosophical interpretations, this research brings the discussion into the real-world classroom experience in Zambian secondary schools. It uniquely frames Civic Education as an actionable remedy for moral decay, providing evidence from learners, educators, and parents to support its claims. The study bridges a critical gap by linking pedagogical practices to moral outcomes, emphasizing practical teaching approaches and community engagement as essential tools for value transmission.

Furthermore, the study contributes novel insights into how Civic Education can intersect with emotional intelligence and social dynamics to foster ethical decision-making among learners. In doing so, it proposes Civic Education not merely as a subject, but as a nation-building tool, vital for raising a generation of responsible, empathetic, and critically-minded citizens. This reconceptualization positions Civic Education at the centre of Zambia's moral regeneration efforts and contributes to broader discourses on education for sustainable development and social justice in Africa.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the escalating issue of moral decadence among learners in secondary schools in Zambia demands immediate and sustained attention. It is not merely a peripheral concern, but a fundamental challenge that threatens the ethical fabric and social coherence of future generations. Addressing this problem should be considered a national priority, and education—widely acknowledged as a powerful agent for individual and societal transformation—must be at the forefront of this moral reconstruction.

Civic Education, in particular, holds immense promise as a strategic and transformative tool in this endeavor. It offers more than academic instruction; it shapes attitudes, instills values, and fosters a deep sense of personal and communal responsibility. When delivered effectively, Civic Education empowers students with critical thinking skills, moral reasoning, and the capacity to make informed and principled decisions in the face of social pressures and ethical dilemmas.

This study affirms that for Civic Education to meaningfully counteract moral decline, it must be implemented through comprehensive, value-driven pedagogies and sustained stakeholder collaboration. Teachers, school administrators, parents, policymakers, and community leaders must work in concert to ensure that Civic Education is not only taught, but lived and modelled within the learning environment.

Among all the subjects in the secondary school curriculum, Civic Education uniquely positions itself as the cornerstone for re-integrating and re-orienting learners in moral reflection and ethical behaviour. It challenges students to reflect on societal values, fosters critical engagement with their roles as citizens, and nurtures a commitment to justice, responsibility, and integrity. The study, therefore, underscores that the future of Zambia's moral landscape depends significantly on how Civic Education is conceived, taught, and supported as a pillar for character formation and national development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the role of Civic Education in addressing moral decadence among secondary school learners in Zambia:

Continuous Evaluation of Civic Education Programmes:

There is a pressing need for systematic evaluation and monitoring of Civic Education programmes to determine their effectiveness in achieving intended objectives, particularly in shaping moral character and ethical awareness among learners. Regular assessments should be conducted to identify gaps, refine pedagogical strategies, and ensure that the curriculum remains relevant and impactful.

Capacity-Building for Civic Education Teachers:

Targeted professional development through workshops and training sessions should be organized for Civic

Education teachers. These platforms would enhance their pedagogical competencies, equipping them with innovative and value-based teaching methodologies tailored to promote moral reasoning and ethical behavior among learners.

Development of Indigenous and Quality Teaching Materials:

Teachers of Civic Education should be encouraged and supported to develop contextually relevant, high-quality instructional materials that resonate with the moral and cultural realities of Zambian society.

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