

Civic Education in Zambian Secondary Schools through the Lens of Competency-Based Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review explores the implementation of Civic Education within Zambia's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), synthesizing insights from recent empirical studies, government reports, and scholarly analyses. It examines key dimensions including curriculum design, teacher preparedness, learner engagement, and institutional support. Findings indicate that while the CBC framework holds significant promises for advancing civic learning and fostering active citizenship, its effectiveness is constrained by limited teacher training and inconsistent assessment practices. The review concludes with targeted recommendations aimed at strengthening Civic Education delivery and enhancing its role in cultivating informed, responsible, and participatory citizens.

Key words: Civic Education, Teaching Strategies, Competence Based Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Civic Education is widely recognized as a cornerstone of democratic societies, playing a vital role in cultivating informed, responsible and engaged citizens. It equips learners with the essential knowledge, skills and values required to actively participate in civic life, contribute to public discourse, and uphold democratic principles (Chanda, 2023). In the Zambian context, the integration of Civic Education as a compulsory subject within the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) reflects a significant pedagogical shift. This transition from traditional outcomes-based education to a learner-centred approach aims to foster deeper understanding, critical thinking and practical application of civic concepts among students. The CBC framework emphasizes the development of competencies that are not only academic but also social and ethical, aligning with the broader goals of national development and democratic consolidation.

This review systematically analyzes the teaching and implementation of Civic Education within Zambia's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), drawing on insights from prior research and comparative experiences in similar educational reform contexts. It investigates the extent to which curriculum design, instructional strategies, and assessment practices support or impede the development of civic competencies among learners. Additionally, the review reflects on the broader implications for educational policy, particularly in relation to teacher preparedness and the effective integration of civic learning across the curriculum.

Historical Overview of Civic Education Teaching in Zambia

Following Zambia's independence, Civic Education was initially included among the subjects taught at the secondary school level (Mainde, 2018). However, Kaumba and Mupeta (2023) noted that, during President Kenneth Kaunda's administration, the teaching of Civic Education at senior secondary and university levels was discontinued. This decision stemmed from concerns that an informed citizenry, equipped with civic knowledge and skills might challenge the prevailing one-party participatory democracy. The suppression of Civic Education reflected broader efforts to limit political dissent and maintain centralized control over civic discourse.

In 2006, Civic Education was reintroduced into Zambia's senior secondary school curriculum, marking a significant shift in educational policy (Chondoka, 2010 and Musonda et al., 2024). This reinstatement followed

a successful pilot project, which demonstrated promising outcomes in the 2005 national examinations (Muleya, 2015 and Kaumba & Mupeta, 2023). The rationale behind this reintroduction was to equip school leavers with the civic knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to navigate and engage with issues in a multi-party democratic society. By fostering civic competence, the renewed emphasis on Civic Education aimed to support Zambia's democratic consolidation and promote active and informed participation among its youth.

In the 2023 National Education Curriculum Framework, Civic Education was designated as a compulsory subject across all secondary school pathways. This inclusion underscores the government's commitment to fostering civic competence among learners at a formative stage. But what does teaching Civic Education under the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) truly entail? According to Magasu et al. (2025), it involves guiding learners to become active, responsible, and informed citizens through a hands-on, participatory, and values-driven approach. The CBC emphasizes practical engagement, ethical reasoning, and learner-centred pedagogy, positioning Civic Education not merely as a subject, but as a transformative tool for democratic development.

Despite Zambia's progressive shift toward a Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), the effective delivery of Civic Education in secondary schools continues to face significant challenges. The transition from traditional content-based instruction to a competency-driven model has revealed critical gaps, particularly in teacher preparedness. Many secondary school educators lack sufficient training in CBC pedagogy, especially in implementing experiential and learner-centered approaches that Civic Education demands (Chanda, 2023; Musonda et al., 2024; Magasu et al., 2025). The curriculum's emphasis on competencies such as critical thinking, civic engagement, and ethical behavior (Kaumba & Mupeta, 2023) necessitates instructional strategies that move beyond rote learning.

However, the strategies used in teaching Civic Education are inconsistently applied due to limited professional development opportunities, inadequate institutional support, and resistance to pedagogical change. Without targeted interventions, the transformative potential of the CBC may be compromised, leaving learners ill-equipped with the civic competencies essential for active and ethical participation in Zambia's democratic society. Through a systematic review, this study examines the status of Civic Education within the CBC framework, evaluates prevailing pedagogical practices, and proposes evidence-based strategies to strengthen its implementation in secondary schools.

Civic Education In Zambia's Cbc

Zambia has transitioned from an Outcome-Based Curriculum to a Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), placing emphasis on learners' ability to demonstrate specific learning outcomes as the core of the educational process (Magasu et al., 2025). This shift reflects a broader pedagogical reform aimed at fostering practical skills, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. The 2023 National Policy on Education, titled *Education for Sustainability*, articulates the overarching goal of education as enabling learners to acquire knowledge, competencies, positive values, and attitudes that contribute to an improved quality of life (MoE, 2023). This policy serves as a strategic framework for cultivating 21st-century skills across all educational levels, aligning with Zambia's long-term developmental aspirations.

Civic Education is one of the four principal subjects in Zambia's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), designed to cultivate responsible, active, and informed citizens. It prioritizes the development of practical skills, values, and attitudes essential for democratic participation, good governance, human rights, and national unity (MoE, 2023). To achieve these objectives, the subject adopts learner-centred and activity-based teaching strategies that foster critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and meaningful community engagement. In order to fully appreciate the significance of Civic Education within the CBC framework, this study explores three thematic areas that form the foundation for its compulsory inclusion in the curriculum.

Imparting Civic Competences

Civic Education in Zambia's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) imparts civic competences by equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, values and positive attitudes necessary for active citizenship (MoE, 2023). It emphasizes understanding of democratic principles, human rights and national responsibilities (Mainde, et al.,

2022), while promoting critical thinking, ethical decision-making and community participation (Kaumba and Mupeta, 2023). Among its expected outcomes as recorded by Chanda (2023) and Musonda, et al., (2024), Civic Education exists to empower and equip learners with knowledge and skills necessary in fostering good characters as members of society. Civic Education enhances social-cultural values by inducting learners into societal practices leading to increased awareness of common norms of their community (Simushi, et al., 2025). This enhances engagement in civic duties and creating mind of tolerance in embracing diverse perspectives.

Civic Education within Zambia's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) plays a pivotal role in developing civic competences by equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes essential for active and responsible citizenship (MoE, 2023). It emphasizes a deep understanding of democratic principles, human rights, and national responsibilities (Mainde et al., 2022), while fostering critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and meaningful community participation (Kaumba & Mupeta, 2023). As highlighted by Chanda (2023) and Musonda et al. (2024), one of the key outcomes of Civic Education is to empower learners with the capacity to cultivate good character and contribute positively to society.

Moreover, Musonda et al. (2024) suggest that Civic Education plays a pivotal role in reinforcing socio-cultural values by immersing learners in community practices. This engagement deepens their understanding of shared norms and traditions, fostering a stronger sense of civic responsibility (Ningsih, et al., 2025). This engagement not only enhances participation in civic responsibilities but also fosters a mindset of tolerance and openness to diverse perspectives—an essential trait in a pluralistic democratic society.

Holistic Development of Learners

Mahmoudi (2012) describes the aim of education as nurturing well-rounded individuals through the integration of cognitive, emotional, social, and ethical development. In alignment with this vision, Civic Education fosters these dimensions by cultivating critical thinking, collaboration, and active citizenship. It equips learners to thrive both personally and within their communities, thereby contributing to personal and national development (MoE, 2023). In the context of Zambia's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), holistic development through Civic Education can be effectively achieved using learner-centered and activity-based instructional strategies. According to Sankar (2025), holistic education emphasizes active learning, interdisciplinarity, lifelong learning, and the development of soft skills in each learner.

Aware of Life-Threatening Vices

The 2023 Curriculum Framework outlines 17 cross-cutting issues that Civic Education in secondary schools is tasked with addressing (MoE, 2023). Through this subject, learners are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to understand and respond to societal challenges, as articulated in the national education policy, ultimately mitigating the effects of ignorance. These cross-cutting and emerging issues represent critical national concerns that impact the well-being of citizens, the stewardship of natural resources, and environmental sustainability. As such, integrating these concerns across all levels of the education system is essential for fostering informed and responsible citizenship.

Cross-cutting themes and emerging issues have been integrated into Civic Education to help learners develop a mindset geared toward responsible living and protection from life-threatening vices (MoE, 2023). As a foundational subject, Civic Education promotes responsible citizenship by fostering awareness, empathy, and proactive engagement with critical societal challenges, both positive and negative. To support this, teachers are encouraged to create safe and inclusive learning environments where students can examine the consequences of harmful behaviors, reflect on core values, and build the skills necessary to make responsible choices and encourage positive conduct within and beyond the classroom.

Embrace Patriotism and National Unity

Promoting patriotism and national unity is a central objective of Civic Education within Zambia's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) at the secondary school level. This subject is designed not only to impart knowledge but also to shape learners' attitudes and values toward their country. According to Mainde et al. (2022), Civic

Education instills in learners a deep sense of love for their nation, respect for national symbols such as the flag, anthem, and coat of arms, and a strong commitment to contributing meaningfully to national development. By engaging with content that emphasizes Zambia's diverse cultural heritage, students are encouraged to appreciate and celebrate differences, thereby fostering unity in diversity. Moreover, Civic Education promotes peaceful coexistence by teaching conflict resolution, mutual respect, and the importance of dialogue in addressing societal issues (Mainde, 2018). Through this process, learners develop a shared sense of identity and civic responsibility, which are essential for building a cohesive and resilient society.

Fostering patriotism and national unity in the classroom can be effectively achieved through deliberate instructional strategies such as teaching national symbols and history, promoting appreciation for cultural diversity, organizing patriotic events, and facilitating open discussions on national identity and responsible citizenship (Simushi, et al., 2025). These approaches nurture in learners a sense of national pride and a deep commitment to peaceful coexistence within their communities. As students internalize these values and historical narratives, they are more likely to actively participate in efforts that promote unity and social cohesion. Magasu, et al., (2020) contend that Civic Education serves as a vital platform for experiential learning, encouraging critical thinking and the practical application of civic principles beyond the confines of the classroom. By engaging with real-world issues and reflecting on their roles as citizens, learners are empowered to become proactive contributors to national development and unity.

Teaching Strategies and Assessments

Effective implementation of Civic Education within Zambia's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) requires a classroom environment that supports interactive and participatory teaching methods. To achieve this, educators must adopt learner-centered strategies that actively engage students in meaningful civic learning experiences. Techniques such as group discussions, debates, role-plays (Mainde et al., 2021), and simulations of democratic processes, including mock elections and parliamentary sessions (Kamboni et al., 2025), serve as powerful tools for immersing learners in real-life civic scenarios (Sakala & Tshabalala, 2025). These methods can be applied to explore pressing societal issues such as drug abuse, corruption, and violence (Chidongo et al., 2022), allowing students to critically examine their impact and reflect on responsible citizenship. Teachers are encouraged to foster inclusive, value-driven learning spaces that promote active participation and integrate real-world civic challenges into the curriculum. Assessment should also reflect this experiential approach, utilizing practical tasks such as debates, collaborative projects, and community engagement activities to evaluate learners' understanding and application of civic principles.

Promoting student-led initiatives such as school clubs, case studies, and community service projects or outreach programs (Kaumba, 2023), plays a vital role in nurturing essential civic competencies among learners. These activities empower students to take ownership of their learning experiences, encouraging them to step into leadership roles, collaborate with peers, and engage meaningfully with real-world issues. Through active participation, students develop a stronger sense of responsibility, empathy, and commitment to the common good. Moreover, these initiatives create opportunities for experiential learning, where theoretical knowledge is applied in practical settings, reinforcing the relevance of Civic Education. To maximize their impact, it is crucial to incorporate regular reflection and structured assessment, enabling learners to critically evaluate their actions, internalize civic values, and refine their understanding of democratic principles (Mainde, et al., 2021). This cyclical process of action and reflection ensures that civic learning is not only retained but also translated into thoughtful, responsible behavior within and beyond the school environment.

In contrast to the outcome-based curriculum, Zambia's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) enables Civic Education teachers to assess civic competencies through evidence-based approaches. Tools such as classroom participation, reflective journals, and scenario-based written assessments provide valuable insights into students' understanding, critical thinking, and ethical reasoning (Sankah, 2025). Additionally, teachers employ rubrics and checklists to evaluate skills like collaboration, respect for diversity, and problem-solving. This comprehensive approach ensures a balanced assessment of both cognitive knowledge and the core values necessary for active and responsible citizenship.

CONCLUSION

Teaching Civic Education within Zambia's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) presents a transformative pathway for nurturing informed, ethical and actively engaged citizens. By prioritizing practical competencies, learner-centered pedagogical approaches and ongoing formative assessment, the CBC ensures that Civic Education is responsive to the evolving needs of a democratic and inclusive society. This alignment fosters not only knowledge acquisition but also the development of critical civic values such as responsibility, participation, and respect for diversity. Although implementation challenges persist, including gaps in teacher preparedness, limited resources and varying levels of community involvement, targeted investments in professional development, instructional materials and stakeholder collaboration can significantly enhance the effectiveness of Civic Education in CBC era. With sustained commitment, Civic Education can play a pivotal role in shaping a generation equipped to contribute meaningfully to Zambia's national development and democratic resilience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Invest in Teacher Training:** The government should allocate resources toward comprehensive teacher training programs that emphasize Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) pedagogy and the development of civic competencies. This will enhance instructional quality and ensure educators are well-equipped to deliver meaningful Civic Education.
2. **Prioritize Funding for Teaching Materials:** Increased funding should be directed toward the development and distribution of teaching materials, particularly those that support teachers in creating context-driven and locally relevant learning resources. This will promote more effective and engaging classroom experiences.
3. **Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation Tools:** The Ministry of Education should design and implement robust tools for tracking CBC implementation and monitoring learner progress in secondary schools. These tools will provide valuable data to inform policy decisions and improve curriculum delivery.

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