

The Role of Civic Education in Promoting Sustainable Peace in Conflict-Affected Communities in Southwest State, Somalia.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study investigates the role of civic education in promoting awareness, reconciliation, and community cohesion in conflict-affected communities of Southwest State, Somalia. It particularly evaluates how educational interventions—integrated within institutional frameworks—can enhance peace-building capacities and democratic engagement in post-conflict contexts. **Design and Methodology** – The research adopts a qualitative methodology supported by structured demographic analysis of 70 respondents. Participants included university students, educators, administrators, and community leaders, selected to capture a diverse range of perspectives. Data was collected through interviews and surveys and analyzed using content analysis and thematic coding, guided by frameworks from civic education and conflict transformation theories. **Findings** – The results indicate that civic education “e.g. especially when embedded as a University Requirement (UR) subject” has significantly improved participants’ understanding of legal rights, governance structures, and conflict resolution skills. Respondents with higher education levels (57% holding Master's or PhD degrees) and urban residency (70%) demonstrated greater civic awareness, suggesting a correlation between educational attainment and civic engagement. However, barriers such as linguistic marginalization, limited rural outreach, and historical distrust of state structures persist. **Practical Implications** – The findings highlight the potential of technology-enhanced civic education platforms to extend access to marginalized and rural communities. Localizing civic content through digital media and incorporating culturally sensitive pedagogies are essential for inclusive learning. **Originality and Value** – This study contributes original empirical data to the under-researched intersection of civic education and educational technology in fragile states. It provides actionable insights for policymakers and educators seeking to design civic learning programs that not only educate but also unify fragmented societies.

Keywords: Civic education, educational technology, conflict resolution, post-conflict societies, Southwest Somalia, peace-building, digital pedagogy, community engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The Somali people have suffered from prolonged oppression and violence at the hands of their fellow Somalis. They have lived in difficult and harsh conditions under both democratic and military regimes. Said Barre’s government didn’t give their citizen the right to protection and pressurizing its people to obey the people the government by any means. As a result of the war and war-related causes, hundreds of thousands of Somalis lost their lives, and many more became displaced internally and externally. The most important factor that has created and sustained.

The clan-based militias’ conflicts is competition for power and resources. State repression was the second major cause of the civil war. The Somali people experienced 21 years of a repressive military state (1969–1991). The military regime used excessive force and collective punishment to suppress opposition. (Elmi & Barise, 2006).

According to Mark Gersovitz (2009) a civil war as a politically organized, large-scale, sustained, physically

violent conflict that occurs within a country principally among large/numerically important groups of its inhabitants or citizens over the monopoly of physical force within the country. According to (Hutchison, Coleman 2015) In the United States the American Civil War (also known by other names) was a civil war fought in the United States from 1861 to 1865, between the North (Union) and the South (Confederacy). The Civil War is “a violent conflict within a country fought by organized groups that aim to take power at the centre or in a region or to change government policies”. According to (Aoki et al. 2002:4) Education is one of the most powerful instruments societies have for reducing deprivation and vulnerability: According to (Thyne, 2006). Education is a means by which a government can make a direct and lasting impact on the lives of its people, which can lower grievances in a society.

Civic education in Somalia has historically failed to contribute to building a peaceful and stable society. Since the establishment of the Somali government, there has been no effective implementation of civic education programs aimed at promoting peace, stability, and good governance within communities. This shortcoming is largely due to the absence of a clear government agenda for civic education, particularly under past dictatorial regimes that feared civic awareness could lead to resistance and demands for accountability.

However, institutions such as Afgoye International University, located in the Lower Shabelle region of Southwest State, Somalia, have taken significant steps to address this gap. AIU has made Civic Education a University Requirement (UR) subject across all its faculties, ensuring that students from diverse academic backgrounds are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to contribute to a peaceful, democratic society.

During the Civil War, Southwest communities were farmers and agro-pastoralists, these communities had not moved from one place to another, because of cultivating their farms while others were pastoralists and tried to push their animals to farmland, just immediately erupted unexpectedly and other formal conflicts were slightly began conflicts related communities. After that, different projects have been released and suggested to teach the people about civil war. Civic education has recently been suggested to generate merit messages to change the overall perceptions of the community to leaf together. The main objectives of this paper was to assess the impact of civic education on promoting awareness, reconciliation, and community cohesion in conflict-affected communities of Southwest State, Somalia. At the same time to evaluate the effectiveness of civic education programs in enhancing citizen participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts. And eventually to identify challenges and propose strategic recommendations for improving civic education initiatives aimed at achieving sustainable peace in post-conflict settings.

The Concept of Civic Education

Civic education encompasses the provision of knowledge, skills, and values necessary for individuals to participate effectively in democratic and social processes. It focuses on:

Awareness of Rights and Responsibilities:

The collapse of the state and the retreat of individuals to their clans and sub-clans for security led to the militarization of civil society. With no central authority to enforce law and order, various sectors of civil society, including clans, sub-clans, and businesses, armed themselves to ensure their security and enforce their own rules. This led to the disappearance of any institutional culture if there had been any, regarding the respect of the rule of law and human rights.

More than 30 years, public opinion has been disrupted by ideas of un-educated people and dismantling all the minds of Somalia people, clan leaders were affected by all types of the community negatively, and people did not get any civic education programs, the public understanding of Somalia community is really un exist. Citizens had no gain civic education from institutions and government as well.

Legally the people of Southwest don't understand their legal rights, in the process of law and order, when the community misunderstands each other fighting occurs in the community they easily deny to go in front of sue, even socially are some perception when they get the same. Political participation is one of the main fundamental rights of the people mentioned by the constitutions, the people in the country dreamed to have these rights which

doesn't give the chance and break the door of barriers to get the equal rights to participate the political space in the country, as well as the citizens have obligations to defend the country and prevent from all the enemies.

Promotion of Tolerance and Diversity:

Southwest have comprised three regions which contains 18 districts, the clan compositions are commonly accepted by all Somalia, as shown the representation of the parliament, this inclusion is unique from others regional administrations that are not respected other clans, the southwest community have acceptance of all kinds of tolerance encounter by the human during the civil war and beyond.

As shown by clan compositions respected in the administration it is also deemed cultural acceptance by the all communities lived in the regions each other. The diversity of culture, language, ethnicity are among the status que of community diversifications in the regions. These communities are endogenous in these regions of Southwest which is different from other regions in Somalia.

The communities in these regions really emphasis any opportunity that might not have others, civic education program will create opportunities to understand and accept each other by shown their cultural distinct, language barriers and ethical acknowledgement.

Conflict Resolution Skills:

Certainly, Southwest communities are depending on their lives in farm, and other neighboring states are pastoralists, conflicts are break out most of the time by considering their mistakes each other but not comprehend the causes of conflicts which might be refrain from any other causes of community contradictions.

University students who have conflict resolution skills could engage this activity by eradicating conflicts between communities. This skill is well deserved to be prepared by the communities and practiced in a normal way could prevent massive conflicts.

Participation in Governance:

Civic education of the community will enhance the level of understanding of the government system, and easily have common objectives to represent each and every one by targeting future development. The community empowerment program will facilitate having accountability in the leadership positions and to contest people decision making offices in the government structure.

Challenges in Conflict-Affected Communities

Conflict-affected communities in Southwest State face unique barriers to sustainable peace, including:

Historical Grievances:

Southwest communities have many grievances related to the civil war and government system, their chances in the government system was rare. The cultural grievance is immense special the language, sometimes the people who were speaking May dialect is marginalized by other Somali communities from other regions while they are the main production of the country.

Southwest community imposed others besides the colonial power, people from other regions got chances from colonial power to fulfill the government regulation to these people and their prospective on the government side to control the whole country. After the military regime was ousted, people from other regions captured and seized these southwest regions by force and took their resources years in the conflict, by looting, killing, and governing mercilessly.

Limited Access to Education:

The main barriers of southwest communities their local dialects May and other local languages were the most

obstacles faced by communities. When parents want to get their children to school they even feel useless because of their support in the farmland activities, if the parents work alone on the farm, they believe they did not get the quantity of products they expect also when they prepare their children to the farmland they believe that the children would fail his future development.

There might be, even the children could be possible to feel boring, because they couldn't adopt the schools, children were not normal schedule learning for every academic year because off of violence which could occurred any time. Sometimes families may have displaced their homes from violence erupted unexpectedly and reasons behind to dropout many students from learning anything.

Weak Governance Structures:

The government system is power sharing currently, most of the communities have representatives except a few of them, while there are mentalities among the society which had adopted as a result of the civil war. These circumstances psychologically affected the communities that lived in one place as well as the government system, some representatives could easily solve the issues while others did not.

In Somalia, strong representations can make you stronger referring to the civil war participation ousted by the regime. The same as the judicial system and other institutions in the government, moreover controlling most of the local and international humanitarian and development agencies, the government system is left behind everything valuable for the government and inclusivity of the communities.

Youth Marginalization:

Highly applicable and practiced by the Human Resource managers in the job market, governmental and non-governmental organizations are practiced every day, there is no merit recruitment process behind a variety of interesting seeking by employers based on clan benefits. Also, the youth encouragement programs that exist in Somalia are among some families, especially those who lead small business creator opportunity programs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Method: Content Analysis

This study employed a qualitative content analysis approach to explore the impact of civic education on awareness, reconciliation, and community cohesion in the conflict-affected communities of Southwest State, Somalia. Content analysis was selected due to its strength in systematically analyzing textual data and extracting meaningful insights, particularly within the context of social and political studies. This method enabled the researcher to interpret civic education narratives, program implementation reports, institutional documents, and relevant academic literature, thereby identifying recurring themes, values, and challenges related to civic education in post-conflict settings.

Data Collection

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources:

- **Primary Data:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including educators, university administrators, community leaders, and students at Afgoye International University (AIU). A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants with direct knowledge of or experience in civic education initiatives. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and focused on the role of civic education in fostering community awareness, peacebuilding, and political participation.
- **Secondary Data:** Relevant documents such as government policy statements, academic articles, program curricula from AIU, and NGO reports on civic education in Somalia were systematically reviewed. These sources provided contextual background and helped triangulate data obtained through interviews.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed a thematic content analysis approach. The process involved the following steps:

- **Transcription and Organization:** Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. Secondary documents were organized according to source and type.
- **Coding:** The textual data were subjected to open coding using NVivo qualitative analysis software. Codes were generated inductively and grouped into themes reflecting the study objectives, including awareness of civic rights, promotion of tolerance, conflict resolution skills, and participation in governance.
- **Theme Development:** Recurring patterns and themes were identified and refined. Themes were analyzed in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework, particularly focusing on how civic education influences community attitudes and behaviors in conflict-affected areas.
- **Interpretation:** The results were interpreted to evaluate the effectiveness of civic education in Southwest State, identify existing challenges, and propose recommendations for enhancing civic education initiatives to promote sustainable peace and social cohesion.

Interview Questions

These semi-structured questions are designed for key stakeholders such as educators, students, community leaders, and government officials.

A. General Background

1. Can you briefly describe your role in the community/university/government?
2. How long have you been involved in civic education activities or peacebuilding programs?

B. Perception of Civic Education

3. What does civic education mean to you or your community?
4. In your opinion, how important is civic education in promoting peace and reconciliation in Southwest State?

C. Implementation and Impact

5. Has your institution/community implemented any civic education programs? If yes, can you describe them?
6. What positive changes have you observed as a result of civic education programs in your community?
7. To what extent do these programs promote community cohesion and reduce clan-based tensions?

D. Challenges and Limitations

8. What are the major challenges facing civic education programs in conflict-affected areas like Southwest State?
9. How do cultural, linguistic, or clan-related factors affect the delivery and reception of civic education?

RECOMMENDATIONS

10. What suggestions would you offer to improve civic education programs in Somalia, particularly in post-conflict areas?
11. What role should universities, NGOs, and the government play in enhancing civic awareness?

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres strictly to ethical principles guiding qualitative research, particularly in conflict-affected and culturally sensitive settings. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. The purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any point were clearly explained. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity; no identifying information is linked to their responses, and pseudonyms or codes were used in data reporting.

Given the post-conflict nature of the research context, special attention was paid to the potential emotional and psychological risks to participants. Interview questions were framed to avoid retraumatization, and interviews

were conducted in environments considered safe and familiar to the participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the research committee of the affiliated academic institutions.

Reliability

To enhance the reliability of the study, a systematic and transparent data collection and analysis process was followed. Interview guides were developed and pre-tested to ensure clarity and consistency. All interviews were audio-recorded (with permission) and transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of participant responses. A coding framework was developed iteratively and applied consistently across the dataset. Inter-coder reliability was ensured through collaborative review and discussion of codes among researchers.

In addition, triangulation was employed by gathering data from different sources—community leaders, university students, educators, and government officials—which helped to confirm the consistency and credibility of emerging findings.

Validity

Validity was ensured through several strategies. First, **content validity** was addressed by basing the interview questions on well-established civic education and peacebuilding frameworks. **Construct validity** was reinforced through thematic analysis, ensuring that identified themes accurately reflected the constructs under investigation (e.g., awareness, reconciliation, cohesion).

Moreover, **member checking** was conducted by summarizing key responses during or after the interviews to verify accuracy with participants. Contextual validity was also considered, with themes and interpretations grounded in the socio-political realities of Southwest State, Somalia. Finally, the use of rich, thick descriptions in the analysis allows readers to determine the transferability of findings to similar contexts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 70 respondents participated in the study, representing a diverse cross-section of stakeholders involved in or affected by civic education initiatives in Southwest State, Somalia. The demographic variables analyzed include gender, role, age, location, educational attainment, marital status, and access to civic education. Each parameter was selected to capture the broad spectrum of perspectives relevant to the study's objectives and to ensure comprehensive, inclusive, and meaningful data interpretation.

a) Gender Distribution

The gender distribution was evenly split, with 35 male (50%) and 35 female (50%) respondents. This parity reflects a deliberate attempt to ensure that both male and female perspectives are equally represented, acknowledging the unique ways in which gender dynamics shape experiences with civic education and political participation, particularly in post-conflict societies.

b) Roles and Social Positions

Participants represented four primary groups: students (28.6%), university administrators (21.4%), community leaders (21.4%), and educators (28.6%). These roles were selected due to their direct or indirect influence on civic education. Students are the primary beneficiaries, while educators and university administrators are responsible for curriculum design and implementation. Community leaders, in contrast, serve as key cultural and political intermediaries, often shaping community-level attitudes and responses to civic engagement initiatives.

c) Age Categories

Respondents were distributed across the following age brackets: under 23 years (11%), 24–29 years (16%), 30–35 years (30%), and above 35 years (43%). This segmentation provides insight into generational differences in the reception and impact of civic education. The predominance of individuals aged 35 and above suggests that

many respondents had firsthand experiences with Somalia's historical governance systems and civil unrest, which may shape their perceptions of civic education's relevance and effectiveness.

d) Geographical Location

Geographically, 70% of respondents resided in urban areas, while 30% were from rural settings. This distinction is essential given the disparities in educational infrastructure and civic engagement opportunities between urban and rural communities. Urban dwellers generally have greater access to civic education programs and public institutions, while rural populations may face logistical, economic, and linguistic barriers that inhibit participation.

e) Educational Attainment

The educational profile of the respondents was as follows: 13% uneducated, 30% held bachelor's degrees, 50% held master's degrees, and 7% held PhDs. This wide educational spectrum provides a foundation for evaluating how different levels of academic exposure influence the understanding and impact of civic education. The inclusion of uneducated respondents also ensures that grassroots voices are represented, which is vital in assessing community-wide engagement with civic education.

f) Marital Status

Marital status, while not quantified in exact percentages, showed that the majority of respondents were married, with single, divorced, and widowed individuals forming the minority. Marital status may influence civic engagement, particularly in traditional societies where familial responsibilities often correlate with heightened interest in community stability and governance.

g) Access to Civic Education

When asked about access to civic education, 80% of respondents indicated they had received some form of civic education, while 20% had not. This is a critical parameter, as it directly relates to the core objective of the study. The 80% access rate suggests a promising reach for civic education programs in the region, but the 20% without access highlights ongoing gaps and the need for more inclusive outreach efforts.

The below charts provide a comprehensive demographic profile for deeper interpretation of the research findings.

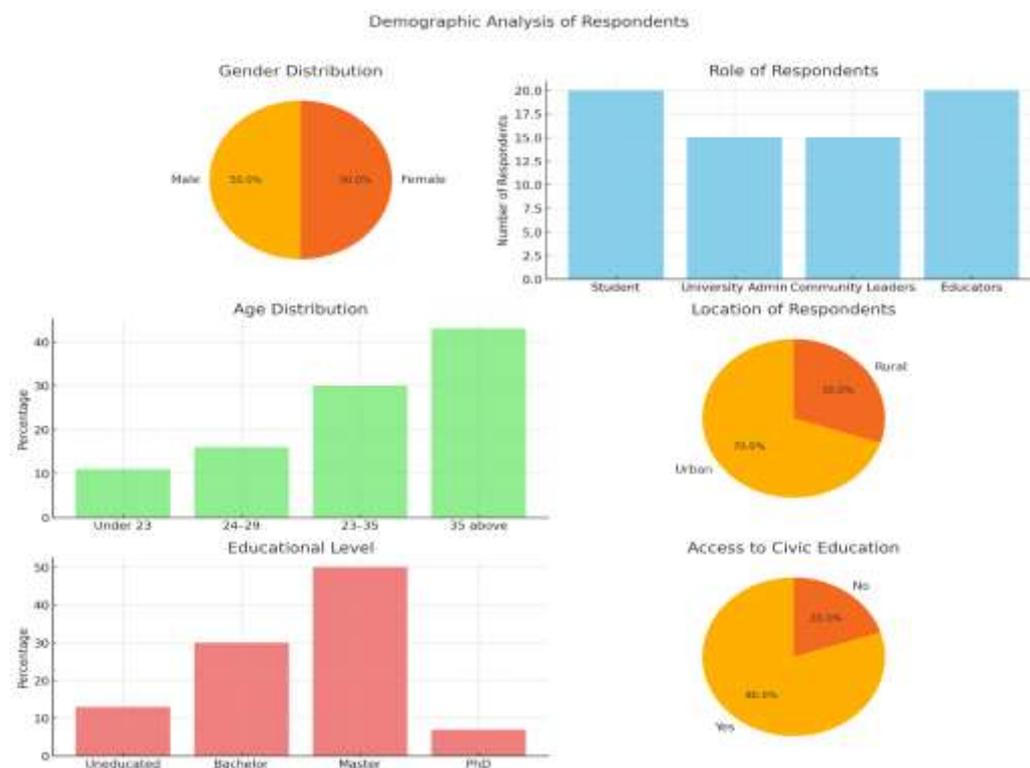


Figure 1 Demographic Analysis of the respondents

Content Analysis:

| Code | Theme | Excerpt/Quote | Source | Interpretation |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Awareness of Rights | Civic Understanding | “Most of our people don’t know their legal rights, and they avoid courts.” | Interview with Community Leader | Indicates a gap in civic awareness and highlights the need for legal education. |
| Conflict Resolution | Peacebuilding Role | “We try to resolve disputes using what we learned in civic classes.” | Student Interview | Shows that civic education contributes to community-level conflict mitigation. |
| Linguistic Challenges | Access to Education | “Many parents don’t send kids to school because they speak only <i>May dialect</i> .” | Document Review (NGO Report) | Language barriers are a significant structural issue limiting educational access. |
| Inclusivity in Governance | Political Participation | “Only powerful clans get represented in politics; others are left behind.” | Educator Interview | Suggests civic education must also address equity and representation in governance. |
| Cultural Diversity | Tolerance and Acceptance | “We learn to appreciate other cultures and clans during civic education classes.” | Focus Group with Students | Indicates potential for civic education to foster social cohesion. |

Perceptions and Experiences

The research reveals that civic education is increasingly perceived as a critical tool for fostering community awareness, peaceful coexistence, and democratic participation in Southwest State, Somalia. Many participants, particularly university students and educators, expressed that civic education had empowered them with a clearer understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. This knowledge was seen to contribute to more informed civic engagement and greater appreciation for diversity and coexistence.

Community elders and local leaders reported positive shifts in attitudes among youth who had been exposed to civic education, noting a decline in acceptance of violence and clan-based discrimination. Furthermore, several respondents emphasized that civic education has helped to break down historical mistrust among clans by promoting shared values and social cohesion.

However, perceptions varied between different demographics. Some rural respondents, particularly those with limited formal education, viewed civic education as abstract or inaccessible. This indicates a need for context-sensitive delivery mechanisms that consider literacy levels and cultural dynamics.

Challenges

Despite its potential, civic education programs in Southwest State face numerous implementation challenges. First, **lack of institutional support** and a coherent national curriculum for civic education significantly hinder widespread adoption. The absence of a formal policy framework results in fragmented and inconsistent delivery across educational institutions and community programs.

Secondly, **limited access to education**, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas, means that large segments of the population remain excluded from civic learning opportunities. Language barriers, especially among communities that speak the May dialect, further restrict the inclusivity of civic education materials and delivery.

Third, **deep-seated grievances and mistrust**, resulting from decades of marginalization, displacement, and violence, make it difficult for civic education programs to gain immediate traction. In such contexts, civic initiatives are sometimes perceived with suspicion, particularly if they are seen as externally imposed or politically motivated.

Lastly, **youth marginalization**—especially in employment, governance, and community leadership—undermines the motivational impact of civic education. Many young people feel disillusioned, as the promises of empowerment through education do not translate into tangible opportunities.

Opportunities

Despite these challenges, several key opportunities exist for strengthening civic education as a transformative force in Southwest State. The integration of civic education into university curricula, as demonstrated by Afgoye International University, serves as a promising model. This institutionalization ensures that future leaders across disciplines are grounded in democratic values, conflict resolution, and social responsibility.

Community-based delivery methods, such as peer education, local radio programs, and collaborations with religious and traditional leaders, offer accessible and culturally appropriate avenues to reach broader segments of the population.

There is also growing recognition among local authorities and civil society organizations of the role civic education can play in **peacebuilding**, particularly in fostering **youth engagement** and **inter-clan dialogue**. Leveraging this momentum could lead to the development of localized, inclusive civic education strategies tailored to the needs of conflict-affected communities.

Accordingly, the rise of digital technologies and mobile communication platforms presents an untapped opportunity to disseminate civic knowledge, especially among youth. With appropriate investment, civic education initiatives could harness these tools to enhance reach and impact.

CONCLUSION

Civic education plays a vital role in promoting sustainable peace in conflict-affected communities of Southwest State, Somalia. Years of civil war, political exclusion, and social fragmentation have left deep scars that continue to hinder peace and development. However, civic education presents a transformative tool that can empower communities by raising awareness of citizens' rights and responsibilities, promoting tolerance and inclusivity, and equipping individuals—especially youth—with conflict resolution skills.

The implementation of well-structured civic education programs can bridge social divides, enhance participation in governance, and counter marginalization and ignorance, which have historically contributed to conflict. By fostering a culture of peace, mutual understanding, and accountability, civic education becomes not only an educational priority but a strategic component of post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding.

To be effective, civic education must be contextually relevant, inclusive of all dialects and communities, and supported by both governmental and non-governmental actors. Moreover, investment in education infrastructure, inclusive governance, and youth empowerment are critical to sustaining the gains achieved through civic learning initiatives. Only by equipping citizens with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to build and maintain peace can Southwest Somalia hope to emerge from its cycle of violence and realize a more just and peaceful future.

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