



An Exploration of Civic Engagement in a Democratic Dispensation among Civic Education Teachers in Selected Secondary Schools in Chifunabuli District, Zambia

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Abstract. Civic engagement formed a critical component of democratic societies, with education systems playing a central role in promoting democratic values among young citizens. In Zambia, Civic Education served as a key subject aimed at instilling principles of democracy, active citizenship, and national responsibility. However, the extent to which Civic Education teachers promoted civic engagement remained underexplored, particularly in rural settings such as Chifunabuli District. This study explored the role of Civic Education teachers in fostering civic engagement within the context of a democratic dispensation in selected secondary schools in Chifunabuli District. A qualitative research design was employed, using interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations to collect data from Civic Education teachers and school administrators. Findings revealed that while most teachers demonstrated a sound understanding of democratic principles, their efforts were constrained by challenges such as limited teaching resources, inadequate professional development, and low levels of community involvement. Despite these challenges, teachers initiated various school-based programs including student councils, debates, and community service activities to promote civic engagement. The study concluded that Civic Education teachers played a vital role in cultivating democratic values but required enhanced institutional support to maximize their effectiveness. Strengthening teacher training, curriculum relevance, and school-community partnerships was recommended to improve civic participation in rural educational contexts.

Index Terms- Civic Engagement, Democratic Dispensation, Civic Education, Secondary Schools, Teacher Practices, Chifunabuli District

I. Introduction

Civic engagement is widely recognized as a foundational component of democratic governance. It involves the active participation of individuals in political, social, and community affairs, and is essential in fostering accountable leadership, responsive policies, and inclusive development. In democratic societies, civic engagement helps citizens understand their rights and responsibilities, strengthens institutions, and promotes transparency and participation in decision-making processes.

In Zambia, the importance of civic engagement has been emphasized through the introduction of Civic Education in the school curriculum. The subject is intended to prepare learners to become informed, responsible, and active citizens. It



covers essential democratic principles such as human rights, rule of law, good governance, and national values. Teachers of Civic Education are therefore strategically positioned to influence learners' understanding of democracy and their role in society. However, there is limited empirical research on how these teachers interpret and promote civic engagement, especially in rural contexts such as Chifunabuli District.

Chifunabuli is a relatively underserved rural district where schools often face constraints in terms of teaching resources, training, and infrastructure. These challenges may hinder the effective implementation of Civic Education and limit the promotion of democratic values among learners. Despite government efforts to decentralize democratic processes, there remains a gap between policy and practice in civic empowerment at the grassroots level.

The problem this study addressed was the lack of documented evidence on how Civic Education teachers in Chifunabuli District engage with democratic principles in their classrooms and promote civic participation among learners. The gap in knowledge on this issue limits the ability of education policymakers and curriculum developers to strengthen civic engagement through education.

The main research questions were:

- How do Civic Education teachers in Chifunabuli District understand and interpret civic engagement within a democratic framework?
- What teaching methods and strategies do they use to promote civic participation among students?
- What challenges do teachers face in promoting civic engagement in secondary schools?

The objectives of the study were to:

- Explore the perceptions of Civic Education teachers on civic engagement in a democratic dispensation.
- Identify the strategies used by teachers to promote civic participation among learners.
- Examine the challenges faced by teachers in implementing Civic Education effectively in rural schools.

By focusing on the voices and experiences of teachers, this study contributes to a better understanding of how education can be used as a tool to deepen democracy in Zambia, particularly in rural and under-resourced communities.

II. Literature Review

Civic engagement has been extensively discussed in educational and political science literature as a critical element of sustaining democracy. According to Putnam (2000), civic engagement encompasses activities that connect individuals to collective civic life, including political participation, community service, and public discourse. Education is widely acknowledged as a vehicle for fostering such engagement,



particularly through subjects like Civic Education that aim to cultivate informed, active citizens.

Theoretical Foundations

The study is anchored in Democratic Citizenship Theory, which posits that education systems should not only transmit knowledge but also develop the skills, values, and dispositions necessary for participation in a democratic society (Dewey, 1916). The Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995) further suggests that individuals are more likely to engage civically when they possess the necessary resources, psychological engagement, and opportunities to participate. These theories underscore the importance of school-based civic learning, and more specifically, the role of teachers in facilitating this learning.

III. Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, aimed at gaining in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and practices of Civic Education teachers in promoting civic engagement within a democratic context. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena in natural settings and allowed for rich, descriptive data.

Sampling Methods and Participants

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who were most relevant to the research objectives. Participants included 10 Civic Education teachers from five selected secondary schools in Chifunabuli District. These schools were chosen based on accessibility, diversity in location (urban-rural spread), and active implementation of the Civic Education curriculum.

Instruments and Tools

- Data were collected using three main instruments:
- Semi-structured interview guide – Used to conduct one-on-one interviews with Civic Education teachers.
- Focus group discussion guide – Used to engage groups of teachers in open-ended discussions on teaching practices and civic engagement.
- Classroom observation checklist – Used to observe classroom interactions, teaching strategies, and student engagement during Civic Education lessons.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection took place over a four-week period. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in-person at the selected schools and recorded with participant consent. Classroom observations were conducted during regular Civic Education lessons to ensure minimal disruption. Field notes and audio recordings were transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. Transcripts from interviews and focus groups were coded and categorized into key themes aligned with the research questions. Patterns and recurring ideas were identified and interpreted to



understand how teachers conceptualized and practiced civic engagement within their teaching. NVivo software was optionally used to aid in organizing and managing qualitative data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of DMI St. Eugene University. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identities. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

IV. Results

Research Question 1: How do Civic Education teachers in Chifunabuli District understand and interpret civic engagement within a democratic framework?

Three major themes emerged regarding teachers' understanding of civic engagement:

Theme	Description
Awareness of Democratic Principles	Teachers demonstrated understanding of key democratic values such as participation, accountability, and rule of law.
Civic Engagement as School Participation	Teachers associated civic engagement with students' involvement in school governance, such as class representation and debates.
Limited Understanding of Broader Civic Action	While familiar with classroom-related engagement, fewer teachers mentioned broader activities like voting advocacy or community mobilization.

Sample Quote

- “Civic engagement means teaching students how to speak up and participate in school elections, but we also try to link this to national elections where possible.” – Participant T4
- Research Question 2: What teaching methods and strategies do teachers use to promote civic participation among students?

Strategy	Observed Frequency	Description
Group Discussions & Debates	High	Frequently used to engage students in issues of governance and rights.
Role-Playing Activities	Moderate	Some teachers used simulations of elections and parliamentary sessions.
Community Outreach Projects	Low	Only a few schools organized external activities like clean-up campaigns or voter awareness drives.



Strategy	Observed Frequency	Description
Use of Civic Textbooks	High	Most teachers relied heavily on the official textbook, sometimes limiting participatory teaching.

Sample Quote

“We encourage them to hold debates and sometimes simulate elections. This helps them to understand democracy in a practical way.” – Participant T1

Research Question 3: What challenges do teachers face in promoting civic engagement in secondary schools?

Challenge	Frequency Reported	Details
Inadequate Teaching Resources	High	Lack of textbooks, visual aids, and interactive learning materials.
Limited Teacher Training	High	Teachers reported insufficient in-service training on participatory methods.
Lack of Community Involvement	Moderate	Minimal collaboration with local civic leaders or institutions.
Student Apathy	Moderate	Some students showed little interest in civic topics, especially in exam-free classes.
Overloaded Curriculum	Low	Some teachers noted limited time due to a crowded timetable.

Sample Quote

“The biggest challenge is the lack of teaching materials. Sometimes we just read from the textbook and that’s it.” – Participant T7

V. Discussion

This study sought to explore how Civic Education teachers in Chifunabuli District understood and promoted civic engagement within a democratic framework. The findings provided valuable insights into the role of teachers in shaping students' civic attitudes and participation, particularly in rural and under-resourced areas.

VI. Conclusion

This study explored the understanding and practices of Civic Education teachers in promoting civic engagement within a democratic framework in Chifunabuli District, Zambia. The findings revealed that while teachers demonstrated a clear understanding of democratic principles, their interpretation of civic engagement was often limited to school-based participation. Despite employing some



participatory teaching methods, such as debates and group discussions, there was a reliance on textbooks, and community involvement in civic activities remained minimal. The study also highlighted significant challenges faced by teachers, including inadequate resources, limited professional development, and a lack of broader community engagement, all of which hindered the effective delivery of Civic Education.

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