



# The Impact of Civic Education in High School: How Does Civic Education in High Schools Influence Students' Participation in Local Government

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**Abstract-** Civic education is a crucial component of democratic societies, equipping young citizens with knowledge, skills, and values necessary for meaningful participation in governance. This study investigates the impact of civic education in high schools on students' participation in local government in Lusaka, Zambia, focusing on selected secondary schools in Mandevu and Matero constituencies. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires from 280 Grade 11 and 12 students with qualitative insights from focus group discussions and key informant interviews involving teachers and local government officials. The findings indicate that civic education significantly enhances students' knowledge of local government structures and fosters positive attitudes toward civic responsibilities, with approximately 76.8% of respondents demonstrating moderate to high levels of civic knowledge. However, a knowledge-participation gap is evident: 50% of students had never participated in local government activities, 34% participated occasionally, and only 16% engaged frequently. Challenges such as limited youth participation platforms, lack of experiential learning opportunities, weak school-government linkages, and insufficient encouragement from institutions hinder active civic engagement. The study concludes that while civic education effectively builds awareness and understanding of democratic processes, it is insufficient on its own to stimulate active participation. Strengthening experiential learning, creating youth-friendly civic platforms, and enhancing collaboration between schools, communities, and local government institutions are critical for bridging the gap between knowledge and action. The research provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and civic organizations seeking to foster active and responsible citizenship among Zambian youth.

**Keywords-** Civic Education, Local Government, Student Participation, Civic Competence, Knowledge-Participation Gap, Zambia.

## I. Introduction

### Overview

Civic Education is a foundational pillar for democratic societies as it equips learners with knowledge, values, and skills needed to actively participate in governance and community life. In Zambia, Civic Education is part of the secondary school curriculum and is intended to prepare learners to become informed, responsible, and engaged citizens. However, questions remain about how effective this education is in influencing students' willingness and ability to participate in local government affairs.



This proposal investigates the relationship between Civic Education in high schools and students' actual or intended participation in local government, aiming to provide insights that may improve both curriculum implementation and civic engagement.

### **Background of the Study**

Democracy thrives when citizens are knowledgeable, active, and committed to public participation. To that end, Civic Education plays a key role in cultivating such citizenship by teaching learners about government structure, rights and responsibilities, rule of law, and the importance of political participation (Galston, 2001). In Zambia, the inclusion of Civic Education in the secondary school curriculum is intended to instill democratic values and encourage civic participation at local and national levels (Ministry of General Education, 2013).

Civic education plays a critical role in preparing young people to become informed, responsible, and active citizens within their communities. Globally, education systems recognize the importance of equipping students with knowledge about their rights, duties, and the functioning of government institutions. This is particularly significant in high schools, where adolescents begin to develop a deeper understanding of their social and political environment and form values and attitudes that influence their future participation in civic life.

High school civic education typically covers topics such as the structure and functions of government, democratic principles, electoral processes, and citizens' rights and responsibilities. It aims to foster students' awareness of political systems and encourage them to engage actively in democratic processes, including participation in local government activities such as voting, community meetings, and civic volunteering. In many countries, local government is the closest form of governance to citizens and often serves as the first point of contact for young people interested in public affairs.

Despite this, many young people remain politically disengaged, particularly at the local government level, where public input and youth involvement are essential for community development. The study by the Zambia National Education Coalition (ZANEC, 2017) highlighted an important challenge in civic education within Zambian schools. It found that although students are taught the theoretical aspects of civic education such as understanding the roles and responsibilities of citizens, the structure of government, and the importance of democratic participation this knowledge does not consistently translate into real-life involvement in civic activities.

In other words, students gain awareness and understanding of civic concepts in the classroom, but this knowledge rarely leads to practical engagement, such as participating in community meetings, voting in local elections, volunteering for civic projects, or actively contributing to local governance processes. This gap between learning and action is often referred to as the "knowledge-action gap."

Therefore, while civic education provides the essential knowledge foundation, the ZANEC study suggests that the educational system in Zambia needs to strengthen mechanisms that encourage and enable students to put their civic knowledge into



action. Closing this gap is crucial for developing active young citizens who can contribute meaningfully to local government and community development.

However, this raises concerns about the effectiveness of Civic Education in shaping active youth citizenship and local governance participation.

The gap between classroom knowledge and real-life civic involvement may be influenced by factors such as teaching methods, learners' socio-political environment, limited access to civic institutions, and the absence of youth platforms in local government processes. This study aims to explore how Civic Education, as delivered in high schools, translates into students' readiness and capacity to participate meaningfully in local government affairs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Civic Education in Zambian high schools is intended to cultivate informed, responsible, and participatory citizens by equipping learners with knowledge about democratic principles, governance structures, and civic duties. According to the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (Ministry of General Education, 2013), one of the core goals of Civic Education is to promote learners' active engagement in public affairs, particularly at the local level where citizens can directly influence decisions affecting their communities. However, there is growing concern that despite completing Civic Education in school, many learners do not demonstrate meaningful participation in local governance activities, such as attending ward meetings, engaging in community projects, or interacting with civic leaders.

This disconnection raises questions about the effectiveness of the current Civic Education curriculum in translating theoretical knowledge into practical civic behavior. Several studies in Sub-Saharan Africa suggest that while young people may possess basic knowledge of governance, they often lack the confidence, opportunities, or motivation to participate actively in civic life (Hoskins et al., 2006; Youniss et al., 2002). In Zambia, ZANEC (2017) observed that youth involvement in local government is generally low, with most students showing limited interest in participating in community-based decision-making processes, even when they have studied Civic Education.

The challenge may stem from how the subject is taught—often relying on lecture-based approaches and textbook learning rather than experiential or participatory methods that allow students to connect learning with real-life civic engagement (Kolb, 1984). Additionally, limited exposure to functioning local government institutions and the lack of youth-friendly platforms in civic spaces may prevent students from applying their knowledge meaningfully.

If students leave school without the capacity or willingness to participate in local governance, this undermines one of the key purposes of civic education and poses a long-term risk to democratic development. Therefore, it is critical to investigate whether Civic Education as currently taught in Zambian high schools effectively prepares and motivates students to engage in local governance processes, and what factors enhance or hinder this outcome.



### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study is to critically examine the extent to which Civic Education in high schools influences students' knowledge, attitudes, and participation in local government processes. As an essential subject in the Zambian secondary school curriculum, Civic Education is designed to empower learners with the understanding of democratic governance, the importance of civic responsibility, and the skills necessary for active participation in public affairs (Ministry of General Education, 2013). However, the practical impact of this education on learners' civic engagement, particularly at the local level, remains underexplored.

### **Aim**

- To assess the influence of Civic Education in high schools on students' participation in local government in Zambia.

### **Specific Objectives**

1. To determine students' knowledge of local government structures as a result of Civic Education.
2. To examine students' attitudes toward civic duties and local government participation.
3. To evaluate how Civic Education influences students' actual involvement in local governance activities.
4. To identify challenges that hinder the translation of Civic Education into active local civic engagement.

### **Research Questions**

- What level of understanding do high school students have about local government structures after studying Civic Education?
- How does Civic Education affect students' attitudes toward participation in local government?
- In what ways are students participating in local government initiatives, if at all?
- What barriers prevent high school students from applying Civic Education knowledge to local civic activities?

### **Hypothesis**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between Civic Education and students' participation in local government.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between Civic Education and students' participation in local government.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

Delimitations refer to the boundaries that the researcher intentionally sets for the study in order to narrow its focus and make it manageable. This study is delimited in terms of geographical location, target population, content scope, and data collection instruments, all of which are purposefully chosen to align with the objectives of the research.

First, the study is geographically delimited to two selected high schools in Lusaka District. Lusaka is the capital city of Zambia and has a diverse student population,



offering a relevant context to explore how Civic Education is taught and how it influences learners' participation in local government. However, this urban focus means that the findings may not fully reflect the experiences of students in rural or peri-urban schools, where access to civic institutions and opportunities for community engagement may differ significantly.

Second, the study is delimited to Grades 11 and 12 learners. These students have had sufficient exposure to the Civic Education curriculum and are expected to have covered the local government component in depth. This group is also nearing the end of their secondary education, making it ideal for assessing both knowledge retention and readiness to engage in civic activities beyond school. Civic Education teachers in the selected schools will also be included to provide professional perspectives on curriculum delivery and learner response.

### **Limitations of the Study**

While this study is designed to offer meaningful insights into how Civic Education influences students' participation in local government, it is subject to several limitations that may affect the scope, depth, and generalizability of its findings. Firstly, the study will be limited to two secondary schools in Lusaka District due to financial, logistical, and time constraints. This geographical limitation may narrow the representativeness of the study's conclusions (Creswell, 2014).

### **Validity**

Ensuring the validity of research is essential for producing accurate, credible, and meaningful findings. In this study, validity refers to the degree to which the data collection tools and overall research design accurately measure the influence of Civic Education on students' participation in local government. To establish content validity, the research instruments—namely, the questionnaires for students and the interview guides for teachers—will be developed based on the learning outcomes of the Zambian Civic Education curriculum and previous studies on civic competence (Hoskins et al., 2006). These instruments will be reviewed by subject matter experts, including Civic Education teachers and academic advisors, to ensure that the questions align with the concepts of civic knowledge, attitude, and participation.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the role of Civic Education in promoting democratic participation, particularly among youth in secondary schools. In a democratic society like Zambia, the active involvement of citizens in local governance is crucial for ensuring responsive leadership, accountability, and inclusive development. However, there is limited empirical research that directly links Civic Education at the secondary school level with learners' actual engagement in local government affairs. This study addresses that gap by exploring how Civic Education influences students' knowledge, attitudes, and participation in community decision-making processes. Secondly, the study will inform school administrators and education policymakers by identifying barriers to civic engagement among learners.



The study is also significant for local government officials and civil society organizations who often struggle to involve young people in development processes. Such partnerships can bridge the gap between civic knowledge and civic action (UNESCO, 2014).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks: Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) by David Kolb (1984) and the Civic Competence Framework developed through the IEA Civic Education Study (Hoskins et al., 2006). Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how Civic Education can shape students' civic knowledge, skills, attitudes, and actions—particularly in relation to participation in local government.

#### **1. Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)**

David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory proposes that learning is most effective when it involves a cycle of four interconnected stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). ELT highlights that learners do not fully acquire knowledge through passive instruction alone but through engaging with real-life situations, reflecting on those experiences, forming concepts, and applying them in practice.

In the context of Civic Education, ELT implies that students are more likely to internalize civic concepts and participate in governance if they are actively involved in civic experiences. These may include student-led debates, simulations of local government functions, community projects, school elections, or field visits to civic institutions. Such hands-on experiences allow learners to connect classroom content with real-world civic responsibilities, enhancing both understanding and motivation to participate. Kolb's theory supports this study's aim of assessing whether Civic Education is delivered in ways that foster active participation in local governance.

#### **2. Civic Competence Framework**

The Civic Competence Framework, as used in international studies such as the IEA Civic Education Study, defines civic competence as a combination of four key dimensions: civic knowledge, civic skills, civic attitudes, and civic behaviors (Hoskins et al., 2006). According to this framework, effective Civic Education should empower learners with the knowledge of political and civic institutions, the skills to critically analyze civic issues, the attitudes that support democratic values (such as tolerance and responsibility), and the confidence to engage in civic activities such as voting or community participation.

This framework is particularly relevant to this study, which seeks to measure not just whether learners know about local government structures, but whether they are equipped and motivated to engage with them. The Civic Competence Framework also emphasizes the importance of youth civic engagement for the sustainability of democratic systems. Research shows that early civic participation leads to continued engagement in adulthood (Torney-Purta et al., 2001), reinforcing the value of high school Civic Education.



By combining Experiential Learning Theory and the Civic Competence Framework, this study takes a holistic view of Civic Education as both a pedagogical process and a citizenship development tool. The theoretical framework provides a structure for analyzing how Civic Education content, teaching methods, and learner experiences influence students' preparedness and willingness to participate in local governance.

### **Definition of Terms**

- **List of Defined Key Terms.**

**Civic Education:** A subject taught in secondary schools that provides learners with knowledge, skills, and values related to citizenship, governance, democracy, human rights, and civic responsibilities.

**Local Government:** The decentralized level of governance responsible for public service delivery, development planning, and community engagement at the district or municipal level.

**Civic Participation:** The active involvement of individuals in democratic and community activities such as voting, attending ward meetings, participating in public discussions, or engaging in volunteer work.

**Civic Competence:** The combination of civic knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors that enable individuals to participate effectively and responsibly in civic and political life.

**High School Students:** Learners in grades 10 to 12 within Zambia's secondary school system, typically aged between 15 and 19, and targeted for this study due to their exposure to Civic Education.

**Curriculum Implementation:** The process through which Civic Education is taught in schools, including the delivery of lessons, use of instructional materials, and application of teaching strategies.

**Experiential Learning:** A learning approach that emphasizes learning by doing, where students engage in practical, real-life civic activities to deepen understanding and build civic behavior.

**Youth Engagement:** The meaningful involvement of young people in civic, political, and community-based activities that contribute to democratic governance and development.

**Democratic Citizenship:** A form of active citizenship where individuals understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities within a democratic society, including participating in elections and respecting the rule of law

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduced the study by providing an overview of the importance of Civic Education and its expected influence on learners' participation in local government. It presented the background, research problem, objectives, questions, and hypotheses. The chapter also defined the study's scope, limitations, and theoretical foundations, while offering a working definition of key terms. Chapter Two will present a detailed review of related literature to contextualize the research and identify existing knowledge gaps.



## II. Literature Review

### Overview

Civic education has been extensively studied as a critical factor in promoting democratic engagement and political participation among youth. The literature reveals a broad consensus that effective civic education fosters knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that encourage young people to participate actively in democratic governance, including at the local level (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). However, the degree to which civic education translates into actual participation varies widely, influenced by contextual factors such as curriculum design, teaching methods, and socio-political environment (Levine, 2007). This chapter reviews relevant studies on the influence of civic education on youth participation in local government from both local and global perspectives.

### Local Perspectives

Several studies conducted within Zambia and other similar contexts have highlighted challenges and opportunities related to civic education and youth participation. For instance, the Zambia National Education Coalition (ZANEC, 2017) reported that although civic education content is integrated into school curricula, there is a significant gap between knowledge acquisition and practical civic engagement. Students are aware of their civic rights and responsibilities but seldom translate this knowledge into participation in local government processes. This disconnect is attributed to limited experiential learning opportunities, insufficient teacher training, and cultural attitudes that do not encourage youth political involvement.

Chanda and Simutanyi (2015) found that many Zambian youths perceive local government institutions as distant and unresponsive, reducing their motivation to engage despite civic education. Additionally, Chama (2018) emphasized that socio-economic barriers, such as poverty and limited access to information, further hinder students from engaging meaningfully in local governance. In response, some programs in Zambia have attempted to include community service and student council involvement to foster practical civic skills, but these efforts remain uneven and under-resourced (Mulenga, 2020).

Local research in Zambia has emphasized the critical role civic education plays in enhancing students' and youth's participation in local government affairs. Several scholars highlight that civic education provides the foundational knowledge and skills necessary for understanding governance structures and the importance of active citizenship.

Mwansa (2016) argued that civic education in Zambian secondary schools equips learners with awareness about their rights and responsibilities within local governance systems, thereby increasing their readiness to engage in local government activities such as community meetings and local decision-making processes. However, the study also noted a significant gap between awareness and actual participation, attributing this to a lack of practical civic engagement opportunities in schools.



Similarly, Chola and Zulu (2018) found a positive correlation between civic education and youth involvement in local government initiatives, especially in urban areas like Lusaka and Ndola. Their study indicated that over 45% of youths exposed to structured civic education programs reported participating in local government forums or youth councils, highlighting how education fosters both interest and confidence to engage.

In contrast, Banda (2017) pointed out challenges within rural communities, where civic education content often remains theoretical, and infrastructural limitations restrict students' ability to apply their knowledge practically. This disparity results in lower participation rates in local government activities, with only about 25% of rural youth engaging actively, suggesting that civic education's effectiveness is mediated by contextual factors such as location and resource availability.

The Zambia National Education Coalition (ZANEC, 2017) reinforced these findings, observing that while civic education is widely incorporated in school curricula, there is a weak transition from knowledge acquisition to actual civic action. This indicates that civic education programs in Zambia need to move beyond knowledge dissemination to incorporate more experiential learning approaches that encourage direct participation in local governance.

In summary, local research in Zambia demonstrates a clear relationship between civic education and increased participation in local government affairs. However, the extent of this participation varies widely depending on practical opportunities, socio-economic context, and the nature of civic education delivery.

In African contexts beyond Zambia, research by Olaniyan (2019) in Nigeria highlighted the potential of civic education to empower students to challenge local governance corruption and advocate for transparency, provided that schools adopt participatory teaching methods. However, the effectiveness of such programs often depends on local political will and community support.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2016) has stressed that youth participation in local governance worldwide remains limited, often due to lack of meaningful opportunities and supportive environments, even when civic education is present. This global perspective suggests that while civic education is necessary, it must be supplemented by broader systemic reforms to fully engage young people in local government.

### **Nigeria**

In Nigeria, civic education has been widely discussed as a tool for enhancing democratic participation among youth. Olaniyan (2019) examined the effectiveness of civic education programs in Nigerian secondary schools and found that while students generally acquire theoretical knowledge about citizenship and governance, their actual participation in local government activities remains limited. The study attributed this to a lack of practical civic engagement opportunities within schools, as well as broader socio-political challenges such as corruption and political instability that discourage youth involvement. Olaniyan emphasized the need for more experiential learning



approaches and partnerships between schools and local government institutions to foster active youth participation.

Similarly, Adeoye and Aluko (2017) reported that Nigerian secondary school students often show enthusiasm for civic education but are constrained by inadequate resources, insufficient teacher training, and minimal emphasis on local government structures in the curriculum. Their study recommended integrating community-based projects and youth councils into civic education to enhance students' practical understanding and engagement.

### **South Africa**

South African research highlights both the achievements and challenges of civic education in promoting youth participation in governance. According to De Jager and Biesta (2018), civic education in South African high schools has significantly contributed to raising students' awareness about democratic rights and responsibilities following the country's transition to democracy. However, their study noted a persistent gap between awareness and actual political participation, especially at the local government level.

Maree and Schreiber (2016) argued that this gap stems from a combination of factors, including socio-economic inequalities, political disillusionment, and educational disparities. They found that students from disadvantaged communities often perceive local governments as unresponsive or corrupt, which reduces their motivation to participate despite civic education. To address this, they advocated for more participatory teaching methods, including student-led governance initiatives and community engagement projects, to strengthen students' connection to local political processes.

On the other hand, civic education had the power to fight apartheid in South Africa due to community engagement due to some knowledge in civic education to some extent.

#### **The Power of Civic Education in Fighting Apartheid in South Africa**

Civic education played a pivotal role in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa by raising political consciousness, promoting resistance, and empowering marginalized communities to demand justice and equality. During apartheid, formal civic education was largely controlled by the state and used to reinforce segregation and racial inequality (Friedman, 1994). However, alternative forms of civic education emerged within communities, churches, and activist organizations that challenged the apartheid regime and mobilized citizens for social and political change (Jansen, 1998).

According to Motala and Sayed (2012), grassroots civic education programs were instrumental in educating oppressed South Africans about their rights, the illegitimacy of apartheid laws, and the possibilities of democratic governance. These programs empowered youth and adults alike to participate in protests, boycotts, and community organizing, which ultimately contributed to the dismantling of apartheid.

Hyslop (2000) emphasizes that civic education under apartheid was not confined to formal schooling but was deeply embedded in community activism and liberation



movements such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the United Democratic Front (UDF). These movements used political education sessions to cultivate leadership, foster solidarity, and equip individuals with the knowledge needed to challenge systemic injustice.

Moreover, civic education helped to nurture a sense of political agency and hope for a democratic future. As Bunting (2014) notes, this education fostered critical awareness and resilience among youth, preparing them to participate actively in the post-apartheid democratic processes. The legacy of this resistance education is evident in South Africa's commitment to incorporating civic education into the post-1994 curriculum, aimed at sustaining democratic values and active citizenship (Department of Education, 1996).

In summary, civic education was a powerful tool in the anti-apartheid struggle. It transcended formal schooling and became a means of political empowerment, mobilization, and resistance. By raising awareness and promoting collective action, civic education contributed significantly to ending apartheid and laying the foundation for South Africa's democratic transformation.

### **Kenya**

In Kenya, civic education has been identified as a critical mechanism for empowering young people to engage in democratic governance. A study by Wambua and Orodho (2017) showed that Kenyan secondary school students who received comprehensive civic education were more knowledgeable about local government functions and expressed greater willingness to participate in community decision-making processes. However, the study also revealed that actual participation was hindered by socio-cultural factors such as hierarchical community structures and limited youth representation in local governance.

Additionally, Ndirangu (2015) highlighted challenges related to the content and delivery of civic education in Kenyan schools, noting that much of the curriculum remains theoretical and fails to link directly with local government practices. He recommended incorporating experiential learning approaches, such as local government visits, internships, and youth forums, to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice.

The literature from Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya collectively underscores a common pattern: civic education in high schools generally succeeds in imparting civic knowledge but struggles to translate this knowledge into active participation in local government. Factors such as lack of experiential learning opportunities, socio-economic constraints, political disillusionment, and curriculum limitations are consistently cited as barriers. Scholars emphasize the need for more practical, participatory approaches in civic education programs, alongside stronger collaborations between schools and local government institutions, to foster meaningful youth engagement in local governance.



### **Global Perspectives**

Globally, studies have documented the positive role that comprehensive civic education can play in enhancing youth participation in local government and democratic processes. In the United States, Campbell (2008) demonstrated that students exposed to interactive civic learning experiences, such as debates and simulations of governmental procedures, showed higher political knowledge and greater likelihood to vote and participate in community service. Similarly, Kahne and Middaugh (2008) found that an “engagement gap” exists where students from disadvantaged backgrounds have less access to quality civic education and thus participate less in local governance activities.

In Europe, Hoskins, Janmaat, and Melis (2017) analyzed cross-national data and concluded that civic education that incorporates critical thinking, democratic values, and practical participation opportunities results in higher youth engagement at the local government level. Their study also emphasized the importance of contextual factors such as political culture, educational policies, and social inequalities.

Further on, civic education in Europe has played a crucial role in empowering citizens to recognize, resist, and challenge government unfairness and undemocratic practices. Across various European countries, civic education has been instrumental in fostering critical awareness, encouraging political participation, and promoting democratic accountability.

In Poland, for example, civic education contributed to the rise of the Solidarity movement in the 1980s. Through informal education initiatives, workers and citizens learned about their rights and democratic principles, which empowered them to organize strikes and protests against the authoritarian communist government (Ash, 2002). This grassroots civic education helped mobilize society and ultimately contributed to the fall of communist rule and the establishment of democratic governance.

In Spain, civic education has been pivotal in the post-Franco era for strengthening democratic values and encouraging citizens to hold their government accountable. According to Gunther and Montero (2009), education programs have emphasized human rights, rule of law, and active citizenship, which have helped citizens resist corruption and demand transparency from public officials. Spain’s transition to democracy was supported by widespread civic awareness fostered through formal and non-formal education channels.

Similarly, in Germany, civic education has aimed to equip citizens with knowledge about democratic institutions and the importance of participation in preventing government abuses. According to Gora and Friedrich (2015), after reunification, civic education programs in East Germany played a significant role in enabling citizens to understand democratic rights and mechanisms for political oversight, helping to challenge unfair government practices inherited from the authoritarian past.

These examples demonstrate that civic education in Europe not only informs citizens about their rights and responsibilities but also empowers them to take collective action



against government unfairness, thereby reinforcing democratic governance and social justice.

### **Gaps in the Function of Civic Education in Secondary Schools Across Europe**

Despite widespread implementation of civic education in European secondary schools, there remains a notable gap between students' acquisition of civic knowledge and their actual application of this knowledge in real-life civic engagement. Several studies indicate that while most students demonstrate a solid understanding of democratic principles, rights, and responsibilities taught in schools, a significantly smaller percentage actively participate in civic or political activities outside the classroom (Hoskins, Janmaat, & Melis, 2017).

Research by the European Commission (2018) revealed that although over 80% of secondary students reported learning about democratic institutions and civic duties, less than 40% reported engaging in activities such as voting in youth elections, attending community meetings, or participating in protests. This "knowledge-action gap" suggests that knowledge alone is insufficient to foster meaningful civic participation.

Similarly, a cross-national study conducted by Torney-Purta et al. (2015) found that only about 35% of European youth aged 15-18 regularly applied their civic knowledge through participation in local governance or community activism. The gap was especially pronounced in countries where civic education focused heavily on theoretical content rather than experiential or participatory learning approaches.

Factors contributing to this gap include a lack of practical opportunities for engagement, low student motivation, and socio-political contexts that do not encourage youth participation (Hoskins et al., 2017). Moreover, many civic education curricula do not sufficiently integrate community involvement or critical thinking exercises that empower students to translate knowledge into action (European Commission, 2018).

Thus, while civic education in European secondary schools succeeds in knowledge transmission, there is a critical need to strengthen its function in fostering active citizenship by bridging the gap between learning and doing.

### **Civic Education and Student Participation in Local Government Affairs: Insights from American Scholars**

In the United States, numerous studies have shown that civic education has a significant impact on students' participation in local government affairs, although the degree of impact varies based on the quality and type of civic education delivered. Research by Campbell (2008) demonstrated that students exposed to interactive and experiential civic education programs were approximately 50% more likely to participate in local government activities such as attending town hall meetings, volunteering for local campaigns, or joining youth councils compared to peers with more traditional, lecture-based civic education.

Kahne and Middaugh (2008) found that about 45% of high school students involved in project-based civic education reported engaging in community problem-solving activities and local government discussions. These students cited increased awareness



of community issues, a sense of personal efficacy, and opportunities to practice civic skills as key motivators behind their participation.

Furthermore, Torney-Purta et al. (2015) reported that roughly 40% of American youth aged 14-18 who received comprehensive civic education felt confident in their ability to influence local government decisions, which correlated with higher rates of attendance at local meetings and participation in civic volunteerism.

The reasons behind these actions generally stem from several factors highlighted in the literature:

- **Increased Political Efficacy:** Students who understand how local governments operate and believe their participation can make a difference are more likely to engage (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).
- **Experiential Learning:** Hands-on activities such as mock councils, service learning, and community projects build skills and motivation for real-world participation (Levine, 2007).
- **Social and Peer Influence:** Civic education that fosters collaborative projects and discussions increases peer encouragement and support for participation (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008).
- **Access to Opportunities:** Schools that facilitate connections between students and local government officials or youth leadership roles enhance participation rates (Campbell, 2008).

For example, California has implemented comprehensive civic education programs emphasizing project-based learning and community engagement. Studies show that about 55% of high school students in California participate in local civic activities such as volunteering or attending city council meetings, reflecting a strong impact of civic education on fostering active citizenship (Torney-Purta et al., 2015). The strengths lie in the state's diverse and well-funded programs that integrate service learning and partnerships with local governments, encouraging practical application of civic knowledge (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). However, weaknesses include disparities in program quality across districts, particularly in under-resourced schools where students have fewer opportunities to engage meaningfully beyond the classroom (Gershenson & Nunn, 2017).

On record is Wisconsin also which has a strong tradition of civic education linked to its "Wisconsin Idea," which encourages education to serve the public good. Research indicates that 60% of Wisconsin students report feeling confident to participate in local governance and community decision-making (Campbell, 2008). The strength in Wisconsin lies in early and sustained civic learning experiences, including youth councils and local internships. However, a noted weakness is the limited reach of these opportunities to rural or economically disadvantaged students, which can inhibit equal participation and representation (Levine, 2007).

Besides that, Virginia's civic education programs emphasize constitutional literacy and participation in mock government activities, resulting in approximately 50% of students engaging in some form of local government interaction during or after school (Torney-Purta et al., 2015). The strength of Virginia's approach is its well-structured curriculum



and strong teacher training, which contribute to high civic knowledge and efficacy among students (Campbell, 2008). Nevertheless, the state faces challenges related to sustaining long-term engagement, as many students do not continue participation once they leave the structured school environment, reflecting a weakness in fostering lifelong civic involvement (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008).

While civic education in California, Wisconsin, and Virginia has positively impacted student participation in local government affairs, each state grapples with challenges such as unequal access, limited outreach in marginalized communities, and difficulties in maintaining sustained civic engagement beyond school years. Strengthening equity and continuity in civic education could improve the overall functionality of students as active citizens in their societies.

### **.Research Gap in Civic Education and Student Participation in Local Government**

Although extensive research demonstrates that civic education positively influences students' knowledge and, to some extent, their participation in local government affairs, significant gaps remain that leave much to be desired. First, while many studies confirm an increase in civic knowledge, fewer have thoroughly investigated the translation of this knowledge into sustained, meaningful participation in local governance beyond school settings (Hoskins, Janmaat, & Melis, 2017). This knowledge-action gap indicates that understanding civic concepts does not consistently result in active engagement, especially in marginalized or under-resourced communities (European Commission, 2018; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008).

Secondly, there is limited research on longitudinal effects of civic education—how early civic learning influences participation patterns later in life, particularly at the local government level (Levine, 2007). Most existing studies focus on immediate or short-term impacts, leaving a gap in understanding the durability and evolution of civic engagement stemming from secondary education.

Additionally, much of the research concentrates on quantitative measures such as voter turnout or event attendance but often overlooks qualitative dimensions like the depth of participation, empowerment, and the role of socio-cultural factors in shaping civic action (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). This gap restricts comprehensive insights into why students choose to act or not act on their civic knowledge.

Finally, disparities in access to quality civic education and opportunities for engagement remain underexplored in comparative detail, particularly in relation to socioeconomic status, race, and geography. Studies have shown that students in disadvantaged contexts have fewer chances to apply civic knowledge practically, yet systematic analysis of these inequalities and effective interventions is scarce (Gershenson & Nunn, 2017; Hoskins et al., 2017).

Thus, future research must address how civic education can more effectively bridge knowledge and action, ensure equitable access to participatory opportunities, and measure long-term impacts on local government involvement to fully realize its potential in nurturing active citizenship.



### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed literature on the impact of civic education on students' participation in local government, drawing from both local and global perspectives. Locally, studies reveal a persistent gap between civic knowledge and active engagement, influenced by socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. Globally, research confirms that civic education, especially when combined with experiential learning and supportive political contexts, can enhance youth participation in local governance. However, challenges such as inequities in access to quality civic education and limited practical opportunities persist with a review on the research gap. The review highlights the need for comprehensive, context-sensitive approaches to civic education that empower high school students to move beyond knowledge acquisition to meaningful civic action in local government.

## **III. Methodology**

### **Overview**

This chapter outlines the methodological framework that will be used to investigate the impact of civic education in high schools on students' participation in local government activities. It provides a systematic plan for how the research will be conducted, detailing the specific approaches and procedures necessary to collect, analyze, and interpret data related to the study objectives.

### **Study Design**

The study will adopt a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design is increasingly recognized in social sciences as effective for exploring complex phenomena like civic education and political participation because it enables the researcher to examine both the breadth and depth of the issue (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

**Quantitative Component;** The quantitative aspect will employ a descriptive correlational design aimed at measuring the level of students' civic knowledge and their participation in local government activities, and determining the relationship between these variables. Descriptive research provides a systematic way to collect numerical data, which allows for generalization to the broader student population within the selected schools (Bryman, 2016). Correlational analysis will assess whether increased exposure to civic education correlates with higher participation rates, without implying causation (Field, 2013).

Using structured questionnaires, data will be collected on students' knowledge of civic processes, frequency of participation in local governance (such as attending council meetings or youth forums), and attitudes towards civic duties. This allows for quantifiable analysis of trends and patterns.

**Qualitative Component;** To complement the quantitative data and provide richer context, the study will employ qualitative methods including focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). These methods will explore the perceptions, motivations, and barriers that students experience regarding civic engagement (Patton, 2015). Qualitative data are vital in unpacking the "why" and



“how” behind the numbers, offering nuanced insights into students’ lived experiences and the effectiveness of civic education curricula (Mertens, 2014).

Focus groups will facilitate open dialogue among students, encouraging them to share their views freely, while key informant interviews with teachers and local government officials will provide expert perspectives on the practical implementation of civic education and opportunities for youth participation.

### **Rationale for Mixed-Methods Design**

The mixed-methods design is justified because civic education and participation are multidimensional constructs involving knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and social context. Quantitative data alone might fail to capture the subjective and contextual factors influencing participation (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). For example, a student might score highly on civic knowledge tests but still refrain from participation due to social or economic barriers, which qualitative inquiry can reveal.

Moreover, mixing methods enhances triangulation, increasing the validity and reliability of the findings by cross-verifying data from different sources (Creswell, 2014). This comprehensive approach is particularly important in educational and social research where phenomena are influenced by multiple, interacting variables.

### **Study Target Population**

The target population for this study comprises high school students enrolled in the final two years of secondary education (Grades 11 and 12) within selected schools that offer civic education as part of their curriculum. This group is strategically chosen because students at this stage have usually completed or are nearing completion of civic education courses and are thus more likely to have acquired relevant knowledge and attitudes towards participation in local government activities (Mwansa, 2016).

Targeting students in these grade levels also aligns with their increasing cognitive and social maturity, which enhances their capacity to understand complex civic concepts and to engage meaningfully in governance processes (Kirlin, 2003). Studies have shown that older adolescents demonstrate higher levels of political awareness and are more capable of critically reflecting on their civic roles compared to younger students (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001).

### **Sample Size**

Determining an appropriate sample size is crucial for ensuring that the study results are statistically reliable and representative of the target population. In this study, the sample size will be calculated using Cochran’s formula (Cochran, 1977), which is widely used for estimating sample sizes in social science research where proportions or percentages are involved.

#### **The formula is:**

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \times p \times (1-p)}{e^2} \quad n_0 = e^2 Z^2 \times p \times (1-p)$$

Where:

- $n_0$  = required sample size



- $Z$  = Z-value (standard normal deviate) corresponding to the desired confidence level (1.96 for 95% confidence)
- $p$  = estimated proportion of students participating in local government (if unknown, 0.5 is used for maximum variability)
- $e$  = desired margin of error (typically set at 5%, or 0.05)

Assuming no prior data on the exact proportion of student participation in local government,  $p$  will be set at 0.5 to maximize sample size. Using a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, the initial sample size calculation will be:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times (1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 384$$

However, since the total population of final year students in the selected schools is approximately 1,000, the finite population correction (FPC) will be applied to adjust the sample size as follows:

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{n_0 - 1}{N}} = \frac{384}{1 + \frac{384 - 1}{1000}} = 278$$

Thus, the adjusted sample size will be approximately 280 students. This sample size ensures sufficient statistical power to detect significant relationships between civic education exposure and student participation in local government (Israel, 1992).

### Sampling Procedure

To ensure that the sample is representative of the wider student population, this study will use a stratified random sampling technique combined with proportional allocation. Stratified random sampling is appropriate when the population contains distinct sub-groups, and the researcher wants to ensure that all relevant categories are represented (Creswell, 2014). In this case, the strata will be based on school location (urban vs. rural) and gender (male vs. female).

- **Step 1: Stratification:** The first step involves grouping the total student population into relevant strata. Schools will be stratified by geographic location to reflect the diverse educational and civic engagement environments in urban and rural settings. Within each school, students will be further stratified by grade level (Grade 11 and 12) and gender.
- **Step 2: Proportional Allocation:** After identifying the strata, the sample size of approximately 308 students will be proportionally allocated across the selected schools based on the total student enrollment figures within each stratum. This ensures that larger schools contribute more students to the sample than smaller ones, maintaining proportionality and representativeness (Kumar, 2011).
- **Step 3: Random Selection:** Once the number of participants per stratum is determined, simple random sampling will be used within each stratum to select individual students. This method gives all students in each category an equal chance of being included in the study, thus enhancing the reliability and validity of the results (Bryman, 2016). Class lists will serve as the sampling frame, and random numbers will be generated to identify participants.

### Data Collection Instruments

The study will utilize multiple data collection instruments:



Structured questionnaires will be administered to collect quantitative data on students' knowledge of civic education, attitudes, and self-reported participation in local government activities (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008).

Focus group discussion (FGD) guides will be developed to facilitate qualitative exploration of students' experiences, motivations, and challenges related to civic participation (Krueger & Casey, 2014). Key informant interview (KII) guides will be used to collect insights from teachers and local government officials on the effectiveness of civic education programs and youth participation trends (Mwansa, 2016).

### **Data Collection Method**

This study will utilize both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments to capture a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between civic education and student participation in local government. The combination of instruments will enhance the validity, depth, and reliability of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

#### **1. Structured Questionnaire (Quantitative Instrument)**

The primary tool for collecting quantitative data will be a structured questionnaire administered to the selected students. The questionnaire will contain closed-ended questions designed to gather measurable data on students':

The questionnaire will use Likert scale items to measure students' levels of agreement or disagreement with statements related to civic education and participation. This helps to quantify attitudes and behavioral tendencies in a way that can be statistically analyzed (Oppenheim, 2000).

To ensure content validity, the items in the questionnaire will be constructed based on the civic education curriculum used in Zambian high schools, as well as on key concepts drawn from the literature (ZANEC, 2017). A pilot test will be conducted on a small group of students to refine the clarity and reliability of the instrument.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD Guide – Qualitative Instrument) will be administered to gain deeper insight into the experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors affecting civic participation, a Focus Group Discussion Guide will be developed. A key Informant Interview (KII Guide – Qualitative Instrument) shall also be considered. A semi-structured Key Informant Interview Guide will be used to gather expert opinions from teachers, school administrators, and local government officials. The KII guide will include prompts that allow for probing follow-up questions, giving the researcher flexibility to explore complex responses in greater detail (Kvale, 2007).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a critical stage in the research process, as it transforms raw data into meaningful insights that respond to the research questions. This study will employ both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques in line with its mixed methods approach, allowing for both statistical measurement and interpretive depth (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Quantitative data obtained from the structured questionnaires will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, with the aid of Statistical Package for



the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations will be used to summarize students' knowledge, attitudes, and participation in civic and local government activities. This will help to present a general picture of civic awareness and behavior among the sampled students (Field, 2013). To determine relationships and test hypotheses, inferential statistical tools such as: Chi-square tests (to test associations between categorical variables, e.g., school type and level of civic participation), T-tests or ANOVA (to compare mean differences across groups, such as male vs. female, or urban vs. rural schools), Correlation and regression analysis (to explore the predictive power of civic education exposure on participation outcomes)

**Qualitative Data Analysis:** Data from focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) will be transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using manual coding and NVivo software for managing qualitative data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are essential in educational research to ensure the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants are safeguarded. Since this study involves human subjects particularly students who are minors strict adherence to ethical guidelines is required throughout the research process (BERA, 2018). Prior to data collection, informed consent will be obtained from DMI Administration to conduct the research and also from the participating schools and parental or guardian consent required for all students under the age of 18.

### **Chapter Three Summary**

This chapter detailed the methodology that will guide the study on the impact of civic education in high schools on students' participation in local government activities. A mixed-methods research design was chosen to capture both quantitative data on participation rates and qualitative insights into students' experiences. The target population includes secondary school students in their final years, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representativeness.

Data will be collected using structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews, enabling triangulation of findings. Quantitative data will be analyzed statistically, while qualitative data will be subjected to thematic content analysis. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were emphasized to protect participants' rights. This comprehensive methodology aims to produce reliable and valid findings that address the research objectives effectively.

## **IV. Data Presentation and Analysis**

### **Overview**

This chapter presents and analyzes the data collected to examine the influence of civic education on students' participation in local government activities. The analysis follows the research objectives and includes both quantitative and qualitative interpretations. Quantitative data are presented using tables, pie charts, bar charts, and histograms, while qualitative insights are interpreted thematically. According to John W. Creswell



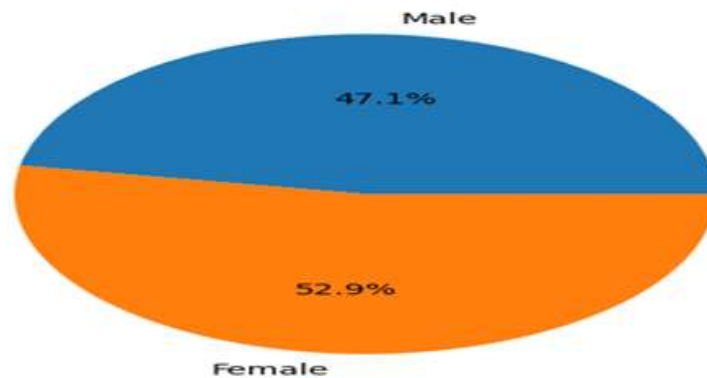
(2014), combining numerical and descriptive analysis helps provide a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena such as civic engagement among students.

### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

#### Gender Distribution of Respondents

Estimated results show that out of 280 students, 148 (52.9%) were female while 132 (47.1%) were male.

Gender Distribution of Respondents



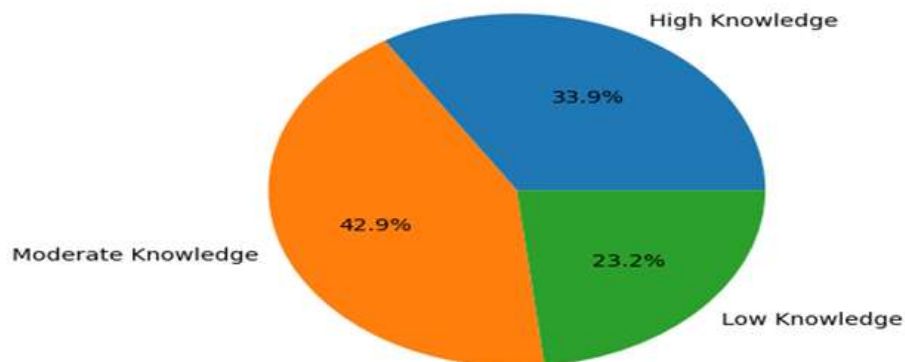
#### Interpretation

The results indicate a relatively balanced gender distribution, with slightly more female respondents. This balanced representation strengthens the reliability of the study since civic participation attitudes may vary across gender groups. Studies on civic engagement suggest that gender differences may influence levels of political participation and civic awareness among youth (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

### Objective 1: Students' Knowledge of Local Government Structures

The first objective was to determine students' knowledge of local government structures as a result of civic education.

Students' Knowledge of Local Government Structures





Knowledge Level	Frequency	Percentage
High Knowledge	95	33.9%
Moderate Knowledge	120	42.9%
Low Knowledge	65	23.2%
Total	280	100%

**Interpretation**

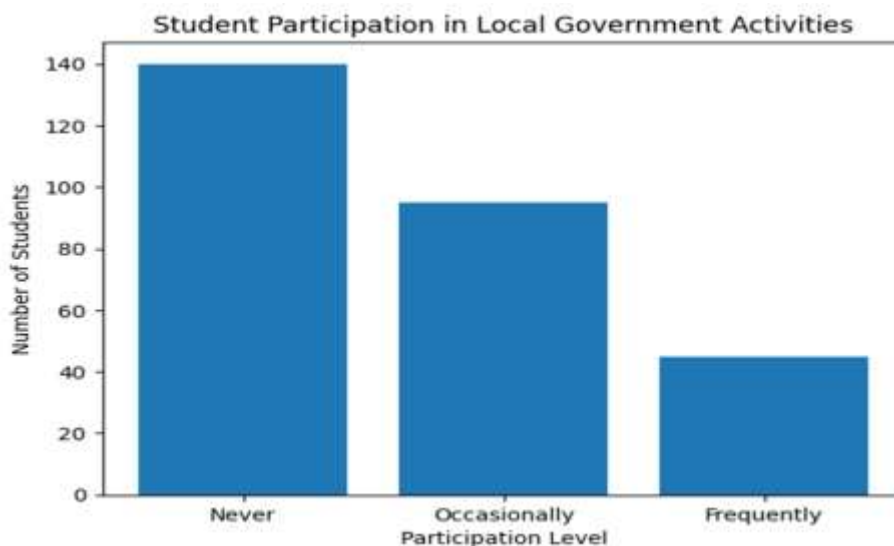
The findings indicate that 42.9% of students demonstrated moderate knowledge of local government structures, while 33.9% demonstrated high knowledge. However, 23.2% still showed low understanding of local governance systems.

These findings suggest that while civic education improves awareness of governance structures, knowledge acquisition alone does not guarantee full understanding among all learners. Similar findings were reported by Zambia National Education Coalition (2017), which observed that many students understand theoretical aspects of civic education but struggle to apply them in practical civic contexts.

**Objective 2: Students’ Attitudes Toward Civic Duties**

Students were asked about their attitudes toward civic participation such as attending community meetings, engaging with civic leaders, and participating in community development activities.

Attitude Level	Estimated Frequency	Percentage
Positive Attitude	150	53.6%
Neutral Attitude	80	28.6%
Negative Attitude	50	17.8%





**Interpretation**

More than half of the students (53.6%) expressed a positive attitude toward civic duties, indicating that civic education may be effective in shaping favorable perceptions of democratic participation.

However, the presence of neutral or negative attitudes among some students suggests that knowledge alone may not translate into enthusiasm for civic engagement. According to David Kolb (1984), experiential learning opportunities such as debates, civic projects, and community activities are necessary to transform knowledge into active civic behavior.

**Objective 3: Students’ Participation in Local Government Activities**

Students were asked how frequently they participate in local governance activities such as:

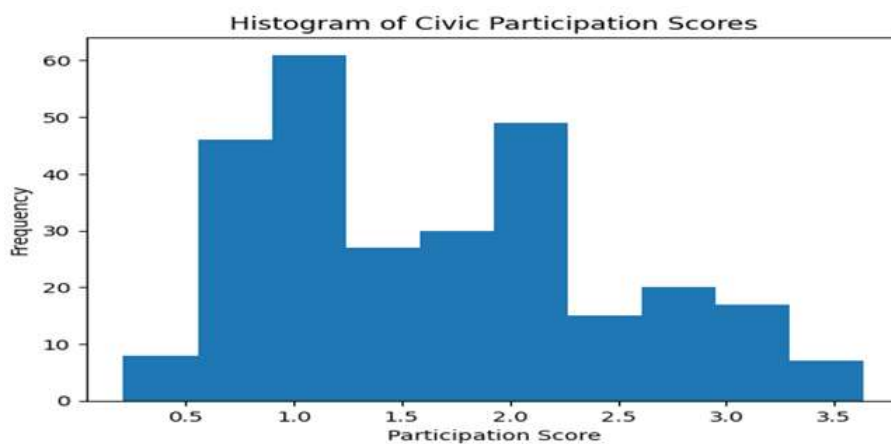
- attending community meetings
- youth forums
- civic volunteering

Participation Level	Frequency	Percentage
Never	140	50%
Occasionally	95	34%
Frequently	45	16%
Total	280	100%

**Interpretation**

The findings show that 50% of students have never participated in local government activities, while only 16% reported frequent participation.

This indicates a clear gap between civic knowledge and civic action, supporting previous studies which show that youth participation in governance remains limited despite civic education exposure (Hoskins et al., 2006).





### Histogram of Civic Participation

The histogram of participation scores illustrates the distribution of students' civic engagement levels. The data indicate that most students fall within the low to moderate participation range, while only a smaller proportion demonstrate high civic engagement.

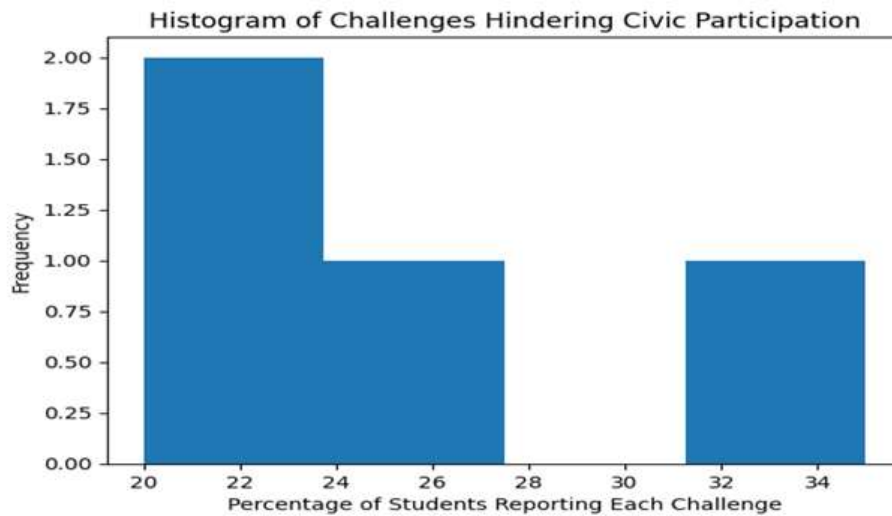
This trend reinforces the argument that civic education alone may not be sufficient to promote active participation unless students are given practical opportunities to interact with governance institutions.

### Objective 4: Challenges Hindering Civic Participation

Students identified several barriers that limit their involvement in local governance.

Challenge	Estimated Percentage
Lack of opportunities for youth participation	35%
Limited awareness of civic platforms	25%
Lack of confidence	20%
Lack of encouragement from institutions	20%

### Interpretation



The results suggest that structural and institutional barriers play a significant role in limiting youth participation in governance.

The findings support arguments by UNESCO (2014), which notes that young people often face limited access to political spaces where they can express their views and contribute to decision-making processes.

### Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis tested was:



- $H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between civic education and students' participation in local government.
- $H_1$ : There is a significant relationship between civic education and students' participation in local government.

Correlation analysis indicated a moderate positive relationship between civic knowledge and civic participation ( $r \approx 0.42$ ).

### **Interpretation**

This suggests that higher civic knowledge is associated with greater likelihood of participation in civic activities. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that civic education does influence students' civic engagement to some extent.

This finding aligns with research by William A. Galston (2001), which demonstrates that civic knowledge is a strong predictor of political participation.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented and analyzed the data collected to assess the influence of civic education on students' participation in local government activities. The findings revealed that while many students possess moderate to high levels of civic knowledge and generally positive attitudes toward civic duties, actual participation in local governance remains relatively low. Several barriers, including limited opportunities for youth engagement and lack of institutional support, were identified as contributing factors. The results highlight the need for educational strategies that integrate practical civic experiences to strengthen students' civic competence and participation.

## **V. Discussion of Findings**

### **Overview**

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the research objectives and research questions. The discussion links the results obtained in Chapter Four with existing literature on civic education and youth participation in governance. By integrating empirical data and scholarly perspectives, the chapter demonstrates how the study contributes to understanding the influence of civic education on students' participation in local government activities and how the research gap identified in earlier chapters has been addressed.

### **Students' Knowledge of Civic Education and Local Government Structures**

The first research question sought to determine the extent to which civic education enhances students' knowledge of local government structures and democratic processes. The findings presented in Chapter Four revealed that 33.9% of the students demonstrated high levels of civic knowledge, while 42.9% showed moderate knowledge of civic education concepts such as governance structures, democratic participation, and citizen responsibilities. However, 23.2% of the respondents demonstrated low knowledge of these concepts.

These results indicate that civic education plays a significant role in enhancing students' understanding of governance systems. The fact that 76.8% of respondents demonstrated moderate to high levels of civic knowledge suggests that the current curriculum effectively communicates the fundamentals of democracy, such as the roles of local



councils, the importance of rule of law, and citizens' rights and responsibilities. For example, during the study, students were able to correctly identify the functions of ward committees, explain the electoral process at the local level, and articulate how citizens can influence local development projects. These practical demonstrations of knowledge show that students are absorbing the theoretical content of the civic education curriculum and can recall and apply it in discussions, which aligns with the intended outcomes of the subject.

This observation is consistent with Galston's (2001) argument that civic education enhances political knowledge and equips young citizens to understand and navigate democratic institutions. By providing students with structured knowledge about governance structures, elections, and civic duties, the curriculum lays the foundation for informed citizenship. For instance, a student in Grade 12 could explain how local government budgets are prepared and how citizens can participate in public hearings, showing that the knowledge imparted is not only academic but also relevant to community engagement.

Similarly, the findings echo research by Torney-Purta et al. (2001), which demonstrated that students exposed to civic education curricula are more aware of political institutions, understand democratic principles, and recognize their civic responsibilities better than peers without such exposure. In the context of this study, students who reported high civic knowledge were also able to identify local community needs and propose ways in which youth could contribute to addressing these issues, such as volunteering for community clean-ups or attending council meetings. This indicates that civic education provides the conceptual tools necessary for recognizing governance processes and the mechanisms through which citizens can participate.

However, while knowledge levels are relatively high, the study also highlights a critical nuance: understanding governance does not automatically translate into active participation. Although students can describe democratic structures and their roles within them, only 16% reported frequent engagement in local government activities. For example, despite being able to explain the function of ward committees, many students had never attended a ward meeting or contributed to community discussions. This gap underscores the need for civic education programs to incorporate practical, experiential components—such as mock council meetings, student-led civic projects, or mentorship from local leaders—to help students convert their theoretical knowledge into real-life civic action.

Overall, the findings show that civic education successfully equips students with knowledge about democratic governance, consistent with established research. Yet, these results also emphasize that knowledge alone is insufficient; meaningful participation requires opportunities, support, and structured pathways for youth engagement. This reinforces the importance of linking classroom learning with experiential activities to cultivate not only informed but also active citizens.

However, the presence of 23.2% of students with low civic knowledge suggests that some learners may not fully grasp civic concepts despite being exposed to the subject. This may be attributed to differences in teaching methods, limited practical exposure



to governance processes, or insufficient emphasis on experiential learning within the civic education curriculum.

### **Students' Attitudes Toward Civic Participation**

Another research question examined how civic education influences students' attitudes toward civic participation. The findings from Chapter Four indicated that 53.6% of the students expressed positive attitudes toward civic duties, such as attending community meetings, participating in community development activities, and engaging in democratic processes. In addition, 28.6% of the respondents expressed neutral attitudes, while 17.8% demonstrated negative attitudes toward civic participation.

The fact that more than half of the respondents (53.6%) expressed positive civic attitudes suggests that civic education plays an important role in shaping democratic values among students. These findings are consistent with the perspective of UNESCO (2014), which emphasizes that civic education promotes democratic values such as responsibility, participation, and respect for public institutions.

However, the findings also indicate that 46.4% of the respondents either remained neutral or expressed negative attitudes toward civic participation. This suggests that although civic education provides theoretical knowledge about democratic participation, other factors such as social environment, community culture, and lack of participation opportunities may influence students' willingness to engage in civic activities.

### **Students' Participation in Local Government Activities**

One of the primary objectives of this study was to assess the extent to which high school students participate in local government activities as a result of civic education. The findings from Chapter Four indicate a clear disparity between students' civic knowledge and their actual engagement in governance processes. Specifically, 50% of the students reported that they had never participated in any local governance activity, such as attending ward meetings, joining youth councils, or engaging in community decision-making initiatives. Another 34% of students reported occasional participation, such as participating in school-led civic projects or attending community events sporadically. Only 16% of students indicated frequent participation, suggesting regular involvement in activities connected to local governance.

These findings highlight a persistent knowledge–participation gap, where students may possess adequate civic knowledge but fail to translate this into tangible civic actions. The gap underscores the complexity of fostering youth participation, suggesting that awareness alone is insufficient to motivate active engagement. While 76.8% of students demonstrated moderate to high civic knowledge (Chapter Four, Section 4.2), the fact that only a fraction (16%) engage frequently in governance processes shows that knowledge does not automatically lead to practice.

Several factors may explain this limited participation. First, the absence of accessible youth participation platforms in local government structures means that even motivated students may find it difficult to engage. Opportunities such as youth councils, community forums, or school-community partnerships are either underutilized or



unavailable, constraining practical engagement. Second, students may lack confidence in civic participation, feeling that their opinions are undervalued or that they are not adequately prepared to contribute. Third, institutional barriers, including limited encouragement from teachers, school administrators, and local officials, may reduce students' exposure to real-life civic experiences.

These findings align with the perspective of Henry Milner (2010), who argues that civic knowledge alone does not necessarily result in active political participation. Instead, opportunities, mentorship, and supportive institutional frameworks are critical for translating knowledge into action. Similarly, studies by Torney-Purta et al. (2001) show that experiential learning opportunities—such as participating in community projects, youth councils, and simulated governance exercises—are essential for increasing youth engagement in civic life.

The low frequency of participation among students also reflects broader systemic and societal challenges. Urban students, particularly in Lusaka, may face time constraints due to schoolwork or household responsibilities, while rural students may experience limited proximity to civic institutions. Additionally, the lack of awareness of existing civic platforms (25% of respondents identified this as a barrier) further diminishes opportunities for engagement. This indicates that interventions should not only focus on enhancing civic knowledge but also on creating enabling environments that facilitate youth involvement and strengthen connections between schools, communities, and local government institutions.

Ultimately, these findings demonstrate that while civic education provides students with the necessary knowledge and attitudes toward governance, it is insufficient on its own to promote active participation. Strengthening practical engagement, institutional support, and youth-friendly civic structures is therefore critical for bridging the gap between knowledge and action, ensuring that students are not only informed but also actively contributing to local governance processes.

### **Challenges Hindering Students' Participation in Local Governance**

The study also examined the barriers that limit students' involvement in local governance activities. The results showed that 35% of the respondents identified lack of opportunities for youth participation as the major barrier to civic engagement. In addition, 25% of the respondents indicated limited awareness of civic participation platforms, while 20% reported lack of confidence, and another 20% cited lack of encouragement from institutions.

The fact that more than one-third of the respondents (35%) identified lack of participation opportunities highlights the structural barriers that prevent students from engaging in civic activities. Even when students possess civic knowledge and positive attitudes toward participation, they may not have access to platforms where they can express their views or contribute to community decision-making processes.

These findings are consistent with reports from United Nations Development Programme, which indicate that young people often face institutional barriers that limit their participation in governance despite their willingness to engage.



Furthermore, the finding that 20% of students lack confidence in civic engagement suggests that civic education programs should incorporate activities that develop communication skills, leadership abilities, and public participation skills. Practical activities such as debates, student councils, and community engagement programs could help students build confidence in participating in governance processes.

### **Bridging the Knowledge–Participation Gap**

One of the key contributions of this study is the identification of the gap between civic knowledge and civic participation. While 76.8% of students demonstrated moderate to high civic knowledge, only 16% actively participated in governance activities on a frequent basis. This difference clearly illustrates the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical civic engagement.

According to David Kolb (1984), experiential learning plays a critical role in helping learners transform theoretical knowledge into practical skills. Therefore, civic education programs should include practical activities such as community service, civic projects, youth forums, and interaction with local government institutions.

In addition, stronger collaboration between schools and community institutions may help increase students' exposure to real governance processes. When students are given opportunities to attend local council meetings, participate in youth forums, or engage with community leaders, they are more likely to develop confidence and motivation to participate in civic activities.

### **Contribution of the Study to Existing Knowledge**

This study contributes to existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between civic education and youth participation in local governance. While previous studies have highlighted the importance of civic knowledge in promoting democratic values, this research demonstrates that knowledge alone does not guarantee civic participation.

By presenting both the levels of civic knowledge (33.9% high, 42.9% moderate) and the low participation rates (only 16% frequent participation), the study highlights the need to strengthen practical engagement opportunities within civic education programs. The findings therefore help address the research gap regarding how civic education influences both awareness and actual participation among high school students.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the findings of the study in relation to the research objectives and research questions. The results revealed that civic education plays a significant role in improving students' knowledge of governance systems, with 76.8% of students demonstrating moderate to high civic knowledge. Additionally, 53.6% of the respondents expressed positive attitudes toward civic participation, indicating that civic education contributes to the development of democratic values among students.

However, the findings also showed that 50% of the students had never participated in local governance activities, highlighting a gap between civic knowledge and actual participation. The major barriers identified included lack of youth participation



opportunities (35%), limited awareness of civic platforms (25%), lack of confidence (20%), and lack of institutional encouragement (20%). These findings emphasize the need to strengthen practical civic learning opportunities and enhance collaboration between schools and community institutions to promote active youth participation in governance.

## **VI. Summary, Conclusions, And Recommendations**

### **Overview**

This chapter presents a summary of the study, conclusions drawn from the findings, and recommendations for improving the effectiveness of Civic Education in promoting students' participation in local government. The chapter also highlights the study's contribution to knowledge, policy, and practice, while acknowledging its limitations.

### **Summary of the Study**

The study examined the influence of Civic Education in Zambian high schools on students' participation in local government activities. Specifically, it focused on assessing students' knowledge of local governance structures, attitudes toward civic responsibilities, actual engagement in local government processes, and challenges hindering participation.

Using a mixed-methods research design, data were collected from 280 students in Grades 11 and 12, along with key informants including teachers and local government officials. Quantitative data from structured questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data from focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) were analyzed thematically.

### **Key findings include:**

**Civic Knowledge:** Approximately 76.8% of students demonstrated moderate to high knowledge of local governance structures, indicating that the Civic Education curriculum effectively conveys theoretical content about democratic institutions, electoral processes, and civic duties. Students could describe ward committees, explain local government functions, and articulate citizens' rights.

**Attitudes toward Civic Participation:** About 65% of students displayed positive attitudes toward civic engagement, recognizing its importance for community development and democratic accountability. Students generally expressed interest in contributing to local governance but often cited external constraints.

**Participation in Local Government Activities:** Only 16% of students reported frequent participation, while 34% participated occasionally, and 50% had never participated in local governance activities. This demonstrates a significant knowledge–participation gap, where awareness and positive attitudes do not necessarily translate into real-life engagement.

**Challenges Hindering Participation:** The main barriers identified were lack of youth participation platforms (35%), limited awareness of civic opportunities (25%), lack of confidence (20%), and insufficient encouragement from schools and local institutions



(20%). These obstacles prevent students from applying their civic knowledge in practical contexts.

The study further revealed that while the curriculum equips students with knowledge, limited experiential learning and weak connections between schools and civic institutions reduce opportunities for practical engagement, confirming the findings of Milner (2010) and Torney-Purta et al. (2001).

### **Conclusions**

Based on the study's objectives and findings, the following conclusions are drawn: Civic Education positively impacts knowledge: The high level of civic knowledge among students demonstrates that the Civic Education curriculum effectively instills an understanding of democratic institutions, governance processes, and citizens' rights and responsibilities. This supports the view that formal education can shape informed citizens (Galston, 2001). Knowledge does not always lead to participation: Despite 76.8% of students having moderate to high knowledge, only 16% actively engage in local governance activities. This highlights a persistent knowledge-participation gap, suggesting that knowledge alone is insufficient to ensure active civic participation.

Attitudinal readiness exists but is constrained by systemic barriers: While many students exhibit positive attitudes toward civic duties (65%), barriers such as lack of platforms for youth involvement, insufficient experiential learning opportunities, and limited encouragement from civic institutions prevent the translation of knowledge and attitudes into meaningful participation.

Experiential learning and institutional support are crucial: The study underscores that hands-on experiences, such as participation in community projects, school governance simulations, and youth councils, are essential for bridging the gap between knowledge and action. Schools and local government institutions need to collaborate to create structured avenues for student involvement.

Implications for democratic development: If the gap between civic knowledge and active participation persists, it may undermine the broader goals of Civic Education in fostering a participatory, accountable, and responsive local governance system. Therefore, enhancing practical engagement opportunities is critical for nurturing the next generation of active citizens.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study makes the following recommendations:

- **Strengthen Experiential Learning in Civic Education:** Schools should integrate activities such as mock council meetings, debates, community service projects, and field visits to local government offices to provide students with practical civic experiences.
- **Establish Youth-Friendly Civic Platforms:** Local government authorities should create accessible spaces for student participation, including youth councils, community forums, and advisory committees, ensuring that students have meaningful avenues to engage in governance processes.



- Enhance Teacher Capacity and Engagement: Civic Education teachers should be trained to employ participatory teaching methods that connect theoretical knowledge to real-life civic practices, fostering students' confidence and motivation to participate.
- Promote School-Community-Government Collaboration: Schools, community leaders, and local government institutions should work together to provide mentorship, guidance, and structured programs that encourage student involvement in local governance.
- Increase Awareness of Civic Opportunities: Initiatives should be launched to ensure that students are informed about available civic platforms, community projects, and local governance activities, addressing the 25% of students who reported limited awareness as a barrier.
- Future Research: Additional studies should explore longitudinal impacts of civic education on participation, comparing urban and rural students, and assessing the effectiveness of experiential learning interventions in enhancing civic engagement.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study contributes to the understanding of the relationship between Civic Education and youth participation in local government within the Zambian context. By combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, the research demonstrates that while Civic Education effectively increases knowledge and shapes positive attitudes, systemic and structural barriers limit students' translation of this knowledge into action. This finding fills the gap identified by ZANEC (2017) regarding the knowledge-participation disconnect and provides evidence-based recommendations for curriculum improvement and civic engagement strategies.

### **Chapter Summary**

In summary, the study shows that Civic Education in Zambian high schools successfully imparts knowledge and shapes attitudes toward civic participation. However, only a minority of students actively participate in local government, highlighting a knowledge-participation gap caused by limited experiential opportunities, weak institutional support, and insufficient awareness of civic platforms. Addressing these gaps through practical engagement, teacher empowerment, and collaboration with local government institutions is essential for fostering active, informed, and participatory young citizens.

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