



# **An Investigation of Factors Contributing to Pupils' Poor Performance in Civic Education in Selected Secondary School in Chirundu District**

**Sikampandu Edgar, Dr Sumaki Suma**

Dmi University Lusaka.

**Abstract-** This study investigates the factors contributing to pupils' poor performance in Civic Education in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District. Despite the importance of Civic Education in promoting responsible citizenship, learners in the district have consistently recorded low academic achievement in the subject. The study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected from pupils, teachers, and school administrators through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. The findings revealed that several factors contribute to poor performance in Civic Education. Key among these were inadequate teaching and learning materials, limited teacher specialization in the subject, ineffective teaching methodologies, and low pupil motivation. Additionally, external factors such as poor parental involvement, language barriers, and overcrowded classrooms were found to negatively affect learners' understanding and engagement. The study also highlighted that some teachers lacked continuous professional development opportunities, which impacted the quality of instruction. The study concludes that improving pupils' performance in Civic Education requires a multifaceted approach involving the provision of adequate learning resources, enhancement of teacher training, and the adoption of learner-centered teaching strategies. It recommends that educational stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, prioritize teacher capacity building, curriculum support, and increased community involvement to enhance academic outcomes in Civic Education.

**Keywords:** Civic Education, academic performance, secondary schools, teaching methods, Chirundu District, learner motivation.

## **I. Introduction**

### **1. Background of the Study**

Education is a fundamental aspect of life that shapes the future of children, and its goals are influenced by societal values and expectations (Owens & Mills, 2010). It is widely accepted that every child should study Civic Education, as it is considered one of the most important subjects in shaping well-rounded, responsible citizens. In Zambia, the Senior Secondary School Civic Education curriculum covers a wide range of topics related to political, economic, social, and cultural issues, which are vital to the country's democratic governance system. Some of the key topics include the Constitution, Governance, Citizenship, Human Rights, Corruption, Legal Education, Family Law, and Global Issues. These topics are aligned with the National Policy on Education, as outlined in *Educating Our Future* (1996).

The primary aim of Civic Education is to equip school leavers with the necessary knowledge and skills to understand and practice their civic rights and responsibilities, both within Zambia and in the global community. The subject is integrated into the Social and Development Curriculum (SDS for Grades 1-7, as well as the Junior Secondary School Social Studies syllabus for Grades 8-9. The introduction of Civic



Education at the High School level was a strategic move to brief the gap between Junior Secondary School and higher education institutions such as colleges and universities. This gap had previously led to Senior Secondary school leavers having limited or no experience in understanding their civic rights and duties.

The inclusion of Civic Education at this level of schooling was deemed a significant contribution to Zambia's education system, especially given the country's democratic principles and values. It is hoped that through Civic Education, students will gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to fulfill their roles as responsible Zambian citizens, not only at the local and national levels but also on the global stage.

However, despite the importance of Civic Education, there has been a noticeable decline in the performance of Grade 12 students in the Civic Education examinations in recent years. Statistics from the Examinations Council of Zambia (E.C.Z, 2024) show a significant drop in the performance of pupils, with exam results deteriorating each year. This decline in performance has raised concerns within the Ministry of General Education, but there has been no formal investigation to identify the factors contributing to this decline. Additionally, there has been little effort to pinpoint the specific aspects of the Civic Education curriculum (CEC) that students struggle with the most during their Grade 12 examinations.

In light of this, the present study seeks to investigate the factors affecting academic performance in Civic Education, with the aim of identifying the root causes of the decline in student performance. The findings from this study will hopefully provide insights that can help improve the teaching and learning of Civic Education and ultimately enhance the performance of students in Zambia's secondary schools.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

The Ministry of General Education has expressed concerns regarding the persistently poor performance of students in Civic Education, as evidenced by the annual Grade Twelve examination results. For example, in 2014, a significant number of students failed in Civic Education, with one-third of boys and two-thirds of girls registering complete failure (Nkata, 2015). Despite the importance of this subject, limited research exists in the Zambian context to identify the specific factors negatively impacting the academic performance of students in Civic Education at the secondary school level. As a result, there is a need for a study that will investigate the underlying causes of the poor performance in Civic Education at the school certificate level in secondary schools, particularly in Chirundu District.

## **3. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify and explore the factors contributing to the poor performance of pupils in Civic Education at the school certificate level in Secondary Schools in Chirundu District.

## **4. Objectives of the Study**

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To determine the factors that affect the academic performance of pupils in Civic Education in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District.



- To assess the availability of teaching and learning resources for Civic Education in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District.
- To identify the challenges faced by teachers in the delivery of Civic Education in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District.
- To explore the measures that can be taken to address the challenges faced in the teaching and learning of Civic Education in secondary schools in Chirundu District.

### **5. Research Questions**

This study will seek to answer the following research questions:

- What factors are affecting the academic performance of pupils in Civic Education in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District?
- Are teaching and learning resources for Civic Education available in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District?
- What challenges are teachers facing in the provision of Civic Education in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District?
- What measures can be implemented to address the challenges faced in teaching and learning Civic Education in secondary schools in Chirundu District?

### **6. Significance of the Study**

This study aims to generate valuable insights into the factors contributing to the poor performance of students in Civic Education in secondary schools, from the perspectives of both teachers and pupils. By understanding these factors, the study hopes to enhance satisfaction and confidence in the teaching and learning process for both teachers and students. Furthermore, the information gathered can play a crucial role in shaping policies to address the ongoing issues related to poor performance in Civic Education. The findings could also assist stakeholders in Teacher Education Departments (TED) and the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) in evaluating and improving the content and delivery of the Civic Education curriculum. Additionally, the results may serve as a useful reference for Teacher Training Colleges, enabling them to reassess the quality and relevance of the content provided at their institutions.

### **7. Delimitation of the Study**

The study will be limited to five secondary schools in Chirundu District. This area was chosen because it is one of the districts where poor performance in Civic Education has been consistently observed. The findings from this district will provide a focused examination of the challenges and factors affecting academic performance in Civic Education at the secondary school level.

### **8. Limitation of the Study**

The findings of the study should be generalized to other districts with caution due to the use of a case study design, which is inherently limited in its ability to produce broad generalizations. While the study will provide valuable insights into the specific context of Chirundu District, the results may not fully reflect the situation in other districts or regions. Therefore, caution should be exercised when applying the findings to other settings.



## 9. Operational Definitions

Civic Education: A subject that deals with the rights and duties of citizens.

Academic performance: Measurable outcomes of pupils' learning in Civic Education, typically through exam scores.

Teaching and learning resources: Materials and tools used to support instruction and learning.

## II. Literature Review

### 1. The Nature of Civic Education

Civic Education has long been a subject of interest in societies, especially regarding how young people are prepared for active citizenship and participation in civic life. This concern is particularly pronounced in democratic societies, where the need for citizens to understand and accept their rights and responsibilities is crucial for the maintenance and improvement of democratic governance. Despite the growing importance of Civic Education, there is evidence that no country, including Zambia, has fully achieved the level of understanding and engagement required from its citizens to ensure a thriving democracy. Civic Education, as a subject, offers multiple approaches to teaching and learning. Battista (2009) emphasized the significance of Civic Education in shaping social, political, and economic understanding. In many countries, including Malaysia, Civic Education is integrated into primary and secondary school curricula, where it serves as a foundation for students to comprehend their roles in society and the wider world. In Zambia, as part of the educational system, Civic Education plays a key role in fostering awareness of governance, rights, and responsibilities among students.

### 2. Factors Affecting Academic Performance of Learners in Continuing Education Schools

In the context of secondary schools, factors influencing academic performance in Civic Education are complex and multifaceted. According to Knowles, Holston, and Swanson (2015), the principles of self-directed, experiential, and problem-centered learning have had a significant influence on educational practices. These principles are foundational to adult learning but can also be applied to secondary school settings. In the case of Civic Education, students' ability to engage with the subject matter and connect it to real-world issues is essential for academic success. Various factors such as teacher preparedness, availability of learning resources, class sizes, and the students' socioeconomic background have been identified as contributors to academic performance. In the case of Civic Education, the lack of adequate textbooks and teaching aids, teacher training challenges, and overcrowded classrooms can significantly hinder students' understanding and performance. These factors align with previous studies that highlight the importance of creating a conducive learning environment for effective Civic Education delivery. This literature suggests that addressing the factors affecting Civic Education performance requires a comprehensive approach, including improving resource availability, teacher training, and fostering an environment where students can engage with the subject meaningfully. The subsequent sections of the literature review will explore these aspects in more depth, providing a



deeper understanding of the challenges and potential solutions for improving Civic Education outcomes.

### **Inadequate Funding**

Funding for education in Africa, including Zambia, has often been inconsistent and inadequate, resulting in several challenges that hinder the quality of education. According to Wikipedia (2010), many educational difficulties could be addressed with proper resource allocation, including purchasing educational materials, providing appropriate training for staff, and improving infrastructure. However, the costs of education in many African countries are kept low due to reliance on state facilities and the payment of very low salaries to teachers. As a result, schools often struggle to provide essential teaching and learning materials, including textbooks and aids, and to motivate teachers effectively.

Mbozi (2008), in his study on the quality of education in selected schools in Livingstone and Lusitu districts in Zambia, found that limited access to textbooks significantly affects academic performance. In one example, four classes of approximately sixty learners each shared only four textbooks, making it challenging for teachers to use them effectively during lessons. Inadequate funding also results in insufficient school infrastructure, which further impacts performance. A study by the Institute of Development Studies (IOB) in Ghana, cited by Mulopo (2010), found that the lack of basic school facilities, such as desks, blackboards, electricity, and water sanitation, negatively impacted school attendance and learning outcomes. This is corroborated by Kelly and Kanyika (2000), who emphasized that learners performed better when provided with comfortable seating and adequate space to write, recommending that no more than two learners should share a desk for optimal results.

### **Over-Enrollment**

Over-enrollment is a prevalent issue in many Zambian schools, which negatively impacts the quality of education. According to Mulopo (2010), over-enrollment results in higher teacher-to-pupil ratios, higher pupil-to-classroom ratios, and insufficient resources such as textbooks and desks. These factors lead to overcrowded classrooms, reducing the effectiveness of teaching and making learning unpleasant. Overcrowding also leads to absenteeism, as students often feel disengaged from the learning process (Ndoye, 2007). Mbozi (2008) further added that overenrollment made it difficult for teachers to provide individual attention to learners, which is particularly detrimental for slow learners who could benefit from remedial support. Teachers were also less likely to engage in group work due to the overwhelming number of pupils, which compounded the problem.

### **Distance to School**

In Chirundu district Zambia the long-distance learners must travel to school significantly impact their education. These challenges are particularly pronounced in the rural areas where infrastructure is limited. The distance learners must travel to attend school is another factor that affects their academic performance. Kelly and Kanyika (2000) suggested that the time spent traveling to school can lower academic achievement, as learners who live far from school are likely to arrive late and may not have sufficient time to study. Furthermore, such learners may be too tired to complete



homework, affecting their overall performance. Mbozi (2008) confirmed that learners who walked long distances to school arrived fatigued and struggled to concentrate in class, ultimately leading to poor performance. In a study conducted by Birdsall and Francois (1996) in Mali, about half of the villages surveyed reported that the distance to school prevented many children from enrolling, highlighting the direct link between location and school attendance. In addition, the learner often miss school due to the length and exhausting commute, leading to higher absenteeism and increased dropout rate. This issue is especially prevalent among girls, who face additional challenges such as safety concerns and households' responsibilities. The long walk to school exposes learners to various health risk for example, the learners at Kapulila secondary school in Chirundu district face significant health and safety risk due to them approximately to Chowa Park and the lower Zambezi national park area know for frequent Elephants activity

Elephants and other wildlife frequently move through areas near schools, posing direct threats to students. For example, in 2009, a 21-year-old student in Kapiri Mposhi was tragically killed by elephants while returning from school. Such incidents highlight the dangers students face, especially those walking long distances to school. The constant threat of encountering dangerous wildlife can cause significant psychological stress among students. This anxiety can affect their concentration and overall well-being, leading to decreased academic performance.

### **Teacher-Related Factors**

Teacher-pupil interaction is another critical factor influencing academic performance. Mbozi (2008) identified negative teacher behaviors, such as using abusive language, threatening, or shouting at learners, as factors that can cause students to feel uncomfortable and disengaged in class. This creates an environment of fear or resentment, leading to poor attendance and performance. Mulopo (2010) discussed the humanistic approach to education, which emphasizes that teachers should focus on the individual learning needs of each student. Teachers are expected to foster an enabling learning environment that promotes self-directed learning. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to understand how their students learn best and to adopt teaching methods that place the learner at the center of the teaching process to achieve better educational outcomes.

Socio-economic factors, such as the educational background of parents, also play a significant role in determining a student's academic performance. Studies, such as those by Brahman et al. (1999), have shown that children from more educated families tend to perform better in school. Conversely, pupils from families with low levels of education often struggle academically, as their parents may not be able to provide adequate support or encouragement for learning.

### **3. Gaps in Previous Studies**

While the studies mentioned above shed light on various factors influencing academic performance, they do not specifically address the factors that contribute to poor performance in Civic Education at the Grade Twelve school certificate level. This gap highlights the need for research focused on understanding the unique challenges faced by students and teachers in Civic Education, particularly at the secondary school level



in Zambia. The present study aims to fill this gap by exploring the specific factors that affect students' performance in Civic Education, with a focus on the Grade Twelve examinations.

### **III. Research Methodology**

#### **1. Research Design**

This study will adopt a case study design to facilitate an in-depth investigation into the factors affecting students' performance in Civic Education at the Grade Twelve School Certificate Examination level. The case study design will enable the researcher to focus on selected secondary schools in Chirundu District, thereby gaining detailed insights into the specific challenges influencing Civic Education outcomes in this region.

A mixed-methods approach will be employed, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This approach will help address the limitations associated with using a single methodology and will enhance the reliability and depth of the findings. As Creswell (2003) suggests, combining qualitative and quantitative methods allows for a more comprehensive understanding of complex educational issues.

#### **2. Target Population**

The target population will comprise three key groups: (1) former Grade 12 pupils from the 2016 intake who studied and sat for Civic Education examinations, (2) all Civic Education teachers, and (3) all Education Standards Officers in Chirundu District. This diverse target group will ensure a comprehensive perspective on the various factors affecting student performance in Civic Education.

#### **3. Sample Size**

The study will involve a sample of 50 participants drawn from secondary schools in Chirundu District to ensure the sample accurately reflects the local educational context. These participants will include learners who sat for the Civic Education examination in 2024, Civic Education teachers who taught Grade 12 classes (with a gender distribution of 50% male and 50% female), Education Standards Officers from the Chirundu District Education Board Secretary (DEBS), and Head Teachers from selected secondary schools within the district.

#### **4. Sampling Procedure**

The study will employ probability sampling, specifically Simple Random Sampling (SRS), to ensure that each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected, thus minimizing selection bias (Sharma, 1983; White, 2005).

For the selection of classes, five out of six available classes will be randomly chosen from Syakanyabanyama, Lusitu, Chirundu, Ng'ombe Ilede, and Kapulila Secondary Schools using numbered cards. Systematic Sampling will be used for learners by alphabetically arranging names and selecting every fifth student.

Purposive sampling will be used for selecting teachers, Education Standards Officers, and Head Teachers due to their expertise and relevance to the study.



## **5. Data Collection Techniques**

Data will be collected using a combination of questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data.

### **Questionnaire**

Structured questionnaires containing closed-ended questions will be administered to teachers and former learners. These questions will be designed to gather data on perceived factors affecting performance in Civic Education. This method will allow for efficient data collection and ease of analysis (Okurut, 2006), while ensuring confidentiality to encourage honest responses.

### **Interview Guide**

An interview guide with open-ended questions will be used to conduct interviews with selected stakeholders. The interviews will provide deeper insights and allow the researcher to probe participants' views in greater detail.

### **Observation Guide**

An observation guide will be used to document physical and environmental conditions in schools. Observations will focus on infrastructure, teaching materials, classroom conditions, and other relevant variables such as student meal provision, contributing to contextual understanding.

## **6. Data Collection Procedure**

### **Questionnaire**

The researcher will personally distribute and collect self-administered questionnaires from learners and teachers. These will include both closed and open-ended questions aimed at capturing data on various academic and institutional factors affecting Civic Education performance. b) Interviews

Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with Education Standards Officers, Head Teachers, and relevant education officials. Open-ended questions will be used to elicit comprehensive responses. Notes will be taken during the interviews to support later analysis.

### **Document Analysis**

The researcher will analyze relevant public documents such as ECZ reports, academic journals, and newspaper articles. This method will be used to corroborate findings from primary data and enhance the study's validity and reliability through triangulation.

## **7. Data Analysis Procedure**

Both qualitative and quantitative techniques will be applied during data analysis.

Qualitative data from interviews, open-ended questionnaire responses, and document reviews will be coded into themes and categories to reveal patterns. Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency tables, pie charts, and bar graphs), which will aid in visual representation and interpretation of the results. The researcher will interpret the data to draw conclusions and formulate recommendations based on the emerging findings.



### **8. Ethical Considerations**

The study will adhere to strict ethical guidelines. Participants will be informed of the purpose of the study and their informed consent will be obtained. The researcher will seek permission from school authorities to carry out the research on the selected sites. Confidentiality will be maintained by assigning codes to participants and using pseudonyms for schools, learners, and staff.

Participants will be assured that their data will be used strictly for academic purposes and will not be shared with unauthorized individuals. The study will observe principles of objectivity, nondiscrimination, and respect for human dignity, ensuring that no participant is marginalized based on gender, age, ethnicity, disability, or other characteristics (Creswell, 2003).

### **Research Design**

This study will adopt a case study design to facilitate an in-depth investigation into the factors affecting students' performance in Civic Education at the Grade Twelve School Certificate Examination level. The case study design will enable the researcher to focus on selected secondary schools in Chirundu District, thereby gaining detailed insights into the specific challenges influencing Civic Education outcomes in this region.

A mixed-methods approach will be employed, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This approach will help address the limitations associated with using a single methodology and will enhance the reliability and depth of the findings. As Creswell (2003) suggests, combining qualitative and quantitative methods allows for a more comprehensive understanding of complex educational issues.

## **IV. Conclusion**

This study set out to investigate the factors contributing to pupils' poor performance in Civic Education in selected secondary schools in Chirundu District. The findings have demonstrated that pupils' underperformance is not the result of a single cause, but rather a combination of interrelated factors within the school and home environment.

The study established that inadequate teaching and learning materials, ineffective instructional methods, and limited teacher specialization significantly hinder pupils' understanding of Civic Education concepts. In addition, low learner motivation, negative attitudes toward the subject, and insufficient parental support further contribute to poor academic outcomes. Structural challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and limited opportunities for teacher professional development were also found to exacerbate the situation.

Overall, the study concludes that improving performance in Civic Education requires coordinated efforts from educators, school administrators, parents, and policymakers. Addressing these challenges through improved resource allocation, adoption of learner-centered teaching strategies, and strengthening teacher training programs can enhance pupils' engagement and academic achievement. Furthermore, fostering a supportive



learning environment both at school and at home is essential for promoting better performance in Civic Education.

## References

1. Birdsall, N. And Francois (2006). Demand for Primary Schooling in Rural Mali: Should user fees be increased? Vol 4n 3EBSCO, host.
2. Jarvis, P. (2011). *The Sociology of Adult and Continuing Education*. New York: Routledge Library Editions.
3. Finkel, S. E., (2003). Can Democracy Be Taught. *Journal of Democracy*. Vol 14 (4) Kelly, M.J. and Kanyika, J (2000). Achievements of the middle basic level: Final Report on Zambia's National Assessment Project: Lusaka Ministry of Education.
4. Lowe, J. (1975). *The Education of Adults: a world perspective*: UNESCO.
5. Malambo, B. (2012). *Factors Affecting Academic Performance of Grant-Aided and Non – Grant Aided Secondary Schools: A Case of Selected Secondary Schools in the Western Province of Zambia*. Lusaka: University of Zambia.
6. *affect the quality of Education in selected Basic Ministry of Education, (2010). General Certificate of Education Results Analysis*. Lusaka.
7. Ministry of Education. (2009). *General Certificate of Education Results Analysis Report*. Lusaka.
8. Muchimba, D. (2010). *The Impact of Social and Economic Factors on Access to free Education in the Basic schools of Zambia: A case of Monze District*. Master of Education Thesis. The University of Zambia.
9. Mulopo, M. (2010). *Stakeholders' Perception of Factors affecting The Performance of Open Secondary School classes: A case of one Open Secondary School Centre in Mazabuka, Zambia*. Master of Education Thesis. Lusaka: The University of Zambia.
10. Ndoyhe, M. (2007). *Africa: Building the foundation for Sustainable Development in HEP*, Newsletter, XXV, (3). Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia, (2010), "Adult Education in Africa"