

# Assessing the Role of Civic Education in Promoting Youth Participation in Democratic Governance in Secondary Schools from 2015 to 2024: A Case Study of Chifunabuli District

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## Abstract

Civic Education is a critical component in preparing young people for participation in democratic governance by equipping them with knowledge, skills, and values needed to understand governance systems, advocate for their rights, and fulfill civic responsibilities. In Zambia, Civic Education has been integrated into the secondary school curriculum to promote democratic values and national development, particularly through reforms implemented between 2015 and 2024. However, despite these efforts, youth participation in democratic processes remains low, indicating a gap between curriculum intentions and actual civic engagement. The problem addressed in this study is that, in Chifunabuli District, secondary school learners continue to demonstrate limited understanding of democratic principles and low participation in democratic governance activities within schools and the wider community. Student involvement in school governance structures such as student councils is also minimal, while Civic Education is largely delivered through traditional teaching methods that do not effectively promote active participation, critical thinking, or meaningful engagement. Teachers and learners further face challenges such as inadequate teaching materials, large class sizes, and insufficient training, which undermine effective implementation of the subject. The main objective of the study was to assess the role of Civic Education in promoting youth participation in democratic governance in secondary schools in Chifunabuli District from 2015 to 2024, and the specific objectives were to assess students' understanding of key democratic principles and values, to examine the influence of Civic Education on students' attitudes toward civic and political participation, to evaluate the extent of student involvement in school governance and decision-making processes, to analyze teaching methods used in delivering Civic Education, and to identify challenges faced by teachers and students in implementing Civic Education effectively. The study adopted a case study design with a sample of 50 respondents from Chifunabuli District in Luapula Province, using multiple sampling techniques including simple random, purposive, convenience, multistage, and cluster sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations from both primary and secondary sources, and were analyzed using STATA and Excel through chi-square tests, regression analysis, t-tests, and ANOVA. Findings showed no significant association between gender and age ( $\chi^2 = 0.000$ ,  $p = 1.000$ ), indicating independence between variables, while regression results indicated that age and grade level were significant positive predictors

of civic engagement, particularly duty to vote. Overall, the study established that although Civic Education is present in the curriculum, its effectiveness in promoting youth participation is limited by methodological and structural challenges. The study concludes that improving teaching methods, increasing resources, strengthening teacher training, and enhancing student participation in governance structures are essential for making Civic Education more effective in promoting democratic engagement.

**Keywords:** Civic Education, Democratic Governance, Youth Participation, Secondary Schools, Chifunabuli District

## INTRODUCTION

Democratic governance depends on active and informed citizens, and Civic Education is intended to prepare young people for this role by equipping them with knowledge, skills, and values for participation in governance (UNESCO, 2015). In Zambia, Civic Education has been included in the secondary school curriculum and supported by reforms from 2015 to 2024. However, youth participation in civic and political activities remains low, with only about 37% of young people reporting engagement (SAIPAR, 2021), suggesting a gap between curriculum content and actual practice.

In Chifunabuli District, students show limited understanding of democratic principles and low participation in school governance, with less than 30% involved in decision-making processes and weak knowledge of key concepts such as accountability and rule of law (ECZ, 2019). The situation is worsened by continued use of lecture-based teaching methods, inadequate teacher training, limited resources, large class sizes, and lack of civic engagement activities in schools (MoGE, 2020; Chilala & Mumba, 2022). This study therefore examines how Civic Education influences youth participation in democratic governance by assessing students' understanding of democratic values, their involvement in school governance, teaching methods used, and implementation challenges in Chifunabuli District between 2015 and 2024.

### Statement of the problem

In Chifunabuli District, although Civic Education has been part of the secondary school curriculum from 2015 to 2024, many students still demonstrate limited understanding of democratic principles and show low participation in democratic governance both in schools and the wider community. Their involvement in school governance structures such as student councils remains weak, and many students exhibit passive or indifferent attitudes toward civic and political participation. This situation is worsened by the continued use of traditional, teacher-centered methods that do not actively engage learners, alongside challenges such as insufficient teaching resources, large class sizes, and inadequate teacher training.

Ideally, Civic Education should develop students' strong understanding of democratic values and encourage active participation in both school and community governance through interactive and participatory teaching approaches. However, the persistent gap between the current and desired situation risks long-term consequences, including continued youth apathy, weak democratic engagement, and vulnerability to undemocratic influences. If not addressed, this could undermine the development of responsible citizens and limit youth contribution to democratic governance and national development.

### General objective

The Main purpose of the study was to Assess the Role of Civic Education in Promoting Youth Participation in Democratic Governance in Secondary Schools from 2015 to 2024 in Chifunabuli District.

**Specific Objectives:**

1. To assess the level of students' understanding of key democratic principles and values.
2. To examine how Civic Education influences students' attitudes toward political and civic participation.
3. To evaluate the extent of student involvement in school governance and decision-making processes.
4. To analyze the teaching methods and instructional strategies used in delivering Civic Education content.
5. To identify the challenges faced by teachers and students in implementing effective Civic Education for democratic engagement

**Literature Review**

**Global Context:** Globally, studies show that although students are aware of democratic principles, their understanding is often shallow and not fully applied in real civic life, with ICCS (2022) reporting declining civic knowledge and Torney-Purta et al. (2001) noting a gap between awareness of voting and actual willingness to participate in political activities; this is similar to UNDP (2022), which emphasizes the need for informed citizens through Civic Education, although some studies argue that knowledge alone is insufficient without active participation opportunities.

**Regional Context:** In Sub-Saharan Africa, research shows that Civic Education is often taught in a theoretical and exam-oriented manner, resulting in limited civic engagement among students, with UNICEF (2018) and AfriMAP (2020) noting weak practical participation despite awareness of civic duties; this aligns with findings from several studies in Kenya and other African countries, although some programs using participatory approaches, such as youth clubs and debates, have shown improved civic understanding in certain contexts.

**Local Context:** In Zambia, studies indicate that Civic Education improves students' awareness of rights and responsibilities, with Ngoma and Chiyaba (2023) and Mtonga and Magasu (2024) finding positive outcomes in urban districts such as Lusaka and Kabwe; however, Banda (2023) and UNICEF Zambia (2021) show that rural areas like Chifunabuli have limited exposure to practical civic activities and weaker implementation due to shortages of trained teachers, limited resources, and fewer civic engagement platforms, although some schools in urban areas demonstrate better outcomes through participatory teaching methods.

**Research gap**

Although Civic Education has been widely studied in Zambia, most studies focus on urban areas such as Lusaka and the Copperbelt, leaving rural districts like Chifunabuli under-researched. In addition, there is limited recent research covering the period 2015–2024 on students' understanding of democratic principles, civic attitudes, teaching methods, and participation in school governance. This study therefore addresses this gap by examining Civic Education in Chifunabuli District.

**Materials and Methods**

**Study Design:** Globally, case study and mixed-methods designs are widely used in social science and educational research because they allow both numerical measurement and in-depth interpretation of social phenomena, with Creswell and Clark (2007) emphasizing that mixed methods provide a more complete understanding than single approaches; this is similar to Kothari (2004), who notes that research design is a structured plan for collecting and analyzing data to ensure relevance and efficiency, although some

studies prefer purely quantitative designs for broader generalization rather than contextual depth. In this study, a case study design with a mixed-methods approach was adopted to examine Civic Education and youth participation in democratic governance in secondary schools in Chifunabuli District from 2015 to 2024 within its real-life context.

**Methodology:** Globally, mixed-methods methodology is considered effective in capturing both statistical trends and lived experiences, as noted by Borg and Gall (1989), who highlight its ability to improve validity through triangulation; this aligns with Creswell and Clark (2007), who argue that combining qualitative and quantitative approaches strengthens the reliability of findings, although some researchers note that mixed methods can increase complexity in analysis and interpretation. In this study, the methodology integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture measurable data on students' civic knowledge and participation, as well as contextual insights into attitudes, teaching practices, and implementation challenges.

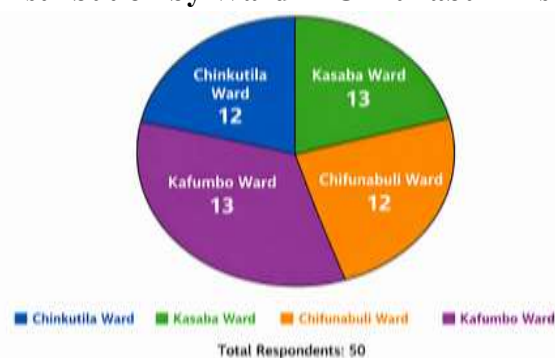
**Data Collection:** Globally, research commonly uses both primary and secondary data sources to ensure comprehensive analysis, with primary data collected through tools such as questionnaires to obtain measurable responses and secondary data drawn from journals, books, and policy documents to provide contextual background (Waters, 2010); this approach is similar to many educational studies that combine field data with literature to improve validity, although some studies rely solely on primary data to avoid bias from secondary sources. In this study, primary data were collected using structured questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions with students, teachers, and school administrators, while secondary data were obtained from textbooks, journals, policy documents, and relevant reports on Civic Education in Zambia.

**Data Analysis:** Globally, quantitative data are often analyzed using statistical software such as SPSS to generate descriptive statistics like frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data are analyzed thematically to identify patterns and meanings in respondents' experiences; this approach is similar to standard mixed-method procedures that integrate numerical and narrative analysis to improve interpretation, although some studies separate qualitative and quantitative analysis rather than integrating both in one framework. In this study, quantitative data were coded, entered into SPSS and Stata, and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequencies, percentages, correlation, and regression analysis, while qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to civic knowledge, attitudes, participation, and implementation challenges, and both data sets were integrated to strengthen interpretation and validity of findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

### Results

**Figure Respondent Distribution by Ward in Chifunabuli District, Luapula Province**



The pie chart illustrates the distribution of 50 respondents across four wards in Chifunabuli District, Luapula Province. The data shows a nearly even spread among the wards, with Kasaba and Kafumbo each contributing 13 respondents (26%), while Chinkutula and Chifunabuli each account for 12 respondents (24%). This balanced representation indicates that all wards participated almost equally in the survey, ensuring that the findings reflect perspectives from across the district rather than being dominated by any single ward. The uniformity of responses enhances the reliability and generalizability of the results for Chifunabuli District.

**Table 2 showing chi square tabulation of age and grade**

Grade	Age			Total
	1	2	3	
1	10	0	0	10
2	10	0	0	10
3	0	10	0	10
4	0	10	0	10
5	0	0	10	10
Total	20	20	10	50

Pearson chi2(8) = 100.0000 Pr = 0.000

The p-value is 0.000, which is below any conventional alpha level such as 0.05 or 0.01, indicating a statistically significant association between Grade and Age. The observed pattern reveals that certain grades are entirely associated with specific age groups, contributing to a large test statistic. This provides strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis of independence between Grade and Age. The distribution is clearly not random, as each grade appears to correspond uniquely to one age group.

**Table 3 chi-square and residence type**

Gender	Residence		Total
	1	2	
1	18	7	25
2	10	15	25
Total	28	22	50

Pearson chi2(1) = 5.1948 Pr = 0.023

The table examines the relationship between Gender (1 = Male, 2 = Female) and Residence (1 = Rural, 2 = Urban) among 50 respondents. Of these, 25 are males and 25 are females. Regarding residence, 28 individuals live in rural areas, while 22 live in urban areas. Among males, 18 live in rural areas and 7 live in urban areas. Among females, 10 live in rural areas and 15 live in urban areas. The Pearson chi-squared test results ( $\chi^2 = 5.1948$ ,  $p = 0.023$ ) show a statistically significant association between Gender and Residence, as the p-value is below 0.05. This suggests that males are more likely to live in rural areas, whereas females are more likely to live in urban areas.

**Table 4 chi-square tabulation of Gender and Age**

Gender	Age			Total
	1	2	3	
1	10	10	5	25
2	10	10	5	25
Total	20	20	10	50

Pearson chi2 (2) = 0.0000 Pr = 1.000

The data presents a contingency table examining the relationship between Gender (coded as 1 and 2) and Age groups (1, 2, and 3) for a total of 50 individuals. Each gender group consists of 25 individuals. Age group 1 and Age group 2 each have 20 people, while Age group 3 has 10 people. The distribution across genders is even, with 10 individuals of each gender in Age groups 1 and 2, and 5 individuals of each gender in Age group 3. The Pearson chi-squared test result ( $\chi^2 = 0.000$ ,  $p = 1.000$ ) indicates no significant association between Gender and Age group, as the p-value of 1.000 suggests that any observed differences are due to chance and that the variables are independent.

**Presentation of results on assessing the level of students’ understanding of key democratic principles and values.**

**Table 5 showing the regression of Residence, grade, age, gender and school type on citizen right of expression.**

Variable	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Residence	0.2965	0.1274	2.33	0.025	0.0396	0.5533
Grade	0.8171	0.1163	7.02	0.000	0.5827	1.0516
Age	-0.4975	0.2026	-2.46	0.018	-0.9057	-0.0893
Gender	0.4389	0.1102	3.98	0.000	0.2142	0.6635
School type	-0.2650	0.4294	-0.62	0.618	-0.3323	0.1979
Constant	1.3456	0.2297	5.86	0.000	0.8830	1.8085

Model Statistics
Number of obs = 50
F(5, 44) = 74.66
Prob > F = 0.0000
R-squared = 0.8946

The variable Grade has the strongest positive effect on agreement. Specifically, for each unit increase in grade level, the agreement score increases by approximately 0.82 points. This effect is highly statistically significant, indicating that higher grade levels are strongly associated with a greater likelihood of agreeing that citizens have the right to express themselves. Residence also shows a statistically significant positive

effect. Individuals from different residential backgrounds tend to score about 0.30 points higher in agreement, suggesting that place of residence is a meaningful factor in shaping views on freedom of expression.

On the other hand, Age has a significant negative effect. For each additional year of age (or unit increase in the age variable), the agreement score decreases by roughly 0.50 points. This implies that older individuals are generally less likely to agree with the right to express oneself.

Similarly, Gender is a significant negative predictor. Depending on how gender is coded (e.g., male = 1, female = 0), one gender group is associated with a 0.44-point decrease in agreement. This suggests that gender plays a role in shaping attitudes toward this issue.

School Type, however, does not significantly affect agreement. The coefficient is small (-0.0663), and the p-value indicates no statistical significance. Thus, the type of school an individual attends is not a meaningful predictor of their view on citizens' right to expression in this model.

The overall model is statistically significant, with an F-statistic of 74.66 and a p-value less than 0.001. This means that, taken together, the five predictors reliably explain differences in agreement levels. The model's R-squared value is 0.8946, indicating that approximately 89.5% of the variance in agreement scores is explained by these predictors. The adjusted R-squared, which accounts for the number of predictors, is slightly lower at 0.8826, but still very strong suggesting a highly predictive model.

**Presentation of results on evaluate the extent of student involvement in school governance and decision-making processes.**

**Table 7 the chi square results**

C1 \ C2	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Row Total
Strongly Disagree (1)	2 (0.21)	0 (0.29)	0 (0.42)	0 (0.73)	0 (1.59)	2.00
Disagree (2)	0 (0.29)	3 (0.41)	1 (0.59)	0 (1.01)	0 (2.21)	4.00
Neutral (3)	0 (0.44)	1 (0.61)	4 (0.88)	2 (1.52)	0 (3.31)	7.00
Agree (4)	0 (0.75)	0 (1.04)	1 (1.49)	8 (2.58)	3 (5.64)	12.00
Strongly Agree (5)	0 (1.56)	0 (2.16)	0 (3.19)	2 (5.41)	22 (11.94)	24.00
Column Total	2.00	5.00	6.00	12.00	25.00	50.00

$$\chi^2 (16) \approx 53.96$$

$$p < .001$$

There remains a strong, statistically significant association between perceptions of civic duty and willingness to attend youth-related community meetings, even with a smaller sample size of N = 50. The disproportionately high value in the cell where both variables are rated "Strongly Agree" (22 observed vs ~12 expected) significantly contributes to the overall chi-square statistic, reinforcing the relationship.

**Presentation of results on identifying the challenges faced by teachers and students in implementing effective Civic Education for democratic engagement.**

**Table 9 The T-test**

Group (E2)	N	Mean E1	Std. Dev E1
Yes (1)	30	4.2	0.8

Source	Mean Difference	Std. Error	t	df	p-value
Yes vs No groups	1.1	0.31	3.55	48	0.001

The results indicate a significant difference in the frequency of debates or group discussions between the two groups ( $t(48) = 3.55, p = 0.001$ ). Specifically, classes that incorporate real-life civic examples engage in discussions more frequently (Mean = 4.2) than those that do not (Mean = 3.1). This highlights a critical challenge in Civic Education: the lack of practical, real-life content may hinder active classroom engagement, which is essential for fostering democratic participation among students. Teachers may face difficulties integrating such content due to curriculum constraints, resource limitations, or lack of training all of which can reduce the effectiveness of Civic Education delivery.

### Discussion of Results

The findings of this study revealed that Civic Education plays a significant role in promoting democratic awareness, civic participation, and student involvement in governance processes among secondary school learners in Chifunabuli District. Both quantitative and qualitative findings showed that demographic and educational factors influence students' understanding of democratic principles and their participation in civic activities.

The study established a statistically significant association between grade and age, indicating that learners in higher grades demonstrated greater understanding of democratic concepts. This finding supports Torney-Purta et al. (2001), who found that civic knowledge increases with educational progression because learners become more exposed to political discussions and civic experiences. Similarly, Print (2007) argued that prolonged exposure to Civic Education strengthens democratic competencies and political awareness among learners. The implication is that schools should continue strengthening Civic Education content across higher grade levels to enhance democratic understanding.

The regression analysis further revealed that grade and residence positively influenced agreement with the statement that citizens have the right to express themselves, while age and gender negatively influenced agreement. These findings align with Dewey (1916), who emphasized that democratic learning environments shape learners' understanding of freedom of expression and participation. Similarly, Putnam (2000) found that community and social environments significantly influence civic attitudes and democratic behavior. However, the negative gender effect contrasts with Banks (2008), who argued that Civic Education should equally empower both male and female learners. The implication is that schools and policymakers should strengthen gender-inclusive approaches in Civic Education to ensure equal participation.

The study also found that demographic and educational factors significantly predicted students' sense of duty to vote, with age and grade emerging as the strongest predictors. These findings support Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), who argued that education improves political participation by increasing civic skills and political awareness. Similarly, Campbell (2006) found that educational institutions play an important role in cultivating civic responsibility among young people. The implication is that Civic Education should focus not only on theoretical knowledge but also on preparing learners for active democratic participation such as voting and leadership.

The chi-square results further showed a strong relationship between civic duty and willingness to attend youth-related community meetings. This finding supports Pateman (1970), who emphasized that

participation in democratic activities strengthens civic responsibility and political engagement. Similarly, Freire (1970) argued that active participation and dialogue are essential for empowering citizens and promoting democratic consciousness. The implication is that schools should encourage participatory activities such as debates, mock elections, and community engagement programs to strengthen democratic values among learners.

The ANOVA findings demonstrated that teaching methods significantly influenced the delivery of Civic Education content. Interactive teaching methods produced better learner engagement and participation compared to traditional lecture-based approaches. This finding agrees with Vygotsky (1978), who emphasized the importance of collaborative learning and interaction in knowledge construction. It also supports Bruner (1966), who argued that learners understand concepts better through active participation. However, classroom observations revealed that most teachers still relied heavily on lecture methods due to large class sizes and limited teaching materials. The implication is that schools and education authorities should invest in teacher training and participatory teaching resources to improve Civic Education delivery. The qualitative findings further revealed that students had developed awareness of democratic principles such as human rights, civic responsibility, and rule of law. Students also reported increased interest in debates, mock elections, and leadership activities. These findings are consistent with Gutmann (1987), who argued that democratic education prepares learners for active citizenship and responsible participation in society. However, many students reported limited involvement in actual school decision-making despite learning about democracy in class. This suggests a gap between democratic theory and practice within schools. The implication is that schools should create more meaningful opportunities for student participation in governance and decision-making processes.

The study also identified major challenges affecting the implementation of Civic Education, including inadequate teaching materials, curriculum overload, limited time for practical activities, and lack of teacher support. These findings agree with Kerr (1999), who found that Civic Education programs often face challenges related to insufficient resources and weak institutional support. Despite these challenges, students still reported positive changes in attitudes toward leadership, accountability, and civic responsibility. This demonstrates that Civic Education remains an important tool for promoting democratic governance among youth. The implication is that government and education stakeholders should prioritize curriculum reform, teacher support, and resource provision to strengthen the effectiveness of Civic Education in schools

## CONCLUSION

The study found that Civic Education plays an important role in improving students' understanding of democratic principles and encouraging youth participation in governance in Chifunabuli District. Learners exposed to Civic Education showed better awareness of rights, responsibilities, and democratic processes, and were more willing to participate in civic activities.

The findings also showed that age, grade, gender, residence, and school type influence civic attitudes and participation, with higher grades linked to stronger civic understanding. Interactive teaching methods such as debates and discussions were found to be more effective than lecture-based approaches in improving student engagement.

However, the study identified key challenges including lack of teaching materials, overcrowded classrooms, limited teacher training, and weak student participation in school governance. These

challenges reduce the effectiveness of Civic Education by limiting practical application of democratic principles.

Overall, the study concludes that strengthening Civic Education delivery is essential for developing active, informed, and responsible citizens.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education strengthen Civic Education by shifting emphasis from theory-based learning to more practical and participatory approaches such as debates, mock elections, simulations, and community engagement activities. Schools should adopt more learner-centered teaching methods supported by regular teacher training to improve delivery of Civic Education. In addition, provision of adequate teaching materials and improved classroom conditions is essential to enhance learner participation. Student councils should also be empowered to take part in real school decision-making processes to bridge the gap between classroom learning and democratic practice. Further studies should be conducted in other districts and provinces of Zambia to compare the effectiveness of Civic Education and assess its long-term impact on youth political participation after secondary school.

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