



Barriers to Implementing Civic Education as a Compulsory Subject in Kabwe District Secondary Schools, Zambia

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Civic education stands as a cornerstone in shaping active citizenship and fostering democratic values within the educational systems. However, the Zambia national education policy provides that the subject should be taught to all learners at the senior secondary school level. Nonetheless, this study investigated the barriers to implementing civic education as a compulsory subject at the senior secondary school level in Zambia, with a focus on Kabwe District secondary schools. Employing a mixed-methods approach under the convergent parallel design, quantitative and qualitative data was simultaneously collected from 319 participants comprising head teachers, heads of department social sciences, teachers of civic education, section heads, grade 12 learners and key informants from the Ministry of Education. An online questionnaire was employed to collect

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quantitative data presented on charts, while qualitative data was gathered through interviews, focus group discussions and document review was presented thematically. Findings reveal high value attributed to civic education by offering the subject to all learners, ensuring adequate-skilled teachers, encouraging active civic engagement opportunities and adequate allocation of material and resources. Barriers identified included the optional status of civic education in the 2013 curriculum framework, lack of clear guidelines, insufficient planning, and inadequate support from authorities. The study contributes valuable insights for policy makers, educators and researchers, informing decision-making processes, curriculum development, and policy adjustments. The study recommends policy reforms by the government to maintain the status of civic education as a compulsory subject in the curriculum framework by lobbying for clear guidelines and emphasising its value.

Keywords: Barriers; civic education; compulsory subject; implementation; policy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Civic education as a subject taught in schools is being emphasised especially its importance in secondary school curricula worldwide [1]. The subject stands as a cornerstone in shaping active citizenship and fostering democratic values within the educational systems globally [2]. According to Kennedy [3] civic education plays a crucial role in shaping informed and responsible citizens capable of actively participating in democratic societies. Recognising its significance, many educational systems globally have made civic education a compulsory subject in secondary schools [4]. Like other nations, Zambia has also embraced this global trend by mandating civic education as a core subject in its secondary school curriculum [5]. This decision reflects the government's commitment to fostering civic engagement, democratic values, and national identity among youth [1].

In Zambia, the national policy on education stipulates that civic education, also known as education for responsible citizenship be taught to all learners at the senior secondary school level to promote civic engagement and democratic participation [4]. As such, implementing civic education as a compulsory subject at the senior secondary school level represents a concerted effort to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for meaningful civic participation [5].

However, civic education was re-introduced at the senior secondary school level in Zambia in 2003 after its abolishment by the United National Independence Party (UNIP) government in 1978 [6]. It is now two decades from the time civic education was re-introduced at the senior secondary school level in Zambia. Local scholars in Zambia report that civic education is now

offered as a compulsory subject in the senior secondary school curriculum from grades 10 to 12 [6-11]. Seemingly, Katongo et al., [12], state that civic education has become one of the compulsory subjects in the Zambian school curriculum.

It is important to state that understanding the value attributed to civic education as a compulsory subject by secondary schools in Kabwe District is crucial for gauging its perceived importance within the educational landscape [2]. Research suggests that the perceived value of a subject influences its prioritisation within the curriculum and shapes the resources allocated for its implementation [13]. Therefore, assessing the value attributed to civic education sheds light on its status and significance within the educational framework of Kabwe District secondary schools and beyond. Additionally, identifying barriers to successfully implementing civic education as a compulsory subject is essential for addressing challenges and improving program effectiveness.

Foreign studies have identified various factors that can impede the implementation of educational policies, including inadequate resources, curriculum overload, and lack of teacher training [14,15]. Such findings cannot be generalised to the Zambian setup. Although local studies such as [8,9,10,11,12] document that civic education is taught as a compulsory subject to learners at the senior level, they lack sufficient detail on its actual implementation. However, the implementation of this policy remained underexplored, specifically on the value attributed to civic education at the senior secondary school level, and the barriers to its implementation. Hence the identified gap in the literature and an attempt made by the researchers to fill the gap. Thus, this study

sought to determine the value attributed to civic education as a compulsory subject by schools in Kabwe District at the senior secondary school level and establish factors that acted as barriers to its successful implementation.

2. OBJECTIVES

The study sought to achieve the following aims and objectives:

1. To determine the value attributed to civic education as a compulsory subject by schools in Kabwe District at the senior secondary school level.
2. To establish factors that acted as barriers to the successful implementation of civic education as a compulsory subject at the senior secondary school level in Kabwe District.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, a mixed-methods approach was employed to gather data, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods [16]. This approach was chosen to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the national policy on teaching civic education in Kabwe District secondary schools. Despite time constraints, triangulation of data was prioritized to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. The research design utilised a convergent parallel design, enabling the simultaneous collection of numerical and descriptive data sets, which were then analysed separately and integrated [17]. This design was selected for its flexibility and efficiency in data collection, analysis, and integration, further enhancing the depth of insights garnered from the study.

3.1 Study Site

The study was conducted in all 32 secondary schools in Kabwe District, Central Province, Zambia. Kabwe District was chosen due to its history of being among the Districts under the first phase where civic education was piloted as an optional subject in 2004 [10]. Secondly, the schools in the district were easily accessible by researchers in that the locations of schools in the district are close to each other.

3.2 Target Population

The quantitative population consisted of 490 individuals, including trained teachers of civic

education, head teachers, heads of section for civic education, and heads of departments (HoDs) of social sciences. The qualitative population included grade 12 learners, teachers of civic education, head teachers, HoDs of social sciences, section heads of civic education, and specialists from the Ministry of Education. The stated population was targeted and linked to civic education taught at the senior secondary school level and was believed to have the information on this study [16].

3.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

A total sample size of 319 was collected for both qualitative and quantitative participants. Quantitative data was collected from 215 participants through an online survey using a web questionnaire, while qualitative data was collected from 104 participants, through individual interviews and focus group discussions using interview and focus group guides. The sample size for quantitative participants was determined using Slovin's formula where the total target population was 490 and with a margin error of 0.05 [18,19]. The qualitative sample size was arrived at, based on data saturation for qualitative participants [16]. Total population sampling encompassed all 32 secondary schools in Kabwe District, aimed at comprehensive coverage and representative responses. Stratified purposive sampling enabled the selection of key stakeholders; head teachers, heads of department, section heads and teachers of civic education. Expert sampling identified two key informants with extensive expertise in civic education. Homogeneous sampling facilitated the selection of grade 12 learners with similar characteristics [16].

3.4 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Quantitative data was collected through an online survey using a web questionnaire containing closed-ended questions [20]. The individual interview method using interview guides as an instrument, and the focus group discussion method using a focus group guide as an instrument were used to collect qualitative data [18]. In addition, the document analysis method using selected documents as instruments was used to collect qualitative secondary data.

3.5 Data Analysis and Presentation

Quantitative data for this study was analysed using descriptive statistics techniques.

Specifically, frequency analysis was conducted to determine the distribution of responses. Percentages were calculated to represent the relative prevalence of each response category. Additionally, visual representations in the form of bar charts, pie charts, and tables were created to present the quantitative data [21,22]. Qualitative data was analysed thematically. Results were presented using themes supported by excerpts from data [23].

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the participants that participated in an online survey.

The analysis for each of the four variables presented in the Table below is as follows:

The survey participants were fairly balanced in gender (54% male, 46% female), with a

concentration of participants in the 29-50 age range (62%, split evenly between 29-39 and 40-50). Most participants held bachelor's degrees (80%), and work experience leaned towards recent graduates (28%) and senior professionals (21%), with a potential dip in mid-career professionals (12%). This demographic mix provides a diverse range of perspectives for the research and is crucial for informing policy decisions.

The first objective aimed at determining the value attributed to civic education as a compulsory subject by schools in Kabwe District at the senior secondary school level. Quantitative results were obtained from 215 participants through a self-administered online questionnaire. Participants were asked to rate the overall value that their schools attribute to civic education at the senior level, based on the options shown in the pie chart below. The results obtained are presented in the Fig. 1.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the participants

Description	Category	N	Percentage
Gender	Male	115	54
	Female	100	46
Age	18-28	34	16
	29-39	67	31
	40-50	67	31
	51 and above	47	22
Qualifications	Diploma	24	11
	Bachelor' Degree	172	80
	Master's Degree	17	08
	Other	02	01
Work Experience	0-5	60	28
	6-10	84	39
	11-15	26	12
	16 and above	45	21

Source: Field Data, 2023

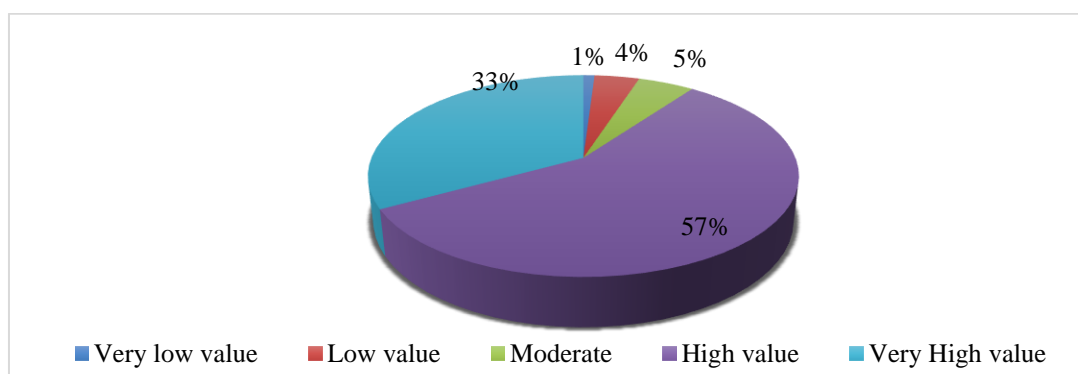


Fig. 1. Level of value attached to civic education

Source: Field Data, 2023

The presented results in the pie chart above illustrate the varying levels of value attributed to civic education at the senior secondary level across schools in Kabwe District. A significant majority of participants, comprising 90% (n=194), reported that their schools either highly valued (57%, n=123) or extremely valued (33%, n=71) civic education. This indicates a positive perception of the subject's importance in nurturing informed and responsible citizens. Conversely, a small percentage of participants indicated that their schools attributed either low (4%, n=8) or moderate (5%, n=11) value to civic education, suggesting potential variations in prioritization among different schools. These findings underscore the need for continuous advocacy and awareness-building efforts to promote the value of civic education across all schools in Kabwe District.

Researchers also gathered qualitative data from 104 participants, comprising 24 individual interviews and 80 participants in eight focus group discussions. The qualitative analysis revealed several key themes: adherence to the National Policy on Education, promotion of active civic engagement, emphasis on skilled teachers and capacity building, and allocation of adequate materials and resources. These findings provide valuable insights into the perceived value of civic education among stakeholders.

Theme 1: Adherence to the National Policy on Education

The first theme centres on the adherence of learning institutions and educators to national policy guidelines mandating the teaching of civic education to all senior secondary school learners. Despite being listed as an optional subject in the 2013 National curriculum framework, findings indicate a strong effort to include civic education for all learners. This underscores the institutional commitment to offering civic education as a core subject, emphasizing its importance in the education system. A Head of Department from school C during a face-to-face interview stated as follows:

To my understanding madam, the policy clearly outlines the importance of civic education at the senior secondary level. As a school, we adhere to this policy by making the subject compulsory for all learners at the senior level, as a way of showing the value that this school attaches to civic education... (Field data, 2023).

The above statements reflect the strong commitment of the educators at the senior secondary level as a way of showing the value attached to civic education, ensuring that all learners at the senior level are taught the subject owing to its importance. The compulsory offering of civic education to all senior learners reflects the significance placed on the subject, emphasising its importance in shaping informed and responsible citizens.

Theme 2: Promotion of Active Civic Engagement

The second theme focuses on encouraging active civic engagement opportunities. This theme underscores the importance of practical application and critical thinking in civic education. Schools facilitate various activities such as debate clubs, civic education clubs, and school councils, encouraging learners to critically analyse civic issues and explore diverse perspectives. These activities are integrated into school assemblies and Parents-Teachers Association meetings to raise awareness and emphasise the value of civic knowledge and engagement for all citizens. To justify the stated theme, one of the teachers of civic education from school F submitted the following response:

As a way of recognising the value of civic education in this school, we encourage the learners to actively participate in various civic engagement activities such as debate club, civic education club, human rights club, anti-drug abuse club, and school councils... (Field data, 2023).

The statements highlighted above provide evidence of the value that schools attach to civic education. The efforts made by schools in providing active civic engagement opportunities to learners emphasise the importance of participation by learners in various clubs and activities to foster a culture of responsibility and engagement among learners.

Theme 3: Emphasis on Skilled Teachers and Capacity Building

The third theme highlights the importance of skilled teachers and capacity building in delivering effective civic education. Schools in Kabwe District prioritise initiatives aimed at enhancing educators' skills, knowledge, and teaching methods through continuous professional development programs, subject

association workshops, and training sessions. This commitment reflects the value placed on civic education and ensures quality instruction. As evidenced by a head teacher at school A, educators acknowledge the significance of ongoing training and professional development in promoting effective civic education as stated below:

As a head teacher who appreciates the value of civic education as a living subject, I believe that having skilled and competent teachers is crucial for delivering quality civic education....I have made it a point that teachers who teach the subject are qualified and competent (Field Data, 2023).

The above quote emphasises the crucial role of skilled teachers and capacity-building initiatives in guaranteeing the successful implementation of civic education. They demonstrate schools' dedication to ensuring educators possess the requisite knowledge and abilities to effectively deliver civic education. This evidence underscores the recognition among schools in Kabwe District of the importance of teaching civic education to all learners at the senior secondary school level.

Theme 4: Adequate Material and Resource Allocation

Adequate material and resource allocation emerged as the fourth theme. Participants emphasised essential teaching materials, resources, and infrastructure to facilitate the effective delivery of civic education. In line with the identified theme, a section head from school E had the following to say:

In this school, we make sure that civic education like other subjects such as sciences, needs to have enough teaching materials and resources for teachers to successfully deliver the subject. We also make sure that the subject is allocated enough periods, as a way of showing the value for the subject (Field data, 2023).

The above themes that originated from qualitative data supported by the excerpts for each theme underscore the value that schools attach to civic education as a compulsory subject, despite some challenges that schools may be experiencing in trying to show the value of the subject.

The integration of numerical and descriptive data on the value attributed to civic education by schools in Kabwe District schools provides a comprehensive understanding of the level of value and the various ways that schools have demonstrated to show the value of the subject.

The results indicate a positive perception in the recognition of the subject. However, a small percentage of participants that indicated having either a low or moderate value of the subject as highlighted in the quantitative data, suggest potential variations in prioritisation among different schools. These findings underscore the need for continuous advocacy and awareness-building efforts to promote the value of civic education across all schools in Kabwe District.

Qualitative findings elaborate by highlighting themes that emerged as policy adherence, promotion of civic engagement, emphasis on teacher capacity, and resource allocation. These themes underscore schools' commitment to nurturing civic values, aligning with broader educational objectives. The study's findings resonate with international practices, as evidenced by research in European countries and Nigeria, affirming the importance of civic education in fostering responsible citizenship [24-26]. Locally, the findings echo the results established by [9] on the positive view and the support that secondary school administrators have for civic education. Schools exhibit proactive policy adherence and prioritise active civic engagement opportunities [1], suggesting a progressive approach to civic education delivery, and highlighting the value that schools attribute to civic education.

The second objective focused on determining the factors that acted as barriers to implementing civic education as a compulsory subject at the senior secondary school level in Kabwe District. The chart below displays the results obtained from 215 participants who completed an online questionnaire. Participants were asked to choose the top three barriers from the five options. These were: Optional Status, Unclear Guidelines, Lack of Proper Planning, Lack of Administrative Support, and Inadequate Teaching Staff. Fig. 2 below illustrates the selected variables examined and their corresponding responses, shedding light on the significant barriers to implementing civic education as a compulsory subject identified by participants.

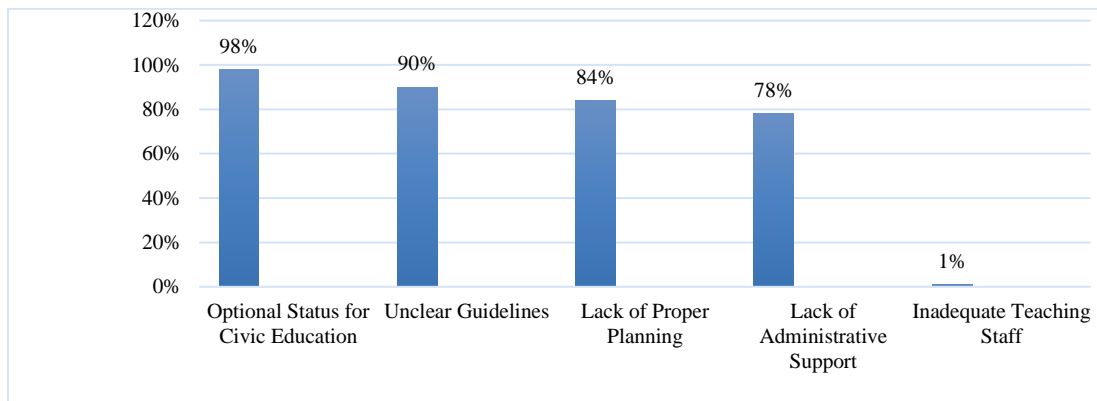


Fig. 2. Barriers to implementing civic education as a compulsory

Source: Field Data, 2023

The quantitative data presented in the chart above outlines the primary barriers hindering the successful implementation of civic education as a compulsory subject in Kabwe District's senior secondary schools. The most prominent obstacle identified by participants was the optional status of civic education in the curriculum framework, with 98% of participants highlighting its significance. This suggests a widespread concern that making civic education optional undermines its importance and effectiveness. Additionally, 90% of participants cited the lack of clear guidelines, emphasising the need for well-defined protocols to ensure effective implementation. Lack of proper planning at the school level was identified by 84% of participants, indicating a need for improved coordination and organization. Moreover, 78% of participants pointed to the lack of support from school authorities as a significant barrier, highlighting the importance of institutional backing for successful implementation. Surprisingly, only 1% of participants viewed the shortage of trained teachers as a major concern, suggesting an adequate availability of qualified educators. Overall, these findings underscore critical challenges that must be addressed to ensure the comprehensive delivery of civic education to all senior secondary school learners in Kabwe District.

The researchers gathered qualitative data from 104 participants, who included 24 individual interviews and 8 focus groups involving 80 participants. The aim was to explore barriers to implementing civic education as a compulsory subject for all learners in Kabwe District secondary schools. The qualitative data highlighted four major themes outlined and discussed below:

Theme 1: Lack of Curriculum Policy Support and Clarity

Lack of curriculum policy support and clarity as a theme that emerged from data underscores the challenges arising from insufficient backing for the 2013 curriculum and unclear directives regarding the compulsory status of civic education at the senior secondary level. Participants voiced concerns about the absence of definitive guidelines and the optional nature of civic education within the curriculum framework, which contradicts national education policy mandates. This lack of clarity led to inconsistency and ambiguity in implementation, hindering the effective delivery of civic education. Almost all participants identified this theme as a significant barrier to implementation. For instance, a teacher of civic education from school G highlighted the following concerns during the interview below:

I do understand that the national policy on education... emphasises that Education for Responsible Citizenship should be taught to all learners at the senior secondary school level. However, the 2013 National Curriculum Framework does not support the national policy on education because some learners following the Technology curriculum and Home Economics were given civic education as an optional subject (Field Data, 2023).

To add on, another head teacher from school D submitted the following response:

We lack clear directives in the curriculum, making it challenging to implement civic education as a compulsory subject.... The

2013 curriculum does not offer comprehensive guidelines for civic education to be taught as a compulsory subject (Field Data, 2023).

The above excerpts provide enough evidence of the lack of curriculum policy support and clarity as a barrier to the successful implementation of civic education as a compulsory subject in secondary schools of Kabwe District.

Theme 2: Lack of Implementation Plans

Lack of implementation plans as the other theme that emerged from data reflects the absence of well-defined strategies for executing civic education as a compulsory subject. Participants, both individually interviewed and from focus group discussions, highlighted issues such as the lack of initiatives from some school administrators, a dearth of innovation in school administration, inadequate planning by school management, and the absence of school policies regarding civic education. Participants noted that without structured approaches, schools faced challenges in integrating civic education meaningfully into the curriculum and other educational activities. As a way of emphasising the barrier to lack of implementation plans, a key informant 1 stated as follows:

Some schools lack proper planning to offer civic education at the senior level. With proper planning and putting some strategies in place, all learners at the senior level can take civic education because it is reflected in all two pathways, despite the optional status in the curriculums for Technology Home Economics and Hospitality (Field Data, 2023).

Within the same line of thought, a teacher of civic education interviewed from school F submitted the following response:

What I would consider to be the key barrier is the absence of implementation plans in some schools as well as this school. For example in our school here, we have just decided to go the optional way as guided by the 2013 curriculum framework (Field Data, 2023).

Based on the preceding theme and the direct responses from the individuals interviewed, it shows that when teachers or schools lack clear guidance on how to implement civic education for the subject to be offered to all learners at the

senior level, it can result in inconsistency and uncertainty in the implementation process.

Theme 3: Insufficient Awareness and Sensitisation

Insufficient awareness and sensitisation as the other theme highlights a lack of comprehensive understanding and awareness among stakeholders regarding the importance of civic education. Participants reported issues such as some school administrators not appreciating the value of civic education, misconceptions about its purpose, and a lack of support from school authorities for its compulsory inclusion. Participants perceived a lack of emphasis on the significance of civic education, leading to a broader lack of awareness among educators, learners, and other stakeholders. In response to the above findings, the head of the department from school C submitted the following response as a way of emphasising the value of civic education:

Madam your research is very cardinal in the field of education....There is a clear lack of awareness about the value of civic education among educators and other stakeholders. They just consider it as a passing subject at the grade 12 national examination. As civic educators, you have a lot of work to make everyone understand the value of civic education (Field Data, 2023).

The response above underscores the ongoing challenge of insufficient awareness and sensitization among educators at the school level regarding the importance of civic education, leading to a lack of full appreciation for its value. This deficiency has resulted in apathy and reluctance among some stakeholders at the school level to support civic education being taught as a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level in Kabwe District.

Theme 4: Curriculum Constraints and Overcrowded Syllabi

Curriculum constraints and overcrowded syllabi are the other identified themes from the data and it underscores limitations within the curriculum, with overcrowded syllabi resulting in insufficient time allocated to civic education and excluding some classes from taking the subject. Participants noted an information gap between the 2013 Curriculum Framework and the national policy on education, highlighting that the

overloaded curriculum lacks space for compulsory civic education for all senior secondary learners. A voice of the head teacher from school H stated as follows, regarding the identified barrier of curriculum constraints and overcrowded syllabi:

Our Zambian curriculum has a lot of subjects such that an important subject like civic education which is believed to prepare learners for responsible citizenship is being neglected and offered as an optional subject. Having a lot of subjects has led to time constraints and overcrowding of the curriculum (Field Data, 2023).

Based on the above excerpt, findings suggest that the curriculum constraints and overcrowded syllabi leave limited time for civic education. Findings underscore some noticeable inadequate time within the curriculum for the integration of compulsory teaching of civic education.

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses provide a comprehensive insight into the factors that acted as barriers to the successful implementation of civic education as a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level in Kabwe District. Key themes identified include the optional status of civic education, lack of clear guidelines, insufficient planning, and inadequate support from authorities. Quantitative data underscores the prominence of these barriers, while qualitative insights offer detailed perspectives, highlighting challenges at the grassroots level. The study findings aligns with existing literature [27,28], emphasising the importance of policy alignment, comprehensive planning, and stakeholder involvement in successful educational implementation [29,30]. Novel insights highlight the urgency of addressing these barriers to ensure the successful delivery of the subject to all learners in the educational system. However, the identified barriers can collectively impede the implementation of civic education as a compulsory subject and that of shaping responsible and informed citizens as highlighted by [31,32]. Identifying and addressing such barriers is crucial to addressing the implementation process for the subject to be all-inclusive so that no learner is left behind in Kabwe District and beyond.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates a widespread recognition of the value of civic education among

schools in Kabwe District, as observed in the quantitative data collected in which the majority of participants indicated a high level of value attached to civic education. This is affirmed by qualitative findings that revealed the actual value that schools attributed to civic education through the themes that emerged from data as; offering the subject to all learners, ensuring skilled teachers and capacity building, encouraging active civic engagement opportunities and adequate allocation of material and resources. This reflects its recognition as a fundamental component of the educational curriculum. Barriers to the successful implementation of civic Education as a compulsory subject at the senior secondary school level included the optional status of civic education in the 2013 curriculum framework, lack of clear guidelines, insufficient planning, and inadequate support from authorities.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the discoveries for the two objectives, the following recommendations are proposed by the researchers.

1. Educators should advocate for policy reforms by the government to maintain the status of civic education as a compulsory subject in all future curriculum frameworks since civic education is a living subject. This includes lobbying for clear guidelines and mandates for the teaching of civic education to all learners at the senior secondary level, emphasising its value in fostering civic engagement and responsible citizenship.
2. The Ministry of Education to provide training and professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their skills in delivering effective civic education. This includes workshops, seminars, and resource materials focused on pedagogical approaches, active learning strategies, and civic engagement methods.
3. The government to foster collaboration among stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, parents, and community members, to create a supportive environment for civic education implementation. This includes engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes, resource allocation, and awareness campaigns.

ETHICAL APPROVAL AND CONSENT

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process, with strict adherence to principles of informed consent, respect for autonomy, and confidentiality [21]. To ensure participant protection and uphold ethical integrity, measures such as anonymising data and obtaining ethical clearance were diligently implemented [24].

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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