



Potency of civic education in promoting political civility among youths in Zambia: A case of Mbala District, Northern Province

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Abstract

The study focused on the potency of Civic Education in promoting political civility among Zambian youths. Qualitative research approach was employed and descriptive design was applied. The target population included, teachers of Civic Education, senior citizens (60 years of age and above) and youths. A sample of 30 participants was used which comprised of eight (8) Civic Education teachers, eight (8) senior citizens and fourteen (14) youths. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants. Focus group discussions and structured interviews were used as research instruments, and collected data was summarised thematically. The study established that, Civic Education enhances political civility by inculcating Zambian youths with knowledge about the society, empowering them with well-informed political mind. Because of Civic Education some Zambian youths make sound decisions as they portray substantive knowledge, increased political awareness and enhanced political engagement with some sense of political tolerance. On the other hand, the study found that some youths expressed political incivility attributed to inadequate platforms (non-formal and informal institutions) providing Civic Education in Zambia, the teaching of tautological or bookish type of Civic Education, and the turning of the subject to be examination oriented among the learners.

Keywords: Civic education, political civility, youths, zambia

Introduction

Civic Education as a discipline is considered to be the processes that affect people's beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities (Crittenden and Levine, 2013). In other words, Civic Education is a field of study which deals Civic Education as a discipline is considered to be the processes that affect people's beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities (Crittenden and Levine, 2013) [9]. In other words, Civic Education is a field of study which deals with the imparting of civic knowledge, civic skills and civic dispositions that can be termed as civility. Civility is based on ideas of respect, equality, and mutuality. Political civility welcomes people to the discussion and fosters dignity for all participants (Benson, 1996) [3]. In Civic Education lenses political civility occurs specifically in potentially contentious peaking situations, and it is marked by both the presence of respect and fair-mindedness and the absence of insults and partisan attacks (Carter, 1998) [7]. Political civility consists of robust discussion of diverse and potentially opposing ideas in a forum where all participants in the conversation adhere to and honour prescribed rules and precedents while offering acceptable standards for engaging in such discussion. Political dimension of civility emphasizes on the responsibilities and duties of citizens of a liberal democracy, rather than simply as individuals interacting in different everyday social settings (Benson, 1996) [3]. Civility is 'bound up with the idea of an association of citizens, and includes cognate ideas of the civic, the civil and the civilian; it concerns one's status and duties as a member of a political community, as a citizen with certain rights and responsibilities. Political civility is the virtue that regulates our actions and interactions in the

specific sphere of social cultural and political engagement. Civic education is a prerequisite for citizenry civility (Peterson, 2019) [26].

In Zambia there are hardly studies conducted on the potency of Civic Education in promoting political civility among youths. The study would contribute to the body of knowledge and literature specifically on matters relating to potency of Civic Education and political civility among youths. The study also offered an opportunity of uncovering salient aspects of Civic Education vis-a-vis promoting of political civility. Hence, basing on the forgoing, the authors thought of undertaking the study so as to establish the potency of Civic Education in the promotion of political civility among Zambian youths, particularly in Mbala district of Northern Province.

The concept of 'Civic Education'

The concept of 'Civic Education' is a very contentious and multifaceted in nature, reason being that it looks at all society endeavours in relation to social, political economic and sustainable issues. This has made the definition of the central subject Civic Education to be problematic, thus it has been defined differently by different scholars and schools of thought. The concept 'Civic Education is made up of two words that is 'civic' and education'. Civic issues are principles, mechanisms, and processes of decision making, participation, practices, beliefs, traditions, governance, and legislative controls that exist in various communities. The term "civic" in itself refers to any community in which the shared connections between people are at a broader level than that of the extended family (including the state) (Keeter, et al, 2002) [14]. Civic issues also encompass various aspects of life that include issues of gender, culture, legal education, democracy, and human

rights among other social, political and economic activities. In the same vein education has been defined by deferent schools of thought differently, however, the authors of this article defines education by quoting Albert Einstein that, "Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school." Hereunder, this paper explores various definitions of Civic Education by different scholars. Muleya (2017: 125-148) ^[19] define Civic Education as a contested field with intense discussions about its goals and what teaching and learning processes should be privileged. In line with Muleya's definition, Civic Education is not an easy concept to define, its definition relies on how the subject is being taught in school and its goals. In order to have clear understanding of what Civic Education is, its goals and the process involved in teaching and learning has to be clearly spelt out. Crittenden and Levine (2013) ^[9] state that "Civic Education" means all the processes that affect people's beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities. In tandem, Carretero *et al* (2016) ^[6] notes that with Civic Education, the focus is on the individual's social and cultural context, the narratives, values, knowledge and norms of action to which the growing individual is exposed in different socio-cultural settings, interactions and experiences that promote or inhibit effective and relevant learning. Therefore, one gets the sense that in trying to understand what Civic Education is, it is important to appreciate the fact that it is not only centred around information about citizenship, governance, democracy, human rights but also learning from individuals' interactions, dialogue and performance of action within their different social, economic, political and cultural settings (Muleya, 2017) ^[19]. From the foregoing definitions, Civic Education is considered to be a whole rounded subject whose aim is to produce holistic citizenry.

Civic Education is also viewed by Peterson (2011) ^[25], as any formative attempt to teach knowledge, skills and dispositions required for citizenship. This is in line with (Muleya, 2018) ^[21] when he contended that, Civic Education is characterised by different dimensions such as citizenship education orientations, content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, resources, pedagogical approaches or practices, context in which it takes place as well as the people that get to interact with its assumptions. Supporting this definition, Giddens and Sutton (2010) ^[10] considers Civic education as the process of inculcating the basic ethics, ethos and mores into the learners to be good citizens that will exercise their rights and duties and respect others. In essence, civic education is a life-shaping form of education which aims at preparing and inculcating in individuals' societal values and norms to be responsible citizens in the society. Correspondingly, Muleya (2017) ^[19] observed that Civic Education as a subject involves active participation of citizens in managing themselves in society and making sure that everyone who needs help is supported.

Further, Civic Education is the education that is concerned with the study of rights and duties of the citizen in a country. It aims at building an informed, responsible and morally-law abiding citizen as well as inculcating in the people a sense of commitment to the fundamental values and principles, Oyesiku (2010) ^[24] sees Civic Education as a school subject which prepares people (students inclusive) of a country for their roles as citizens. In the view of Okwenu and Anyacho (2005), Civic Education is a type of education

that individuals in the state receive for the positive development of ideas, beliefs, habits and attitudes cherished by the society to enable them live as useful and effective members of the society. It equips the individuals with the knowledge, understanding and skills to play active roles in the society and enable informed citizens who are morally and socially responsible.

Moreover, Strandbrink (2017:65) ^[28] defines Civic Education in terms of normativity that transcend 'culture' altogether in favour of secularist and neutralist patterns. This means that Civic Education allocate an educational and formative role to a number of civic institutions, not just to schooling in the formal education system. It includes education for civic engagement in public life can be created and shaped through a nation's system of laws, through the constitution of institutions and, indeed, through the generative effects of civic participation itself.

The Concept of 'Political Civility'

Political dimension is one of the born of contention in the world nowadays, Zambia inclusive. One of the ways in which democracy is measured is by the level of political dispensation of a particular country. Political civility is a civic virtue of interacting with others in a manner that conveys respect and a commitment to collective reasoning concerning common matters even in the face of deep and intractable disagreement (Barber, 1998). In Barber's view, political civility is a cornerstone or pillar of political civilization at individual level, party level and country level. In his understanding, political civility leads to political tolerance a civic virtue of respecting other people's political opinions more especially those from another political parties.

Correspondingly, Jamieson, Weitz, and Kenski (2017) ^[12] aptly noted that, political civility employs socially current standards of considerate address and interaction in order to express one's commitment to the fundamental democratic norm of treating all as free and equal, deserving of mutual respect. Also, the former president of United States of America (USA), President Obama in 2009, delivered a commencement address at the University of Notre Dame, where he encouraged all U.S. citizens to be civil with one another, to approach their political conflicts with "Open hearts. Open minds. Fair-minded words." Therefore, the act of doing politics with open hearts, open minds and fair-minded in other words can be referred to political civility. Further, modern liberals understand civic virtue in terms of civility. Civic virtue denotes preferential patterns of behaviour which are valued to the extent to which they are conducive to effective citizen engagements within society such as political engagement (Barber, 1998).

Political civility is the virtue that regulates people's actions and interactions in the specific sphere of political engagement. Peterson suggests that everyday civility is a prerequisite for political civility (Peterson, 2019) ^[26]. Peterson's conception of political civility consists of two elements: (a) civil conduct, which is sincere engagement and interaction with others showing a commitment to open-mindedness; and (b) the emotional states of fellow-feeling and mutual well-wishing. These latter emotional states, Peterson (2019) ^[26] thinks, are essential for civic friendship. When citizens understand themselves in terms of civic friendship, he believes, civility is nourished. What is required for political civility is emotional states of fellow-

feeling and mutual well-wishing according to which others are regarded as moral equals who are deserving of equal concern and respect (Snow, 2020) [27].

Civility has been studied in a variety of political contexts. Much of the work examines civility in democratic society in general. Scholars have assessed the quality of civility in governmental systems and public settings, or reflected on the ethical dimensions of public discourse in a contemporary society (Arnett, 2001; Caldwell, 2000) [1-4]. Specific studies have examined civility in the political understanding. This latter work examines the level of civility during specific debates and explores how civility is related to politicians' willingness to compromise or collaborate with fellow politicians within and outside political parties. Civility is also a major construct in the movement toward public deliberation and dialogue. This growing movement toward citizen participation in governance has emerged around the globe (Nabatchi *et al.*, 2012) [22].

Although there is a wide range of formats for this civic participation, most deliberative forums gather people in small groups to engage in facilitated, civil discussion about contentious issues affecting their community. Public dialogue and deliberation events have grown, at least in part, out of concern about polarized and uncivil public discourse, and they present a way for everyday people to civilly participate in politics. Some of these forums draw explicitly on Arnett's (2001) [1] idea of dialogic civility as an agreement that permits learning from one another to take place.

Additionally, Mayo (2002) [17] argue that civility smoother over social interactions, minimizing violent conflict by bringing individuals together around issues of common concern in a way that is mutually respectful. The value of civility for a just democracy has caused it to acquire a certain hegemonic status. Civility effectively provides a therapeutic solution to the problem of social and political distance by giving individuals a felt connection to others. In justifying political civility further, deliberative democrats tend to place more emphasis on its epistemic role that civility is one of the facilitating conditions for democratic processes of generating reliable knowledge and political opinions (Carter, 1998) [7].

Methodology

Study Approach and Design

The study undertook a qualitative based approach, because it was particularly concerned with the way in which people understand and give meaning to their social world. With regard to the qualitative research approach, Creswell (2012) [8] infers that a qualitative study is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. This study employed a descriptive design, there was need for comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand, and giving a detailed description of the subject.

Study Site, Population and Sample

This study was conducted in Zambia's Mbala District of Northern Province. The population included, teachers of Civic Education, Senior Citizens and youths who are former Civic Education learners. Creswell (2012:627) [8] defines a sample as "a subgroup of the target population that the

researcher plans to study for the purpose of making generalizations about the target population." Thus, a sample of thirty (30) participants was used which comprised of eight (8) Civic Education teachers, eight (8) senior citizens and fourteen (14) youths.

Data Collection Instruments and Analysis

In order to gather data for this study, semi-structured interview guides and focused group discussions were used as instruments. The use of the two instruments provided the researchers to collect valid and reliable data. A gap in one of the research instruments was supplemented by the other research instrument. The study employed thematic analysis method complimented by in-depth explanations presented in narrative form as obtained from the informants, summarizing of key findings as well as the interpretations and conclusion of the data collected. Coding was done as follows, interview with teachers coded as (IT1, IT2, ...), interview with senior citizens coded as (ISC1, ISC2...) and from focus group discussion coded as (FGD 1...)

Results

Presentation and Discussion

Civic Education and Political Civility in Zambia

The study covered the crucial and interesting issue on Civic Education and its potency in promoting political civility among on youths in Zambia. Laura (2016) [15], political civility is a 'thinner' relationship, characterized by interactions among citizens who do not necessarily share the same values or belonging to same political organisation. It is about having mutual respect among political players despite belonging to different political organisations.

From the findings it was revealed that political civility in Zambia is being influenced positively by Civic Education. From the interviews with Civic Education teachers, one interviewee said that, "Civic Education deals with three dimensions of civic knowledge, civic skills and civic disposition, which is responsible for sharpening an individual to become civilized, and politically aware of their political duties and that of the government activities." (IT1) Another participant from a focus group discussion pointed out that, "Civic education equips students that are Zambian youths with knowledge, attitudes, and skills required for competent and responsible participation in the political life of their communities." (FGD1)

Generally, Civic Education in Zambia encourages people to join political organisations which influence decisions of the government and gives an insight of what attitude and values should be towards political discourse. Sydnor, (2019) [29] seem to be in support with the findings of this study when aptly wrote that, Civic Education is one of the most important predictors of political civility, in fact, the most important catalyst that shapes citizens mind transform then in such they start participating in political activities such as voting. Kardiyat (2014) [13] seem to be in agreement with the findings of this study when he avows that Civic Education brings the students to become individuals who have a sense of nationalism and love for the country, democratic, and become citizens who have competitiveness; disciplined, actively participate in building a peaceful life in politics.

In addition, from the study findings, Civic Education foster good political values for students, so that they are independent, able to sort out, which are positive and negative. The same basic pattern applies to both men and

women and to all races and generations. Civic Education, in short, is an extremely powerful predictor of political civility. This was also supported by Barber (2003) [2] that, Civic Education youths form their political attitudes on the basis of facts and issues rather than personalities and attacks. One interviewee said that, "Civic Education to some extent is making our youths to have political will. Today's youths are advocating for good tenants of democracy by participating in political activities such as voting, and voicing out. For example, in the previous elections we saw a good number of youths turning up in numbers to vote against the political hooliganism shown by the previous regime. (ISC2). The study further established through one of the participants in the focus group discussion that, "Politicians are aware that Civic Education is key in influencing citizen's view on the political world and was the reason why the former President Kaunda never wanted Civic Education to be taught in Zambian senior secondary Schools. (IT2)

The findings from this study are line with (Campbell, 2008) [5] who supported that, Political Scientists have since restarted their inquiry, revealing that Civic Education in fact works, improving not only students' political knowledge, but also their political efficacy and intent to later become voters and politicians. From the study findings in an interview, one participant said that, "Civic Education helps youths to have knowledge and skills to understand, challenge, and engage with democratic society. Youths who are active, informed, and responsible, willing and able to take responsibility for themselves and their communities and contribute to the political process." (IT3)

Thus, Civic Education helps youths to develop self-confidence and a sense of agency, and successfully deal with life changes and challenges such as bullying and discrimination that takes place in a political space. Correspondingly, Mukaba (2018) noted that, Civic Education is a tool that enables learners to develop an informed, effective, and responsible citizenry. It fosters development to resolve values and principles that enable a free society to exist. Thelma (2024) [30] from a study conducted in Lusaka also found that, youths make informed decisions, they do participate fully in political issues of the country. The political government is also able to deal with its political fundamental problems while it responds to political changing demands of people (or this development to work, political culture, authoritative structures, and political general processes must make certain changes).

On the other hand, the study findings revealed that in some cases Zambian youths lack political civility despite being Civic Education graduates as stated by one of the respondents that, "Increasing numbers of Zambian youths are disengaged from political institutions such as voluntary associations, community-based organizations, political parties and electoral activities such as voting and being informed about public issues." (ISC3). The same was noted during focus group discussion when a participant said that, "Young people embody incivility trends and are less likely to vote and less interested in political discussion and public issues than either their older counterparts or young people of past decades." (FGD2). Basing on the findings it can be deduced that Zambian political arena has been faced with lots of challenges that threaten Zambian fragile democracy and some of these have been attributed to political intolerance, lop-sidedness, suppression of political opponent and silencing of the masses. These have been associated

with poor understanding of political civility and the less participation of youths who can provide and sustain quality in political spheres.

Bottlenecks to Effectiveness of Civic Education in Promoting Political Civility.

Inadequate Non-Formal Civic Education Institutions

From the findings it was discovered that apart from formal schooling there is inadequate Civic Education platforms which are informal or non-formal. Hence, the provision of Civic Education has been highly affected negatively thereby retrogressively affecting the inculcation of political civility among Zambian youths. This came to light during a focus group discussion when one participant stated that, "In Zambia, Civic Education is mostly taught in formal Institutions such as senior secondary schools, college and universities. This has hampered the imparting of political civility attributes to a large number of youths who may have no access to formal education." (FGD 4)

The same findings came out during interviews with a senior citizen who said that, "There is much incivility tendencies among youths who have never attended formal schooling because they lack behind in the area of being exposed to Civic knowledge, skills and virtues." (ISC 4)

This factor is worth noted, Civic Education has not been actively taught to majority youths and other citizens outside formal schooling. It is not easy to find informal and non-formal institutions providing civic knowledge, skill, and virtues to the general citizenry more especially in rural and remote areas of the country. From the interviews a Civic Education teacher aptly said that, "I can firmly confirm that Civic Education has been neglected for many years and the vast majority of our young people outside formal schooling are not taught Civic Education at all." (IT6). When Civic Education is not given enough platforms for its provision, social, cultural and political values cannot be adequately imparted in youths as evident from the foregoing findings. In tandem, Jonathan and Stekelenburg (2002) [14] research report found that in some countries the provision of Civic Education is below average, they further contended that, several experimental studies have yielded support for the notion that political incivility negatively affects political trust.

Tautological type of Teaching

From the study findings, another factor hindering the potency of Civic Education in promoting civility among youths in Zambia is the rote-learning (tautological) style of teaching Civic Education used by teachers and other civic educators. In an interview, a response given by one of the informants was that, "Most often the subject is taught without objectivity by most teachers, teachers concentrate on finishing the syllabus as opposed to imparting substantial civic knowledge to learners." (IT6) Another teacher during an interview admitted by saying that, "The methods in which Civic Education is delivered is making the subject to lack the needed quality, or producing civilised citizens. The subject has been characterized with theoretical part of teaching and learning while neglecting the practical part of participative learning and teaching." (IT3). Husen (2018:158) [11] supported the findings from this study that, "Students are expected to memorize and recall all of the information which is provided to them in textbooks...". Interestingly, Magasu, Muleya and Mweemba (2020:1486)

[16] also noted from their study that, “most of the participants viewed lack of practical assessment as the main factor affecting the effective teaching of Civic Education in Secondary Schools in Zambia.....The findings suggest that lack of practical assessment denied learners an opportunity to engage with community affairs.” The use of bookish type of teaching methods is contrary to the objectives of Civic Education, which is to develop the civic knowledge of citizens and their social skills through analysis, evaluation, understanding and an ability to criticize the issues around them, in simple term Civic Education for citizenry civility.

Examination Oriented type of Learning

From the findings, examination-oriented type of teaching and learning makes Civic Education to be ineffective. This can be attributed to ineffective communication by teachers on the goals and aim of teaching Civic Education. From a focus group discussion, a participant said, “The culture and notion of learning for examinations is making Civic Education learners to lack substance when integrated in communities after leaving school.” (FGD12). Learning for examinations make most youths in Zambia to lack what is expected of them after leaving school. In fact, as the life of the political community progresses and becomes more complex over time, and as common goals and purposes are needed and sought more often by citizens, the importance of a basic affection between and encouragement among citizens grow. If they are not cultivated in the Civic Education of the young the affective bonds necessary to the continued success of democratic politics will not develop (Peterson, 2011) [25].

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is cardinal to point out that Civic Education in Zambia has positively influenced the political civility among youths as evident from the findings of the study discussed above. It is equally important to note that despite the positive influence Civic Education has impacted on the Political civility, some youths are still portraying political incivility trait. Civic Education’s effectiveness in the sphere of promoting political civility among youths has been hindered or affected negatively by some factors such as: apart from formal schooling there is inadequate platforms (non-formal and informal institutions) providing Civic Education in Zambia, the teaching of tautological or bookish type of Civic Education, and the turning of the subject to be examination oriented among the learners.

Recommendations

- Government to engage and encourage non-formal institutions such as the media and Civil Society organisations to be providing Civic Education to the general citizenry more especially in rural and remote areas.
- Government through the Ministry of Education should provide professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their pedagogical skills and knowledge of civic education content.

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