

Review Article

Civic Educators' Comprehension of Citizenship and Its Influence on Civic Engagement in Selected Universities and Secondary Schools in Zambia

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Abstract

This study established the Civic Educators' comprehension of citizenship and its influence on civic engagement in selected universities and secondary schools in Zambia. Using a qualitative research approach and descriptive research design. The target population were lecturers and students at University of Zambia, Kwame Nkrumah University and Chalimbana University. The sample size was 30 participants. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse data because themes were strongly linked to data. The findings revealed that lecturers had a comprehensive conception of citizenship. They defined citizenship to comprise rights and duties. This aligns with the definition of citizenship as practice and the communitarian theory of citizenship, that takes into consideration both rights and duties as important aspects of citizenship. The teachers and student teachers conceptualised citizenship in terms of belonging and qualification. This conception emphasized rights over duties as per the liberalist theory of citizenship. The study argued that the participants' comprehension of citizenship influenced their conception of civic engagement in universities and selected secondary schools in Zambia. The findings of the study recommended the need for enhanced Civic education training and curriculum development to foster meaningful civic engagement and understanding of the concept of citizenship. The study also recommended professional development programmes and relevant curriculum reforms.

Keywords

Civic Educators, Comprehension, Citizenship, Civic Engagement

1. Background and Context

Civic education is critical in developing responsible, active, and knowledgeable citizens who can meaningfully participate in democratic processes. Civic Education provides students with knowledge, beliefs, and skills that foster an understanding

of rights, duties, and engagement in community and national affairs [20] and [29]. Civic education has been included into both secondary and university curricula in Zambia, as part of

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Received: 8 February 2026; Accepted: 20 February 2026; Published: 22 July 2026



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the government's larger goal of promoting democratic governance, national unity, and social responsibility. Since the return of multiparty democracy in 1991, Zambia has made concerted attempts to raise civic consciousness through education [30]. The Ministry of Education, in partnership with teacher training institutions, has established Civic Education as a course to help young people develop their citizenship skills. Despite these measures, [4] noted that concerns remain about the extent to which civic education has resulted in active citizenship and civic participation among Zambians, particularly youth. Low voter turnout, political indifference, restricted community participation, and ineffective civic action have generated concerns about the efficacy of civic education programs in schools and universities.

Civic educators such as teachers and lecturers tasked with teaching civic values and knowledge are at the heart of this dilemma. Their comprehension of civic duty, democracy, and citizenship has a big impact on how they instruct and how students assimilate these ideas [32]. Teachers may not be able to motivate students to participate actively in civic life if they have a narrow or misunderstanding of citizenship that emphasises legal status above active engagement. On the other hand, educators are more likely to develop responsible learners if they are able to define citizenship broader as advocacy, community involvement, and active participation. In Zambia, variations in educators' training, exposure to democratic practices, and institutional support may affect their comprehension and approach to civic education. While universities often emphasize theoretical aspects of citizenship, secondary school educators may focus more on practical civic duties. Yet, few empirical studies by [27-31] and [4] have explored how civic educators' understanding of citizenship actually shapes the civic engagement behaviors of their students across educational levels.

Therefore, this study seeks to assess Civic Educators' comprehension of citizenship and its influence on civic engagement in selected universities and secondary schools in Zambia. Understanding educators' perspectives, pedagogical approaches, and their impact on learners' civic attitudes and participation, the study aims to contribute to the improvement of civic education and the promotion of an active, informed citizenry.

Research Question

What are Civic Education Lecturers', teachers and students' understanding of the concept of citizenship?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualisation of Citizenship

Citizenship is a multidimensional notion that includes legal, political, and social components that together define an individual's relationship with a nation-state. It includes not only the legal status of citizenship in a country, but also the privi-

leges and obligations that come with it. According to [6], citizenship consists of three key elements: civil, political, and social rights, which together allow an individual to fully participate in society. The legal component of citizenship is frequently linked to nationality, which offers individuals specific legal rights and protections under the law. Political citizenship goes beyond legal rights and includes active engagement in the democratic process, such as voting and holding public office. Social citizenship emphasises the importance of social welfare and economic stability in ensuring that all citizens have access to fundamental necessities and services, hence promoting equality and social justice [13]. Furthermore, the concept of citizenship has expanded to include notions of global and digital citizenship, which recognises individuals' interconnectivity across national borders and digital space. This approach fosters a sense of responsibility for global issues such as human rights, environmental sustainability, and social equality. Citizenship is more than just a legal position; it is a dynamic and developing construct that represents the interaction of rights, obligations, and identities in a societal context [14]. The ongoing discussion on citizenship is shaped by traditions or ideas of liberal, communitarian, civic republicanism, critical multiculturalism, and national and global citizenship. The main aim of incorporating civic education into the curriculum of Zambian secondary schools was to cultivate authentic democratic citizenship.

2.2. Liberal Citizenship

The foundation of liberal citizenship rests upon the individual's (universal) entitlement to rights as a citizen. Therefore, this type of citizenship focuses on the individual who is predominantly motivated by self-interest [7]. The paramount significance of this type of citizenship depend on individual autonomy, and the emphasis is on the state to refrain from interfering in the personal affairs of its citizens. Every individual possesses the prerogative to determine their level of engagement in society [21].

At the core of this theory was to assertion that each person possessed the freedom to exercise rational independence and pursue their interests. [36] defines rational autonomy as the ability of citizens to develop, modify, and actively pursue their understanding of the collective welfare. According to [17], every individual possesses an equitable entitlement to fundamental rights and freedoms. Consequently, each person has the autonomy to determine their own choices [15]. The liberal theory of citizenship prioritises the state's impartiality in the lives of its citizens. Therefore, it is possible that the state's role was restricted to safeguarding the rights of individual citizens. The focus of this type of citizenship is for the state to refrain from intervening in the daily affairs of its citizens. In exchange, the primary duty of the citizen was to fulfil their tax obligations in exchange for the safeguarding of their rights. Citizenship, in the liberal context citizenship is recognised status as a legal status [7].

2.3. Communitarian Citizenship

Communitarianism was another tradition that influenced the discourse on citizenship. Communitarians oppose the principles of individualism as proposed by the liberalist. The fundamental tenet underlying their perspective is that individuals are inherently integrated within the socio-cultural collective. Therefore, the emphasis was placed on the common good rather than individual goals (rights). The fundamental principles of a functioning society were loyalty, consensus, and the absence of conflict. Communitarians advocated for citizens' active engagement in society and prioritised collective welfare over personal interests (Lister, 2024). The latter was based on the ethical aspect of citizenship and centred on engagement in the community, encompassing sociocultural factors. According to [12], communitarian theory regarded the community as the initial foundation for citizenship. [18] argued that in the communitarian theory, citizenship is based on a culturally-defined community, prioritising political participation and identity over individual rights and freedoms. It recognises individuals as active participants in society, as opposed to liberalism's emphasis on individuals as isolated and passive. This theory prioritised deliberative forms of democracy and the active involvement of individuals.

2.4. Civic Republican Citizenship

Civic republicanism is a significant influence on the idea of citizenship, constituting the third tradition. Similar to the communitarian theory, the civic republican citizenship theory also centres on the community [12]. This theory emphasised two crucial aspects: openness and democratic governance [34]. Openness referred to a condition in which politics was based on the public sphere. Democratic governance meant that individuals within the community actively shape and participate in the governance processes. This theory emphasises the ethical aspect of citizenship and regards citizens as actively participating in public discussions and demonstrating a commitment to the community [22]. The primary emphasis is placed on the responsibilities of individuals towards their community, and their active participation in the formulation of policies and/or demonstration of dedication to public matters.

The theory mentioned above is rooted in classical republicanism, which highlights the importance of individuals serving and actively participating in politics [22]. Political participation by citizens was the ultimate manifestation of citizenship. The theory was based on Aristotle's concept of city-states, which emphasised the importance of considering the citizens' characters before participation. Aristotle (384-322 BC) held the belief that the latter option would lead to a shared connection among the citizens, which was crucial for the cohesion of the nation. Citizens were anticipated to engage in public activities, thus eliminating any apathy among them. According to [22], the civic republican theory sought to develop citizens who possessed the qualities necessary to participate meaning-

fully in their society's social, political, and democratic dimensions.

2.5. National Citizenship

National citizen was defined as an individual who is either born or granted citizenship in a particular state or nation [10]. Citizens are obligated to show loyalty to the government and in return entitled to receive its protection from the government. Citizenship can be understood as the condition of possessing the rights and responsibilities of a citizen, and the qualities of an individual seen as a part of society. [10] delineated national citizenship into "civic" and "ethnic" nationalism. According to [18], citizenship served as a legal means for societies to ensure continuity of passing national heritage from one generation to the next by establishing a connection between the past and future. The concept of national citizenship, comprises of three concepts namely; *jus soli*, *jus sanguinis*, and naturalisation.

2.5.1. Jus Soli

The principle of *jus soli* entails citizenship determined by the location of one's birth. The concept acknowledges the entitlement of individuals who were born within the geographical boundaries of a specific state to obtain complete and equitable inclusion in society [34]. This principle highlights birthplace as the primary factor for determining the allocation or denial citizenship. *Jus soli*, in its original state, is impartial to any factor other than the place of birth. [11] stated that any child born within the jurisdiction of a particular country is entitled to its citizenship, irrespective of how their parents entered the country, whether their residence was legal or illegal, and the length of time the child has stayed in the state is irrelevant. For instance, a Zambian woman who unlawfully crosses the border with the specific intention of giving birth on American territory. By doing so, she ensures that her child receives the benefits associated with being a lawful United States citizen. The mother might eventually return to Zambia with her newborn child, but this will not change the fact that the child already possesses absolute entitlement to full membership within the United States of America.

2.5.2. Jus Sanguinis

In contrast to *jus soli*, *jus sanguinis* does not prioritise birthplace as a fundamental principle. On the other hand, *jus sanguinis* grants political membership by considering one's parentage and family connections [9]. The contemporary establishment of *jus sanguinis* emerged from the Civil Code of 1804, following the French Revolution, where the principle of territoriality was discarded [16]. According to the French Civil Code, parents, particularly fathers, were granted the authority to confer their political affiliation to their children at birth, regardless of the child's place of birth, whether in France or overseas. Between 1799 and 1815, the idea of "attributing" European colonial expansion extended the principle of *jus*

sanguinis to non-European countries [35]. The concept of descent membership was regarded as innovative and profoundly egalitarian. According to [25], the principle of *jus sanguinis* deviated from the feudal tradition of *jus soli*, which connected individuals to a specific territory and its ruling lord. Conversely, *jus sanguinis* establishes a connection between citizens and their collective political endeavour through their affiliation with the state. Collectively, as stated by [25], they formed a group of individuals who shared the same privileges, subject to the same responsibilities, and legally considered to be equal. In the nineteenth century, several European countries, such as Austria, Belgium, Spain, Prussia, Italy, Russia, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden, adopted the *jus sanguinis* principle by codifying and imitating the aforementioned reform. Nevertheless, *jus sanguinis* carries connotations of exclusion that are frequently linked to ethnic and national bias. [25] have contended that *jus sanguinis* was used as a means to conceal discriminatory practices against specific segments of the population by depriving them of complete access to the privileges and advantages of citizenship based on an unalterable criterion of "ancestry".

2.6. Naturalisation

Naturalisation is the legal means of obtaining citizenship, aside from birth and descent. [26], states that naturalisation is the ultimate stage in the process of obtaining citizenship after birth. While birthright citizenship is automatic and based on factors beyond one's control, naturalisation is a voluntary procedure. It necessitates the individual's agency, proactive behaviour, and explicit consent, as well as the acknowledgment and approval of the political community. To qualify for naturalisation, an individual must be lawfully granted permanent residency in a foreign country [3]. In the 21st Century, each nation is required to grant entry exclusively to its citizens, while individuals from other countries do not possess a comparable entitlement. Individuals from countries perceived as economically disadvantaged or politically unstable often face more rigorous criteria when applying for entry into developed nations. These inequalities apply even when individuals are only seeking temporary entrance to a country, not to mention permanent residence status [26].

Therefore, an individual desiring to obtain lawful residency in a foreign nation must apply for immigration status to the appropriate governmental body, such as the Immigration Department and Citizenship Board in Zambia, which are both departments of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security. Typically, this type of application necessitates the submission of comprehensive information to the destination country regarding the applicants' financial status, educational background, family situation, and other personal particulars [33]. Additionally, it entails a thorough medical evaluation conducted by a doctor authorised by the state, and frequently necessitates applicants to undergo a thorough interview conducted before acquiring an immigration visa [8]. Nevertheless,

the final decision on whether to grant or reject permanent residency status is made by an immigration official at the point of entry, such as the border, who has the power to decline such status.

2.7. Global Citizenship

Global citizenship involves being part of a larger community and recognising our shared humanity, as well as the interdependence and interconnectedness of different cultures within local, national, and global contexts [24]. Global citizenship encompasses the idea of extending citizenship beyond national boundaries and embracing a global perspective. It involves adopting a communal approach to education, where schools are diverse in terms of culture, language, and race [5] and [19]. [24] defined global citizenship as the capacity to perceive the world as a unified entity, making comparisons and contrasts in a pluralistic manner. It involves recognising that "reality" exists in multiple linguistic versions, understanding power dynamics systematically, and maintaining a balanced awareness of experiences about external entities. [23], included consideration for the rights and well-being of others in addition to the aforementioned. The scholars such as [23] and [27], emphasised the significance of multiple rights and specifically mentioned the concept of "intercultural citizenship." According to [27], intercultural citizenship can be defined as the acknowledgment of the rights and social standing of various sub-groups, which are distinguished by factors such as gender, ethnicity, language, and religion. From this standpoint, certain aptitudes and duties encompass the citizens' inclination to engage in politics at the local, national, and international scales, the capability to be responsive to and safeguard human rights, and the competence to address issues as a member of the global community [23]. Nevertheless, [27] contended that the endorsement of dual citizenship gives rise to inquiries regarding the concepts of identity and citizenship. [27] advocated for a concept of "cosmopolitan citizenship" that transcends national allegiances.

3. Methodology

The study took a qualitative approach and applied a descriptive design. The study was conducted in selected universities and secondary schools in Zambia's Lusaka and Kabwe Districts. The target population included Civic Education lecturers and teachers from four (4) secondary schools and three (3) universities in Lusaka and Kabwe Districts. The total sample size of the study was 30 participants. Data was collected from lecturers and teachers using interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) were used to collect data from the students. Participants were chosen using purposeful sampling, namely homogeneous purposive sampling. Data was gathered via semi-structured interviews. The collected data was analysed thematically.

4. Results and Discussion

The study focused on establishing the civic education teachers' and lecturers' comprehension of citizenship and its influence on civic engagement. One on one interviews and focus group discussion was used to collect data. The study revealed that the participants held diverse perspectives on the notion of citizenship. The views of the participants on the concept of citizenship are presented below.

4.1. Citizenship as Rights and Duties

On citizenship as rights and duties, the following were the responses. The participant lecturers defined citizenship in terms of the rights and duties of citizens. When questioned about the meaning of the concept of citizenship, the following responses were given:

The concept of citizenship is very important. That's because for the citizens to participate they must understand their rights and responsibilities in society.

"The term refers to the connection between a citizen and the state. It is based on two elements; that is the rights the citizen enjoys from the state and the duties or responsibilities that the citizen offers to the state."

"Citizenship is about rights and responsibilities in society. The citizens should know the connection between them, the government, the community and the environment."

The study revealed that the definition of citizenship as rights and duties by the lecturers appeared to be comprehensive and was not bias towards rights or duties only, it emphasised the aspect of citizenship that balances both rights and duties. The lecturers' definitions of citizenship as rights and duties mirror [2] and [12] descriptions of liberal and communitarian citizenship. The lecturers' definition of citizenship as a duty is in line with [12] communitarian understanding of citizenship. While the liberal conception of citizenship focused on the individual rights of citizens as defined by [36]. As a result, it is possible to speculate that the lecturers' definition of citizenship as rights and duties provided a balanced view of the concept. Liberal citizenship viewed citizenship as individual pursuing their rights, reflecting a society of independent individuals whose objective is not civic engagement in public activities. Civic engagement was ineffectual in liberal citizenship since the importance was on a loose interaction between the state and the citizens. Participation was optional in such a setup. Citizens contributed only when they are motivated to do so, promoting passive citizenship. According to [36] and [1] a person participates only when they consider the costs necessary to attain some valued end.

Citizens' rights focus on pursuing materialistic interests. [36] warned that the liberal idea of citizenship overlooked the role of the public sphere as the place of citizenship. The emphasis of liberal citizenship was primarily on the legal status and

civic rights of citizens. Clearly, from this perspective, it is impossible to establish spaces for citizens to participate and recognise the duty expected of them as citizens. This, appears to be the situation in universities and secondary schools. However, some lecturers defined citizenship as a duty. The definition of citizenship as a duty reflected what [12] identified as the Communitarian idea of citizenship. The fundamental principle of communitarianism focus on citizens as members of a sociocultural community with a constitution mandate that confers rights and duties. Therefore, one can speculate that as a result, the emphasis of this conception of citizenship is on the common good rather than individual rights on. Communitarians urge citizens to actively participate in society and to prioritize the common good over personal gain. According to [12], the communitarian view arose from the belief that individuality was the result of community relationships rather than individualism. The community is the beginning point for citizenship in communitarian sense. As noted by [2], citizenship was anchored in a culturally defined community in the communitarian thought, with an emphasis on the characteristics of political involvement and identity rather than individual rights and liberties. In contrast to liberalism, it recognises individuals as active citizens through civic engagement in society.

4.2. Citizenship as Belonging

The study revealed that the majority of participants, in-service teachers and student teachers perceived the notion of citizenship as being associated with membership in the state. Some of the Civic education student teachers defined citizenship in the following way.

"So, it is the status of being a citizen or belonging to the nation."

"Citizenship is simply belonging to a particular country. I am Zambian because I belong to Zambia. You can also be a citizen of a group you belong to or a country. Somehow, citizenship is based on these two factors. If your parents are from Namibia and you were born in Zambia, you are automatically a Zambian citizen."

"Mr Sakala, I think citizenship is the rule of Jus Sanguinis; for instance, if my parents are born in Zambia, then I am a citizen of Zambia. Another factor to consider is Jus Soli. For instance, even if my parents are stationed in Namibia, I would still be considered a citizen of Namibia and Zambia as long as I was born in Zambia."

Nevertheless, a teacher also delineated citizenship as the state of being a member of a specific nation.

In my viewpoint, citizenship can be defined as the status of being a member of a specific nation or community, indicating a sense of belonging to that country. That's where one benefits from the privileges of that particular country, and not only benefits, but there is that interaction between the citizen and the government.

"Citizenship can be defined as the condition of being a member of a specific nation. My thought is that there are

purported advantages associated with being a citizen of a nation.”

The study revealed that the teachers and student teachers of Civic Education had a different understanding of the concept of citizenship compared to what was anticipated, as evidenced by their responses in interviews and focus group discussions. The participants defined citizenship as belonging to the state without mentioning the citizen's commitment to society and the state. This demonstrated the challenges that the teachers and student teachers faced in developing accurate ideas about citizenship. [14] indicated that the concept of citizenship constitutes membership, belonging to a political community, and the creation of a political life for all citizens to participate. The above definition and the participants' view on the concept confirmed a narrow conception of citizenship. In a nutshell, Civic education student teachers and teachers did not define citizenship comprehensively as expected. It was expected that civic education teachers would give a clear perspective biased toward the positive and a thorough knowledge of the definition of citizenship of rights and duties, but this was not the case. Hearing this definition and point of view on citizenship, especially from teachers, was unsettling. Because of the definition's sole emphasis on national belonging, it provided a narrow and prejudiced perspective. This type of citizenship perception is modest because it just focuses on identity. Throughout the interviews and focus group discussion, the researcher couldn't help but question if secondary school civic education teachers are adequately preparing pupils as future democratic citizens.

4.3. Citizenship as a Qualification

The study revealed that certain participants perceived citizenship as a qualification as outlined by the Constitution. One of the teachers stated that:

“I would define citizenship as the qualification that a person should meet as defined by the Constitution. It prescribes when one can get the National Registration Card and how many years a foreigner should reside to qualify for citizenship.”

“There is also naturalized citizenship where if I have lived in a country for 10 years, I can renounce my former country and become that country's citizen.”

Student teachers in the Focus Group Discussion added that: “When teaching citizenship, I usually work with the constitution because there are certain parts of the Zambian constitution that bring out the exact qualifications of citizenship and how one can lose citizenship; that is exactly what is in the constitution.”

“When defining citizenship, I refer to the Zambian constitution, which brings out the exact qualifications of citizenship and how one can lose citizenship. Citizenship can also mean belonging to a nation that will require a citizen to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes.”

The study revealed that the participants' teachers and student teachers defined citizenship as a qualification. The responses of Civic Education teachers and student teachers mirror what [26] described as “the national orientation of citizenship that focuses on passing down a legacy from one generation to the next.” The ideas of *jus soli*, *jus sanguinis*, and naturalisation are used to describe such a concept of national citizenship. The *jus soli* principle suggests a territorial interpretation of birthright citizenship. The statement acknowledges the entitlement of every individual born within the geographical boundaries of a specific state to possess complete and equitable status as a citizen [26]. This idea makes the place of birth the primary basis for granting or denying birthright citizenship. *Jus soli*, in its original form, is “blind” to all reasons of understanding citizenship other than birthplace.

Jus sanguinis grants political membership based on parentage and family links. However, *jus sanguinis* has exclusionary implications that are frequently connected with racial and national favoritism. As stated by [25], the principle of *jus sanguinis* was used to hide discriminatory practices against specific groups of people by denying them complete access to the privileges and advantages of citizenship based on an unalterable criterion of “ancestry” that they had no control over. In such instances, the principle of *jus sanguinis* established an unjustifiable framework of legalised hereditary ranking. Therefore, *jus sanguinis* could lead to a scenario where individuals receive the advantages of being a member of a political community and are entitled to all the associated rights and benefits, without having any corresponding obligations [25]. Naturalisation is the only legal way of getting citizenship other than through birth or descent. According to [33], this is the ultimate step in attaining post-birth citizenship. Whereas birth right citizenship is involuntary and ascriptive, naturalisation is a voluntary but constitutional procedure. To be eligible for naturalization, a person must be lawfully permitted long-term residence in another country.

5. Conclusion

The study's findings on citizenship comprehension revealed differences in understanding the concept, that lecturers possessed a thorough grasp of the concept. They defined it in terms of rights and duties that a citizen should enjoy and perform. Citizenship as rights reflected the liberalist conception of citizenship, while citizenship as a duty is the communitarian view of citizenship. The study also revealed that Civic Education teachers and student teachers had a narrow comprehension of citizenship. Citizenship is defined as the state of belonging to a particular nation. Such a definition was limited, as citizenship includes rights and duties and, generally, participation. The study revealed that some participants understood citizenship as a qualification that citizenship from the rights and duties, critical multiculturalism, and a global perspective.

6. Recommendations

- 1) The study recommended the need for enhanced Civic education training and curriculum development to foster meaningful civic engagement and understanding of the concept of citizenship.
- 2) The study also recommended professional development programmes to enhance the conceptualization of citizenship.

Abbreviations

FGDs Focus Group Discussions

Author Contributions

Exsaviour Sakala: Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Visualization

Magasu Oliver: Methodology, Resources, Software

Dingase Mtonga: Formal Analysis, Resources, Validation

Samson Letsoaka Tshabalala: Funding acquisition, Project administration, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of Interest.

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