

# The 2023 Competence-Based Education Curriculum in Zambia: What does it mean to a Civic Education Teacher?

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## ABSTRACT

The 2023 Competence-Based Education Curriculum Framework in Zambia was thoroughly assessed in this study. It represents a significant departure from traditional teaching methods to a more learner-centered, experiential, and skill-based approach. The framework aims to cultivate critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and active community participation as key civic education competencies. By examining the curriculum's structure, implementation strategies, and stakeholder perspectives, the study highlighted various challenges, including inadequate teacher training, limited resources, and ineffective assessment methods. The study puts forward recommendations to address these issues to maximise the curriculum's potential to produce well-informed and actively involved citizens capable of contributing to Zambia's democratic and developmental objectives.

**Keywords:** Civic, Competence, Curriculum, Framework, Critical thinking, Problem solving

## INTRODUCTION

The development of democratic societies relies heavily on civic education, which encourages active participation in governance and community life. The 2023 Competence-Based Education Curriculum Framework introduced in Zambia aligns with the global trends, integrates emerging issues, aligns the education system with National Development Plans, and migrates the education system from an Outcome-Based Education (OBE) to a Competence Based Curriculum (CBE) with a view to promoting education that will enhance the acquisition of competences, knowledge, skills, positive attitudes and values necessary for sustainable development of the nation (MoE, 2013). With the approach, there is emphasis on practical skills and experiential learning over memorisation and rote learning.

Competence-Based Education (CBE) aims to develop learners' abilities to apply learned knowledge in real-world situations rather than solely focusing on knowledge transfer (Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2014). In Zambia, the curriculum reform is designed to create a more civically engaged and socially responsible population to address the country's needs. The 2023 Education Framework adopts a learner-centered and experiential approach to foster competencies in critical thinking, ethical responsibility, and active civic engagement. Furthermore, the framework promotes values such as integrity, community service, and respect for human rights. This study delves into the framework's structure, identifies implementation challenges, and assesses its potential to have a positive impact on Zambian society. The study also provides recommendations for enhancing the framework's effectiveness in achieving its educational objectives.

## Statement of the problem

The move from traditional civic education to a competency-based framework offers great potential to enhance student learning and societal involvement. Nevertheless, this transition poses challenges. The newly introduced 2023 Competence-Based Education Curriculum in Zambia is confronted with several significant issues.

Numerous educators lack the essential training to effectively deliver competency-based education. The majority of teachers are accustomed to teaching focused on content and might find it challenging to shift to a more dynamic, skills-oriented approach (Misbah et al., 2020). Competency-based education necessitates specific teaching materials, technology, and resources, which are often inadequate in Zambian schools, particularly in rural areas (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019). Traditional assessment methods, which emphasise memorisation, are ill-suited for evaluating the competencies highlighted in the new curriculum, such as critical thinking and problem-solving (Kaumba et al., 2020). The success of competency-based civic education hinges not only on the active involvement of educators but also on the broader community. In many instances, there is limited cooperation between schools and local communities (Ministry of Education, 2023). Given these challenges, this study aims to investigate the implementation of the curriculum and propose solutions to enhance its effectiveness.

### **Competence-Based Education (CBE) Approach**

Competence-Based Education focuses on learning outcomes, highlighting the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required by learners to tackle real-world challenges (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019). Unlike traditional education, which leans towards theory, CBE prioritises practical application and active learning. In civic education, the primary goal of CBE is to develop students who possess not only knowledge about their rights and responsibilities but also the capability to positively engage with societal issues (Naranjo, 2022). In the Zambian context, this entails fostering a comprehensive understanding of democratic principles, human rights, governance, and the rule of law.

### **Description of the 2023 Civic Education Curriculum Framework**

The 2023 curriculum has been developed with a focus on key skills that aim to equip students for meaningful participation in civic activities.

#### **Civic Knowledge and Literacy**

Civic education curriculum based on competence emphasises the importance of civic knowledge and literacy, aiming to equip learners with the necessary understanding, skills, and attitudes for active and responsible participation in democratic societies. Civic knowledge pertains to grasping the structures, processes, and principles of government, while civic literacy focuses on the ability to critically engage with civic content and apply it in real-world situations (Ministry of Education, 2023). Within a competency-based civic education curriculum, civic knowledge and literacy are intended to empower students with the understanding and skills essential for becoming well-informed, responsible, and engaged citizens. Through a combination of knowledge, critical thinking, practical application, and involvement, students and learners can make meaningful contributions to democratic processes and community well-being (Holmes *et al.*, 2021). By incorporating these elements into civic education, schools can nurture a generation of civic-minded individuals capable of addressing local, national, and global challenges.

#### **Critical thinking and Problem Solving Skills**

The curriculum promotes the analysis of intricate civic issues, the consideration of multiple viewpoints, and the formulation of logical solutions (Catacutan *et al.*, 2023). This is particularly crucial in a swiftly changing global environment, where individuals must navigate through misinformation and political divisions. Critical thinking and problem-solving are crucial elements of a competency-based civic education curriculum, as they empower students to scrutinise complex civic issues, assess information, and devise practical solutions, ultimately preparing them to be active, well-informed citizens. Integrating critical thinking and problem-solving into a competency-based civic education curriculum is vital for nurturing knowledgeable, engaged citizens. According to Giaffredo *et al.*, (2022) and Kaumba *et al.*, (2020), teachers can facilitate the development of these skills by designing curriculum and teaching methods that foster them, helping learners to become adept at analysing complex issues, evaluating information, and devising effective solutions. This approach readies students to actively participate in civic life and make positive contributions to their communities and democratic societies.

## Ethical and Moral Responsibility

The importance of ethical conduct and integrity is highlighted in the curriculum. Students will be educated on the significance of accountability and responsibility in both personal and public spheres, with the aim of addressing corruption and promoting transparent governance (Wasserman, 2020). Ethical and moral responsibility is integrated as a fundamental aspect of a competency-based civic education curriculum, ensuring that students understand civic principles and develop the character and judgment needed to act responsibly as citizens. According to Mainde *et al.*, (2021) and Kaumba *et al.*, (2020), the integration of ethical and moral dimensions into civic education helps students address complex issues with integrity and empathy, leading to making decisions that align with their values and the common good. Including ethical and moral responsibility in a competency-based civic education curriculum is essential for nurturing students who are not only knowledgeable about civic principles, but also committed to acting with integrity and empathy. Ethical reasoning promotes civic virtues and enables students to apply their learning to real-world situations. Educators can assist students in addressing challenging moral dilemmas and making positive contributions to their communities.

## Practical Civic Engagement

The curriculum encourages experiential learning through involvement in community service projects, active participation in local governance initiatives, and engagement in civic organisations. These endeavors enable students to apply academic knowledge in real-life situations, strengthening their learning through practical experience (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019). Practical civic engagement within a competency-based civic education curriculum is cardinal for converting academic knowledge into meaningful action. It concentrates on providing students with the abilities, experiences, and drive to participate actively in their communities and democratic processes. Practical civic engagement enables students to implement their comprehension of civic education principles in real-life scenarios, nurturing a sense of accountability and capability. According to Muleya (2020), community projects, service learning, and advocacy endeavors can assist learners in cultivating the skills, experiences, and determination required for active civic involvement. By engaging meaningfully, students acquire a deeper comprehension of their roles as citizens and become better equipped for a democratic society.

## Implementation Strategies

The competence based Civic Education curriculum in Zambia face several challenges, despite its innovative design, therefore, the strategies below are necessary:

### Teacher Training and Capacity

Civic Education teachers need to adopt new teaching methods that focus on hands-on, learner-centered learning and skill building in order to effectively implement the curriculum. However, many Civic education teachers in Zambia were trained in traditional, content-based approaches and find it challenging to shift to a competence-based model (Ayalew *et al.*, 2024). According to a study by Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019), more than 60% of teachers were not adequately trained in competence-based education, which hinders their ability to effectively implement the new curriculum. The success of a competence-based civic education curriculum depends heavily on the training and capabilities of teachers. Teachers are essential in facilitating learner-centered learning, nurturing skills, and evaluating civic engagement, but this requires specialised training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to ensure that teachers have the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to deliver high-quality civic education.

### Teaching Resource

The successful execution of CBE relies on having access to a variety of educational materials, such as updated textbooks, ICT resources, and teaching aids. Nevertheless, numerous Zambian schools, especially those in rural areas, have limited resources and insufficient funds to obtain these materials (Ministry of Education, 2023). This lack of resources obstructs both the teaching and learning processes. The implementation of a

competence-based civic education curriculum may encounter various resource constraints that could affect its effectiveness. These constraints may impede the full engagement of learners, hinder the provision of meaningful experiences, and inhibit the achievement of desired learning outcomes. According to Mumba *et al.*, (2023), addressing these resource limitations is crucial for ensuring the successful implementation of a competence-based civic education curriculum. Solutions such as investing in teacher training, establishing partnerships, utilising technology, and advocating for policy support can help to overcome many of these challenges. By addressing these resource gaps, schools can better prepare students to become informed, active, and responsible citizens.

### Assessment Mechanisms

Developing appropriate assessment tools is a significant challenge in the implementation of CBE. Traditional examination systems are primarily geared towards evaluating memorisation and theoretical knowledge, while CBE requires assessing more complex competencies, such as critical thinking and problem-solving (UNESCO, 2017). Teachers find it difficult to accurately measure students' progress without clear guidelines for assessing these competencies. In a competence-based civic education curriculum, assessment mechanisms are specifically designed to gauge learners' capacity to apply civic knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes in real-world situations (Mpate, 2023). Competency-based learning redirects the focus from rote memorisation to applying knowledge, critical thinking, and problem-solving, emphasising practical skills that equip learners to become active and informed citizens.

### Community Engagement

Engaging with the community is a vital aspect of civic education, but many schools struggle to form partnerships with local communities for civic engagement projects. This difficulty limits students' ability to put their learning into real-world practice (Akinrinola, 2020). Community involvement is essential for the success of the Competence-Based Civic Education Curriculum in Zambia. It acts as a connection between classroom learning and practical application, ensuring that students not only grasp civic education concepts but also actively participate in their communities. According to Nombo (2022), in a Competence-Based Curriculum, the emphasis is not solely on gaining knowledge but also on cultivating practical skills and attitudes that encourage active citizenship. Through community engagement, students have the chance to apply their knowledge, develop a sense of responsibility, and comprehend the societal impact of their actions.

### Stakeholder Feedback

The 2023 Civic Education Curriculum has received mixed feedback from stakeholders. Policymakers and advocates for educational reform have largely embraced the shift to a Competence-Based Approach, seeing it as vital for shaping the next generation of active citizens (Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2014). However, teachers have voiced concerns about the pace of the reform and the insufficient professional development opportunities available to them (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019). Parents are also divided, with some supporting the curriculum's emphasis on practical skills, while others fear it may impact academic performance in core subjects like mathematics and science (Wasserman, 2020). It is important to address the reception issues highlighted by stakeholders to ensure the success of a Competency-Based Civic Education Curriculum. Active involvement of students, teachers, parents, community members, and policymakers is essential for ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant, effective, and responsive to the needs of all stakeholders. This collaborative approach contributes to the creation of a curriculum that not only enhances students' civic knowledge and skills but also encourages meaningful engagement with their society.

## CONCLUSION

The introduction of the 2023 Competence-Based Civic Education Curriculum in Zambia is a significant move towards updating the country's education system and encouraging proactive citizenship. The curriculum focuses on skills like critical thinking, civic participation, and ethical conduct, which are in line with international standards for civic education. Nevertheless, certain obstacles to implementation, such as



insufficient teacher training, scarce resources, and ambiguous assessment criteria, need to be resolved to guarantee its effectiveness.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are put forward by the study:

- To ensure a smooth transition to competence-based education, the Zambian government should invest in comprehensive and continuous professional development programs for teachers, focusing on experiential learner-centered teaching methods, competence-based assessment, and the use of ICT in civic education.
- Resources should be allocated by the government and educational stakeholders to ensure that all schools, particularly those in rural areas, have the necessary teaching materials and technologies to support the new civic education curriculum.
- The Ministry of Education should collaborate with experts to create assessment tools that effectively measure the competencies emphasised in the new curriculum. These tools should extend beyond traditional examinations to encompass project-based assessments, reflective assignments, and practical activities.
- Schools should engage with local communities, civic organisations, and government agencies to provide learning opportunities for students to participate in civic projects. These partnerships will bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application, thus enhancing the effectiveness of civic education.
- A robust monitoring and evaluation system should be put in place to monitor the progress of the curriculum's implementation. Continuous feedback from teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders should be gathered to make necessary adjustments and improvements.

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