

## Examining Civic Education Learning and Assessment Strategies in Selected Secondary Schools in Zambia

### ABSTRACT

**Aims:** This study explored learning and assessment of Civic Education from the pupils' standpoint.

**Study Design:** Employed a qualitative research paradigm, in particular a descriptive research design.

**Place and Duration:** The study was conducted in selected rural secondary schools of Central, Lusaka and Southern provinces of Zambia, between April 2022 and April 2023.

**Methodology:** It targeted 300 learners from 30 secondary schools in Central, Lusaka and Southern provinces. Schools and participants were systematically selected. Data was collected using a questionnaire with open-ended questions, analysed descriptively and thematically.

**Results:** Findings show that teachers employ teacher-centered methods and neglect learner-centered methods which are ideal in teaching and learning Civic Education in schools. Findings also revealed that most learners like answering section A (multiple choice), followed by section B (one word or short phrased answers), with section C (essay writing) being the least. All participants contended that teachers could not prepare learners for section C during both formative and summative assessment.

**Conclusion:** The Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ) should train all teachers of Civic Education as examiners so that they acquire knowledge, build and sharpen their assessment skills; and ECZ should consider including continuous assessment in Civic Education as part of grade 12 national examination to allow learners interact with the community through research projects when they are in grade 11.

Keywords: Community of Inquiry, Civic Education, Pupil, Assessment, Secondary School

### INTRODUCTION

Education goes beyond all other divides of human origins as it is the great equalizer of conditions of men and the wheels that balance socio-economic status of men in a community. It is the tool that links individuals' well-being and possibilities for improved living as it plays a vital part in the multi-dimensional development of human capital [1]. Education, according to [2], is both a fundamental human right and a driver for economic progress and human development. Zambia, like the rest of the world, has a predominantly formal academic educational system that is separated into three levels: elementary education, secondary school and tertiary [2]. At every level, there are specific competencies required for students to acquire at the end of the course.

The secondary school curriculum in Zambia shows that the academic path is dominated by examinations, with a strong emphasis on passing national examinations [3]. World over, students' academic performance in schools has been a source of concern [4]; [5]. This is because education is not about memorising notes or course content, as students seem to think and take it to be. It is centred on student acquisition of rightful knowledge, instilling of necessary skills, transformation of individual character and preparation of individual learners to remain resilient to current and future challenges. This explains why [1] recognises that each child is an individual, developing at their own pace and differing in needs, abilities, interests, cultural influence, learning patterns and behaviours. Rationally, this entails that when children enter school, they bring a variety of characteristics with them. In order to improve their academic performance, they should be treated as individuals with distinct abilities, personalities, and knowledge.

In Zambia, educational achievement is measured by means of academic results obtained during national examinations. All subjects, Civic Education inclusive, are assessed in the

same way. Both formative and summative assessments are given to learners in Civic Education. Suffice to say, the ultimate goal of Civic Education is to provide school leavers with the civic information, skills they need to comprehend, practice their civic rights and responsibilities both within and outside Zambia [6]. However, little is known on the views that learners hold on Civic Education learning and assessment practices. This exploratory study aimed at collecting learners' viewpoints relating to assessment patterns in civic education. The objectives of the study were to:-

1. Establish how teachers prepare their learners for Civic Education national examination and community engagement.
2. Determine learners' most favorite section in Civic Education national examinations.
3. Ascertain learners' impression on the essay writing section in Civic Education during national examination.

## Literature Review

### Conceptual Framework

Assessment is one of the practices in education intended to find out the activities or content which learners have learnt during a specific period of time. Often times, assessment can be undertaken at three points: prior to learning, during learning and after learning. [7] defines assessment as all activities that teachers and students undertake to get information that can be used to alter teaching and learning. Assessments are developed by a wide array of groups and individuals to identify individual student weaknesses and strengths so that educators can provide specialised academic support educational programming, or social services [8]; [9]. Such educational activity help educators with useful feedback about students learning achievement. It provides interaction between teachers and students in the classroom. This includes teacher observation and analysis of student work such as home-works, tests, essays, reports, practical procedures and classroom discussion of issues [7].

There are two major types of assessment commonly used in education setup namely; formative and summative assessment. Figure 1 below offers conceptual framework underpinnings on when, why, and how formative and summative assessments are conducted.

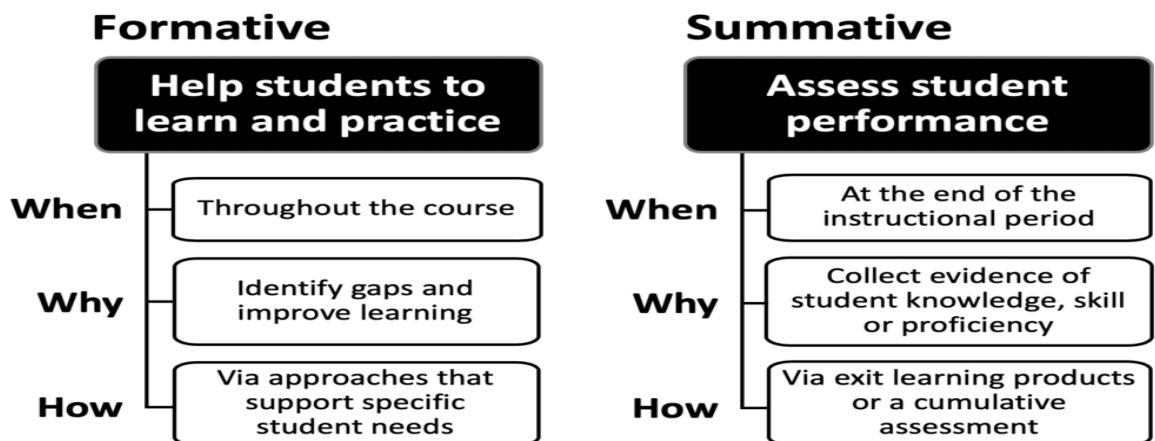


Figure 1: Conceptual framework on formative and summative assessments

The aforementioned has shown that formative assessment is aimed at aiding learners to learn and practice what the teacher plans for them in every Civic Education lesson. The teacher has to ensure the intended objectives on what was planned to teach learners in every lesson are achieved [10]. Formative assessment is conducted throughout the course of study to identify misconceptions, challenges, and learning needs during teaching and learning process. As such, the teacher is guided on how to provide clarity,

as well as to suggest remedial work where necessary. Formative assessment helps to shape learning. Once learners understand that formative assessment is meant to improve their learning, they would be encouraged and be committed to it [11]; [12]. It is only when teachers of Civic Education realise the potential which formative assessment has on student-learning practices will they prepare learners for academic success and community engagement.

According to [7] formative assessment is embedded in the teaching and learning process and provides feedback to the teacher in the course of teaching to enable them judge how well students are learning. Students understand exactly what they are to learn, what is expected of them, are given feedback and advice on how to improve their work. In assessment for learning, teachers use assessment as an investigable tool to find out, as much as they can, about what their students know and can do, and what confusions, preconceptions, or gaps exist. Thus, formative assessment provides information on the effectiveness of teaching Civic Education which will help to determine an appropriate remedial action where necessary [7]. This kind of assessment occurs throughout the learning process. It provides room for teachers to help learners who seem to be lagging behind, where possible, change teaching strategies if it is discovered that the majority of learners have challenges in comprehending learning activity.

It is expected that learners will be assessed periodically to determine whether the intended outcomes have been internalised and competences mastered. For the sake of this, teachers are advised to conduct continuous assessments, whether weekly or fortnightly or monthly. A mid-term assessment would also be ideal so that where deficiencies are observed some remedial measures are put in place. It is recommended that an end-of-term assessment be conducted at each grade level [6]. This is to ascertain the quality of information which the children might have learnt during that period of time.

Summative assessment in Civic Education is meant to evaluate learning, based on knowledge, ability, or achievement after a period of instruction, such as; a unit, course, or program studied. In some courses, it can be combined with formative assessments in form of school-based continuous assessments which are formally guided by the national examining body [13]; [14].

Summative assessment is a public event organised to ascertain how well students have learnt a particular learning activity over a period of time. Formative assessment is also conducted at the end of a training program to provide evidence of achievement to parents, other educators, students and sometimes to outside groups. Since it is conducted at the end of a learning activity to determine the level of students' achievement or how well a programme has performed, summative assessment affect students' future positively or negatively [7]. Unfortunately, this form of assessment does not provide room for a teacher to correct or help individual learners who have challenges in certain aspects of learning.

### ***Rationale of Assessment in Civic Education***

The senior secondary school Civic Education curriculum covers content across political, religious, economic, social and cultural scenes that are key to Zambia's democratic system of governance [6]. Undoubtedly, teaching and learning Civic Education helps society recognize the role that this subject plays in today's constantly changing world. Assessments have a number of benefits. [8] and [9] posit that it provides feedback on the effectiveness of instruction and gives students a measure of academic progress.

Formative assessment helps in measuring student improvement over time. [6] contends that through Civic Education, learners get equipped with knowledge, skills and values that enable them practice their civic rights and perform duties as responsible Zambian citizens at local, national and international levels. Examples abound of students, at various levels of education, who engage in civic debate contests locally and internationally. Ostensibly,

the traits they exhibit are acquired during the learning process. [9] posits that assessment provides motivation to students.

Teachers use assessment for learning to enhance students' motivation and commitment to learning. When teachers commit to learning as the focus of assessment, they change the classroom culture to one of student success. Literature suggests that a teacher needs to motivate students to write essays as well as providing various supportive writing activities such as peer correction and frequent use of dictionaries [6, 7, 9, 13, 15]. This arouse interest in learners to engage during Civic Education classroom teaching and learning process. Assessments enable teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching methods used during classroom lessons. Students reflect on their work on a regular basis, usually through self and peer assessment and decide (often with the help of the teacher, particularly in the early stages) what their next learning will be. [8] reveals that assessment is important as it helps in ranking the students' capabilities compared to whole group evaluation.

### **Composition of Civic Education Summative Assessment in Zambian secondary schools**

The introduction of Civic Education at High School level in Zambia fills the gap that existed between Junior Secondary School and institutions of higher learning in teaching civic obligations and matters. This gap had an impact on senior secondary school leavers who, mostly, graduated with little or no experience of Civic Education with regards to their roles, rights and obligation in the community. Hence, this major development in the curriculum was identified as an important contribution to Zambia's education system that is based on democratic principles and values. For this reason, the general outcomes of the Civic Education course according to the Zambian Curriculum Framework of 2013 are to:

1. Create an understanding of the political process and appreciation of good governance.
2. Promote positive attitudes, responsibilities, duties, obligations, freedoms and rights of a citizen in the learner.
3. Create awareness on the need for respect, promotion of democracy, human rights and freedoms.
4. Develop an understanding of global issues.

In order to fulfil the expectations cited in the preceding paragraph above, the Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ) in 2020 [13] categorised Civic Education summative assessment into three major sections A, B and C. Before this change, Civic Education national examination was divided into two examination papers namely; paper one with one section containing 50 multiple choice questions and paper two with three sections containing a varying number of questions in each. Table 1 below shows major changes that have taken place in Civic Education examination at school certificate ordinary level since 2009.

Table 1: Civic Education examination, school certificate ordinary level, 2009

PAPER ONE		PAPER TWO					
2	Multiple choice	SECTION A 20 marks		SECTION B 40 marks		SECTION C 40 marks	
		No. of questions	Answer	No. of questions	Answer	No. of questions	Answer
2009	50	12	12	10	5	5	1, other
2010	50	11	11	10	5	5	1, other
2011	50	12	12	10	5	5	1, other
2012	50	14	14	10	5	5	1, other

2013	50	12	12	10	5	5	1, other
2014	50	14	14	10	5	5	1, other
2015	50	14	14	10	5	5	1, other
2016	50	16	16	7	4	5	1, other
2017	50	15	15	7	4	5	1, other
2018	50	15	15	7	4	5	1, other
2019	50	14	14	7	4	5	1, other
2020	Cancelled	20	20	5	5	5	2
2021	Cancelled	20	20	5	5	5	2

*Source: Examinations Council of Zambia, Civic Education Papers, 2009-2021.*

The Examinations Council of Zambia shifted paper one assessment format to section A of Civic Education national examination in 2020 [13]. This change resulted into making Civic Education as one paper examination. There are twenty (20) multiple choice closed ended questions in this section. Each question carries one mark making 20 marks for the entire section. Multiple choice questions test learner's level of understanding, factual recall, the ability to apply, analyse and evaluate. According to [8] and [16] this kind of assessments are easier to evaluate or score as learners are provided with options to pick from.

Section B of Civic Education national examination contains Five (5) objective questions (ECZ, 2020-2022). However, each of the five questions has varying sub-questions. Learners are required to answer the entire question in which each composed question carries 8 marks. This means that section B of Civic Education national examination carries the total of 40 marks. This section tests a learner's factual recall and their level of knowledge.

Section C comprises questions that cover essay writing. It is the last part of the Civic Education national examination in Zambia. This section contains five (5) questions in which learners are required to answer two (2) only (ECZ, 2020-2022). Each question contains 20 marks. It is also important to note that the kinds of questions asked under this section vary. Some questions require a learner to write an essay on a single topic or more (multifaceted, interdisciplinary, as the case may be). This section, it seems, is the most dreaded by learners, owing to the performance.

Students performance in this section is often average and below, for the majority. This indicates that this is the most difficult part of the Civic Education examination to the learners. Essay writing is often time consuming to evaluate and the resulting judgments often exhibit poor reliability [8]. [15] point out three main problems faced by students in essay writing as; linguistics, cognitive, and psychological problems. A study by [17] confirms that writing is the most difficult skill to learn because it require writers to have a great deal of lexical and syntactic knowledge as well as principle organisation in second language to produce a good written text. These are key elements used by readers to judge the quality of work.

Since Civic Education aims at preparing each individual learner with community engagement, learners are supposed to be prepared in effective communication by imparting writing, speaking and listening skills. This requires that the methods used during teaching and learning process are supposed to be learner-centered for them to acquire research, analysis, and evaluation skills [6]. However, [3] observed that most teachers of Civic Education preferred lecture, question and answer method in class instead of classroom interaction models such as group work, peer teaching, and role play. The former does not prepare learners adequately in community engagements.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative research, in particular the descriptive research design. Descriptive research is a type of research that is used to describe the characteristics of a population as it collects data that are used to answer a wide range of what, when, and how questions pertaining to a particular population or group [18]; [19].

The study was conducted in selected rural secondary schools of Central, Lusaka and Southern provinces of Zambia. These three provinces were selected because researchers come from these areas, hence it was easy to collect data without cultural hindrances, less language barriers, cost-effective (since it was not a funded project), travel logistics were reasonable [20]. 300 learners from a selection of 30 secondary schools were systematically identified for the purpose of collecting data through open-ended questionnaires. Systematic random sampling accorded all potential participants an equal opportunity to be selected.

The data collected was analysed in two ways: firstly, through descriptive ways and; secondly, using themes that emerged as guided by objectives of this study. The researchers reviewed literature which (1) appraises thematic data analysis [21]; [22]; [23]; (2) provides consistent efficacy insight into how to conduct thematic analysis; (3) provides circumstances of conducting research with an applied focus [24]; shows varying inductive and deductive approaches of coding qualitative data thematically [25].

In order to protect respondents' image, character symbols were used in this document instead of actual names of study participants. This ensured the anonymity of respondents [18]; [26] Researchers explained the objectives of the study to respondents, who voluntarily participated in the study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings and discussion are presented according to objectives that guided this study as follows:

1. To establish how teachers prepare their learners for Civic Education national examination and community engagement.
2. To determine learners' most favorite section in Civic Education examinations.
3. To ascertain learners' impression on the essay writing section in Civic Education.

This study targeted 300 grade 12 pupils in Civic Education classes in selected rural secondary schools of Lusaka, Central and Southern Province. 149 were female, 139 were male while 12 participants indicated on the questionnaire that they were bi-sex. Participants in this study were in the age range: 10 – 30 years as 4% (n=11) were falling under age range of 11-15, while 74% (n=223) were 16-20. Further, 16% (n=48) were aged 21-25 and 6% (n=18) of respondents were aged 26-30.

### ***How Teachers Prepare Learners in Civic Education Classes***

The figure below shows respondents' response captured from the questionnaires distributed on how teachers prepare their learners for Civic Education national examination and community engagement.

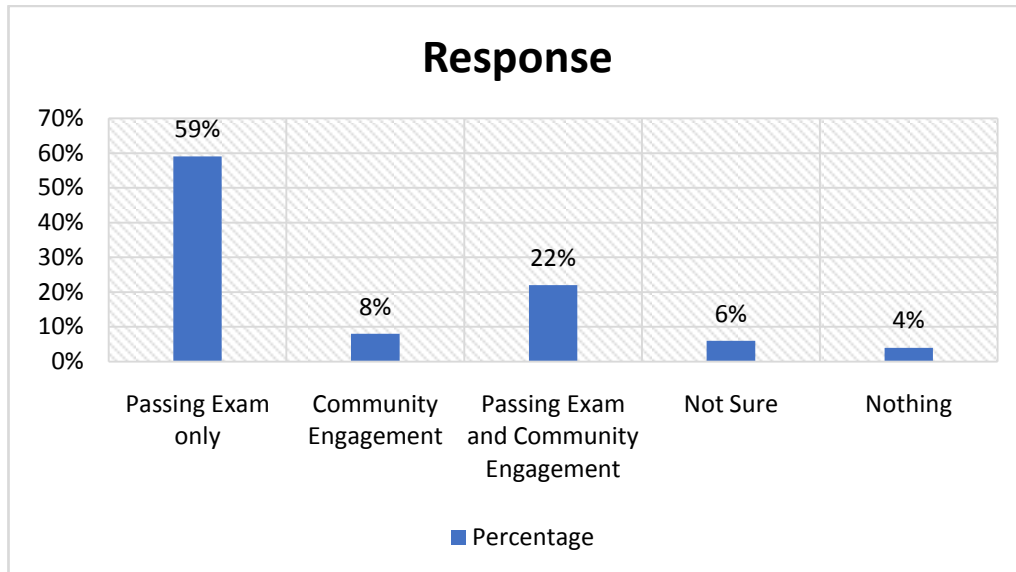


Figure 2: How teachers prepare learners in Civic Education classes

The study findings show that 59% (n=178) of learners said that their teachers prepare them for passing Civic Education national examination only. Those that said their teachers prepare them for community engagement are represented by 8% (n=25) and 22% (n=67) revealed that their teachers prepared them for both passing the national examinations and for community engagement. Further, 6% (n=18) of learners said they were not sure what their teachers were preparing them for and the least was 4% (n=12) of learners who said that their teachers prepared them for nothing during Civic Education lessons. When asked as to why they responded that way, learners gave various reasons among them were individual experiences. Those who indicated that their teachers prepare them for passing national examinations indicated that their teachers only emphasize passing national examinations. One of the questionnaires recorded that:

*“our teacher prepare us to pass the exam and uses text book and pamphlets to teach”.*

Teaching Civic Education for examination preparation erodes the purpose for the introduction of Civic Education in secondary schools as provided in the Ministry of Education [6] where learners get equipped with knowledge, skills and values that enable them think, reflect and do, rather than reproduce what they are merely taught (rote learning). If this is ignored, learners will be limited to express themselves in community activities. Similarly, [3] revealed that teachers are drivers in the success of any teaching, hence need to be prepared before the implementation of any policies takes place. They play an important role in learners’ acquisition of knowledge and development of skills needed in their future survival. This calls for invigorated ways of teaching Civic Education that will go beyond the classroom situation.

Findings of this study also revealed that teachers often got committed and failed to complete the syllabus. This led them to fail to concentrate on preparing learners for effective community engagement. Unanimous submissions by students coincide with what the school administrators revealed regarding teachers commitment to teaching tasks and inability to complete syllabi. Findings further pointed to teachers avoiding being questioned by their supervisors when the national results from summative assessment are released. Majority learners 59% (178) shared similar observations as indicated:

*“our syllabus was completed in term one and since then we have been revising past examination question papers to prepare us on how to answer those question”.*

Since these teachers are biased towards preparing of learners to passing national examination, key competency areas as outlined in [7] will be missed where teaching and learning process need to provide feedback that enables the teacher to judge how well students are learning. If the teacher is only concerned in teaching to complete the syllabus, learners might not acquire necessary competencies required in subjects like Civic Education. It was also observed in [27] that the desired goal in the field of teaching and learning process can only be achieved if the teacher prepare learners to acquire necessary competencies in the subject area.

The findings of the study also revealed that 22% (n=67) of learners indicated that their teachers prepared them for both passing national examination and for community engagement. Those of this view indicated that teachers of Civic Education could not only expose them to examination tactics, but also to community engagement through keep the surrounding clean ventures. It was recorded that:

*“our teacher also involves us in the community like cleaning the surroundings and voting for our class representatives”.*

As learners are prepared for national examinations, they are also supposed to acquire skills that will make them relevant to the community. [28] and [29] highlighted how Civic Education and service learning are supplementing each other. Learning Civic Education is completed when learners are exposed to community institutions or activities that brings classroom lessons into reality. Therefore, teachers need to take a keen interest in this trajectory.

#### **Learners' Most Favourite Section in Civic Education Examinations**

Findings of the study revealed that the majority 86% (n=258) of learners prefer section A of Civic Education according to past examination papers they went through. Their views were that this section happen to be the easiest part of the exam. This agrees with [8] and [16] who posit that multiple choice questions are easier to evaluate or score as learners are provided with options to pick from. This section of the exam provide every candidate an opportunity to write something even when one has not studied. According to respondents:

*“We like multiple choice section because it is easy. You can write something even when you have not studied because answers are already given, so our duty is to choose whichever answer one thinks is correct”.*

Scholars like [9] and [30] also reveal that multiple choice section is quick and easy to score by candidates hence provide motivation to learners. This section provides unprepared learners an opportunity to guess correct answers which may also give wrong impression to the teacher.

#### **Learners' Impression of the Essay Writing Section in Civic Education**

The caption below shows figure 3, which depicts learners' impression on the Essay Writing Section 'C' in Civic Education summative assessment.

The study revealed that 52% (n=156) of learners find section C (essay writing) of Civic Education as very difficult section in any exam. 22% (n=65) of learners said they do not like it while 12% (n=37) said it depends. Further, 8% (n=24) indicated section C is helpful and 4% (n=11) shows they find this section as easiest. Interestingly, 2% (n=7) participants indicated they do not like section C of Civic Education examination paper. This finding corroborates with a study conducted by [31] on why senior high school candidates perform poorly in essay writing examination papers.

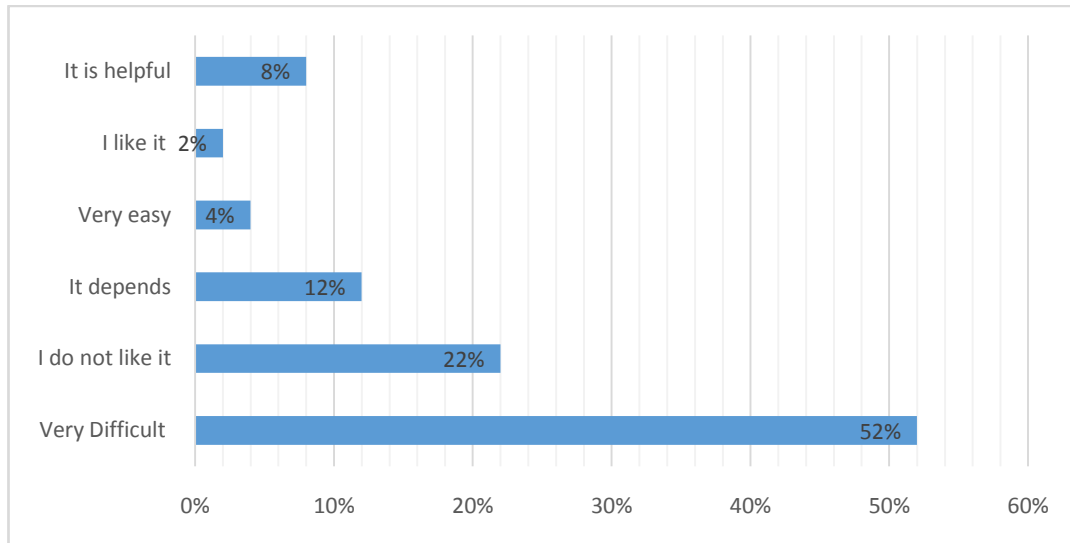


Figure 3: Learners' Impression on Essay Writing

The researchers sought information on the factors that make learners perform poorly in the Civic Education essay writing section. The study revealed that learners do not know how to answer essay questions in Civic Education examinations:

*"We have been writing end of term test and we find it difficult to answer this section of the exam because we get low marks compared to other sections when the teacher gives us back our results".*

[17] agrees with this finding as learners find essay writing as the most difficult part of the exam as it require one to have a great deal of lexical and syntactic knowledge to produce a good written work. Such skills are to be learnt in class and teachers need to expose learners through formative assessment.

The study established that most learners study Civic Education by memorising and not understanding the subject topic. Suffice to say, many students and educators seem to echo that memorising topics does not amount to learning. The authors posit that this challenge for learners as they are expected to bring out their views or arguments on important issues in their community. According to respondents' response:

*"our friends memorise Civic Education notes. But you cannot memorise essays. Essays you need to know the topic and not memorise"*

Lack of commitment to studying came out as one of the factors leading to poor performance of learners in Civic Education essay writing section:

*"we do not study a lot thus why we find it difficult to answer section C of Civic Education examination".*

The findings of the study are in line with those of [15] who pointed out three main problems faced by students in essay writing as; linguistics, cognitive, and psychological problems that come as a result of lack of content. The authors contend that this scenario makes students lack subject or topic content as they do not take studying seriously.

## CONCLUSION

This study has described the learning and assessment of Civic Education in selected secondary schools in rural areas of Zambia. It was established that teachers concentrate on teacher-centered method neglecting learner centered method which is ideal in teaching and learning Civic Education. It was also revealed that most of learners prefer section A (multiple choice), followed by section B and section C (essay writing) being the

least I. Participants claimed teachers could not prepare learners for section C during formative assessment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Examinations Council of Zambia should train all teachers as examiners and markers so that they transcend the same skill during formative assessment.
2. The government and schools should include continuous assessment in Civic Education for grade 12 national examinations to allow learners interact with the community through research project when they are in grade 11.
3. The government, schools and stakeholders in education should conduct a study examining the role of Civic Education teachers in preparing learners for summative assessment in Zambia.

## Ethical Approval:

As per international standard or university standard written ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

## Consent

As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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