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**Original article**

## **Citizenship education and its relevance to Zimbabwe**

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**ABSTRACT**

Informal education systems in the traditional African systems were aimed at, among other things, passing on cultural values, norms and knowledge skills from one generation to the next. In addition, the youth were taught to preserve their cultural identity. Owing to fundamental shifts in classical family systems and educational practices in Africa, countries such as Zimbabwe have come to recognise the need for including societal values and norms, ethics, morals and responsibilities in the whole school curricula in order to inculcate value systems and maintain the national legacy and cultural heritage. One strategy for achieving the desired cultural ethos is implementing a deliberate Citizenship Education programme which should be incorporated into the formal education system. Citizenship Education could also be inculcated through extra curricula activities such as sport. Besides the transmission of the cultural norms and values, Citizenship Education should incorporate humanitarian issues such as inclusion of people with disabilities in social processes. In the same vein, the Citizenship Education programme should be flexible to cater for the needs of learners with special needs. This paper explores the relevance of Citizenship Education to the prevailing Zimbabwean situation. In the long term, Citizenship Education has the capacity to improve the socio-political and economic advancement of a country. The paper concludes that Citizenship Education is relevant to the Zimbabwean situation, despite that it has been heavily politicised and has, in some cases, lost its original intention. In the long term, the programme has a propensity to improve the socio-political and economic conditions of the country.

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De-politicisation of Citizenship Education could be the first step towards re-aligning it to the intended national ethos and ideals. This should be policy driven. The programme should endeavour to inculcate values and norms that facilitate nation building and should not be used for partisan political orientation.

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## **1. Introduction**

Citizenship Education is concerned about training students to become responsible and good citizens in terms of ability to preserve cultural and national identity. It entails teaching human rights and developing individual consciousness and collective responsibilities and duties among learners. The ethos of human rights, equality, cultural identity, morality and social inclusion underline the foundations of Citizenship Education. Fenton (1967) views Citizenship Education as teaching of a combination of attitudes and values, inquiry skills and knowledge values that are consistent with the ideals of that society.

The definition of Citizenship Education is, however, contextual. It reflects the social and political system inherent in a particular society. For example, in a socialist state, Citizenship Education is conceptualised as the teaching and proliferation of genuine socialist principles in a manner that the principles become '... part of the national conscience' (Barker, 1986). In a way, Citizenship Education is one of the principal ways of cultivating good citizenry in the younger generations. Sen (2000) cited in Valk, Cummings and van Den (2004) says, '... the narrow definition of Citizenship Education entails teaching the right to vote and the broader definition refers to the knowledge about entitlements rights, responsibilities and agency.'

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) mandates educational systems to prepare the child to live an independent life in society and to know his / her rights, entitlements and responsibilities as a citizen. Cole (2000) concurs that, Citizenship Education '...instils, in students, a belief in human dignity and equality.... and a concern for human rights.' In the context of this paper, Citizenship Education should be reflective of issues of social and moral concern and should acknowledge how the concepts of fairness and justice can be applied to social life in general. It should ensure that all citizens of a country understand the significant aspects of national topical and contemporary issues and events. Thus Citizenship Education also aims at facilitating equality of social conditions in respect of social justice. For instance, in addition to teaching rights, Citizenship Education should inculcate principles of fairness in the conduct of responsibilities and duties. Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides for rights and privileges while Article 13 directs that the rights may be subject to certain restrictions as are provided for by the law and are necessary. This suggests that, while children should be made aware of their rights and freedoms they should also be trained to recognise and appreciate their societal duties and responsibilities. Ford (2002) insists that Citizenship Education does not only teach about the availability of rights, entitlements and freedoms, but also emphasises subsequent responsibilities in order to produce 'citizens who are responsible for their own actions.'

## **2. The Status of citizenship education in Zimbabwe**

Currently, in Zimbabwe, Citizenship Education is not treated as a single discipline or a separate subject in schools but is catered for through a few topics in History, Social Studies and Geography among other subjects. In tertiary institutions, particularly at Teacher's Colleges, Citizenship Education is currently taught under the banner of National Strategic Studies (NSS). Some time back there used to be Political Economy and Education with Production studies at Teacher's Colleges. The two subjects used to incorporate citizenship issues within their curricula. According to Nziramasanga (1999), it is instead desirable to have a specific curriculum entitled Citizenship Education in order to inculcate in our students the spirit of unhu / ubuntu, that is, a genuine and acceptable character or deportment. Rose (1967) earlier on noted that citizenship cannot be learnt through spontaneous naturalisation but through a systematically taught curriculum. At the turn of the millennium, there was vigorous talk about Populations Studies, a subject which was to be taught from primary to high school and was

to be directly linked to Citizenship Education in Zimbabwe. Alas, the subject has not been fully implemented to date. In the past, National Youth Service Centres have also been set up in the country to among other issues, explore Citizenship Education. Surprisingly, these centres have only been active during times of stiff political competition. As such, the centres have turned out to ZANU PF schools of propaganda. Similarly, National Strategic Studies which is currently taught in some tertiary institutions in the country has also been dismissed as a programme aimed at politicisation of learners based on the manifesto of the ruling party and not on the overall national order. There have also been suspicions, among the populace, that the ruling party ZANU PF has used these so called Citizenship Education programmes as an instrument for the misrepresentation of facts about the liberation struggle and the post independence events aimed at portraying ZANU PF as the only party which staged the war, the only saviour of the people and the only legitimate governing body. It is on these bases that, Citizenship Education in Zimbabwe is viewed as having been heavily politicised.

Usher and Edwards (1994) confirm that some governments of developing countries misconceive Citizenship Education as teaching of politically correct norms and values.' Cole (2000) sees nothing wrong with this, arguing that Citizenship Education can as well be used as a form of social control. Critically speaking, Cole's idea, good as it may sound, risk the danger of justifying Citizenship Education as a legitimate tool for perpetrating individual political parties' manifestos. Such a practice is tantamount to infringing on people's rights and freedoms of association. The scenario would be totally at variance with Zimbabwe's constitutional political system which purports to strive on freedom of association.

### **3. Challenges of implementing citizenship education in Zimbabwe**

One challenge that may affect the implementation of Citizenship Education could emanate from the realisation that, certain traditional African beliefs which are at variance with the ideals of Human Rights Charters are still deep rooted in some communities in Zimbabwe. However, this observation on its own is suggestive of the need for a deliberate Citizenship Education which should treat cultural heritage as a dynamic and not a static system. Some communities in Zimbabwe, for instance, still do not believe in women and children's rights. These communities deny gender equality in the name of culture. They also continue to consciously or unconsciously engage children in forced labour and deny the girl child full access to education. Such communities may resist the full implementation of a rights based Citizenship Education programme in order to maintain the status quo. In this regard, Ford (2000) reports, "Although women might be citizens in a conceptual sense, marriage takes away the privileges of their citizenship in a real sense." Channey (1994) then warns that it is a fundamental illegitimacy to deny a group of people citizenship rights on the basis of a shared collective feature such as gender.

The other challenges could be related to financial and/or resource constraints. Finances would be needed to facilitate reviews of current literature materials and to train and/or staff-develop relevant educationists. A new paradigm shift would need to be informed by a cross cutting consultative process. This might not be as easy as it sounds. Integrating differing views and diverse cultural practices and belief systems into a comprehensive educational package that represents the total social order would call for serious political commitment and cultural compromise from all the stakeholders. In addition, the school system in Zimbabwe is currently so congested that it may require merging certain related subjects. This will constrain the already bleeding fiscus more. Despite these challenges the justifiable rationalisation of the need for Citizenship Education in Zimbabwe stands.

### **4. Discussion**

The ideal purpose of Citizenship Education should be to produce citizens who have a spirit of national consciousness and who are overly patriotic not partisan. It is unfortunate that in Zimbabwe, more often than not, patriotism is seen as allegiance to the existing political order. Channey (1994) implores that through Citizenship Education; citizens would enjoy full participation in the political process and would legitimately claim in particular, their national identity. As such, Nziramasanga (1999) laments that, in Zimbabwe, violence, vandalism and indiscipline in schools and in the general society are indicators of lack of unhu / ubuntu which is more evident in the youths. This observation advances the need for a formal Citizenship Education programme which is free from political indoctrination. Such a programme would enable the teaching of the ethos of responsible citizenship. In addition, Parson (1977) observes that Citizenship Education is necessary in developing countries. The author

reports that, in Switzerland for instance, Citizenship Education has made it possible to make changes in the pattern of nationality as a basis of national solidarity.

Like in many other African countries, the role of the traditional extended family system has been eroded by urbanisation in Zimbabwe. Families have tended to be more nuclear making it impracticable for children to be taught national ethics and cultural values at home. This further justifies a genuine call for a deliberate Citizenship Education programme in schools to teach such values in order to maintain the social fabric. In the main, Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools (QCA, 1998) cited in Cole (2000) actually recommends that 'Citizenship Education should take up to 5% of curriculum time across all stages.' This can be done by either designing a stand-alone subject or incorporating citizenship issues into various other existing subjects and activities including sport.

Citizenship Education provides for a common status of a people which Zimbabwe needs in order to revive its economic and political systems. Citizenship Education becomes even more relevant to Zimbabwe considering that the country is not only a developing country but is also a former colony, which is struggling with socio-economic management. A proper Citizenship Education would ensure that social vices such as economic crimes, corruption and nepotism which have widely been blamed for the perpetual economic meltdown are harnessed. In addition, Barker (1986) observes, "The legacy of Zimbabwe's colonial past has created a situation such that people need to be liberated from the values, expectations and attitudes that capitalism imposed upon them." This implies that Citizenship Education could act as a liberating force from neo-colonial injustices and malpractices that are still evident in Zimbabwe. Regrettably, these injustices and malpractices are perpetrated by the very leaders of the various arms of government.

In addition to facilitating political and economic uprightness in Zimbabwe, Citizenship Education could also inculcate into the learners, humanitarian ideals based on the philosophy of equality of opportunities. Valk et al (2004) proclaims that there is a discernable shift from seeing only the civic and political rights as the arena for demanding fundamental human rights to a more global view of human interactivity. Citizenship Education in Zimbabwe would need to emancipate the disadvantaged populations such as the disabled and instil the spirit of selflessness as well as individual and collective responsibility. According to Usher and Edwards (1994) Citizenship Education has the capacity to facilitate the accomplishment of emancipator goals for all citizens by laying the foundation for a democratic social formation which Zimbabwe badly needs.

Zimbabwe also needs Citizenship Education in order to train students to become more responsible, tolerant and rational future citizens who would fit well within the diverse and pluralistic society that characterises the country's population. It is however important that the practice of Citizenship Education in Zimbabwe should not separate abstract rights from the realm of everyday life. In other words, a Citizenship Education programme that would be relevant to Zimbabwe should not be just theoretical but must be consonant with what especially older citizens or leaders uphold as genuine societal values and norms in real life. A number of cases have been reported in Zimbabwe about political leaders who engage in illicit deals. Citizenship Education would be needed to address such vices. For Citizenship Education to achieve this, it has to be pragmatic. Valk et al (2004) further note with concern that scholarly work on Citizenship Education tends to be abstract forgetting that the practice of citizenship involves 'real people struggling for recognition, rights and inclusion in policy agendas in real life situations.' Citizenship Education should therefore seek to cultivate genuine political participation among the young generation of a country.

Voter apathy which has been characterising the electoral process in Zimbabwe for a long time now could as well be a manifestation of the lack of genuine Citizenship Education in the country's school system. Parson (1977) argues that governments cannot suddenly claim to give equal direct political participation without educating citizens about their rights, freedoms and responsibilities. This should start from primary school and should not only be instituted when there is a looming electoral process. The design and implementation of Citizenship Education should, in effect, be pivoted on specific policies. It should be noted however that despite such efforts as suggested, the possibility that not all citizens would automatically enjoy full political participation in its true essence must be born in mind. For instance, persons with profound disabilities may need to be catered for by specifying how they can be cared for and included in the Citizenship Education equation. For this reason, Citizenship Education policies should be dynamic and should cover aspects like how people with disabilities would be included in social processes including politics. The curriculum itself should be flexible to cater for the diversity of the student population in schools.

Voter education which is usually left to politicians and electoral commissioners can as well be covered within the Citizenship Education curriculum. It should not be all left to politicians since politicians are bound to be more partisan than patriotic. Advocacy for a rights based approach to Citizenship Education should be emphasised in this regard. Nziramasanga (1999) points out that, Citizenship Education in Zimbabwe should therefore not be considered an option but a necessity. Even in developed countries a need for Citizenship Education has been noted. In U.S.A, for instance, a National Citizenship Test demonstrated a shocking lack of information about the country's political system, rights and constitutional provisions (Fenton, 1967). In this regard, Citizenship Education should result in citizens who are bearers of rights and who can act politically to secure more entitlements due to them (Valk et al., 2004). In effect, Citizenship Education should lead to internalisation of a value system that encompasses human ethics and that respects human dignity. The net result would be political stability despite the multiparty system that has existed in Zimbabwe.

## **5. Conclusion**

It is reasonable to conclude from this treatise that, in spite of challenges, Citizenship Education is relevant to the Zimbabwean situation. However it should not be conceived as an instrument for partisan politicisation of the masses. Citizenship Education should conscientise young citizens about their rights, freedoms, privileges, duties and responsibilities and inculcate the right cultural heritage and instil acceptable norms and values. Citizenship Education should also aim at unifying citizens of diverse social formations that characterise the Zimbabwean population. Essentially, Citizenship Education in Zimbabwe would work to minimise social injustices and poor corporate governance that have contributed toward the current economic disintegration and social incongruence. Thus, Zimbabwe being a signatory to many of the major international Human Rights Charters cannot claim irrelevance of Citizenship Education which has become a major form of social politics in championing the development of human rights consciences the world over. Strategies for successful implementation of Citizenship Education programmes include either having a stand-alone examinable subject or incorporating citizenship issues into other school subjects including sport and supporting every initiative with specific policy frameworks.

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