

Undergraduate Science Students' Attitudes towards Citizenship Education: the case of Bachelor of Science students enrolled at Bindura University of Science Education.

L. J. Nyamwe¹, L. Mutanda¹, L. P. Kusure¹, T.J. Katsinde^{1*}

Department of Science Education, Bindura University of Science Education
P.Bag 1020 Bindura,Zimbabwe.E-mail: *Corresponding Author: tjcatsinde@buse.ac.zw

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Abstract

This study sought to answer the research question: What are the attitudes towards Citizenship Education (CE) of the Bachelor of Science (BSc) students pursuing undergraduate studies at Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE)? Questionnaire responses from 104 undergraduate students majoring in various science disciplines offered at BUSE revealed five themes of attitudes towards CE. The five themes of attitudes expressed by the undergraduate students were enjoyment, understanding, impact, status and personal benefits of CE. The students expressed views that they found the CE course to be enjoyable although they felt that it should be optional rather than a core course. One implication of the findings from the study for science instructional practice is that knowledge gained by student studying CE can provide them with a repertoire of examples from the political, economic, historical and social contexts of Zimbabwe which may enhance their understanding of science concepts.

Key words: Attitude, Citizenship Education, theme, values

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to assess the attitudes towards Citizenship Education (CE) of Bachelor of Science (BSc) students pursuing undergraduate studies at Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE). The university introduced CE as a core course for undergraduate students in 2004. The introduction of CE at BUSE as indeed in other tertiary institutions was a directive from the Ministry of Higher Education in its effort to implement the Nziramasanga Commission's recommendations. The commission recommended that CE be included in the curricula of primary, secondary and tertiary education.

The Nziramasanga Commission Report recommended the introduction of CE in tertiary education curricula with the intent that the course would inculcate the following values in tertiary education level students:

- i. Development of a spirit of national consciousness and patriotism, obedience to legitimate authority and respect for other citizens' views on various social, economic and political issues.
- ii. Development of a whole and sober-

- iii. minded person with respect for other citizens' rights and property (unhu/ubuntu).
Development of citizens who are loyal, responsible, productive and respectful of the laws and institutions of their nation. (Nziramasanga Commission Report, 1999: 354)

In making these recommendations the Commission felt that students' understanding of the goals of CE would reduce indiscipline and student lawlessness in educational institutions. Student lawlessness in tertiary education institutions was rife in the 1990s. Student unrests in that decade were characterized by vandalism and violence. Understanding the principles of CE would therefore instill appropriate values among the citizens of Zimbabwe in general, and tertiary level students in particular, to uphold and appreciate the importance of this country as a unique nation, which citizens should value, be proud of and be prepared to sacrifice their lives for its existence.

The CE course was compulsorily introduced at a time when the country was going through tense political competition. The changes from a *defacto* one party state to a multi-party system caused a lot of rivalry between political parties in the country at the time that

CE was introduced. After the signing of the Unity Accord on 22 December 1987 till 2000, Zimbabwe was a multi-party democracy with non-active opposition parties. Dominance by the ruling party over weak opposition political parties resulted in the ruling party winning all parliamentary seats in the general elections held in 1990 and 1995 respectively. By virtue of there being no strong opposition parties to the ruling ZANU(PF) party during the period 1987 to 2000, there was a *de facto* one party in Zimbabwe although the country was not formally institutionalized as a one-party state.

Introducing CE at a time when active opposition parties were emerging as critical opponents of the ruling ZANU(PF) party made students hold skeptical views about the course. Dominant student opinions towards the course were the belief that the course was the ruling party's strategy to lure them to sympathize with and support its policies. This opinion was nurtured by the belief that the contents of the course would ostracize opposition parties.

Since the introduction of the CE course at BUSE there were no empirical studies to assess undergraduate students' attitudes towards it. The impetus of this study was to fill this gap by exploring the attitudes that undergraduate students studying for a BSc degree programme at BUSE have towards the course. To assess the undergraduate science students' attitudes towards the course, the study was guided by the research question: What are the attitudes (towards CE) of BSc students pursuing undergraduate studies at BUSE?

The study is significant in that findings from it might provide insight into improving the content of the course offered at BUSE in particular, and other tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in general. The findings might also significantly inform national debate on whether the current implementation strategies of CE are meeting the intended goals envisioned by the Nziramasanga Commission (1999).

Conceptual framework

The introduction of CE as a compulsory and examinable course in tertiary education institutions in Zimbabwe reflects a single-minded pursuit of meeting perceived national needs. CE provides a relationship between an individual and the state, in

which the two (state and individual) are bound together by reciprocal rights and obligations to each other (Heywood, 1994). However, the precise nature of this relationship is a polemic issue. Contesting views on the issue are that CE is a legal status that can be defined objectively or viewed as national identity, a sense of loyalty or belonging. The most contentious question relates to the precise nature of citizens' rights and obligations, and the balance between the two. Citizens in a country are not, however, merely bearers of rights, able to make claims against the state but also have duties and obligations to perform to the state that protects, nurture and care for them (Heywood, 1994). In this regard CE has to be learned in order to make young people become responsible citizens of a country (Parker, 1991; Patrick, 2002).

While CE can be understood from a variety of sources, particularly through family and media, schooling remains the formal source of the subject for young people and the avenue through which governments can instill in youths the values of a nation. Formal CE education imparts to students essential knowledge, skills and values that make them informed, responsible and participative citizens of a country (Schoeman, 2006; Sears, 1994; Sim, 2005; Print, 1997).

Studying CE has the potential to enhance the development of goals such as positively shaping student attitudes, values and knowledge of Zimbabwe's culture. Another purpose for studying CE is to facilitate the development of national cohesion, the instinct for survival and student confidence in the future of Zimbabwe. Achievement of these goals might be enhanced by instruction that:

- fosters student understanding of the history of Zimbabwe in ways that might encourage a sense of national identity among students and development of pride and self-respect in being citizens of the country.
- encourages students to relate Zimbabwean history to the present day society.
- exposes students to Zimbabwe's unique challenges, constraints and vulnerabilities that make it different from other African countries.
- instills in students an appreciation of the core values of Zimbabwean culture.

There is general agreement in debates on the essence of CE that achievement of these goals might lead to the development of morally upright citizens. However, debates on the essence of achieving these goals evolve from the differences between CE and

Political Education (PE). Contesting views in the debate are the primary and overriding purposes for studying both PE and CE (Barr, Barth & Shermis, 1977). Some PE concepts overlap the CE discipline. Variations of teaching PE that include aspects of CE are expected given that the contents of both PE and CE may vary depending on the historical circumstances, the development, the politics, and the cultural values and traditions of a country. An overriding fact for studying both PE and CE is an acknowledged objective of the development of the rational, thoughtful, critical and independent thinking skills among citizens, such as making sound judgments, evaluating evidence, recognizing values and detecting bias, as well as drawing inferences based on a reasoned consideration of evidence and arguments at hand (Goh, 1997).

Effective studying of CE is expected to prepare students to adopt a participative role in shaping Zimbabwe's destiny; thus moving away from mere social citizenship to active citizenship. The infusion of student thinking that is nurtured by the understanding of CE goals as perceived by Engle and Ochoa (1988) can be counter-socialization. Counter-socialization of studying CE may be strengthened or weakened by factors such as attitude, experience, age and ability of the students to understand the essence of studying CE. This study is an attempt to assess undergraduate students' attitudes towards CE with a hope of unveiling both the intended and unintended goals of studying the course as delineated by the Nziramasanga Commission (1999).

Research Methodology

The nature of the data that answers the research question necessitated the use of a questionnaire (Vacc and Bright, 1999). A questionnaire was appropriate to solicit the undergraduate students' attitudes on a five point Likert scale (Hobson, 2003; Frid 2000) of Strongly Agree (SA) through to Strongly Disagree (SD). A questionnaire was necessary to enable the undergraduate students to express their attitudes towards the course in order to find ways of improving the course to make it meet both national and individual needs.

The data that were used to answer the research question was collected from 104 undergraduate Bachelor of Science students majoring in mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, geography, accountancy, economics, police and strategic studies, and business studies. The students attending CE lectures during one of the two two-hour slots per week allocated to the course answered the questionnaire

that sought to provide data for this study. Students who were absent on the day the questionnaire was administered did not provide data for this study.

The questionnaire was administered to the undergraduate students during the last lecture of the semester in which they studied the CE course. The last session of the CE course was set aside for evaluation as it was assumed that students could freely express their attitudes towards the course. On the day of the administration of the questionnaire, two of the authors who were teaching the groups gave out the questionnaire at the beginning of the lecture for students to fill anonymously as part of the evaluation of the course. The students were given unlimited time to fill the questionnaire so that each one of them could have ample time to express their attitudes towards CE. All the questionnaires were returned after 30 minutes. Some of them were returned blank.

The questionnaire gathered students bio-data such as gender, age, area of study, and whether the students had prior tertiary education in order to determine whether these variables influence the students' attitudes towards CE. Sixty-nine point two percent (69.2%) of the students were males while 30.8% were females. The average age of the students was 25 years. Twenty-two of the students majoring in police and strategic studies received initial training in policing at diploma level and were upgrading their qualifications to undergraduate level. The rest of the students were pursuing undergraduate studies at varying stages after "A" Level.

The items on the questionnaire that sought to assess the undergraduate students' attitudes towards CE were written with insight drawn from literature and the authors' experiences of teaching the course. The Rasch model (Boone, 2006) was used to choose the items relevant to this study. Using the principles of the Rasch model explained by Boone (2006) the extreme ends and middle statements on the questionnaire were identified first on a positive-negative continuum of possible attitudes towards the CE course. Later the statements between the middle and either end of the positive to negative attitude continuum were written. After identifying the items in the order as described above they were regrouped in a mixed order so that items belonging to the same theme do not appear along side each other on the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was brain-stormed by the authors for their clarity after designing. The wording of some items were changed after the brainstorm. For instance, "I see Citizenship Education as a course I will use a lot in my life" was reworded to "Citizenship Education is a beneficial course to me" (B3). Item

B12 was changed from “the topics covered in Citizenship Education are relevant to issues in Zimbabwe” to “Citizenship Education topics are relevant to the Zimbabwean context”. After the authors agreed on the face validity of the questionnaire it was piloted on final year Bachelor of Science Education students who had studied CE in their third year. Minor changes involving tenses were made on the items after the pilot study.

Results

Frequencies of responses falling in each of the 5-point Likert scale continuum were used to determine the popularity of undergraduate students' views in the positive attitudes (agree and strongly agree) or negative attitudes (disagree and strongly disagree) (Hobson, 2003; Frid 2000). Neutral responses (N) were used to separate positive and negative attitudes because they were not indicative of the attitudes to which the undergraduate students' attitudes belonged (Nyaumwe, 2006). In order to analyse the results in a comprehensive way the undergraduate students' attitudes were grouped into themes that capture similar themes. For instance, a common theme dominating “I enjoy learning Citizenship Education” (B1) and “learning Citizenship Education is interesting” is enjoyment. In a similar way the other items were grouped into themes that best described the undergraduate students' general attitudes towards CE as shown in Table 1.

The five themes that summarised the BSc undergraduate students' attitudes towards CE were enjoyment, understanding, impact, status, and benefits of CE. A brief explanation of the students' attitudes towards CE under each of these themes is chronicled next. Categorization of the items into these themes was done after structuring the items of the questionnaire. Advance knowledge of the themes that summarized the questionnaire was conceived as necessary in order to go for data collection fully aware of what the study sought.

Enjoyment

Table 1 show that the majority of the undergraduate students (62.5 %) agreed and strongly agreed that they enjoyed the CE course while 25.9 % disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. Sixty eight point two percent (68.2 %) of the undergraduate students expressed positive attitudes on the statement that the course was interesting while 23 % expressed negative attitudes on the statement. From these responses it can be inferred that the majority of the undergraduate students in the study expressed positive attitudes towards the items on the enjoyment theme.

Understanding of CE

Sixty-one point six percent (61.6%) of the BSc undergraduate students expressed positive attitudes that CE provided them with an understanding of the history of Zimbabwe whilst 15.4 % expressed negative sentiments towards the statement (Table 1). Thirty five point six percent (35.6 %) of the undergraduate students agreed and strongly agreed that CE and PE were different while 25% of them disagreed and strongly disagreed that CE was different from PE (Table 1). Of interest is a sizeable percentage (39.4%) of the undergraduate students who were neutral on the statement. Based on the attitudes expressed by the students it can be concluded that the majority of the undergraduate students developed an understanding of the history of Zimbabwe after studying CE although they did not show knowledge of the differences between CE and PE.

Impact of the CE course

It was interesting to study the impact of CE on the undergraduate students' personal lives. Fortyeight point one percent (48.1%) of them expressed opinions that CE lectures changed their views towards the course while 27.9% of them expressed opinions that studying the course did not change their views on the course (Table 1). The students expressed views that some of the skills that they gained from studying CE were helpful to them (57.7%) to become better citizens and 24.1% of them denied that the course inculcated in them attitudes that made them become better citizens (Table 1). It can be concluded that the majority of the undergraduate students expressed positive attitudes towards CE as equipping them with skills that enabled them to become better citizens, but it cannot be ascertained that attending the course changed their views of the discipline of CE.

Benefits of the CE course

CE was regarded as a beneficial course by the majority of the undergraduate students (58.6%) while 23% of them found the course not useful to them (Table 1). Forty-four point two percent (44.2%) of the undergraduate students expressed opinions that CE was important in their lives while 27% of them expressed views that the course was not important in their lives. The majority of the undergraduate students (68.3%) expressed positive attitudes that the topics covered in CE were relevant to Zimbabwe. Fortyeight point one percent (48.1%) of the undergraduate students agreed and strongly agreed that CE was an essential course and 29.8% of them disagreed and strongly disagreed that the course was relevant to

Table 1: Students' attitudes towards CE from the questionnaire

N = 104

Item	SA %	A%	N%	D%	SD%
Enjoyment					
<u>B1: I enjoy learning Citizenship Education (CE)</u>	25.0	37.5	10.6	9.6	16.3
B4: Learning CE is interesting	24.0	44.2	6.7	11.5	11.5
Understanding Citizenship Education					
<u>B2: CE gives me an understanding of the history of Zimbabwe</u>	21.2	40.4	23.1	8.7	6.7
B6: CE and Political Education are different	12.5	23.1	39.4	6.7	18.3
Impact of the course					
B8: CE has changed my views of the course	13.5	34.6	24.0	9.6	18.3
B10: Skills gained in CE will help me to be a better citizen	23.1	34.6	18.3	5.8	18.3
Status of the course					
B5: CE should be an optional course	51.9	15.4	6.7	14.4	11.5
B11: CE should be compulsory because it is important	15.4	10.6	14.4	21.2	38.5
Benefits					
<u>B3: CE is a beneficial course</u>	24.0	34.6	18.3	6.7	16.3
B7: CE is important in my life	14.4	29.8	28.8	9.6	17.3
B9: CE is a useful course	16.3	37.5	17.3	7.7	21.2
B12: CE topics are relevant to the Zimbabwean context	26.0	42.3	16.3	2.9	12.5
B13: CE is an essential course	10.6	37.5	21.2	10.6	19.2

them. It can be concluded that the majority of the undergraduate students (58.6%) benefited from attending the CE course, 53.5% of them found the course necessary and 68.3% found the contents of the course relevant to the Zimbabwean context. Given that 44.2% of the undergraduate students found CE important to their lives and that 48.1% of them found the course essential, it cannot be categorically concluded that the undergraduate students found the course important and essential.

Status of the CE course

The majority of the undergraduate students (67.3%) agreed and strongly agreed that CE should be an optional course while 25.9% of them disagreed and strongly disagreed that the course should be an optional one (Table 1). On the other hand a minority of the undergraduate students (26%) agreed and strongly agreed that CE should be a compulsory course because it is important while the majority (59.7%) of them disagreed and strongly disagreed that the course should be a compulsory one. It can be concluded that the majority of the undergraduate students want the course to be optional rather than compulsory.

Age and gender were not found as variables that influenced the undergraduate BSc students' attitudes towards CE. However, questionnaires filled by students studying police and strategic studies expressed more positive attitudes towards CE than

those from students studying other undergraduate programmes.

Discussion

The attitudes of the undergraduate BSc students enrolled at BUSE who participated in this study were grouped into five themes of enjoyment, conceptual understanding, effects, status and benefits of CE after constructing the items on the questionnaire. The majority of the undergraduate students in this study expressed positive attitudes on the enjoyment items (Table 1). They enjoyed studying CE (62.5%) and 68.2% of them found the course interesting. The students enjoyed and found the course interesting probably because it covered current issues in ways that enlightened them on civic rights issues, the history of the country and the functions of parliament among others. Visits to parliament with groups of students enabled them to observe practical sessions of the august house. The visits to parliament might have generated enthusiasm in the students, which might explain why the majority of them acknowledged that the course is interesting and enjoyable to them.

Although the students enjoyed and found CE both interesting and enjoyable they had a hazy understanding of the course that was different from PE. This study could not make conclusive views on

whether the students who participated in the study know the differences between CE and PE. Whilst 35.6% of the undergraduate students agreed and strongly agreed that CE and PE were different, 25 % of them disagreed and strongly disagreed that CE was different from PE (Table 1). A sizeable proportion of the students (39.4%) remained neutral on the item. One possible inference of the undergraduate students' opinions can be attributed to their lack of knowledge of PE because they were not exposed to it as students. Another reason for the lack of clarity between CE and PE content can be that by covering current issues in the Zimbabwean context, CE covers political, social and economic issues, which made the undergraduate students, perceive it synonymously with PE. Students having difficulties to differentiate CE and PE were not unique to this study. Schoeman (2006) reported that South African students also associated CE with knowledge of political issues, concepts and structures. Kerr (2005) also observed similar conclusion in making the conclusion that to a large extent, students in England failed to recognize the differences between CE and PE.

Despite the fact that undergraduate students in this study did not express attitudes that show that they understand the differences between CE and PE, the majority of them expressed positive attitudes on the impact of the course to their personal lives. Fifty-seven point seven percent (57.7%) of them expressed views that studying CE was helpful to them to become responsible citizens and 24.1% of them denied that the course inculcated in them attitudes that make them become better citizens (Table 1). The perceived utility value of CE expressed by the undergraduate students enabled them to perceive the course as relevant to them. In addition to the knowledge factor, a high percentage (68.3%) of the students indicated that the course proffered topics that were important in their lives (B12). Other benefits derived from studying the course included helping students to develop into citizens who are informed of their rights and obligations. The role of CE in inculcating democratic values in students as noted in this study concurs with findings from other international studies by Butts (1988), Drisko (1993) and Robbins *et al.*, (2003) who concluded that CE inculcated in students respect for national and individual rights of other citizens.

Although the impact of CE has been great on the undergraduate students' lives, the students felt that the course should be optional (67.3%) and not compulsory (59.7%). Their overcrowded timetable could be a possible explanation why the

undergraduate students would like CE to be an optional course rather than a compulsory one. The attitudes of the undergraduate students on the status of CE as revealed by this study can be a fertile ground for the basis of further inquiry.

Conclusion

The findings from the study revealed that students have a positive attitude towards CE but they would prefer the course to be offered as an optional one rather than a core course. The findings also reveal that students enjoyed studying the course because it helped them to become patriotic citizens who have a sense of belonging and are informed of their rights and obligations. The findings also reveal that students associated CE with acquiring historical knowledge of Zimbabwe. Such students indicated that the course proffered some topics such as the constitution, the history of Zimbabwe, economic situations, democracy and security among others, which are important to their daily lives. One implication of the findings from this study is that CE is important to undergraduate students because it enriches their knowledge about various issues that influence the historical, economic and social development of Zimbabwe that enable them to make informed decisions when studying for their BSc degrees and when they take up their different and varied careers after the programme.

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