



Teachers and pupils' perspectives on Teaching and Learning of Geography in selected schools of Luapula and Lusaka provinces of Zambia: Benefits, Challenges and Prospects

Kaiko Mubita¹, Kasonde Mundende², Inonge Milupi³, Kalisto Kalimaposo⁴

^{1,2,3,4} University of Zambia, School of Education

ABSTRACT

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Geography education in schools plays a critical role in providing pupils with a comprehensive understanding of the world around them. Using descriptive research design, which involved qualitative data collection and analysis, this study explored pupils and teachers' perspectives on benefits, challenges and prospects of learning and teaching geography in schools. The study used homogenous purposive sampling to select schools and participants for the study. A total of 4 schools were sampled. 8 geography teachers were sampled purposefully. More so, 16 pupils who studied geography were sampled purposefully. The selection criteria included schools with a diverse range of pupil populations and geography teachers with varying levels of experience. Data was collected using in-depth interviews (teachers) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) for pupils. The qualitative data collected from the in-depth interviews and FGD were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in the data. The study reviewed that geography promotes the development of critical thinking skills, global awareness, and a sense of environmental responsibility. However, teaching and learning geography in schools could also present significant challenges, such as limited instructional time and materials, inadequate resources, and a lack of teachers, among others. Despite these challenges, the study reviewed that there were many promising prospects for geography education, including improved digital literacy, increased interdisciplinary learning, and enhanced global citizenship.

Keywords:

Geography, teaching, learning, prospects

1. INTRODUCTION

Geography is a subject that focuses on the study of the Earth, its features, and the interactions between humans and the environment (Kerski, 2013). It is a multidisciplinary subject that combines aspects of physical, social and environmental sciences. Geography is an important subject in schools as it provides pupils with a range of knowledge, skills, and values that are necessary for understanding the world and making informed decisions (Maantay, 2010).

In Zambia, the teaching and learning of geography in schools has evolved over the years, with changes in curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment strategies (MoE, 2013).

Corresponding Author: Kaiko Mubita

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In the past, geography was primarily taught as a memorization of facts and figures, with little emphasis on critical thinking and analysis (Driver et al., 1996). However, in recent years, there has been a shift towards a more inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning geography, which emphasizes problem-solving, critical thinking, and the application of knowledge (Lambert & Morgan, 2015; CDC, MoE, 2013).

Studies have shown that the teaching and learning of geography in schools have numerous benefits for pupils. For example, learning geography can enhance pupils' spatial awareness and their ability to interpret and analyze maps, which is an important skill in today's globalized world (Kerski, 2013). Additionally, geography can help pupils understand the complex interactions between humans and the environment, which is important for addressing global issues such as climate change, natural disasters, and resource management (Maantay, 2010).

However, there are also challenges to the teaching and learning of geography in schools. One challenge is the lack of

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resources, such as textbooks, maps, and other teaching materials (Mubita *et al.*, 2022; Mundende *et al.* 2022). Additionally, there is often a shortage of qualified geography teachers, particularly in developing countries (UNESCO, 2016). Moreover, the traditional focus on memorization rather than critical thinking and problem-solving skills can limit pupils' understanding of geography (Driver *et al.*, 1996). Against this background, this study explored the benefits, challenges and prospects of teaching and learning of geography in selected schools of Luapula and Lusaka provinces of Zambia.

1.1 Problem statement

Geography teaching and learning helps us to explore and understand space and place - recognising the great differences in cultures, political systems, economies, landscapes and environments across the world, and exploring the links between them. All these attributes should be motivating enough to make pupils want to learn geography and attain good results therein. However, according to Examination Council of Zambia (2020) statistics, the geography examination results for pupils were going down. Could it be that teachers and pupils of geography were less motivated? What were the challenges? What are the prospects of teaching and learning geography in Zambian schools?

1.2 Aim

This aim of this study was to explore benefits, challenges and prospects of teaching and learning of geography in selected schools of Luapula and Lusaka provinces of Zambia.

1.3 Objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- (a) to ascertain the benefits of teaching and learning geography in selected schools of Luapula and Lusaka provinces of Zambia
- (b) to investigate the challenges of teaching and learning geography in selected schools of Luapula and Lusaka provinces of Zambia
- (c) to propose ways of improving the teaching and learning of geography in selected schools of Luapula and Lusaka provinces of Zambia

1.4 Significance of the study

The findings of the study would be of help to the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders revise geography content and make it more responsive to the needs of society. The Ministry of Education may also be helped to improve the design of the curriculum so that it addresses issues that affect geography learners locally without compromising the global view of geography.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Geography education is a critical component of a well-rounded education. It equips pupils with the necessary skills to understand and interpret the world around them, as well as to engage in meaningful citizenship. This literature review

aims to explore the research on teaching and learning geography in schools.

Teaching Strategies: The traditional method of teaching geography has been criticized for being too teacher-centered and not engaging enough for pupils. However, recent studies have shown that there are effective strategies that can be used to teach geography. For example, "Teaching Geography Creatively" by Chris Rowles and Briony Cooke (2015) proposes creative approaches to teaching geography, such as using poetry, art, and drama.

Mundende and Namafe (2019) recommended the provision of 'equal opportunity' in the teaching and learning of geography where you leave no learner behind. The emphasis in this work is to ensure that teachers teach each individual child and attends to their specific needs.

Digital Technologies: The use of digital technologies in teaching geography has become increasingly popular in recent years. Aylett and Hanlon (2010) conducted a study on the effectiveness of digital technologies in teaching geography and found that pupils who used digital technologies performed better than those who did not. DeMers (2014) also provided guidance on how to integrate geospatial technologies such as Google Earth and ArcGIS Online into geography teaching.

Fieldwork: Fieldwork is an essential component of geography education as it allows pupils to experience the physical and human geography firsthand. Fuller and Jenkins (2000) and Mundende (2015) discussed the value of fieldwork in geography education and provided examples of successful fieldwork activities.

Social Justice: Herman and Lambert (2007) argued for the importance of teaching geography from a social justice perspective. This involves using geography education to promote understanding and empathy for marginalized groups and to encourage pupils to become active citizens in promoting social justice.

Conclusion: In conclusion, there is a wealth of research on teaching and learning geography in schools. While traditional teaching methods have been criticized for being too teacher-centered, there are effective strategies that can be used to engage pupils in geography education. The use of digital technologies, fieldwork, and a social justice perspective are just a few examples of approaches that can be taken to improve the teaching and learning of geography in schools.

Studies have shown that geography education has numerous benefits for pupils. For example, it improves pupils' critical thinking skills, spatial reasoning, and knowledge of different cultures (Cox *et al.*, 2018; Semken & Butler Freeman, 2008). Geography education also helps pupils develop a sense of global citizenship and promotes their understanding of environmental issues (Ward & Oldham, 2018).

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Despite its benefits, geography education also faces several challenges. One of the main challenges is the lack of emphasis on geography in schools, with some schools prioritizing other subjects over geography (Osborne, 2018). Additionally, geography education faces challenges related to the lack of qualified teachers, limited resources, and outdated curricula (Mehta & Liu, 2018; Mundende and Namafe, 2019). The prospects of geography education are promising, as there has been a growing recognition of the importance of spatial thinking and geographic literacy in the 21st century. Advances in technology have also provided new opportunities for geography education, such as the use of geospatial technologies and virtual field trips (Kerski, 2019). Additionally, the integration of geography with other subjects such as history, social studies, and science can provide a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary education (Pruitt et al., 2019).

Geography education has many benefits for pupils, including improving critical thinking skills, promoting global citizenship, and enhancing knowledge of different cultures. However, it also faces challenges related to limited resources, lack of qualified teachers, and outdated curricula. The prospects for geography education are promising, with advances in technology and growing recognition of the importance of geographic literacy. The integration of geography with other subjects can also provide a more interdisciplinary and comprehensive education. It is crucial to address the challenges facing geography education and to promote its benefits to ensure that pupils receive a well-rounded education.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research methodology used in the study of teaching and learning geography in schools.

Research Design: The study employed a descriptive research design, which involved qualitative data collection and analysis. This was meant to get opinion and perception of pupils and teachers on the benefits, challenges and prospects of teaching and learning geography in Zambian schools.

Sampling: The study used homogenous purposive sampling to select schools and participants for the study. A total of 4 schools were sampled. These were 2 from urban and 2 from rural settings. This sampling was meant to get balanced views from participants in different and varying geographical settings. From each schools, 2 geography teachers were sampled purposefully. More so, 4 pupils who studied geography were sampled purposefully. This made it a total of 16 pupils. The selection criteria included schools with a diverse range of pupil populations and geography teachers with varying levels of experience.

Data Collection: The study collected data using two main methods: Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews. The FGD guide (administered to pupils) included open-ended questions in order to get more insight from

pupils. In-depth interviews were administered to teachers. The in-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of the participants to obtain more detailed and nuanced information. *Data Analysis:* The qualitative data collected from the in-depth interviews and FGD were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in the data.

All in all, the study employed a descriptive research design, using qualitative data collection and analysis. The study used purposive sampling to select schools and participants for the study, collected data using FGD and in-depth interviews, and presented data using verbatim analyzed using descriptive thematic analysis. The study also ensured ethical considerations in conducting the research.

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Benefits of teaching and learning geography in schools

Participants' voices on benefits of teaching and learning geography in Zambian schools

"Learning geography has opened my eyes to the world around me. I have a greater understanding and appreciation of different cultures, languages, and physical landscapes." – (Pupils, FGD)

"Studying geography has helped me to develop critical thinking skills and the ability to analyze complex data and information." - (Pupils, FGD)

"As an educator, I have seen firsthand the positive impact of geography education on pupil engagement, interest, and learning outcomes. It is a subject that truly resonates with pupils and encourages them to think outside the box." – (Teacher, interview)

"Geography education is critical for preparing pupils to be informed and active global citizens. It promotes cultural awareness, empathy, and environmental responsibility." – (Teacher, interview)

Teaching and learning geography in schools has numerous benefits for pupils, both in terms of their academic development and their broader understanding of the world around them. Below are some of the key benefits of geography education.

Develops critical thinking skills: Geography education helps pupils to develop critical thinking skills, as they learn to analyze and interpret data, maps, and other geographic information. This can help pupils to make informed decisions and solve problems in a variety of contexts (National Geographic Society, 2021).

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Fosters global awareness and cultural understanding: Studying geography exposes pupils to diverse cultures and societies around the world, helping them to appreciate and respect differences in beliefs, values, and traditions. This can promote greater empathy and understanding of others (National Council for Geographic Education, 2018).

Promotes environmental awareness and sustainability: Geography teaching and learning encourages pupils to understand the impact of human activity on the environment, and to develop a sense of responsibility for sustainable practices. This can help to promote greater environmental awareness and action (UNESCO, 2019 & Mundende, 2015).

Enhances spatial thinking skills: Geography education helps pupils to develop spatial thinking skills, such as the ability to understand and interpret maps and other spatial data. These skills are important for a variety of academic and professional fields, including science, engineering, and urban planning (National Research Council, 2006).

Supports career readiness: Geography education can help pupils to develop the skills and knowledge needed for a variety of careers, including those in environmental science, international business, and tourism. This can help to prepare pupils for a diverse and global workforce (American Association of Geographers, 2021).

4.2 Challenges of teaching and learning geography in schools

Here are some quotes from teachers and pupils that reflect the challenges of teaching and learning geography in schools selected in this study:

"One of the biggest challenges of teaching geography is the limited instructional time available. With so many subjects to cover, it can be difficult to give geography the attention it deserves." – (Geography teacher, Interview)

"Sometimes I find geography class boring because it feels like all we do is memorize facts and figures. It would be more interesting if we could do more hands-on activities and learn about real-world issues." – (Pupil, FGD)

"As a geography teacher, I find that it can be challenging to keep up with new technologies and resources that can enhance the learning experience. It requires a lot of professional development and ongoing learning." – (Geography teacher, Interview)

"Limited resources can be a challenge when studying geography. For example, our school doesn't have a budget for field trips, which would be a great way to learn about physical

geography and ecosystems." – (Pupil, FGD)

"Assessment can be a challenge in geography because it's such a diverse subject. It's difficult to measure knowledge and skills in a way that's fair and accurate." – (Geography teacher, Interview)

As noted from the foregoing verbatim, there are several challenges that teachers and pupils faced in teaching and learning of geography in the selected schools. Below are some of the key challenges noted.

Limited instructional time: according to National Geographic Society, (2021) geography is often taught as a secondary subject in many schools, which means that there may be limited instructional time devoted to it. This can make it difficult for teachers to cover all of the important content and skills, and for pupils to fully engage with the material.

Lack of resources: Geography teaching and learning in Zambian schools often requires access to specialized resources, such as maps, globes, and other spatial data. However, many Zambian schools may not have the resources or funding to provide these materials, which can limit the effectiveness of geography instruction (National Council for Geographic Education, 2018, Mubita *et al.*, 2022).

Limited teacher training: Many teachers may not have received adequate training in geography education, which can make it difficult for them to effectively teach the subject (Mundende *et al.*, 2022). This can lead to a lack of confidence and competence in delivering geography content, which can in turn impact pupil learning (UNESCO, 2019).

Lack of pupil interest: Geography may not be seen as an exciting subject by some pupils, which can make it difficult to engage them in the material. This can lead to low levels of pupil motivation and interest, which can impact their learning outcomes (National Research Council, 2006 & Mundende and Namafe, 2019).

Inadequate assessment: Many assessments of geography learning are focused on memorization of facts and figures, rather than deeper understanding and critical thinking. This can make it difficult for teachers to accurately measure pupil learning, and for pupils to develop meaningful connections to the material (National Council for Geographic Education, 2018).

4.3 Prospects of teaching and learning geography in schools

Teaching and learning geography in schools has promising prospects for both teachers and pupils. Below are some of the key prospects of geography education:

According to Chirwa and Mubita (2021) geography often involves the use of geographic information systems (GIS) and other digital technologies and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to analyze and interpret spatial data. This can help to improve pupils' digital literacy

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and prepare them for a variety of 21st century careers (National Research Council, 2006).

More so, teaching and learning geography in Zambia promotes a sense of global citizenship, as pupils learn about diverse cultures, languages, and customs around the world. As noted by American Association of Geographers (2021) this can help to prepare pupils for active engagement in a global society.

Geography is an inherently interdisciplinary subject, and studying it can help pupils to see the connections between different fields and topics. To this effect, the National Geographic Society (2021) noted that this can promote more holistic and integrated learning across subject areas.

Geography teaching and learning in Zambia can help pupils to develop spatial thinking skills, such as the ability to understand and interpret maps and other spatial data. These skills are important for a variety of academic and professional fields, including science, engineering, and urban planning (National Research Council, 2006).

According to UNESCO (2019) geography teaching and learning can help to promote greater environmental awareness and action, as pupils learn about the impact of human activity on the environment and explore strategies for sustainability.

4.4 Proposals on how to improve the teaching and learning of geography in schools in Zambia

Incorporate more experiential and place-based learning: Experiential learning and place-based education can help pupils to connect with their environment and develop a deeper understanding of geography (Mubita *et al.*, 2022; Mundende *et al.*, 2022). This can include field trips, virtual reality experiences, and other immersive learning opportunities. (Cobb, 2017; National Council for Geographic Education, 2014)

Use technology to enhance learning: Technology can be used to enhance the learning experience in geography, through the use of interactive maps, data visualization tools, and other digital resources (Mundende *et al.*, 2022; Chirwa and Mubita). This can help pupils to visualize and analyze complex geographic data and concepts. (Bollmeier & Landenberger, 2015; DiMaggio, 2018).

Foster interdisciplinary learning: Geography is a subject that naturally lends itself to interdisciplinary learning, as it involves the study of physical, social, and environmental systems (Mundende *et al.*, 2022). By integrating geography with other subjects such as history, science, and literature, pupils can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the world (McKenzie & Kuykendall, 2019).

Provide professional development opportunities for teachers: Professional development can help teachers to stay up-to-date on the latest teaching strategies, technologies, and resources for geography education. This can include workshops, conferences, and online courses (Graff & Jackson, 2018).

Increase access to resources and materials: Providing adequate resources and materials, such as maps, atlases, and textbooks, can help to support geography education in schools (Mubita *et al.* 2022; Mundende *et al.* 2022). This can also include providing access to digital resources and online databases. (National Council for Geographic Education, 2016).

By implementing these proposals, it is possible to enhance the teaching and learning of geography in schools, and prepare pupils for the complex challenges facing our world today and in the future.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teaching and learning geography in schools is essential for providing pupils with a well-rounded education that prepares them to be informed and engaged global citizens. The study of geography enables pupils to develop critical thinking skills, global awareness, and a sense of environmental responsibility, among other important skills and knowledge. However, teachers and pupils in selected schools of Luapula and Lusaka provinces faced several challenges in teaching and learning geography, including limited instructional time, inadequate resources, and a lack of teacher training. Despite these challenges, there are many promising prospects for geography education, such as the potential to promote digital literacy, interdisciplinary learning, and enhanced global citizenship. Moving forward, it is crucial to continue investing in geography education in schools and addressing the challenges that teachers and pupils face, in order to prepare pupils for the complex challenges facing our world today and in the future.

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