

Civics Teachers' Interpretation of the Competence-based Civics Syllabus for Tanzanian Secondary Schools

Author's Name: Dr Jerome Sila Machange (PhD)
Tanzania Institute of Education
P. O. Box 35094
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
E-mail: jmachange1970@gmail.com
Phone: +255786972155

Abstract

Among others, effective teachers' classroom practices, is largely influenced by their understanding of the curriculum, particularly the subject syllabus. In 2005, the Tanzania Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) changed the Civics syllabus from content into competence-based. However, since then, nothing much was known regarding Civics teachers' (CTs') interpretation of that innovation. This study examines CTs' internalised liberal democratic political values inherent in the 2005 secondary school Civics syllabus. It sought to find out CTs' understanding of the concept of competence-based curriculum (CBC) and the core features of the Civics syllabus. The findings indicate that, the CTs could not clearly interpret the concept CBC and the key features of the Civics syllabus. It is revealed that the larger group of CTs had wrong or negative perception regarding the concept CBC. It is also discovered that only some few CTs could positively describe the core features of the Civics syllabus. It is concluded that CTs' interpretation of competence-based Civics syllabus was not positive enough to infer adequate internalisation of liberal democratic political values inherent in the Civics syllabus.

Key words

Competence-based curriculum, Civics syllabus, Civics teachers, interpretation

1. Introduction

In 2005, the Tanzania Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) changed the secondary school Civics syllabus from content into competence-based. The revised Civics syllabus seeks to develop learners' competences, that is, civic knowledge, skills and attitudes. As such, MoEC (2005) prescribed, the intended civic competences that needs to be developed to the learners. In particular, the review aimed at making the teaching of Civics more interactive and learner-centred. However, several studies indicates that teachers' interpretation of new or revised curriculum differs and mostly not reflect the intended message. For instance, a study by Blignaut (2008) noted that teachers' prior views and beliefs influenced their interpretation of the curriculum. Teachers' views, experience and knowledge influenced their construction of meaning of the new curriculum, that is, the introduced curriculum was interpreted in the light of what was already understood and experienced.

Further, a study by Makeleni and Sethusha (2014) observed that teachers were unfamiliar with the curriculum principles and they experienced difficulty to conceptualise and apply the new curriculum principles. Based on this background, a study was conducted to examine Civics teachers' (CTs') internalised the liberal democratic political values inherent in the 2005 secondary school Civics syllabus. It sought to find out CTs' understanding of the concept of competence-based curriculum (CBC) and the main features of the Civics syllabus. It is contemplated that Civics teachers' understanding of the curriculum, particularly the liberal democratic political values contained in the subject syllabus should be related. Such liberal democratic political values include participatory pedagogy; emphasis of the development of civic competences, application of assessment for learning; learner-centred teaching; and use of practical activities in learning Civics.

2. Theoretical perspectives

Several studies have been conducted which explain some of the interpretations made by teachers regarding the new curriculum or education innovation. In Australia, a study by Kennedy, Jimenez, Meyer, Mellor, and Smith, (2002) found that teachers' personal views are much likely to influence them than outside policies. This means that teachers' personal ideals and understanding determined the nature of civic and citizenship education conducted in schools and not the curriculum policy issued by the government. Similarly, a study by Blignaut (2008) on teachers' sense-making and enactment of curriculum revealed that teachers' prior views (on teaching and learning) and beliefs influence their interpretation of the new curriculum. Blignaut (2008) asserted that:

One teacher was adamant that lecturing was the core of what teaching was all about and that memorisation constituted an important part of learning. Those views were thus incorporated into his classroom teaching irrespective of the policy requirement that foregrounds learner-centred teaching. (p. 116)

Some other studies show that teachers' interpretation of curriculum involves positive and negative perceptions, of which both positive and negative perceptions exist in any given curriculum innovation. On one hand, Chan (2010) noted that the curriculum innovation is positively interpreted when teachers work under the new direction of the curriculum in order to meet the requirements of new innovation. In this regard, a compliance approach was used by teachers to meet the set indicators and standards of the government so as to offer good public image in terms of student performance and school effectiveness. As such, Chan (2010) contended that teachers implemented curriculum so as conform to the demand of the government.

On the other hand, when curriculum innovation is negatively interpreted, teachers' personal views are much likely to influence them than outside policies (Kennedy, Jimenez, Meyer, Mellor, & Smith, 2002). This means that teachers' personal ideals and understanding determined the nature of civic and citizenship education conducted in schools and not the curriculum policy issued by the government. Makeleni and Sethusha (2014) noted that teachers experienced difficulty in incorporating the curriculum principles into teaching plans and classroom lessons. As such, not all teachers had internalised curriculum principles which were prerequisite for curriculum implementation.

Additionally, Taole (2013) found that teachers negatively viewed the curriculum review because the changes made in the new curriculum did not work for them. This means that teachers may face difficulties because of inadequate knowledge or information regarding the core message of the curriculum innovation. Moreover, Paulo (2014) revealed that pre-service teachers were aware of the

concepts related to CBC for secondary schools such as learner-centred teaching methods and the intended competences. However, it was observed that the same pre-service teachers were unable to use the recommended teaching methods when teaching in the classroom.

Now, little was known regarding how CTs in secondary schools interpret the competence-based Civics syllabus. It is from this background that this study seeks to contribute an understanding about CTs' interpretation of the competence-based Civics syllabus by examining their understanding of the concept of CBC and core features of the Civics syllabus.

3. Methodology

3.1 Approach and area of the study

The study employed the qualitative research approach, a single case study, in particular. The choice of this approach was grounded on the assumption that such design would provide an opportunity for the researcher to investigate the phenomenon in depth, which enabled the yield of detailed descriptions about CTs' understanding of the concept of CBC and the main features of the Civics syllabus. The study was conducted in Tanzania in one municipal of Dar es Salaam region, namely Kinondoni Municipality. Kinondoni Municipality was chosen as study area because it had CTs and students who were much exposed to political information that is denied in other areas in the country and in turn affects the way they teach and learn Civics in the classroom (Riggio, 2012).

3.2 Population and sample

For the purpose of representation, all 20 wards in the Municipality were purposively stratified into two major groups: group 1, wards found in urban areas; and group 2, wards located in suburban areas. A purposeful random sample of 1 ward from each group was done to form a total number of 2 wards which participated in the study. Then, a purposeful sample of 4 schools (2 public and 2 private) with 2 or more teachers with an experience of four years or above of teaching Civics were selected from each ward to form a total number of 8 schools studied. The sample comprised 16 CTs, 8 school academic teachers (SATs), and 1 school inspectors (SI). The respondents are referred to by using Arabic numbers, CT1 or CT2 (for Civics teachers), and the letters of alphabet A – H (for schools) to preserve their anonymity.

3.3 Instruments

This study employed two data collection methods: interviews and documentary analysis. Interviews are conducted because some other things such as people's feelings, thoughts, intentions, or past events cannot be directly observed (Patton, 2002). Likewise, document analysis conducted as it is an avenue through which a researcher can construct a specific case out of life history or a process (Flick, 2006).

3.3.1 Interviews

Interviews were central to elicit information regarding respondents' feelings, thoughts and intentions, and behaviours that took place at some previous point in time regarding CTs' interpretation of competence-based Civics syllabus. Thus, individual in-depth interview schedules in the form of semi-structured and open-ended questions were used to collect data from CTs, SATs and the School Inspector.

3.3.2 Documentary analysis

In this study, analysis of the Civics syllabus and CTs' instructional materials or documents was made. On the one hand, the analysis of the syllabus helped to identify aspects of liberal democratic political values inherent in the document. On the other hand, analysis of CTs' instructional materials, CTs' schemes of work and lesson plans, enabled the collection of some accounts produced previously by the CTs and therefore illuminated the integration of liberal democratic political values in those teaching plans.

4. Results

The study focused on CTs' understanding of the concept of CBC and main features of the Civics syllabus. This was deemed necessary because CTs' understanding of the term CBC and the main features of the syllabus would reveal their internalised liberal democratic political values inherent in the Civics syllabus. In this regard, the study collected data through interviews with CTs, SATs, the School Inspector and document analysis (teachers' schemes of work and lesson plans).

4.1 CTs' perception of the concept CBC

Through interviews, CTs were required to explain their perceptions of the concept CBC as far as Civics is concerned. This question was very important because the successful implementation of competence-based Civics curriculum depends on how teachers perceive it.

The responses to this question indicated that CTs' perception of CBC can be analysed in two groups. The first group of CTs appeared to have positive understanding but not comprehensively. The second group of CTs did not understand the concept at all. CTs from the first group perceived CBC as curriculum or syllabus that insists on the use of participatory teaching methods. For instance, **CT1** from school **A** who belonged to this group had this to say:

Competence-based curriculum is a syllabus that insists on the use of participatory teaching and learning methods so that students can have a chance to participate in order to easily understand what is being taught.

Other CTs from this group associated CBC with learner-centred learning. They considered CBC as learner-centred learning comprising aspects such as learner involvement, learners' use of their own efforts to learn, learners' opportunity to practise, and teachers' facilitation of active learners' involvement in the teaching and learning process. In explaining this matter, **CT1** from school **C** commented:

The competence-based curriculum is a curriculum which insists on learner-centred learning, in which students learn using their own efforts, that is, their own abilities to learn.

Similarly, **CT2** from school **G** added that:

The competence-based curriculum is the curriculum that based on participatory methods that emphasise learner-centred strategies, the learner being the centre of learning.

Further, one CT who also belonged to the first group explained that CBC refers to a curriculum that emphasise permissive instruction. It is a curriculum which does not consider students as tabula rasa and the teacher is not the only source of knowledge. For instance, the **CT** from school **F** remarked that:

Competence-based curriculum means, while one is teaching in the classroom, he/she is not supposed to be the source of everything. It means the teacher is supposed to consider that learners also have something to share.

The other group of CTs, which was the largest one, failed to explain the meaning and also wrongly defined the concept CBC. Some CTs in this group revealed clearly that they did not understand the concept. Therefore, they did not say anything regarding CBC. To substantiate this, **CT2** from school **B** who belong to this group stated that:

It is out of my mind. I can understand each word separately, but not in combination. So, I do not understand it.

The other CTs who also belong to this group gave incorrect explanations regarding the concept of CBC. They explained that CBC is a curriculum that focuses on imparting skills and knowledge to the learners. To prove this, **CT1** from school **D** said:

It is an approach of curriculum that focuses on imparting skills and knowledge of a particular subject.

The findings from this category indicate that only some CTs managed to explain some aspects related to the concept of CBC. In other words, the data show the CTs could not precisely explain the concept of CBC. This situation denotes that CTs had little understanding of the core message of present curriculum innovation, that is, emphasis on civic competence development. If CTs have low level of understanding of the core message of the curriculum, it is likely that their teaching of the subject would be influenced by other political values, not liberal democratic political values inherent in the Civics curriculum.

4.2 CTs' understanding of key features of 2005 Civics syllabus

Teachers' understanding of the main features of the 2005 Civics syllabus was important as it enabled the study to determine how CTs described the syllabus and had internalised the core information, that is, the democratic political values or dispositions inherent in the document.

When CTs were asked to describe the key features of the 2005 competence-based Civics syllabus, the results indicated a similar trend of responses with those collected regarding CTs' perception of the concept of CBC. In this regard, the responses can be categorised into two groups. The first group comprised few CTs who correctly described some features associated with the syllabus which implied minimal understanding of the syllabus among CTs. The second group represented CTs who could not do so.

The CTs from the first group reported that the main feature of 2005 competence-based syllabus was the emphasis on the use of participatory teaching methods. They said that the syllabus emphasised students' involvement through practical activities such as dialogue, discussion, debate and questions and answers. On this matter, **CT2** from school **A** had this to reveal:

The main feature of the 2005 Civics syllabus is the emphasis on participatory teaching methods. The 2005 Civics syllabus insists on the use and application of participatory methods when teaching Civics lessons.

Other CTs who also belong to the first group explained that the main feature of the 2005 competence-based Civics syllabus was the emphasis of learner-centred learning. They said that students had some capabilities so they should be involved in the creation and search for

information. The CTs also clarified that the other feature of the Civics syllabus was that it emphasised the content related to daily life experiences of students.

The CTs in the second group could not identify the key features of the 2005 competence-based Civics syllabus. To prove this, **CT2** from school **G** gave this comment regarding features of 2005 Civics syllabus:

I am not so sure. I can only mention the topics and the number of topics for each class, but nothing else.

The **CT1** also from the second group, coming from school **E** added that:

It is difficult for me to describe the features of the syllabus. May be if you could give me this question before, I could answer it well.

Information regarding CTs' understanding of Civics syllabus was also gathered through interviews with SATs and the School Inspector. These were required to comment on the CTs' ability to teach the 2005 Civics competence-based syllabus effectively. This was essential because CTs' effectiveness in teaching the Civics syllabus would as well reflect their internalisation of the information contained in the document.

The findings from SATs indicate that only few CTs could effectively teach the syllabus. According to SATs, those CTs who could effectively teach the syllabus had been trained on CBC by TIE. Commenting on this, the **SAT** from school **A** had this to claim regarding the ability of CTs to teach the Civics syllabus:

Teachers who attended training can effectively teach the syllabus. Two out of four Civics teachers attended training on competence-based curriculum. So, they have knowledge on how to teach it using the competence-based approaches.

This argument was also supported by **SAT** from school **E** who said:

All Civics teachers have been trained on how to teach the current Civics syllabus. These teachers have also been trained on the new methods of teaching and learning in line with the competence-based curriculum.

The SATs also revealed that there were CTs who could not effectively teach the Civics syllabus because they had no training on CBC. This situation could be found with some CTs or all CTs at a particular school. To substantiate this, the **SAT** from school **F** commented that:

The Civics teachers cannot effectively teach the subject. They are not trained to teach the Civics competence-based syllabus.

Moreover, the interviews with SATs indicate that some teachers who were teaching were not experts because they were not trained to teach the subject. Further, the SATs claimed that some of the CTs were Diploma holders who did not study Civics as a subject in the teacher colleges. To exemplify this, **SAT** from school **H** had this to say:

Most of the teachers who teach Civics are from teacher colleges, the Diploma holders. They did not study Civics as a subject and therefore it is difficult for them to teach Civics effectively.

Other interview was done to one of the School Inspector from the Inspectorate Department, Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. The inspector claimed that to a larger extent, the

CTs could not effectively teach the 2005 Civics syllabus. This observation is similar to what was revealed by SATs, that is, CTs had not been trained to teach the 2005 Civics syllabus. The inspector also commented that even those who had been trained, it was done on ad hoc basis. The training they attended was not comprehensive enough in terms of time and coverage to enable them be capable of teaching the Civics syllabus effectively.

The findings under this category are similar to those about CTs' perception of the concept CBC. In this case, CTs showed low level understanding of the key features of the Civics syllabus. The findings also indicate that only few CTs could effectively teach the 2005 Civics syllabus, that is, those CTs who had been trained about the 2005 Civics syllabus. This situation denotes little internalisation of the key principles as well as liberal democratic political values inherent in the Civics syllabus.

4.3 CTs' Interpretation of Civics syllabus into teaching plans

Documentary review was conducted to investigate CTs' interpretation of the Civics syllabus into their teaching plans. The review involved teachers' schemes of work and lesson plans. The analysis of these documents was essential because it helped to determine how the CTs operationalise the Civics syllabus, particularly when preparing their classroom lessons. In order to achieve this, guiding questions were used so as to identify expressions that represent teachers teaching roles as well as students learning tasks. The identified expressions were analysed to see whether they conform to the information contained in the Civics syllabus.

The findings indicate that CTs' interpretations of Civics syllabus were of two kinds. There were those who perceived the teacher as a facilitator of students' learning and those who regarded a teacher as the only provider of information in the learning process. Table 1 summarises the expressions portraying teachers as facilitators.

Table 1 Expressions portraying teacher as a facilitator

	Task	School/Frequency							
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
i.	Guide students to do activities	10	7	8	33	13	13	9	2
ii.	Invite knowledgeable person		2		1				1
iii.	Ask questions	2		2					
iv.	Clarify students' points			1					
v.	Assign activities to students				1		1		3
vi.	Assist students to do activities	1						3	

Table 1 shows that guiding students in doing different activities was the dominant activity for a teacher as a facilitator. Clarifying students' points was the least activity teacher performed as a facilitator. In the analysis of schemes of work also indicated few expressions that described teachers as providers of information. Such expressions include teachers to: to identify agents of socialisation, to explain and to tell meaning of terminologies.

In addition, the analysis of the schemes of work identified expressions that represented students' learning activities. These activities could allow active involvement of students during teaching and learning process. Table 2 summarises the expressions which were identified.

Table 2 Students' learning activities

Task	School/Frequency							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
i. Discuss in groups	4	4	10	10	1	4	2	8
ii. List down		2						
iii. Present before the class	2	1	5	11	1	4	2	2
iv. Ask questions		1	1					
v. Answer questions		1				4		
vi. Explain concepts			4		2			
vii. Demonstrate			4					
viii. Brainstorming		4		5			5	4
ix. Read texts	1			7		4	1	2
x. Summarise orally				1		1		
xi. Evaluate the lesson					1			
xii. Identify reasons	3				2		6	
xiii. Collect data	2					1		
xiv. Role play								1
xv. Clarify points raised	2							1

Table 2 indicates that most of the learning activities were of higher levels of the cognitive domain which include: explain, evaluate, identify, discuss, present, ask and answer questions, demonstrate, write down, summarise, collect data, and clarify. Further, Table 2 shows that activities related to group discussions were dominant students' learning activities, that is, they appeared in all analysed schemes of work. Classroom presentations followed as the leading students' learning activities. Activities related to evaluation and role play were the least performed in the teaching and learning process.

In analysing teachers' lesson plans, two categories of teaching roles, namely, teacher as a facilitator and teacher as a provider in the teaching process were also identified. Table 3 presents the tasks that depict the teacher as a facilitator as revealed in the lesson plans.

Table 3 Tasks depicting a teacher as a facilitator

Task	School/Frequency							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
i. Ask students some questions	7	2	6	3		1		2
ii. Guide students to do activities	9	6	8	8	4	14	4	6
iii. Provide exercises	4	1	3			2		
iv. Give clarifications			3					
v. Facilitate students					3		9	
vi. Assign students home work					4		1	
vi. Ask students to summarise the lesson					1			1

The findings in Table 3 are similar to those identified in schemes of work. Guiding students in doing activities was also dominant in the teachers' lesson plans. Asking students to summarise the lesson was the least activity that depicted a teacher as facilitator.

Some expressions that denoted a teacher as provider of information were also identified. Such expressions included: teachers as presenters, teachers as explainers and teachers as responsible for summarising the lesson.

Regarding students' learning activities, the findings show that most of them required them to be knowledge creators as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Tasks depicting students as knowledge creators

Task	School/Frequency							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
i. Answer oral question	10	4	4	8		6	5	7
ii. Participate in discussion	2	1		4		3		4
iii. Write exercises	2					2		
iv. Reflect	2							
v. Identify	1						4	
vi. Explain			1			1		
vii. List down		1						
viii. Brainstorming			4				3	4
ix. Demonstrate			1					
x. Present				4	4			
xi. Summarise		1			1		5	

Table 4 indicates that the dominant expressions which depicted students as knowledge creators were those requiring students to answer oral questions followed by those requiring students' participation in the discussions. Listing down was the least activity that depicted students as knowledge creators. Moreover, the findings from the documentary analysis showed that the tasks requiring students to be knowledge recipients were very few in the teachers' lesson plans. Such activities were students to copy notes, listening and taking notes when the teacher is teaching. Others were students listening to teachers' explanations, and listening to audio CD.

In general, the findings in this category have indicated that CTs' interpretation of Civics syllabus into their teaching plans largely denoted the teacher as facilitator of students' learning and students as knowledge creators. CTs complied with teacher's teaching roles and students' learning activities as prescribed by the Civics syllabus. This means that the content in CTs' teaching plans complied with the content found in the Civics syllabus. However, such compliance was simplistic because the identified expressions were just copied, almost word to word from the Civics syllabus without making any necessary elaboration for practical classroom teaching and learning.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Teachers' interpretation of curriculum is related to teachers' epistemology attributes, namely, teacher individual cognition, situated cognition, and policy representation (Raselimo & Wilmot (2013). In this study, the teachers' interpretation of the Civics syllabus focuses on teachers' understanding (i.e., teacher individual cognition) of the core features of new education innovation,

in this case, the competence-based Civics curriculum. Specifically, the focus was on how CTs understand the concept CBC and key features of the Civics syllabus.

The findings indicate that one group of CTs interpreted CBC as curriculum or syllabus that focuses on the use of participatory teaching methods and learner-centred instruction, that is, positive interpretation of the syllabus. CBC as an educational innovation focuses on the development of an entire individual as opposed to content-based curriculum which only emphasise individuals' cognition (Kafyulilo et al., 2012). In Woods's (2008) view, CBC put emphasis on the shift from an emphasis on content, that is, from memorisation of factual knowledge to understanding of concepts, acquisition of skills and positive attitudes. In this study, however, it appears that CTs' responses about the concept CBC were not comprehensive as some relate it only to the use of participatory teaching methods while others relate it to learner-centred learning. This situation implies that some CTs have positive interpretation but limited knowledge of CBC.

The findings have shown that the other group of CTs, which was large, had wrong or negative perception regarding the concept CBC. They equated CBC with curriculum that focuses on imparting knowledge and skills to the learners, which contradict the principles underpinning CBC. Likewise, it is shown that some other CTs could not explain or describe the concept CBC at all. This was also reflected in their teaching plans; they contained information that required the teachers to assume the role of being the knowledge providers and students being knowledge recipients which was contrary to the CBC's principles. These results are in line with Nara (2011) who found that teachers in secondary schools had poor understanding of CBC because they were not trained in how to implement the innovation.

This situation is interpreted that the CTs had low level of understanding of the concept CBC which is central in the Civics syllabus. This limited understanding of the concept CBC by the CTs implies little internalisation of the liberal democratic political values inherent in the Civics syllabus, CBC concept being one among them. As Makeleni and Sethusha (2014) observe, teachers were not familiar with the curriculum principles and therefore not able to implement the curriculum effectively. Similarly, these findings reflect those from Komba and Mwandanji (2015) who found that most of secondary school teachers do not clearly understand the concept of CBC and its objectives which are critical in the implementation of the school curriculum.

Similarly, results regarding CTs' understanding of the key features of the Civics syllabus indicate that some few CTs could positively describe some features of the Civics syllabus. TIE (2011) suggests that CTs must be clear with prescribed course teaching objectives, content or topics, competences, methods of teaching, assessment procedures or tools and the required teaching and learning resources. The findings show that some CTs positively identified features such as emphasis on the use of participatory teaching methods, students' involvement in the teaching process and learner-centred learning. These results, however, are limited. The CTs were not aware of other important features, nature of topics on democracy, the emphasis on competences development to the learners and importance of assessment for learning inherent in the Civics syllabus.

Additionally, the findings have shown that CTs' teaching plans largely contained expressions requiring the teachers to be facilitators of students' learning which means positive interpretation. The dominant expression regarding teachers being facilitators of learning was "*guide students to ...*" However, such expression was just copied as it appears in the Civics syllabus. The CTs were just complying with what is in the syllabus without practical translation for effective classroom Civics

teaching. As Kafyulilo et al. (2012) and Paulo (2014) observe, theoretically, teachers understood the competence-based approaches but had limited skills for classroom implementation. This implies CTs had inadequate knowledge on how to practically translate the syllabus into their teaching plans as well as classroom teaching.

Moreover, as noted in CTs' perception of CBC concept, the other group of CTs could not identify the key features related to the Civics syllabus. This situation is interpreted as lack of understanding of the core information regarding the Civics syllabus. If CTs could not identify the key features related to the Civics syllabus, it means that they negatively or had not conceived the political values inherent in the syllabus. This consequently would make them to implement the syllabus based on other political values, not those related to liberal democratic political values inherent in the syllabus. As Komba (1996) observes, CTs who do not perceive the values integrated in the Civics curriculum are likely to be influenced by other political values, not those from the curriculum.

This study has taken a step in understanding how CTs in secondary schools interpret the competence-based Civics syllabus. The findings established that, largely the CTs could not clearly describe the concept CBC and the key features of the Civics syllabus. This situation implies CTs' negative and low level of understanding of the information contained in the Civics syllabus. It has been established that only some CTs could positively interpret the core features of the 2005 Civics syllabus because of lack of in-service training. It is concluded that CTs' interpretation of competence-based Civics syllabus was not positive enough to infer adequate internalisation of liberal democratic political values inherent in the Civics syllabus.

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