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Does Civic Education Impact Primary-School Students' Civic Outcomes? Experimental Evidence from Liberia*

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Abstract

We present experimental evidence on a civic education program in Liberia's public primary schools across 140 schools serving grades 3 and 4. The program provided new civic textbooks, teacher training, bi-weekly instruction, and regular classroom monitoring. After one school year, treatment students scored 0.38 SDs higher on civic knowledge assessments. Gains were concentrated in factual knowledge (0.37 SDs), with positive effects across the achievement distribution. However, it had no impact on students' civic engagement. Classroom observation data reveal that instruction was heavily textbook-centered, in contrast to the participatory models common in high-income countries.

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Introduction

Democratic decline is a global phenomenon, with increasing concerns about the erosion of electoral integrity, weakening legislative oversight, and rising authoritarian tendencies across both established and emerging democracies (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Waldner & Lust, 2018). Between 2017 and 2023, the world experienced the most significant deterioration in credible elections in nearly 50 years, with 47% of countries seeing a decline in at least one key democratic indicator (International IDEA, 2024). Recent studies warn that low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and post-conflict nations are particularly vulnerable to threats to democracy (Diamond, 2020; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019), as institutional dysfunction, corruption, social divisions, and political disengagement are especially pronounced (Freedom House, 2021; Mainwaring & Bizzarro, 2019).

In response, governments and international donors have widely promoted civic education as a means to strengthen democracy in these contexts by increasing citizens' knowledge of democratic systems and fostering civic values and engagement (Carothers & Ottaway, 2000; Finkel, 2013). Following the wave of democratic transitions in the late 20th century, civic education programs expanded significantly, with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) alone allocating between $30 and $50 million annually to such initiatives between 1990 and 2005 (Finkel, 2013). Yet the evidence on civic education’s effectiveness remains scarce, especially in LMICs. Most research comes from high-income countries (HICs), where effective programs often integrate participatory teaching methods (Morduchowicz et al., 1996; Green et al., 2011) and experiential components outside the classroom (NORC, 2019). However, implementing these approaches in low-resource settings is challenging, as instruction tends to rely on rote learning and lecture-based methods, and experiential learning opportunities

are often prohibitively expensive (Barrett, 2017; Tabulawa, 2013; Akyeampong et al., 2023). Moreover, the premise that participatory or experiential pedagogy is necessary for effective civic education is contested. A prominent line of argument emphasizes that students may first need foundational civic content knowledge before discussion-based or participatory approaches can be productive, and that knowledge-rich instruction is therefore paramount (Hirsch, 2020). We have limited causal evidence, however, on whether feasible, textbook-centered civic education can meaningfully build civic learning in low-resource and post-conflict democracies, where the approaches most commonly studied in wealthier countries are often difficult to implement at scale. To our knowledge, this study offers the first experimental evaluation of a civic education program's effects on student civic outcomes in a low-income, post-conflict context. We present findings from a randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluating the impact of a civic education intervention on students' civic knowledge and engagement in Liberia's public primary schools. We randomly assigned 140 public schools across three counties - Grand Bassa, Montserrado, and Nimba - to either a treatment group (70 schools) that received new textbooks, teacher training, bi-weekly classroom instruction, and regular monitoring to support educators, or a control group (70 schools) that did not receive the intervention. The intervention was implemented largely as intended, with 100% of teachers and 96% of students receiving new civic education textbooks, and civic education lessons being delivered regularly. Given the resource constraints typical of such settings, teacher training was limited to two days and focused primarily on textbook content and lesson planning. This program thus provides a unique opportunity to assess whether a classroom-based, textbook-centered civic education model that omits more interactive approaches improves student civic outcomes. We collected data at both baseline and endline on

third- and fourth-grade students' civic knowledge and engagement and conducted classroom observations at endline to assess impacts on instructional practices.

We present three sets of results. First, we find that the program led to substantial improvements in students' civic knowledge. After one school year, treatment students outperformed control students by 0.38 standard deviations (SDs) on endline assessments ($p < 0.01$). The program led to gains across two of the four civic knowledge content domains (groups of civic topics covered in the curriculum), with improvements in civic participation (0.36 SDs, $p < 0.01$) and civic society and systems (0.28 SDs, $p < 0.01$).

Second, the program primarily strengthened factual civic knowledge, as reflected in significant gains in the "knowing" cognitive domain (0.37 SDs, $p < 0.01$), while effects on higher-order reasoning and application were null. Classroom observations suggest that these knowledge gains were driven by textbook-centered instruction rather than shifts in pedagogy. Teachers in treatment schools used textbooks for 55% of class time, compared to 15% in control schools ($p < 0.01$). Students similarly increased their use of textbooks, and their level of engagement also improved.

Third, the program had no measurable impact on students' civic engagement, even though our engagement outcomes were drawn directly from behavioral objectives in the student textbooks and focused on short-run, age-appropriate practices in students' everyday lives. This finding is consistent with prior evidence that civic behaviors are difficult to change (Finkel & Ernst, 2005; Manning & Edwards, 2014; NORC, 2019; Soule, 2002), particularly absent sustained opportunities to practice civic skills and participation (Campbell, 2008; Finkel & Ernst, 2005; Hahn, 1998; Hoskins et al., 2021; Slomczynski & Shabad, 1998; Soule, 2002). Notably, much of the existing evidence on civic engagement emphasizes older adolescents' or adults'

political participation; our results show how difficult it is to move even proximal, age-appropriate civic behaviors.

Our study makes several contributions to the civic education literature. First, it addresses the critical lack of experimental research on civic education in any context. Despite political socialization theories emphasizing the importance of early civic exposure (Keating et al., 2010; Sears, 1979; Van Deth et al., 2011), experimental evaluations at the primary level are nearly nonexistent, with the only known RCT conducted in Canada (Mahéo, 2018). This gap is particularly significant in low-income countries, where primary school is often the highest level of education completed by most students (World Bank, 2019). While a handful of randomized evaluations have examined civic education programs at the secondary level (Green et al., 2011; Morduchowicz et al., 1996; NORC, 2019), such studies also remain rare, particularly in LMICs. Our findings provide causal evidence that a textbook-centered civic education program can substantially improve student knowledge, demonstrating that civic instruction can be effectively adapted to low-resource settings without relying on costly or complex pedagogical changes. While engagement outcomes were null, the knowledge gains we document remain consequential given longitudinal evidence that civic knowledge acquired during childhood and adolescence predicts higher adult civic participation, trust, and engagement (Beck & Jennings, 1982; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Nie & Hillygus, 2001).

Second, our study also contributes to the literature on classroom instruction in LMICs, where most observational research has focused on math and language due to their prominence in standardized assessments and accountability frameworks (Pritchett & Beatty, 2015; Glewwe & Muralidharan, 2016; Westbrook et al., 2013). By contrast, less frequently tested subjects, including civic education, remain largely understudied, leaving gaps in our understanding of how

they are taught in resource-constrained environments. Our findings suggest that instruction in civic education follows similar patterns to math and language, with a strong reliance on rote memorization and teacher-centered methods. This highlights the need for further research on instructional practices in non-core subjects to better inform education policy and teacher training in LMICs.

Third, this study contributes to a growing body of research on the effectiveness of textbook-based interventions in LMICs. While prior studies have found limited average effects of textbook provision on learning outcomes (Glewwe et al., 2009; Sabarwal et al., 2014), our findings suggest that when instructional materials are well-aligned with students' needs and integrated into a structured delivery model, they can significantly enhance learning. Unlike earlier interventions where textbooks were either not distributed effectively (Sabarwal et al., 2014) or failed to match students' language and comprehension levels (Glewwe et al., 2009), the civic education program in Liberia combined high textbook accessibility with contextual relevance and consistent use in classrooms. These results underscore that the impact of textbook provision depends heavily on the design and implementation of the intervention, offering new insight into how instructional materials can support learning in under-resourced education systems.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The Experiment section details the context, sample, randomization, and intervention design. The Data section describes data collection methods and instruments. We then outline our Empirical Strategy before presenting the Results. Finally, we conclude with a Discussion and Conclusion highlighting the program's implications for further research on civic education and its potential applications in policy within post-conflict, low-resource settings.

Experiment

Context

Liberia presents an important case to examine whether, and how, civic education can enhance civic knowledge and engagement in post-conflict, resource-constrained settings. Persistent challenges to democratic consolidation, many rooted in a history of civil conflict, combined with an under-resourced education system, raise questions about the feasibility and effectiveness of civic education programs in such a context.

Liberia is a coastal West African country, founded in the nineteenth century by formerly enslaved and free Black settlers from the United States. For more than a century, an Americo-Liberian settler elite dominated political and economic life, limiting indigenous participation in national governance. This long-standing exclusion, compounded by a military coup, ethnic favoritism, repression, and economic crisis, culminated in an armed rebellion in late 1989 that sparked a civil war. Liberia's civil war (1989–2003) intensified existing cleavages and contributed to new ones, leading to persistent inter-ethnic tensions (CRS, 2016), the marginalization of minorities (Ochiai, 2023), widespread mistrust, and low social cohesion (Blair et al., 2011; IPA, 2011) - barriers that continue to undermine democratic development. Weak social cohesion erodes public trust in governance and hinders the development of inclusive institutions, destabilizing democracy (Fukuyama, 2001; Gisselquist, 2012; Robinson, 2017). The marginalization of minorities further weakens democratic norms by perpetuating exclusion and unequal access to resources and political participation (Gurr, 2000; Diamond, 1999). Prolonged conflict also weakens the rule of law, fosters corruption, and disengages citizens from political processes (Walter, 2010; Brinkerhoff, 2005; Snyder, 2000). These dynamics, deeply embedded in Liberia's post-conflict landscape, pose significant barriers to building a stable and resilient

democracy (Freedom House, 2021; Transparency International, 2023; World Bank, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

These barriers to democratic consolidation have spurred growing interest in civic education among Liberia's politicians, Ministry of Education, and international donors. However, implementing such programs remains particularly challenging due to the country's severely under-resourced education system and reliance on didactic teaching methods. Although free and compulsory education is mandated for grades one through nine (MoE, 2016b), systemic barriers, including high informal costs, a severe shortage of trained teachers, and inadequate school facilities such as lack of electricity, clean water, and functional sanitation, negatively impact teachers and contribute to low enrollment and high dropout rates (LISGIS, 2020; Waydon et al., 2016; USAID, 2021). As of 2021, only 62% of primary-school-age children were enrolled, and even fewer progressed to secondary education (UIS, 2021). The system's reliance on lecture-based instruction methods, including rote memorization, further hampers efforts to deliver effective education (USAID, 2016; World Bank, 2019). As a result, learning outcomes remain poor: a large proportion of students in Grades 3–6 fail to meet minimum proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy, with literacy rates for Grade 3 students below 50% (MoE, 2016b; UIS, 2021).

The challenges facing Liberia's democracy, rooted in its legacy of civil conflict, highlight the critical importance of equipping students with the civic knowledge and behaviors necessary to foster democratic consolidation. Concurrently, the systemic underfunding and didactic instructional methods within Liberia's education system underscore the need to understand if and how civic education can be effectively implemented in such an environment.

Sample

The sampling frame for the study includes 167 public primary schools in the counties of Grand Bassa, Montserrado, and Nimba. The civic education program's non-governmental implementing organizations selected these counties to maximize variability in factors that could affect the implementation of the new curriculum, including population density, poverty index, levels of trust in public institutions, information consumption, and literacy rates. The three counties offer varied settings: Montserrado's dense urban environment, including the capital Monrovia, contrasts with Nimba's expansive rural districts and Grand Bassa's coastal mix of small towns and villages. Within each county, schools that were inaccessible within four hours from a central district location or located in non-adjacent districts were excluded to ensure logistical feasibility for program implementation and data collection. Schools were further required to have class sizes between 15 and 40 students in grades 3 and 4 to balance statistical power with effective assessment administration. After excluding 16 schools for inaccessibility, 4 that were not operational, and 2 with no students in grades 3 or 4, 145 schools remained eligible. Of these, we included all 44 eligible schools in Grand Bassa and randomly selected 48 schools per county in Montserrado and Nimba. We selected a total of 140 schools (70 treatment, 70 control) based on these criteria. This represents approximately 16% of public primary schools across the three counties. Figure A.2 in the Appendix maps study counties, districts and sampled schools.

Within each selected school, we randomly sampled one grade 3 classroom and one grade 4 classroom, resulting in 280 classrooms. We selected grades 3 and 4 because previous studies suggest these grades in Liberia can complete written assessments with enumerator support (IPA Liberia, 2021), which we confirmed during a scoping trip in February of 2022 and an instrument

pilot in May of 2023, making data collection feasible and cost-effective. The third- and fourth-grade textbook content also aligns with previous civic education studies (Schulz et al., 2018), enabling us to both anticipate its potential impact on civic outcomes and leverage established assessment frameworks and measures to assess them (Schulz et al., 2016). To balance statistical power with feasibility, in each classroom, we aimed to randomly select 10 students for data collection for a total of 2,800 students.

Randomization

We randomly assigned the 140 schools in the sample either to a treatment group (70 schools that received the intervention in the 2023–2024 school year) or to a control group (70 schools that did not receive the intervention during the study period but were scheduled to receive it in subsequent years, following a randomized wait-list design), with randomization stratified by county and district. In the 70 treatment schools, all students in grades one through six received the intervention, though our evaluation focused on grades 3 and 4. In the 70 control schools, no students received it. Endline data suggest that contamination was minimal as only 8 percent of control school principals (6 out of 70) reported teaching civics, and 11 percent (8 out of 70) had copies of the new civic education textbooks on campus. Among these, only three schools were both teaching civics and had textbooks. Since principals self-reported whether they taught civics, it is possible that this number is even lower, as some may have been referring to elements of the existing social studies curriculum rather than the new civics program.

The randomization procedure was successful, yielding two statistically equivalent groups at baseline, as evidenced by the absence of significant differences in characteristics or assessment scores between experimental groups (Table 1). The average age of assessed students was about 13, around 47 percent were in grade four, with the remainder in grade 3, and around 54 percent

were male. Figure A.1 in Appendix A confirms that the baseline score distributions are nearly identical across groups.

Intervention

The program, funded by USAID, and implemented by local non-governmental organizations with Liberian MoE support, consists of four main components: (1) textbook distribution, with newly developed civic education textbooks provided to teachers and students; (2) teacher training, where teachers and district-level officials receive training on the new textbooks; (3) classroom instruction, with trained teachers delivering civic education lessons to students on a bi-weekly basis; and (4) monitoring, with implementing partners conducting bi-monthly visits to observe classroom instruction, verify adherence to the curriculum, and provide additional support to teachers as needed. Given financial constraints typical of education programs in low-resource settings, teacher training was limited to two days and focused primarily on textbook content and lesson planning rather than pedagogical innovation.

The new civic education textbooks served as the main instructional resource and provided a concrete formulation of what teachers were expected to cover in class. The grade 3 textbook covers citizenship and community, including who qualifies as a citizen, citizens' rights and responsibilities (emphasizing their equal application across groups), protection of vulnerable groups, interpersonal respect and teamwork across communities, tribes, and religious groups, and peace education. The grade 4 textbook covers democratic systems and actors, including the origins and types of democracy, branches and levels of government, political parties, elections, civil society, the rule of law, governance, and peace education. The texts also explicitly encourage age-appropriate engagement, such as helping peers and neighbors, and obeying community laws.

The intervention's Theory of Change (ToC) posits that providing teachers with training and textbooks, and students with textbooks and classroom instruction, will increase students' civic knowledge and, over time, foster civic attitudes and behaviors (see Table A.1 in Appendix A). Given the intervention's textbook-centered design, our short-term evaluation focuses on (1) civic knowledge of the concepts emphasized in the Grade 3 and Grade 4 texts and (2) a small set of civic behaviors explicitly encouraged in the texts. This emphasis is consistent with prior work linking civic knowledge and school- and community-based civic practices to later civic participation (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Campbell, 2008; Youniss et al., 1997; Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Our outcomes of interest are also in line with broader civics research, which focuses on fostering students' civic knowledge (e.g., constitutional structure, branches and levels of government, electoral processes, rights), attitudes (e.g., political tolerance, support for democratic norms and rule of law, political efficacy), and behaviors (e.g., voter registration/turnout or intention, contacting representatives, participating in school/community groups, volunteering) (Campbell, 2019; Carnegie Corporation of New York & CIRCLE, 2003; Donbavand & Hoskins, 2021; Finkel & Ernst, 2005; Niemi & Junn, 1998; NORC, 2019; Shakeel & Wolf, 2024; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Torney-Purta et al., 2011). Since lecture-based civic curricula most consistently improve factual knowledge and often yield weaker or null effects on behaviors, we prioritize knowledge outcomes and adopt modest expectations for short-term changes in engagement (Finkel & Ernst, 2005; Manning & Edwards, 2014; NORC, 2019).

Despite the challenges of implementing education programs in a low-resource setting like Liberia, including poor road infrastructure that complicates material delivery and school monitoring, implementation data indicate high overall fidelity across the program's four components. Treatment school principals confirmed that textbooks reached 100% of treatment

schools, with 96% of students confirming receipt of textbooks and 94% reporting in surveys that they regularly took them home. Teacher training had a 94% participation rate, according to implementing organizations' records, with teachers and principals reporting in interviews that they valued the training for enhancing their understanding of civics and improving their lesson planning. However, many requested additional sessions, citing the two-day training as insufficient. Civics instruction adhered closely to the program schedule, with 100% of schools listing civic education lessons twice a week on their official class timetables and classroom observations indicating an average lesson duration of 38 minutes, just under the targeted 45 minutes. Monitoring visits occurred frequently, with 29 out of 48 teachers and principals interviewed reporting two to four visits per month, and most describing the feedback provided during these visits as valuable for improving teaching practices and student engagement.

Successfully delivering textbooks to both teachers and students at scale is a particularly meaningful achievement in this context, where students rarely have access to textbooks, and when available, they are often insufficient to provide each primary student with their own copy (UNESCO, 2016). Even teachers often rely on donated materials that do not align with the national curriculum (World Bank, 2010).

Data

Data Collection and Attrition

We collected data at baseline at the beginning of the school year during which the program was being implemented (2023–2024), and at endline near the end of that same school year in all 140 schools (70 treatment and 70 control). At both rounds, students completed a civic knowledge assessment and a survey measuring civic engagement. At endline, we also conducted classroom

observations to assess instructional practices in 60 schools (30 treatment and 30 control), along with teacher and principal interviews in 30 treatment schools and parent focus group discussions (FGDs) in six treatment schools to gather feedback on program implementation fidelity. Throughout implementation, implementing organizations also collected monitoring and administrative data to track program implementation fidelity.

At baseline, we assessed 2,116 students. Due to low enrollment and/or attendance in many schools, selecting 10 students per classroom (i.e., 20 students per school) was not always possible. When one grade did not have at least 10 students, enumerators selected additional students from the other grade if available. In some schools, grades 3 and 4 are combined as one classroom with the same teacher. In these cases, enumerators followed the same selection approach, aiming to select 10 grade 3 and 10 grade 4 students from the classroom. On average, we assessed 15 students per school.

At endline, we endeavored to contact the same students that were included in the baseline sample. We collected endline data at all 140 schools and assessed a total of 1,784 students.

As shown in Table 2, there was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups in the rate students were reassessed at endline, indicating that similar proportions of students from both groups were present for the endline. Enumerators were able to reassess 85 percent of the students who participated in the baseline assessment. We also did not find statistically significant differences in follow-up rates based on characteristics like grade level, gender, socioeconomic status, or baseline test scores. We did, however, find some evidence of differential attrition between the treatment and control groups based on age. Older students in the treatment group were slightly less likely to be reassessed at the endline than younger students, with the likelihood of reassessment decreasing by about 1.5 percentage points for each year of age.

Although this difference is statistically significant, it is relatively small in size. A joint test, which considers all background characteristics together, confirmed that the treatment and control groups were not statistically significantly different in the types of students who were lost to follow-up.

Student Civic Knowledge

The student assessment measured civic knowledge at baseline and endline using a framework directly adapted from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) (Schulz et al., 2016), and aligned with the Grade 3 and Grade 4 Liberian civic education curriculum. ICCS is the flagship, recurring comparative study of civic and citizenship outcomes run by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). Building on the IEA's earlier civic education studies (1971 Six Subject Survey; 1999 CIVED), ICCS has been implemented in 2009, 2016, and 2022. It provides a validated, widely used structure for assessing civic learning, facilitating construct validity and comparability with the broader civics literature (Schulz et al., 2018). Consistent with ICCS, items were organized into four content domains that map to the civic topics covered in the textbooks. "Civic society and systems" focuses on citizenship and how state institutions and intermediaries are organized and operate, including types of democracy, branches and levels of government, and governance. "Civic principles" covers the normative foundations of civic life, including rights, responsibilities, and the rule of law. "Civic participation" addresses how people take part in civic life, including elections and ways communities organize to influence government. "Civic identities" concerns belonging and living together in diversity, including national and community identity, relations across tribes and religions, and peace-promoting attitudes and behaviors. Students were also assessed across two cognitive domains. Items in the "knowing" domain measure students' ability to recognize and define civic concepts, while items in the "reasoning and applying" domain assess their ability to

relate concepts, draw inference, and generalize principles to real-world scenarios (e.g., selecting appropriate actions in brief scenarios). Detailed domain definitions from the ICCS assessment framework, our Liberia-adapted assessment framework, and representative items are provided in Appendices B.2–B.4.

The endline assessment included a set of items in common with the baseline instrument to ensure comparability across waves. The assessment incorporated questions spanning multiple difficulty levels to prevent "floor" and "ceiling" effects, where students might answer either none or all items correctly. We estimate scores using a two-parameter logistic (2PL) item response theory (IRT) model estimated on pooled baseline and endline data, which allows both assessments to be placed on a common scale using the shared items. This approach accounts for differences in item difficulty and discrimination, meaning each item's capacity to distinguish between similarly performing students. IRT-scaled scores are standardized to have mean zero and standard deviation one at baseline. For domain-specific content and cognitive subscales, we use standardized percent-correct scores, as there are not enough items per domain to estimate separate IRT models.

Student Civic Engagement

We administered a student survey at both rounds to measure students' civic engagement. Items were adapted from a previous civic education study in Liberian schools (Quaynor, 2012) and selected because they aligned with textbook content. Students were asked how frequently they engaged in civic behaviors at school and in their communities using a 4-point scale. The three items included helping peers with schoolwork, helping neighbors with chores, and obeying community laws, all age-appropriate behaviors that are explicitly promoted by the textbooks. The survey also collected student background characteristics, including gender, age, language spoken at home, and socioeconomic status, to allow for subgroup analyses.[1]

Instructional Practices

At endline, we conducted classroom observations in a random subset of 60 schools (30 treatment and 30 control). These observations provide insight into instructional practices by capturing how teachers allocated class time across different instructional activities and materials, as well as how students used materials and their levels of engagement with the teacher. The protocol was adapted from the Stallings (World Bank, 2015) tool, with enumerators recording observations at nine time intervals during a typical lesson.[2] Additional details on instrument development and adaptation are provided in Appendix A.2.

Empirical Strategy

Intent-to-Treat Effect

We estimated the intent-to-treat effect of the offer of the intervention by fitting the model:

$$Y_{ij}^{t=1} = \alpha_{r(k)} + Y_{ij}^{t=0}\gamma + T_j'\beta + \varepsilon_{ijk} \quad (1)$$

where $Y_{ij}^{t=1}$ is the outcome of interest for student i in school j at endline ($t = 1$); $Y_{ij}^{t=0}$ is a measure of that outcome at baseline (when available); $r(k)$ is the randomization stratum of district k and $\alpha_{r(k)}$ is the corresponding stratum fixed effect; T_j is an indicator variable for random assignment to the intervention; and ε_{ijk} is the idiosyncratic error term. The parameter of interest is β, which captures the causal effect of the offer of the intervention. We estimated equation (1) by ordinary least-squares regression, using cluster-robust standard errors to account for within-school correlations across students in outcomes. All analysis controls for students' baseline assessment scores in all program effect calculations.

We also fit variations of this model where outcomes are measured at the classroom level

(to estimate the impact of the intervention on pedagogical approaches) and models that interact the treatment indicator with student, teacher, and school covariates (to test for heterogeneous effects for each primary outcome).[3] We report intent-to-treat effects and do not scale to treatment-on-the-treated effects since we do not observe cumulative dosage.

Results

Student Civic Knowledge

After one school year, the civic education program had a notable impact on students' civic knowledge, as measured by their performance on the student assessment. As shown in Table 3, treatment students scored 0.38 SDs higher on IRT-scaled scores than control students ($p < 0.01$). This represents a meaningful shift in civic knowledge, moving the median student in treatment schools approximately 15 percentile points higher than their counterparts in control schools. To further contextualize these gains, the 2016 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) assessed civic knowledge in 24 countries (Schulz et al., 2018). Our estimated +0.38 SDs gain is roughly equivalent to a 38-point increase on the ICCS scale which is comparable to moving from a country like Colombia (482) to just above the international average (517), within a global range of scores spanning from 467 to 586.

Two recent meta-analyses of education interventions in low- and middle-income countries find average effects of between 0.08 and 0.15 SDs (Evans & Yuan, 2022; McEwan, 2015). Our effect size is more than double the size of the upper bound in this range. However, these comparisons should be interpreted with caution, as both meta-analyses focus on math and language achievement, rather than civic-education knowledge.

Breaking results down by content domain, we find the intervention had positive effects on students' civic knowledge across several areas. The largest gains were observed in civic participation (0.36 SDs, $p < 0.01$) and society and systems (0.28 SDs, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that the program was particularly effective in strengthening students' understanding of how civic institutions function and how individuals can engage in civic life. Gains in civic principles and civic identities were smaller and not statistically significant.

When considering cognitive domains, the intervention primarily improved knowledge acquisition, with treatment students scoring 0.37 SDs higher than control students on the "knowing" domain ($p < 0.01$). However, the effects on higher-order skills such as reasoning and applying were smaller and not statistically significant.

The intervention improved civic knowledge across all levels of the achievement distribution. Quantile treatment effect estimates show that the treatment distribution first-order stochastically dominates the control distribution, meaning that students in the treatment group outperformed their control counterparts at every percentile of the endline civic-knowledge distribution (Figure 1, Panel A). Average treatment effects by baseline scores confirm that students at every level of prior achievement benefited from the intervention (Figure 1, Panel B). The gap between treatment and control students is somewhat larger in the middle of the distribution, suggesting that medium-performing students at baseline and endline saw the largest gains, with smaller gains at both tails (which become statistically insignificant at the top of the distribution). This pattern is consistent with the interaction between treatment and baseline IRT score, which is −0.058 and not statistically significant (Table 4).

We also find that treatment effects were significantly larger in rural districts, with an interaction coefficient of 0.706 ($p < 0.01$), indicating substantially stronger gains in rural schools

relative to urban schools. Because rural status is defined at the district level, the county–district stratification fixed effects used in the main specification cannot be included. We therefore estimate this specification with county fixed effects instead, and interpret these estimates with some caution. We do not observe significant heterogeneity in effects by student gender, grade level, household SES, or language spoken at home.

Instructional Practices

The program shifted classroom instruction toward textbook-centered learning, with both teachers and students relying heavily on textbooks. Students also became more engaged with the teacher. However, we find no or minimal impact on the amount of time teachers spent on learning activities. As shown in Table 5, Panel B, teachers in treatment schools used textbooks for 55% of class time on average, compared to 15% in control schools ($p < 0.01$), while control teachers relied much more on the blackboard (49.6% vs. 24.9%, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, students in treatment schools used textbooks for 63% of class time, while students in control schools only used textbooks for 2% of class time ($p < 0.01$). While this difference may be partially explained by the lack of textbooks in control classrooms, the high proportion of class time dedicated to textbook use suggests that teachers in treatment schools relied heavily on the new civic education textbooks, in line with program expectations. The results from Table 5, Panel C also show that students in treatment schools were significantly more likely to be engaged. In treatment schools, all students were engaged for 87% of class time compared to 71% in control schools ($p < 0.05$). However, we find no evidence that the program changed how teachers allocated class time across learning activities, classroom management, or off-task activities (Table 5, Panel A): both control and treatment classrooms spent roughly 77% of observed time on learning activities, with classroom management around 15–17% and teacher off-task time around 6–8%, broadly in line

with established "good practice" time-use benchmarks from classroom observation research (Stallings & Knight, 2003; Bruns & Luque, 2015). The clearest distinction between treatment and control classrooms is instead instructional materials. In a low-resource setting where instruction often relies heavily on blackboard-only teaching and periods with no materials are common (Bruns & Luque, 2015), providing individual, take-home textbooks may have given teachers and students a shared reference point for lessons, consistent with the higher whole-class engagement we observe in treatment classrooms.

Student Civic Engagement

The civic education program had no significant impact on students' self-reported civic engagement behaviors. As shown in Table 6, students in treatment schools were no more likely than those in control schools to report engaging in civic activities, such as helping peers, assisting neighbors, or obeying community laws. For example, we can rule out effects larger than approximately 8 percentage points for students' self-reported compliance with community laws. It is worth noting that baseline levels of reported civic engagement were already high, particularly for helping others and obeying laws, leaving limited room for measurable improvements and raising the possibility of ceiling effects for some items.

Discussion

Our program's strong effects on civic knowledge expand our understanding of what forms of civic education can be effective in low-resource, post-conflict settings. Most prior studies evaluating civic education have been implemented in HICs and emphasized participatory teaching and experiential learning (Morduchowicz et al., 1996; Green et al., 2011; NORC, 2019). Yet, we have limited causal evidence on whether these interactive methods were needed for

improving civic knowledge. Our results show that a textbook-centered intervention can significantly improve students' understanding of civic concepts, even in environments where instruction remains largely didactic and teacher training is limited. These findings suggest that civic education can be effectively implemented in resource-constrained settings without requiring fundamental shifts in pedagogy, making knowledge-building programs more scalable and sustainable.

The distributional and heterogeneity analyses suggest that the program's knowledge gains were broadly shared across students, with somewhat larger improvements among students in the middle of the baseline achievement distribution and in rural schools. The latter impacts, however, should be interpreted with caution, as estimating them entails substituting the randomization-strata fixed effects for county fixed effects.

At the same time, our results underscore the challenges of translating civic knowledge gains into civic engagement in the short-term. Despite substantial improvements in factual knowledge, we find no effect on students' reported civic behaviors, aligning with broader evidence that civic education programs rarely generate clear behavioral effects (Finkel & Ernst, 2005; Hoskins et al., 2021; Manning & Edwards, 2014; Soule, 2002). Importantly, our engagement measures were drawn directly from the textbooks' behavioral objectives and captured age-appropriate, everyday practices; that these outcomes did not move reinforces the view that content delivery alone is unlikely to shift behavior in this age group. Given that the average student age in our study was 13, this pattern also accords with developmental psychology evidence that early adolescents are highly responsive to peer norms and social cues, which can constrain the behavioral impacts of adult-led instruction (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Prinstein & Dodge, 2008). By contrast, observational and

quasi-experimental work points to stronger associations between civic engagement outcomes and participatory, discussion-based, service, and experiential approaches (e.g., Campbell, 2008; Finkel & Ernst, 2005; Hoskins et al., 2021; Slomczynski & Shabad, 1998; Soule, 2002; Torney-Purta et al., 2001) plausibly because these models embed learning in peer interaction, collective practice, and group norms rather than relying primarily on adult-delivered persuasion (Campbell, 2008; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Youniss et al., 1997). These findings imply that while textbook-centered civic education can build foundational understanding at scale, instilling civic behaviors may require pedagogical complements that are harder to implement in low-resource settings (e.g., Alan et al., 2021; Dhar, Jain, & Jayachandran, 2022). Future research should test scalable, lower-cost ways to introduce peer discussion and practice opportunities and assess longitudinally whether early knowledge gains really do translate into civic participation over longer horizons.

Our findings have important policy implications. High levels of textbook use and student engagement in treatment schools suggest that instructional materials can be a powerful tool for structuring lessons and increasing classroom engagement, particularly in contexts where access to instructional resources is severely limited and where teachers have limited training. By investing in high-quality, contextually relevant civic education materials, policymakers can provide educators with the tools they need to effectively deliver civic instruction. Our findings stand in contrast to a few previous studies which found limited or no impact of textbook provision on average student learning outcomes (e.g., Glewwe et al., 2009; Sabarwal et al., 2014). In Kenya (Glewwe et al., 2009), textbooks benefited only the highest-performing students, likely due to language barriers and a curriculum misaligned with the broader student population's needs. In Sierra Leone (Sabarwal et al., 2014), uncertainty about future textbook

supplies led administrators to store books rather than distribute them, resulting in minimal student access.

In contrast, our study in Liberia demonstrates that a textbook-centered civic education program can effectively enhance civic knowledge across a diverse student body. Several factors may explain this divergence. First, the Liberian program ensured high textbook utilization, with 96% of students receiving and regularly using the materials and 94% reporting regularly taking them home. Second, the textbooks were contextually tailored to the Liberian setting, aligning with students' language proficiencies and cultural backgrounds. Third, the program's structured implementation, including bi-weekly lessons and regular monitoring, likely reinforced consistent usage and integration into classroom activities - though the cost and feasibility of maintaining monitoring visits at scale may pose challenges when expanding such a program. These elements may have mitigated common challenges observed in other contexts, such as misalignment with student needs and inconsistent material usage. This comparison underscores that the effectiveness of textbook interventions is highly contingent on contextual factors, including material relevance, implementation fidelity, and support structures. Our findings suggest that, when these elements are carefully considered and addressed, textbook-based programs can yield significant educational benefits, especially in low-resource settings.

Our findings come from a single national context and should be generalized with caution. Liberia is a post-conflict, low-income democracy with severe school resource constraints, and our findings are most likely to generalize to settings that share these three features. First, they may generalize best to countries roughly 15 to 20 years after ethnic-based civil wars, where basic state functions have been restored but inter-group trust remains low, such as Sierra Leone, Côte d’Ivoire, and the Central African Republic. Second, they likely apply most to contexts with

fragile democratic institutions and persistent citizen disengagement, including countries with comparable levels of political rights and civil liberties, such as Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique (Freedom House, 2021). Third, the results are most relevant where schooling systems face severe material constraints and textbook-centered instruction represents the most feasible scalable approach, such as Guinea-Bissau, the Central African Republic, and Sierra Leone (World Bank, 2023). Settings where these conditions converge, particularly Sierra Leone and the Central African Republic, may be especially suitable for replication studies.

Conclusion

This study provides the first experimental evidence on the effectiveness of civic education in a low-income, post-conflict setting. We find that a simple, textbook-based approach can significantly improve civic knowledge across a broad range of students. These findings have important implications for policymakers and practitioners. While interactive civic education programs may remain valuable, they are not the only viable approach. Well-structured, classroom-based, textbook-centered programs can be a practical and effective way to enhance civic knowledge in resource-constrained settings, offering a scalable model for strengthening democratic foundations in fragile states. Future research should explore how civic education can move beyond knowledge acquisition to actively foster civic engagement, particularly in contexts where significant shifts in pedagogical approaches are infeasible.

Ethical Approval

This impact evaluation was approved by the Atlantic Center for Research and Evaluation Institutional Review Board (ACRE IRB) at the University of Liberia for research on human subjects under Protocol #23-05-368.

Endnotes

1. Results for attitudes measures are available upon request; see Appendix A.2 for details.

2. We also piloted an adapted Teach Primary tool (Molina et al., 2022) but excluded its findings due to reliability concerns. Results are available upon request; see Appendix A.2 for details.

3. A pre-analysis plan for this study was registered in the AEA RCT Registry under the title *Does Civic Education Impact Primary School Students' Civic Outcomes? Experimental Evidence from Liberia* (RCT ID: AEARCTR-0013817), first published on June 24, 2024.

Table 1: Summary statistics and randomization balance

	(1) Control	(2) Treatment	(3) Difference
A. Demographics			
Age	13.198	13.230	0.033
	[2.153]	[2.080]	(0.131)
Grade 4	0.470	0.463	-0.006
	[0.499]	[0.499]	(0.018)
Male	0.535	0.551	0.016
	[0.499]	[0.498]	(0.025)
B. Household assets			
Fridge / Icebox	0.100	0.093	-0.010
	[0.300]	[0.291]	(0.017)
Television	0.186	0.208	0.013
	[0.389]	[0.406]	(0.024)
Phone	0.894	0.887	-0.004
	[0.308]	[0.317]	(0.023)
Computer	0.139	0.170	0.027
	[0.346]	[0.376]	(0.021)
Mattress	0.931	0.914	-0.014
	[0.254]	[0.281]	(0.022)
Car, truck, or motorbike	0.434	0.448	0.017
	[0.496]	[0.498]	(0.033)
Radio	0.825	0.797	-0.024
	[0.380]	[0.402]	(0.023)
Table	0.924	0.887	-0.033
	[0.266]	[0.317]	(0.022)
Chair/bench	0.913	0.888	-0.021
	[0.282]	[0.316]	(0.022)
C. Assessment Score			
IRT-scaled (std.)	-0.000	0.043	0.029
	[1.000]	[1.075]	(0.071)
N (students)	1,101	1,006	2,107
F-ratio (covariates)			1.011
P-value			0.444

Notes: This table compares students in the control group and treatment group at baseline. It shows the means and standard deviations of students in the control group (column 1) and treatment group (column 2). The "Difference" (column 3) tests for differences between groups including randomization-strata fixed effects. The sample includes all students observed at baseline. The F-test examines the joint significance of all baseline characteristics in predicting treatment assignment. IRT-scaled assessment scores are expressed in standard deviations. Standard deviations appear in brackets, and standard errors (clustered at the school level) appear in parentheses. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

Table 2: Follow-up rate in endline assessments

	(1) Follow-up rate
A. Treatment	
Treatment	-0.006
	(0.020)
N (students)	2107
Control mean	0.850
B. Treatment and baseline	
Treatment	0.183*
	(0.107)
Age	-0.008
	(0.006)
Grade 4	-0.021
	(0.022)
Male	-0.014
	(0.020)
Household assets index (std.)	0.006
	(0.021)
IRT-scaled score (std.)	0.006
	(0.011)
Age × treatment	-0.015*
	(0.008)
Grade 4 × treatment	-0.005
	(0.032)
Male × treatment	0.025
	(0.033)
Household assets index (std.) × treatment	-0.009
	(0.024)
IRT-scaled score (std.) × treatment	0.012
	(0.016)
N (students)	2107
F-ratio (Interactions)	1.178
P-value	0.323

Notes: This table shows estimates from regressions predicting follow-up status in the endline assessments. Follow-up is defined as having an observed test score at endline. The sample includes students present at baseline. Panel A regresses follow-up on treatment status, and Panel B regresses follow-up on treatment status interacted with baseline characteristics. Both panels include randomization-strata fixed effects. Standard errors (clustered at the school level) appear in parentheses. The F- and p-values refer to a test of joint significance for all interaction terms. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

Table 3: Treatment effects on endline assessments (standardized scores)

	Control	Treatment	Difference
A. Overall Assessment Score			
IRT-scaled (std.)	0.000	0.442	0.379***
	[1.000]	[0.968]	(0.086)
B. Content domains			
Society and systems score (std.)	0.000	0.353	0.284***
	[1.000]	[0.947]	(0.070)
Principles score (std.)	0.000	0.166	0.091
	[1.000]	[1.023]	(0.090)
Participation score (std.)	-0.000	0.429	0.364***
	[1.000]	[0.941]	(0.062)
Identities score (std.)	0.000	0.071	0.021
	[1.000]	[0.948]	(0.067)
C. Cognitive domains			
Knowing score (std.)	0.000	0.429	0.370***
	[1.000]	[0.929]	(0.078)
Reasoning and applying score (std.)	0.000	0.159	0.076
	[1.000]	[0.980]	(0.085)
N (students)	936	848	1,784

Notes: This table shows the impact of the intervention on students' standardized assessment scores. Panel A presents treatment effects using IRT-scaled scores for the overall assessment; Panels B and C present treatment effects using percent-correct scores for content and cognitive domains. Estimates come from regressions of assessment outcomes on a treatment indicator with controls for randomization strata and standardized baseline assessment score (baseline IRT score for overall score, domain-specific baseline percent-correct scores for domain analyses). All scores are standardized to have mean zero and standard deviation one in the control group. The results displayed are for all students with both baseline and endline measurements. Standard deviations appear in brackets, and standard errors (clustered at the school level) appear in parentheses. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

Table 4: Heterogeneous impacts on endline assessments (IRT-scaled scores)

	(1) Grade 4	(2) Male	(3) Household assets index (std.)	(4) English native speaker	(5) Rural district	(6) Baseline IRT score (std.)
Treatment	0.431***	0.361***	0.384***	0.383***	-0.177	0.380***
	(0.095)	(0.101)	(0.085)	(0.084)	(0.219)	(0.087)
Covariate	0.330***	0.105*	-0.039	0.101	-0.335	0.226***
	(0.069)	(0.060)	(0.046)	(0.086)	(0.214)	(0.034)
Interaction	-0.105	0.028	0.084	-0.009	0.706***	-0.058
	(0.086)	(0.090)	(0.059)	(0.150)	(0.238)	(0.046)
N (students)	1784	1784	1784	1784	1784	1784

Notes: The table shows the impact of the intervention on standardized IRT-scaled endline assessment scores, with heterogeneity by six baseline variables: grade, sex, household index (standardized), whether the student speaks either standard English or Liberian English as the main language at home, whether the student's school is in a rural district, and baseline IRT-scaled score (standardized). Estimates come from regressions of endline test scores on a treatment indicator, each baseline variable, and their interaction. All specifications control for the baseline IRT-scaled score (standardized), except column (6) where the baseline IRT-scaled score is the heterogeneity dimension. All regressions include randomization-strata fixed effects, except for the regression on rural district, which includes county fixed effects instead. Standard errors (clustered at the school level) appear in parentheses. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

Table 5: Treatment effects on instructional practices

	(1) Control	(2) Treatment	(3) Difference
A. Allocation of instructional time on and off task			
Proportion of class time...			
...spent on learning activities	0.776	0.769	-0.023
	[0.152]	[0.219]	(0.054)
...spent on classroom management	0.146	0.172	0.033
	[0.096]	[0.149]	(0.033)
...spent off task	0.078	0.059	-0.011
	[0.078]	[0.187]	(0.046)
N (schools)	30	30	60
B. Allocation of time using different materials (teachers)			
Proportion of class time...			
...taught using a textbook	0.150	0.565	0.402***
	[0.215]	[0.374]	(0.080)
...taught with no materials	0.215	0.124	-0.086
	[0.146]	[0.210]	(0.055)
...taught using notebooks/writing materials	0.111	0.047	-0.060*
	[0.164]	[0.065]	(0.033)
...taught using blackboard	0.496	0.249	-0.246***
	[0.225]	[0.263]	(0.052)
...taught using tablet	0.028	0.015	-0.011
	[0.117]	[0.049]	(0.023)
N (schools)	30	30	60
C. Allocation of time engaging students			
Proportion of class time...			
...with all students engaged	0.706	0.865	0.146**
	[0.168]	[0.254]	(0.055)
...with ten or more students engaged	0.089	0.080	0.002
	[0.122]	[0.179]	(0.040)
...with two to ten students engaged	0.141	0.018	-0.132***
	[0.136]	[0.050]	(0.026)
...with one student engaged	0.011	0.000	-0.011*
	[0.031]	[0.000]	(0.006)
...with no students engaged	0.054	0.037	-0.004
	[0.066]	[0.183]	(0.044)
N (schools)	30	30	60

Notes: This table shows the impact of the intervention on various instructional practices, namely teachers' and students' use of class time. Estimates come from regressions of class time allocation outcomes on a treatment indicator with controls for randomization strata. Standard deviations appear in brackets, and standard errors (clustered at the school level) appear in parentheses. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

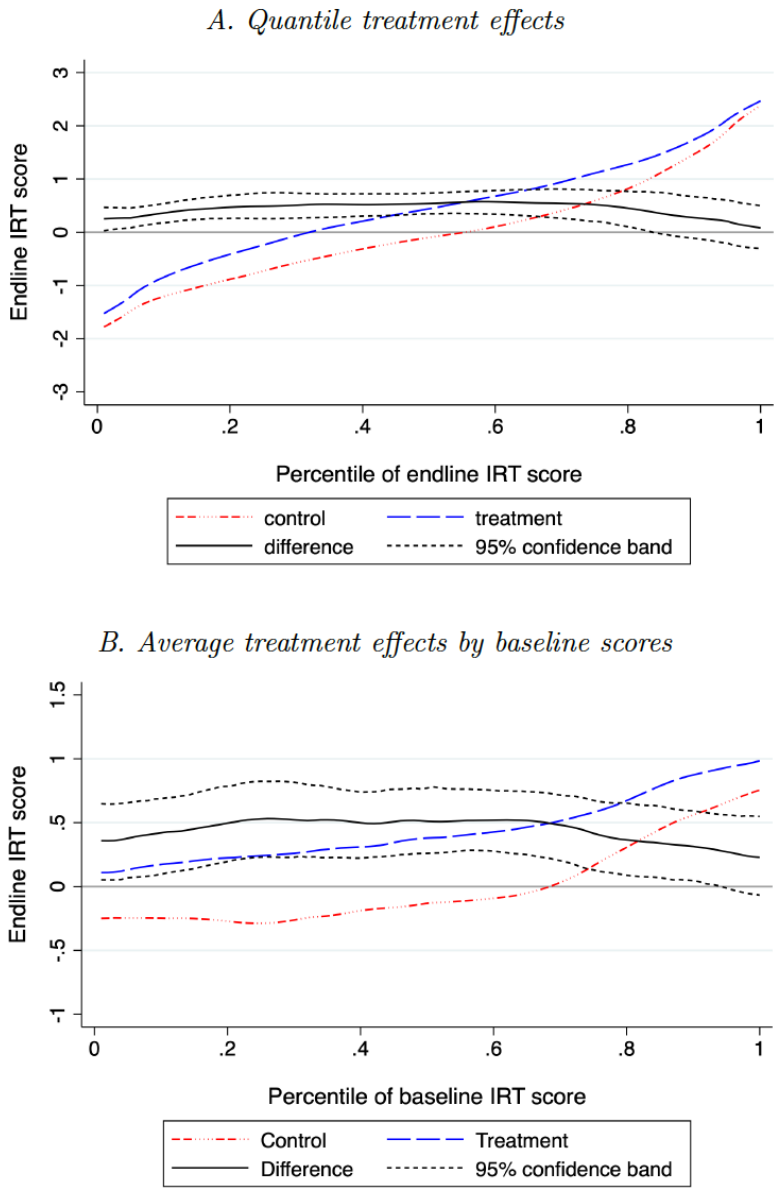
Table 6: Treatment effects on civic engagement

	(1) Control	(2) Treatment	(3) Difference
I help other students with their schoolwork.	0.751	0.719	-0.034
	[0.433]	[0.450]	(0.021)
I help my neighbors if they ask me.	0.843	0.854	0.006
	[0.364]	[0.354]	(0.019)
I obey the laws in my community.	0.777	0.818	0.036
	[0.417]	[0.386]	(0.023)
Civic Engagement Index (Endline)	0.790	0.797	0.003
	[0.291]	[0.289]	(0.015)
N (students)	936	848	1,784

Notes: This table shows the impact of the intervention on students' civic engagement behaviors. Civic engagement was measured at both baseline and endline. The three civic engagement outcomes are binary indicators coded as 1 if the student reported engaging in the behavior "always" or "often" and 0 if the reported engaging in the behavior "rarely" or "never". The Civic engagement index is constructed as the mean of these three binary indicators, providing an overall measure of students' civic engagement. Estimates come from regressions of survey outcomes on a treatment indicator with controls for randomization strata and baseline measures of civic engagement. Standard deviations appear in brackets, and standard errors (clustered at the school level) appear in parentheses.* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

Figures

Figure 1: Distributional treatment effects on endline assessments (IRT-scaled scores)



Notes: Panel A shows quantiles of endline IRT-scaled assessment scores for treated and control students who participated in the baseline and endline assessments, estimated by local polynomial regressions of endline scores on endline percentiles separately by experimental group. The solid black line plots the difference between treatment and control (quantile treatment effects). Panel B shows estimates of average endline IRT-scaled assessment scores and treatment effects at each percentile of baseline IRT-scaled assessment score, estimated by local polynomial regression. Dashed lines display bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Does Civic Education Impact Primary School Students' Civic Outcomes?

Experimental Evidence from Liberia

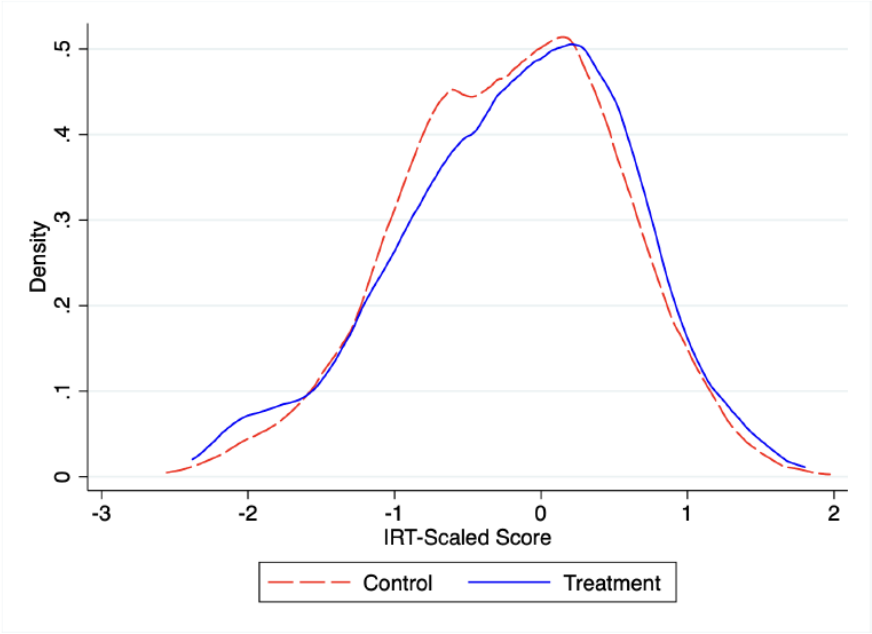
Appendix A: Additional Figures and Tables

Table A.1: Theory of Change of Liberia's Primary Civic Education Program

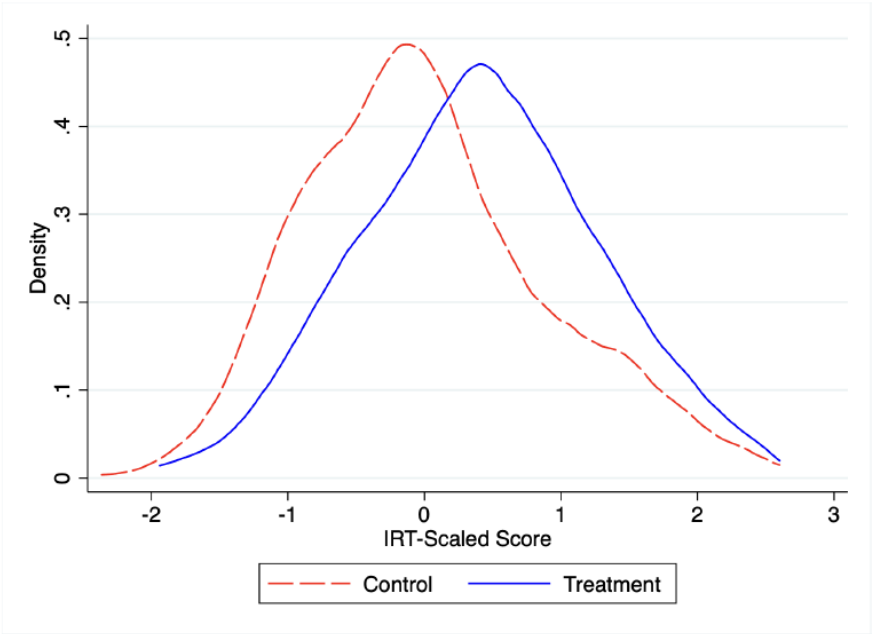
Needs	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Teachers require training and resources to effectively deliver civic education. Students need access to structured civic education materials that promote responsible citizenship.	Teacher Training: Teachers receive training on the new curriculum. Textbook Distribution: Teachers and students receive civic education textbooks. Classroom Instruction: Teachers deliver civic education lessons twice per week. Monitoring & Support: Implementing partners conduct monitoring visits to observe instruction and provide additional teacher support.	Teachers increase their knowledge of the civic education curriculum. Students each have textbooks during class and take textbooks home and use them for study. Students receive classroom instruction on civic education.	Students increase their civic knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.	More responsible citizens who: - Are civically engaged in their communities -Participate politically (e.g., voting, advocacy) -Hold duty-bearers accountable -Obey the law and uphold democratic norms -Think critically about civic and political issues
	Teachers understand the new curriculum and its pedagogical approach Textbooks are delivered in a timely manner Teachers attend school consistently	Students can read and understand the material in the textbook Students attend school consistently	Interactions at school / home / community do not contradict the content and values embraced by the civic education curriculum Classroom instruction includes some participatory approaches	

Figure A.1: Distributions of IRT-scaled scores on student assessments

A. Baseline assessment scores

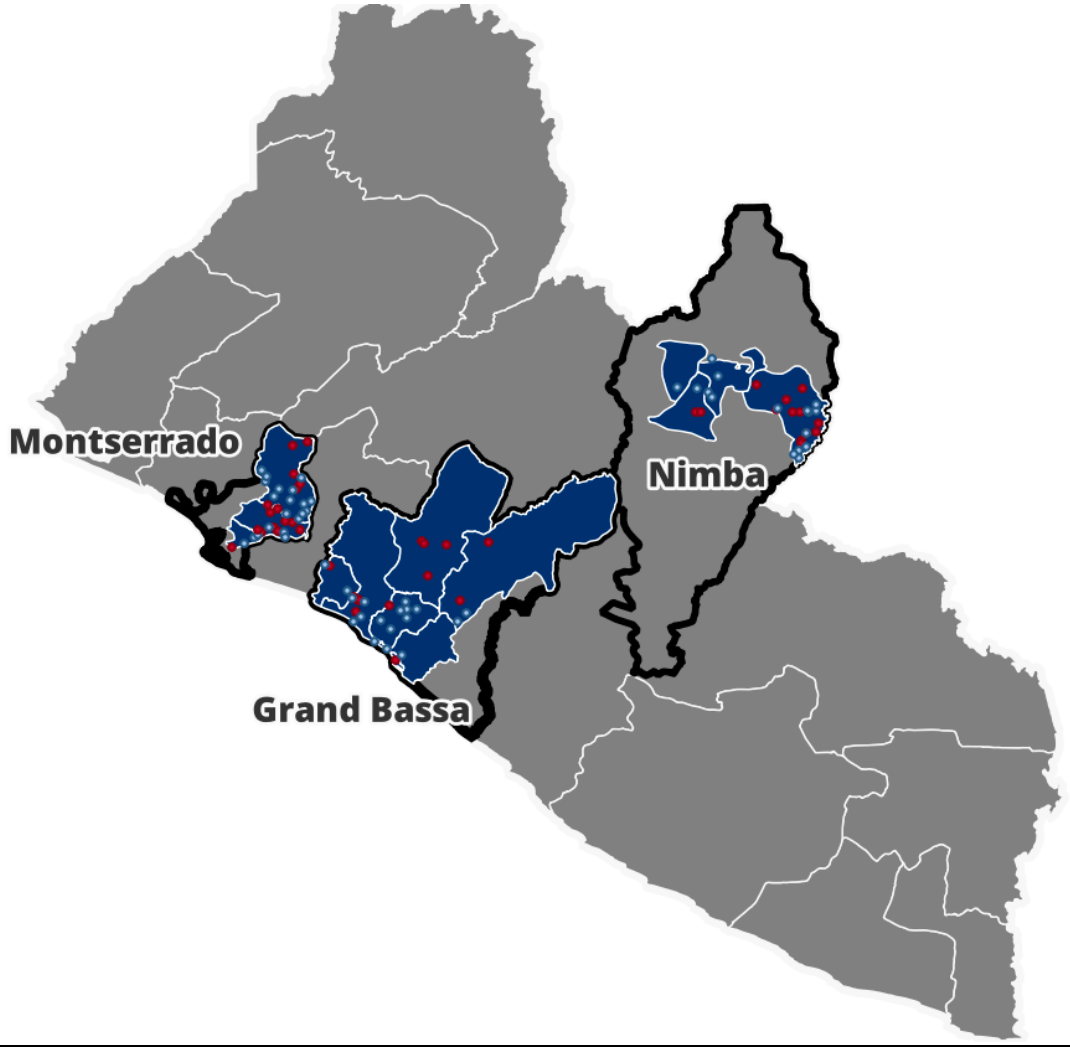


B. Endline assessment scores



Notes: The figure shows the distribution of IRT-scaled scores on the student assessments. IRT-scaled scores are expressed in standard deviations.

Figure A.2: Map of Study Sites in Liberia: Counties, Districts, and Schools



Appendix B: Additional Details on Data Collection and Measurement

Appendix B.1: Data Collection Protocols

Implementation Data Provided by Implementing Organizations

To assess implementation fidelity, we relied on monitoring and administrative data collected by implementing partners (IPs) throughout the 2023–2024 school year. These data included information on teacher training attendance, textbook distribution, lesson frequency and duration, and teacher-level administrative details, such as grade taught, payroll status, and post-training retention.

Qualitative Data

We conducted qualitative interviews with various stakeholders to gather insights into program implementation. This included interviews with 18 teachers, 18 principals, and 12 combined principal-teacher interviews (where the principal also taught civic education) in the 30 treatment schools where classroom observations took place. Additionally, we interviewed County Education Officers (CEOs) in the three sampled counties and seven District Education Officers (DEOs) across the nine sampled districts. To incorporate perspectives from parents, we conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) at six randomly selected treatment schools, holding two per county, with a total of 38 parents (16 male, 22 female). These interviews provided valuable feedback on the successes and challenges of program delivery, while CEO and DEO interviews offered broader insights into its implementation over the school year. Parent FGDs helped gauge community perceptions of civic education and the program's impact.

Student Assessment

The endline assessment mirrored the baseline version in item distribution between content and cognitive domains, with refinements based on baseline findings. The endline version was shortened from 40 to 30 questions, with 10 questions revised to improve clarity and relevance, while 20 items remained unchanged to facilitate the application of a common item response theory model and ensure results remained on the same scale. More details on the ICCS assessment framework are provided in Appendix B.2. The full Liberia Civic Education IE Assessment Framework, which outlines the final domains, subdomains, and their definitions, is available in Appendix B.3.

Student Survey

The student survey was designed to measure both civic behaviors and civic attitudes. However, we encountered significant measurement challenges in assessing attitudes, leading to their exclusion from the final analysis. Measuring civic attitudes in children, particularly those in early primary school, presents difficulties, as traditional survey instruments such as Likert scales rely on abstract reasoning that young children may struggle to interpret reliably (Borgers, Leeuw, & Hox, 2000). This challenge was further compounded in the Liberian context, where education

is predominantly lecture-based and emphasizes rote memorization over critical thinking (Ministry of Education, 2016; USAID, 2016; World Bank, 2016). Prior research suggests that students in such educational systems are more likely to provide responses they believe authority figures expect rather than their genuine opinions (Chambers et al., 2006; Paulhus, 1991). These issues led to a lack of meaningful variation in responses (e.g., ceiling effects), prompting us to drop most civic attitude measures from the analysis. While results are not reported in the main text, details on the measurement issues and summary statistics are available upon request.

Classroom Observations

The classroom observations used an adapted version of the Stallings Classroom Observation System (World Bank, 2015) to capture how teachers allocated instructional time, how frequently they used different teaching methods and materials, and how students engaged with lessons. Enumerators recorded observations in 15-second intervals every five minutes throughout the lesson, yielding approximately nine observations per 45-minute class.

To measure the allocation of instructional time on and off task, we used the classroom observation instrument to record teacher activities. Enumerators observed classrooms by recording what was happening at nine different points in time or “snapshots”, five minutes apart, throughout the lesson. In treatment schools, civic education classes were observed, while in control schools, social studies classes were observed. This process allowed us to approximate the share of lesson time dedicated to different types of activities, materials, and student groups.

Enumerators categorized observed activities into three main groups: (a) on-task learning activities such as reading aloud, explanations or lectures, question-and-answer sessions, practice and drill, copying, individual assignments, group activities, and student presentations; (b) classroom management activities, including providing instructions, discipline, managing students, and classroom organization; and (c) off-task activities, encompassing social interactions with students or adults, or teacher absence from the classroom. Based on the nine "snapshots" per lesson, we calculated the proportion of time spent on learning activities, classroom management, and off-task behavior, expressing these as a percentage of total class time.

We also measured the actual use of textbooks during civic education lessons by teachers and students during classroom observations. During each snapshot, enumerators categorized materials used as "No material," "Textbooks," "Notebooks/writing material," or "Blackboard." We then calculated the proportion of class time teachers and students spent using textbooks.

We also used the classroom observation instrument to measure student engagement. During each snapshot, enumerators categorized the number of students engaged with the teacher as: "No students," "One student," "2 to 10 students," "10 or more students," and "All students." These observations allowed us to calculate the proportion of class time in which different numbers of students were engaged.

To ensure reliability, two enumerators observed lessons together in the 30 treatment schools, while a separate pair of enumerators observed lessons in the 30 control schools. The inter-rater reliability for control school enumerators showed an observed agreement of 92.22

percent, with an expected agreement of 65.21 percent, yielding a Cohen's Kappa of 0.7763, indicating substantial agreement. For treatment school enumerators, the observed agreement was even higher at 97.78 percent, with an expected agreement of 55.31 percent, resulting in a Cohen's Kappa of 0.9503, reflecting near-perfect agreement.

In addition to the Stallings observations, we also piloted an adapted version of the Teach Primary (Molina et al., 2022) tool to measure additional instructional practices. However, given significant concerns about the reliability of this adapted tool in our context, we do not report results in the main text. These data are available upon request.

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Appendix B.2: ICCS Assessment Framework Domain Definitions

The following ICCS domain definitions are included in the IEA ICCS 2016 International Report (Schulz et al., 2018). The definitions are reproduced verbatim and can be found on pp.10–11 of the report.

"The four content domains in the ICCS assessment framework are civic society and systems, civic principles, civic participation, and civic identities (Table 1.1). Each of these contains a set of sub-domains that incorporate elements referred to as 'aspects' and 'key concepts.'

- CIVIC SOCIETY AND SYSTEMS (THREE SUB-DOMAINS): (i) citizens (roles, rights, responsibilities, and opportunities), (ii) state institutions (those central to civic governance and legislation), and (iii) civil institutions (the institutions that mediate citizens' contact with state institutions and allow citizens to pursue many of their roles in their societies).
- CIVIC PRINCIPLES (FOUR SUB-DOMAINS): (i) equity (all people having the right to fair and just treatment), (ii) freedom (of belief, of speech, from fear, and from want), (iii) sense of community (sense of belonging, connectedness, and common vision among individuals and communities within a society), and (iv) rule of law (equal and fair application of the law to all; separation of powers and legal transparency).
- CIVIC PARTICIPATION (THREE SUB-DOMAINS): (i) decision-making (organizational governance and voting), (ii) influencing (debating, demonstrating, developing proposals, and selective purchasing), and (iii) community participation (volunteering, participating in organizations, keeping informed).
- CIVIC IDENTITIES (TWO SUB-DOMAINS): (i) civic self-image (individuals' experience of their place in each of their civic communities), and (ii) civic connectedness (sense of connection to different civic communities and the civic roles individuals play within each community). ICCS also includes global citizenship as a key concept relating to students' civic identities.

The two cognitive processes in the ICCS framework are:

- KNOWING: This refers to the learned civic and citizenship information students use when engaging in the more complex cognitive tasks that help them make sense of their civic worlds.
- REASONING AND APPLYING: This refers to the ways in which students use civic and citizenship information to reach conclusions that are broader than the contents of any single concept. This process also refers to how students use these conclusions in real-world contexts.

The assessment framework identified the different types of student perceptions and behaviors relevant to civics and citizenship. Two affective-behavioral domains were identified: (i) attitudes, and (ii) engagement.

- ATTITUDES: These refer to judgments or evaluations regarding ideas, persons, objects, events, situations, and/or relationships. They include students' beliefs about democracy

and citizenship, students' attitudes toward the rights and responsibilities of groups in society, and students' attitudes toward institutions.

- ENGAGEMENT: This refers to students' civic engagement, students' expectations of future civic-related action, and students' dispositions to actively engage in society (interest, sense of efficacy). The notion of engagement includes concepts such as preparedness to participate in forms of civic protest, anticipated future political participation as adults, and anticipated future participation in citizenship activities."

Appendix B.3: Liberia Civic Education Student Assessment Framework

CONTENT DOMAINS
CIVIC SOCIETY AND SYSTEMS
CITIZENSHIP
Know what a citizen is and how one becomes a citizen (e.g., birth, naturalization, and dual/multiple citizenships)
Understand that citizens have responsibilities toward their government and other citizens, why such responsibilities exist, and the implications of eschewing/violating such responsibilities
STATE INSTITUTIONS
Know what democracy is, its defining characteristics (e.g., voting, free speech, right of assembly), differences with other forms of government (e.g., monarchy), and types (e.g., direct and representative)
Identify the three branches of government (i.e., legislature, executive, judiciary), their duties and responsibilities, equality and interrelatedness under the constitution
Know the composition of the legislature (i.e., lower or upper houses), number and assignment of representatives, responsibilities, and interrelatedness in the law-making process
Know the composition of the executive (i.e., president and cabinets), its responsibilities, and how members are elected and for how long
Know the composition of the judiciary (including the supreme court), its responsibilities, and how members are appointed and for how long
Know the country's division into administrative jurisdictions/political subdivisions, their different levels (i.e., counties, cities, districts, townships, chiefdoms, clans, towns, and boroughs), and how they are managed
CIVIL INSTITUTIONS
Know what a political party is, its objectives/roles in a democracy, and how they may be organized into systems (e.g., single or multiparty system)
Understand Liberia's multiparty system, its main political parties, and the role of opposition political parties
CIVIC PRINCIPLES
EQUITY & FREEDOM (RIGHTS)
Understand what rights are, the different types of rights that exist, how they are codified, and their implications for citizens and governments
Know all individuals have certain inalienable rights by virtue of being human
Understand citizens have additional rights by virtue of belonging to a country (e.g., fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution)
Understand some groups (e.g., children, women, disabled) have special rights because of their vulnerability/historical disadvantage in society
Recognizing the roles of individuals and the government in enforcing rights
RULE OF LAW (RESPONSIBILITIES)
Understand what rule of law/responsibilities are, the types of responsibilities that citizens have, how they are codified, and their implications for citizens and governments
Understand citizens have responsibilities by virtue of belonging to a country (e.g., paying taxes, participating in the democratic process, defending the country)

Recognize the roles of individuals and government in enforcing responsibilities, including the potential for the abuse of the rule of law
CIVIC PARTICIPATION
DECISION-MAKING
Know what elections are, what their objectives/purposes are in a democracy, and their different types (e.g., primary, general, local, by-elections)
Identify the characteristics of successful elections (e.g., free and fair elections, trust in the process and results, voting as a right and responsibility, informed voters)
Understand Liberia's elections system (e.g., officials to be elected, frequency, use of secret ballots, eligibility of candidates and voters) and the role of the National Elections Commission
Know what governance is, how the three branches of government are supposed to work together and with the people, and the characteristics of good governance (e.g., accountability, inclusion, participation)
INFLUENCING
Know what civil society and civil society organizations are, their roles in a democracy, how they are established, their different types (e.g., community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, international non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations), and how they work with government
CIVIC IDENTITIES
CIVIC SELF-IMAGE
Understand how individuals influence and are influenced by their relationships with others (e.g., family, neighbors, other citizens, citizens of other countries)
Know that citizens of the same country may differ along multiple dimensions (e.g., sex, ethnicity, religion, citizenship)
CIVIC CONNECTEDNESS (PEACE)
Appreciate the importance of tolerance toward diversity on both principled (e.g., moral) and pragmatic grounds (e.g., safety, peace)
Know what peace is, how it is constructed/maintained (e.g., among family, friends, schoolmates, and neighbors), and the implications of breaking it (e.g., bullying, gossip)
Know what peace education is, how it can be fostered (e.g., listening, speaking clearly, being honest), and its relationship to self-esteem

COGNITIVE DOMAINS
KNOWING
Define: Identify statements that define concepts and content (e.g., recognize definitions of citizenship, rights, democracy, etc.)
Describe: Identify statements that describe the key characteristics of concepts and content (e.g., distinguish between general aspects of citizenship and specific aspects of democratic citizenship)
Illustrate: Identify examples that support or clarify statements about concepts and content (e.g., voting as an example of exercising choice over leaders)
REASONING AND APPLYING
Relate: Use the key defining aspects of a concept to explain or recognize how an example illustrates a concept (e.g., similarities between citizenship and membership in a family)

Justify: Use evidence and concept to construct or recognize a reasoned argument to support a point of view (e.g., why citizens should be nice to each other)
Integrate: Identify connections between different concepts across themes and content domains (e.g., how citizenship is related to rights)
Generalize: Identify conceptual principles manifested as specific examples and explain how they apply in other contexts (e.g., how a student group may choose a leader much like a country chooses a president)
Evaluate: Identify judgments about the advantages/disadvantages of alternative points of view/approaches (e.g., understand the consequences of littering for a community)

Appendix B.4: Representative Assessment Items by Domain

CONTENT DOMAIN	COGNITIVE DOMAIN	SAMPLE ITEM
Civic society and systems	Knowing	How many branches of government did the Constitution of Liberia create? a. 1 branch b. 2 branches c. 3 branches d. 4 branches
	Reasoning & applying	Just like a member of a neighborhood has the right to get water from the local well or pump and the responsibility to keep the well or pump clean, a _____ also has rights and responsibilities toward other members of his or her country. a. Politician b. Citizen c. Legislature d. Foreigner
Civic principles	Knowing	Which of the following is a right that only citizens of Liberia have? a. The right to play. b. The right to vote in Liberian elections. c. The right to education. d. The right to religion.
	Reasoning & applying	Emmanuel and his schoolmates are trying to get on the school bus, but there are too many children trying to get in at once. Which of these actions would be the BEST way to show that he is a good citizen? a. He should say “excuse me” if he wants others to move out of the way. b. He should push others out of the way to get in. c. He should say “please” if he wants others to move out of the way. d. He should suggest that he and others form a line or a queue.
Civic identities	Knowing	Which of the following should people from different tribes be able to do in Liberia? a. Vote and hold political office. b. Live and find work anywhere.

		c. Own property in any part of the country. d. All of the above answers are correct.
	Reasoning & applying	James meets Mohammed on his first day of school. When they start talking, James gets to know Mohammed belongs to a different tribe than his. What should he do? a. Kindly say goodbye and walk away. b. Continue getting to know Mohammed and, if they like each other, become friends. c. Make another friend from his same tribe. d. Finish lecturing and not talk to Mohammed again.
Civic participation	Knowing	You can vote in Liberian elections: a. If you live in Liberia. b. If you are a Liberian citizen that is at least 18 years old. c. If you are a Liberian citizen of any age. d. If you have a university education.
	Reasoning & applying	N/A (no items)

Appendix B.5: Approach to Analysis for Qualitative Data

For the qualitative data analysis of KII and focus group transcripts, we employed a systematic thematic coding approach to identify key patterns and insights from the data. We developed a structured coding framework, drawing predetermined themes from the evaluation's research questions and adding themes that emerged from the data itself. The team systematically applied codes to segments of text that reflected key areas of interest, such as program implementation challenges, successes, and stakeholders' perspectives on civic education. The coding process was iterative, with ongoing refinement as new patterns emerged during the initial rounds of coding. Once the coding framework was refined and finalized, two different researchers independently coded the same 10 percent of transcripts. The coders then compared their work, discussing any discrepancies in the application of codes and making necessary adjustments to align their interpretations. Only after achieving a high level of agreement in the coding process did the team proceed with splitting up the remaining transcripts for coding by one of the two researchers.

Once all transcripts were coded, we analyzed the frequency and salience of specific themes across the dataset. This involved counting how often key themes were mentioned and identifying any notable variations in perspectives based on different respondent groups (e.g., by county, teachers/principals vs. DEOs/CEOs). Following this, the team developed higher-level takeaways by grouping related themes and interpreting their broader significance in relation to the program's implementation and outcomes.