



Section/division **Accident and Incident Investigations Division**

Form Number: CA 12-57

LIMITED OCCURRENCE INVESTIGATION REPORT – FINAL

Reference Number	CA18/2/3/10652						
Classification	Accident		Date	20 April 2026		Time	0532Z
Type of Operation	Training (Part 141)						
Location							
Place of Departure	Port Alfred Airport (FAPA), Eastern Cape Province		Place of Intended Landing		Port Alfred Airport (FAPA), Eastern Cape Province		
Place of Occurrence	Runway 28R, Port Alfred Airport (FAPA), Eastern Cape						
GPS Co-ordinates	Latitude	33° 33' 43.56" S	Longitude	26° 52' 57.77" E	Elevation	272ft	
Aircraft Information							
Registration	ZS-ISU						
Make; Model; S/N	Piper Cherokee, PA-28-180 (Serial Number: 28-7305561)						
Damage to Aircraft	Substantial			Total Aircraft Hours		26 197.3	
Pilot-in-command							
Licence Type	Student Pilot Licence (SPL)		Gender	Female		Age	24
Licence Valid	Yes	Total Hours	91.2	Total Hours on Type		72.6	
Total Hours 30 Days	5.4		Total Flying on Type Past 90 Days			8.4	
People On-board	1+0	Injuries	1	Fatalities	0	Other (on ground)	0
What Happened							
On Monday, 20 April 2026, a student pilot (SP) on-board a Piper Cherokee PA-28-180 aircraft with registration ZS-ISU took off on a solo navigational flight from Port Alfred Airport (FAPA) in Eastern Cape province with the intention to return to the same airport. The flight was conducted under visual meteorological conditions (VMC) by day and under the provisions of Part 141 of the Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) 2011, as amended. According to the SP, during the take-off roll at approximately 0525Z from Runway (RWY) 28L at FAPA, the aircraft yawed to the left. Initially, the SP considered the yaw to be normal as the right rudder input was expected during the take-off roll. However, when she applied the right rudder, the slip indicator moved towards the left. After take-off, the aircraft climbed to approximately 1 300 feet (ft) at an air speed of about 120 miles per hour (mph). She then noticed that the engine revolutions per minute (RPM) did not reduce as expected when she pulled back on the power (reduced power). She then decided to return to the airport by turning right on to downwind leg.							

Upon joining the downwind leg, the aircraft yawed to the right, making it difficult to maintain a straight and level flight. She, again, pull back on the power and, this time, the engine rpm reduced, resulting in a significant decrease in air speed and a rapid loss of altitude.

During the final part of the downwind leg, the SP broadcasted a MAYDAY on frequency 122.0-Megahertz (MHz) before turning base leg with the intention to land on RWY 28L. After the turn, the SP attempted to correct the right yaw but was unsuccessful as the aircraft continued to yaw to the right, making it unfeasible to land on RWY 28L. She then opted to land on RWY 28R as it was the most ideal. The aircraft landed and rolled on RWY 28R; however, it veered to the right before it came to rest in the bushes, just off the runway. The nose landing gear and both wings were substantially damaged. The SP sustained minor injuries.

The SP stated that the cause of the accident was her inability to control the aircraft due to trim configuration; this was followed by a loss of directional control upon landing and the runway excursion.

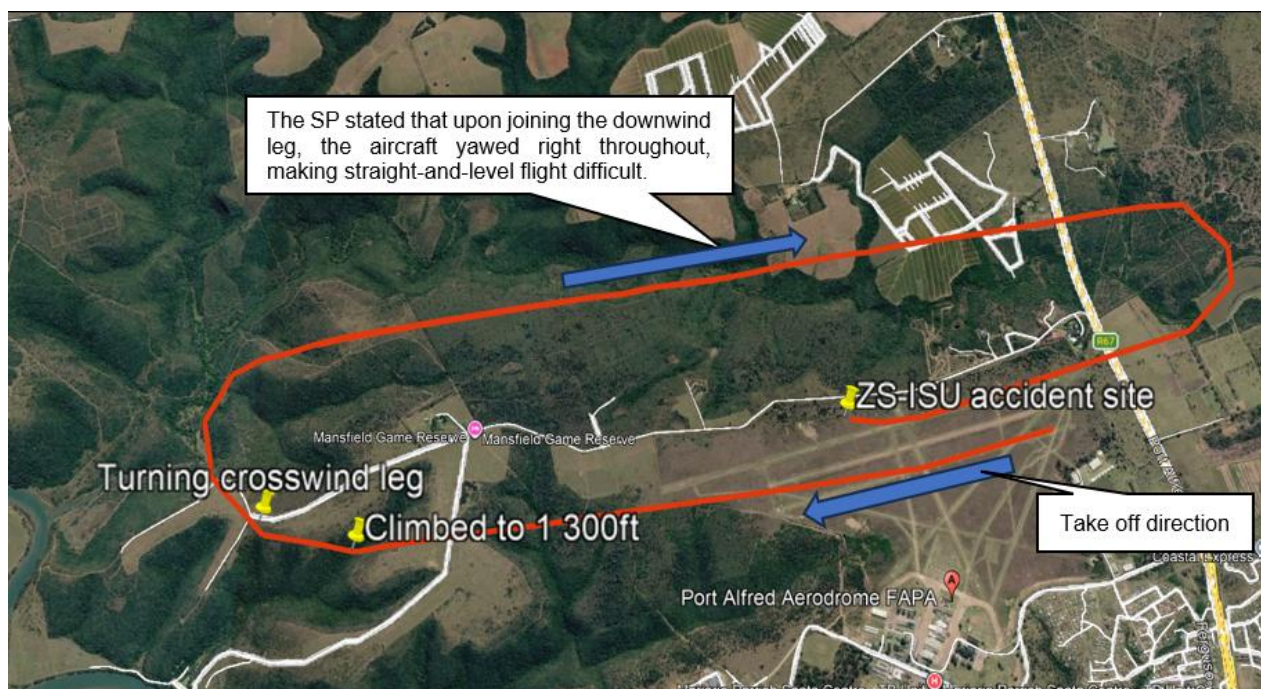


Figure 1: An aerial view of the airport and the approximate accident site. The red line traces the flight path from take-off to landing. (Source: Google Earth)



Figure 2: The resting position of the aircraft. (Source: Operator)



Figure 3: The front view of the aircraft after the accident. (Source: Operator)



Figure 4: The collapsed nose gear. (Source: Operator)



Figure 5: The damaged right wing. (Source: Operator)

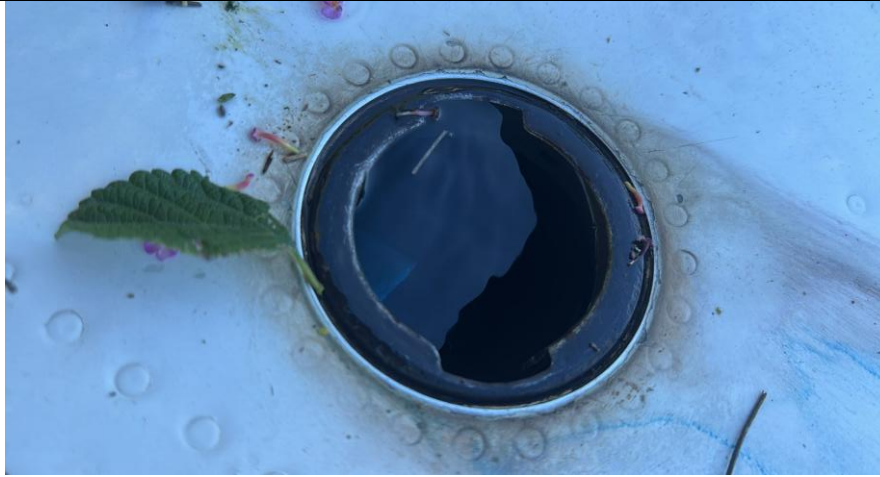
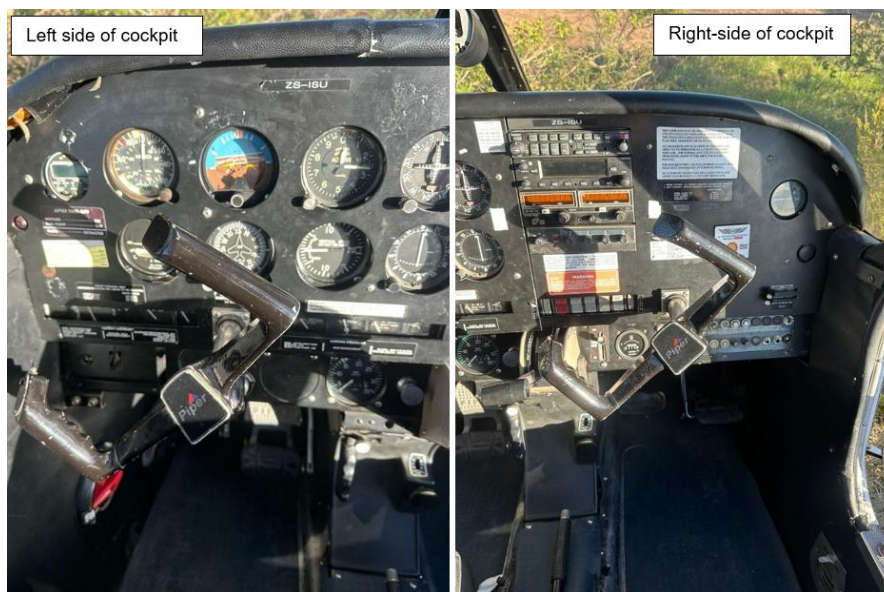


Figure 6: The aircraft had adequate fuel in the tank. (Source: Operator)



Figures 7 and 8: The cockpit view after the accident. (Source: Operator)



Figure 9: The trim control indicator as it was found set to the right. (Source: Operator)

The trim control was set towards the right, which caused the aircraft to yaw to the right after take-off.

Take-off Checklist (Source: Piper Cherokee Pilot's Operating Handbook [POH])

The following items should be checked before take-off:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Fuel on proper tank | 7. Seat backs erect |
| 2. Electric fuel pump on | 8. Fasten belts/harness |
| 3. Engine gauges checked | 9. Trim tab set |
| 4. Flaps set | 10. Controls free |
| 5. Carb. heat off | 11. Door latched |
| 6. Mixture set | 12. Air-conditioner off |

The take-off technique is conventional for the Cherokee. The tab should be set slightly aft of neutral, with the exact setting determined by the loading of the aircraft. Allow the airplane to accelerate to 50 to 60 MPH, then ease back on the wheel enough to let the airplane fly itself off the ground. Premature raising of the nose or raising it to an excessive angle will result in a delayed take-off. After take-off let the aircraft accelerate to the desired climb speed by lowering the nose slightly. Take-offs are normally made with flaps up. However, for short field take-offs, and for take-offs under difficult conditions such as deep grass or on a soft surface, distances can be reduced appreciably by lowering flaps to 25°.

Training Organisation's (ATO's) Observations After the Accident

An instructor who conducted a walk-about after the accident noticed that the nose oleo and nose gear had collapsed, the propeller had also slightly bent backwards. The right-side wing had sustained damage to the leading and trailing edges; the left-side wing had minor damage. The airframe also sustained damage. The rudder trim was set fully to the right. The free movement and travel of the controls was checked and found satisfactory. Later, the aircraft was moved closer to a hangar where an engine inspection was to be conducted. The engine was started without difficulties (as the propeller was not damaged); all engine parameter readings were found to be within the normal operating range. A magneto drop check was performed, and the outcome was normal. The engine was removed and placed on the test bench for a full ground run test; no abnormalities were detected.

Meteorological Information

The following weather report was submitted by the pilot on 20 April 2026 via the pilot's questionnaire form.

Wind Direction	270°	Wind Speed	5kt	Visibility	9999
Temperature	14°C	Cloud Cover	Nil	Cloud Base	Nil
Dew Point	9°C	QNH	Unknown		

The weather did not contribute to this accident.

Conclusion

Post-accident inspection revealed that the trim control was set to the right during take-off, which resulted in the aircraft yawing to the right.

Findings

1. Pilot Information

- 1.1 The student pilot (SP) had a Student Pilot Licence (PPL) that was initially issued by the Regulator (SACAA) on 13 November 2024 with an expiry date of 16 October 2026. The SP had logged a total of 91.2 hours of which 72.6 were on the aircraft type.
- 1.2 The SP had a Class 2 aviation medical certificate that was issued on 29 October 2024 with an expiry date of 31 October 2029 with a restriction to wear corrective lenses.

2. Aircraft

- 2.1 The last mandatory periodic inspection (MPI) of the aircraft was certified on 26 March 2026 at 26 126 total airframe hours. The aircraft had accrued 71.3 hours since the last MPI.
- 2.2 The aircraft Certificate of Registration (C of R) was issued to the present owner on 13 December 2013.
- 2.3 An aircraft maintenance organisation (AMO) had issued a Certificate of Release to Service (CRS) on 26 March 2026 with an expiry date of 25 March 2027 or at 26 226 airframe hours, whichever comes first.
- 2.4 The aircraft had a valid Certificate of Airworthiness (C of A) that was initially issued by the Regulator on 6 December 2021. The latest C of A was renewed on 7 November 2025 with an expiry date of 31 December 2026.
- 2.5 The AMO which conducted the MPI was issued an AMO Certificate on 29 September 2025 with an expiry date of 30 September 2026.

2.6	The aircraft had adequate fuel for the flight.
3.	<u>Environment</u>
3.1.	Clear weather conditions prevailed at the time of the flight. The weather was not a factor in this accident.
4.	<u>Approved Training Organisation (ATO)</u>
4.1.	The approved training organisation (ATO) had an ATO Certificate that was issued by the Regulator on 1 August 2023 with an expiry date of 31 July 2028.
5.	<u>Mission</u>
5.1.	During the take-off roll, the aircraft yawed to the left and the SP applied right rudder. The rudder trim moved towards the left; however, during the downwind leg, the aircraft yawed to the right likely due to overcorrection of the rudder trim.
5.2.	The SP did not correctly configure the aircraft prior to the take-off roll by adjusting the rudder trim according to the required procedure outlined in the Piper Cherokee Pilot's Operating Handbook [POH].
5.3.	The aircraft's rudder trim was found fully set to the right, which likely contributed to the right yaw during the downwind leg.
5.4.	After touch down, the SP lost directional control and the aircraft veered off to the right before it came to a stop. The nose landing gear was damaged as a result.
Probable Cause(s)	
Loss of directional control during landing, attributed to the right-configured rudder trim during take-off which caused the aircraft to yaw to the right. The aircraft subsequently veered off to the right of the runway after touch down.	
Contributing Factor(s)	
Incorrect take-off configuration.	
Safety Action(s)	
None.	
Safety Message and/or Safety Recommendation/s	
None.	

About this Report
<i>The decision to conduct a limited investigation is based on factors including whether the cause is known and the evidence supporting the cause is clear, the level of safety benefit likely to be obtained from an investigation and that will determine the scope of an investigation. For this occurrence, a limited investigation has been conducted, and the Accident and Incident Investigations Division (AIID) has relied on the information submitted by the affected person/s and organisation/s to compile this limited report. The report has been compiled using information supplied in the initial notification, as well as from follow-up desktop enquiries to bring awareness of potential safety issues to the industry in respect of this occurrence, as well as possible safety action/s that the industry might want to consider in preventing a recurrence of a similar occurrence.</i> <i>All times given in this report are Co-ordinated Universal Time (UTC) and will be denoted by (Z). South African Standard Time is UTC plus 2 hours.</i>
Purpose
<i>In terms of Regulation 12.03.1 of the Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) 2011 and ICAO Annex 13, this report was compiled in the interest of the promotion of aviation safety and the reduction of the risk of aviation accidents or incidents and not to apportion blame or liability.</i>
Disclaimer
<i>This report is produced without prejudice to the rights of the AIID, which are reserved.</i>

This report is issued by:

**Accident and Incident Investigations Division
South African Civil Aviation Authority
Republic of South Africa**