



The Heritage Based Curriculum: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract: This paper is a critical synopsis of the recently rolled out Heritage Based Curriculum of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe which is expected to run from 2024 to 2030 in line with the country's Vision 2030 policy initiative. The Heritage-Based Curriculum represents a bold step in reimagining Zimbabwe's education system. While challenges are inevitable during this transition, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education is committed to ensuring its success. Parents, learners, and teachers are expected to familiarize themselves with the new curriculum for ease of implementation. One of the most significant changes in the HBC is the replacement of Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA) with School-Based Projects (SBPs). Together, Zimbabwe can achieve an education system that not only honours its heritage but also prepares its learners for a brighter future. Each learner is now required to complete one School Based Project (SBP) per learning area annually. These projects emphasise hands-on learning and practical application of skills. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has issued Secretary's Circular No. 9 of 2024, providing detailed guidelines for implementing SBPs across all educational levels. The transition to SBPs reflects the ministry's commitment to fostering innovation and problem-solving skills among learners. As a result of the introduction of HBC, schools have been instructed to cease all CALA activities immediately and adopt SBPs as mandated by the ministry. Since this is a relatively new curriculum, it became necessary to unpack it so that all stakeholders can appreciate its aims and objectives and how it looks like.

Keywords: Heritage Based Curriculum, school-based project, cultural heritage, creativity, innovation, practical skills, streamlining

1. INTRODUCTION

The expansion of the education system during the 1980s led to many qualified graduates supplied onto the job market Mackenzie (1988). Sadly, this increased supply of educated manpower has not been met by an equal or greater supply of jobs to absorb them (Atkinson, 1982). This has been worsened by the shrinking of the private sector as some companies closed down and others relocated to neighbouring countries to escape the poor economic situation. Unemployment quickly rose to unimaginable rate, about 70 per cent according to 2002 estimates. Some people in the country argue that the school curriculum should be revamped to align it with the needs of the country's industries (. They complain that most students who graduate lack the requisite skills for them to be employed. Thus, people argue that the system is failing to produce employable graduates. For example, the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training which was headed by one of the country's leading educationists, Nziramasanga (1999), recommended that the curriculum be changed to focus on employment related skills and other essential skills. However, the government is not moving fast enough to implement some of the commission's recommendations, and as a result the irrelevance of the curriculum is an issue most people still blame for the rising unemployment (Chung, and Ngara, 2005). The Government of Zimbabwe through its Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has implemented a raft of educational policy changes since attaining independence in 1980 (Gomo, 2003). In those earlier times, these changes were geared towards aligning the education system with the populist principles of nationalism and people centeredness as well as removing imbalances in access to education created by the colonial system. In 2015, a Competence-Based Curriculum Framework was instituted which ran from 2015 to 2022. The thrust was to produce a learner who possessed key competences that would enable them to undertake entrepreneurial activities. 2023 saw the review of the competence Based Curriculum that sought to align the Competence Based Curriculum with the philosophy of the new dispensation of the Second Republic led by the President of Zimbabwe, Cde Dr Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa. This review gave birth to the Heritage-Based Curriculum which is especially geared towards increasing accessibility, inclusivity, equitability, quality and sustainability in the education system.

The President of Zimbabwe, Cde Dr E.D. Mnangagwa as cited by MoPSE (2024) says his Government outlines the philosophical policy basis of education in Zimbabwe as “Innovation and Knowledge Driven Economy”. He goes on to say this policy is being advanced as a result of the realisation that the economic success of any country is directly determined by the quality of the education system of that country and that the most effective factor of production is human capital expressed in knowledge, skills, creative abilities and moral qualities of individuals in a society. MoPSE Minister Hon. Dr T. Moyo, (MP) says that the underlying principle of the Heritage Based Curriculum is an education system that produces goods, services and solutions that are useful to the economy and social wellbeing. He further asserts that the Heritage Based Curriculum is, therefore, delivered conscious of the environment.

According to MoPSE (2024), the Primary and Secondary Education system as espoused by both the Competence Based Curriculum Framework and the current Heritage Based Curriculum is informed by the philosophy of Ubuntu/Unhu/Vumunhu and thus, further provides a comprehensive plan for sustainable education. It, therefore, packages and operationalises a curriculum hinged on heritage.

2. WHAT IS THE HERITAGE BASED CURRICULUM?

According to MoPSE (2024), the Heritage Based Curriculum (HBC) Framework is the main reference document informing the development and revision of the syllabi, designing and use of learning resources and the assessment of learning from year 2024 to 2030. The HBC builds on the strengths of the preceding Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015 to 2022 and adopting a Heritage Based Education thrust. MoPSE (2024) defines heritage as tangible and intangible natural endowments such as social and historical legacy, beliefs, languages, land, flora, fauna, water, minerals and cultural values that are passed down from one generation to the next. MoPSE further highlight that the underlying principle is an education system that produces goods and services useful to the economy, based on heritage and conscious of the environment. The HBC emphasises the teaching of both theory and practice, thereby offering a balance between the acquisition of knowledge and that of skills. The aim is to produce pupils with relevant competencies such as skills, knowledge, values, attitudes and dispositions that are key to national development. Pupils will, therefore, be channelled through different pathways as per their strengths and abilities from ECD to Advanced Level, to initiate and enhance creativity and innovation for socio-economic transformation. HBC emphasises on strengthening measures to mould these pupils to cherish and practise the Zimbabwean philosophical orientation of Ubuntu/Unhu/Vumunhu.

MoPSE (2024) further states that the HBC integrates and reinforces a strong scientific and technological bias promulgated through STEAM as part of the Government's skills development strategy, focusing on the five key sectors of the economy. It creates a base for human capital development through acquisition of knowledge, skills and values for employment creation and furthering education in higher and tertiary institutions. According to MoPSE, the HBC accommodates a two-route progression system for all pupils as follows:

Route One: meant for pupils who choose to progress to “A” level, then tertiary.

Route Two: meant for pupils who choose to follow the Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework’s (ZNQF) skills pathway. Such pupils do vocational courses whilst at school and are trade tested at National Foundation Certificate and National Certificate levels which are equivalent to “O” and “A” levels respectively. They then can enrol in polytechnics, Industrial Training Colleges, Vocational Training Colleges, Agricultural Colleges and other training institutions for further skills development courses for certification or just to acquire skills. The school is expected to facilitate the process.

3. RATIONALE OF THE HBC

According to MoPSE (2024) the HBC Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2024-2030 aligns Primary and Secondary education to Higher and Tertiary Heritage Based Education 5.0. It, therefore, emphasises what pupils are expected to know, understand, value, demonstrate as well as emphasise the preservation of indigenous knowledge as a result of the pupils’ learning experiences in schools and non-formal education settings. Fundamental to its purpose is the provision of a structure around which schools can build educational programmes that ensure pupils achieve desired learning outcomes. This HBC framework identifies learning areas and assessment processes for all pupils. It is intended to guide schools and stakeholders on the curriculum process in a rapidly changing environment.

According to MoPSE (2024), the development of the HBC framework is driven by

- a) the growing urgency among policymakers and educators to adequately prepare Zimbabwean pupils for the 21st century skills,
- b) increased public and parental concerns regarding the relevance of education,
- c) the necessity to respond to the needs of industry and commerce
- d) Trends in global education standards that need benchmarking.

4. OPPORTUNITIES CREATED BY HBC

The coming of the HBC has ushered in a new era in the education system of Zimbabwe. There are several opportunities that have been made possible by the Heritage Based Curriculum. Although the HBC has not yet been fully implemented, with a lot of work still to be done, several opportunities can be envisaged (Chikoko, 2017). The HBC, with its objective of inculcating practical skills in pupils for solving contemporary societal challenges, will provide a conducive platform for innovation among both the primary school sector and the secondary school sector pupils. Zimbabwe, and Africa at large, has been lagging behind in innovation owing to the absence, or presence in rudimentary form, of cultural infrastructure that promotes innovation. There are a very limited number of economic and technological goods and services that have been developed or mothered in Africa, let alone Zimbabwe. It is high time Zimbabwe joins the band wagon of the innovation drive that has taken the world by storm.

Another opportunity that can be envisaged is the creation of jobs among the populace. The HBC aims at producing pupils that are not job seekers but creators of jobs for the citizenry. This will reduce unemployment among the country's youth and eliminate idleness which has been one of the major causes of drug abuse among Zimbabwean youths. Skills acquired by the youths will increase their productivity and capacity to earn income and create wealth. A lot of man hours are being lost by jobless school-leavers who have virtually nothing productive to do. The negative externalities emanating from this trend have had a negative impact on the fabric of society with many youths engaging in vicious crime and anti-social behaviour detrimental to both their wellbeing as individuals and the wellbeing of society at large. With the advent of HBC, these externalities are likely to dwindle. Enhanced skills among the citizenry of the nation will bring about sustainable utilisation of the national heritage achievable through effective and efficient resource extraction, beneficiation and value addition. Zimbabwe has had a culture of heavy dependence on the extractive industry and exportation of raw materials and unfinished products. This trend is likely to diminish with the advent of the HBC. The benefits accruable from beneficiation and value addition of locally available resources will transform the lives of the rural communities. With her vast mineral deposits and a fledgling agricultural sector, the HBC is a step in the right direction for Zimbabwe. The HBC is likely to create a generation of think tanks and entrepreneurs who will be proud protectors of the nation's national heritage. It has been shown that among human societies, benefitting from local resources produces a sense of ownership among the locals which will in turn cause them to protect the source of their benefits. The motivation to protect what is not yours and that from which you generate the least of benefits is always minimal.

5. CHALLENGES LIKELY TO BE POSED BY THE HBC

Over the years, Zimbabwe has had very good programmes on paper yet failing to implement them effectively. The HBC is not any different. It is good on paper and in principle, yet likely to face challenges in implementation. As it stands currently, the country lacks a cultural infrastructure that promotes innovation. There is need for the creation of innovation hubs where individuals that are keen to discover new ideas and products can research freely without limitation and discover new possibilities that will positively impact the technological and economic development of the nation. For any new program to be successfully implemented, there is need to create the correct mind-set in those who will participate in the implementation. Currently, the grassroots implementers who are the country's educators manning the school system generally have a negative attitude to the constantly changing curricula. This is exacerbated by a mind-set among the populace that is geared towards employment rather than employing. There is need to decolonise the minds of the people so that they turn away from the colonial mentality of getting educated in order to be employable.

Funding issues are a likely challenge that will be faced in trying to implement the HBC. There is need for adequate funding to create the necessary school infrastructure for the effective implementation of the HBC. If the requisite cultural infrastructure that can promote innovation is to be created, there is

need to invest in the building of laboratories, technological hubs, social networks and the acquisition of the requisite technological goods and services that will help actuate research and innovation in schools to produce solutions tailor-made to solve local contemporary problems as intended by the HBC. As it stands right now, most public schools especially those in the rural communities lack basic materials and laboratories for the implementation of the HBC. Funding is also necessary for the training of educators who are the critical implementers to align their thinking with the dictates of the HBC. Already, there have been some implementation challenges that have seen delays in the implementation of the HBC. Initial proposals were for the implementation of the HBC in the month of May 2024 nationwide. Yet by September, there has not been much made in this regard. The current crop of Grade 6, Form 3 and Form 5 pupils were supposed to have started the heritage based mini projects in May, but this had a delayed take off. Teachers, school administrators and SDCs have not yet been trained to reorient them so that they think the HBC way. The poor remuneration of teachers is likely to limit the successful rolling out of the HBC. The current crop of teachers lacks the zeal and motivation to implement the HBC. Funds availed for the rolling out of the HBC should be availed and not be diverted for other use. The presence of political will and the necessary infrastructure to fight corruption will make things better. Diminished community support and non-payment of school levies is also likely to play havoc with the successful realisation of the goals of the HBC. Most of the country's rural communities have been crippled by the donor syndrome and need thorough and extensive sensitisation to the need to take an active part in the funding of their schools in order to achieve the goals of the HBC.

6. CONCLUSION

The HBC for Primary and Secondary Education 2024 – 2030 has been received with mixed feelings by educators in the country. In spite of that, the HBC seems to be a good educational policy likely to yield good results should it be fully implemented with adequate funding and support from the government. Funding is a critical factor that should be considered if the HBC is to have meaningful impact on society. So far, the government has fared well in the implementation cycle of the HBC but need to improve on timelines in training of teachers and resourcing for teaching and learning materials. The Secretary's Circular No. 4 of 2024 pointed that the HBC implementation start date was May 2024. Trainings at the grassroots started eight months late. Syllabi were provided in December and school-based projects also started late. The need to stick to timelines have to be seriously considered so that there is full implementation.

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