



NATIONAL ECONOMIC CONSULTATIVE FORUM

POLICY PAPER

**ANALYSIS OF ZIMBABWE'S HERITAGE BASED CURRICULUM:
IMPACT AND FEASIBILITY**

2025

Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Background	1
3.0 Historical Overview of Curriculum Changes	2
4.0 Conclusion	5
5.0 Recommendations for Enhancing Zimbabwe's Education Curriculum.....	6
6.0 References.....	9

1.0 Introduction

The education curriculum in Zimbabwe has undergone significant transformations over the years, reflecting broader socio-economic and policy shifts. One of the most notable changes was the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2015, which adopted a hybrid assessment model aimed at fostering practical skills alongside academic knowledge. More recently, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education launched the Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC), a framework designed to integrate Zimbabwe's cultural and historical heritage into the education system. This shift represents a long-overdue response to the recommendations of the 1999 Nziramasanga Commission, which underscored the need for an education system that is both contextually relevant and forward-looking (University of Zimbabwe, 1999).

Introduced in 2025, the HBC seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application by emphasizing competencies that align with Zimbabwe's developmental aspirations. Unlike previous curricula, which primarily focused on subject-specific knowledge acquisition, the HBC prioritizes a holistic learning approach that nurtures students' inherent skills, critical thinking abilities, and problem-solving capacities. By embedding societal values and real-world applications into education, the HBC aims to produce well-rounded graduates who can effectively contribute to national development.

However, while the HBC presents an innovative approach to curriculum design, its successful implementation depends on several factors, including teacher preparedness, resource availability, and alignment with labour market demands. This paper critically examines the implications of the updated curriculum on teaching methodologies, assessment strategies, and student outcomes. It also explores potential challenges and opportunities within the framework, offering policy recommendations to enhance the quality, relevance, and sustainability of Zimbabwe's education system.

2.0 Background

Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education while promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. It emphasizes universal access to quality early childhood, primary, secondary, and higher education, the elimination of gender disparities, the provision of relevant skills for employment, and the promotion of education that fosters sustainable development and global citizenship (UN, 2015). In alignment with these objectives, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) undertook a comprehensive review of Zimbabwe's school curriculum in 2015. This reform marked a shift from a traditional assessment model to a hybrid system incorporating Continuous Assessment (CA) alongside Summative Examinations (SE). The goal was to establish a more holistic approach to

student evaluation and learning. In response, the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC), established in 1996, adopted this model to improve the assessment of learners' progress and competencies.

The Competency-Based Curriculum Framework (2015–2022) introduced Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALAs) as part of a broader strategy to address gaps in the previous education system. This framework sought to evaluate competencies beyond those measurable through summative assessments, recognizing the limitations of relying solely on traditional examinations. However, as the implementation of CALAs progressed, concerns emerged regarding the overwhelming workload placed on students and teachers, as well as the practical challenges of effectively integrating continuous assessment into the education system.

In 2024, the curriculum underwent further revision, culminating in the adoption of the Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC). This framework reflects a paradigm shift towards an education system that is not only competency-based but also rooted in Zimbabwe's cultural, historical, and developmental context. The HBC is designed to cultivate an emancipatory and transformative learning environment by fostering practical skills, critical thinking, and creativity. A key feature of the revised curriculum is its two-route assessment model, which accommodates diverse learner aspirations: the academic route, tailored for students pursuing higher education, and the vocational route, designed for those seeking trade and technical skills (Sunday Mail, 2025). Additionally, the curriculum streamlines learning areas into six core subjects, reducing the burden of excessive assessments while maintaining a focus on essential competencies.

Despite the progressive vision of the HBC, several challenges remain. Studies indicate that many teachers lack the necessary expertise in competency-based assessment, hindering the effective implementation of continuous evaluation. Furthermore, while digital technologies present opportunities for enhancing learning, they also introduce barriers, particularly in resource-constrained environments where access to technology is limited. The success of the HBC will therefore depend on the availability of adequate training for educators, the provision of necessary resources, and the alignment of assessment methods with the broader objectives of Vision 2030, which seeks to develop a skilled workforce capable of contributing to Zimbabwe's economic transformation.

3.0 Historical Overview of Curriculum Changes

The shift to a competence-based curriculum is underpinned by various educational theories and frameworks. Continuous assessment plays a pivotal role in guiding educational decisions, offering feedback, and improving instructional efficacy (Masters, 2014; Huba & Freed, 2000). Empirical research demonstrates that effective assessment practices actively engage students in learning while fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

However, the implementation of curriculum reforms is often fraught with challenges, given that such changes disrupt entrenched beliefs and institutional norms (Fullan, 2015). High costs, uncertainty regarding outcomes, and resistance from risk-averse stakeholders further complicate the reform process. Moreover, substantial investments are required in teacher training, capacity building, and resource development to ensure the successful adoption of new educational methodologies. Many countries experience a strong inclination towards maintaining traditional educational practices rather than embracing reform (OECD, 2017). The integration of digital technologies in education also presents significant barriers, particularly in resource-constrained environments, where issues of accessibility and usability persist.

South Korea provides a compelling case study of successful curriculum transformation. Major reforms implemented in 2009 and 2015 sought to decentralize education, shifting from rote learning to a competency-based model that grants local schools greater autonomy. These changes emphasized the development of key competencies, including self-management and analytical skills, which have been instrumental in South Korea's emergence as a global leader in high-tech industries. High schools, such as Busan Design High School, pioneered specialization as early as 1998, paving the way for industry-backed education reforms. Industrial collaboration has been a defining feature of South Korea's curriculum reform, with companies investing in research and development to align education with market needs. Education expenditure increased substantially, rising from 52 trillion won to 84 trillion won in 2022, reflecting strong governmental support for educational advancement (Ayhan, 2024). The rigorous selection and training of teachers further strengthen the system, ensuring high pedagogical standards and subject mastery (OECD, 2019).

South Korea's success is also attributable to effective governmental support structures. Local education authorities work closely with schools to ensure the seamless execution of national policies. The integration of digital technology has revolutionized South Korean classrooms, equipping them with interactive whiteboards, digital projectors, and high-speed Internet, thereby fostering an immersive learning experience. Initiatives such as the Free Semester Program, introduced in 2013, reduced examination pressure while promoting innovative assessments and career-related learning. More recently, the focus has shifted to artificial intelligence (AI) education, with pilot schools integrating AI-focused curricula. The Creative Schools Initiative, launched in 2018, underscores the importance of nurturing creativity and an entrepreneurial mindset, preparing students for the digital economy. South Korea's reforms have significantly improved student outcomes, as evidenced by the country's high rankings in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2019).

A similarly transformative approach has been adopted in British Columbia, Canada, through the K-12 Innovation Strategy, which promotes personalized learning and curricular flexibility. This initiative reduces the prescriptive nature of content-driven

curricula, emphasizing higher-order thinking and deep learning (Frost, 2024). Key principles of the reform include enhancing school autonomy, prioritizing essential learning, and fostering cross-curricular competencies that support lifelong learning. The British Columbian model empowers educators with greater autonomy, enabling them to tailor instruction to students' unique needs. Per-student spending in government schools increased by 6.7% from 2012/13 to 2021/22, demonstrating sustained investment in education (Zwaagstra, 2023). Canada's consistent outperformance of the United States in PISA exams further highlights the effectiveness of its curriculum innovations. This presents valuable lessons for Zimbabwe's Heritage-Based Curriculum, which could benefit from similar flexibility and competency-focused learning models.

Despite the promising prospects of competency-based curricula, Zimbabwe has encountered significant challenges in implementing its Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). A study by Ndongwe et al. (2024) found that inadequate teacher training remains a critical issue, with 80% of school heads and 70% of teachers citing insufficient in-service training as a major concern. Most educators received only three days of training, which they consider inadequate for effectively implementing the new curriculum. Other impediments include limited government and external support, shortages of essential learning materials, and overcrowded classrooms. Teachers often manage large class sizes while teaching subjects outside their areas of expertise, further complicating curriculum delivery. Additionally, 60% of school heads and 90% of teachers highlighted the absence of a clear policy framework for effective curriculum implementation, resulting in demotivation and lack of professional development opportunities. Addressing these deficiencies is imperative for the CBC to achieve its intended educational objectives (Ndongwe et al., 2024).

Uganda's experience with its thematic primary curriculum, introduced in 2007, presents cautionary lessons. The reform aimed to enhance literacy and numeracy through thematic learning and mother-tongue instruction. However, ineffective implementation has led to persistently low literacy and numeracy levels. Contributing factors include inadequate teacher training, textbook shortages, and insufficient supervisory support (SESIL 2, 2018). This underscores the importance of robust teacher capacity building and resource allocation in ensuring curriculum success.

Vietnam's primary curriculum reform, as highlighted in the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (2013/14), offers valuable insights. The country's education strategy prioritized reducing curriculum overload by focusing on a limited number of subjects. The report emphasized the need to strengthen foundational language and numeracy skills before introducing complex concepts. Additionally, Vietnam adopted a multilingual approach by employing language assistants to support minority students, ensuring equitable access to education (UNESCO, 2014). Zimbabwe could adopt similar strategies to streamline its curriculum and enhance foundational learning.

South Africa's curriculum transformation journey provides further lessons. The post-apartheid government sought to dismantle the racially divisive education system, leading to multiple curriculum revisions. Curriculum 2005, introduced in the late 1990s, was criticized for its complexity and lack of substantive content. This was later addressed through the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12, culminating in the introduction of Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) in 2012. These policies provided clearer teaching and assessment guidelines, enhancing curriculum coherence. Despite improvements, challenges such as poor parental involvement, weak school governance, and ineffective leadership continue to hinder educational progress (Modisaotsile, 2012). These experiences suggest that while curriculum reform is necessary, effective implementation requires strong institutional support, adequate training, and well-defined policy frameworks.

Zimbabwe's competency-based curriculum reform can draw valuable lessons from these international experiences. South Korea and Canada demonstrate the importance of sustained investment in education, teacher training, and digital integration. Vietnam and Uganda highlight the necessity of prioritizing foundational literacy and numeracy skills while avoiding curriculum overload. South Africa's challenges underscore the need for a clear regulatory framework, effective school leadership, and strong stakeholder engagement. By addressing these critical areas, Zimbabwe can enhance the effectiveness of its curriculum reform and create a more dynamic and competency-driven education system.

4.0 Conclusion

The ongoing evolution of Zimbabwe's education curriculum, particularly the introduction of the HBC, marks a significant step towards aligning the education system with the country's socio-economic and developmental needs. The HBC, with its dual assessment routes and emphasis on competencies, represents an important shift towards producing graduates equipped with practical skills, critical thinking abilities, and a deep understanding of Zimbabwe's cultural and historical heritage. This shift is essential for addressing the country's developmental challenges and advancing towards Vision 2030.

However, the successful implementation of the HBC and its predecessors, including the CBC, hinges on several critical factors. The lack of adequate teacher training, limited access to resources, and insufficient policy frameworks present substantial barriers to effective execution. To realize the full potential of these reforms, substantial investments in teacher capacity building, resource allocation, and infrastructure development are required. Additionally, a robust policy framework is essential to guide the consistent and effective delivery of the curriculum across the education system.

International experiences, particularly those of South Korea, Canada, and Vietnam, provide valuable lessons for Zimbabwe in terms of curriculum flexibility, the integration

of digital technologies, and the need for sustained investment in education. These examples underscore the importance of aligning curriculum reforms with labour market needs, promoting stakeholder collaboration, and ensuring that foundational skills are not overlooked in the drive for innovation. Zimbabwe could benefit from adopting similar strategies that emphasize competency-based learning while addressing the structural challenges that hinder the successful implementation of curriculum reforms.

Ultimately, for Zimbabwe's education system to achieve its objectives and meet the expectations of national development, key actions such as enhancing teacher training, improving resource allocation, strengthening institutional support, and fostering stakeholder engagement are essential. By addressing these areas, Zimbabwe can build a more resilient, inclusive, and competency-driven education system capable of contributing meaningfully to the country's socio-economic transformation.

5.0 Recommendations for Enhancing Zimbabwe's Education Curriculum

The following recommendations are designed to address critical gaps in education assessment, curriculum relevance, teacher training, resource provision, and stakeholder engagement. By prioritizing continuous professional development, digital integration, and enhanced collaboration among key stakeholders, these recommendations aim to inform public policy and ensure that education systems adapt to the evolving needs of society and the economy. Through a comprehensive approach that fosters innovation, inclusivity, and lifelong learning, these strategies seek to elevate the quality of education and better prepare students for future challenges.

1. Enhance Teacher Training and Professional Development

To ensure the successful implementation of the HBC and other competency-based education reforms, there must be a comprehensive overhaul of teacher training programs. This should include expanded in-service training, continuous professional development opportunities, and the provision of specialized courses focused on competency-based assessment and pedagogical skills. Teachers must be equipped not only with subject-specific knowledge but also with the skills to foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving in students. This would help address the current inadequacies in teacher preparedness and ensure that educators are capable of effectively delivering the new curriculum.

2. Strengthen Institutional and Policy Support

Clear and consistent policy guidelines are essential for the successful implementation of the HBC. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should provide comprehensive support structures that include detailed curriculum guidelines, regular monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms to assess the progress of curriculum adoption. Strengthening institutional support will also involve creating a robust feedback system

where teachers, school administrators, and other stakeholders can provide input on the challenges they face, enabling the Ministry to make informed adjustments as needed. Establishing a clear regulatory framework would help reduce confusion and improve the overall coherence of the education system.

3. Improve Resource Allocation and Infrastructure

Adequate resources, both in terms of teaching materials and technological infrastructure are critical for the success of the HBC. The government should prioritize the provision of essential learning materials and invest in digital technologies to enhance learning experiences. This includes increasing access to computers, internet connectivity, and interactive learning tools, especially in rural and underserved areas. In addition, addressing the issue of overcrowded classrooms by reducing student-teacher ratios would improve the learning environment and allow for more personalized and effective teaching.

4. Promote Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

For the HBC to align with national developmental goals, collaboration between government, educational institutions, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders is crucial. The government should actively engage with industry leaders, policymakers, and local communities to ensure that the curriculum meets the evolving demands of the labour market. Encouraging partnerships with industries and vocational training centers could help tailor education to specific skills required in the workforce. Furthermore, promoting community involvement in curriculum design and implementation would foster a sense of ownership and support for the reforms.

5. Emphasize Foundational Skills and Reduce Curriculum Overload

While the HBC aims to equip students with a broad range of competencies, it is crucial that foundational skills, such as literacy and numeracy, remain a core focus of the curriculum. Care should be taken to avoid curriculum overload, as seen in some international cases. Zimbabwe could benefit from streamlining the curriculum to ensure that students gain a strong foundation before progressing to more complex concepts. This would help prevent cognitive overload and ensure that students have the necessary skills to succeed in both academic and vocational routes.

6. Stability in the Implementation of the Curriculum

There is a need to avoid constantly updating the syllabus, as these frequent changes may suggest that insufficient research was conducted when the curriculum was revised in 2015. A better approach would have been to conduct a pilot project in various communities over a two-year period to evaluate the feasibility of the new curriculum and then implement it based on the insights gained from the pilot.

7. Teacher Recruitment

For the curriculum to be successful, it is essential to hire additional teachers to create a more sustainable student-teacher ratio. This will prevent teachers from being overwhelmed, allowing them to manage their workloads effectively. Consequently, they'll be able to gather feedback from each student, facilitating personalized learning experiences.

8. Increase Education Spending

It is necessary to raise budget allocations for education from approximately 3% to 5% of GDP in order to align with international standards and to guarantee the effective implementation of the HBC.

9. Monitor and Evaluate Curriculum Implementation

Effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are vital to ensuring that the HBC and other curriculum reforms meet their intended objectives. The government should establish clear M&E frameworks that assess the quality and outcomes of curriculum delivery. Regular assessments of student performance, teacher effectiveness, and curriculum relevance should be conducted to identify gaps and areas for improvement. This process should be participatory, involving input from educators, students, and parents to ensure that feedback is accurately captured and acted upon.

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