Heritage based curriculum: Teacher preparedness and implementation- a case for Zimbabwe

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Abstract: On May 7, 2024, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education launched the Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) [1]. The primary objective of HBC is to prepare students for active citizenship and instill in them a deep appreciation for the Zimbabwean philosophical principles of unhu/ubuntu/vumunhu. Furthermore, HBC emphasizes the preservation and transmission of cultural, historical, and traditional knowledge [2]. Teachers play a crucial role in the implementation of this curriculum, as they are often referred to as curriculum implementers [3]. This paper is guided by four key questions: (1) What is your understanding of HBC? (2) How do you perceive teacher preparedness? (3) In what ways can teachers be supported to ensure effective curriculum implementation? (4) What challenges do teachers encounter during the implementation of HBC? This study focuses on teacher preparedness for HBC implementation, specifically in the Gutu District of Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. It is grounded in curriculum theory, which provides a framework for various curriculum-related tasks, including design, development, implementation, and supervision. The methodology employed purposive sampling, along with focus groups and interviews with secondary school teachers in the Gutu district. Research findings indicated that HBC had not yet been introduced in schools, teachers had not undergone in-service training, and they were unprepared for the new curriculum. The timing of the May 7, 2024, launch, combined with the lack of teacher engagement, can be likened to the Igbo proverb about "going for a cry without eyes." This study advocates for a grassroots approach to curriculum implementation, which recognizes the essential role of teachers in this process [4]. Additionally, the study recommends comprehensive in-service training for teachers prior to the introduction of HBC to ensure effective implementation. Engaging parents as stakeholders can further enhance deep learning by promoting inquiry-based approaches [5]. Ultimately, the study concludes that HBC holds significant potential to cultivate patriotism and reinforce the Zimbabwean philosophy of ubuntu/unhu/vumunhu, thereby contributing to the decolonization of the curriculum.

Keywords: Curriculum development, Curriculum implementation, Curriculum reform and Curriculum decolonization, Curriculum theory, Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC), Teacher preparedness.

1. Introduction and Background

Wahlström [6] characterizes curriculum as the comprehensive learning activities that are either planned or facilitated by educational institutions, encompassing both group and individual learning situations both within and outside the school environment. The curriculum delineates the content to be learned by students and provides educators with methods to evaluate and assess student learning outcomes. Without a structured curriculum, teachers may lack assurance that they are delivering pertinent content or offering students the necessary opportunities for success in their subsequent educational pursuits. Mohammed [7] describes curriculum as the officially selected body of knowledge

that the government, through the Ministry of Education or any board providing education, intends for students to learn. On May 7, 2024, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education introduced the Heritage Based Curriculum (HBC) [8]. This initiative aims to develop highly competent students with a national perspective consistent with Zimbabwe's National Vision 2030, which aspires to establish an upper middle-income society by the year 2030, guided by National Development Strategies 1 and 2 (2021-2030). According to Permanent Secretary's Circular No. 4 of 2024, key objectives of the HBC include promoting and valuing Zimbabwean identity, preparing students for active citizenship, fostering peace and sustainable development, and reinforcing values aligned with the Zimbabwean philosophical principles of Unhu/Ubuntu/Vumunhu.

Heritage encompasses our natural and human resources, including flora, fauna, water, minerals, and human capital, which our educational system seeks to leverage [9]. A fundamental principle of Heritage Based Curriculum is to create an educational framework that delivers economic value through the sustainable utilization of heritage resources. The HBC is implemented with consideration of the environmental context it aims to enhance, focusing on equipping students with the skills, values, and attitudes necessary for life and professional success. Prior to the adoption of the Heritage Based Curriculum, Zimbabwean schools operated under a Competence Based Curriculum [10]. The primary distinction between CBC and HBC lies in their focus and educational objectives. CBC prioritizes developing the skills and competencies essential for success in real-world scenarios [11]. It emphasizes practical skills, problem-solving capabilities, and the application of knowledge across diverse contexts. Conversely, HBC highlights the importance of preserving and transmitting cultural, historical, and traditional knowledge Masika [2] centering on comprehension and appreciation of cultural heritage, values, and historical contexts. Additionally, the educational goals demonstrate distinct differences. CBC seeks to provide students with skills and competencies suitable for direct application in daily life [12] while HBC aims to cultivate a profound understanding of cultural heritage. HBC emphasizes historical events, traditional practices, languages, and values, fostering a sense of identity and connection to the past.

In summary, while CBC is focused on practical skills and real-world applications, HBC is dedicated to nurturing cultural and historical awareness and preservation. The development and implementation of a curriculum can be complex; thus, engaging all stakeholders, particularly those directly involved in student instruction, is crucial for successful execution Capita [4]. Alsubaie [13] asserts that the teacher is the most pivotal figure in the curriculum implementation process. Teachers play a vital role in transforming curriculum innovations into classroom practices [14] and the transition to a new curriculum necessitates changes in teaching methodologies [8]. Given their knowledge, experience, and competencies, teachers are central to any curriculum implementation initiative.

The shift from CBC to HBC requires a transformation in instructional orientation Cheng'ere [15] and the associated changes in pedagogy necessitate targeted training for educators, enabling them to navigate the paradigm shift and adopt pedagogical strategies that facilitate effective curriculum implementation. Therefore, it is essential to assess how prepared teachers are to implement the new curriculum in schools. This study aims to investigate teacher preparedness, and the implementation of the Heritage Based Curriculum in public secondary schools within the Gutu district of Masvingo province, Zimbabwe.

2. Statement of the Problem
HBC aims to promote and foster a strong sense of Zimbabwean identity among pupils, encouraging them to embrace and practice the philosophical principles of Unhu/Ubuntu/Vumunhu [16]. Like many African nations, Zimbabwe adopted educational values established during colonial rule, which were later seen as essential for development in postcolonial contexts [17]. Within this framework, HBC represents an initiative to decolonize the curriculum. The process of curriculum decolonization is generally understood as the dismantling of educational systems that have been dominated by foreign practices and Eurocentric knowledge, to better serve marginalized and formerly colonized communities,

particularly in Africa [14]. HBC serves to break away from colonial legacies and to instil in pupils an understanding and appreciation of their cultural heritage, values, and history in post-colonial contexts [2].

However, the transition to HBC in Botswana encountered significant implementation challenges, primarily due to a lack of preparedness among teachers [18]. Insufficient training and professional development opportunities left many educators unprepared to effectively deliver HBC content. Similarly, the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Zimbabwe has faced its own set of challenges that have hindered its efficacy. Issues such as inadequate implementation strategies and lack of support systems for teachers have been noted [19]. Educators frequently struggle with the shift from traditional to competency-based methods because of insufficient knowledge regarding the new curriculum. With the introduction of HBC, this study will utilize Zimbabwe as a case study to examine the extent to which educators have been empowered to execute these curriculum transformations. The primary research question guiding this inquiry is: To what extent are teachers prepared to implement HBC to address issues of Zimbabwean identity and to foster an appreciation of Unhu/Ubuntu/Vunhu among pupils?

By investigating teacher preparedness and the implementation of HBC, this study aims to inform policy on effective strategies to cultivate highly competent students with a distinctly Zimbabwean perspective. Based on the research findings, we will provide recommendations for empowering teachers to successfully deliver the aims of HBC. This study will contribute to the ongoing discourse regarding the necessity of empowering educators to transform the Zimbabwean curriculum in line with decolonization efforts. The purpose of this study is to examine the preparedness and implementation of HBC by teachers in Zimbabwe. To achieve this objective, the research will focus on the following questions:

2.1. Research Questions
The study was guided by the following research questions:
1) What is your understanding of HBC?
2) What is your perception of teacher preparedness in the implementation of HBC?
3) How can teachers be supported to ensure fidelity of curriculum implementation?
4) What are the challenges teachers face in the implementation of HBC?

3. Theoretical Framework
A theoretical framework articulates and examines the underlying theory that elucidates the existence of the research problem under investigation [20]. It serves as the foundation for a specific theoretical approach. In this research, curriculum theory is employed as a lens to analyse the available literature on teacher preparedness and the implementation of the HBC in Zimbabwean schools. Curriculum theory, which gained prominence through the work of Didace and Andala [21] and Yasar and Aslan [22] is instrumental in various aspects of education, including the design, development, implementation, and supervision of curricula. It provides guidance for educators in areas such as lesson planning, instructional delivery, student engagement, and progress assessment. Furthermore, curriculum theory aids planners in selecting appropriate methods for implementation and evaluation, organizing relevant content and learning experiences, and clearly articulating curricular goals [23]. This study focuses specifically on curriculum implementation.

4. Literature Review
4.1. Heritage Based Curriculum
According to UNESCO [24] the curriculum serves as a crucial means through which a country equips its citizens with the essential skills, attitudes, and values necessary for personal and national development. It can also be interpreted as a collection of educational experiences that inform the teaching and learning process in schools and other educational contexts. A curriculum delineates the

expected learning outcomes for students, encompassing the knowledge, skills, and competencies they are anticipated to acquire [25]. The selection of these educational experiences is typically the responsibility of the Ministry of Education or relevant educational boards [7].

Permanent Secretary's Circular No. 4 of 2017 defines heritage as the natural resources of Zimbabwe. These resources include flora, fauna, water, minerals, and human capital that should be leveraged by our education system. In the context of Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC), the guiding principle is an education system that delivers goods and services that are beneficial to the economy, drawing upon these heritage resources. Heritage represents the legacy of the past, which we selectively adapt for current relevance. It embodies the inheritance we pass on to future generations, enabling them to apply it purposefully within their own contexts.

The documentation of HBC's history in southern Africa is limited [26]. However, globally, HBC's origins trace back to the 1960s, emphasizing its role in providing individuals with a sense of history and belonging [27]. HBC seeks to preserve significant aspects of the past for public education purposes. Shava and Zazu [26] concluded that the development of HBC in post-colonial southern Africa is closely linked to the region's colonial history. Research indicates that HBC was officially launched in Zimbabwe on May 7, 2024 [28]. Other southern African nations, including Botswana, Lesotho, and Namibia, are also engaging in various HBC initiatives [27]. HBC can be regarded as an effort to reform and decolonize the curriculum in post-colonial southern African states. This decolonization process entails dismantling educational frameworks dominated by foreign practices and Eurocentric viewpoints to make room for indigenous knowledge and the perspectives of formerly colonized populations [14, 29-32]. Asserts that this process involves revising and restructuring content and practices to challenge and eliminate colonial biases and perspectives.

The colonial education system inherited by Zimbabwe has been characterized as racist, individualistic, competitive, Eurocentric, and capitalist, necessitating reconstruction to better serve the needs of the Zimbabwean populace Chimbi and Jita [14]. Bhurekeni [33] argues that this educational model did not originate from the values and needs of the African communities it aimed to serve. Ideally, education should emerge organically from the local environment and the learning process should address societal needs. Historically, the European-imposed curriculum was designed to further their interests, and thus, it is imperative for Africans to develop a curriculum that reflects their own continent and aspirations, rather than relying on external assistance.

Based on existing literature, the objectives of HBC are outlined as follows.

4.2. Promoting a Sense of Identity, Ownership and Responsibility

HBC is considered crucial in promoting a sense of ownership, identity and responsibility in pupils [34]. Through HBC pupils are made aware of their identity and responsibilities that would necessitate them to be active participants in the preservation of their endowments [35]. The sense of ownership, identity and responsibility is very important especially in the context of post-colonial Africa where colonisation and marginalisation took centre stage in the management of heritage resources. Colonisation led indigenous people lose their identity and ownership of their natural endowments [36].

4.3. Preparing Pupils for Peace, Participatory Citizenship and Sustainable Development

HBC is viewed as playing a critical role in promoting peace, participatory citizenship and sustainable development among pupils. In the context of post-colonial southern Africa, HBC as Chimbunde and Moreeng, 2023a posit, has great potential to promote respect and tolerance of cultural diversity thereby enhancing social cohesion, peace and sustainable development.

4.4. Promoting Critical Thinking and Creativity

HBC promotes the development of children as critical and creative thinkers [24]. Such skills are essential for both personal and social development [24]. In the context of post-colonial Southern Africa, it is important for learners to develop critical thinking skills to facilitate the reconstruction of their

heritage. According to İSLAMOĞLU [37] HBC emphasizes both historical and contemporary aspects, thereby providing learners the opportunity to create and appreciate their own heritage. When effectively designed, HBC supports learners in constructing their heritage from their unique perspectives [38].

4.5. Cherishing the Zimbabwean philosophical orientation of Unhu/Ubuntu/ Vumunhu

Permanent Secretary's Circular No. 4 of 2024 indicates that HBC is enhancing efforts to instil in students an appreciation for and adherence to the Zimbabwean philosophy of Unhu/Ubuntu/Vumunhu. Unhu is significant as it encompasses core values such as mutual respect, interconnectedness, and communal harmony. This philosophy underscores the notion that an individual's well-being is intricately linked to the greater good of the community [39]. It encourages individuals to act with kindness, reflect on the implications of their values on others, and collaborate for the benefit of the community, ultimately fostering a more cohesive and harmonious society.

5. Teacher Preparedness in the Implementation of HBC

The transition from CBC to HBC necessitates modifications in instructional methods; thus, prioritizing comprehensive teacher induction in HBC is essential for the successful implementation of the curriculum [40]. According to Zindi [1] teachers are fundamental to curriculum delivery and must possess thorough knowledge, skills, and capabilities to integrate various components effectively to foster an optimal learning environment. Their role is critical, as they are responsible for making decisions on what to teach from the established curriculum. Successful implementation of curriculum innovations occurs when educators understand the requirements of the curriculum Okoth [41]. Ocak and Olur [42] assert that to teach effectively and facilitate learning, teachers need to have pedagogical knowledge and skills to incorporate HBC aspects as core competencies in their instruction. This indicates that teacher training is vital for the effective execution of HBC in educational settings.

Teachers are instrumental in creating opportunities for students to learn and reach their potential [43]. In the context of HBC, educators must embrace a shift from a teaching-centred approach to a learning-centred paradigm and conduct formative assessments of student progress. Similarly, Syomwene [23] emphasizes the importance for teachers to recognize their role in bridging the gap between the curriculum and learners during instruction. Therefore, educators require knowledge and skills that empower them to implement appropriate pedagogical strategies, develop lesson plans, design assessment tools, and choose suitable instructional materials that cater to students at varying levels of proficiency.

Syomwene [23] highlights the significance of reflective lesson planning. Hadisaputra, et al. [44] define a lesson plan as a written outline detailing the procedures, content, materials, time allocation, and learning environment involved in instruction. Research has examined the influence of teacher training on lesson planning and its effect on curriculum implementation. Mosothwane [45] conducted a study evaluating the role of trained primary school teachers as key agents in curriculum implementation in South Africa. The findings indicated that teachers are critical in executing the curriculum and recommended that to achieve educational goals, teachers must be trained in developing effective lesson plans for the new curriculum prior to engaging in the implementation process. This underscores the necessity of prioritizing teacher training before rolling out a new curriculum.

In Cameroon, a study by Zhuwale and Shumba [46] assessed the extent of HBC implementation in primary schools. The results revealed that many teachers lacked an understanding of HBC. Furthermore, even those who had received training and were knowledgeable about the curriculum faced significant challenges in effective implementation, primarily due to resource shortages and a lack of improvisational skills. The study concluded that for teachers to implement a curriculum effectively, they must be knowledgeable and adequately resourced. This lends support to the notion that HBC implementation may be hindered by teachers' inadequate knowledge and skills regarding the curriculum, as well as resource limitations.

Muzvondiwa and Gudyanga [47] conducted research on teacher preparedness to implement a newly developed Grade 3 curriculum in Zimbabwe, focusing on teachers' competency in lesson planning according to the new curriculum. Their findings indicated that the training provided to educators was insufficient for effective curriculum implementation. The study suggested that the Ministry of Education should introduce short courses to address knowledge gaps among teachers concerning the new curriculum. This emphasizes the critical need for training teachers on lesson plan development whenever a new curriculum is instituted.

Another investigation by Zhuwale and Shumba [46] explored factors impeding the smooth implementation of the curriculum in rural Zimbabwean schools. The study found that teachers' limited knowledge of how to integrate the new curriculum's components into their instruction was a major obstacle. Consequently, the study recommended comprehensive training for teachers in the new curriculum, affirming that such training is essential for effectively incorporating various elements of the curriculum.

Sabola [48] conducted a study in Malawi to evaluate the training of teachers in relation to the revised primary school curriculum. The research aimed to determine whether teachers could develop suitable measurement and evaluation tools for the revised curriculum. The findings suggested that teachers were largely unable to implement the curriculum effectively, and many had not received training on the necessary instructional methods. This highlights the importance of training teachers to implement curriculum changes, especially those involving new assessment approaches.

Permanent Secretary's Circular No. 4 of 2024 outlines the implementation modalities for HBC, which include maintaining Continuous Assessment Learning Areas (CALAs) for examination classes (Grades 7, Form 4, and Form 6) to complete the assessment cycle for submission to the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC). Non-examination classes (Grades 6, Form 3, and Form 5) will initiate School-Based Projects (SBP) in May 2024, with each student undertaking one project per learning area per year. SBPs differ from CALAs and require new assessment methods.

The successful implementation of a curriculum is significantly influenced by the training and professional development of teachers. This was highlighted by Kisirkoi and Kamanga [49] in their research on the impact of teacher training and professional development on science curriculum implementation in Kenya. The study concluded that these factors are essential for effective curriculum delivery. It recommended that the government prioritize continuous training and professional development opportunities for teachers through in-service programs to enhance curriculum implementation.

6. Challenges to Curriculum Implementation

Numerous factors can impede the successful implementation of a new curriculum. Mitchell [50] identified key factors, including the role of teachers and the environment in which the curriculum is deployed. The successful implementation of a new curriculum may encounter challenges such as:

6.1. In-service Training of Teachers

Research indicates that insufficient in-service training for teachers is a significant barrier to effective curriculum implementation [51]. Changes in curriculum necessitate modifications in both content and pedagogical approaches from teachers. This underscores the need for teachers to receive support during curriculum transitions to address new expectations. Katshuna and Shikalepo [52] examined curriculum implementation in South Africa and highlighted the inadequate preparation of many teachers to engage with the proposed changes. Similarly, Mandukwini [53] noted that the curriculum was introduced in an environment lacking sufficient teacher training and curriculum initiation. Therefore, the training and ongoing professional development for in-service teachers responsible for executing the new curriculum is critical [44]. These findings emphasize the importance of curriculum awareness for teachers prior to implementation, ensuring they comprehend and appreciate the changes intended by the new curriculum, thus equipping them to enact these changes effectively. Ogar and Aniefiok [54] cautioned that adequate

teacher training is essential, as the success of any curriculum implementation relies heavily on teachers' ability to translate the official curriculum into meaningful classroom experiences.

6.2. Knowledge of Content

In a discussion on professional development and reforms in science education in the Ngwenya [55] noted that a lack of understanding of the new curriculum content among teachers is a significant barrier to implementation. Similar findings by Mellegård and Pettersen [56] and Sadler, et al. [57] indicated that teachers' insufficient subject matter knowledge hampers the successful execution of the curriculum in classrooms. Katshuna and Shikalepo [52] also found that the effective implementation of a curriculum in Israeli schools was contingent on school-specific circumstances and the availability of specialized teachers for subjects.

6.3. Provision of Instructional Materials

The effective implementation of a curriculum also relies on the availability and quantity of instructional materials within schools Choppin, et al. [58]. Didace and Andala [21] emphasized that a lack of instructional resources is a significant obstacle to the successful execution of a curriculum. Oche [59] highlighted the critical role of textbooks as a constraint in curriculum implementation, arguing that they provide a structured and coherent presentation of content that educators may not otherwise access. With adequate textbook resources, teachers can serve as a primary source of knowledge for students preparing for national examinations [48].

6.4. Supervisory Support Services

Mohammed [7] asserted that a lack of supervisory support for teachers can hinder the successful implementation of any curriculum. Chitamba and Jita [60] emphasized the importance of teacher supervision, noting that "observation followed by immediate and expert feedback on classroom instruction provides a basis for teacher learning with direct relevance to teaching" (p. 2). They reported that in Thailand, head teachers are expected to regularly supervise their staff, either personally or through delegated representatives. In Zimbabwe, school inspectors, heads, deputy heads, and heads of departments are responsible for providing teacher support services through regular classroom supervision [48].

7. Teacher Support for Fidelity Curriculum Implementation

Teachers play a pivotal role in the implementation of curriculum; without the necessary skills, effective change is unlikely to occur [61]. The significance of teachers in this process cannot be overstated. Professional development is a critical component of successful curriculum implementation, as highlighted by Govender [62]. Iskandar [63] aptly states that "the continuous development of all teachers is the cornerstone of meaning, improvement, and reform." This underscores the necessity for ongoing professional development to enable teachers to adapt their practices and effectively implement new curricula with fidelity. Despite the recognized importance of this professional development, evidence from South Africa and beyond indicates that it is often insufficient [56, 64, 65]. Permanent Secretary's Circular No. 4 of 2024 outlines the direction for implementing HBC starting in May 2024 but fails to address the professional development needs of teachers, who are instrumental to this effort. The Circular emphasizes that "it is incumbent upon every school to effectively implement the provision of this circular" [16]. According to Fareo [66] during a period of change, everyone requires additional support. Consequently, it is essential to provide multifaceted support to teachers responsible for curriculum implementation at the classroom level [65].

7.1. Teacher Ownership

Teacher ownership of the new curriculum is essential for facilitating change [67]. This concept can be understood as a "mental or psychological state of feeling ownership of an innovation, which develops

through the teacher's mental and/or physical investment in it" [68]. In this context, Kafyulilo, et al. [40] define ownership as a condition in which teachers perceive the curriculum as their own, fostering a willingness to assume responsibilities, take risks, and make sacrifices. Penuel, et al. [61] argue that teacher ownership can be nurtured and enhanced through the co-construction of the curriculum. Furthermore, engagement of teachers throughout the design, development, and implementation phases, either as individuals or teams, can significantly strengthen this ownership [69].

7.2. Support from School Management Team

The school management team is instrumental in guiding and facilitating the successful implementation of the curriculum at the school level. This team is responsible for creating a supportive environment conducive to teaching and learning [60]. They play a vital role in initiating communication and fostering support for teachers to implement the new curriculum [67]. Importantly, the management team can establish structures that promote collaboration among teachers in curriculum implementation and organize professional development sessions at both departmental and school levels. Additionally, they should incorporate curriculum reform into their strategic development plans [67]. Instructional leaders can further support curriculum implementation by promoting professional learning communities (PLCs), which bring together school professionals to collaboratively focus on effective curriculum implementation [60].

7.3. Bottom-Up/ Grass Root Approaches

Skedsmo and Huber [70] highlight that developed countries such as Singapore, Finland, and Australia employ a bottom-up approach, also referred to as grassroots curriculum development. They explain that in this model, decisions are made by teachers who are responsible for implementing the curriculum. This process fosters a sense of ownership among teachers and enhances their awareness of the necessary changes. Setiawan [69] emphasizes that both teachers and students play a crucial role in the change processes associated with the grassroots approach. Carl [71] argues that those who implement and utilize the curriculum should be actively involved in its development to ensure accountability. In Finland, teachers are granted the autonomy to make suggestions regarding curriculum design [72]. They are encouraged to initiate school-based curricula and personalized instructional methods. As a result of this involvement and autonomy, Skedsmo and Huber [70] assert that teachers' motivation, sense of ownership, and responsibility toward curriculum implementation are significantly enhanced. Olivier [32] further contends that Finland is regarded as a model of successful curriculum reform due to its grassroots approach.

In Australia, teachers also play a vital role in the curriculum development process by participating in the creation of new syllabi and curriculum guides across all grade levels [73]. They actively design and write the syllabi, serve on curriculum boards, and engage in school-based pilot programs for the syllabi. In contrast, many African countries tend to utilize a top-down or administrative model for curriculum development [41]. According to Priestley and Xenofontos [74] this model entails decisions being made at higher levels, resulting in limited teacher consultation and engagement. Carl [71] criticizes the administrative approach as totalitarian, viewing teachers as mere recipients of directives, despite their critical role in curriculum implementation.

In South Africa, restricted teacher involvement in curriculum implementation curtails creativity and innovation Hoadley [28]. Abudu and Mensah [75] attribute the failure of many reforms in South Africa to this administrative model.

7.4. Lack of Instructional Resources

Additionally, a lack of instructional resources can lead to negative perceptions and responses to new curriculum initiatives [76]. The Permanent Secretary's circular No. 4. [16] asserts that the responsibility for ensuring quality educational provision regarding HBC at the local level lies with head teachers, parents, businesses, and the community. Some communities, particularly in rural areas, face

significant resource limitations. Ngao, et al. [77] identify challenges in rural regions, including insufficient financial support and lack of technological resources. Several strategies have been proposed to address these resource challenges. For example, Wolven [78] suggests that additional resources from diverse sources should be allocated to upgrade satellite schools, thereby enhancing their ability to implement the curriculum effectively. Mupa [79] recommends that schools engage in income-generating projects rather than solely relying on funding from donor agencies or government subsidies.

7.5. The Timing and Purpose of Curriculum

Finally, the timing and purpose of curriculum reforms can impede successful implementation [80]. It can be observed that politicians often promote curriculum changes to advance their political agendas and maintain power, rather than addressing critical issues arising from these changes [81]. To mitigate challenges related to timing and purpose, it may be beneficial to advise teachers to adopt a gradual approach to curriculum implementation rather than pursuing rapid changes. While teachers may feel pressured to adopt new curricula, without the opportunity to reflect on the innovations and their experiences, they may fail to recognize their value [44].

8. Methodology

The study utilizes insights from curriculum theory to examine teacher preparedness and the implementation of HBC. The research employed qualitative methods, specifically focus groups and interviews [82]. Qualitative approaches, such as interviews and focus groups, are recognized for providing a more in-depth understanding of social phenomena compared to solely quantitative methods like questionnaires [83]. Focus groups are frequently used as a data collection method in organizational change initiatives, as they not only gather valuable information but also foster feelings of participation and buy-in among respondents, thereby enhancing enthusiasm and commitment to improvement [84, 85]. Additionally, focus groups enable employees to make recommendations regarding the programs to be introduced [86]. According to Nyumba, et al. [83] focus groups are essential for understanding the attitudes and behaviours of group members, as well as the dynamics of social systems.

For this research, four focus groups, each consisting of eight purposively selected teachers of varying ages, were conducted. The focus group discussions were structured around eight questions categorized into four sections: teacher preparedness, curriculum implementation, instructional resources and support, and impact and future directions. An additional set of four questions was included to further elicit information from the participants, with each session lasting approximately one hour.

Furthermore, twenty interviewees were purposefully selected to respond to fifteen questions. Five questions addressed teacher preparedness, another five focused on curriculum implementation, three dealt with resources and support, and the final two questions pertained to impact and future directions. Interviews are known for providing rich, detailed, and contextualized data that can facilitate a deeper understanding of the respondents' thoughts, feelings, and experiences Dunwoodie, et al. [87]. Monday [88] emphasizes that interviews establish a personal connection with respondents, which can lead to more candid and emotionally honest responses.

8.1. Data Analysis

Data analysis of qualitative data from focus groups and individual interviews commenced and continued concurrently with data collection. This approach was necessary as the researcher retained a clear recollection of the interviews. Audio-recorded data were transcribed and documented. The analysis focused on how respondents articulated their answers to each question. Responses for each question were aggregated, allowing for the identification of themes, which were then systematically organized into coherent categories.

9. Findings

The study was conducted with the objective of investigating the preparedness and implementation of HBC by educators in Zimbabwe. The focus group results are organized into four sections: Section 1 addresses teacher preparedness for HBC, Section 2 examines the implementation of the HBC curriculum, Section 3 gathers information on resources and support available for HBC, and Section 4 explores the impact of HBC on student engagement, cultural awareness, and academic achievement. Additionally, this section considers the ways in which teachers envision HBC being implemented in the future.

9.1. Section 1 Teacher preparedness

This section addresses teacher training regarding the Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) and the confidence of educators to implement it following their training. Findings from the four focus groups revealed that teachers had not received any training or support related to HBC. The overwhelming response from all four focus groups was that they had not undergone training and were unfamiliar with the Heritage-Based Curriculum Framework. Nevertheless, all participants indicated that their supervisors had mentioned the introduction of HBC during staff meetings in May 2024. This was further supported by the feedback from all fifteen respondents. Respondent R10 commented:

I never received any training on HBC. The head just told us the competence-based curriculum was replaced by HBC and that Curriculum took effect from 7 May 2024. The does not seem to know more about the curriculum as well. On the ground, there is nothing to show for HBC, yet the head insists that it was already introduced. We are yet to see what will happen.

Respondent 2 was very categoric on the issue of confidence when he said:

I don't have confidence to teach HBC. How can I have confidence to teach it when I was never taught. I will gain confidence after receiving training.

9.2. Section 2 Curriculum Implementation

This section aims to examine the implementation of HBC by asking the question, "Can you describe a successful lesson or project that integrates local history?" Additionally, it seeks to understand what contributed to its success and the challenges encountered in implementing HBC. Through focus groups and interviews, it was determined that teachers had not implemented HBC in their curriculum. All participants in the focus groups and interviews agreed that they had neither taught lessons on HBC nor conducted HBC-related projects. They also expressed uncertainty regarding the distinction between CBC and HBC. Interview participants questioned how HBC could be considered introduced when no workshops had been conducted at the school, cluster, district, or provincial levels. Furthermore, respondents noted that they had never taught an HBC lesson, preventing them from discussing the success or failure of such lessons. Respondent 5 stated:

You cannot talk of a successful HBC lesson when I have never attended a workshop.

When asked how she implemented HBC in her classroom respondent R10 said:

I am yet to learn about HBC for now I am familiar with CBC

When respondent R15 was asked what specific HBC topics she had covered. She replied:

I haven't taught any HBC topics. I don't have the syllabus. I only heard that it is coming soon.

9.3. Section 3 Resources and Support

The most prominent feedback from the focus groups indicated a lack of instructional resources for HBC. Participants expressed the belief that following the announcement from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education regarding the introduction of HBC, the existing instructional materials in schools would simply be repurposed. This perspective was further reinforced by the absence of dedicated purchases for HBC resources. Additionally, the theme of limited availability of HBC resources was reiterated by the interview respondents. When asked about the resources (such as textbooks and

technology) available to support their teaching of HBC, respondents R6, R7, R10, R13, and R14 provided the following insights:

> The whole of this year we neither received textbooks nor held seminars on HBC.

Respondent R7 expressed frustration with talk of HBC and said:

> I am totally confused about this HBC. It is talked about in schools and social media but there is nothing practical about it. We are coming to the end of the year now, yet we see nothing happening about HBC, ummm (throwing his hands in the air) the situation is very confusing. They should have given us the syllabus and textbooks before their launch so that by the time they launch, we would be ready to teach the curriculum.

Respondent R6 expressed a lot of anxiety when asked about textbooks. She said:

Look, you can't talk of textbooks for a curriculum which is not there. Maybe to start with, we will be using our old textbooks. Since the announcement of this curriculum by the head, I can't commit myself to the outgoing curriculum, yet we are told a new one is coming. We are doing Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA), but we are told in the new curriculum they won't be there. So now should I continue with CALAs or wait for the new curriculum which is not coming?

9.4. Section 4: Impact and future directions

This section sought to find out the impact of HBC on student engagement, cultural awareness and academic achievement. It sought to discover the respondents' experiences with HBC and how they want to see it implemented.

Narratives of respondents R2, R4, R9 suggest that although they had not taught HBC, they believed that it focused on the past and that it teaches learners to love their country.

Respondent R2 commented: Although I have never taught HBC, I think it will teach the past. Learners will be taught what is found in their country and I think they will love it. They will like it because they will not do CALAs. CALAs a problem to both teachers and learners.

Respondent R4 observed that: *I don't know how things will be like with the coming curriculum, whether learners will pass it or not, but they will like it.* `

On future directions for HBC and the role of teachers, all focus groups firmly believed that should be involved in implementing the curriculum through workshops. They agreed that if teachers are involved, it would be difficult for the curriculum to be taught in schools. Focus groups complained that it was unfair on their part to hear the introduction of the new curriculum merely through the heads. They looked forward to seminars and workshops at school level and cluster level, that way, they would feel empowered and confident to teach the curriculum.

On future directions with HBC respondent R9 stated:

I feel should attend workshops and meetings before the new curriculum is taught in schools. The government should start teaching teachers first before bringing it to schools. Once teachers have been taught, the government can now bring it to schools. Schools would then buy textbooks.

On the same topic, R10 said:

Teachers need workshops to be confident to deliver HBC. Imagine I have left college 20 years ago, I need to be guided on new trends like HBC. How can I just be asked to teach HBC without some guidance. Ummm, no, no, it would be unfair.

10. Discussion of Findings

The qualitative analysis of HBC revealed several pertinent findings related to teacher preparedness and curriculum implementation in Zimbabwe. These findings can be discussed in relation to themes that emerged from thematic analysis.

10.1. Teacher Preparedness

The study's findings indicate that teachers did not receive adequate training for teaching HBC, resulting in insufficient preparation and confidence to successfully implement the curriculum. This

observation aligns with the research conducted by Hwande and Mpofu [89] which revealed that Zimbabwean teachers were unprepared to execute a newly developed Grade Three curriculum. Similarly, findings from an investigation in Makunja [12] sought to assess how effectively teachers were ready to implement a revised primary school curriculum. The results indicated that many teachers lacked the necessary training, leading to minimal implementation of the curriculum.

These findings diverge from the principles of curriculum theory, which emphasize the vital role teachers play in curriculum development and implementation. Curriculum theory also provides guidance for teachers in selecting appropriate methods for implementing the curriculum. The term "curriculum implementer" highlights the significant responsibility that rests with teachers [3]. As noted by Matowo and Tenha [90] a substantial portion of the burden of curriculum implementation is borne by the teacher.

Haque and David [34] argue that when the government introduces a curriculum without involving teachers, it can result in diminished confidence among educators in executing it, or even lead to the rejection of the curriculum, thereby hindering its successful implementation. Teachers are responsible for translating the curriculum document into manageable units, such as schemes of work and daily lesson plans. A lack of familiarity with the curriculum can adversely affect its implementation.

Curriculum Implementation

The findings of the study indicated that by December 2024, teachers had not delivered any HBC lessons or implemented any HBC school-based projects, despite the introduction of the curriculum on May 7, 2024. This situation is at odds with both the intent and the requirements of the curriculum theory. According to curriculum theory, one of the critical responsibilities of teachers in curriculum implementation is to make informed decisions regarding methods and instructional materials to enhance teaching and learning outcomes [90]. To strengthen curriculum implementation, it is essential to focus on the professional development of teachers [91]. The introduction of HBC on May 7, 2024, appears to have been implemented at a superficial level, lacking substantial engagement in practice. For many teachers, HBC may seem like an unattainable concept when they struggle to express their ideas and contribute effectively to the new curriculum implementation.

10.2. Resources and Support

Curriculum theory indicates that instructional resources are crucial for successful curriculum implementation Chuene and Teane [92]. Ogunseemi and Idowu [93] emphasize the importance of providing teachers with adequate support to effectively utilize these resources and implement the curriculum. It is essential that these resources are accessible, inclusive, and culturally responsive to meet the diverse needs of students. Textbooks are fundamental in facilitating the teaching and learning process [76] as they enable teachers to assign reading materials to students when available. Recognizing that teachers cannot cover all content independently; the use of textbooks allows students to broaden their understanding and encourages active participation in classroom activities. Feedback gathered from four focus groups and fifteen interviews revealed a significant concern regarding the lack of textbooks for HBC, with participants expressing hope that existing textbooks would be beneficial once the new curriculum is introduced in schools. Additionally, the unavailability of instructional resources has been identified as a major challenge in curriculum implementation in various countries, including Nigeria [68], Zimbabwe [55] and Tanzania [12].

10.3. Impact and Future Directions

This section aimed to assess the impact of HBC on student engagement, cultural awareness, and academic achievement. Both focus groups and interviews revealed a lack of experience with HBC, making it challenging for participants to respond to the inquiry. The feedback from focus groups and interviewees indicated dissatisfaction with the curriculum, as they felt it was imposed upon them without adequate context or understanding. Curriculum theory posits that excluding teachers from the curriculum implementation process can result in various adverse outcomes. One significant consequence

of not involving educators is a lack of ownership and buy-in, which may lead to resistance to change [94]. Furthermore, neglecting to engage teachers often results in insufficient comprehension of the curriculum and its fundamental principles, ultimately leading to ineffective implementation [8]. A study conducted in Namibia [95] found that secondary school teachers were not meaningfully engaged in the curriculum development process, despite their essential role in its implementation. Research indicates that the prevalent top-down approach to curriculum development, particularly in developing countries, often omits teachers from the decision-making process, which can hinder effective implementation [74].

11. Recommendations

Permanent Secretary's Circular No. 4 of 2024 provides an overview of the implementation modalities for the Home-Based Curriculum (HBC). Specifically, non-examination classes, as well as Grade 6, Form 3, and Form 5, will initiate school-based projects starting in May 2024. Each student in these levels will undertake one project per learning area annually. Consequently, by the end of 2024, Grade 6, Form 3, and Form 5 students will have completed their inaugural school-based project and will be preparing for the subsequent project in 2025.

Research findings indicate that the government's approach to HBC implementation has been somewhat insufficient. Despite the directives outlined in Permanent Secretary's Circular No. 4 of 2024 and the announcements made by school leaders following district meetings, active efforts towards HBC implementation appear to be lacking. The study also highlights that teachers may lack the necessary knowledge for effective HBC implementation, suggesting that they were not adequately consulted during the curriculum development process.

To enhance relevance and effectiveness, as well as align the curriculum with the needs of learners and society, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education may consider adopting a grassroots approach to curriculum development and implementation. This approach advocates for the engagement and empowerment of teachers in the curriculum development and execution process [4].

Additionally, the Ministry should prioritize the initiation of in-service training programs to adequately prepare teachers for curriculum implementation. Such training enhances teachers' confidence and readiness to apply the new curriculum [8] and fosters a motivated and enthusiastic environment for curriculum execution.

Upon completing in-service training, teachers should be equipped to develop comprehensive lesson plans that delineate specific instructional strategies, materials, and assessment methods. They are encouraged to employ a variety of instructional approaches, including direct instruction, guided practice, and independent practice, to actively engage students and facilitate deep learning [8].

Finally, parents, as key stakeholders, can play a crucial role in supporting deep learning by promoting inquiry-based learning experiences [5]. They can also nurture their children's natural curiosity by encouraging exploration of topics of interest in greater depth.

12. Conclusion

One significant contribution of this paper to the existing literature is its presentation of an effective approach to the implementation of HBC. However, it appears that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education is currently employing a Top-down (Administrative) approach. For Zimbabwe to fully benefit from HBC, it may be beneficial to consider a Grassroots approach to curriculum implementation. The objectives of HBC, as outlined in Permanent Secretary's circular No. 4 of 2024, advocate for this Grassroots approach. This method emphasizes teacher autonomy and community engagement, in contrast to the current approach that may lead to teacher alienation [2]. The existing framework detailed in Permanent Secretary's Circular Minute No. 4 of 2024 resembles a superficial attempt at implementation, which may not yield meaningful results. Further research could enhance the discourse on teacher preparedness and implementation by investigating teacher involvement in curriculum design and development.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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