Volume 11, Issue 1, January – 2026 International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology
ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jan824

The Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) 2024–2030: Implications for Quality, Inclusive and Competence-Based Education in Zimbabwe

Dr. Evershine Ndongwe[1]

[1]Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Chivi, Zimbabwe

Publication Date: 2026/02/07

Abstract: Zimbabwe's Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) 2024–2030 represents a significant paradigm shift aimed at aligning education with national heritage, socio-economic transformation, and global development agendas. Anchored in Heritage-Based Education 5.0, Vision 2030, the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1), and the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2021–2025, the curriculum seeks to produce competent, innovative, and patriotic pupils. This paper analyses the philosophical foundations, structure, pedagogy, and assessment mechanisms of the HBC using qualitative document analysis. Findings show that the HBC provides a coherent framework for competence-based, inclusive education aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4, though its success depends on teacher capacity, infrastructure, financing, and sustained research support.

Keywords: *Heritage-Based Curriculum; Competence-Based Education; Zimbabwe; Vision 2030; SDG 4; Curriculum Reform.*

How to Cite: Dr. Evershine Ndongwe (2026) The Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) 2024–2030: Implications for Quality, Inclusive and Competence-Based Education in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 11(1), 3169-3174. https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jan824

I. INTRODUCTION

Education systems worldwide are undergoing significant reform in response to the evolving demands of the 21st century, including rapid technological advancement, globalisation, climate change, and the need for sustainable and inclusive development. These transformations have necessitated a shift away from traditional content-driven curricula towards competency-based and contextually responsive education systems that equip pupils with relevant knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes for active participation in socio-economic development. International frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4) and the African Union's Agenda 2063 emphasise the provision of equitable, inclusive, and quality education that is aligned with national development priorities and local realities.

Within this global and regional reform trajectory, Zimbabwe has undertaken a comprehensive reorientation of its education system through the introduction of the Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) 2024–2030. The HBC represents a deliberate policy intervention aimed at repositioning education as a catalyst for national development, innovation, and industrialisation, while simultaneously preserving and promoting Zimbabwe's cultural identity, indigenous knowledge systems, and heritage values. Unlike previous curricula that were often criticised for being overly academic, examination-oriented, and disconnected from pupils' lived experiences, the HBC seeks to foster practical skills, entrepreneurship, creativity, and problem-solving competencies that are responsive to local and national socio-economic needs (Ndongwe 2025).

The Heritage-Based Curriculum builds on earlier curriculum reforms, particularly the competence-based framework introduced in 2015, while aligning education more explicitly with Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy (NDS1 and NDS2). Ndongwe (2025) points that, central to the HBC is the integration of science, technology, innovation, and industrialisation with cultural heritage, moral values, and citizenship education. This integration is intended to produce well-rounded pupils who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible, innovative, and capable of contributing meaningfully to community and national development (MOPSE 2023).

However, while the HBC presents a bold and contextually grounded vision for education reform, its implementation raises

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jan824

critical questions regarding quality, equity, and inclusivity (Ndongwe 2025). Issues such as teacher preparedness, resource availability, infrastructure disparities between urban and rural schools, assessment practices, and the inclusion of pupils with disabilities and other marginalised groups remain central to debates on the effectiveness of the curriculum. There is also concern about whether the emphasis on heritage and practical skills can be balanced with global competitiveness and academic rigor in an increasingly interconnected world (Mukucha and Ndongwe, 2025).

Against this backdrop, this paper critically examines Zimbabwe's Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) 2024–2030, with particular focus on its implications for quality and inclusive education. The study interrogates the philosophical underpinnings of the curriculum, its alignment with national and international education goals, and the opportunities and challenges associated with its implementation. By doing so, the paper seeks to contribute to ongoing scholarly and policy discussions on curriculum reform in Zimbabwe and other developing contexts pursuing education systems that are both globally relevant and locally grounded.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

The Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) is anchored in a broad philosophical conception of heritage that encompasses both tangible and intangible endowments, including natural resources, cultural artefacts, indigenous knowledge systems, languages, values, beliefs, and social practices. This philosophical orientation recognises heritage not merely as a historical legacy to be preserved, but as a dynamic and productive resource that can be harnessed for socio-economic development, identity formation, and sustainable livelihoods. By foregrounding heritage, the curriculum seeks to decolonise knowledge production and reposition indigenous epistemologies alongside global knowledge systems within formal education.

Conceptually, the HBC aligns closely with Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 framework, which extends the traditional university tripartite mandate of teaching, research, and community service to include innovation and industrialisation. Through this alignment, the curriculum promotes the transformation of knowledge into goods and services that address local challenges and contribute to national development. Pupils are encouraged to apply theoretical knowledge to real-life contexts through project-based learning, production units, and community engagement initiatives, thereby bridging the gap between schooling and the world of work.

The curriculum is further underpinned by a pupil-centred and constructivist pedagogical approach, which views pupils as active participants in the construction of knowledge rather than passive recipients of information. Learning is designed to be experiential, inquiry-based, and problem-oriented, allowing pupils to develop competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and entrepreneurship. Teachers assume the role of facilitators and mentors, guiding pupils to explore, experiment, and reflect within authentic learning environments rooted in their communities.

In addition, the HBC is informed by human capital and capabilities theories, which emphasise the development of skills, competencies, and agency as prerequisites for individual and national development. The curriculum aims to expand pupils' capabilities by equipping them with practical, vocational, technological, and life skills that enhance employability, self-reliance, and social participation. This orientation resonates with the broader goal of inclusive education, as it acknowledges diverse pupil abilities, interests, and learning pathways.

Finally, the philosophical foundations of the HBC are closely linked to principles of social justice, inclusivity, and national consciousness. By integrating heritage studies, citizenship education, and values such as Ubuntu/Unhu, the curriculum seeks to promote social cohesion, ethical leadership, and respect for cultural diversity. At the same time, it aspires to prepare pupils for participation in a globalised knowledge economy by fostering adaptability, digital literacy, and innovation. These philosophical and conceptual underpinnings collectively frame the HBC as a transformative curriculum aimed at producing competent, culturally grounded, and development-oriented citizens.

III. STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR

The Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) adopts a comprehensive and vertically articulated structure that spans early childhood development (ECD) through primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education. This continuum is designed to ensure progressive learning, smooth transitions between levels, and the cumulative development of competencies, values, and skills. The curriculum recognises prior learning and diverse pupil entry points, thereby supporting flexible learning pathways that accommodate varying abilities, interests, and socio-economic contexts.

At the Early Childhood Development (ECD) level, the HBC places emphasis on holistic child development, focusing on cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and moral growth. Learning at this stage is play-based and experiential, aimed at nurturing curiosity, creativity, language development, and social interaction within culturally familiar environments. Indigenous games, stories, songs, and local languages are integrated to foster early identity formation and cultural appreciation, while laying the foundation for lifelong learning.

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jan824

At the primary school level, the curriculum prioritises the acquisition of foundational skills, including literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, scientific inquiry, and basic life skills. These competencies are viewed as essential building blocks for further learning and meaningful participation in society. Teaching and learning approaches are pupil-centred and activity-based, with increasing integration of practical tasks, environmental studies, and heritage-related content. Assessment at this stage is largely formative, aimed at tracking pupil progress and providing timely feedback rather than merely ranking pupils.

The lower secondary phase serves as a transitional stage where pupils consolidate foundational competencies while beginning to explore a broader range of learning areas. The curriculum introduces greater subject differentiation, exposure to technical and vocational skills, and increased emphasis on problem-solving, creativity, and innovation. Career guidance and orientation are incorporated to help pupils identify interests and strengths, thereby supporting informed pathway selection in later stages.

At the upper secondary level, the HBC provides differentiated and flexible pathways that respond to pupils' aspirations, abilities, and labour market demands. These pathways include academic, technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial streams, allowing pupils to pursue education that aligns with both personal goals and national development priorities. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is given increased prominence, with stronger linkages to industry, community production units, and local economic activities. This diversification is intended to reduce over-reliance on purely academic routes and to enhance employability and self-reliance among school leavers.

Across all levels, the curriculum promotes inclusivity through the provision of special needs education, remedial support, and alternative learning arrangements for pupils with disabilities, those from marginalised communities, and pupils at risk of dropping out. Flexible progression, recognition of prior learning, and multiple exit and re-entry points are incorporated to support lifelong learning and reduce educational exclusion. Overall, the structured yet flexible design of the HBC seeks to create an integrated education system that nurtures foundational competencies, supports differentiated learning pathways, and prepares pupils for productive participation in society.

IV. TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES

Teaching and learning within the Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) are anchored in pupil-centred pedagogical approaches that position pupils as active constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients of information. Central to this orientation are inquiry-based, problem-based, and project-based learning strategies, which encourage pupils to explore real-world challenges, ask meaningful questions, and generate contextually relevant solutions. These approaches are intended to cultivate higher-order cognitive skills, including critical thinking, analysis, creativity, and innovation, which are essential for lifelong learning and national development.

Inquiry-based learning enables pupils to investigate issues drawn from their immediate environments, communities, and national contexts, fostering curiosity and scientific thinking. Problem-based learning, on the other hand, presents pupils with authentic and complex problems that require collaboration, research, and reflection to resolve. Through project-based learning, pupils engage in extended tasks that integrate multiple learning areas, culminating in tangible products or services such as prototypes, exhibitions, performances, or community interventions. These pedagogies align with the Education 5.0 philosophy by linking knowledge acquisition to innovation, production, and socio-economic relevance.

Within this pedagogical framework, teachers assume the role of facilitators, mentors, and co-pupils. Rather than transmitting knowledge, teachers guide learning processes, scaffold understanding, and create enabling environments that support exploration and experimentation. This shift requires teachers to employ diverse instructional strategies, integrate formative assessment practices, and adapt teaching to accommodate varying pupil abilities, learning styles, and cultural backgrounds. Continuous professional development is therefore essential to equip teachers with the skills and confidence needed to effectively implement pupil-centred approaches.

The HBC also emphasises collaborative learning, recognising learning as a social process. Group work, peer learning, and cooperative tasks are encouraged to develop communication skills, teamwork, and respect for diverse perspectives. These collaborative practices are particularly important in multicultural and inclusive classrooms, where pupils bring different experiences and abilities. In addition, the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and community resources enhances relevance and authenticity, allowing pupils to connect classroom learning with lived experiences.

Furthermore, teaching and learning under the HBC are supported by the integration of digital technologies and experiential learning opportunities. Digital tools are used to support research, creativity, simulation, and communication, while experiential learning takes place through fieldwork, school-based production units, community projects, and industry linkages. Together, these approaches promote real-world application of knowledge and skills, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Overall, the teaching and learning approaches promoted by the HBC seek to develop competent, innovative, and socially responsible pupils who are capable of applying knowledge to

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jan824

solve practical problems, contribute to community development, and adapt to changing socio-economic conditions

V. ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The assessment framework of the Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) is grounded in School-Based Continuous Assessment (SBCA), pupil profiling, and nationally standardised checkpoints, reflecting a shift away from high-stakes, examination-dominated evaluation towards a more holistic and formative assessment model. This framework is designed to support learning, track pupil progress over time, and capture a broad range of competencies, including cognitive, practical, social, and affective domains.

School-Based Continuous Assessment constitutes the core of the assessment system, enabling teachers to assess pupils regularly through diverse and authentic tasks aligned with curriculum outcomes. These tasks include projects, practical demonstrations, portfolios, presentations, experiments, performances, and community-based activities. By emphasising performance-based assessment, the HBC allows pupils to demonstrate applied knowledge and skills in real-world contexts, thereby reinforcing the curriculum's focus on relevance, innovation, and problem-solving.

Pupil profiling is an integral component of the assessment framework and involves the systematic documentation of pupils' academic progress, competencies, talents, values, and interests over time. Profiles provide a comprehensive picture of pupil development beyond test scores, capturing achievements in areas such as entrepreneurship, technical skills, creativity, leadership, and civic engagement. This longitudinal approach supports personalised learning, informed career guidance, and smoother transitions between educational levels and pathways.

National assessment checkpoints are incorporated at key stages of the education cycle to ensure quality assurance, standardisation, and comparability across schools. These checkpoints serve a diagnostic and benchmarking function rather than a purely selection-oriented role, helping to monitor system performance and inform policy decisions. When combined with SBCA, national assessments contribute to a balanced assessment system that values both localised evaluation and national standards.

The HBC assessment framework is also aligned with the principles of inclusivity and equity. It provides flexibility in assessment methods to accommodate pupils with diverse needs, including those with disabilities, learning difficulties, and different cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Adaptations such as differentiated tasks, assistive technologies, and alternative modes of demonstration are encouraged to ensure fair assessment and reduce exclusion.

Despite its strengths, the effective implementation of the assessment framework presents practical challenges, including increased teacher workload, the need for assessment literacy, moderation mechanisms, and adequate resources. Addressing these challenges requires ongoing teacher training, clear guidelines, and robust monitoring systems to maintain reliability and credibility. Overall, the assessment framework of the HBC represents a transformative approach that seeks to promote holistic pupil development, enhance learning quality, and align assessment with the broader goals of national development and inclusive education.

VI. INCLUSIVITY AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Inclusivity is a central pillar of the Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) 2024–2030 and is mainstreamed across policy design, curriculum content, pedagogy, and assessment. The curriculum recognises pupil diversity in terms of ability, socio-economic background, language, gender, and geographical location, and seeks to ensure equitable access to meaningful learning opportunities for all. Provision is made for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities through differentiated instruction, adaptive assessment practices, and the use of assistive technologies, thereby promoting participation and reducing educational exclusion.

The HBC also extends inclusivity beyond formal schooling by recognising the role of non-formal and alternative education pathways. Flexible learning arrangements, community-based programmes, and recognition of prior learning are incorporated to accommodate out-of-school youth, early school leavers, and adult pupils. This approach supports lifelong learning and skills acquisition, particularly for pupils who may not progress through conventional academic routes, and aligns education with broader social and economic inclusion objectives.

In addition to inclusivity, the curriculum places strong emphasis on the development of skills relevant to the 21st century and national development priorities. Cross-cutting themes such as entrepreneurship, environmental sustainability, climate change adaptation, digital literacy, health education, citizenship, and gender equality are integrated across learning areas rather than treated as isolated subjects. This integration ensures that pupils develop transferable skills, values, and attitudes necessary for navigating complex social, economic, and environmental challenges.

The HBC promotes the development of technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial skills from an early stage, fostering a culture of innovation, productivity, and self-reliance. Pupils are encouraged to engage in hands-on activities, school-based production units, and community projects that enable them to apply knowledge in practical contexts. These experiences contribute to the development of employability skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, communication,

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jan824

adaptability, and leadership, which are essential for participation in both the formal and informal economies.

Moreover, the curriculum integrates values education and national consciousness through principles such as Ubuntu/Unhu, ethical responsibility, and social cohesion. By combining skills development with moral and civic education, the HBC seeks to produce well-rounded citizens who are not only economically productive but also socially responsible and committed to national development.

Despite these strengths, the effective realisation of inclusivity and skills development depends on adequate resourcing, teacher capacity, and institutional support. Investment in specialist personnel, inclusive learning materials, and skills infrastructure is critical to ensure that all pupils benefit equally from the curriculum. When these conditions are met, the HBC holds significant potential to advance inclusive education and skills development in support of Zimbabwe's Vision 2030.

VII. IMPLEMENTATION PILLARS AND CHALLENGES

The successful implementation of the Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) 2024–2030 is underpinned by several interrelated pillars, namely curriculum design and alignment, human resources and staffing, infrastructure development, financing, and research and innovation. These pillars collectively provide the institutional and systemic foundation necessary for translating curriculum policy into effective classroom practice and meaningful learning outcomes.

The curriculum pillar focuses on coherent curriculum design, alignment of learning areas, syllabi, assessment frameworks, and teaching materials with the philosophy and objectives of the HBC. Effective implementation requires the availability of clear syllabi, teachers' guides, pupil materials, and assessment instruments that support pupil-centred and competency-based approaches. Inconsistencies or delays in curriculum materials risk undermining fidelity of implementation and creating disparities across schools.

Staffing and human resource capacity constitute a critical pillar of implementation. Teachers, school leaders, curriculum developers, and education officers are expected to possess the pedagogical, technical, and assessment competencies necessary to operationalise the HBC. However, teacher preparedness remains a major challenge, particularly in relation to pupil-centred pedagogies, continuous assessment, inclusive education, and the integration of technical and vocational skills. Limited access to continuous professional development, especially in remote and rural areas, constrains effective curriculum delivery and innovation.

Infrastructure development is another central pillar, particularly given the curriculum's emphasis on practical, technical, and digital learning. Effective implementation requires adequately equipped classrooms, laboratories, workshops, ICT facilities, libraries, and reliable utilities such as electricity and internet connectivity. Significant infrastructure gaps persist between urban and rural schools, with many rural institutions lacking basic facilities to support project-based learning, production units, and digital integration. These disparities pose a serious threat to equity and quality in curriculum implementation.

Financing remains a cross-cutting pillar that affects all other implementation dimensions. The HBC requires sustained and predictable funding to support infrastructure development, procurement of learning materials, teacher training, assessment systems, and inclusive education services. However, fiscal constraints and competing national priorities limit the availability of resources, often shifting financial burdens to schools and communities. This reliance on local funding can exacerbate inequalities between well-resourced and disadvantaged communities.

The research and innovation pillar emphasises evidence-based implementation, continuous monitoring, and curriculum refinement. Ongoing research, pilot studies, and feedback mechanisms are essential for identifying implementation gaps, documenting best practices, and informing policy adjustments. Weak research capacity, limited data systems, and insufficient stakeholder engagement can undermine the responsiveness and adaptability of the curriculum.

Overall, while the implementation pillars of the HBC provide a comprehensive framework for education reform, persistent challenges related to resources, capacity, and infrastructure threaten to compromise intended outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated policy action, strategic investment, strengthened partnerships with communities and the private sector, and sustained commitment to teacher development and system-wide support. Without such measures, the transformative potential of the Heritage-Based Curriculum may remain unevenly realised across the education sector.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) 2024–2030 represents a bold and transformative approach to education reform in Zimbabwe, seeking to realign the education system with national development priorities, cultural heritage, and global demands of the 21st century. By emphasising competence-based learning, innovation, industrialisation, and inclusivity, the HBC moves beyond traditional examination-oriented models towards an education system that is responsive, relevant, and development-driven. The curriculum's integration of indigenous knowledge systems, practical skills, and pupil-

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jan824

centred pedagogies positions education as a strategic tool for socio-economic transformation and national identity formation (Ndongwe 2025; Mukucha & Ndongwe 2025).

From a policy perspective, the successful realisation of the HBC's objectives is contingent upon strengthened teacher professional development. Teachers remain the primary agents of curriculum implementation, and sustained investment in pre-service and in-service training is essential to build capacity in pupil-centred pedagogy, continuous assessment, inclusive education, and technical and vocational instruction. Without adequately trained and supported teachers, the intended pedagogical and assessment reforms risk remaining aspirational rather than practical.

Financing and infrastructure development also emerge as critical policy imperatives. The practical and skills-oriented nature of the HBC demands well-resourced learning environments, including laboratories, workshops, ICT facilities, and inclusive infrastructure. Targeted and equitable funding mechanisms are required to address persistent disparities between urban and rural schools and to prevent the deepening of educational inequalities. Strategic partnerships with the private sector, development partners, and local communities can play a complementary role in mobilising resources and enhancing implementation capacity.

Furthermore, policy frameworks must prioritise research, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure evidence-based implementation and continuous curriculum improvement. Systematic data collection, impact assessments, and stakeholder feedback are necessary to track progress, identify challenges, and inform timely policy adjustments. Strengthening research capacity within the education sector will enhance accountability and support innovation aligned with national needs.

In conclusion, while the Heritage-Based Curriculum offers a promising pathway towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 and Zimbabwe's Vision 2030, its transformative potential depends on coherent policy alignment, sustained investment, and inclusive implementation strategies. A holistic approach that integrates teacher development, adequate financing, infrastructure expansion, and robust research systems is essential to translate the curriculum's vision into tangible improvements in educational quality, equity, and national development outcomes.

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