



# Insights into the Implementation of Curriculum Reforms in Zimbabwe: Heritage Studies and History in Mutare District Secondary Schools

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## Abstract

The study provides insights into the implementation of Zimbabwe's 2015-2022 curriculum, particularly to determine the successful implementation of the Heritage Studies and History curriculum reforms in line with official guidelines. Although Zimbabwe's Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education issued a circular in January 2017 mandating the implementation of curriculum changes for secondary schools between 2017 and 2022, the directive alone may not have guaranteed successful adoption and implementation. While curriculum reform implementation is meant to ensure national goals, global evidence suggests various factors hinder successful curriculum implementation. The study used a qualitative approach, employing a case of secondary schools in Zimbabwe's Mutare district to generate data. The conceptual framework adopted a five-step cyclical

model for curriculum implementation review. Data was generated through interviews, complemented by document and website analysis. Ten teachers from ten secondary schools in the Mutare district participated in the study. It was established that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has made important efforts to enhance the successful implementation of the new curriculum through teacher workshops and instructional materials. However, the dissemination of curriculum information and the training of teachers through workshops were rushed. The education ministry failed to monitor or evaluate the implementation process at the grassroots level. The study identified challenges, including overloading teachers with work, restricting learners' choice of subjects, a shortage of instructional resources, and a lack of qualified teachers for the newly introduced subject, Heritage Studies. Based on these findings, recommendations have been made.

**Keywords:** History; Heritage studies; Curriculum framework; Curriculum implementation; Curriculum implementation review; Secondary schools.

## Introduction and Background<sup>1</sup>

Curriculum implementation is an important stage in the curriculum development process. It is the stage when the contrived activity is put into operation to realise the intended outcomes (Lestari and Widiastuty, 2023). In this regard, governments worldwide often take the initiative to reform their education systems so that their national visions are achieved (Madondo, 2022; Petherick, 2023). Given the above, the Zimbabwean government was no exception. In early 2017, Zimbabwe's primary and secondary schools had to implement a new and revised school curriculum (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017). The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education gave this directive after several consultative meetings with various education stakeholders. These consultative review meetings aligned with the recommendations of the Nziramasanga Commission of Enquiry into Education report of 1999, which calls for all stakeholders' participation in curriculum reformation processes (Nziramasanga, 1999). Additionally, the curriculum reforms were intended to align Zimbabwe's primary and secondary education with the country's 2013 Constitution, the 1999 Agrarian Reform and Globalisation in Information Technology and Communications (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015a).

As a result of the consultative review meetings, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education produced a national document, the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Schools (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015a). The Curriculum Framework introduced changes to Zimbabwe's school education system (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017). The Curriculum Framework was designed and developed as a medium to long-term guiding policy for teaching and learning in Zimbabwe's primary and secondary schools for 2015 to 2022 (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015b). The Framework consisted of many new and revised learning areas. In the case of the secondary school curriculum, some of the learning areas were sciences, mathematics, languages, humanities, commercials, technical vocational, and music and arts. Under humanities, the specific subjects were heritage studies (a new subject), history, sociology, economic history, and family and religious Studies.

Using a circular, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education directed the implementation of the Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 at the school level, beginning in January 2017 (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017). Paradoxically,

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the PhD study of the first author. The second author acted as the supervisor for the research.

the directive was issued against heavy criticism and disgruntlement from education stakeholders such as teachers' unions, politicians, parents, and civil society, who felt the implementation stage was rushed (Ndlovu, 2017; Nkala, 2017). Despite this criticism and disgruntlement, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education insisted that there was no going back concerning the implementation of the new curriculum. Among other secondary school subjects, heritage studies was mandatory, while history was an elective (Bentrovato and Chakawa, 2022; Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017). However, the researchers agree with studies suggesting that implementing a curriculum reform is complex, and its adoption is unpredictable (Haque and David, 2022; Voogt, Pieters and Roblin, 2019).

Given the scenario that the Zimbabwean secondary schools were directed to implement the Curriculum Framework 2017-2022, Lestari and Widiastuty (2023:111) recommend that once instructors implement a new curriculum, administrators "... can begin evaluating it and making adjustments if necessary". Mohanasundaram (2018) and Supriani, Meliani, Supriyadi, Supiana and Zaqiah (2022) agree that once the curriculum is made available to schools for implementation, it has to be monitored and evaluated occasionally to ensure that it remains relevant. The significance of curriculum implementation assessment as part of the curriculum development process is further revealed by Voogt et al. (2019), who confirm that curriculum developers at national levels are often challenged to have their curriculum adopted and implemented in schools. Fullan (1991:17) supports the same view by asserting that: "Educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it's as simple and complex as that." It was because of the referred limits and possibilities that exposed the gap that this study had to address. Given the above background, the research reviews the implementation of the new curriculum at the secondary school level from its inception in January 2017-2022, with a focus on heritage studies and history teaching and learning at Form 3 and Form 4 (O-level) in the Mutare district of the Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe.

## **Purpose and Contribution of the Study**

The curriculum implementation review process is an important exercise in curriculum enterprise since it has the potential to influence the success of curriculum implementation (Lestari and Widiastuty, 2023). For Furneaux and Brooke (2019), curriculum implementation review enhances student learning, engagement, experience and outcomes. The study findings may encourage education stakeholders to take responsibility and work

together to address issues that could hinder the successful implementation of a secondary school curriculum in this and similar contexts. The findings provide possible solutions for Zimbabwe's education officials and others in similar contexts to implement a new curriculum effectively. The study also reflects on the challenges teachers and learners encounter and how these could be addressed. It further encourages the education ministry and/or academics to institute a fully-fledged curriculum implementation review of the entire curriculum framework, which may result in its revision and building of an improved and revised Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Besides, insights from the study may have global implications for countries in similar situations. This research may also add value to curriculum theory and practice as a field of study, particularly on principles of curriculum implementation review.

Given the above, this study was guided by the following research question:

*How did the Mutare district secondary schools implement the heritage studies and history curriculum reforms?*

## Literature Review

The concept of curriculum has been defined differently by different scholars. The idea originated from *currere*, a Latin word meaning a race course (Offorma, 2014). Based on this, the concept curriculum was classically taken to refer to a study course or a student's list of subjects under study (Supriani et al., 2022). According to Nevenglosky (2018), a curriculum is a complete programme for learners that includes their experiences and knowledge prospects. Mashayamombe (2024) regards it as a guide or prescription for teaching and learning purposes, which serves as the working definition for this paper. The Curriculum Framework, 2015-2022 or subject syllabus, is considered such a curriculum.

Throughout the world, a curriculum is used as an instrument to prepare learners for future life and also as a way of addressing problems that society faces (Offorma, 2014). Since society keeps changing, the curriculum is also constantly changing to meet societal demands (Nkyabonaki, 2013). Therefore, the issue of curriculum change is a concern for every nation since its vision and aspirations are expressed and advanced through the nature of its education system (Mashayamombe, 2024). This explains why scholars vehemently argue that no curriculum is apolitical (Madondo, 2021; Petherick, 2023). Given this argument, countries often finance processes of curriculum reforms so that they keep up with changes or challenges (Nkyabonaki, 2013). The introduction of Zimbabwe's

Curriculum Framework, 2015-2022 can be understood within this context (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017).

In most cases, curriculum change or reform is introduced following a process of curriculum implementation review (Tyler, 1949). Curriculum implementation review is a justified process in curriculum development practice. Some of the justifications are that it gives feedback on the effectiveness of curriculum implementation, helps in the understanding of the prevailing situation in school set-up in terms of resources such as textbooks and other curriculum documents, offers a means of understanding for education stakeholders to make a value judgment on the worthiness of the curriculum, and reduces risks on resource wastage (Haque and David, 2022; Mulawarman, 2021). Curriculum evaluation refers to the gathering of data that can be used to come up with an informed decision on whether the curriculum or programme is worth or effective enough to be retained as it is, altered, or dropped completely (Neumann, Robson and Sloan, 2018). For the purpose of this research, curriculum implementation review refers to the activity of reviewing, assessing, and evaluating the operationalisation of a curriculum to determine the extent of the latter's implementation. Because of this working definition, the study was motivated by the desire to review the implementation of heritage studies and history from 2017 up to 2022, based on the guidelines and the intended outcomes of the 2015-2022 Curriculum Framework.

Batton et al. (2015) advises that when it comes to curriculum implementation review, the first stage is to review the national curriculum framework with the syllabi, ascertaining whether there is cohesion between how the learning areas are presented vis-à-vis the intended outcomes. With this in mind, the researchers assessed the implementation of Zimbabwe's new curriculum, particularly history and heritage studies at the secondary school level. According to Benvorato and Chakawa (2022), a top-down approach was used with regard to the introduction and elevation of the heritage studies subject over history. It has to be kept in mind that the political context of the country influenced these curriculum reforms. Following Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, the government was prompted to initiate a decolonised curriculum that addressed the inadequacies of the previous system, which had been criticised for failing to meet the educational needs of the Zimbabwean society (Chimbunde and Kgari-Masondo, 2021). In the context of this study, teachers were forced to teach heritage studies as a mandatory subject, while history was not (Benvorato and Chakawa, 2022).

## Conceptual framework of the study

The implementation of curriculum reforms in Zimbabwe, particularly in the context of heritage studies and history in secondary schools, necessitates a robust conceptual framework to guide the research process. Therefore, Furneaux and Brooke's (2019) five-step cyclical model for curriculum implementation review was found most suitable. A conceptual framework is defined as a structure that operationalises curriculum theory by systematically identifying and defining the components and elaborating on their relationships (Pohan, Azmi and Rafida, 2022). It offers a structure that guides research to reduce the chances of omissions regarding the study's focus (Salomao, 2023). Therefore, this model provides a structured approach to systematically evaluate curriculum implementation, guided by specific questions (Furneaux and Brooke, 2019).

**Table 1:** Key guiding questions of Furneaux and Brooke's five-step model with brief explanations

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### **Step 1: Where are we now, and where do we need to be?**

This aspect of the model provides a basic understanding of the current state of the curriculum and identifies desired outcomes for the reform.

### **Step 2: How are we going to get there?**

The step identifies pathways to achieve intended outcomes, the development of a strategy, and key stakeholders.

### **Step 3: What do we need to make it happen?**

This step focuses on the practical steps necessary to achieve the curriculum goals. It emphasises preparation, resources, and active involvement of all stakeholders in the implementation process.

### **Step 4: How do we make it happen?**

This process involves the actual implementation of the curriculum changes. It includes workshops for teachers and creating awareness of the new curriculum.

### **Step 5: How can we sustain the positive impact on student learning, engagement, experience, and outcomes?**

This step emphasises the long-term sustainability of curriculum reforms and ensures that the positive changes brought about by the new curriculum are maintained and enhanced over time.

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The questions of Furneaux and Brooke's cyclical model are instrumental in establishing a clear vision for the intended outcomes of a curriculum implementation review. The model further emphasises the importance of aligning the operationalisation of the curriculum with established benchmarks, thus ensuring structure and reliability in its implementation (Fauzi, 2019). The above conceptual framework suggests that in the curriculum implementation review process, the vision or intended outcomes for the curriculum must be established. Additionally, it needs to be established how the intended outcomes will be achieved. With this in mind, and when reviewing the implementation of the curriculum, the research had to establish whether the operationalisation of the curriculum was in line with the set benchmarks. Using this five-step model, the study aimed to critically assess the implementation of heritage studies and history in secondary schools in the Mutare province, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on curriculum reform in Zimbabwe.

## **Research design and methodology**

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study, with the case study being used as the research design. Qualitative research can be defined as the generation, analysis, and interpretation of data to gain some insights into a phenomenon of particular interest (Alnaim, 2023). Such a social phenomenon is understood in a natural setting (Hameed, 2020). As such, the researchers were interested in reviewing the implementation of a curriculum. For the study to be manageable, a case study was chosen as the research design (Alnaim, 2023). It emphasises the focus on a unit, which can be an institution, individual, class, or group of people (Mahlambi, Van den Berg and Mawela, 2022). In this regard, Zimbabwe's Mutare district of the Manicaland province was chosen as the geographical setting of the case study.

### ***Population and sample***

The Mutare district has seventy-five secondary schools. From these, ten teachers from ten secondary schools were chosen as study participants. Ten (seven male and three female) was regarded as manageable for the transcription, analysis, and interpretation of the data generated. The selection of the participants was based on potentially rich sources of data (Obilor, 2023). Each of the ten teachers taught history or heritage studies or both at the O-level between 2017 and 2022 (cf. Table 2). Thus, purposive sampling was used to identify the study participants. Given that the participants were practising heritage studies



and history teachers, the researchers considered them suitably qualified, rich data sources.

### ***Data-generation tools***

Interviews, document studies, and website analysis were used as the methods of data generation. The interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended, which promoted consistency regarding the focus of the study and ensured that the interviewer and interviewee were engaged in the topic (Barrett and Twycross, 2018; McGrath, Palmgren and Liljedahl, 2019). Additionally, interviews are an appropriate method used in curriculum implementation reviews (Hussain, Dogar, Azeem and Shakoor, 2011). Document analysis involved primary documents such as circulars from the education ministry and subject syllabi. Such documents were rich sources of primary evidence used for triangulation and to complement interview data (Morgan, 2022). Website analysis on information posted on the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's website was also used. For example, the education ministry posted updated and valuable information about the new curriculum, including the national policy and goals for the Curriculum Framework, 2015-2022, secondary school learning areas, and implementation modalities (<http://www.mopse.gov.zw/index.php/updated-curriculum/curriculum-framework/>). Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe. The data generated was analysed and interpreted using the thematic analysis method.

## **Findings and discussion**

This section presents the study findings through the major themes which emerged from the study as presented in Table 3. The conceptual framework of the study guided the emerging themes. Six of the ten participants taught heritage studies and history at the O-level at their respective schools. Three of the remaining four participants taught heritage studies, while the remaining one was a history teacher. The participants were from different schools and joined the teaching profession at the secondary school level before the implementation of the New Curriculum Framework in 2017. Their ages ranged from 35 to 58 years. The purpose of the study was to review the implementation of the Curriculum Framework, 2015-2022, in particular the implementation of heritage studies and history at O-level from 2017 to 2022. As part of ethical considerations, the names of the participants and their respective secondary schools were removed. Rather, pseudo names were used as indicated

in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Participants in the study

| Type of participant | Pseudo name | Sex                   | Subject taught                    |
|---------------------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Interviewees        | A to F      | 4 males and 2 females | Both heritage studies and history |
| Interviewees        | G to I      | 3 males               | Heritage studies                  |
| Interviewee         | J           | 1 female              | History                           |

To initiate the review of the implementation of Zimbabwe's 2015-2022 curriculum, particularly heritage studies and history at O-level, national aims for the latter were established along with the methodology for achieving such aspirations. This was in line with the cyclical model for curriculum implementation review, which recommended identifying the intended outcomes and how they were to be achieved (Furieux and Brooke, 2019). Having established those two important principles in the curriculum implementation review, support efforts by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education for the successful implementation of the new curriculum were evaluated. Besides, challenges faced by teachers during the implementation of the new curriculum were also established.

From the thematic analysis, four themes emerged and are presented in Table 3. Subsequently, they are discussed in detail.

**Table 3:** Themes emerging from the study

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Theme 1 | Intended outcomes for Zimbabwe's 2015-2022 curriculum: Heritage studies and history teaching and learning                               |
| Theme 2 | Methodology to achieve the intended outcomes  |
| Theme 3 | Ministerial support rendered to heritage studies and history teachers to facilitate the successful implementation of the new curriculum |
| Theme 4 | Challenges encountered by secondary school heritage studies and history teachers in the implementation of the new curriculum            |

***Intended outcomes for Zimbabwe's 2015-2022 curriculum: Heritage studies (4006) and history (4044) teaching and learning***

Theme 1 was guided by the conceptual framework question, *Where do we need to be?* Zimbabwe's curriculum, 2015-2022, has a number of intended outcomes. These outcomes are well presented in the Curriculum Framework and in the heritage studies and history syllabi. One of the central intended outcomes was the development of skills and empowerment of individuals (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015b). Examples of skills to be developed through history teaching and learning are critical thinking, problem-solving, self-management, decision-making, communication, and conflict resolution. Similarly, the teaching and learning of heritage studies are intended to develop individuals who are responsible to the extent of valuing and protecting cultural, economic, and even liberation heritage (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015a). Such an education system is meant to mould responsible and patriotic citizens (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015a; Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015b). This can be appreciated if patriotism is considered as the love for and loyalty to one's country (Merry, 2020).

The successful moulding of patriotic citizens would be a natural expression by individuals who take pride in their nation. In this regard, a society that accepts human character would be moulded (*Ubuntu/Unhu*). *Ubuntu/unhu* is a Ndebele/Shona concept respectively, which implies a human being in totality and morally upright sense. Thus, the concept of *Ubuntu/unhu* is used as one of the justifications for crafting Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework, 2015-2022. Hence, the youth needed to promote *Ubuntu/unhu* as recommended by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education in 1999 (Nziramanga, 1999; Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2018.). The successful moulding of patriotic citizens, whose minds are fully soaked in *Ubuntu/unhu*, would then "... uphold our national unity, sovereignty, governance by embracing Zimbabwean constitution, national symbols, and events which foster patriotism, national identity, and a sense of pride and ownership of factors of production such as natural resources" (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015a:1). Such a curriculum is aligned with Lawton's (2012) model of curriculum development. Lawton's position is that a curriculum should be developed based on a selection of aspects from society that are deemed relevant. In this regard, it is the political leadership, just like in the case of Zimbabwe, which decides which part of culture has to be included as part of the curriculum (Lawton, 2012).

### ***Methodology to achieve the intended outcomes***

Theme 2 emerged when the researchers considered the second step in terms of how a curriculum implementation review should be conducted, guided by the question, *How are we going to get there?* This implied identifying how the intended outcomes were to be achieved. The aforementioned intended outcomes were to be achieved through teaching and learning. In this regard, teaching and learning Heritages studies and history at O-level call for learner-centred approaches. Prescribed teaching and learning approaches included discovery, research, educational tours (at least three times a year), e-learning, projects, and tasks (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015a; Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015b). The project and task approaches were new to history teaching and learning at the secondary school level. While heritage studies was a new secondary school subject, using projects and tasks were also new teaching and learning approaches in this context.

In terms of projects, learners are expected to conduct research and write a report on a topic of their choice selected from either the O-level or Form 4 learning areas (Zimbabwe School Examination Council, 2017). The projects must be done within two years as part of the continuous assessment for a terminal result, seeking to promote investigation, application, problem-solving, and communication skills (Zimbabwe School Examination Council, 2017). The template for the project report was as follows: topic, background, objectives, sources, methods of data collection, findings, conclusion, and recommendations (Zimbabwe School Examination Council, 2017). Concerning the tasks, whose intended outcomes are similar to that of project writing, learners are given termly tasks (i.e, three at Form 3 and two at Form 4), for example, an investigative task and writing a short report, which also constitute part of the continuous assessment (Zimbabwe School Examination Council, 2017).

In terms of time allocation on the school timetable, thirty-five to forty minutes were prescribed for a lesson for both heritages studies and history, with four and five periods per week respectively (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015a; Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015b). This suggests that the teachers had to draft a school timetable that allowed teacher-learner interaction for at least thirty-five minutes per lesson, and not more than forty minutes. Ideally, such allocated time is assumed adequate for individuals to be transformed through their learning experiences into responsible characters in line with the intended learning outcomes.

With the rationale, methodology, and time allocation for the teaching and learning of

heritage studies and history in mind, the teacher is then expected to interact with learners using specified themes or learning areas to produce societally acceptable individuals. Table 4 below shows the O-level learning areas in heritage studies and history.

**Table 4:** O-level learning areas in heritage studies and history

| O-level heritage studies (Forms 3 and 4)   | O-level history (Forms 3 and 4)  |
|--|--|
| Socialisation  | Sources of history   |
| Family and the country   | State formation in Zimbabwe and the region such as Great Zimbabwe, Mutapa, Ndebele, and Zulu |
| Ubuntu (norms and values), such as courtship practices, dance, and drama               | Slave trade and the Portuguese activities in the Zambezi Valley                              |
| Colonisation of Zimbabwe and resistance to colonialism in Zimbabwe                     | Early missionaries and agents of colonisation and scramble for Africa                        |
| Independent Zimbabwe, sovereignty, and governance                                      | Colonisation and resistance to colonisation in Zimbabwe                                      |
| National heritage such as the national flag, heritage sites, and natural resources     | Colonial rule and struggle for independence in Zimbabwe and post-independent Zimbabwe        |
| Zimbabwean constitution  | Land reform in Zimbabwe  |
| Global issues such as pollution, human traffic, land degradation, and waste management | South Africa since 1884  |
|  | First and Second World War; the League of Nations  |
|  | Europe in the 20 <sup>th</sup> Century, the United Nations, and the Cold War                 |
|  | The rise of dictators in Europe; Chinese, Cuban, and Russian revolutions                     |
|  | Democracy and human rights   |

Source: Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015a; Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015b.

In view of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, when teachers successfully implement the above-mentioned curriculum, the result would be the moulding of responsible, patriotic individuals. The importance of this statement cannot be overstated. In a context where political purposes had often manipulated historical narratives, the Ministry of this new curriculum was seen as a means to empower learners to understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens (Pinto, 2023). This empowerment was crucial for learners' individual development and for the broader goal of fostering a politically aware and active citizenry capable of handling national issues (Dzvimbo, 2019).

The next section is a review of the operationalisation of the O-level heritage studies and history curriculum at the O-level, with the view to establishing whether the implementation of the curriculum changes was a success.

### ***Ministerial support rendered to history and heritage studies teachers to facilitate the successful implementation of the new curriculum***

Theme 3 of this study was guided by the specific question that underpins the third step in terms of the principles of a curriculum implementation review, namely, *How do we make it happen?* (Furneau and Brooke, 2019). Given the above guide for a curriculum implementation review, the researchers established what the education ministry did to enhance the successful implementation of the curriculum reforms. In light of the above conceptual framework, the study established that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, through the district education officials, descended to school clusters towards the end of 2016, where a few selected teachers were trained. During the workshops, "... teachers were also taught how to draft a school-based syllabus from the national one, scheming and implementing the new curriculum using different approaches" (Interviewee F). This was confirmed by the other participants of the study. This exercise was held between late 2016 and early 2017 (Interviewees A, C, D, F, and H).

All participants testified that they participated in workshops that were coordinated either by district education officers or fellow teachers who district education officials trained. Interviewee J confirmed her participation in the works: "We were informed of the rationale for the Curriculum Framework, 2015-2020. We gained a lot of knowledge, especially an understanding of the overview of the new curriculum and how it was supposed to be implemented." Another interviewee added: "The November 2016 preparations [workshops] enabled me to understand the philosophy and vision behind the curriculum" (Interviewee D). Interviewee I, a heritage studies teacher, also reported:

“They (district education officers) trained us on how we were supposed to scheme our work.” In this regard, one other interviewee said that she was even given templates of the scheme of work, whose headings and sub-headings were easy to follow when it came to scheming (Interviewee J). This was a positive way towards the intended goal(s) because key stakeholders in curriculum implementation needed to be involved to feel “ownership” and accustomed to the curriculum that they had to implement (Alsubaie, 2016; Alter and Gafney, 2020).

However, while the workshops were meant to familiarise the teachers with the new curriculum, some participants in this study argued that the workshops were rushed, as implied by the rhetorical question: “How did you expect us (teachers) to master the new style of planning and scheming, given the short notice. Remember, we (teachers) were rushed into the workshops in December 2016, and forced to start implementing the new curriculum on 10 January 2017.” (Interviewee A) Rather, all ten participants complained that they were not given enough time to prepare for implementing the new curriculum. It was, therefore, established that the education ministry rushed curriculum information dissemination. Curriculum experts such as Peskova et al. (2019) and Voogt et al. (2019) warn that curriculum reforms that are rushed into implementation without adequate involvement of teachers are often resisted by the latter.

All participants pointed out that the government trained teachers through workshops, although not often, up to 2021. However, they further indicated that there were no follow-ups to see if the curriculum reforms were successfully implemented. For instance, four out of the ten participants indicated that heritage studies was not offered as a mandatory subject at their respective schools, which contradicted the ministerial directive (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017). Additionally, five participants noted that heritage studies and history were allocated 30 minutes per lesson instead of the prescribed 35 to 40 minutes. This suggests that, in some instances, the curriculum changes were not adequately implemented in the Mutare district as per the ministerial requirement, something that curriculum monitoring could have addressed (Mavhunga, 2006).

It can be concluded that the education ministry made significant efforts to assist the teachers to ensure the successful implementation of the new curriculum through workshops and the release of some instructional materials. To some extent, these workshops helped the teachers have a theoretical understanding of what was expected to implement the new curriculum successfully. However, curriculum information dissemination and conducting initial workshops to train teachers were rushed. Besides, the education ministry did not monitor the implementation process at the school level.

### ***Challenges encountered by secondary school heritage studies and history teachers in the implementation of the new curriculum***

The fourth and last theme of the study focused on the challenges that heritage studies and history teachers faced while implementing the new curriculum. All participants reported that they faced challenges that inhibited them from successfully implementing the new curriculum. Generally, the challenges included confusion among teachers concerning the level at which the new curriculum was to be offered in January 2017, overburdening teachers and learners with workloads, limiting learners' choice of subjects, shortage of instructional resources, and shortage of qualified teachers to teach the newly introduced subject heritage studies.

The study established that from the onset of the implementation of the new curriculum in early January 2017, it was not clear at what level the new curriculum had to be introduced. Some participants said they introduced it only at Form 1 while others implemented it at Forms 1, 2, and 3 (Interviewees B, C, E, F, and H). Interviewee G put it as follows: "While we were not sure where to start, we later agreed as a school to offer the new curriculum to Forms 1, 2, and 3 learners." "At Gray High School (a pseudo name), we introduced it (new curriculum) to Form 1, and later on to 2 and 3", said Interviewee A. This confusion was clarified by Interviewee J, who said: "The mix-up was due to the fact that our ministry (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education) had not clearly communicated until schools received a circular in February 2017." While the circular was received, it was date-stamped on 18 January 2017 (Interviewees D, H, and G; Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017). The circular clarified that the implementation had to start at Forms 1, 3, and 5. This implies that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education used a fragmented approach when it came to curriculum information dissemination. While Alter and Gafney (2020) define curriculum dissemination as a process that includes taking the curriculum to the instructors, the education ministry's approach was defective because it was not communicated in time. Alter and Gafney (2020) further advise that curriculum dissemination must be completed before implementation. Therefore, the fact that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education disseminated only part of the curriculum information before implementation was not aligned with the principles of curriculum information dissemination. This negligence made the curriculum implementers unsure of the learner level/form to start receiving the new curriculum (Interviewees D, H, and G).

Another challenge was that both teachers and learners felt overburdened with their workloads. Seven participants argued that more work was added, hindering their



effectiveness. The issue of tasks as part of continuous assessment was identified as the major cause of overburdened workloads. In the words of one history teacher: “How can you expect me to be an effective teacher when I am supposed to supervise 54 tasks of my students in a term, for five school terms?” (Interviewee F) In support of this view, another teacher complained that besides introducing tasks requiring supervision, the education ministry never reviewed the minimum work the teacher should give, mark, and record. Thus, regarding work coverage, secondary school history teachers are expected to give, mark, and record at least one objective type of test per week, one essay per fortnight, and one test per month (Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, 2006). Regarding burdening students, it was reported that tasks were burdensome to learners who are supposed to study the seven compulsory subjects in addition to the electives (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017). Since each subject has five tasks, it implied that, for example, “... if a learner is taking ten subjects, it means the learner is expected to do ten tasks per term, translating to fifty tasks in two years [duration for an O-level study]” (Interviewee H). It was further pointed out that although tasks are meant to develop investigative and critical thinking skills in individual learners, the intention was likely to be doomed because they complained of too much work (Interviewee A). This scenario falls far short of Learner (2022), who argues that when it comes to curriculum development and implementation, the interests of learners have to take centre stage. In this regard, the heritage studies and history curriculum reforms suffer from the deficiency of being learner-centred (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2009).

The study further established that, as a result of the seven compulsory subjects, which included agriculture, English language, heritage studies, general science, indigenous language, mathematics, physical education, sport, and mass displays (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017:4), the secondary school curriculum became too wide. Resultantly, subjects such as family and religious studies, history, and geography were offered to a few classes or dropped from the school curriculum (Interviewees B, F, and H). One participant revealed that it was a painful experience at her school for both history teachers and learners that history was dropped at both Forms 3 and 1 levels to accommodate heritage studies (Interviewee C). In the same vein, one other history teacher said: “For the love of the history subject not to ‘die’, as a school, we agreed that two classes dropped history as an elective subject, while the other two classes continued with the subject at Forms 1 and 3.” (Interviewee F) From this revelation, it can be argued the implementation of the new curriculum was marred by challenges.

At one school, it was reported that although history was an elective, the members of

the History Department and the O-level learners rejected phasing out the subject from the school timetable despite the fact that the curriculum had become too wide due to the inclusion of the seven compulsory subjects. Rather, instead of sticking to at least thirty-five minutes per lesson, five periods per week, it was reduced to thirty minutes per lesson, four periods a week to include history (Interviewee G). While the mandatory subject, heritage studies, was officially allocated at least thirty-five minutes per period and four times a week, it was reduced to thirty minutes per period and three periods per week (Interviewee G). This confession made it clear that the classroom teacher has veto power to or not to implement a curriculum change. Thus, this validates the statements of Peskova et al. (2019) and Voogt et al. (2019) that teachers are critical agents in the successful implementation of any curriculum innovation.

While some participants appreciated the introduction of the new subject heritage studies, it was not without implementation challenges. The introduction of heritage studies as a new secondary school subject was associated with a lack of instructional resources, especially in the first two years of the implementation stage. According to all ten participants, by January 2017 there were no instructional resources approved by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education besides the syllabus. To this end, implementation of the new reforms was a struggle. Elaborating on this view, a heritage studies teacher said: “In the first six months of my experience in teaching heritage studies, I solely used my syllabus to make notes for my students. I only managed to get a heritage studies textbook towards the end of May 2017. Funny enough, the textbook is awash with errors, not exhaustive, and lacks chronology in the presentation of study topics.” (Interviewee F) Examples of errors noted are that the stone buildings at Great Zimbabwe were built with stones and dagga; Matebeleland is sometimes written as Matabeleland on the same page.

The problem of shortage of resources was also confirmed by other heritage studies teachers who said they had to search for information on the internet, although they were not sure of the quality (Interviewees A, D, and J). Some who did not have access to the internet said they purchased prepared notes from vendors in the city of Mutare. Commenting on the quality of the teaching notes, one teacher said some notes were good and usable, while others were too brief, shallow, and questionable (Interviewee H). Such a challenge was worsened by the fact there were no Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council specimen question papers which could have been used as guides, especially in the formulation of assessment questions. In line with this challenge, it was reported that there were no specimen question papers even with the textbooks published in 2017 with the education ministry’s approval (Interviewees D and J).

Another major problem was the shortage of teachers qualified to teach heritage studies, as neither teachers' training colleges nor universities trained teachers specifically to teach the subject before 2017. There has never been such a subject in the Zimbabwe education system since 1980. It was established that in many cases the teachers whose subjects were dropped as a result of the new curriculum had to teach heritage studies (Interviewees B, F, and H). Most of the 'victims' were teachers trained to teach history, geography, and religious Studies. Nevertheless, even those who trained as science and mathematics teachers were made to teach heritage studies in dire situations. In this regard, one may wonder or question the impact of teaching outside one's area of specialisation vis-à-vis the attainment of the national curriculum goals. This may result in teacher frustration and ultimately damage the integrity of the teaching profession.

## Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. If curriculum planners and policymakers wish to witness the successful adoption and implementation of curriculum reform, the issue of personnel and instructional resources needs to be adequately addressed. Information about the reforms should be adequately disseminated to teachers so that they are not imposed but accepted before being asked to implement such reforms. Teacher buy-in is crucial in any curriculum reform.
2. During curriculum reforms, the teachers-learners' workloads must be realistic and consultation among all key stakeholders is needed. This will alleviate both teachers and learners from the excessive burden that the new curriculum may come with.
3. High-quality resources must be developed well before schools are directed to implement curriculum reforms. In this case, the approved heritage studies textbooks for schools in Zimbabwe must be reviewed to establish whether the content is of good quality and depth and sufficiently in line with the Curriculum Framework.
4. Before a new subject is implemented in the school curriculum, teachers need to be adequately trained to teach the subject. In this regard, teachers' training colleges and universities can assist by providing such training. This training should not be rushed, and follow-up workshops should be conducted to address challenges

faced during implementation. Mentoring support networks should also be established to help teachers teach the new subject, heritage studies.

5. A robust system for evaluating curriculum implementation should be established. Regular visits by district education officers to schools should be conducted to ensure that the curriculum is being implemented as intended and any deviations from the prescribed guidelines are promptly addressed. Such monitoring will also allow for real-time feedback and adjustments to improve the process.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to assess the implementation of Zimbabwe's 2015 – 2022 curriculum reforms within secondary schools in the Mutare District, particularly in Heritage Studies and History. Using Furneaux and Brooke's five-step cyclical model for curriculum implementation review as the conceptual framework, the study provided a structured evaluation of the reform's processes and outcomes. The findings highlight that while the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education made commendable efforts, such as conducting workshops and providing instructional materials, the rushed implementation process left teachers ill-prepared, with insufficient training and a lack of resources. This, coupled with overwhelming workloads and the shortage of qualified teachers for the new subject, heritage studies, negatively affected the achievement of the effectiveness of the reforms. The study further revealed that history was often marginalised in some schools, reducing instructional time and diminishing historical knowledge. The conceptual framework emphasised the importance of preparation, ongoing support, and evaluation in curriculum implementation, of which all were insufficiently addressed in this case. Despite the challenges, the research points to the curriculum's potential to foster critical thinking, patriotism, and national values provided that the gaps identified in this study are addressed. The success of curriculum reforms, whether in heritage studies or history, depends not only on the ambition of their design but on the quality of their execution. Therefore, while implementing the heritage studies and history curriculum reforms was partially a success, the challenges outweighed the successes in many instances. Like all studies, this study also has its limitations. The main limitation of this study was the unwillingness of some teachers to participate due to lack of time. In conclusion, the study has provided insights into the complexities and challenges surrounding the implementation of Zimbabwe's 2015-2022 curriculum reforms in heritage studies and history. Further research on topics such as the longitudinal impact on curriculum reforms, teachers' professional development, resource allocation, and policy effectiveness can provide valuable insights into this critical area and is therefore encouraged.

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