



# Misconstructions about the Heritage Based Curriculum: The Detractor of Educational Foci

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## Abstract

The national curricula the world over should be focused on the apposite exploitation of the natural resources for economic sustainability. In essence, the curricula which have thrusts on capacitating learners to exploit the natural resources for the improved livelihoods of the citizenry are referred to as indenized curricula. In Zimbabwe, the approximation of the indenized curriculum is dubbed the Heritage Based Curriculum (HBC). The HBC was hastily introduced at the beginning of the 2025 academic year in primary and secondary schools. There are misconstructions about the essence of HBC among the education practitioners. Misconstructions, are evoked when the crux of understanding it is hinged on the six learning areas in primary schools. The HBC is complex and should be informed by different philosophies which among others are; naturalism, pragmatism and in the Zimbabwean context, Ubuntu/Unhu. The philosophies help in developing the appropriate mind set for the indenized curriculum mutatis mutandis HBC. The research focuses on the extent of the detrimental effects of the misconstructions about the HBC. The qualitative approach was employed for the generation of data. The paradigm which guided the research was the hermeneutic phenomenology. The informants are purposively selected on the criterion that they were participants at the HBC dissemination workshops. The informants were interviewed and their perceptions were audio recorded after their consent was sought. The data were analysed thematically. The findings exposed the misconstructions about HBC and the effects thereof in stifling the efficacious implementation. The curriculum disseminators should explicate the essence and antecedents of HBC to the curriculum implementers in order to motivate them to embrace it.

**Keywords:** Heritage based Curriculum; Ubuntu/Unhu; Indenized Curriculum; Curriculum Implementation; Economic Sustainability

## Introduction

The Zimbabwean education system is endeavouring to conscientise the citizenry about their heritage and to capacitate them to participate in the issues about economic

sustainability. There is a strong conviction among curriculum designers that the Heritage Based Curriculum (HBC) is the panacea to economic sustainability. The ideation at the curriculum designing level could be noble but may not be embodied to efficacy if there are misconstructions about

some issues in HBC. The problem usually starts at the dissemination stage. The dissemination of the curriculum could be problematic when there are misconstructions emanating from epistemic gaps about the essence of the curriculum to national development. When the essence of the curriculum is not clearly articulated to the stakeholders there would be misconstructions which have detrimental effects on HBC implementation and subsequent evaluation.

Effective curriculum dissemination requires that the dialogical approach be employed in curriculum dissemination for the solicitation of stakeholders' misconstructions about the curriculum [1]. Any misconstructions should be done away with before the dissemination stage. All the stakeholders should have a shared vision of what the new curriculum intends to achieve [2]. The avoidance of the dialogical approach begets the epistemic closeness which is embodied in the monological approach which imparts information through communiques. The understanding of the disseminator about the issue focused on is expected to override all other contexts. Insidiously there is the promotion of the culture of silence which alienates some key stakeholders and relegates them into a state of anomie and estrangement.

## Background

The Zimbabwean Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) adopted and launched the HBC for the primary and secondary school learners in July 2024. The curriculum was meant to ameliorate the social and economic turbulence which the country is reeling under. Thus, the curriculum transformation to HBC was considered to be the panacea to the socio-economic problems. The focus of HBC is on capacitation of the learners with the requisite skills, knowledge and attitudes for active participation in national development ventures. The thrust of HBC is on the provision of education for sustainable socio-economic development in the context of Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean heritage and the natural resources are considered to be critical issues in the HBC.

The HBC is the realization of the global focus on education for sustainable socio-economic development which was declared by UNESCO from 2005-2014. The aim was to equip learners with critical, creative and problem-solving skills requisite for a sustainable future. The learners are supposed to be active and transformative participants in exploiting the readily available resources for socio-economic development meant to sustain livelihoods of future generations [3].

The HBC is reactive to colonial education in Zimbabwe which was meant to promote socio-economic and political hegemony of the colonialists. Most aspects of the British-

oriented curriculum were embraced for more than a century. Mimicry of the colonialists' ways of life was positively sanctioned in education and religion which were the very influential state ideological apparatuses. Inevitably, the identity of the indigenes was compromised. In light of the vices of the colonial education and its remnants in the curriculum after attaining political independence in 1980, the HBC in Zimbabwe is responsive to some colonial vices such as demeaning the philosophy, knowledge and language and also vilifying the religious traditions of the indigenes. Consequentially, Zimbabwe has been having a hybridized curriculum with nebulous perceptions of heritage education. The education curriculum has been serving the interests of the British supremacy. It is the aim of the curriculum designers in Zimbabwe to extricate the hegemony by conscientizing the citizenry about their indigenous inheritance and identity through HBC.

The construct 'heritage' needs temporal interrogation. The epochs in the history of a nation state are indispensable in the unpacking of the construct. Considering 'heritage' simplistically obfuscates its contextual underpinnings. Having been under colonial rule for almost a century, the indigenous Africans in Zimbabwe have succumbed to the machinations of the state ideological apparatuses. The very viral among other ideological apparatuses are the systems such as education and religion. These two ideological apparatuses worked in cahoots to self-estrangle the indigenous Zimbabwean Africans. After political independence in 1980, the indigenous Africans in Zimbabwe had 'heritages' from colonialism and from historical significance of places like the Great Zimbabwe Monuments and Victoria Falls. The colonial heritages are; philosophy, culture and language. The colonial state ideological apparatuses were so vicious to the extent that the indigenous Zimbabwean Africans currently have colonial legacies as their heritage. The colonial heritage is so deeply ingrained in the minds of the indigenous Zimbabwe Africans that they consider the English-naming of the heritage sites by the colonialist as proper [4]. The maintaining of the colonial names and using them in schools is tantamount to celebrating colonial legacy.

## Explications of Constructs

### Heritage Based Curriculum (HBC)

Heritage defines a people Bender, et al. [5] since it incorporates the philosophy, culture and historical legacies of a people which cascaded down through at least three generations. The construct 'heritage' is complex and should always be explicated in particular spatial and temporal contexts. The spatial context is concerned with the physical aspects like the monuments. The temporal context is concerned with cultural transiency influenced

global interactions within particular epochs. Despite the effects of the global interactions, a people's identity should be maintained since it is inextricably connected to their heritage. Without consideration of heritage, the identity of a people is a nullity.

The HBC is realized through heritage education which fosters requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes for the appreciation of the historical past and identity [6]. Thus, education for national development is anchored on the Ubuntu/Unhu philosophy, culture and historical legacies of the people of Zimbabwe. The operational definition of HBC is that it is the blending of the tenets in Ubuntu/Unhu philosophy with the contemporary knowledge which characterises the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) disciplines. The HBC is aimed at preserving the identity of the indigenes [7] by reflecting on the efficacy of employing indigenous knowledge on STEAM disciplines for innovative practices enroute to sustainable socio-economic development.

### Unhu/Ubuntu

In the context of indigenous Africans in Zimbabwe, the philosophy of Ubuntu/Unhu is one of the most invaluable heritages. It guides the indigenes' collectivist thinking and communalist practices which are some of the very important characteristics of heritage. Consequentially the philosophy on which the HBC should be anchored on is Unhu/Ubuntu. It is a philosophy which has all the branches which constitute a philosophy. However, Ubuntu/Unhu accentuates the axiological branch with emphasis on mutuality in humane interactions [8-10]. Due to the emphasis on mutuality of humaneness in interactions, Ubuntu/Unhu has a ubiquitous adage among the indigenous people of southern Africa but with linguistic variations. In Zimbabwe, the Ndebele have the adage; *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* [11-12]. The Shona variation is *Munhu munhu muvanhu* [13]. The adage stresses on that everyone has an obligation to respect the contributions of other members of his community in the interpretation of the world. Thus, Mbiti [14] postulates that in the interpretation of the world, the Ubuntu oriented person bears it in mind that, 'I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am'. The adage has epistemological and axiological underpinnings that inform the practices of the people guided by Ubuntu/Unhu in the interpretation of the world and the creation of knowledge.

Ubuntu/unhu should be considered as the kingpin of the aspects of life of the people of the Bantu origin. According to Mandela Ubuntu is a philosophy constituting a universal truth, a way of life which underpins an open society [15]. Thus, the epistemic guidance offered by Ubuntu/Unhu philosophy could be the panacea to creating authentic

indigenous knowledge [16] on which the HBC could be anchored.

### Curriculum Dissemination

Curriculum dissemination is the process which should firstly be focused on explaining the rationale and components of a new or updated curriculum [17]. Effective curriculum dissemination provides explications about the goals and requisite knowledge and fosters a sense of ownership of the curriculum. Subsequently there is in-service training of the implementers to enable them to adopt and adapt themselves to effective implementation. The following stage is the clarification of the evaluation procedures to the implementers. Ultimately the resources indispensable to curriculum implementation such as the syllabuses are distributed to the implementers. Flawed curriculum dissemination leads to inconsistent implementation, ultimately impacting negatively on the achievement of the curriculum aims [18].

### Curriculum Implementation

The dissemination of the curriculum is critical for the motivation of the implementers to effectively actualize the curriculum [19]. Curriculum implementation is the process of selecting appropriate learning facilitation strategies for the learner and employing them to achieve the curriculum goals. It involves the teaching of learners within prepared learning environments attuned to the realization of curriculum goals [20]. The teachers are the critical curriculum implementers [21].

Curriculum implementation is adversely affected when the teacher has hazy understanding of the essence of the curriculum [22]. The teacher should be adequately informed about the rationale of the curriculum change and/or innovation in order to be motivated for active involvement.

### Indenized Curriculum

A curriculum for sustainable development should be naturalized so that the natural resources which are readily available can be exploited for improvement of livelihoods. To naturalize a curriculum is to indenize it. A curriculum which is based on the indigenous resources is an indigenized curriculum [23]. Consequentially, the hinging of the curriculum on natural resources, indigenous philosophy and knowledge systems is indenisation of the curriculum. The indenized curriculum is preservative of all aspects of life of the indigenes. Inevitably, indenisation of the curriculum was abhorrent during colonialism. The indigenous strategies were being considered inferior in the knowledge creation spaces at national and global levels [24,25]. Thus, the HBC

which is an embodiment of indenisation of the curriculum should be philosophical rather than rhetorical and political. Philosophically, the indenized curriculum rationalizes the components of the curriculum. When the curriculum is considered rhetorically and politically it means that the most convincing words are used to lure the audience with promises which cannot be actualized. The indenized curriculum is anchored on spatial, temporal and philosophical realities of a nation state.

### Economic Sustainability

Economic sustainability is the state of thriving in turbulent situations which involves exploiting appropriate strategies for lifelong economic prosperity. There is cautiousness of not impacting adversely on the social, environmental, and cultural welfare of the community and the predecessors [26]. The human and the natural resources should not be sloppily exhausted. The natural resources should be conserved and the human resource should be motivated. The strategies for fostering economic sustainability should be the core aspects in the education curriculum [27]. Curriculum needs to be planned for the attainment of economic sustainability [28].

### Research Methodology

The study employed the qualitative research methodology which was guided by the hermeneutics phenomenology

paradigm. The focus was on the interpretation of the realities of life [24]. Phenomenology focuses on the lived realities of the informants and hermeneutics focuses on the interpretation of the lived realities. Thus, the paradigm is hybridized, underscoring the symbiotic synergy between phenomenology and hermeneutics. The understanding of the world in which the informants lived was focused on. These were descriptions of the lived realities which were expressed in the informants' own words. The verbatim descriptions imply that interviews were used in the generation of data. The interview data were the descriptions and interpretations of realities of life of the informants which Hoberg [29] refer to as *emic* interpretations. The information-richness of *emic* data facilitates the *etic* (researcher's) identification of themes in the *emic* descriptions and interpretations of reality [30]. Thus the thematic approach was used in the interpretation of data.

The sample of the informants was purposively selected. The criterion for selection was their status as facilitators at the curriculum dissemination workshop. The table below shows the gender, professional qualifications years of experience of the informants. For the ethical consideration of anonymity, the informants were given pseudonyms and referred to as Informant 1, Informant 2, ... Informant 9 and Informant 10.

Informant	Male	Female	Qualification	Teaching Experience in years
Informant 1		X	Bed	15
Informant 2		X	Med	18
Informant 3		X	Med	10
Informant 4	X		Diploma	25
Informant 5	X		Bed	22
Informant 6		X	Med	26
Informant 7		X	Bed	17
Informant 8	X		Med	21
Informant 9	X		Bed	30
Informant 10	X		Bed	16

**Table 1:** Informants by gender, qualifications and age.

### Reflections on Findings

#### HBC as the Constellation of Six Learning Areas

There are misconstructions about what HBC is all about. Informant 9 postulated that; "HBC is the six learning areas which are; Indigenous Languages, English Language, Mathematics, Science and

Technology, Social Studies, and Physical Education and Arts at the primary level"

The HBC is considered as the constellation of six learning which are compartmentalised and without a common goal. Each learning area is considered as a standalone entity. Such a consideration is detrimental to the focus of the HBC. The goals of the HBC should be well explicated to the stakeholders so that each learning area

is considered as an indispensable constituent part of the macro-organism. The organic approach which considers each learning area as requisite for realising heritage should be adopted. The learning areas should be complementary to achieving a common goal.

### **HBC as Hinged on Content Based Instruction (CBI)**

The conception of HBC is hinged on CBI by some stakeholders. Informant 2 had a content-oriented understanding of HBC; "HBC is about the inclusion of the sixteen languages in the primary school curriculum for facilitation of learning". The implementation of HBC is believed to be facilitated by CBI. The CBI is realised when a variety of media of instruction which the learners are conversant with are used for understanding content and development of targeted skills [31].

The variety of the languages is important for addressing the identity needs of the diverse citizenry. However there is need to improve on the quality of the languages as media of instruction [32]. The ideal situation is to have a dictionary for each language before being formally used as media of instruction in the schools.

### **Contrastive Perception of HBC with Competence Based Curriculum (CBC)**

HBC is conceptualised in contrast to CBC. Informant 6 proclaimed, "HBC is unique in that there is a school project to be done by all learners from Early Childhood Development (ECD) to Advanced Level" (Informant 6).

Another contrastive perception was given by informant 1 who posited that;

"HBC is better than CBC because the continuous assessment learning activities (CALAs) were biased about learners' actual performance" (Informant 1).

Corroborative remarks about contrastive perceptions were also postulated by Informant 4;

"HBC is less strenuous since it has only six learning areas. It is not as laborious as the CBC" (Informant 4).

The HBC is contrasted to the CBC not in terms of focus but more on the strain in implementation. The distinction between the two curricula should be clear. CBC has a thrust on practical skills which can be applied in the real world. The emphasis is on skills development. On the other hand, HBC focuses on the integration of the indigenous culture, history, values, and traditions with contemporary technology. The trust is on building an identity which could have been lost due to some circumstances like colonialism. In succinct, CBC is about life-long skills whereas HBC is about reconnecting education with the cultural roots [33].

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) emphasizes on the complementarity of CBC and HBC. According to the Communications Director of MoPSE, the HBC enhances the continuous assessment learning activities (CALA) to sharpen the competencies of learners [34]. Though the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education emphasizes on continuation of CBC to anchor HBC, some stakeholders do not embrace that thinking.

### **Conception of HBC as Research Oriented**

The informants understand the importance of research in HBC but they are not explicit about how each learner is going to be involved in research work. Informant 8 proclaimed; "Every learner does research. Even the ECD learner does research".

The involvement of children as researchers needs a paradigm shift. The children are co-creators of knowledge about their lives. Their potentials should not be demeaned but there is need for clarity on their engagement [35].

Informant 3 gave a general statement which connected HBC with research;

"HBC is about researching on our heritage".

The orientation of all learners to researching about their heritage is noble. However, what the researches are about and how they are going to be carried out require interrogation. The stakeholders are not conversant with how the learners will be involved.

### **Misconstructions about the Philosophy Underpinning HBC**

The informants have some misconstructions about the philosophy which guides the selection of content and methods in the HBC, Informant 7 explained;

"African philosophy should guide the HBC but very few people are practicing Ubuntu/Unhu. Those who practice Ubuntu/Unhu are labelled primitive".

There is confusion about the philosophy which should be underpinning the HBC in Zimbabwe. Informant 7 confuses Ubuntu/Unhu with African philosophy. Ubuntu/Unhu is not a philosophy of all the people on the African continent. It is a philosophy of the people of southern Africa who are of the Bantu origin.

### **Reservations with the Philosophy Underpinning HBC**

There is a conviction among some informants about the redundancy of Ubuntu/Unhu as an efficacious philosophy for underpinning HBC. Informant 5 rationalized;

"Ubuntu is manifested in indigenous languages but there is adulteration of values. There is a lot of mixing up of languages and Ubuntu is redundant"

Informant 5 is an adherent of the universalistic perspective which considers philosophy as transcendental of cultural boundaries. The universalists have the conviction that all philosophies are global and not ethno-centric [29].

The essence of a philosophy is not realised in HBC. Informant 10 postulated that;

“The philosophy underpinning HBC does not matter but the content and the activities”

The philosophy of a people is the most invaluable heritage. The philosophy guides all the activities of a people. Informant 10 is not aware of the essence of a philosophy on the realisation of the goals of a curriculum. The philosophy of a nation state is the bedrock of the educational foci. Philosophy guides the crafting of the aims of education, selection of content and methods and organization of all educational practices [36].

### **Demeaning the Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

Indigenous knowledge had been demeaned during the colonial era. Informant 2 enunciated;

“Some of the indigenous knowledge is not competitive in the global knowledge creation spaces”

Some corroborative remarks were articulated by informant 4: “Some indigenous knowledge about medicinal herbs is considered dubious at global level” (Informant 4)

Some stakeholders are not confident with the indigenous knowledge at global level. They demean it. The despising of the indigenous knowledge is a manifestation of the remnants of colonial legacy. Colonialism had the tendency of exalting Western scientific epistemologies and vilifying the indigenous knowledge systems [37]. The informants still succumb to colonial legacies. They should be aware of the fact that even the narratives about how the indigenous knowledge sustained livelihoods are critical for motivating innovative ventures in HBC. Innovations in an indigenized curriculum should be hinged on indigenous curriculum. The misconstructions about indigenous knowledge system could stifle the implementation of HBC

On the other hand, the sceptics of indigenous knowledge are universalists who argue that knowledge is scientific as thus universal. They stress on the removal of the qualifier, ‘indigenous’. The argument is that qualifiers have a cosmetic effect on some pseudo-knowledge [29].

### **Lack of Ownership of HBC by Stakeholders**

Some stakeholders, the very influential ones lack ownership of the HBC. They consider it as a top-down edict. Informant 6 postulated;

“HBC is a policy issue which has to be followed.”

Corroborative remarks were given by informant 1;

“When the Minister says that the HBC must be implemented, it must be implemented.”

Confirmatory remarks were also expressed by informant 5; “One has to adapt oneself to the dictates of the HBC because it is what the Minister is after.”

The extent of misconstruction of the HBC as a ministerial edit is enunciated by Informant 7; “HBC could be a passing phase. The CBC came and went away. HBC has come and will go away”

The misconstruction about HBC as an imposition stifles the motivation of the stakeholders to be actively involved. The contributions of the stakeholders are merely acceding to the dictates of top management. The top-down approach is monological. There is only one source of information which is considered infallible. Any contradistinctive contributions are considered to be insubordinate and they are negatively sanctioned. Thus there is reinforcement of the culture of silence. The subordinate stakeholders are denied the opportunity to voice out their views due to power imbalances [38]. The curriculum issues at the inception stage requires the dialogical approach. The dialogical approach focuses on the collaborative communication which fosters the co-creation of knowledge about programmes which are in the inception stage [39-42].

### **Conclusion**

The misconstructions about the HBC stifle the educational foci. The aims of HBC should be explicated to all the stakeholders. It is the principal role of the curriculum disseminators to conscientize the implementers about the essence of the HBC. When the aims are hazy, some stakeholders hold on to some trivial issues which they pick on during dissemination. What readily comes to the mind of most HBC implementers are the six learning areas and contrastive explanations with the CBC. The term ‘heritage’ needs to be unpacked so that the stakeholders especially curriculum implementers are made aware of what it entails. Without thorough interrogation of the term, there could be a focus on celebrating colonial legacy. The philosophy Ubuntu/Unhu guiding the national ethos is not fully emphasized on. Lack of appreciation of such a philosophy could be detrimental to the successful implementation of the HBC. The implementers of HBC lack ownership of the curriculum due to lack of both declarative and procedural knowledge. The disseminators lack ownership of the HBC since they perceive it as an imposition on them from top ministry officials.

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