



Barriers to heritage-based education policy implementation in rural Zimbabwe: insights from Masvingo Catholic secondary schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the barriers to effective implementation of Heritage-Based Education (HBE) policy in rural Zimbabwe, with particular focus on Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province. Heritage-Based Education was introduced to align the education system with Zimbabwe's cultural values, indigenous knowledge systems, national identity, and socio-economic development goals. Despite its significance, the implementation of the policy in many rural schools has faced numerous challenges that limit its effectiveness and intended outcomes. The study explores the experiences and perceptions of school administrators, teachers, and learners regarding the practical application of HBE within Catholic secondary schools. The study is guided by Sen 's Capability approach and supported by Nussbaum's Central capabilities. A qualitative case study approach was employed to gather in-depth insights from six catholic secondary selected in Masvingo Province. Purposive sampling was used to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomena and snowball sampling was used to reach difficult research participants such as schools inspectors and Responsible Authorities of the schools. Data was collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis to understand the meaning of the data and emerging patterns. The findings reveal that inadequate teaching and learning resources, limited teacher training and professional development, insufficient funding, and lack of policy clarity are major barriers to effective implementation. The study also found that tensions between heritage-based curricular expectations and the religious orientation of Catholic schools create challenges in integrating certain aspects of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices. Furthermore, poor infrastructure, limited access to technology, and the rural context of schools hinder the adoption of innovative teaching methods that support heritage-based learning. The absence of consistent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms was identified as a significant obstacle. The study concludes that while stakeholders acknowledge the importance of Heritage-Based Education in promoting cultural identity and national development, successful implementation requires stronger institutional support and contextual adaptation. It recommends increased government funding, continuous teacher capacity-building programmes, provision of relevant educational resources, and enhanced collaboration among policymakers, church authorities, school leaders, and local communities. Addressing these challenges would strengthen the implementation of Heritage-Based Education and improve its contribution to culturally responsive and sustainable education in rural Zimbabwe. The study contributes to ongoing discussions on educational policy implementation in developing contexts and offers practical insights for enhancing heritage-based learning in faith-based rural schools.

Key Words: Barriers, Catholic Secondary Schools, Education Policy Implementation, Masvingo, Rural Zimbabwe

I. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of Heritage Based Education Policy in Zimbabwe represents a change in thinking aimed at reorienting the curriculum toward indigenous knowledge systems and cultural identity (Mapurisa & Pisirai, 2025, Wuta, 2026). The HBE framework, approved by Cabinet in February 2024, is designed to produce learners with relevant skills, applied knowledge, and dispositions anchored in the Zimbabwean philosophical orientation of Unhu/Ubuntu (Ndongwe, 2025, Mapurisa & Pisirai, 2025). This policy reform seeks to decolonize the education system by moving away from colonial-era curricula that perpetuated epistemic marginalization and towards a model that embraces heritage as a basis for learning (Mapurisa & Pisirai, 2025). The curriculum emphasizes five key pathways: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM); Visual and Performing Arts; Humanities, especially the history of Zimbabwe; Technical/Vocational Education and Training (TVET); and Commercial studies. This transformative approach is grounded in the belief that education should foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills essential for navigating 21st-century challenges (Ndongwe, 2025). However, the success of this ambitious policy reform hinges critically on the capacity and agency of frontline implementers, namely teachers, school heads, and local education authorities. These

actors need to navigate a complex terrain of institutional, material, and ideological constraints. In Masvingo rural Catholic secondary schools, implementers face unique challenges that emerge at the intersection of state-mandated curricular change and the distinct ethos of faith-based education. These challenges include inadequate training and professional development that leaves educators unprepared to teach heritage content; acute shortages of culturally relevant teaching resources and textbooks; entrenched pedagogical habits rooted in colonial-era curricula that resist epistemic disruption (Machingambi & Chiripanhura, 2026); and tensions between the secular, state-defined heritage framework and the religious values upheld by Catholic school governance.

Although the Heritage-Based Education Curriculum provides an ambitious policy framework, effective curriculum implementation remains the most critical determinant of its success. Education policy implementation refers to the process through which officially formulated educational policies are translated into classroom practice by teachers, school leaders and other stakeholders (Ndongwe, 2025). Successful implementation depends on several interrelated factors, including teacher preparedness, leadership support, availability of teaching and learning resources, infrastructure, financial support, community participation, monitoring mechanisms and policy coherence (Ndongwe, 2025, Machingambi & Chiripanhura, 2026). Therefore, where these conditions are inadequate, curriculum reforms often fail to achieve their intended educational outcomes despite sound policy design.

Within this study, the dependent variable is the implementation of the Heritage-Based Education Policy, while the independent variables comprise the barriers that influence implementation. These barriers may include inadequate teacher training, shortages of instructional materials, insufficient financial resources, limited infrastructure, inadequate policy dissemination, weak administrative support, limited stakeholder participation, resistance to change and contextual challenges associated with rural schooling (Ndongwe, 2025, Machingambi & Chiripanhura, 2026, Mapurisa & Pisirai, 2025). Understanding the interaction between these variables is essential for identifying factors that facilitate or constrain effective policy implementation in rural educational settings.

The implementation of heritage-based education presents unique opportunities and challenges in rural Zimbabwe. Rural schools often possess rich cultural resources, indigenous knowledge systems and strong community traditions that provide a favourable environment for heritage-based learning (Ndongwe et al., 2025). However, these potential strengths are frequently undermined by persistent structural challenges such as limited funding, inadequate technological infrastructure, teacher shortages, poor transport networks and insufficient professional development opportunities (Mapurisa & Pisirai, 2025, Machingambi & Chiripanhura, 2026). Rural schools also experience disparities in access to educational resources when compared with their urban counterparts, making curriculum implementation considerably more complex. Consequently, while heritage-based education seeks to utilize local cultural resources, many rural schools may lack the institutional capacity necessary for effective implementation.

Faith-based schools occupy a distinctive position within Zimbabwe's education system because they combine government curriculum requirements with faith-based educational traditions. Catholic secondary schools, in particular, have historically contributed significantly to educational provision (Machingura & Kalizi, 2024), especially in rural communities where government schools are relatively scarce. These schools are recognized for promoting academic excellence, moral education and community development (Muderedzwa, 2022). However, the implementation of the Heritage-Based Education Policy within Catholic schools may involve balancing national curriculum expectations with institutional religious values, historical traditions and existing pedagogical practices (Ndlovu, 2014). This creates a unique policy environment that requires careful investigation, particularly in rural districts where mission schools continue to play a central role in educational provision.

Masvingo Province provides an appropriate context for examining these issues because of its rich historical and cultural heritage, including significant archaeological sites, indigenous cultural practices and historical institutions that are central to Zimbabwe's national identity (Mapurisa & Pisirai, 2025). The province is also characterized by numerous rural Catholic secondary schools serving geographically dispersed communities with varying socio-economic conditions (Muderedzwa, 2022, Ncube, 2013, Mutale, 2015, Marongedza et al. 2023). These schools operate within environments where the objectives of heritage-based education could potentially be realized through close engagement with local culture and community knowledge. At the same time, they face considerable implementation challenges arising from resource limitations, rural isolation and institutional constraints (Ndongwe, 2025), making them suitable sites for investigating barriers to policy implementation.

Although emerging studies have examined Zimbabwe's Heritage-Based Curriculum and teacher preparedness, much of the existing literature focuses on general curriculum implementation or urban settings (Mapurisa & Pisirai, 2025), with limited attention to the experiences of rural mission schools. Similarly, few studies have specifically explored how Catholic secondary schools in rural Masvingo negotiate the practical demands of implementing the Heritage-Based Education Policy within their distinctive institutional and socio-cultural contexts (Machingambi & Chiripanhura, 2026). This creates a significant knowledge gap regarding the contextual factors influencing policy implementation in rural faith-based schools.

Against this background, this study seeks to investigate the barriers to Heritage-Based Education Policy implementation in rural Zimbabwe, using Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province as a case study. By identifying



the institutional, pedagogical, socio-economic and contextual factors that influence policy implementation, the study aims to contribute to curriculum implementation literature and provide evidence-based recommendations for policy-makers, school administrators and educators. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform strategies that strengthen the effective implementation of heritage-based education while promoting equitable educational opportunities and preserving Zimbabwe's cultural heritage within rural school communities.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite Zimbabwe's ambitious adoption of the Heritage Based Education Policy as a vehicle for decolonizing the curriculum and embedding indigenous knowledge systems into formal schooling (Ndongwe, 2025, Mapurisa & Pisirai, 2025), the actual implementation of this policy remains fraught with systemic and contextual obstacles that threaten its effectiveness (Machingambi & Chiripanhura, 2026). In Masvingo Catholic secondary schools, situated within a rural and resource-constrained environment, frontline implementers such as teachers, school heads, and diocesan education officers are encountering a persistent gap between policy intentions and classroom realities. Preliminary evidence indicates that these implementers grapple with inadequate pre-service and in-service training on heritage content, acute shortages of culturally relevant teaching materials, and pedagogical frameworks still anchored in colonial legacies (Ndongwe, 2025, Wuta, 2026, Mapurisa & Pisirai, 2025). Further compounding these issues are the unique demands of faith-based institutional governance, which often prioritizes religious doctrine over state-mandated curricular reforms, creating ideological friction. While the policy envisions a transformative educational experience rooted in local culture (Machingambi & Chiripanhura, 2026), the voices and experiences of those mandated to enact it have received limited scholarly attention. This study therefore addresses the critical research problem, the underexplored and multifaceted challenges faced by implementers of the Heritage Based Education Policy in Masvingo rural Catholic secondary schools, and the consequent failure to translate policy rhetoric into meaningful pedagogical practice. Without a systematic investigation of these barriers, efforts to realize the policy's goals will remain hampered, perpetuating the very epistemic marginalization the policy seeks to dismantle.

1.2 Research Objectives

To investigate the barriers perceived by stakeholders in implementing the Heritage -Based Education policy within rural Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province

11. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The Capability Approach, as articulated by Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum, (2011) provides a powerful theoretical lens for analyzing barriers to Heritage Based Education Policy implementation in Masvingo rural Catholic secondary schools. Sen (1999)'s emphasis on substantive freedoms and functionings reframes the policy's goal not merely as curriculum delivery but as expanding students' and teachers' real opportunities to engage with, produce, and benefit from indigenous knowledge. Implementation barriers such as inadequate teacher training, lack of culturally relevant resources, and ideological tensions with Catholic doctrine can thus be understood as conversion failures: factors that prevent available resources (e.g., policy documents, funding) from being converted into actual capabilities (e.g., the ability to teach heritage content confidently, the ability for students to critically value their own culture). Nussbaum (2011)'s Central Capabilities, particularly senses, imagination, and thought, practical reason, and affiliation, offer criteria for evaluating whether the policy genuinely enhances human flourishing or merely imposes a top-down mandate. For instance, when teachers lack pedagogical autonomy or are forced to teach heritage content without proper preparation, their capability for practical reasons are constrained, while students' affiliation with their cultural identity may remain superficial. Furthermore, Nussbaum (2011)'s insistence on dignity and threshold levels exposes how resource scarcity in rural Masvingo creates capability deprivations that the policy, as currently implemented, fails to address. This framework shifts the analytical focus from mere policy compliance to whether all stakeholders, especially marginalized girls, and rural learners, genuinely gain the freedom to participate in and benefit from heritage education. By applying the Capability Approach, this study can critically assess whether the Heritage Based Education Policy functions as a genuine expansion of human capabilities or, paradoxically, reproduces inequalities when implementers lack the necessary support to convert policy intent into lived educational freedoms.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Lack of training among teachers on Education policy implementation

The African literature on education policy implementation consistently reveals teacher capacity gaps and professional unpreparedness as major barriers. In Malawi, education policy implementation encountered excessive enrolment per class and language barriers in instruction (Altinyelken & Hoeksma, 2021). The Ghanaian experience with



educational reforms revealed that policy implementation was undermined by lack of educators' disposition and deficiency in pedagogical competence of teachers (Addai-Mununkum & Setordzi, 2023). Angwaomaodoko (2023) noted that education policy implementation in Nigeria was weighed down by an overloaded curriculum, while Ghanaian teachers and learners lacked familiarity with the new revised curriculum policy. Catholic secondary schools' staff in Uganda were overburdened with demands of education policy (Mugula et al., 2020).

In Malawi, the National Strategy on Inclusive Education noted that teachers lacked insights and capacity to implement education policies, and teachers from colleges lacked hands-on programmes on policy implementation (MacJessie-Mbewe et al., 2023; Chirwa et al., 2021). The Zambian experience revealed lack of qualitative and quantitative educators (Changwe & Mwanza, 2022). The Tanzanian experience on policy implementation of Chemistry learning area in Nyamagara district revealed lack of capable and skilled chemistry educators and lack of government support in capacitating teachers to provide quality education in sciences (Chacha & Onyango, 2022). The Rwandan experience demonstrated that teachers had limited insights and comprehension of the Global Education curriculum and inadequate professional development (Bosire et al., 2025).

In South Africa, post-Apartheid education policy implementation noted the absence of teachers from learning institutions, weak pedagogical knowledge, limited government support, and insufficient institutional capacity (Swart et al., 2022). In Zimbabwe, many educators lack training in competency-based learning pedagogies, leading to poor pedagogical adaptation (Chanda & Murebwa, 2024). Excessive administrative burdens, such as Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALAs), have demoralized teachers, resulting in passive resistance to policy directives (Chanda & Murebwa, 2024). Makuvire and Sithole (2024) noted that teachers lacked motivation and expertise, with a gap between teachers and curriculum policy. Chimbunde and Moreeng (2024) also noted that educators experienced discouraging attitudes, embedded traditions, work frustrations, and they tend to resist educational change. Teacher capacity gaps such as lack of professional development opportunities and heavy workload (Mashayamombe & Berg, 2024) impacted negatively on policy implementation. Ndongwe et al. (2024) noted that education policy ineffectiveness was due to inadequate capacity building workshops, overwhelming duties of teachers as well as learners and educators' poor grasp of Competence-Based Curriculum policy.

2.2.2 Shortage of financial and material resources

Education policy implementation in Africa faces the issue of inadequate resources. Kenyan private Catholic schools encountered limited financial resources and inadequate school facilities (Kithinji et al., 2022). Altinyelken and Hoeksma (2021) noted that shortage of educational supplies undermined education policy implementation in Malawi. The Nigerian experience highlighted obstacles such as financial constraints, poor facilities provision, and shortage of qualified personnel (Jacob & Samuel, 2020). Angwaomaodoko (2023) noted problems of insufficient resources, human capital flight, and inadequate education infrastructure. Addai-Mununkum and Setordzi (2023) concurred that resource constraints impacted negatively on policy implementation in Ghana and Africa as a whole.

Curriculum policy implementation in Ghana revealed challenges including insufficient resources and inadequate logistical support (Tawiah et al., 2025). Poor facilities in Nigerian schools undermined the success of policy implementation (Angwaomaodoko, 2023). The implementation of the New National Standard Curriculum in Nigeria revealed challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, resource constraints, and limited classroom space (Anderson, 2020). Catholic secondary schools in Uganda experienced shortage of financial resources, lack of pedagogical materials, and frequent staff departures (Mugula et al., 2020). In Rwanda, education policy implementation in Kocuriko district noted inadequate instructional resources and negative school climate (Bosire et al. 2025).

In Malawi, education policy implementation encountered problems including shortage of educational materials (Banda, 2020), deficiency in inclusive learning resources, and schools' infrastructure not being user-friendly (MacJessie-Mbewe et al., 2023; Chirwa et al., 2021). The Zambian experience revealed that education policy implementation was undermined by poor infrastructural facilities and learning equipment (Changwe & Mwanza, 2022), with secondary schools' infrastructure experiencing squalid conditions and structural weakness (Mwelwa & Phiri, 2024).

The South African experience in rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal revealed problems such as social inequalities, shortage of resources, insufficient curriculum delivery, and grand expectations of academic outcomes without requisite resources (Moorosi & Bantwini, 2023). Education policy effectiveness in remote and rural learning institutions was hindered by lack of adequate resources (Moorosi & Bantwini, 2023). Insufficient resources and absence of teachers' motivation towards implementation undermined policy success (Berhanu & Gobie, 2023).

In Zimbabwe, rural secondary schools, particularly Catholic-run institutions, face severe infrastructural deficits including inadequate classrooms, laboratories, and digital resources (Mazambani & Tapfumaneyi, 2024). Government failure to adequately fund the Heritage-Based Curriculum has left schools struggling to procure teaching materials, exacerbating disparities between urban and rural institutions (Matowo & Tenha, 2023). Gondo et al. (2019) cited inadequate financial resources and inadequate learning infrastructures hindering policy uptake. Mashayamombe and Berg (2024) noted shortage of instructional resources in Mutare district. Ngwenya (2020) identified inadequate financial, physical, material, and human resources constraining positive educational outcomes in Bulawayo. Ndongwe et al. (2024)

highlighted that lack of resources has grossly undermined policy uptake. In Gweru district, the Competence-Based Curriculum encountered problems such as limited resources, scarce reading materials, poor infrastructure, and lack of practical learning equipment.

2.2.3 Political Interference, Corruption and ideological differences

Research conducted in Africa has revealed that teachers and administrators encounter problems in education policy implementation such as political interference, corruption, and ideological orientation (Jacob & Samuel, 2020). The Nigerian experience noted that education policy implementation was hindered by institutional constraints, absence of accountability and misgovernance, and lack of educational policy continuity. The Ghanaian experience noted that education policy implementation is undermined by ambiguity in education policy goals (Addai-Mununkum & Setordzi, 2023), reflecting the manifesto of the incumbent President, resulting in compromises and negotiation (Donkor et al., 2021).

Africa has encountered the politicization of education policies. In Ghana, the Free Senior High School Policy has been politicized by two major political parties for political gain (Kofiniti, 2024). Kenyan, Tanzanian, and Ugandan politicians have galvanized political support using free secondary education policies. Political interference disrupts policy continuity, with successive governments introducing reforms without proper stakeholder consultation (Dube, 2024).

Catholic secondary schools have resisted aspects of the Heritage-Based Curriculum that conflict with Christian doctrine, particularly those related to indigenous spirituality (Muderedzwa, 2022). This church-state tension mirrors broader patterns across Africa, where faith-based institutions often challenge secular policy mandates (Paul, 2025). Ideological tensions between secular policies and faith-based values create additional challenges, as seen in Zimbabwe's Catholic schools (Muderedzwa, 2022).

2.2.4 Weakness on Supervision and Evaluation

One of the significant challenges facing African education policy implementation is weak monitoring and evaluation systems. The implementation of the National Strategy on Inclusive Education in Malawi revealed problems including a weak assessment framework (MacJessie-Mbewe et al., 2023; Chirwa et al., 2021) and inadequate oversight from educational authorities (Banda, 2020). The Zambian experience showed weak thrust on educational supervision and the absence of invaluable instruments to enhance education quality delivery services (Changwe & Mwanza, 2022).

The Rwandan experience revealed that while the government used technology to enhance education policy implementation, challenges included inadequate feedback mechanisms, fear of abuse of technology gadgets, inadequate digital infrastructure, and information management systems (Bosire et al., 2025). The South African experience noted that monitoring and evaluation of education reforms were rendered weak due to lack of management and leadership supervision and school calendar discrepancies (Berhanu & Gobie, 2023).

2.2.5 Synthesis of Literature and Identification of Research Gap

Synthesizing the African evidence reveals that education policy implementation across the continent is consistently hindered by interrelated barriers: inadequate teacher training and professional preparedness, chronic underfunding and resource constraints, ideological and political tensions, and weak monitoring and evaluation systems. These barriers are particularly acute in rural, resource-poor settings and in faith-based institutions where state policies may conflict with religious values.

However, a critical gap exists limited empirical research has systematically examined the barriers to Heritage-Based Curriculum implementation in Zimbabwe's Catholic secondary schools, and no studies specifically focus on Masvingo Province. Furthermore, existing literature tends to examine each barrier in isolation rather than as an interconnected system, and few studies employ the Capability Approach as a theoretical lens to understand how structural barriers constrain the capabilities of both teachers and learners. The present study addresses these gaps by providing a context-specific, qualitative analysis of barriers to Heritage-Based Education Policy implementation in Masvingo Catholic secondary schools.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth, contextualized understanding of the barriers to effective Heritage Based Education Policy implementation. The case study approach was appropriate as it allows for the exploration of complex, multifaceted phenomena within their real-life context (Annamalah, 2024), specifically, the unique institutional and socio-cultural environment of Masvingo Catholic secondary schools. This design enabled the researcher to capture the lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of diverse stakeholders and



providing initial knowledge into emerging issues (Yin, 2018) involved in policy implementation, aligning with the transformative paradigm's emphasis on giving voice to marginalized perspectives. The research design was chosen because of its emphasis on exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory (Tasci et al., 2019).

3.2 Study Area

The research was conducted in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe, focusing specifically on Catholic-affiliated secondary schools located in rural districts. Masvingo was selected due to its rural character, limited educational infrastructure, and strong presence of Catholic mission schools that have historically played a significant role in the region's education system. These schools represent a critical site where state-mandated heritage education policy intersects with faith-based institutional values, resource constraints, and rural socio-economic realities.

3.3 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised all stakeholders directly involved in or affected by the implementation of Heritage Based Education Policy in Masvingo Catholic secondary schools. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select 50 respondents who could provide rich, relevant information on the phenomenon under investigation. The sample was distributed as follows:

Table 1

Participants Composition

Category	Number	Gender Distribution
Learners	5	3 boys, 2 Females
Teachers	20	12 Males, 8 Females
Heads of Department at school level	5	3 Females, 2 Males
Head Teachers/Head of School	5	4 Males, 1 Females
Schools Inspectors	5	3 Males and 2 Females
Parents/ Community leaders	10	5 Males and 5 Females
Total	50	50

Purposive sampling is also defined as evaluating sampling techniques in qualitative research. Purposive sampling ensured that respondents possessed direct experience with policy implementation and could articulate the barriers encountered. To this research purposive sampling was chosen ahead of other sampling techniques owing to its strength of providing knowledge into complex issues, being flexible and less expensive and it focuses on cases with valuable and rich insights (Tajik et al., 2024, Etikan et al., 2016). However, the weakness of purposive sampling is attributed to lack of generalizability of the findings to other cases of similar nature (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). Snowball sampling is defined as network sampling or participant driven sampling (Ting et al., 2025, Memon et al, 2023, Memon et al.2024,). The snow ball sampling was used in this study owing to its advantages such as being used to identify hard-to-reach participants (Noy, 2008, Atkinson & Flint, 2001, Ting et al., 2025), particularly parents and inspectors and Catholic priests in charge. Snowball sampling was also employed in the study because it is key in researching sensitive topics, higher participants response rate and cut the costs involved in the study (Ting et al., 2025),

3.4 Data Collection

Data was collected through three primary methods to ensure triangulation and depth: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with headteachers, school inspectors, and a subset of teachers and parents. Interviews were chosen for this study because they provided exploration of perceptions and lived realities of research participants (Chand, 2025). Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes and followed a flexible guide that explored participants' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of the policy. Probes were used to elicit detailed narratives. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held separately with learners (two groups of 7–8 participants each) and teachers (one group of 8 participants). FGDs lasted approximately 90 minutes and encouraged interaction, allowing participants to build on each other's responses and reveal shared or divergent perspectives. FGDs are defined as a qualitative research technique to appreciate and comprehend in-depth knowledge about a society or group of people (Muralidharan & Sampath, 2025). FGDs were employed in this study because they provide rich and contextualized data from group members participation, provides flexibility in exploring issues at hand and saves much time (Krueger & Casey, 2015, Muralidharan & Sampath, 2025) and limitations of FGDs are captured as unequal power of participants, undermining of confidentiality and limited generalizability of the data (Bryman, 2016). Document analysis was employed in this study because of its power to provide triangulation to other sources, rich descriptions and assist in uncovering new meaning and new knowledge (Bowen, 2009) and documents provide historical, institutional, and personal records that link with other sources (Chand, 2025). Document analysis supplemented interview and FGD data. Relevant documents included curriculum frameworks, policy circulars,



school syllabi, lesson plans, and inspection reports. These documents provided contextual information and helped triangulate participants' accounts. All interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual observations.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis framework, which is well-suited for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. The six-phase process included: Firstly, familiarization with data was done. Transcripts and field notes were read repeatedly to gain immersion in the data. Generating initial codes was done where data were systematically coded using open coding to capture relevant features related to barriers to implementation. Thirdly, there was searching for themes where codes were grouped into potential themes based on patterns, relationships, and recurring ideas. Fourthly, themes were reviewed, refined, merged, or split through iterative comparison with the data set. Fifthly, there was defining and naming of the themes where each theme was clearly defined, and its essence was articulated. Lastly, there was producing the report where themes were presented with illustrative quotes and interpretive commentary. Coding was conducted manually, supplemented by NVivo software for data organization. The analysis was guided by the Capability Approach, which served as a sensitizing framework to interpret how barriers constrained the conversion of policy resources into actual capabilities for teachers and learners.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were strictly observed throughout the research process. Approval was obtained from the relevant university ethics committee and the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Permission was also secured from the Masvingo Catholic Diocese Education Office and individual school authorities. Key ethical practices included: Firstly, there was informed consent: all participants received detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. Written consent was obtained from adult participants; for learners under 18, parental consent and learner assent were both secured. Secondly, confidentiality and anonymity were observed: Participants were assured that their identities would be protected. Pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and reports, and identifying information was stored separately from data. Thirdly, there was voluntary participation in the study. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. They were minimizing harm to participants where sensitive topics were managed with care; participants who showed distress were referred to school counseling services. Data security was also employed. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher.

3.7 Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the rigor and credibility of the findings, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness were addressed. The credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources (learners, teachers, headteachers, inspectors, parents), methods (interviews, FGDs, document analysis), and investigators (peer debriefing). Member checking was conducted by returning preliminary findings to a subset of participants for verification. Transferability was supported by providing thick, detailed descriptions of the study context, participants, and processes, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar settings. Dependability was established through an audit trail that documented all research decisions, data collection procedures, and analytical steps. A reflexive journal was maintained to track the researcher's positionality and potential biases. In addition, confirmability was ensured by grounding interpretations in participants' own words and triangulating across multiple data sources. The audit trail and reflexive journal further demonstrated that findings emerged from the data rather than researcher preconceptions. Therefore, through adhering to these methodological and ethical standards, the study generated trustworthy, nuanced insights into the barriers confronting implementers of Heritage Based Education Policy in rural Masvingo Catholic secondary schools.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Inadequate Teacher Training and Professional Preparedness

Participants consistently identified inadequate teacher training and professional preparedness as a primary barrier to Heritage-Based Curriculum implementation. A head of department noted:

"Workshops pertaining to the HBC are done but at a low scale. Some of the teachers still lack the relevant knowledge, skills and experiences on the paradigm shift from the Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) to the HBC. Teacher training gaps militate against the full implementation of the HBC." (Head of Department, Catholic secondary school, Bikita District, 19/09/25)

A teacher added:

"Teachers report limited professional development opportunities, with few workshops or refresher courses to help them interpret and deliver the curriculum effectively. This shortage of training leads to inconsistent

implementation and affects student learning outcomes." (Teacher, Catholic secondary school, Zaka District, 14/10/25)

A schools inspector elaborated:

"One of the most significant challenges is the limited and inconsistent training of teachers prior to and during HBC implementation. Many teachers report receiving brief orientation workshops rather than comprehensive training. Some teachers lack content knowledge in heritage studies and indigenous knowledge systems. Teachers struggle to interpret syllabi, assessment requirements, and learning outcomes." (School Inspector, Bikita District, 20/09/25)

Participants also noted that low teacher morale, linked to salary grievances, compounds training deficits:

"Teachers in schools have become redundant because of lack of continuing professional development programme. Changes that come with change need people who are equal to the challenge brought about by the new information. Teachers are not very keen to go the extra mile in proper implementation of the HBC policy programme because of anger emanating from the low salaries they are receiving." (Deputy Head, Catholic Secondary school, Masvingo District, 20/11/25)

Another teacher confirmed:

"The teachers need training. Teachers need to be trained in the HBC and equipped with the necessary skills. Many teachers do not understand the thrust and expectations of the HBC." (Teacher, Catholic secondary school, Chivi District, 26/11/25)

These findings align with the African literature documenting teacher capacity gaps as a persistent barrier to curriculum reform. The finding that workshops are conducted at a low scale and lack comprehensiveness supports Ad-dai-Mununkum and Setordzi's (2023) observation that deficiency in pedagogical competence of teachers undermines policy implementation. The finding that teachers lack content knowledge in heritage studies and indigenous knowledge systems echoes MacJessie-Mbewe et al. (2023) and Chirwa et al. (2021), who noted that teachers lacked insights and capacity to implement education policies in Malawi.

The finding that low teacher morale and salary grievances compound implementation challenges are consistent with Ndongwe et al. (2024), who noted that teachers, as critical implementers, are demoralized by their working conditions. This finding also aligns with Chimbunde and Moreeng (2024), who highlighted that teachers encounter negative attitudes, entrenched beliefs, emotional frustrations, and resistance to educational reforms. From the Capability Approach perspective (Sen, 1999), inadequate training constrains teachers' internal capabilities such as the skills, knowledge, and competencies required to perform effectively. When teachers lack pedagogical content knowledge and professional development opportunities, their agency freedom, that includes the ability to act on their own judgment, is severely restricted. Furthermore, low morale and salary grievances affect teachers' conversion factors, even when training is provided, personal factors (demotivation, frustration) prevent effective conversion of training into classroom practice. This finding supports Nussbaum's (2011) emphasis that capabilities require not only resources but also supportive institutional and personal conditions to be realized.

4.1.2 Underfunding, Infrastructure and Resource Constraints

Participants identified chronic underfunding and resource constraints as a fundamental barrier to HBC implementation. A head of department noted:

"Problems with implementation have often emanated from lack of funding. Response to payment of fees in schools is very low especially among day scholars. There is lack of and poor connectivity in some secondary schools. The HBC requires that learners do their research on the internet, embracing Information and Communication Technology (ICTs). However, some Catholic Secondary schools in Masvingo lack connectivity. There is no electricity and Wi-Fi systems. This shoots down the objective of embracing the 21st century technology as prescribed by the HBC." (Head Teacher, Catholic secondary school, Masvingo District), 20/11/25)

A Schools inspector added:

"Underfunding and resource constraints undermined successful policy implementation. The resources to roll out the curriculum are inadequate, no ICT facilities infrastructure, no hard copies of textbooks and syllabuses distributed in schools, soft copies not effective provided majority of teachers do not have good ICT gadgets. No internet connection in most schools." (Schools Inspector, Catholic secondary school, Gutu District, 26/11/25)

A school head confirmed:

"Most schools lack funding to implement HBC since the government of Zimbabwe did not avail the financial resources to schools." (Head teacher, Catholic secondary School, Gutu District, 26/11/25)

These findings align with the extensive African literature documenting resource constraints as pervasive barriers to curriculum implementation. The finding that schools lack Information Communication Technology (ICT) facilities, internet connectivity, textbooks, and syllabi supports Matowo and Tenha's (2023) observation that government failure

to adequately fund curriculum reforms leaves schools struggling to procure teaching materials. The specific finding that some Catholic secondary schools lack electricity and Wi-Fi systems echoes Mazambani and Tapfumaneyi's (2024) documentation of severe infrastructural deficits in rural secondary schools.

The finding that fee collection is low, particularly among day scholars, and that legal protections prevent schools from enforcing payment, reveals a critical financial conversion factor. From the Capability Approach (Sen, 1999) perspective, even when the policy intention (HBC) is sound and teachers are willing, the lack of financial resources at household level and institutional level prevents conversion of policy into practice. Schools cannot purchase teaching materials, maintain infrastructure, or invest in ICT because the resource base is chronically insufficient. This finding supports Sen's (1999) argument that resources alone are not sufficient for capability expansion, but without resources, capability expansion is impossible.

4.1.3 Ideological and Philosophical Tensions

A distinctive finding of this study is the ideological and philosophical tension between the state's Heritage-Based Curriculum policy and Catholic Church doctrine. A teacher explained:

"Teachers often face tension between the Catholic mission of moral and spiritual formation and the national heritage-based requirements. In practice, they must carefully navigate lessons to ensure they meet the HBC objectives without compromising religious teachings. Some teachers cope by integrating faith-compatible examples into heritage lessons or prioritizing elements that align with both sets of expectations, though this can be time-consuming and mentally demanding." (Head teacher, Catholic secondary school, Chivi District, 28/11/25)

Another teacher added:

"State ideology emphasizes national identity and cultural preservation, while Catholic Church values prioritize faith-based moral education. Both influence policy uptake positively when aligned, but conflicts may arise if national objectives contradict religious teachings. Successful implementation relies on finding harmony between the two." (Teacher, Catholic secondary school, Zaka District, 16/10/25)

However, a teacher also noted areas of compatibility:

"The HBC stresses on using vernacular languages in the teaching of mathematics and sciences is compatible with the Catholic Church use of indigenous language in evangelizing. Even white priests learn local languages and use them." (Teacher, Catholic Secondary School, Bikita District, 21/09/25)

These findings align with Muderedzwa (2022) observation that Catholic secondary schools have resisted aspects of the Heritage-Based Curriculum that conflict with Christian doctrine, particularly those related to indigenous spirituality. The finding that teachers must navigate carefully between state requirements and religious teachings mirrors Paul (2025) documentation of church-state tensions across African faith-based institutions.

From the Capability Approach perspective, this ideological tension affects both teachers' and learners' capabilities. Teachers' agency freedom is constrained because they cannot fully implement either the state curriculum or the Catholic mission without compromise. Learners' practical reason, the capability to form a conception of the good, may be expanded if they learn to navigate multiple value systems but may also be constrained if one value system is prioritized over another. The finding that vernacular language policy is an area of compatibility is significant: it demonstrates that when state policy aligns with Church practice, implementation is facilitated. This supports Nussbaum's (2011) emphasis that social and institutional conversion factors (including the compatibility of value systems) critically determine whether resources are converted into valued functionings.

4.1.4 Shortage of Teaching and Learning Resources

Participants consistently reported acute shortages of teaching and learning resources. A teacher noted:

"Most Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo are experiencing problems in fully implementing the HBC due to lack of resources, particularly textbooks and syllabi. Quite a few classroom practitioners rely on the internet when searching for content that aligns with the HBC. Consequently, learners take time to embrace the HBC." (Teacher, Catholic secondary School, Chivi District, 30/11/25)

A school inspector added:

"Most Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo operate in economically marginalized settings characterized by shortage of textbooks, teaching aids, equipment for practical subjects and appropriate infrastructure. The absence of locally relevant instructional materials undermines the experiential and practical orientation of HBC, especially in vocational, agricultural, and technical learning areas." (Schools Inspector, Catholic Secondary School, Chivi District, 30/11/25)

The head of department confirmed:

"Most Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo operate in remote areas and are largely characterized by inadequate resources in terms of textbooks and instructional media." (Head of Department, Catholic Secondary School, Masvingo District, 20/11/25)

A learner representative added:

"One of the major obstacles to implementing HBC in Masvingo Catholic secondary schools is lack of adequate teaching resources and training. Many schools struggle with insufficient textbooks, culturally relevant teaching materials, and teaching aids to support the heritage-based content." (A Learner, Catholic secondary school, Bikita District, 26/09/25)

These findings align with the African literature documenting textbook and material shortages as pervasive barriers. The finding that teachers rely on the internet for content, in a context where many schools lack connectivity reveals a fundamental contradiction. The finding that the absence of locally relevant instructional materials undermines the experiential and practical orientation of HBC supports Mazambani and Tapfumaneyi's (2024) observation that rural schools face severe infrastructural deficits. From the Capability Approach perspective, teaching and learning resources are essential means for converting policy intention into learner capabilities. Without textbooks, teaching aids, and equipment for practical subjects, teachers cannot effectively deliver the curriculum policy expectations, and learners cannot develop the practical skills that HBC emphasizes. The absence of culturally relevant instructional materials is particularly significant: HBC's goal of promoting indigenous knowledge systems cannot be achieved where the materials to teach those systems do not exist. This finding supports Sen's (1999) argument that capability expansion requires not only formal policy commitment but also the material means to realize that commitment.

4.1.5 Weak Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

One of teachers noted that:

limited backstopping from educational authorities: while the Heritage Based Education policy outlines broad goals, schools often lack detailed, context-sensitive implementation guidelines. lack of monitoring visits, limited professional support and inconsistent feedback from education inspectors contribute to uneven implementation across schools (Teacher, Catholic Secondary School, Gutu District, 28/11/25)

"Monitoring and Evaluation was not being done regularly to assess implementation progress and adjust where necessary" (Deputy Head Teacher, Catholic Secondary School, Chivi District, 02/12/25)

The research participants noted that education policy implementation is weakened by poor monitoring and evaluation from education authorities and in some instances the monitoring of progress of implementation in some schools is absent. Scholars noted that weak assessment framework undermined education policy implementation in Malawi (MacJessie-Mbewe et al., 2023). In a similar vein in the Rwandan experience, Bosire et al. (2025) noted that inadequate feedback mechanisms undermined education policy implementation. The conversion failures of policy implementation undermined the capabilities advocated by Nussbaum (2011) and Sen (1999). In light of the above, education authorities' assessment put more emphasis on compliance with policy directives and examination performance and, they do not adequately address the development of learners' capabilities and marginalize voice of learners.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This qualitative case study examined the barriers to effective Heritage-Based Education Policy implementation in Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, using Sen's Capability Approach and Nussbaum's Central Capabilities framework as the theoretical lens. Based on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 50 respondents, the study identified five interconnected barriers: (1) inadequate teacher training and professional preparedness, (2) chronic underfunding and resource constraints, (3) ideological and philosophical tensions between state policy and Catholic doctrine, (4) acute shortages of teaching and learning resources, and (5) weak monitoring and evaluation systems.

The central finding is that these barriers do not operate in isolation but constitute an interconnected system of constraint. The interplay of these barriers creates a situation where even committed teachers and a well-intentioned policy cannot achieve the desired educational and developmental outcomes. The study concludes that persistent structural and institutional barriers undermine the HBE policy's potential to promote meaningful educational outcomes. Without targeted interventions to expand the capabilities of both teachers and learners, through comprehensive training, adequate resourcing, resolution of ideological tensions, and strengthened monitoring systems, the gap between policy intention and actual practice will persist, perpetuating educational inequalities in marginalized rural communities like Masvingo.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, several strategic actions are recommended to address the identified barriers. For the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, it is essential to develop and fund a comprehensive, sustained teacher professional development programme for HBE implementation. This should replace brief orientation workshops with ongoing training, mentoring, and peer learning networks, particularly focusing on heritage studies and indigenous

knowledge systems. Additionally, the government must allocate adequate financial resources for HBE implementation, including the provision of textbooks, teaching aids, ICT infrastructure, and equipment for practical subjects, with particular attention to rural and remote schools that face the most severe resource constraints. A clear framework for resolving ideological tensions between state curriculum requirements and faith-based institutional values should be established, including formal dialogue mechanisms between the Ministry and Church education authorities. Furthermore, strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems to provide timely feedback and support to teachers and schools is crucial, including regular school visits, data-driven improvement planning, and recognition of successful implementation practices.

For the Catholic Church and the Diocese of Masvingo, developing faith-compatible HBE implementation guidelines would help teachers navigate the tension between state requirements and Catholic doctrine, providing concrete examples and lesson plans that integrate heritage content with Catholic values. Advocating for increased government funding to Catholic secondary schools, while also mobilizing Church resources such as parish contributions, donor funding, and diaspora remittances, would address immediate resource gaps. Establishing teacher support networks within the Diocese, including professional learning communities, mentoring programmes, and resource-sharing mechanisms, would foster a collaborative environment for effective implementation.

For development partners and NGOs, funding infrastructure development in Masvingo Catholic secondary schools, particularly electrification, ICT connectivity, laboratory equipment, and classroom construction, is a priority. Supporting teacher professional development programmes focused on HBE content and pedagogy, including training of trainers, production of locally relevant teaching materials, and establishment of teacher resource centres, is also essential. Facilitating dialogue forums between the Ministry of Education and Church education authorities would help resolve ideological tensions and develop collaborative implementation frameworks. Collectively, these recommendations offer a roadmap for stakeholders to address the persistent barriers to HBE policy implementation in Masvingo Catholic secondary schools, enabling the policy to realize its potential for expanding the capabilities of both teachers and learners in marginalized rural communities.

Declaration of Interest

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