Institutional dynamics of heritage-based education policy implementation in rural catholic secondary schools, Masvingo, Zimbabwe: Schools inspectors' perspective

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of Heritage-Based Education (HBE) in Zimbabwe represents a significant policy reorientation intended to reposition education around indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage, local contexts and national development priorities. However, translating this policy orientation into meaningful educational practice, particularly in rural schools, remains dependent on the institutional capacities and stakeholder relationships that mediate policy implementation. This study examined stakeholder engagement and Heritage-Based Education policy implementation for rural development in Zimbabwe, focusing on school inspectors' perspectives on institutional dynamics in Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province. The study was theoretically anchored in Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, which conceptualises development as the expansion of substantive freedoms and capabilities that enable individuals and communities to pursue lives, they have reason to value. The framework provided an analytical basis for examining whether institutional arrangements and stakeholder engagement enable schools to convert HBE policy provisions into meaningful educational and developmental opportunities for rural learners and communities. The study adopted a qualitative research approach to generate an in-depth understanding of the institutional processes shaping HBE implementation. The study population comprised 20 school inspectors responsible for the supervision and monitoring of secondary schools in Bikita, Zaka, Chivi, Masvingo and Gutu districts in Masvingo Province. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, based on their professional responsibilities, policy knowledge and direct involvement in educational supervision and policy implementation. Data were generated through qualitative engagement with participants and analysed thematically, enabling the identification of recurrent institutional patterns, enabling conditions and implementation constraints. Findings indicate that the effectiveness of HBE implementation is strongly mediated by interconnected institutional and stakeholder factors. School leadership and management emerged as a critical determinant, with effective leadership promoting stakeholder coordination, policy interpretation, resource mobilisation and institutional commitment, while weak management constrained implementation. Teacher competence and continuous professional development were also central, as teachers require appropriate pedagogical knowledge, cultural competence and professional support to translate HBE principles into classroom practice. The study further found that the alignment between Catholic educational ethos and the philosophy of HBE created both opportunities and areas requiring careful institutional negotiation, particularly around values, cultural knowledge and the purpose of education. In addition, the financial capacity of schools significantly influenced implementation, with resource-constrained rural schools experiencing difficulties in sustaining policy-related activities. The availability of teaching and learning resources, including materials appropriate to heritage-oriented pedagogies, similarly affected the quality and consistency of implementation. The study concludes that HBE cannot be implemented effectively through policy directives alone. Its contribution to rural development depends on institutional capability, meaningful stakeholder engagement, teacher preparedness, leadership, financial sustainability and adequate learning resources. Viewed through the Capability Approach, strengthening these institutional conditions is essential for transforming HBE from a curricular policy into a mechanism for expanding learners' capabilities, cultural agency and participation in rural development. The study contributes to development studies scholarship by demonstrating how institutional dynamics mediate the relationship between education policy implementation and rural development outcomes in faith-based educational settings.

Keywords: Catholic Secondary schools, Heritage -Based Education, Masvingo Province, Policy Implementation, Rural Development in Zimbabwe, Secondary Schools Inspectors, Zimbabwe.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education occupies a central position in development because it expands people's capabilities to participate meaningfully in social, economic and cultural life. From a development studies perspective, however, education should not be understood solely in terms of access, enrolment or academic achievement; rather, its significance lies in the extent to which it expands substantive freedoms, human agency, social inclusion and opportunities for individuals and communities to pursue valued ways of living (Sen, 1999).Within this broader understanding of development, the implementation of Heritage-Based Education (HBE) in Zimbabwe represents an important policy shift with potential implications for rural development. This study examines stakeholder engagement and the implementation of Heritage-Based Education for rural development in Zimbabwe, focusing on institutional dynamics within Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province.

Zimbabwe's education system has undergone significant policy transformations since independence, reflecting changing national aspirations and development priorities. The post-independence education reforms sought to redress colonial inequalities and expand access to education, while subsequent curriculum reforms increasingly emphasised relevance, skills development, citizenship and national development (Madondo, 2021, Ndongwe, 2026). The Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (2015–2022) promoted competence-based learning and sought to align education with Zimbabwe's socio-economic development priorities (Chimbunde &Moreeng, 2024). More recently, the movement towards Heritage-Based Education has sought to reposition education around Zimbabwe's history, culture, indigenous knowledge systems, local languages, values and community realities (Machingambi & Chiripanhura, 2026, Mapurisa & Pisirai, 2025). The policy is therefore not simply a curricular intervention; it constitutes an attempt to make education more responsive to local contexts and to connect knowledge production with national and community development.

This policy orientation is particularly significant in rural Zimbabwe, where schools operate within complex socio-economic, cultural and institutional environments. Rural communities may experience limited educational resources, inequalities in access to opportunities, teacher shortages and weak linkages between formal schooling and local knowledge systems (Nera & Nyikadzino, 2025, Tarisayi, 2019, Marongedza et.al., 2023). Consequently, the successful implementation of HBE depends not only on national policy directives but also on how different stakeholders interpret, negotiate and operationalise the policy at institutional and community levels. Stakeholders, including school inspectors, school administrators, teachers, learners, parents, church authorities and communities, possess different interests, forms of knowledge and degrees of influence. Their engagement may therefore facilitate or constrain the translation of policy intentions into educational practice. But for the purpose of this study, it solely focused on views of Schools inspectors on regard to Heritage Based Education policy implementation among rural Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province.

The study is theoretically informed by Sen (1999)'s Capability Approach, which conceptualises development as the expansion of people's substantive freedoms and capabilities to achieve lives they have reason to value. Applied to HBE, the Capability Approach enables analysis of education beyond measurable outputs by asking whether heritage-oriented educational practices expand learners' capabilities, agency, cultural recognition and participation in community life. It also draws attention to the institutional conditions that enable or restrict such capabilities. Stakeholder engagement becomes important because institutions can either convert educational resources and policy opportunities into meaningful capabilities or reproduce constraints and inequalities. The approach consequently provides a useful framework for interrogating whether HBE implementation in rural Catholic schools contributes to broader processes of human development and social transformation.

The thrust of this study is therefore to examine HBE implementation as a development process rather than merely a curriculum or administrative reform. It specifically investigates how stakeholder engagement shapes policy implementation and how institutional dynamics within Catholic secondary schools influence the capacity of HBE to contribute to rural development. The study focuses on Masvingo Province, where Catholic secondary schools provide a significant institutional context for examining the interaction between state education policy, faith-based educational traditions, local communities and rural development aspirations. The study ultimately argues that the developmental potential of HBE depends not only on the content of policy but also on the quality of stakeholder participation and the institutional environments through which policy is translated into practice.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Zimbabwe's shift towards Heritage-Based Education (HBE) represents a significant transformation in national education policy, reflecting efforts to make schooling more responsive to indigenous knowledge, culture, local languages, community values and national development priorities (Ndongwe, 2026). The policy is particularly significant for rural communities, where education is expected not only to facilitate academic attainment but also to strengthen cultural identity, human capabilities, community participation and locally relevant development. However,

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the transition from policy formulation to effective implementation remains complex. The developmental promise of HBE depends substantially on the institutional contexts within which the policy is interpreted, negotiated and translated into everyday educational practices.

A key challenge concerns the extent and quality of stakeholder engagement in the implementation of HBE. Although policy implementation involves multiple actors, including government officials, school inspectors, teachers, school administrators, parents, learners, communities and church authorities, their roles, levels of participation and influence may not be equally distributed. In rural schools, institutional and socio-economic constraints may further affect the capacity of stakeholders to participate meaningfully in policy processes. Consequently, there is a potential gap between the participatory intentions of HBE policy and the realities of implementation at school level. It has been noted, where stakeholders are inadequately engaged, policy implementation may become predominantly top-down, limiting local ownership and reducing the potential for heritage-based knowledge to respond to community-defined development needs (Tandi et al., .2025, Musweere et al., 2024).

This problem is particularly pertinent within Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province, where state education policy intersects with the institutional traditions, values and organisational structures of faith-based education. Catholic schools constitute distinctive institutional spaces in which national curriculum requirements, religious educational traditions, professional practices, community expectations and local cultural knowledge converge (Lemeyu & Nyachowe, 2026). These multiple institutional influences may create opportunities for innovative implementation but may also generate tensions regarding whose knowledge, values and priorities should shape educational practice. Understanding these institutional dynamics is therefore essential for determining how HBE policy is experienced and implemented within rural Catholic secondary schools.

Furthermore, existing studies of HBE tend to emphasise curriculum reform, indigenous knowledge, cultural preservation and pedagogical transformation (Ndongwe, 2026; Ndongwe, 2025; Nzayisenga, 2025; Mapurisa & Pisirai, 2026, Machingambi & Chiripanhura, 2026), while comparatively less attention has been devoted to stakeholder engagement as a mechanism through which policy implementation can produce developmental outcomes in rural contexts. There remains insufficient empirical understanding of how school inspectors, as important actors in educational governance, perceive stakeholder participation and the institutional factors that facilitate or constrain HBE implementation. This represents an important knowledge gap because inspectors occupy a strategic position between policy formulation and school-level implementation and are therefore able to provide insights into policy compliance, institutional capacity, stakeholder relationships and implementation challenges.

From a development studies perspective, the problem extends beyond whether HBE is being implemented according to policy requirements. The central concern is whether the implementation process expands the educational and social capabilities of rural learners and communities. Drawing on Sen (1999)'s Capability Approach, the study therefore considers whether stakeholder engagement and supportive institutional arrangements enable HBE to enhance learners' cultural agency, participation, knowledge, identity and opportunities to pursue valued forms of social and economic life. Conversely, institutional constraints, unequal participation and limited resources may restrict these capabilities and reproduce existing rural inequalities.

The problem addressed by this study is thus the uncertain relationship between stakeholder engagement, institutional dynamics and the developmental implementation of HBE in rural Zimbabwe. Without understanding how stakeholders participate and how institutional conditions shape implementation, it remains difficult to assess whether HBE can move beyond policy rhetoric to become a meaningful instrument for rural development. This study consequently investigates school inspectors' perspectives on these dynamics in Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province, thereby contributing empirical evidence to debates on education policy implementation, stakeholder participation, capabilities and rural development in Zimbabwe.

1.2 Research Objectives

i. Explore school inspectors' perspectives on the institutional dynamics shaping policy implementation in rural Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province.
ii. Analyse the extent to which stakeholder engagement and institutional arrangements enable or constrain HBE's policy implementation among rural Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province.

11. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

Sen (1999)'s Capability Approach and Nussbaum (2011)'s Capability framework provides a strong theoretical foundation for examining stakeholder engagement and heritage-based education policy implementation for rural development in Zimbabwe. Their ideas shift attention from education as the mere delivery of knowledge towards education as a means of expanding people's capabilities, freedoms, dignity, and opportunities to live meaningful lives

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(Sen, 1999, Nussbaum, 2011).This perspective is relevant to the study of institutional dynamics in Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province because heritage-based education can contribute to rural development when learners are enabled to use knowledge, cultural identity, skills, and social relationships to improve their lives and communities. Sen (1999) argues that development should be understood as the expansion of substantive freedoms and capabilities rather than simply economic growth. Therefore, from this perspective, effective implementation of heritage-based education policy should expand the capabilities of rural learners to participate meaningfully in social, cultural, economic, and civic life. School inspectors, therefore, have an important role in determining whether institutional practices create such opportunities.

Five major points from Nussbaum (2011)'s Capability framework can particularly inform this study. The first is bodily health, which highlights people's ability to live a life of adequate health and wellbeing. In rural Catholic secondary schools, heritage-based education should recognise the relationship between indigenous knowledge, environmental practices, nutrition, health, and community wellbeing. Inspectors can assess whether policy implementation connects classroom learning with local knowledge that promotes healthy and sustainable rural communities. The second is bodily integrity, which concerns people's ability to move freely and live with security and dignity. Within schools, this capability relates to safe learning environments, protection from discrimination, and respect for learners' cultural identities. Stakeholder engagement should therefore ensure that learners can express their cultural heritage without fear or exclusion.

The third capability is senses, imagination and thought, which is particularly important for education. Nussbaum (2011) emphasises access to education that enables people to think, imagine, reason, and express themselves freely. Heritage-based education should consequently not be reduced to memorising traditional practices. Instead, Catholic schools should enable learners to critically examine Zimbabwean history, indigenous knowledge, languages, values, traditions, and contemporary challenges. School inspectors can play a monitoring and advisory role in determining whether teachers have adequate resources and institutional support to achieve these objectives.

The fourth capability is affiliation, which involves developing relationships with others and participating in social interaction with dignity and equality. This directly informs stakeholder engagement. Effective heritage-based education requires collaboration among schools, parents, churches, traditional leaders, communities, education authorities, and learners. In Catholic secondary schools, institutional dynamics may influence how these stakeholders participate in curriculum implementation. Inspectors can therefore identify whether decision-making structures promote meaningful participation, inclusion, and respect for different perspectives.

The fifth capability is control over one's environment, which includes both political participation and access to economic opportunities. Heritage-based education can contribute to rural development by equipping learners with practical knowledge and skills derived from local resources and cultural practices. Schools can connect heritage education with entrepreneurship, agriculture, environmental conservation, vocational skills, and community development. From Sen's perspective, such education expands learners' real opportunities to make choices and pursue valued livelihoods.

Overall, Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011) provide a useful lens for examining whether heritage-based education policy implementation in Masvingo Catholic secondary schools genuinely expands the capabilities of rural learners. The perspectives of school inspectors are important because they reveal how institutional structures, stakeholder relationships, resources, leadership, and policy interpretation either enable or constrain these capabilities. The capability approach therefore allows the study to move beyond measuring policy implementation as compliance and instead examine whether education contributes to human dignity, cultural identity, participation, empowerment, and sustainable rural development.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Financial Burden and Resistance of Stakeholders to Policy Implementation

Scholars have consistently identified financial burden and stakeholder resistance as obstacles to education policy implementation. Mazambani and Tapfumaneyi (2024) found that rural parents criticise the financial burden of school-based projects which many households cannot afford. Similarly, Mashayamombe and Berg (2024) observed that urban parents express concerns that vocational tracks may limit university pathways for their children. Adding to this critique, Dube (2024) argued that education policy implementation in Zimbabwe is anchored in political manipulation by politicians, curriculum planners and educators for the benefit of the governing party. Voogt et.al. (2018) further noted that curriculum policy is failing to meet the needs and interests of learners in the 21st century. Rahman et. al. (2018) identified various factors affecting policy implementation including educator needs, lack of syllabus-assessment alignment, inadequate classroom resources, absence of educator development facilities and the need for sustainable research. Ofor-Douglas (2024) similarly noted problems undermining implementation such as inadequate funding, corruption and poor infrastructure facilities. Taken together, these scholars agree that financial constraints and

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stakeholder resistance are persistent barriers, though they diverge on whether these challenges stem primarily from resource limitations or from political manipulation of policy processes.

2.2.2 Stakeholder Relationships and Contextual realities

A significant body of scholarship emphasises the importance of stakeholder relationships in shaping policy implementation outcomes. Ndongwe et al. (2024) found that policy implementation failed because teachers, as critical implementers, are largely demoralised by their working conditions. Mashayamombe and Berg (2024) concurred that implementation failed owing to rushed implementation and the Ministry's lack of monitoring and evaluation capacity at local level. Ndongwe (2025) further noted that teachers, school administrators and communities do not feel ownership of the policy, with most stakeholders exhibiting negative attitudes towards its implementation. Ndongwe (2025) also observed decreasing community support leading to non-payment of school fees. Gondo et al. (2019) and (Matowo & Tenha (2023)) similarly noted that stakeholders including teachers, head teachers, school inspectors and provincial education directors were inadequately consulted, contributing to gaps in understanding and execution. Chimbunde and Moreeng (2023) further enunciated that educators were largely marginalised and excluded from policy formulation and development deliberations. Chimbunde and Moreeng (2023) highlighted that teachers encountered problems including negative attitudes, entrenched beliefs, emotional frustrations and resistance to reforms. In contrast, Mhlanga et al. (2021) found that teachers have a positive disposition towards policy implementation but are frustrated by lack of adequate support from key stakeholders. This contradiction suggests that teacher attitudes are shaped more by contextual support than by policy content itself. Machingambi and Chiripanhura (2026) identified inadequate teacher training, resource shortages and limited understanding of the policy's purpose as additional obstacles. Nyamayedenga (2024) noted that policy implementation was undermined by negative attitudes among both educators and learners regarding Continuous Assessment Learning Activity (CALA). Mufanechiya et al. (2024) attributed policy failure to outdated thinking, inadequate partnership with industry, misalignment between acquired skills and market needs, and minimal support from learners, families and other stakeholders. Megbo and Saka (2015) found that in Nigeria, teachers' resistance to policy changes and insecurity among primary implementers undermined implementation. However, Chimbunde and Moreeng (2024) offered a constructive perspective, noting that educator participation in policy formulation increases positive attitudes and empowers teachers. Gondo et al. (2019) emphasised that stakeholders are critical for successful policy implementation. Cobbold (2017) found that negative stakeholder attitudes and minimum pre-implementation training undermined Ghanaian policy implementation, also noting the influence of district education officers' attitudes, educator attitudes, community beliefs and relationship quality between central and local authorities. Across this body of literature, there is broad agreement that stakeholder relationships are critical, yet scholars disagree on whether the primary challenge is inadequate consultation, poor working conditions or insufficient institutional support.

2.2.3 Cultural and Religious Influence on Education Policy Implementation

Research on faith-based education reveals distinct dynamics affecting policy implementation. Rymarz (2024) found that parents in Catholic secondary schools in Australia resist Catholic schooling, particularly the teaching of religious education to their children. Haldane (2024) noted that Catholic secondary schools in Ireland encounter problems including social, cultural and demographic shifts that affect Catholic identity formation. Okello et al (2025) studied Catholic school boards in Uganda, finding that boards demonstrate independence in priority setting and policy formulation but experience problems in informed decision-making and broad-based stakeholder participation. They further noted that Catholic schools experience an intricate interplay between operational autonomy and foundational religious influence, with board autonomy shaped by both cooperative and conflicting governance forces (Okello et al., 2025). These studies collectively demonstrate that faith-based educational institutions face distinctive challenges in policy implementation, including resistance to religious instruction, identity formation pressures and governance tensions. This body of literature directly informs this study's exploration of similar processes in Masvingo Catholic secondary schools.

2.2.4 Resources Constraints

Scholars consistently identify resource constraints as a fundamental obstacle to education policy implementation. Ndongwe et al. (2026) noted that the Heritage-Based Curriculum in Zimbabwe is transformative, but its implementation is undermined by poor teacher capacity, weak infrastructure facilities, inadequate funding and lack of sustainable research support. Mashayamombe and Berg (2024) acknowledged the importance of HBC policy implementation but noted various inhibiting problems including heavy workloads, limiting choice of learning areas, inadequate teaching and learning resources, and lack of qualified professional educators for new learning areas. Madondo (2021) found that rural schools face lack of proper academic facilities, inadequate personnel, funding shortages and insufficient teaching and learning resources. Ndongwe (2025) identified funding shortages, lack of immediate learning resources, absence of functional laboratories and poor teacher remuneration as obstacles to policy fidelity. Megbo and Saka (2015) cited inadequate funding as a key challenge in Nigerian secondary schools. Busdir et

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al. (2022) noted lack of internet connectivity and online learning resources as additional constraints. Across these studies, there is unanimous agreement that resource constraints severely undermine implementation, though scholars differ on whether the most critical constraint is financial, infrastructural or human capacity related.

2.2.5 School Leadership and Organisational Culture

The importance of school leadership and organisational culture emerges consistently across the literature. Ndongwe (2026) noted that successful HBC implementation depends on strong school leadership, professional preparedness of educators, adequate funding and well-supported research base. Megbo and Saka (2015) found that school leadership, educational inspectors at district level and central government leadership are critical for successful policy implementation. It was further noted that incompetence of school leadership and time-wasting generally undermined implementation (Megbo & Saka, 2015). Busdir et al. (2022) identified bureaucratic hierarchy, teacher capacity, pandemic effects and lack of relationship between teachers and learners as obstacles. These studies agree on the centrality of leadership but diverge on whether leadership failures are primarily competency-related, structural or resource-based. The literature consistently suggests that effective leadership can mitigate other implementation challenges, while weak leadership exacerbates existing constraints.

2.3 Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature demonstrates that education policy implementation is shaped by multiple interconnected factors: stakeholder engagement, financial resources, teacher preparedness, cultural and religious influences, school leadership and institutional capacity. Scholars generally agree that stakeholder consultation is essential, yet there is contradiction regarding whether policy failure stems primarily from inadequate consultation, poor working conditions or resource shortages. Similarly, while resource constraints are universally acknowledged as obstacles, scholars disagree on whether financial, infrastructural or human capacity limitations are most critical. Studies have explored financial burdens and stakeholder resistance (Mazambani & Tapfumaneyi, 2024; Mashayamombe & Berg, 2024; Dube, 2024), teacher demoralisation and inadequate consultation (Ndongwe et al., 2024; Gondo et al., 2019; Chimbunde & Moreeng, 2023), cultural and religious influences (Rymarz, 2024; Haldane, 2024; Okello et al., 2025), resource constraints (Ndongwe et al., 2026; Mashayamombe & Berg, 2024; Madondo, 2021) and leadership dynamics (Ndongwe, 2026; Megbo & Saka, 2015). However, few studies have examined how institutional dynamics mediate HBE implementation in faith-based rural schools from inspectors' perspectives. This study addresses this gap by examining stakeholder engagement and heritage-based education policy implementation for rural development in Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province. Using Sen (1999)'s Capability Approach, it investigates how institutional arrangements enable or constrain the translation of HBE policy into meaningful educational and developmental opportunities for rural learners and communities

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study research design to examine stakeholder engagement and Heritage-Based Education Policy (HBC) implementation in rural Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. The design was appropriate because the study sought to understand how school inspectors interpret, monitor and support policy implementation within specific institutional and socio-cultural contexts. Lim (2024) and Denny and Weckesser (2022) inform the use of qualitative inquiry to explore participants' experiences, perceptions and interpretations. The researcher therefore treated policy implementation as a context-dependent process shaped by institutional practices, stakeholder relationships and local circumstances.

The case study design enabled an in-depth examination of the interaction between national education policy requirements and the realities of rural Catholic schooling. It provided an analytical basis for exploring how institutional priorities, resource availability, cultural values and administrative practices influence implementation. The design was aligned with the study's objectives concerning Institutional policy dynamics and stakeholder perspectives, strengthening policy implementation. The study consequently prioritized contextual understanding over statistical generalization.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Bikita, Chivi, Zaka, Gutu and Masvingo Districts in Masvingo Province. These districts provided geographical boundaries for examining school inspectors' perspectives on HBC implementation in rural and semi-rural educational contexts. Their inclusion enabled the study to consider how contextual differences may influence policy interpretation and institutional capacity. The study area was relevant because rural educational institutions may experience constraints involving infrastructure, staffing, teaching materials and financial resources. Such conditions can affect the translation of policy intentions into educational practices. Catholic secondary schools

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also operate within national policy requirements while maintaining distinctive institutional traditions and educational priorities. The researcher therefore examined the study area as an institutional and socio-economic context in which policy expectations interact with local implementation conditions.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised school inspectors responsible for supervising, monitoring and supporting schools within the five selected districts. These professionals were relevant because their responsibilities include curriculum oversight, instructional guidance, school evaluation and monitoring compliance with educational requirements. Their professional experiences could illuminate the institutional processes influencing HBC implementation.

The study focused on inspectors whose responsibilities and experience were relevant to the research objectives. Their accounts were used to examine stakeholder engagement, policy interpretation, institutional constraints and perceived developmental implications. The research recognized that inspectors' perspectives provide valuable professional insights but do not automatically represent the experiences of teachers, learners, parents or Catholic education authorities.

Table 1

Participants Composition OF school inspectors

District	No of Inspectors Interviewed	Gender Distribution
Bikita	3	2males and 1 female
Gutu	4	3 males and 1 female
Masvingo	4	2 males and 2 females
Chivi	4	3 males and 1 female
Zaka	5	4 males and 1 female

3.4 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The study employed purposive sampling to select 20 school inspectors from the five districts, with approximately four participants drawn from each district. Purposive sampling was appropriate because qualitative research requires participants who possess relevant knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Tajik et. al., 2024) Selection was therefore guided by professional responsibilities and the capacity to provide information concerning policy implementation. The sample distribution provided geographical coverage while allowing detailed engagement with participants. The sample size was considered in relation to the study's qualitative orientation, the specificity of the participant group and the depth of information required. However, numerical adequacy alone does not establish qualitative rigour. The richness, relevance and sufficiency of the evidence need also to be considered. The research therefore interpreted the sample as a basis for generating contextual insights rather than statistically representative conclusions. The actual distribution of participants across districts was confirmed against fieldwork records.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The study employed semi-structured interviews and document analysis. These methods complemented each other by generating evidence about inspectors' experiences and the formal expectations governing policy implementation.

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 20 school inspectors. The method provided a consistent framework for addressing the research objectives while allowing flexibility to probe emerging issues. Kakilla (2021), Ruslin et al. (2022) and Magaldi and Berler (2020) inform the methodological value of flexible interviewing, clarification and follow-up questioning. Open-ended questions explored stakeholder engagement, policy interpretation, institutional dynamics. Probing questions enabled participants to explain their experiences and clarify particular statements. The research used this approach to generate detailed professional accounts of how policy requirements were understood and implemented within rural Catholic educational settings.

3.5.2 Document Analysis

Document analysis complemented the interviews by examining formal policy expectations and institutional arrangements. Relevant materials included HBC policy documents, curriculum frameworks, school development plans, inspection reports, Catholic education guidelines and other official educational records relevant to the research

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objectives. . Documents were selected to inform the study because they are non-reactive, unaffected by the researcher's presence, eliminating bias, provide cost-effective historical data, enabling longitudinal analysis without conducting new fieldwork (Rapley& Rees, 2018, Chand, 2025, Bowen, 2009).

Documents were examined for evidence concerning policy objectives, institutional responsibilities, implementation expectations and educational priorities. Their contents were compared with interview accounts to identify convergence, divergence and contextual differences. The research recognized that documents reflect particular institutional purposes and should not automatically be treated as neutral representations of practice. Their relevance and significance were therefore assessed in relation to their sources, purposes and contents.

3.6 Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to interpret interview transcripts and documentary evidence. The process involved familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review and interpretation. The research repeatedly examined the data to identify significant statements and recurring patterns related to the research objectives. Relevant data segments were coded and grouped into categories concerning stakeholder engagement, policy interpretation, institutional capacity, cultural values, resource constraints, implementation practices . Related categories were subsequently developed into broader themes. The researcher reviewed the themes against the original evidence to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts and documentary materials.

Triangulation was used to compare evidence from interviews and documents. Areas of agreement, contradiction and complementarity were examined to develop a more nuanced understanding of implementation. Differences between sources were not automatically treated as errors; they were interpreted in relation to institutional context and the purposes of the evidence. Claims about development outcomes were treated as participants' perceptions unless supported by additional evidence establishing actual changes. The researcher thus moved beyond description towards explaining how institutional and contextual factors shape policy implementation.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought from the relevant research authorities before data collection. Permission was also sought from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and appropriate Catholic education authorities. Participants received information about the study and provided informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw in accordance with the conditions communicated during consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected through participant codes or pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information from the research report. Particular care was required because inspectors occupy identifiable professional positions within specific districts. The researcher therefore considered the possibility of indirect identification through quotations and institutional descriptions. Research information was handled responsibly, and participants' views were represented accurately without presenting individual opinions as universal institutional facts.

3.8 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was strengthened through comparison of interview accounts and documentary evidence. Dependability was supported by maintaining records of sampling, data collection, coding and analytical decisions. Confirmability was promoted through systematic examination of the evidence and reflexive consideration of the researcher's assumptions. Transferability was supported by describing the study context, participant group and methodological procedures. These measures provided a framework for evaluating the transparency and credibility of the research process. The researcher remained attentive to divergent accounts and avoided claims that exceeded the available evidence.

1V. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 School leadership and Management Support

Secondary school inspectors in Masvingo Province emphasised that school leadership and management are critical determinants of Heritage-Based Education (HBE) policy implementation. One inspector observed:

> *"Leadership and supervision are critical to successful HBC Implementation. Some Catholic secondary schools have high heads turnover, and this affects stability and fidelity of the policy implementation. Normally with some change of leadership in terms of schools heads and priests, it stalls implementation of the projects. The new leadership normally brings new vision and focus "* (Schools Inspector 1, Gutu District 22/06/26).

Another inspector noted:

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> *"Some heads are more effective than others in the HBC policy implementation. Management support in Catholic schools is based on the support from the Responsible Authority (RA). In situations where relations between school, administration and RA, specifically the priest in charge of the school, naturally the implementation of the HBC is compromised because the RA will not release funds to resource the system. High Leadership support enhances implementation of the HBC".* (Schools Inspector, Bikita District,10/06/26).

A third inspector added:

> *"Stakeholders see HBC as relevant and valuable, but their experience is shaped by teacher training, resources availability, leadership and stakeholder involvement. Therefore, where these are strong implementation is smoother. In situations where they are weak, policy implementation remains superficial"* (Schools Inspector, Gutu District, 12/06/26)

"There is also apathy to change, thus uptake of the HBC is very low". (Schools Inspector, Gutu District, 9/6/26)

These findings align with Ndongwe's (2026) observation that successful HBC implementation hinges on strong school leadership and professional preparedness. Similarly, Megbo and Saka (2015) found that school leadership at district and central levels is critical for successful policy implementation, while incompetent leadership undermines implementation. Busdir et al. (2022) identified bureaucratic hierarchy and teacher capacity as obstacles, consistent with inspectors' observations about leadership instability affecting policy fidelity. However, Gondo et al. (2019) emphasised that stakeholders' critical role in policy success requires meaningful consultation, a condition that inspectors' narratives suggest is often absent when leadership transitions occur.

From Sen's (1999) Capability Approach perspective, effective leadership functions as a conversion factor that enables schools to transform policy resources into meaningful educational capabilities. Where leadership is stable, supportive and aligned with policy objectives, learners' capabilities to engage with heritage-based knowledge are expanded. Conversely, where leadership is unstable or unsupportive, institutional capacity to convert policy intentions into practice is constrained, limiting learners' freedoms to access culturally relevant education. The researcher observes that leadership continuity and stakeholder coordination emerge as essential institutional conditions for translating HBC policy rhetoric into tangible developmental outcomes for rural communities.

4.1.2 Teacher Competence and Continuous Professional Development

Inspectors consistently identified teacher competence and professional development as central to HBE implementation. One inspector noted:

> *"The HBC not well accepted after coming before the conclusion of the Competence Based Curriculum. HBC is viewed as coming with too many changes. There is lack of training to the implementers at grass roots level such as teachers and school administrators. There is no incentive based for teachers and school administrators, rather HBC is accompanied with more paperwork"* (School Inspector 3, Gutu District, 9/6/26).

However, another inspector offered a contrasting perspective,

> *"Generally, the teachers deployed to the Catholic schools in the district are high-quality teachers who are generally competent and can produce better results. Most of them are seasoned teachers. They are also ever receiving the necessary in -service professional development because the schools are resourced"* (Schools Inspector, Bikita District, 10/06/26)

A third inspector highlighted systemic challenges,

> *"HBC implementation was hurried as there was no action plan put in place for the implementation. Teachers or stakeholders were not involved or rather prepared as no resources were availed for the HBC implementation. Pupils can now connect better- since it is a hands-on curriculum though somehow pupils feel it will affect exam results. As for parents some are supportive but at the same time are concerned about the science subjects. The school administration is overwhelmed with the sourcing of resources"* (Schools Inspector 1, Zaka District,12/06/26)

Another inspector added:

> *"Shortage of textbooks and other resources, especially electronic gadgets for purposes of mainstreaming blended learning has grossly undermined HBC implementation "* (Schools Inspector 2, Gutu District, 12/06/26).
>
> *"Manpower shortage -some learning areas such as ICT need specialist teachers who are not easy to get given the constrained budget of the national treasury to recruit new teachers".* (School Inspector, Gutu District, 9/6/26)

These findings resonate with Ndongwe et al. (2026), who noted that the Heritage-Based Curriculum is transformative but undermined by poor teacher capacity. Mashayamombe and Berg (2024) similarly observed that rushed implementation and inadequate monitoring capacity inhibited success. Madondo (2021) found that rural schools lack adequate personnel and funding, while Rahman et.al. (2018) identified the absence of educator development facilities as a critical gap. The contradiction between inspectors' observations some noting competent teachers while others citing inadequate training suggests that teacher preparedness varies significantly across schools, reflecting

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differential resource allocation and institutional support. This divergence aligns with Mhlanga et al. (2021), who found that teachers have positive dispositions but lack adequate support from key stakeholders. From Nussbaum's (2011) capability framework, teacher competence is essential for expanding learners' capabilities in senses, imagination and thought. Where teachers are well-prepared, learners can critically engage with Zimbabwe's heritage, indigenous knowledge and contemporary challenges. Where teachers lack training, learners' opportunities to develop these capabilities are constrained, reinforcing educational inequalities between well-resourced and under-resourced rural schools. The researcher observes that the hurried implementation without adequate teacher preparation reflects a fundamental policy failure, the state imposed a transformative curriculum without ensuring the institutional conditions necessary for its success. This undermines not only policy fidelity but also the developmental potential of heritage-based education for rural learners.

4.1.3 Provision of Teaching and Learning resources

The provision of teaching and learning resources is key in the implementation of HBC policy process. One inspector noted:

> *"The schools are generally resourced, learners go out on tours, teachers are periodically in-serviced. Use of ICTs in the school is minimal-looking at the class of school in question-more computers and use of interactive boards is required."* (Schools Inspector, Bikita District,10/06/26)

However, another inspector offered a contrasting view:

> *"Teachers were trained for exam focused curriculum. There is also lack of infrastructure and resources for smooth implementation of the curriculum. The HBC model requires small groups for easy management of projects, yet the classes are large. As for pupils, they're overwhelmed with exam pressure and focus more on the STEM subjects than the Heritage Based Curriculum"* (Schools Inspector 1, Zaka District, 12/06/26)

A third inspector observed

> *The schools are experiencing old and poor classroom infrastructure"* (Schools Inspectors, Gutu District, 12/06/26).

These findings align with Ndongwe (2025), who identified lack of immediate learning resources and absence of functional laboratories as obstacles to policy fidelity. Mashayamombe and Berg (2024) noted inadequate teaching and learning resources, while Madondo (2021) found that rural schools face lack of proper academic facilities. Busdir et al. (2022) identified lack of internet connectivity and online learning resources as additional constraints. The inspectors' observations reveal a resource gap between schools, with some benefiting from better infrastructure and resources while others struggle. This uneven distribution reflects broader rural-urban inequalities and institutional capacity differences.

From Sen's (1999) Capability Approach, resources are not an end in themselves but a means of expanding capabilities. In situations, where teaching and learning resources are adequate, schools can convert policy intentions into meaningful educational experiences that expand learners' freedoms and opportunities. However, where resources are inadequate, policy implementation remains superficial, and learners' capabilities to engage with heritage-based knowledge are constrained. The researcher observes that the resource gap between schools undermines the equity objectives of HBE policy, as learners in under-resourced rural schools are denied opportunities available to their better-resourced counterparts. This perpetuates rather than reduces educational inequalities.

4.1.4 Financial Capacity of schools

Financial capacitation was cited as key in the successful implementation of HBC in Masvingo Catholic secondary schools. One inspector noted:

> *"The schools are experiencing resource constraints especially regarding funding of the projects"* (Schools Inspectors, Gutu District, 12/06/26).

Another offered a more optimistic view:

> *"The schools are generally adequately financed from school fees. The schools in the district, however, has potential to raise more funds through production units which the school is not utilizing to realise HBC expectations"* (Schools Inspector, Bikita District, 10/06/26).

A third inspector highlighted systemic financial challenges:

> *"There is lack of financial resources to carry out workshops-training of teachers, and to procure resources needed to support the implementation of HBC"* (School Inspectors, Gutu district, 09/6/26).

Another added:

> *"Lack of financial support- treasury have challenges in providing full support for the purpose of essential teaching and learning materials"* (School Inspector, Zaka District, 12/06/26).

These findings resonate with Ofor-Douglas (2024), who cited inadequate funding as a key implementation obstacle. Mazambani and Tapfumaneyi (2024) noted that rural parents criticise the financial burden of school-based projects. Ndongwe et al. (2026) identified inadequate funding as undermining implementation, while Megbo and Saka

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(2015) cited inadequate funding in Nigerian secondary schools. The contradiction between inspectors' observations some noting adequate financing while others citing financial constraints suggests that financial capacity varies significantly across schools, reflecting differential fee-paying capacity and institutional resource mobilisation. From Nussbaum's (2011) capability framework, financial resources are essential for expanding learners' capabilities, particularly control over one's environment. In circumstances, where schools are adequately financed, learners can access practical knowledge and skills derived from local resources and cultural practices. However, where financing is inadequate, heritage education cannot be effectively implemented, and learners' opportunities to develop capabilities for rural development are constrained. The researcher observes that the financial burden of HBE implementation falls disproportionately on rural schools with limited fee-paying capacity, perpetuating inequalities between urban and rural learners. The potential for schools to raise funds through production units, as noted by one inspector, suggests opportunities for institutional innovation that could mitigate financial constraints.

4.1.5 Alignment of Catholic Ethos and HBC Philosophy

A major issue raised by schools inspectors on HBC implementation among the Catholic secondary schools was the alignment of the Catholic ethos and HBC philosophy.

One inspector noted:

> *"There is also the dynamic of HBC alignment within the Catholic ethos. Some heritage practices conflict with the Catholic doctrine"* (Schools Inspector, Gutu District, 12/06/26).

Another offered a more harmonious perspective:

> *"There are alignment of catholic ethos and the HBC philosophy. Whilst Catholic schools are guided by Christian values, the HBC seeks to promote cultural heritage among other issues like innovation, digitalization etc.-so far so good, there seems to be no clash, and things are going on well"* (Schools Inspector, Bikita District, 10/06/26.

A third inspector observed:

> *"Religious doctrine strongly influences how the policy is received. Since Catholic values emphasize moral integrity, community service, and respect for human dignity, teachers and administrators tend to interpret HBC in ways that align with these principles. For instance, heritage lessons are framed to reinforce ethical conduct and social responsibility"* (Schools Inspector, Masvingo District, 11/07/26).

Another 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 appear to contradict religious teachings. Successful implementation relies on finding harmony between the two"* (Schools Inspector, Gutu District, 9/06/26).

These findings resonate with Rymarz (2024), who found that parents in Catholic schools resist religious education. Haldane (2024) noted that Catholic schools encounter social and demographic shifts affecting identity formation. Okello et al (2025) found that Catholic school boards in Uganda experience intricate interplay between operational autonomy and foundational religious influence. The inspectors' observations reveal both alignment and tension between Catholic educational values and HBE policy objectives, suggesting that successful implementation requires institutional negotiation and contextual interpretation.

From Sen's (1999) Capability Approach, the alignment between institutional values and policy objectives affects the capacity of schools to expand learners' capabilities. In situations where alignment is strong, schools can integrate heritage education with faith-based values, enhancing learners' cultural and moral development. In circumstances, where tensions exist, institutional negotiation is required to ensure that policy implementation respects both national objectives and religious values. In the foregoing analysis, it was observed that Catholic schools possess established structures of moral formation and community engagement that can complement HBE objectives, but institutional coherence requires careful navigation of potential conflicts between heritage practices and religious doctrine.

4.1.6 Stakeholder Perceptions and Experiences

Various schools inspectors in the selected districts provided their views on HBC policy implementation among Catholic secondary schools citing the views of parents, learners, educators and school administrators. One inspector noted:

> *"Parents have a strong feeling that the change from Competence -Based Curriculum to Heritage -Based Curriculum shortchanged the learners"* (Schools Inspector, Zaka District, 11/06/26).

Another observed:

> *"Teachers feel they are not supported by necessary instructional materials to implement HBC. These teaching materials include textbooks and ICT gadgets"* (Schools Inspector Bikita District, 10/06/26).

A third inspector highlighted the burden on learners:

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> *"Learners are carrying the burden of School Based Projects which are usually done by their teachers and other people selling them from the streets. This has given the financial burden to the parents of learners"* (Schools Inspectors, Gutu District, 9/6/26).

Another inspector identified monitoring challenges:

> *"Schools' inspectors do not have requisite tools or gadgets to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the HBC. These gadgets include tablets for electronic supervision. In this area, there is a serious gap".* (Schools Inspectors, Chivi District, 13/06/26)

These findings align with Ndongwe (2025), who found that stakeholders do not feel ownership of the policy and exhibit negative attitudes towards implementation. Gondo et al. (2019) and Matowo and Tenha (2023) noted that stakeholders were inadequately consulted, creating gaps in understanding and execution. Mashayamombe and Berg (2024) observed that heavy workloads and limiting learner choices inhibit success. Chimbunde and Moreeng (2024) found that educator participation in policy formulation increases positive attitudes and empowerment, suggesting that the lack of consultation observed by inspectors contributes to stakeholder resistance. The inspectors' observations reveal that stakeholder perceptions are shaped by multiple factors: parents' concerns about educational quality, teachers' lack of resources, learners' burden and inspectors' inadequate monitoring tools.

From Nussbaum's (2011) capability framework, stakeholder engagement is essential for expanding learners' capabilities, particularly affiliation developing relationships with others and participating in social interaction with dignity and equality. In a scenario, where stakeholders are inadequately engaged, policy implementation becomes top-down, limiting local ownership and reducing the potential for heritage-based knowledge to respond to community-defined development needs. Hence, it was noted that the gap between policy intentions and stakeholder experiences reflects a fundamental failure of participatory governance. Therefore, without meaningful stakeholder engagement, HBE cannot achieve its developmental potential for rural communities, as those most affected by the policy teachers, parents and learners lack the agency to shape its implementation.

4.2 Synthesis and Theoretical Reflections

The findings, examined through Sen's (1999) and Nussbaum's (2011) Capability Approach, reveal that HBE implementation in rural Catholic secondary schools is shaped by interconnected institutional factors: leadership stability, teacher competence, resource availability, financial capacity, alignment between Catholic ethos and HBE philosophy, and stakeholder perceptions. The findings demonstrate that policy implementation is not merely a technical process but a negotiated institutional process influenced by leadership, organisational culture and stakeholder relationships.

The study supports Ndongwe's (2026) assertion that successful HBC implementation depends on strong leadership and professional preparedness, while also confirming Gondo et al. (2019) that stakeholder engagement is critical for success. The findings align with Mashayamombe and Berg (2024) on resource constraints and rushed implementation, while also resonating with Chimbunde and Moreeng (2024) that educator participation in policy formulation increases positive attitudes. However, the study also reveals contradictions: while some inspectors noted competent teachers and adequate resources, others cited inadequate training and resource shortages, suggesting significant variation across schools.

From the Capability Approach, HBE can contribute to rural development when institutional arrangements enable the expansion of learners' capabilities. Effective leadership functions as a conversion factor, enabling schools to transform policy resources into meaningful educational experiences. Teacher competence is essential for expanding learners' capabilities in senses, imagination and thought. Resources and financial capacity are means of expanding capabilities, particularly control over one's environment. Alignment between Catholic ethos and HBE philosophy affects the capacity of schools to expand learners' cultural and moral capabilities. Stakeholder engagement is essential for expanding learners' capabilities in affiliation developing relationships and participating in social interaction with dignity and equality.

The researcher observes that without deliberate institutional strengthening, the gap between policy intentions and implementation realities will persist, perpetuating educational inequalities between rural and urban learners. The findings underscore the importance of a capability-oriented approach to HBE policy and programming one that focuses on expanding institutional capacity, stakeholder engagement and the conversion of policy resources into meaningful educational and developmental opportunities for rural communities.

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V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that the implementation of heritage-based education policy in rural Catholic secondary schools in Masvingo Province is shaped significantly by institutional dynamics operating at school, diocesan and broader educational-system levels. Schools inspectors' perceptions and experiences suggest that policy implementation is not merely a technical process of translating national policy into classroom practice; rather, it is a negotiated institutional process influenced by leadership, organisational culture, teacher preparedness, resource availability, stakeholder relationships and contextual realities. Although heritage-based education provides an important framework for reconnecting schooling with Zimbabwe's history, culture, indigenous knowledge systems, values and national identity, its effective implementation remains uneven across rural Catholic secondary schools.

The findings further imply that the distinctive Catholic institutional ethos can both facilitate and constrain implementation. Catholic schools possess established structures of moral formation, community engagement and value-based education that can complement the objectives of heritage-based education. However, differences in institutional priorities, interpretations of curriculum requirements and levels of policy ownership may create tensions between national educational expectations and established school practices. Inspectors' experiences therefore underscore the importance of institutional coherence, collaborative leadership and contextualised policy interpretation.

Moreover, rurality presents structural challenges that cannot be overlooked. Limited teaching and learning resources, inadequate access to professional development, shortages of appropriately prepared teachers and infrastructural constraints may undermine the translation of policy aspirations into meaningful pedagogical practices. Consequently, successful heritage-based education requires more than policy directives and curriculum documents. It requires sustained institutional support, capacity building, adequate resources and mechanisms for continuous monitoring and professional learning. The study therefore concludes that policy implementation is more effective when national policy, Catholic educational values and local cultural contexts are deliberately aligned rather than treated as separate domains.

5.2 Recommendations

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, in collaboration with Catholic education authorities and teacher-training institutions, should establish sustained professional development programmes on heritage-based education. Training should move beyond policy awareness to practical pedagogical competencies, including indigenous knowledge integration, culturally responsive teaching, local history, learner-centred methodologies and curriculum contextualisation. Inspectors should participate in these programmes to promote consistency in policy interpretation and supervision. Policy implementation should be supported through structured consultation among schools inspectors, diocesan education offices, school administrators and teachers. Regular professional dialogues, feedback mechanisms and joint curriculum-review activities would enable stakeholders to identify implementation barriers and develop contextually appropriate responses. Such collaboration could also reduce policy ambiguity and strengthen institutional ownership.

Government and Catholic education authorities should prioritise equitable resource allocation to rural schools. This should include relevant textbooks, locally produced instructional materials, digital resources, libraries and opportunities for learners to engage with community-based cultural knowledge. Schools should also be encouraged to collaborate with local communities, museums, cultural institutions and knowledge holders to supplement limited formal resources. Inspectoral monitoring should assess not only policy compliance but also the quality, relevance and contextual responsiveness of implementation. Monitoring frameworks should recognise the distinctive circumstances of rural Catholic schools while maintaining national curriculum standards. Regular evaluations should generate evidence for policy refinement, resource allocation and targeted institutional support, thereby transforming inspection from a predominantly compliance-oriented activity into a developmental mechanism for sustainable heritage-based education implementation.

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