

Civic engagement and social responsibility in Zimbabwean schools: analysing community-school partnerships and the heritage, competence-based curriculum

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Abstract

Zimbabwe has been implementing educational reforms to promote civic engagement, social responsibility, and community involvement in schools. Central to these efforts is the Heritage, Competence-Based Curriculum (HCBC), which seeks to align formal education with community needs by emphasising practical skills, cultural awareness, and active citizenship. This study adopted the Social Network Theory (SNT) as a conceptual framework to understand the relationships and interactions among key stakeholders in education. An integrated methodological approach, combining focus group discussions (FGDs) and document analysis, provided a strong foundation for examining civic engagement and social responsibility in Zimbabwe's government and public schools. The study highlights the critical role of community-school partnerships in the success of the HCBC, emphasising the need for greater community involvement in decision-making processes and school governance. While the HCBC has the potential to equip pupils with vital competencies through project-based learning and collaboration, several challenges were identified, including limited community engagement, inadequate resources for citizenship education, and an overemphasis on traditional academic achievements. Key findings reveal that School Development Committees (SDCs) often lack the capacity for meaningful input, reducing their effectiveness. Moreover, teachers and schools are generally unaware of key organisations such as UNICEF, UNDP, and FAO, which could provide critical support. The study also underscores the importance of integrating the philosophy of Ubuntu/Unhu/Vumunhu into the curriculum, alongside values like ethics, tolerance, and mutual respect. To ensure the long-term success of the HCBC, recommendations include strengthening community-school partnerships, enhancing teacher training in citizenship education, adopting flexible teaching methods, and regularly reviewing the curriculum. These strategies aim to promote participatory citizenship, sustainable development, and a more inclusive, responsive educational system that aligns with Zimbabwe's social and economic realities and online methodologies in teaching and learning at schools.

Keywords: Citizenship Education, Civic Engagement, Community-School Partnerships, Heritage-Competence-Based Curriculum, Social Network Theory

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe (MoPSE), introduced a Competence-Based Curriculum Framework (CBC) 2015-2022. CBC is an approach where teaching and learning is based on discrete skills rather than dwelling on only knowledge or the cognitive domain of learning (Ministry of Education, Republic of Rwanda, 2015). CBC emphasises what learners are expected to do rather than concentrating on what they are expected to know. Learners can acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to solve situations they encounter in everyday life (MoPSE, 2020). The competence-based element focuses on equipping pupils with the skills necessary to thrive in the 21st century. This includes critical thinking, collaboration, entrepreneurship, and digital literacy. More so, it shifts the focus from rote learning to mastery of practical skills, aiming to make pupils more adaptable and prepared for the demands of the modern economy. After a curriculum review of the first curriculum cycle 2015-2022, CBC was extended and fused with Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) 2024-2030. According to MoPSE framework, the heritage aspect of the curriculum seeks to instil pride in Zimbabwean culture, history, and values. It integrates traditional knowledge and practices into the school system, creating a sense of national identity and belonging among pupils. By linking learning to real-life contexts, pupils develop not only academic skills but also a deep connection to their roots. The role of heritage education in supporting the protection and sustainable management and use of heritage resources is already widely acknowledged (Zazu, 2016). The curriculum evaluation resulted in a number of changes. For example, the reduction in continuous assessment weighting, a decrease in the number of Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA) and the amplified prominence on the Zimbabwean philosophical orientation of Ubuntu/Unhu/Vumunhu. The authors equate this viewpoint to citizenship education. Hakobyan (2016) posit that, citizenship education is important because it builds character and develops the soft skills such as communication, initiative, social interaction and teamwork. Citizens who are willing and able to take responsibility for themselves and their communities and contribute to the political process. The underlying principle is an education system that produces goods and services useful to the economy, based on heritage and conscious of the environment, (MoPSE, 2024; Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development (MHTESTD), 2020).

Epstein, et al (2002) observed that despite strong agreement on the importance of the goals mentioned above, most schools, districts, and states still need help in developing comprehensive programmes of school, family, and community partnerships. Pupils face serious challenges both in school and in their communities, including child labour, abuse, illness (such as HIV/AIDS), lack of basic needs and support, and school dropout. These problems can lead to negative outcomes such as street life, early marriage or pregnancy, poor mental and physical health, low academic performance, violence, and substance abuse (Ministry of General Education, 2013). In view of these and other challenges faced by pupils, schools in Zimbabwe have increasingly collaborated with community stakeholders, including local leaders, businesses, and parents. These partnerships aim to address local needs, foster practical problem-solving, and enhance pupils' engagement with their surroundings. Zazu, (2016) suggests that, Heritage education needs to be socio-culturally situated, and responsive to the immediate needs and interests of local communities, not just the nation state. The learners' interest is likely to increase if in its orientation the learning processes are centred on issues relevant to their world views. This approach encourages pupils to become agents of positive change within their communities, thereby contributing to local development and civic responsibility. As such, community-school partnerships play an essential role in successful schools, often providing supports and resources to meet staff, family, and pupil needs that go

beyond what is typically available through school. Reciprocally, community partners benefit from their relationships with schools, including learning about schools' inclusive culture (Gross et al, 2015). The study seeks to explore the complex relationships between civic engagement, social responsibility, community-school partnerships, and the Heritage, Competence- Based Curriculum (HCBC) in Zimbabwe's government and public schools. The authors acknowledge that teachers are essential in supporting the 2024-2030 curriculum framework.

Conceptual Framework

The theory of how social organisations connect reinforces the understanding of civic engagement, social responsibility, and community-school partnerships. In this study the Social Network Theory (SNT) helped establish a foundation for analysing the complex relationships between education, community, and civic participation. SNT, posits that social organisations connect through complex networks of relationships, interactions, and exchanges. These connections facilitate information sharing, resource allocation, and collective action. The main components of SNT are; (i) Nodes, that is organisations, individuals or any other entities capable of forming relationships (ii) Links, refers to relationships, interactions such as friendships, professional interactions, or flows of information (iii) Ties is the strength, weakness, and multiplicity. (iv), Network Structure defined by the pattern of ties between nodes (density, centrality, clusters and subgroups). In SNT the connection mechanisms are firstly shared goals and interests. Secondly, resource dependence. Thirdly, social identity. Fourthly, trust and reputation. Lastly, communication and information exchange (Kadushin, 2004; Pescosolido, 2011). The assumptions are that organisations are interconnected and interdependent. Relationships are critical for resource access and knowledge sharing. More so, network structure influences organisational behaviour and outcomes. In this regard SNT provided a valuable lens through which the authors examined the effectiveness of community-school partnerships within Zimbabwe's HCBC, particularly regarding civic engagement and social responsibility.

Fitting SNT into Community-School Partnerships in Zimbabwe

The nodes in the social network are the schools, communities, teachers, pupils, government bodies, and other local stakeholders. The strength of the ties between these actors directly affects the success of civic engagement initiatives and the implementation of the HCBC. Schools are not isolated entities but part of a broader social ecosystem, where collaboration with local communities is essential for addressing challenges like poverty, unemployment, and cultural preservation.

The effectiveness of civic engagement in Zimbabwe's government and public schools depends on the quality of these relationships. For example, strong partnerships between schools and local businesses can lead to resource-sharing and support for educational programmes that focus on practical skills, thereby promoting HCBC. In SNT terms, fostering strong ties within these networks is crucial for mobilising community resources, enhancing communication, and ensuring that community needs are integrated into the curriculum.

Central actors in the network (e.g., school leaders or influential community members) play a pivotal role in driving civic engagement. Central nodes can be key influencers who mobilise resources, shape public opinion, or facilitate the flow of important information. For instance, school leaders who are highly connected within their communities can effectively promote social responsibility initiatives by leveraging their relationships with local authorities, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), or cultural leaders.

SNT emphasises the importance of bridging ties or connections between different clusters or groups within a network. In Zimbabwe's community-school partnerships, these ties are critical

for connecting schools with different community groups, such as rural and urban communities, traditional leaders, or local government. Bridging ties can introduce new ideas and innovations into the curriculum, allowing schools to better respond to diverse community needs.

SNT can also help to explain the diffusion of the HCBC across different schools and communities. Schools with more central positions in social networks are likely to adopt and implement the curriculum more effectively, as they have better access to resources, information, and support. On the other hand, more isolated schools may face difficulties in fully realising the curriculum's goals without strong community ties or external support.

Although informal connections between schools, families, and communities are relatively easy to develop, creating strong, long-term partnerships is more complex. This process demands a clear vision, consistent policies, and fundamental changes to the system. It goes beyond offering integrated services or programmes connected to schools, it involves combining school and community resources in a structured and sustainable way. Such integration can only be achieved through formalised, institutional partnerships with clearly shared responsibilities (Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2006). The partnership model is widely regarded as the most suitable approach for relationships between education professionals and parents. In this model, educators are seen as experts in teaching, while parents are recognised as experts on their own children. This creates a collaborative relationship where both parties share their knowledge and decision-making responsibilities to ensure the best possible educational outcomes for the child (MOGE, 2013).

Epstein, et al (2002) hypothesise that the model of school, family, and community partnerships locates the pupil at the centre. The inarguable fact is that pupils are the main actors in their education, development, and success in school. School, family, and community partnerships cannot simply produce successful pupils. Rather, partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide, energise, and motivate pupils to produce their own successes. Social organisations connect through diverse networks. Strong ties facilitate cooperation and resource sharing. Weak ties enable information diffusion and innovation. Network position influences organisational influence and power. Parents and professionals can contribute different strengths to their relationship, thereby increasing the potency of the partnership (MOGE, 2013).

2. METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative phenomenological design was utilised to investigate the vital role of civic engagement and social responsibility in Zimbabwean government and public schools. This design was chosen because it allowed for a deep exploration of participants' lived experiences, focusing on the perspectives of teachers regarding community-school partnerships and the implementation of HCBC. The approach is particularly well-suited for understanding how teachers experience and interpret their role in fostering civic engagement through education. SNT further informed the study by providing a conceptual lens to examine how the relationships and interactions among various stakeholders such as teachers, schools, communities, and local institutions shape and influence these educational experiences and outcomes. 76 purposively selected primary and secondary school teachers participated in the study. These teachers were actively involved in Zimbabwe's government and public schools, either in rural or urban settings. The sampling criteria considered subject and pathways. The sample represented teachers from a wide range of subject areas and learning pathways, including Social Science, Indigenous Languages, Physical Education and Arts, Heritage Studies, Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), Humanities, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and Commercial subjects. This ensured a diverse range of perspectives. Participants had at least two years of teaching experience to

ensure they had substantial exposure to the HCBC and were involved in MoPSE curriculum, as well as CALA development and administration. Teaching levels represented both primary and secondary education, ensuring that the findings reflect the experiences of teachers at different stages of the education system.

The teachers were divided into five focus groups to allow for in-depth discussions and the exploration of shared experiences. This method is well-suited for phenomenological studies as it enabled participants to engage in rich dialogue, providing insights into their collective understanding of civic engagement and the efficacy of the HCBC. The focus on teachers' perspectives and experiences allowed for a nuanced understanding of how community-school partnerships are experienced in real-world contexts, as well as how teachers interpret their role in fostering civic responsibility through the curriculum. By using focus groups, the researchers were able to identify common themes, challenges, and successes in the implementation of the HCBC within Zimbabwean schools. The phenomenological design aligned with the aim of the research, which was to uncover the lived experiences and meanings that teachers attach to their roles in promoting civic engagement. This design helped to capture the complexity and depth of the teachers' experiences, which are central to understanding how community-school partnerships can be strengthened. The chosen methodology was effective in gathering comprehensive data on teachers' experiences with Zimbabwe's HCBC and its impact on civic engagement. By focusing on the teachers' lived experiences, the study provided critical insights into the practical challenges and opportunities within the Zimbabwean education system. The study leveraged Online Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as a primary method for data collection, which provided several key advantages, including:

- **Geographic Diversity:** Teachers from both rural and urban schools across Zimbabwe could participate without the constraints of physical travel, allowing for more inclusive representation from various regions.
- **Time Efficiency and Flexibility:** Participants could engage in discussions from their own locations at convenient times, reducing the logistical barriers associated with in-person discussions.
- **Increased Population:** The online nature of the FGDs allowed for a larger and more diverse sample of participants, contributing to richer data.

Document analysis complemented the FGDs, focusing on:

- **Curriculum Documents:** Examining how civic engagement and social responsibility are reflected in the curriculum.
- **Policy Papers:** Reviewing national education policies and the HCBC, particularly in identifying gaps or inconsistencies.

By reviewing these documents, the researchers compared teachers' lived experiences with official guidelines and policies, identifying discrepancies or challenges in the curriculum's implementation. Hence, thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes in the FGDs and documents, such as the effectiveness of community-school partnerships or challenges in promoting civic responsibility. Content analysis focused on examining the representation of civic and social responsibility in the curriculum texts, analysing how these concepts are embedded and identifying any gaps.

Challenges encountered included defining and operationalising civic engagement. Civic engagement and social responsibility are broad, multifaceted concepts that can be interpreted differently by various stakeholders, making it difficult to develop standardised definitions and measurements for the study. Secondly, reluctance to discuss political issues. Some

participants were hesitant to share their views on politically sensitive topics, reflecting concerns about expressing opinions in group settings, especially on issues with potential political implications. Lastly, were measurement difficulties. Measuring attitudes and behaviours related to civic engagement posed challenges, particularly in terms of how effectively the curriculum promotes these values in different contexts (rural vs. urban, primary vs. secondary). To address these challenges, Pilot-Testing of FGDs was done to address concerns about participation and the online format, and to further refine the process and encourage open discussions. Secondly, triangulation for validity was done. Multiple data sources (FGDs and document analysis) were used to triangulate findings, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena studied and validating the results. The discussions began by a brief background to the development of HCBC in the Zimbabwean context. Finally, confidentiality measures were employed to protect participants' identities, FGDs were coded as OFG1, OFG2, OFG3, OFG4, and OFG5, ensuring that individual teachers could share their perspectives without fear of repercussions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community-School Partnerships

Partnerships, are generally defined as collaborative efforts between two or more organisations aimed at supporting each other's objectives and achieving shared benefits. Community-school partnerships often referred to as collaborations, are meaningful relationships with community members, organisations, and businesses that are committed to working cooperatively with a shared responsibility to advance the development of pupils' intellectual, social, and emotional well-being (Gross et al, 2015). These partnerships work towards a shared vision, where responsibilities, risks, and benefits are collectively undertaken and are aimed at fostering civic engagement, promoting social responsibility, and improving pupil development. Epstein, et al (2002) observed that, teachers and administrators want to know how to work with families in positive ways and how to involve the community to increase pupil success. Families want to know if their schools are providing high-quality education, how to help their children do their best, and how to communicate with and support teachers. Pupils want to succeed in school and know that they need guidance, support, and encouragement from their parents, teachers, and others in the community. The intent is to sustain such partnerships over time. The range of entities in a community are not limited to agencies and organisation; they encompass people, community based organisations, postsecondary institutions, religious and civic groups, programmes at parks and libraries, and any other facilities that can be used for recreation, learning, enrichment, and support (Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2006). Effective community-school partnerships are essential for fostering civic engagement and social responsibility, as SNT emphasises the importance of relationships and interconnectedness among actors within a network. In this context, schools, families, community organizations, and other stakeholders function as nodes whose strong, collaborative ties enhance the flow of information, resources, and support, ultimately strengthening civic outcomes and the implementation of initiatives like the HCBC.

Types of Community-School Partnerships

Community partnerships come in a variety of forms, including family-friendly businesses, comprehensive service schools, and the placement of social services on educational institution campuses. These partnerships can be between one school and a single community

agency or involve multiple schools collaborating with a network of organisations. Parents-Teacher Associations (PTAs): PTAs are one of the most common types of community-school partnerships, involving active collaboration between parents, teachers, and sometimes local government bodies. They focus on promoting the educational welfare of pupils and enhancing communication between families and schools. For example, Zambia uses PTAs to improve learner performance, pupil retention, and encourage reading for learning (MOGE, 2013). In countries like Zimbabwe, School Development Committees (SDCs), bring together parents, teachers, and local stakeholders to contribute to school management. Their roles include providing resources, upholding discipline, fostering a healthy learning environment, and tracking student progress. In Zimbabwe, SDCs work in partnership with schools to allocate resources, implement projects efficiently, and support school feeding initiatives. (MoPSE, 2024).

Business and NGO Partnerships: schools often partner with local businesses or NGOs to gain access to additional resources, expertise, and opportunities for pupils. These partnerships can provide internships, funding, and real-world experiences for pupils, linking education with practical skills. For example, United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) supports MoPSE to provide Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools, that is, functional clean water sources, safe sanitation facilities e.g. toilets and proper hygiene practices e.g. waste management.

Faith-Based and Cultural Organisations: schools sometimes collaborate with faith-based or cultural organisations to support holistic pupil development, often emphasising moral education, cultural heritage, and social responsibility. These organisations provide mentorship, counselling, and sometimes funding. Schools have a stake in building relationships with youth serving community-based organisations (CBO), and those organisations often turn to schools for access to young people and linkages to school-based service providers (Fabionar, & Campbell, 2010).

Benefits of Community-School Partnerships

Fabionar and Campbell, (2010) acknowledge that next to the family, schools are one of the most influential developmental contexts that shape the life chances of youth. Schools have increasingly shouldered the responsibility of promoting not only intellectual achievement but also civic, social and physical well-being. Both teachers and the communities have the responsibilities of preparing and teaching pupils in schools and homes. There is need to realise that the two parties have the responsibility of jointly getting involved in the learning and upbringing of the children. Parents can make a huge contribution to the learning of their children through participating in the development of the schools in many ways (MOGE, 2013).

Improved Academic Outcomes: engaging the community in school activities can enhance pupils' academic performance by addressing various social and environmental factors. Gross, et al (2015) established that community-school partnerships can impact pupil success and post-school outcomes as well as positively influence and benefit the community in return. In other words, educational outcomes improve when schools form and sustain ongoing

partnerships with CBOs. MOGE (2013) posit that the best approach in helping to achieve improved learner performance is through formation of a strong community-school partnership, which will help in strengthening the alliance between the school and community in effectively supporting teaching and learning both in and out of school. Gross, et al (2015) concur when they say that community-school partnerships play an essential role in successful schools, often providing support and resources to meet staff, family, and pupil needs that go beyond what is typically available through school.

Fostering Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility: these partnerships encourage pupils to become more engaged citizens. Working with local organisations helps pupils see the practical implications of their education, fostering a sense of responsibility towards their communities. CBOs are in a unique position to assess risks and develop assets that support youth, families, and communities (Kakungulu, 2024).

Resource Mobilisation: partnerships with businesses and NGOs can bring in much-needed resources for schools, from infrastructure to extracurricular activities. In Zimbabwe, for example, SDCs help provide the resources needed to ensure effective learning environments. UNICEF manages the School Improvement Grants (SIG) under the Education Development Fund. Global Partnership for Education supports the Complementary SIG in terms of infrastructure upgrades. Partnerships with parents and local stakeholders can promote better attendance, provide learning resources, and help monitor pupils' progress. Concerted effort between schools and communities is not only inevitable but a need (Gross, et al 2015). Kakungulu, (2024) Highlights that community partnerships offer valuable resources, services, and information that support school development. These collaborations supply schools with supplementary assets such as technology and volunteer support that enrich the learning experience for pupils. Community partnerships support pupils' social and emotional development through resources like counselling, mentorship, and extracurricular activities. Their sustainability depends on shared understanding of goals, attitudes, expectations, and perceived outcomes.

Cultural Preservation: collaborations with cultural organisations help pupils connect with their heritage, reinforcing values related to cultural identity, language, and history. This is crucial for curricula like Zimbabwe's HCBC, which emphasises the integration of local culture in education. The community can also contribute by offering financial assistance, in-kind services like mentoring and after-school programmes, and by helping to provide culturally appropriate materials and insights into students' needs. Epstein, et al (2002) emphasises that pupils are often their parents' main source of information about school. In strong partnership programs, teachers help pupils understand and conduct both traditional communications with families (e.g., delivering memos or report cards) and new communications (e.g., interacting with family members about homework or participating in parent-teacher pupil conferences).

Challenges and barriers in Community-School Partnerships

Kakungulu, (2024) observed that, partnerships are a term whose meaning shifts as differently positioned social actors 'interpret' the concept variously in terms of the security, resources, capabilities and circumstances of the local community. It encompasses controversy, contestation, proffered strategies of change and, ultimately, resistance. As such, previous

research has observed that partnerships often decrease as pupils progress through grades unless schools and teachers actively establish and apply suitable partnership practices at every grade level. Some of the challenges include:

Resource Limitations: while partnerships aim to mobilise resources, there may still be significant gaps, especially in rural areas or schools with limited community engagement. Some schools may not have access to local businesses or organisations that can offer substantial support. In 2016, MoPSE reported that the country's growth is increasingly limited by infrastructure challenges such as electricity, water, and transportation issues; the scarcity and high cost of long-term capital; expensive business operations; low productivity levels; and a manufacturing sector that lacks competitiveness.

Power Imbalances: partnerships can be affected by uneven power dynamics, where wealthier or more influential community members may dominate decision-making processes, side-lining other stakeholders, especially in low-income areas. Given the current fiscal constraints, education provinces are receiving much less than the anticipated amounts and ration funds to help support those schools that are most in need (MoPSE, 2016).

Lack of Commitment or Participation: in some cases, community members, parents, or organisations may lack the time, interest, or understanding of how to engage effectively with the school. This can result in weak or superficial partnerships that do not yield the desired outcomes. The current situation prevailing in most of our schools today is that of lack of involvement by the community in the affairs of the teachers and learners. It has become common to see schools working in isolation, because there is a general assumption that the Government, through the MOGE, will provide the support required for the schools to run efficiently (MOGE, 2013).

Cultural and Political Sensitivities: schools may face challenges related to cultural differences or political tensions in the community, which can hinder open dialogue or collaboration. For example, some parents may hesitate to engage in discussions that touch on politically sensitive topics in their communities.

Case Studies

As more is learned about the role of pupils in partnerships, a clearer understanding emerges of how schools, families, and communities need to collaborate with pupils to enhance their chances of success. Zimbabwe's Primary Schools: according to Ngwenya et al. (2008), 90% of Zimbabwe's primary schools are government-owned, while 10% are privately owned. In government schools, a partnership exists between the government and the local community. The government provides teachers, stationery, and per capita grants, while communities/parents are responsible for infrastructure development. SDCs, democratically elected by parents and communities annually, give parents a voice in setting fees, school infrastructure development, and maintenance.

UNICEF Initiatives in Zimbabwe: UNICEF collaborated with several organisations, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UNFPA,

UNAIDS, and WHO, under various programmes. These initiatives focus on skilling, entrepreneurship, employability, and social services for adolescents and youth, as well as sexual and reproductive health, HIV, and gender-based violence services. Additionally, UNICEF co-convened the Child Budgeting Series with the Ministry of Public Service, Labour, and Social Welfare, contributing to an increased government allocation for protection.

School Grants and Support: schools in Zimbabwe receive support for school-level recurrent expenditures through per capita grants (for non-government schools) and tuition grants (for government schools). These funds are intended for the purchase of school supplies. UNICEF has played a key role in supporting MoPSE in implementing various educational programmes, including the School Improvement Grants (SIG), which have benefited nearly 1.5 million learners. UNICEF also provided resources for infrastructure upgrades, learning materials, assistive devices for children with disabilities, and digital learning platforms like the Learning Passport.

Binga, Zaka, Hwange, Bulilima, and Mangwe Districts: in these districts, Snv Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) Zimbabwe, in partnership with UNICEF and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), engaged communities through participatory methodologies. These initiatives enabled dialogues between the school administration and the community to address school development challenges. The Enhanced Food Security through the Empowerment of Schools Programme was one such effort to involve communities in school management.

Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Programme: the success of the GPE programme in Zimbabwe was facilitated by strategic support from the MoPSE and UNICEF. Capacity strengthening, strong collaboration, and effective problem-solving contributed to the programme's success in improving school systems and educational outcomes.

SDCs: according to Zimbabwe's MoPSE (2024), SDCs play a crucial role in resource provision, promoting pupil well-being, maintaining discipline, and supporting school feeding programmes that are essential for improving attendance and performance.

Morning Star School: under Selbourne Park Christian Church in Bulawayo, launched a "Learning to Read" programme in 2024. This programme targets disadvantaged out-of-school children aged 6-12, teaching them to read and write through a Bible-based curriculum before reintegrating them back to school. The school has successfully pilot-tested this initiative in Harare and Nyamandlovu and plans to expand to other regions. Teachers are community-based, and the school provides necessary teaching and learning resources.

Zambia's PTA Model: in Zambia, PTAs play a significant role in fostering strong links between schools and communities. The Ministry of General Education (MOGE, 2013) emphasizes the importance of PTAs in improving pupil retention and promoting a culture of reading.

Community-School Partnerships: in the United States, Community Schools partner with local organisations to provide services such as healthcare and adult education programmes to pupils and families. These partnerships are particularly effective in improving academic achievement in underserved communities.

REACH Coalitions in the U.S.: support schools by addressing factors such as unstable home environments, gang violence, healthcare access, and affordable housing. Schools partner with REACH to enhance local resources, offer pupil support services, and create civic engagement opportunities (Fabionar & Campbell).

Schools Without Limits: the project assessed primary and secondary pupils and schools in New South Wales. A lot of evidence was gathered to the effect that school-based partnerships with parents, community organisations, and businesses had a direct, potentially positive effect on pupil performance (Kakungulu, 2024). Through CONTACT's involvement in community partnership approaches, good indicators of "best" practice have been noted. This can provide a useful point of reference for school improvement initiatives.

The Heritage and Competence-Based Curriculum

Zimbabwe's HCBC seeks to cultivate socially responsible and capable citizens. This section outlines the curriculum's civic engagement elements and explores teachers' views on its implementation, emphasising both its strengths and challenges. The country's constitution offers a strong foundation for balanced national development, affirming education not only as a fundamental human right but also as the basis for the nation's social, cultural, and economic progress. According to the Heritage Based Curriculum framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2024 – 2030, emphasis is on the teaching of both theory and practice, balancing the acquisition of knowledge and skills. It aims to produce pupils with relevant competencies such as skills, knowledge, values, attitudes and dispositions that are key to national development. Pupils are channelled through different pathways as per their strengths and abilities from Early Childhood Development (ECD) to Advanced Level, to initiate and enhance creativity and innovation for socio-economic transformation. The HCBC expresses societal ideals and practices that guide the preparation of pupils for suitable roles in society. Zimbabwean beliefs and values underpinning the HCBC include self-reliance, entrepreneurship, responsible citizenship, global awareness, environmental stewardship, inclusivity, multiculturalism, tolerance, Ubuntu/ Unhu/ Vumunhu, a sense of interdependence and mutual support. The philosophy emphasises on ownership of our natural resources, respect for life, self, others, environment and property (MoPSE,2024). 'A good human being' denotes a good citizen, 'responsibility' is one of the defining characteristics of citizenship and 'devotion to family and the welfare of the community' also manifests the social obligation expected of a good citizen (Wuta, 2022). According to Hakobyan, (2016) responsible citizens have knowledge about their role in their communities, their country, and their world. Responsible citizens participate in activities that make their world a better place. Responsible citizens are change agents that act out against social, economic, and environmental injustices. Merrifield (2001) acknowledges that, learning through doing seems to be a key route to active citizenship, although there is little hard evidence.

To complement the philosophical underpinnings given above, MoPSE learning and teaching teacher's guide, (2024) encourages teachers to adopt some of the following strategies to facilitate civic engagement and pupils' continuous learning in all learning areas:

- design authentic, project-based learning experiences that require pupils to apply skills in real-world contexts
- facilitate discussions and activities that encourage critical analysis, innovation, multiple perspectives, and creative problem-solving
- incorporate collaborative group work, where pupils learn to communicate effectively, delegate responsibilities, and work interdependently
- explicitly facilitate digital research, evaluation, communication, and provide opportunities for pupils to apply them
- build in pupils, opportunities for self-reflection, goal-setting, and adapting learning strategies based on feedback
- model strong critical thinking, communication, and collaborative skills during learning
- provide scaffolding and support, and gradual release of responsibilities as pupils gain confidence and independence
- offer timely, specific feedback to help pupils identify areas for improvement and next steps
- encourage a growth mind-set, where pupils see challenges as opportunities for learning and development
- use performance-based learning, such as demonstrations, presentations, projects, and portfolios
- incorporate at all times and in all learning areas the learning of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and positive dispositions
- ensure acquisition and application of values which include respect, responsibility, integrity, empathy, perseverance and citizenship
- ensure acquisition and application of positive dispositions that include curiosity and inquisitiveness, selflessness, openness to new experiences, perseverance and resilience, optimism and hopefulness, empathy and compassion, and ethical behaviour.

There are numerous reasons for establishing partnerships between schools, families, and communities. Collaborations between communities and schools frequently lead to modifications in the curriculum and pupil learning experiences, directly impacting pupil achievement. The origin of these partnerships, whether from businesses, religious groups, parents, volunteers, or educational institutions is less significant than their effective establishment and functioning. Such partnerships can enhance school programmes and atmosphere, offer support and services to families, develop parents' skills and leadership abilities, foster connections among families within the school and community, and assist teachers in their roles. Several researchers affirm the positive impact of community-school partnerships on curriculum development, school climate, family engagement, and student outcomes (Epstein, 2018; Jeunes, 2012). However, the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all pupils succeed in school and in later life. When parents, teachers,

pupils, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around pupils and begins its work. According to the MoPSE Learning and Teaching Teacher's Guide (2024), teachers are thus expected to:

- Foster a learning environment where pupils can use local resources to address problems and develop innovative solutions.
- Choose a variety of learning materials, including texts, media, and artefacts, that reflect diverse heritage perspectives.
- Support pupils in creating projects and activities that enable them to explore and express their social and cultural identities.
- Use teaching approaches that align with the learning preferences and cultural traditions of different communities.
- Invite community members, elders, and guest speakers to share their knowledge and experiences related to heritage.

The following opinions on implementation of HCBC were given by the teacher participants in the study:

- MOPSE conducted a comprehensive curriculum review between 2015 and 2022, resulting in the implementation of CBC in 2017. This review process, aimed at aligning education with the 21st-century demands, brought about significant changes, notably affecting the weighting and number of subjects in the CALA component.
- MOPSE curriculum review brought about significant changes in the assessment framework, notably adjusting the weighting and number of CALA subjects. While the focus on continuous learning and practical skills remains, the adjustments reflect a greater emphasis on summative assessment and a prioritisation of core subject mastery. These changes aim to create a more balanced and robust assessment system that better aligns with the demands of the 21st century, promoting a deeper understanding of core concepts and skills while encouraging pupils to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world challenges
- The CALA weighting was reduced from 30% to 20% in the CBC. This shift reflects the importance of formal examinations in assessing pupils' mastery of core concepts and skills. The focus shifted to demonstrate a greater emphasis on summative assessment at the end of a learning cycle.
- Reduced Number of CALA: The CBC also reduced the number of CALA subjects, streamlining the assessment process and allowing for a greater emphasis on depth of learning in core subjects.
- Focus Still Remains: Despite the adjustments in weighting and number, the focus of the CALA component remains the same. It continues to emphasise continuous assessment, formative evaluation, and the development of practical skills and competencies, encouraging pupils to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world contexts.
- John Dewey reiterated teaching by doing philosophy - pragmatism -progressivism, where teacher facilitates learning through discussion, taking the learner as the centre of knowledge, teacher demonstrates while learners imitates, killing rote learning, therefore

in the Zimbabwean context CBC is effective since we are now learning to be employers not employees as was the goal of the past curriculum.

- The skills development and critical thinking aspect is visible in practical subject in which pupils are given situations and are required to identify the problem, carry out researches, come up with possible solutions and make a functional artefact to be presented for marking.
- Zimbabwe's CBC has the potential to promote civic engagement and social responsibility by incorporating community service, project-based learning, and critical thinking skills. By defining and emphasising civic duties and social responsibilities, the curriculum can empower pupils to become active and responsible citizens.
- Evaluating Zimbabwe's HCBC reveals both positive and negative aspects regarding its impact on civic engagement and social responsibility.
- The HCBC in Zimbabwe presents a balanced mix of advantages and challenges in promoting civic engagement and social responsibility. While it effectively enhances practical skills, critical thinking, and inclusivity, issues such as implementation challenges and resource limitations can hinder its full potential. Addressing these shortcomings is essential to maximise the positive impacts of the curriculum on future generations.
- Inconsistent implementation and inadequate teacher training, limited resources and infrastructure, overemphasis on academic achievement may hinder the curriculum's effectiveness. Packing too many competencies into the curriculum can lead to superficial coverage and inadequate depth.
- Looking at inadequate teacher training and resources. The effective implementation of the CBC requires well-trained teachers and adequate resources. However, there are concerns that teachers may not have received sufficient training on civic education and social responsibility, and that schools may lack the resources to support these aspects of the curriculum.
- Some teachers may lack the necessary skills to effectively implement HCBC approaches, leading to superficial engagement with civic topics.
- Insufficient resources and infrastructure can hinder the practical aspects of the curriculum, limiting pupil participation in community projects.
- Schools in rural areas may struggle to organise outreach programmes due to lack of funding or transportation.
- The focus on competencies rather than traditional examinations can create challenges in assessing pupil progress and understanding.
- Teachers may find it difficult to evaluate pupils' civic engagement effectively without standardised assessments.
- In some communities, there may be resistance to new educational approaches, hindering the adoption of the HCBC.
- Traditional views on education may prioritise rote learning over practical engagement, affecting community support for the curriculum.
- A focus on competencies may lead to neglect of fundamental academic subjects, which are also important for civic knowledge.

- If too much emphasis is placed on practical skills, pupils might lack essential knowledge in history or government, which is crucial for informed citizenship.

Despite the increasing demand for education, systematic underfunding for the sector beginning in the late 1980s has continued, with negative effects on access, quality, equity and learning outcomes (MoPSE. 2016). Ngwenya, et al (2008) made the same observation when they said that, with the Government support declining over the years due to a poor performing economy, the education sector has experienced resource constraints especially teacher exodus and inadequate budgets. Many pupils, especially girls, dropped out of school before graduating, while many failed their examinations. Scholars who discuss similar challenges of underfunding and its impact on Zimbabwean education include (Chabaya, Rembe, and Wadesango 2009; Mavhunga and Mushayikwa 2015; Mushoriwa, 2013 & Gudyanga, 2012). Given this background of the difficult period in education from 2008 to 2023, HBC as an educational approach centres on the heritage and experiences of a country. Its goal is to provide pupils with a curriculum that is reflective of and relevant to their own backgrounds, identities and the country's resources thereby creating an educational experience that is more inclusive, representative, and meaningful for pupils from that heritage background. It can lead to increased engagement, better academic outcomes and stronger connections between school and community (MoPSE, 2024).

Efficacy Assessment

This section presents research findings on the effectiveness of community-school partnerships and the HCBC in promoting civic engagement and social responsibility. International comparisons provided context for evaluating Zimbabwe's progress. While the curriculum has been praised for its holistic approach to education, it faces challenges such as limited resources, teacher training gaps, and inconsistent implementation across regions. The success of the programme also hinges on effective collaboration between schools and their communities, which can vary depending on local conditions. There are positive examples where these partnerships have led to innovative projects that address issues such as health, social and local governance. The SNT guided the analysis by emphasising the significance of relationships and interconnectedness among various stakeholders in education. SNT helped to interpret how the strength and quality of ties between schools, communities, and other actors influence the outcomes of civic engagement initiatives and the effective implementation of the HCBC. The FGDs were guided by the following themes:

- Community-School Partnerships,
- Curriculum design, and
- Social responsibility.

Community-School Partnerships

On collaboration and cooperation between schools and communities, participants gave the following opinions:

- Pupils participate in community service projects, environmental awareness campaigns, health education programmes, youth forums and debates. The curriculum encourages participation in forums where pupils discuss local governance and social issues, enhancing their understanding of civic rights and responsibilities (OFG1).

- On civic engagement, we can refer to a case of a Harare school in Epworth (Makomo Primary School). The school is involved in the waste management projects. Pupils at this school have been actively engaged in recycling plastic waste and creating innovative projects, such as making school bags and replicas of generators from discarded plastics. The school has an eco-club recognisable projects came to light in 2023. They are now trying to be innovative as they reduce reuse and recycle (OFG3).
- By incorporating community service and project-based learning, the curriculum encourages pupils to participate in civic activities, such as voting (e.g., student council elections), community clean-up initiatives and fundraising for local charities.

The study's findings indicate that community involvement in the affairs of teachers and learners in government and public schools is minimal. Ngwenya et al. (2008) observed that community participation is often limited to financial contributions, with little influence over decision-making. While schools increasingly place demands on parents to support their children's education, many parents face basic livelihood challenges, making it difficult for them to meet these expectations. SDCs which are intended to represent the community's voice, often merely endorse the head teachers' decisions without having the capacity for meaningful input.

Moreover, there was no mention of key organisations such as UNICEF, UNDP, WHO, the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, the Zimbabwe Economics Society, School Improvement Grants (SIG), the Global Partnership for Education, the or the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). This suggests that the participant teachers were either unaware of these organisations or their activities, or did not perceive them as relevant to community-school partnerships. This limited awareness may be restricting opportunities for wider collaboration and support aimed at improving the educational environment. Scholars who have discussed similar observations regarding limited awareness among educators about key organisations involved in education and community support in Zimbabwe include (Chireshe and Chireshe, 2010; Mutasa 2014; Moyo and Chigona, 2016 & Chikwiri, 2017).

Curriculum Design

HCBC's focus on practical skills and cultural heritage may contribute to its effectiveness. The teacher participants had this to say:

- *This new approach to education focuses on developing the skills and competencies needed for active participation in society and fostering a sense of responsibility towards the community (OFG1).*
- *It is an educational framework that focuses on equipping pupils with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to effectively perform tasks and solve real-world problems (OFG2).*
- *The curriculum has real-world relevance as it emphasises connections to real-life situations, ensuring that learning is applicable and meaningful. Present real-world problems that require pupils to research, analyse, and propose solutions, fostering critical analysis (OFG2 and 3).*

- One way in which critical thinking can be promoted is through the use of case studies. Case studies present real-life scenarios that require individuals to analyse information, identify key issues, and develop solutions. By working through case studies, individuals are able to practice their critical thinking skills in a practical setting (OFG3).
- The curriculum's emphasis on community service and project-based learning promotes engagement with local issues and social responsibility. Pupils learn to address real-world problems, preparing them to tackle complex social challenges (OFG4).
- The curriculum is a learner-centred model which arranges learning and teaching around the actual competencies that a practitioner needs to function effectively in the real world. Allows student teachers in colleges to grasp concepts and skills and apply them in practical situations (OFG3).
- It promotes interdisciplinary Learning. The curriculum often integrates subjects such as social studies, arts, and entrepreneurship, fostering an understanding of civic rights and responsibilities and encouraging pupils to think about their roles within society (OFG1).
- Limited opportunities for pupil voice, critics argue that the CBC may limit opportunities for pupil voice and activism. The focus on prescribed outcomes and standardised assessments may discourage pupils from engaging in critical dialogues and taking action on issues they care about (OFG3).
- Overemphasis on individualism, some critics also contend that the CBC's emphasis on individual achievement and competition may undermine the development of a sense of collective responsibility and social solidarity (OFG4).

Participants viewed HCBC in Zimbabwe as a gateway to equipping learners with critical skills and competencies that incorporate civic and social values, enabling them to solve real-world problems. The Ministry of Education, Republic of Rwanda (2015), supports this view, recognising that a competence-based curriculum elevates learning by offering challenging and engaging experiences that promote deep thinking rather than rote memorisation. Additionally, Hakobyan (2016) highlights that citizenship education benefits not only schools and educational organisations but also society at large by producing motivated, responsible learners who positively engage with their communities. For society, this approach fosters an active and responsible citizenry, willing to participate in national life and contribute to the democratic process. The HCBC emphasises an educational approach centered on the heritage and experiences of a country. Its goal is to provide pupils with a curriculum that reflects their backgrounds, identities, and the nation's resources, creating an inclusive and meaningful educational experience. This relevance can lead to greater pupil engagement, improved academic outcomes, and stronger connections between schools and their communities (MoPSE, 2024).

Participants highlighted project-based learning and case studies as particularly suitable teaching methods for this curriculum. However, concerns were raised about the potential threats posed by standardised assessments, prescribed outcomes, and an overemphasis on individual achievement, which could undermine the broader goals of the HCBC. Scholars like Chikunda (2017) have explored similar concerns regarding the tension between progressive teaching approaches, such as project-based learning and the constraints imposed by standardised assessments and prescribed outcomes, particularly in the context of Zimbabwe's HCBC.

Social responsibility

Focusing on social responsibility can encourage learners to become active and engaged citizens. The Heritage-Based Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (2024–2030) aims to equip pupils for participatory citizenship, peaceful coexistence, and sustainable development by promoting awareness of rights and duties, encouraging tolerance and respect for others, supporting the management of diversity and conflict, and fostering environmental preservation (MoPSE, 2024). Participants gave the following opinions:

- One of the key aspects with the HCBC is its emphasis on having the learners practice the African philosophy of Ubuntu/Unhu/Vumunhu. It seeks to impart this philosophy through the teaching of civic subjects like Heritage Social Studies as well as Family, Religious, and Moral Education (FAREME). Learners are taught social skills like how the family lives and behaves in a community. In this regard, the curriculum promotes civic engagement as well as social responsibility (OFG3).
- By encouraging pupils to think critically about social issues and come up with innovative solutions, the curriculum helps to cultivate a sense of agency and empowerment among young people (OFG1).
- The curriculum places a strong emphasis on collaboration and teamwork. By working together on projects and assignments, pupils learn the value of cooperation and collective action. Through collaborative efforts, pupils are able to make a positive impact on their communities and contribute to the common good (OFG1).
- By focusing on group work and discussions, the CBC promotes dialogue among pupils about social issues, helping them to develop informed opinions and understand diverse perspectives, which is crucial for civic engagement (OFG2).
- Another important aspect of the HCBC is its focus on ethics and values. This helps to instil a sense of social responsibility and encourages pupils to make ethical decisions that benefit the wider community (OFG1).
- Social issues such as poverty, inequality, and climate change require innovative solutions that address the root causes of these problems (OFG4).
- The curriculum's focus on civic competence has led to a greater understanding of citizens' rights and responsibilities. Pupils are encouraged to think critically about social issues, fostering informed decision-making and active citizenship (OFG4).
- The curriculum encourages pupils to participate in community projects, fostering a sense of responsibility and enabling them to practice civic engagement. These projects

can lead to increased awareness of local issues and motivate pupils to take action (OFG3).

- The HCBC emphasises the importance of social values such as honesty, integrity, and respect for others, which are fundamental for nurturing responsible citizens. This foundational training can foster a culture of social responsibility among pupils. By involving youths in decision-making processes within schools and communities, the HCBC empowers them to take ownership of social issues, strengthening their commitment to social responsibility (OFG2).
- Broader societal issues, including political instability and economic challenges, may impact how effectively the HCBC can promote civic values and engagement. Pupils may find it difficult to engage civically in an environment where social issues are pervasive (OFG2).

Some participants indicated that the HCBC may foster active citizenship by integrating the philosophy of Ubuntu/Unhu/Vumunhu, civic education, collaboration, discussions, decision-making, ethics, and values. These elements promote a holistic approach to addressing social issues that affect both pupils and their communities, such as poverty, inequality, climate change, political instability, and economic challenges. Tackling these issues requires a strong understanding of citizens' rights and responsibilities, active participation in community projects, and innovative problem-solving.

However, as Wuta (2022) notes, the advancement of citizenship education faces significant local challenges, including uncertainty about its definition, inadequate resources, lack of staff expertise, and the prioritisation of national curriculum subjects, which are mandated by law. Other researchers addressing similar challenges in Zimbabwean citizenship education include; (Magudu, 2012; Namasasu, 2012; Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru & Shizha, 2011). Despite these barriers, the HCBC aims to prepare pupils for participatory citizenship, peace, and sustainable development. This includes fostering awareness of rights and responsibilities, promoting tolerance and mutual respect, managing diversity and conflict, and preserving and protecting the environment (MoPSE, 2024).

Strategies for Enhancing Community-School Partnerships and the Role of Organisations and Schools

Building on research findings and teacher insights, this section proposes strategies to enhance community-school partnerships and promote civic engagement through the HCBC in Zimbabwe. The HCBC represents a forward-thinking approach to education reform, aimed not only at developing pupils' intellectual capabilities but also at fostering a sense of civic duty and social responsibility. Community-school partnerships are pivotal to the success of this curriculum, providing opportunities for practical application and community involvement. One of the challenges identified through SNT in the Zimbabwean context could be the presence of structural gaps in the network where there is a lack of communication or collaboration between schools and certain community members. This can hinder the efficacy of the HCBC. However, sustained support and investment are necessary to address challenges and ensure the curriculum's long-term success. SNT can be used to map out these gaps and propose

strategies to bridge them, such as creating platforms for interaction between schools and underrepresented community groups. The following strategies outline roles for organisations, schools, and key stakeholders.

Partner Selection

Effective partner selection is crucial to building trust-based relationships, which form the foundation for coordinated and realistic decisions. As Kakungulu (2024) points out, these partnerships can influence resource distribution and access to key stakeholders. Schools and organisations should use tools like SNT to identify central actors who can advocate for better resource allocation and support for marginalised schools. By leveraging these partnerships, schools can enhance civic engagement and encourage pupils to take active roles in their communities. Similarly, Bhengu and Svosve (2018) demonstrate how school leaders in Zimbabwe effectively mobilize resources through partnerships. Others, such as Musesengwa and Chimbari (2021), emphasize the role of social capital in influencing collaboration outcomes. The use of tools like SNT or collective impact frameworks (Kania & Kramer, 2011; Hanleybrown et al., 2012) can help schools identify central actors and build effective advocacy networks that support marginalised schools and enhance civic engagement.

Parent and Community Engagement

According to Epstein et al. (2002), the external model of overlapping spheres of influence suggests that pupils grow and learn within three main contexts: family, school, and community. When these spheres are drawn together, collaborative efforts can significantly influence pupil development. For the HCBC to succeed, schools must actively engage parents and communities, ensuring they understand and support the curriculum. Strong information networks are essential for disseminating knowledge about HCBC objectives, particularly in rural areas where schools are more isolated. By establishing connections with urban areas, schools can adopt best practices and innovations.

Flexibility in Partnerships

Flexibility within partnerships is essential for adjusting to shifting social, economic, and political conditions. Collaborations that promote open dialogue and mutual cooperation tend to be more resilient and capable of adapting to emerging challenges. By embedding adaptability into community-school relationships, these partnerships are more likely to remain effective and aligned with evolving needs over time (Green, et al 2020; Kania, et al 201; Auerbach, 2015; Signorelli, et al. 2021).

School Governance

School governance, which involves the participation of local stakeholder including teachers, parents, pupils, and community members plays a vital role in managing school operations. As MOGE (2013) highlights, effective governance enhances resource allocation, decision-making, and overall school performance. The SDC is central to these efforts, focusing on transparency, accountability, and the equitable use of resources. Good governance includes active communication, consensus-building, and participation from all stakeholders, ensuring that schools operate efficiently and inclusively. Effective governance improves resource allocation, decision-making, and school performance through transparency and inclusive participation (Bush & Glover, 2014). School Development Committees play a vital role in

promoting accountability and community involvement, which enhances equitable resource use (Kivuva & Nasongo, 2009; Mulkeen, 2010).

Curriculum Review and Revision

Regular review and revision of the curriculum are crucial to its ongoing relevance, with teachers playing a central role in implementation and adaptation (Fullan, 2007; Tyler, 2013). Teachers are on the front lines of curriculum delivery. Incorporating learner feedback through formative assessments enhances curriculum responsiveness, while curricula that address social contexts better prepare pupils for active citizenship (Banks, 2008). Assessments should focus on observing learners and incorporating their opinion. A curriculum that evolves in response to pupils' needs and the changing social environment will better prepare them for active citizenship.

Incorporating Citizenship Education

Embedding citizenship education as a curriculum cornerstone fosters learners who are both mentally adept and socially engaged (Wuta, 2022). This approach is echoed by scholars such as Mavhunga et al. (2012), who critique the inconsistent attention given to civic education in Zimbabwe's schooling system. Similarly, Marovah (2019) argues that citizenship education must be delivered through critical and democratic pedagogical practices to nurture socially aware citizens. Ngwenya (2023) emphasizes that curriculum frameworks should include practical citizenship experiences such as simulations and participatory governance to build civic responsibility among learners.

Teacher Training and Support

Ongoing teacher training and support are essential for the successful implementation of the HCBC. Teachers must be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to engage pupils effectively and deliver the curriculum. This includes professional development programmes that focus on innovative teaching strategies and the practical application of civic education. Ongoing professional development is vital for HCBC's success equipping teachers with innovative pedagogical skills and application of civic education (Singh & Mukeredzi, 2024; Chinengundu et al., 2022).

Learner Support Services

When pupils receive encouragement and support from their school, family, and community, they are more likely to succeed academically and contribute to societal development, an idea echoed by several scholars. For instance, in Uganda, support from caregivers and teachers has been shown to improve attendance and grades among vulnerable adolescents (Osugi et al., 2018). Similarly, initiatives fostering parental engagement have been linked to better overall student performance and well-being (European School Education Platform, 2024). These services help address individual pupil needs, ensuring that all pupils have the opportunity to succeed within the HCBC framework.

Competence-Based Reporting

Adopting a competence-based reporting system where learner progress is assessed based on demonstrated mastery rather than age or grade, aligns closely with the goals of the HCBC framework, which emphasizes practical competencies and civic engagement. This shift in assessment is supported by Scheopner Torres et al. (2018), who emphasise advancement through demonstrated competencies, and Kocakülah and Köseoğlu (2023), who define competence-based assessment in terms of mastery evidence. Further support comes from Lenz, Wells, and Kingston (2015), who advocate for rubrics that reflect continuous skill growth; and Reigeluth and Karnopp (2013, 2020), who call for personalised, mastery-based educational models.

Engagement in Civic Activities

Through strong social networks, schools can facilitate greater pupil participation in community development activities, furthering the civic engagement goals of the HCBC. Schools can foster a sense of responsibility by involving pupils in social and civic projects, encouraging them to take active roles in their communities. Citizen learning does not only happen through social movements and campaigns. It also seems that participation in the organisations of the civil society can provide experiences from which citizenship knowledge, abilities and dispositions are learned (Merrifield, 2001).

Thinkers emphasise that curricula should reflect a nation's philosophical foundations and ideologies to align educational outcomes with civic goals (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru & Makuvaza, 2014). A coherent philosophical value system is crucial for a sound education system, one that prepares pupils for national development and community improvement. As MoPSE (2024) notes, the curriculum framework for primary and secondary education should be informed by the nation's philosophy and ideology. Schools, in collaboration with organisations, can play a pivotal role in fostering this national vision by promoting civic engagement and aligning educational outcomes with broader societal goals.

5. CONCLUSION

The research highlights the critical role of community-school partnerships in fostering active citizenship and social responsibility among learners in Zimbabwe. HCBC presents a forward-thinking approach that not only focuses on academic success but also emphasises civic engagement, ethical values, and the importance of social responsibility. However, the findings also reveal significant gaps in the involvement of communities, including minimal decision-making power for SDCs and limited awareness of key organisations like UNICEF and FAO, which could offer valuable support.

It is evident that while HCBC has the potential to equip pupils with essential life skills and foster active citizenship, its success is hindered by various challenges. These include a lack of community engagement, inadequate resources for citizenship education, and an overemphasis on traditional academic subjects, which often marginalise the civic and social components of the curriculum.

Furthermore, the research confirms that current teaching practices and governance structures within schools are insufficiently equipped to fully realise the goals of the HCBC. Although project-based learning and case studies are recognised as effective methods for this curriculum, the emphasis on standardised assessments and individual achievement may undermine the holistic educational goals of fostering civic duty, social values, and real-world problem-solving.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and community leaders aim to strengthen community-school partnerships and foster a culture of active citizenship.

- **Strengthen Community-School Partnerships:** Community involvement should go beyond financial contributions to include decision-making roles in school governance. Efforts must be made to build the capacity of SDCs so that they can meaningfully participate in school management and advocate for the community's educational needs.
- **Enhance Awareness of Key Supporting Organisations:** Schools and teachers need to be educated about the roles of important organisations such as UNICEF, UNDP, WHO, and FAO, among others, which can provide financial, technical, and policy support. Raising awareness about these partnerships will create more opportunities for resources and collaboration.
- **Prioritise Citizenship Education:** Citizenship education should be more deeply embedded into the national curriculum, with sufficient resources allocated to support its teaching. Teachers need training in citizenship education to deliver the curriculum effectively, ensuring that pupils develop a comprehensive understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens.
- **Adopt Flexible and Inclusive Teaching Methods:** Project-based learning, case studies, and collaborative discussions should be prioritised as key teaching methods under the HCBC to help pupils address social issues and solve real-world problems. There must also be a shift away from rigid standardised assessments, allowing pupils to demonstrate their competencies in more flexible and meaningful ways. **Address Structural Challenges:** MoPSE should allocate more resources towards citizenship education and promote ongoing professional development for teachers to enhance their capacity to teach the HCBC effectively. Additionally, schools should be supported to improve community outreach and engage more effectively with parents and local stakeholders.
- **Encourage Active Participation and Inclusivity:** Schools should foster environments that encourage pupils to participate in CALA, community projects, decision-making, and discussions on social issues. By emphasising values such as tolerance, respect for diversity, and conflict management, pupils can be better prepared to contribute positively to both their local communities and the broader national context.
- **Frequent Curriculum Review and Adaptation:** Regular reviews of the HCBC curriculum should be conducted to ensure it remains relevant and aligned with Zimbabwe's evolving social, political, and economic landscape. This process should involve teachers, parents, community members, and pupils to create an inclusive and responsive educational framework.

By addressing these recommendations, Zimbabwe's educational system can harness the full potential of the HCBC to cultivate a generation of active, engaged, and responsible citizens who are well-prepared to contribute to the nation's development and tackle its socio-economic

challenges. Grounded in SNT, this approach highlights the importance of strengthening the relationships among key actors; schools, communities, government bodies, and local organisations, to create a supportive and interconnected environment that enhances civic engagement and educational outcomes.

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