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Education 5.0 and the Heritage-Based Curriculum in Zimbabwe: A Critical Analysis of the Merits, Demerits and Implications for Educational Quality and National Development

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ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe's contemporary education reforms increasingly seek to connect learning with national development, technological change, cultural identity and the production of practical competencies. Two particularly important reforms are Education 5.0 in higher and tertiary education and the Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) for primary and secondary education. Education 5.0 extends the conventional functions of teaching, research and community service by placing explicit emphasis on innovation and industrialisation, while the HBC seeks to make schooling more responsive to Zimbabwe's tangible and intangible heritage, indigenous knowledge, environmental resources, values, competencies and developmental priorities. This article critically analyses the merits, demerits and implications of these reforms for educational quality and national development. A critical scoping review was undertaken using the methodological logic of the Joanna Briggs Institute approach to scoping reviews and PRISMA-ScR. Evidence published primarily between 2019 and 2025 was organised thematically around curriculum relevance, decolonisation, learner competence, innovation, entrepreneurship, teacher preparedness, infrastructure, digitalisation, assessment, equity, governance and national development. The manuscript retains the supervisor-confirmed PRISMA-ScR counts supplied for the final version: 360 records identified, 71 duplicates removed, 289 records screened, 211 excluded, 78 full-text sources assessed, 40 excluded and 38 sources included in the thematic synthesis. The synthesis indicates that the reforms have substantial potential to improve contextual relevance, practical competence, cultural identity, innovation, entrepreneurship and links between education and productive activity. However, benefits are constrained by inadequate infrastructure and funding, rushed teacher preparation, curriculum overload, uneven digital access, assessment misalignment, institutional resistance, limited monitoring and the risk of treating heritage as static or romanticised knowledge. The article argues that Education 5.0 and the HBC should be implemented as complementary rather than isolated reforms, with heritage providing context, competence providing capability, innovation providing a mechanism for application, educational quality providing the quality-control principle, and national development providing the broader purpose. A Heritage–Competence–Innovation–Quality–Development framework is proposed as an integrated basis for policy, curriculum design, teacher development, assessment and implementation monitoring.

Keywords: Education 5.0; Heritage-Based Curriculum; Zimbabwe; curriculum reform; educational quality; decolonisation; indigenous knowledge; innovation; entrepreneurship; national development.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

In the twenty-first century education systems are expected to continue transmitting established knowledge and simultaneously prepare learners to be able to engage in higher cognitive activities to address global challenges. Education systems must therefore develop learners' critical thinking, creativity and fostering problem-solving skills, digital competencies and skills to support local and global entrepreneurship and the capacity to develop flexible solutions to the broad range of local and global challenges. Success in these endeavors would depend on design and implementation of curriculum policies accounting for the country's

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needs and aspirations for national development. Such a challenge becomes more pronounced in developing nations because education is expected to develop human capital and social cohesion, enhance cultural and innovativeness and address existing social and economic challenges.

These challenges have spurred curriculum reform in Zimbabwe. The current thrust in curriculum reform in Zimbabwe is comprised of two interrelated parts. Firstly, Education 5.0 extends Education 3.0's emphasis on teaching, research and community engagement to Innovation and industrialization at the tertiary level. Secondly, at primary and secondary levels, the 2024-2030 Heritage-Based Curriculum Framework emphasizes Zimbabwean heritage, Indigenous knowledge and Practical Competences and will focus on National Development. The Heritage Based Curriculum (HBC) aims to strengthen school-based learning and teaching and resources as well as assessment activities during the 2024-2030 period and aims to establish a synchronization of school-based learning with a knowledge-based and Innovative Economy (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education [MoPSE], 2024).

These two reforms cannot be seen as disparate policy initiatives. In the HBC context, learning at the school level is connected to the upper and tertiary-level Heritage-Based Education 5.0, while Education 5.0 aims to transform knowledge to innovation and productive/industrial activities. The policy design can be considered as cumulative. Schools can develop basic knowledge and skills. Vocational and tertiary institutions can deepen the skills, and universities can produce research, innovations, and inventions. Industry and community can convert knowledge into productive and socially useful deeds. The HBC framework includes heritage in a broad sense and includes social heritage and historical legacy, ethical and moral values, indigenous languages, land and flora and fauna, and cultural values, as well as balancing theory and practice (MoPSE, 2024).

However, having ambitious curriculum policies does not necessarily produce quality and effective educational practices. The experiences of past Zimbabwean reforms suggest that the implementation of the policies might be constrained by poor estimation of the textbook needs, the aimed curriculum becoming too extended, lack of adequate supervision, and inadequate number of well-prepared teachers (Mashayamombe & van den Berg, 2024). Similar concerns have been observed in studies on Education 5.0 regarding technological means, resources, and the change of culture in teaching staff (Zishiri et al., 2024; Mupaikwa, 2025). The main challenge, therefore, is not if the reforms are innovative, but if the institutions, professions, resources, and education in the reforms' spirit are available.

1.2 Education, Development and Curriculum Transformation

Zimbabwe's Curriculum Transformation is tied to the country's broader development agenda. The National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) places emphasis on human capital and the country's transformation towards a empowered and prosperous upper-middle-income society through innovation and Industrialization, entrepreneurship and knowledge production (Republic of Zimbabwe, 2020). It is upon the education sector to provide knowledge and skills to support productive sectors, as well as to develop responsible citizens who can actively engage in social and civic life.

As the education sector is now established along the developmental path, Education 5.0 is justifiable. If universities and research remain disconnected from both community and production, the positive developmental impact of higher education may remain preferential. On the other hand, research that is connected to innovation, entrepreneurship, industry, and community needs and is problem-focused, has the potential to directly enhance productivity and solve problems. Similar to Mupaikwa (2025), assessing Education 5.0 should consider institutional capacity and digital infrastructure and innovation skills, and not only innovation projects.

At the school level, the HBC aims to establish this trajectory by amalgamating knowledge with skills, values and practical competencies. The policy is not about adding a new heritage subject. Heritage in learning is about connecting education with the resources, identities and developmental challenges of Zimbabwean communities. It is about place-based learning, problem-based learning, cultural preservation and entrepreneurship. This means that there is a high demanding implementation agenda. Teachers need to take the broad policy aspirations and transform them into classroom realities.

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1.3 Education 5.0 as a National Reform

If Education 5.0 is placed in the context of Education 3.0, the latter's representation of Teaching, Research

and Community Service is extended to incorporate innovation and industrialization. Knowledge, research, innovation, application, industrialization and development can then be seen as successive steps of a conceptual movement. Innovation and industrialization shift the burden of responsibility upon higher education to ensure that research and scholarship are realized in the form of use-inspired inventions and practices that make a difference.

While the reform is generally well-received, there are certain valid concerns with respect to the ability to implement it. Muzira and Bondai (2020) studied the perceptions of Zimbabwean state university educators. They noted that while the educators preferred Education 5.0 to Education 3.0, they also noted a number of limitations resulting from the infrastructure and financing gaps. More recently, Zishiri et al. (2024) studied five Zimbabwean universities and noted that limitations to Education 5.0 persisted as a result of a lack of technology, a lack of funding, and inadequate training of university staff. A 2025 systematic review also noted that digital infrastructure and digital competencies, in addition to a lack of funding and negative perceptions, also present major limitations to Education 5.0 (Mupaikwa, 2025).

1.4 Heritage-Based Curriculum

The Heritage Based Curriculum represents a major shift in the way primary/secondary curricula are designed. According to the 2024-2030 framework, heritage encompasses both tangible and intangible natural endowments, social capital, historical legacy, beliefs, languages, land, flora, fauna, water, minerals and values. This seeks to develop a Zimbabwean learner that is fit for purpose, and equipped with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for life and work while preserving local knowledge and fostering national identity (MoPSE, 2024).

The benefits of this perspective for education are promising. Culturally and contextually grounded learning helps make knowledge relevant, marine learners with the community, as well as offering learners the chance to apply local challenges to their learning. Heritage can also be an avenue for interdisciplinary intermingling of agriculture, environmental management, architecture, food processing, crafts, tourism, and cultural industries, as well as natural resource management and cultural industries. Recent research within Heritage-Based Education 5.0 has indicated that cultural heritage and community engagement have the potential to enhance critical thinking, inventiveness, problem-solving and innovation (Garwe, 2025).

However, heritage should not be treated as an immutable repository of knowledge. A critical heritage-based curriculum must differentiate between valuable knowledge that needs to be maintained, and the critical evaluation of inherited practices and the development of new adaptive knowledge and skills. Tarugarira (2025) cautions against romantic illusions of heritage and sustained unreflective traditionalism. The goal here should be to engage critically with local and indigenous knowledge, instead of replacing one Lukau with another.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

An implementation gap exists between the educational ideals of Education 5.0 and the HBC. Both reforms articulate aspirations for relevance, practicality, innovation, and impact; however, evidence from Zimbabwe indicates that implementation is constrained by the preparedness of teachers, resources, infrastructure, funding, assessment, curriculum, institutional pushback, and monitoring. There have been similar challenges with the implementation of previous curriculum reforms characterized by hurried dissemination and training, inadequate resources, curriculum teacher overload, and a shortage of qualified Heritage Studies teachers (Zishiri et al., 2024). Education 5.0 shares similar challenges at the tertiary level, particularly regarding technology, funding, and staff development (Mashayamombe & van den Berg, 2024).

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The issues with curriculum reform go beyond the design of policy. This study is particularly interested in implementation and assessment to address Zimbabwe's "reforms of innovation and heritage, competence, and national development" and how they provide concrete improvements in teaching and learning and outcomes over policy frameworks. Superficial compliance rather than meaningful reform may occur if reforms are implemented poorly and lack the necessary resources. Inequities could worsen between poorly resourced and resource adequate institutions.

1.6 Purpose and Objectives

This article evaluates Education 5.0 and the Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) in Zimbabwe describing their pros and cons and assessing their implications on educational quality and advancement of the nation. The objectives of this article are to:

(1) examine the conceptual foundations of Education 5.0 and HBC;

(2) identify their potential benefits for educational quality;

(3) analyse implementation challenges and risks;

(4) examine implications for innovation, entrepreneurship and national development;

(5) propose an integrated framework for strengthening implementation.

1.7 Research Questions

- What are the important conceptual and educational advantages of Education 5.0 and the Heritage Based Curriculum?
- What is the critique that is expressed in the literature?
- What do the reforms imply for educational quality?
- How do the reforms assist in achieving innovation in the field of national development?
- **What policies and what type of institutions would support the reforms?**

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Conceptualising Education 5.0

Education 5.0 is the intentional integration of teaching, research, and community engagement aimed at production and transformation of knowledge into innovation and purposeful applications. This model of higher education is not purely about the integration of technology. This model considers higher education as an active participant in national development rather than a producer of academic degrees.

An overly restrictive interpretation is also problematic. Not all knowledge must be commercialized right away and not every discipline can be gauged by patents, spin-offs, or other industrial metrics. Within the current system of higher education, fundamental research and the humanities, social sciences, cultural studies, and scholarship have their rightful place. Education 5.0 should be seen in the context of broadening the social and productive obligations of education rather than entirely aligning scholarship with commercialization.

2.2 Conceptualising Heritage-Based Education

The foundation of heritage-based education is composed of cultural, historical, environmental, and indigenous resources. Within Zimbabwe, the intention of the HBC is for curriculum content, pedagogy, teaching and learning resources, and assessment to be incorporated rather than for it to be an isolated cultural studies

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subject. This approach is place-responsive learning where learners investigate their geography, histories, languages, environmental resources, social issues, and community activities.

2.3 Education 5.0 and the HBC

The HBC and Education 5.0 can be aligned. Education 5.0 emphasizes the need for innovation and application, while the HBC emphasizes the need for a focus on context, heritage, identity, values, and local resources. Their overall alignment can be described in this way: heritage defines the context, competence provides the means, innovation provides the way, educational quality defines the criteria, and national development provides the goal.

2.4 Decolonial Theory

Curriculum is never neutral. Decolonial theory provides a framework for analyzing the HBC because it illuminates priorities concerning whose knowledge is given legitimacy and how questions of history and epistemology will be addressed. Education grounded in African heritage will offset colonial epistemic injustice by valuing indigenous knowledge systems. Garwe (2025) supports Heritage-Based Education 5.0 as a decolonial approach and emphasizes the importance of co-construction, community involvement and cultural identity within knowledge.

A critical decolonial position would strive for more than simply replacing one form of epistemic exclusion. Native knowledge systems must be preserved and critically engaged, to the extent that they can be documented and investigated; in this way, the goal must be to make epistemology plural and foster the dialogue between the “native” and the “European” in positive terms.

2.5 Human Capital Theory

In Human Capital Theory, education is an investment that results in increased knowledge, skills and abilities. Education 5.0 shares this perspective because, among others, it promotes innovation, entrepreneurship, and improved industrial and labor market engagement. Similarly, the HBC makes decisions based on the intent to foster competencies for life and employment. From this viewpoint, curriculum quality is defined by learners developing capabilities that increase productivity and labor market engagement.

One limitation is that education serves multiple functions beyond the generation of labor market productivity. Education ought to foster the development of cultural identity, citizenship, ethics, social cohesion, creativity, and the individual. Education must go beyond human capital, and should incorporate theories of educational quality and human flourishing.

How Does The Capability Approach Define Education?

The capability approach broadly defines educational quality beyond theachelvment of academic results and the securing of employment.It asks what learners are capable of achieving and becoming. A high quality HBC/ Education 5.0 system aims to augment the learners' capabilities to think critically, communicate, solve problems, design and deploy technology, create and sustain livelihoods, and critically engage with and preserve the culture, while actively participating and contributing to the community and society. Thus, the expansion of capabilities can be viewed as the interconnection of culture and national development.

2.7 Constructive Alignment

The constructive alignment approach has enormous potential. Curricular outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment must be for one another. In case policy encourages creativity and practical problem-solving as well as innovation, and teaching methods continue to reward memorization, then implementation would become internally inconsistent. Education 5.0 and HBC, therefore, require alignment or congruence of learning outcomes, teaching and learning approaches, teaching and learning resources, and graduate outcomes.

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2.6 Capability Approach

Theory	Central analytical question	Implication for the reforms
Decolonial theory	Whose knowledge counts?	Legitimise indigenous knowledge and challenge inherited epistemic exclusions.
Human Capital Theory	What productive capabilities does education develop?	Connect learning to employability, innovation and productive activity.
Capability Approach	What are learners actually able to do and become?	Assess broader competencies, agency, identity and participation.
Constructive alignment	Are curriculum, pedagogy and assessment coherent?	Align outcomes, teaching, resources and assessment with desired competencies.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Education 5.0 and Higher Education Transformation

These scholars discuss Education 5.0 as one of many ways to make higher education more development oriented. First, Muzira and Bondai (2020) found that educators' expectations towards Education 5.0 were largely positive, but infrastructure and finance remained issues of concern. More recently, Zishiri et al. (2024) provide qualitative evidence to support the view that Education 5.0 is constrained by lack of and low quality of ICT, inadequate funding, refusal to change, and limited faculty training. Finally, Mupaikwa (2025) brings together these different constraints within a framework of institutional capacity, ICT, and innovation.

These scholars seem to agree that we should not evaluate Education 5.0 based only on the number of innovation projects reported by universities. The quality of innovation, sustainability of projects, research-industry linkages, staff capabilities, infrastructure, and intellectual property all need to be addressed. There are universities with innovation policies, yet they do not have the facilities, finance, mentorship, partnerships with industry, or the ecosystem of support to help them move from policy to practice.

3.2 Heritage Studies and Curriculum Implementation

The 2015-2022 curriculum is another useful example for the current HBC. Mashayamombe and van den Berg (2024) conducted research focusing on Heritage Studies and History at ten secondary schools in the Mutare District. They noted that although the ministry conducted some workshops and supplied some teaching and learning materials, dissemination, and training of teachers took place in a rush. The grassroots level monitoring was insufficient. Teachers faced heavy workloads and there were insufficient Teaching and Learning support materials and an unmet need for trained teachers. Their findings illustrate that the implementation of a curriculum requires preparation and support, ongoing monitoring and adjustment, rather than issuing a policy.

The implied message for the 2024-2030 HBC is that if teachers are expected to integrate heritage across learning areas, to use project-based methodologies and to develop competencies and employ authentic assessments, then they require substantial and sustained professional development, as well as the required materials.

3.3 Heritage-Based Education 5.0 and Decolonisation

Garwe (2025) provides a refinement of Heritage-Based Education 5.0 by integrating heritage, community involvement and decolonial transformation in higher education. The model is valuable as it presents students as participants in the construction of knowledge as opposed to being passive learners. It also connects heritage and innovation: cultural and community knowledge is a base for research, innovation, and solving problems.

Tarugarira (2025) offers a critical challenge to the romanticisation of heritage and the possibility of heritage-based approaches to be transformative within institutions that are structurally embedded within legacy

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paradigms. This critique posits that curriculum transformation is inextricably bound to institutional transformation. Curriculum transformation limited to changes within course content while pedagogy, assessment, research recognition, governance, and the ways in which research and the knowledge base of the institution are constructed remain unchanged will result in limited transformation.

3.4 Teacher Preparedness

Teacher preparedness is a key cross-cutting component of reform. Teachers are policy morphers in that they interpret syllabi, choose examples, organize activities, assess learners, and decide whether new and innovative strategies were used. Because learning and teaching reforms within the curriculum that includes heritage, projects, entrepreneurship, and the use of digital technologies require a high degree of pedagogy and a broad range of subject areas, the teaching team is equally important.

Teacher professional growth must include both curriculum and pedagogy. Teachers must be provided with opportunities to locally document heritage, work with community knowledge holders on heritage, design interdisciplinary projects, use digital tools, assess and manage learners' competencies, and create a learner-centered environment. Mentoring and school-based professional learning communities can augment formal training. Evidence from Mutare demonstrates that brief workshops are not sufficient for sustainable reform (Mashayamombe & van den Berg, 2024).

3.5 Infrastructure and Funding

Both reforms require a notable investment of resources. Education 5.0 entails a portfolio of digital resources, as well as laboratories, research space, incubation and prototyping space, intellectual-property resources, and industry partnerships. The HBC requires learning resources, active-learning spaces, community partnerships, local heritage, and support to teachers. The absence of all of these resources leads to a potentially symbolic implementation of both reforms, whereby institutions adopt design innovations without remarkable learning.

Thus, funding must be considered a major implementations consideration instead of a minor administrative detail. Resources should be assigned where and when learning has the greatest impact, such as with teacher resources, connectivity and power, laboratories, learning materials, libraries, community initiatives, and assessment. Industry partnerships and resources from museums and cultural institutions; local authorities and communities should also be leveraged, but not used in lieu of sufficient government funding.

3.6 Digitalisation and Inequality

Digital technologies can enhance both reforms by providing learning resources and opportunities for cooperation, laboratory access, entrepreneurship, assessments, and archives. Digital technologies can, however, deepen existing social inequalities. Schools and institutions characterized by weak infrastructure and insufficient digital resources will be unable to fully participate in digitally-intensive reforms. Education 5.0 requires a strategy for digital inclusion that focuses on digital equity and literacy.

3.7 Assessment Reform

Assessments are a critical aspect of designing a curriculum. If learners are tested through memorization-based high-stakes assessments, they have little reason to cultivate creativity, experiment, and develop practical skills and an entrepreneurial spirit. When curricula claim to value certain skills, assessments need to be aligned to capture those skills. A viable assessment strategy would be to combine assessment formats such as examinations, portfolios, projects, practical demonstrations, problem-based assessments, presentations, innovation challenges, and community-oriented projects. The approaches should be carefully scaffolded to avoid authentic tasks undermining assessment reliability and equitability. Progressive competence as well as innovativeness could potentially be documented through a series of digital portfolios.

3.8 Curriculum Overload

An overabundance of curriculum offerings presents significant threats to quality. The evidence collected from

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Mutare demonstrates how Mandatory subjects and the Curriculum offerings result in theSubjects becoming marginalized and the instructional time becoming inadequate. Therefore, when the Heritage Curriculum is introduced, we should simultaneously implement a Curriculum Offering reduction strategy. Heritage should be integrated into the existing learning areas if it is Pedagogically appropriate, as opposed to being an additional requirement.

3.9 Equity, Inclusion and Social Cohesion

All areas of the Zimbabwean community need to be reflected in the national curriculum to include all languages and contexts. Heritage-based education can improve identity and social cohesion. Heritage-based education will, however, worsen social cohesion when it narrowly or selectively includes heritage. Heritage-based education curriculum design should be carried out in collaboration with members of the community, teachers, learners and relevant institutions.

There is a material aspect to equity. Infrastructure limitations in some schools may negatively impact educational opportunities. For example, a project that requires internet access, transport to heritage sites or use of special equipment may benefit learners in schools with more resources. The quality of education also should be assessed by the impact of reforms on inequality. Universal policy goals require differentiated support for under-resourced schools and communities.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The critical scoping review was the preferred methodology for the research. The design of a scoping review was considered appropriate because the evidence base is comprised of different forms of evidence that include empirical, conceptual, and/or policy studies, curriculum, and institutional frames. This review will not attempt to pool an average effect size. Instead, this review will map the existing evidence, and where themes are present, critically synthesize them. The approach is based on the JBI Manual for Evidence Synthesis and PRISMA-ScR reporting guidance (Aromataris el al., 2024; Tricco el al. 2018).

4.2 Review Period and Sources

The substantive review period was 2019 to 2025. The review focused on literature and policy evidence pertaining to Education 5.0, Heritage-Based Curriculum, Heritage-Based Education 5.0, indigenous knowledge, educational quality, innovation, and entrepreneurship and their relationship to national development in Zimbabwe. The sources were from the databases and searching platforms including Google Scholar, African Journals Online, ERIC, SpringerLink and Frontiers, as well as the institutional repositories and the Zimbabwean Government, UNESCO and United Nations publications.

4.3 Search Strategy

The search terms used combinations of the followings: “Education 5.0” AND Zimbabwe, “Education 5.0” AND curriculum AND Zimbabwe, “Education 5.0” AND innovation AND Zimbabwe, “Education 5.0” AND entrepreneurship AND Zimbabwe, “Heritage-Based Curriculum” AND Zimbabwe, “Heritage-Based Education” AND Zimbabwe, “indigenous knowledge” AND curriculum AND Zimbabwe, and “heritage” AND “educational quality” AND Zimbabwe. The search terms were modified to the syntax of the database where it was necessary.

4.4 Eligibility Criteria

Included	Excluded
Zimbabwe-focused evidence	Evidence without substantive Zimbabwean relevance
Education 5.0, HBC or closely related curriculum reform	Incidental mentions of the reforms

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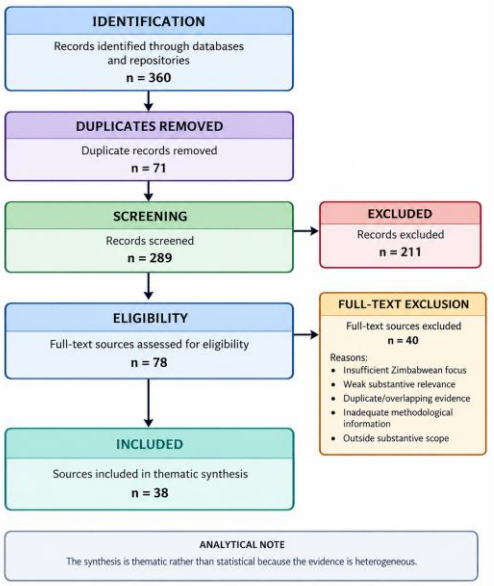
Primarily 2019–2025	Outside the substantive review period without strong foundational relevance
Empirical, conceptual, policy or documentary evidence	Promotional material lacking analytical value
Evidence addressing at least one research question	Insufficient information for meaningful thematic synthesis
Relevant peer-reviewed or authoritative policy sources	Duplicates or overlapping records

4.5 Screening and Selection

There were two parts to the screening process.initially titles and abstracts were screened for relevance. Then potentially relevant full texts were screened against inclusion/exclusion criteria. The final manuscript reports the following PRISMA-ScR capitalized counts: 360 records identified; 71 duplicates removed; 289 records screened; 211 records excluded at screening; 78 full-text sources assessed; 40 full-text sources excluded; and 38 sources included in the thematic synthesis. These counts are shown consistently in the manuscript's flow representation.

Flow Representation

PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram



4.6 Data Extraction and Thematic Synthesis

Data were organised into authors and years, type of evidence, level of education, focal concepts, and methods. Synthesis included familiarization with data, noticing patterns, grouping related patterns, formulating analytical themes, comparing supporting and critical data, and thinking about the patterns in terms of the quality of education and national development.

4.7 Quality and Methodological Transparency

Since the review uses heterogeneous evidence, it will not attempt to give a single quality score to evidence

with different methods. The review gives more weight to peer-reviewed empirical studies and policy documents. The rest of the evidence (conceptual, reflective, etc.) is used to develop and critique the evidence. It is understood that to achieve an evidence synthesis worthy of publication, it is imperative that the sources used, date(s) of searches, search strings, and the reasoning for full-text exclusions are reported in the main articles. These should be saved for audit trail submissions, if requested by the reviewing journal.

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5. RESULTS AND CRITICAL SYNTHESIS

5.1 Characteristics of the Evidence Base

The final thematic synthesis included 38 sources. The evidence base was extensive and reflected the broad nature of the research problem. It included empirical studies, conceptual and theoretical pieces, policy and curriculum documents, review studies and institutional and/or international reports. This is a strength of the evidence base, as reforms occur at multiple levels, including policy, institutions, classrooms, and communities and, indeed, at the level of national development. It is also a weakness, as it cannot be measured in a single statistical form.

Evidence type	Number	Percentage
Empirical peer-reviewed studies	15	39.50%
Conceptual/theoretical studies	8	21.10%
Policy/curriculum documents	7	18.40%
Review studies	4	10.50%
Institutional/international reports	4	10.50%
Total	38	100.00%

5.2 Merit 1: Increased Curriculum Relevance

An advantage of the HBC is the opportunity to integrate learning with learners' lived environments. Concepts that are usually abstract can take meaningful shape when local histories, languages, environmental resources, and community practices are part of learning experiences. This can also enhance learner motivation and identity construction and build authentic contexts for ensuring inquiry. Consequently, the emphasis on heritage in the HBC can be synergistically aligned to learner-centered and place-based pedagogies.

5.3 Merit 2: Development of Practical Competence

The HBC and Education 5.0 place more emphasis on the application of knowledge, of which the HBC has more defined frameworks on the balance of theory and practice. With Education 5.0 focused on innovation and industrialization, the two frameworks, when combined, can enhance practical competencies and problem-solving skills and promote an entrepreneurial spirit. This is particularly appropriate when it is expected that education should aim to foster employability and self-employment beyond the achievement of qualifications.

5.4 Merit 3: Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Within Education 5.0, a policy framework to link research to innovation is outlined. At school, the HBC can foster the foundational competencies for this framework via project-based learning, local activities and resources. At university level, research, innovation, and industry collaboration can deepen the framework. The greatest potential, however, is to integrate innovation into problem-based learning; this should be the overarching goal.

5.5 Merit 4: Cultural Identity and Decolonization

The HBC has the potential for legitimizing local languages, histories, knowledge systems and community experiences and therefore for the development of cultural identity. Garwe (2025) empirically investigates the use of heritage based Education 5.0 and proposes its use for developing cultural identity and fostering a sense of belonging, as well as knowledge co-construction. This has importance in postcolonial societies in which educational content was determined by external, colonizing epistemological frameworks. The decolonial merit comes to the fore only when learners are provided the opportunity to interrogate knowledge as opposed to mindlessly memorizing cultural data.

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5.6 Merit 5: National Development and Local Resource Utilization

When framed correctly within the nexus of research and innovation, heritage has the potential to make meaningful and sustained contributions to the economy and development. Agricutlure, environmental management, cultural tourism, crafts, food processing, architecture, and the management of natural resources offer potential school and university level projects. The HBC's emphasis on local resources has the potential for framing a model of development that is based on local science and local knowledge while being in contact with global science and technology.

5.7 Demerit 1: Constrained Resources and Infrastructure

The first and most serious of the constraints will be the lack of proper alignment of policy intent and budget. Education 5.0 will need digital infrastructure, laboratories and research facilities, as well as an innovation ecosystem, while implementation of the HBC will require teaching and learning materials as well as community resources. The challenges of Zimbabwe have been well documented (Muzira & Bondai, 2020; Zishiri et al., 2024; Mupaikwa, 2025) and unless there is a significant new focus on funding, it is likely the implementation will be inconsistent.

5.8 Demerit 2: Teacher Preparedness and Workload

Teacher preparedness is another important aspect. From the Heritage Studies implementation experience, rushed workshops and insufficient support can result in teachers not feeling prepared (Mashayamombe & van den Berg, 2024). Curriculum innovation can also increase the amount of work to prepare for since project-based learning requires the design of several learning activities, the coordination of several resources, and the assessment of complex learning artifacts. Without adjusting the workload and providing ongoing professional development, reform can increase the stress felt by teachers and diminish the quality of the work.

5.9 Demerit 3: Curriculum Overload

Curriculum overload can nullify the competencies reforms try to inculcate. When schools try to cover too many policy priority domains, the instructional time is fragmented and, more often than not, results in shallow learning. The HBC should thus be implemented via valuable and focused curriculum integration; it should not be about adding more content.

5.10 Demerit 4: Assessment Misalignment

As long as the dominant assessment mode is conventional exams, learners and teachers will reasonably choose to focus on examinable content over innovation and practical work and community projects. This is at odds with the aims of the policy. Reform of assessments should coincide with the reform of the curriculum, with the addition of tasks that are authentic and competency based, along with appropriately designed exams.

5.11 Demerit 5: Epistemological Romanticism

Heritage in education has its benefits, but there exists the possibility for it to be over romanticized. Not all traditions that have been passed on are equitable or valid in the modern day and age. Tarugarira (2025) notes a valuable concern when she refers to the symbolic form of decolonization. A distinct heritage-based curriculum should inspire children to question, compare, examine and redetermine the boundaries of knowledge, rather than treating heritage as totally out of bounds.

5.12 Demerit 6: Digital Inequality

With respect to the use of digital tools in the innovation sphere and heritage preservation, digital inequalities can create a two-tier education system. Wealthier schools can implement digital projects while other schools that lack resources may not. Digital transformation requires socioeconomic inequalities to be addressed by the provision of affordable connectivity and internet, not for-profit devices and the digital literacy of teachers.

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6. IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

Quality dimension	Potential contribution	Principal risk	Required response
Relevance	Connects learning to local realities	Tokenistic heritage content	Place-based projects and community partnerships
Competence	Develops practical and transferable skills	Curriculum overload	Rationalise content and prioritise deep learning
Cultural responsiveness	Strengthens identity and indigenous knowledge	Romanticisation or exclusion	Critical, inclusive treatment of diverse heritage
Teacher quality	Encourages innovative pedagogy	Insufficient training and workload	Continuous professional development and mentoring
Assessment validity	Can support authentic demonstrations	Exam misalignment	Blend examinations with portfolios and practical assessment
Digital competence	Supports innovation and collaboration	Digital divide	Invest in connectivity, devices and digital literacy
Inclusion	Can recognise diverse learners and communities	Unequal resources	Targeted support for disadvantaged schools
Innovation	Links learning to problem-solving	Innovation reduced to commercial outputs	Support research, creativity and social innovation

6.1 Educational Quality as Relevance

Educational quality must consider the degree to which learning is able to adapt to the learners' contexts, without compromising academic rigor. The HBC has the potential to achieve this goal by integrating local resources and experiences within its curriculum. Contextual relevance should not equate to an absence of disciplinary knowledge. High quality contextual learning requires teachers to connect local examples to broader concepts and evidence and use/adjust appropriate methods of analysis.

6.2 Educational Quality as Competence

Competence describes learners' ability to draw upon knowledge and skills in novel situations. This dimension of educational quality can be enhanced through well-designed project-based and practical learning components that are appropriately assessed. Education 5.0 emphasizes innovation and if this approach is sustained then competence should be extended to include communication, ethics, teamwork, digital literacy and critical thinking as well as entrepreneurship.

6.3 Educational Quality as Equity

High educational quality cannot be achieved when positive changes from reforms improve only a few, privileged, well-resourced institutions. Therefore, when evaluating reforms, equity should be the predominant concern. Funding, development of the physical infrastructure, and creation of opportunities for professional growth of teachers should target schools and institutions that lack the most of these opportunities.

6.4 Educational Quality as Assessment Validity

Assessment has the greatest impact on the educational system because assessment communicates what an educational system values. If educational documents prioritize curriculum innovation and practical competence, yet a system's high stakes assessments reward memorization, then the system is communicating contradictory messages. Assessments should be the primary focus during curriculum implementation, not when a system is modified.

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7. IMPLICATIONS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

7.1 Human-Capital Development

The reforms will develop human capital by building sector specific knowledge and competencies in Zimbabwe's productive sectors. The biggest benefits will accrue when educational systems develop adaptable capabilities versus vocational training. Individuals are better able to respond to changing labor market demands when they can solve problems, communicate, utilize technology and innovation, and are enterprising.

7.2 Innovation and Industrialisation

Education 5.0 can strengthen the research-to-production chain by encouraging universities to work alongside industry and the community. The HBC can further strengthen the chain by developing early exposure to local problem definition and the use of available local resources for problem solving. The two reforms can therefore contribute to a continuous innovation ecosystem extending beyond schools and higher learning institutions to the productive sectors.

7.3 Entrepreneurship and Employment

Entrepreneurship should not only be about starting a business. It should be about problem identification, resource mobilization and creating value. School and university projects can 'mess' with and develop entrepreneurial disposition through prototyping, budgeting, market research, and reflection. Entrepreneurship education, however, should be coupled with real-life support systems, including incubation, mentoring, financing and market access otherwise it will be simply talk.

7.4 Indigenous Knowledge-Based Development

Indigenous knowledge has the potential to contribute to economic development when it is a source of research and innovation. This can include agriculture, traditional natural medicine, food processing, crafts, environmental conservation, cultural tourism, and traditional architecture. The aim should be to document and preserve the knowledge and critically evaluate it for contemporary needs.

7.5 Community Development

Community Engagement can make education socially accountable. Learner-based and university-led community challenges tackle local challenges on healthcare, agriculture, waste management, water and sanitation, energy, preservation of the local culture, and the growth of small enterprises. It provides the foundation for the community service aspect of education while bringing innovation and heritage.

7.6 Social Cohesion and National Identity

A culturally relevant curriculum that incorporates and promotes respect and responsible citizenship, while acknowledging and accommodating diversity is more likely to develop national identity. The HBC's emphasis on Unhu/Ubuntu/Vumunhu well as the emphasis on participatory citizenship serves this purpose. How to ensure that national identity is inclusive and that cultural education promotes dialogue among communities - is the challenge.

8. PROPOSED HERITAGE – COMPETENCE – INNOVATION – QUALITY – DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The integrated nature of the proposed framework has brought about the acknowledgement of five interrelated elements. First, Heritage provides the context, connecting learning to the history, languages, cultures, ecologies and indigenous knowledge of Zimbabwe. Second, Competence translates the context to mean the abilities of learners that include critical thinking, communication, digital literacy, skills and enterprise. Third,

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Innovation provides the means to learners and the institutions of learning to apply knowledge and convert it to solutions, products, services and social interventions. Fourth, Quality introduces the control principle where relevance, rigor, and equity are combined with teaching and learning, and effective assessment. Fifth, Development introduces the larger aim where educational outcomes are linked to the development of the human capital, productivity and social cohesion, and the transformation of the nation in a sustainable way.

Element	Core question	Key implementation actions	Expected outcome
Heritage	What local knowledge, resources and identities can inform learning?	Community engagement, local-language resources, heritage documentation	Contextual relevance and cultural identity
Competence	What should learners be able to do?	Competency-based pedagogy, projects, practical learning	Transferable learner capabilities
Innovation	How can knowledge become solutions?	Research, prototyping, entrepreneurship, incubation, industry links	Products, services, technologies and social innovations
Quality	How do we ensure educational standards?	Teacher development, assessment reform, monitoring, equity safeguards	Improved learning quality and accountability
Development	What wider social and economic purpose is served?	Alignment with national priorities and community needs	Human capital, productivity, inclusion and sustainable development

Figure 2. Integrated Logic of the Proposed Framework

HERITAGE → COMPETENCE → INNOVATION → QUALITY ASSURANCE → NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The arrow cones indicate that this process is both iterative and iterative. Improvements and the community's experience must contribute to the revision of the curriculum. Development should also result in new Educational questions.

9. POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve implementation financing.

The government should create stable funding for the development of teachers, by facilitating their connection, funding labs, learning resources, innovation and community service projects. Funding resources should focus on underfunded schools and institutions to avoid reform-generated inequality.

2. Make continuous professional development of teachers a priority.

Teacher development should focus on professional learning communities, mentoring, demonstration of lessons and active support in various pedagogies that implement competency-based, project-based, digital and heritage-integrated learning.

3. Prioritize integrated curriculum

Heritage and innovation should be integrated throughout the learning and curriculum areas, rather than added continuously as different contents. The priority of the curriculum review should be on sufficient depth, consistency, and workload balance.

4. Create a new system of assessment.

Assessment should integrate different methods of assessment including projects, exhibitions, portfolios, practical demonstrations, innovation challenges and community-based tasks; definition of the assessment

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tasks should be coupled with a clear description of the moderation process to ensure the assessment tasks are valid and fair.

5. Prioritize the development of school-community partnerships.

Schools should create alliances with museums, heritage sites, local government authorities, testing centers, cultural organizations, universities and community holders to create learning opportunities.

6. Increase digital Inclusion.

Digital resources should be considered critical for quality education. Infrastructure should be treated as an educational quality requirement. This should be complemented by funding for digital educational resources, connectivity, devices and teacher digital competence.

7. Create a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system.

The implementation should be monitored at all levels (school, district, institution and national level) using measurable indicators on teacher readiness, the presence of resources, teaching and learning, assessment and learning outcomes, as well as equity.

8. Foster breadth in academic pursuits and critical reflection.

Education 5.0 should not equate scholarship with commercialization, and heritage should not equate to devoid critical thinking. Research, the humanities, the social sciences, and critical thought must continue to play their part.

9. Create an innovation pipeline.

School projects ought to have avenues to vocational and higher education institutions, incubation centers, corporate partnerships, and community businesses so that projects may leave the classroom and continue to develop in the real world.

10. Institutionalise stakeholder participation.

The development and review of curricula should include teachers, learners, parents, communities, universities, industries, and relevant professional associations.

10. DISCUSSION

The critical synthesis suggests the strongest case for Education 5.0 and the HBC lies in their potential for

complementarity. Education 5.0 can respond to the productive and innovation dimensions of education, while the HBC can respond to the cultural, contextual and foundational dimensions of education. The integration of the two has the potential to create an education system that is both innovation focused and grounded in the local contexts. This potential, however, is contingent rather than automatic.

The evidence also shows that the real constraint is implementation capacity and Chardon suggests that while the studies identified various problems including financing, infrastructure, teacher readiness, and community engagement as well as lack of monitoring, it is likely that the constraints are not due to a lack of policy will. It is, in fact, the opposite, and there is a real risk that the policy will outstrips the system's capacity, resulting in a decoupling of policy and practice.

A second important issue is the definition of transformation. Transformation cannot be equated to the number of innovation projects or enterprises and heritage activities. An advanced education system will increase learners' capacity, improve the quality and relevance of teaching, address the issues of equity, enhance the

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production of knowledge and achieve social outcomes. Although Education 5.0 may result in commercialisation, it should not be the only or the main measure of success.

The third issue is epistemological. Heritage-based education can aid the decolonisation process by expanding the knowledge base in education. Decolonisation, however, cannot be achieved through the inclusion of indigenous knowledge. Decolonisation demands a shift in the knowledge base, the manner in which learners interact with knowledge, and a shift in the knowledge base and the way in which evidence is evaluated. Garwe (2025) and Tarugarira (2025) address the inclusion of community and knowledge-holder participation and the risk of superficial changes in the name of heritage.

Educational quality must be the overarching principle. Both reforms can become burdensome if implementation is driven by the number of curriculum requirements rather than the quality of learner experiences. Quality educational outcomes will be achieved through a well-designed curriculum, a range of quality learning resources and frequent monitoring of the learner experiences. In this regard, the Heritage–Competence–Innovation–Quality–Development framework places quality between innovation and development; innovations are only meaningful and worthwhile if they meaningfully advance the education and social outcomes of a society.

11. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has many limitations. To begin with, the synthesized literature covers multiple sources including empirical, conceptual, and policy literature; therefore, the results cannot be similar to a meta-analysis in that causality cannot be established. Second, the literature pertaining to Education 5.0 and the current HBC is fairly recent meaning that there is a scarcity of longitudinal data on the outcomes of learners and their subsequent employment, level of innovation, and contribution to national development. Third, many literature sources areanchored in the same institutions or districts limiting the ability to generalize the findings. Fourth, the rapid nature of the implementation means that future changes to policy may substantially impact the institutional context. Finally, the PRISMA-ScR counts used in this last draft of the manuscript are the supervisor confirmed counts. The authors should have the search audit and provide it to a target journal, if requested, for verification.

12. CONCLUSION

Education 5.0 as well as the Heritage Based Curriculum is a clear attempt to place Zimbabwean education with the goal of being relevant, competitive, innovative, culturally appropriate and focused on national development. The two have strong conceptual bases. Education 5.0 connects knowledge, research, and innovation to useful, productive activities while the Heritage Based Curriculum connects learning to Zimbabwe's heritage, indigenous knowledge, community wisdom, and local resources.

Despite the design, implementation, and publication of the policy, there are many other considerations. The

primary challenges are poor infrastructure and financing, lack of adequate Teacher training, curriculum overload, mismatch of assessment to curriculum, digital inequality, poor policy monitoring, as well as romanticizing of heritage. All of these issues can be addressed and present the conditions in which policy reforms can succeed or fail.

Integrated implementation is the strategy the article suggests for Zimbabwe. Heritage must be freighted with propriety, not uncritical traditionalism, and competence must contain capability without reducing education to employability. Innovation must provide means to scholarship application without scholastics devolving to commerce, quality assurance must protect standards, and development must provide the purpose without overwhelming the cultural and humanistic emphases of education. The Heritage – Competence – Innovation – Quality – Development nexus gives useful alignments for dealing with each of the factors cited above.

The focus for future research is beyond the policy framework to include longitudinal research on competencies of learners and teachers, assessment, outcomes of innovation, impacts of community

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involvement and equity of school and higher education institutional provisions. This will determine the educational and developmental outcomes brought about by the reforms.

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Appendix A: Final PRISMA-ScR Audit Summary

Stage	Final count
Records identified	360
Duplicates removed	71
Records screened	289
Records excluded at screening	211
Full-text sources assessed	78
Full-text sources excluded	40
Sources included in thematic synthesis	38