

Zimbabwe's educational curriculum reforms from 2015 to 2024: human rights implications to learners, educators, parents and guardians

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ABSTRACT: The right to education is one of the most critical socio-economic rights for the African child. It unlocks a myriad of opportunities. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is categoric on the need to advance the child's right to education. Since 1980 Zimbabwe's education curriculum system has undergone an extensive metamorphosis. These reforms have affected the enjoyment of human rights. It is from this premise that this qualitative desk research seeks to interrogate the effects of Zimbabwe's education curriculum reform from 2015 to 2024 on the enjoyment of human rights by learners, educators, parents and guardians. The study was conducted through document analysis and thematic content analysis was employed for data analysis. The findings were that the introduction of the Continuous Assessment Learning Activities and the newly-introduced school-based projects increased the workloads of educators, learners, parents and guardians due to too many learning areas and projects, affecting their social rights. Economic rights have been affected by the high costs of learning materials, raw materials for projects and internet services. It was recommended that adequate financial resources be availed to the relevant ministry so that wifi and learning materials are availed at all schools.

TITRE ET RÉSUMÉ EN FRANÇAIS

Les réformes des programmes éducatifs au Zimbabwe (2015-2024) : implications en matière de droits humains pour les apprenants, enseignants, parents et tuteurs

RÉSUMÉ: Le droit à l'éducation constitue l'un des droits sociaux fondamentaux pour l'enfant africain, ouvrant la voie à une multitude d'opportunités. La Charte africaine des droits et du bien-être de l'enfant insiste sur l'impératif de promouvoir et de protéger ce droit. Depuis l'indépendance en 1980, le système éducatif zimbabwéen a connu de profondes transformations, avec des réformes qui ont eu des répercussions sur la jouissance effective des droits humains. Cette étude qualitative examine l'impact des réformes des programmes éducatifs entreprises au Zimbabwe entre 2015 et 2024 sur les droits humains des principaux acteurs éducatifs : apprenants, enseignants, parents et tuteurs. L'analyse repose sur une étude documentaire et une

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approche thématique de l'analyse de contenu. Les résultats mettent en évidence que l'introduction d'activités d'apprentissage à évaluation continue et de projets scolaires a significativement augmenté la charge de travail pour les enseignants, les élèves, ainsi que leurs familles, en raison d'un trop grand nombre de domaines d'apprentissage et de projets imposés. Cette surcharge a affecté la jouissance des droits sociaux de ces groupes. Par ailleurs, les coûts élevés associés au matériel pédagogique, aux matières premières nécessaires aux projets scolaires et aux services Internet ont eu des répercussions sur les droits économiques. Il est recommandé de doter le ministère compétent de ressources financières suffisantes pour garantir la disponibilité du matériel pédagogique et un accès universel au wifi dans toutes les écoles, afin de réduire les inégalités et de favoriser une mise en œuvre équitable des réformes éducatives.

KEY WORDS: Zimbabwe; education reforms; 2015-2024; human rights implications

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1 INTRODUCTION

The post-independence government of Zimbabwe adopted numerous reforms to address inequalities in the provision of education.¹ Despite the high literacy rate, Zimbabwe's education system inadequately prepared students for the demands of life and the labour market.² Like many former colonies, the education system was designed in line with the British model.³ The educational systems that were put in place were created to maintain the colonial social hierarchy, promote neo-colonial dependence, uphold elitism, and inadequately train individuals for success and a constantly changing global environment.⁴ Since the

1 T Mapolisa & T Tshabalala 'The impact of the economic meltdown on the education system of Zimbabwe' (2013) 3 *International Journal of Asian Social Science* 2254.

2 D Gory & others 'From content knowledge to competencies and exams to exit profiles: Education reform in Zimbabwe' in FM Reimers (ed) *Implementing deeper learning and 21st century education reforms: building an education renaissance after a global pandemic* (2021) 145.

3 As above.

4 P Chimbunde & BB Moreeng 'Post-colonial educational reforms in Zimbabwe: a fake badge of decolonisation of the curriculum' (2024) *Power and Education* 1.

system divided education on the basis of race, there was an urgent need to adopt an educational system detached from Eurocentric influence, and tailored to the specific needs of local communities.⁵ In response, several initiatives designed to reform the education system with a more socialist orientation were put in place by the government of Zimbabwe.⁶ The most momentous achievement was the significant rise in student enrolments during the first two decades of independence.⁷ This expansion created challenges such as limited resources at educational institutions and overcrowding.⁸ In 2000 governments across the world, including Zimbabwe and other various key stakeholders, participated in the World Education Forum (WEF) in Dakar, Senegal.⁹ The participants of the forum agreed to adopt six Education for All (EFA) goals and the Dakar Framework for Action. In 2014 an inclusive curriculum reform was initiated by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to ensure that the educational policies were aligned to international standards and improve the country's quality of education.¹⁰

Zimbabwe crafted a national plan of action setting the objectives and targets towards EFA in 2015. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development were responsible for implementing actions and activities to attain EFA goals. The national plan of action generated meaningful results with regard to realising the EFA goals such as increasing early childhood development availability to 98 per cent of primary schools, training early childhood development teachers and para-professionals, and consistently revising the education syllabi.¹¹ The government also transfigured the secondary education curricula in order to take in technical and vocational subjects and collaborate with industry partners to improve polytechnics and technical colleges.¹² The challenges that were encountered on the road to achieve the EFA include unavailability of adequate education finance; shortage of infrastructure and equipment; poor conditions of service for teachers; gaps in monitoring and supervision; and no provision of facilities for underprivileged children.¹³

5 As above.

6 C Gomba 'Post-colonial theory in Zimbabwe's education system: headmasters' views' (2018) 7 *International Journal of Research Studies in Education* 77.

7 E Shizha & MT Kariwo *Education and development in Zimbabwe: a social, political and economic analysis* (2011) 3.

8 As above.

9 Education for all 2015 national review report: Zimbabwe.

10 N Mapendere & N Masvimbo 'The Zimbabwe Continuous Assessment Learning Activity (CALA) analysis. Stakeholders' perceptions in cluster 35 of Nyajena in Masvingo District. A phenomenological approach' (2023) 4 *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews* 233.

11 Education for all 2015 national review report: Zimbabwe (n 9).

12 As above.

13 As above

The 2015 WEF, which was held in Incheon, Republic of Korea, reaffirmed the legacies of Jomtien (Thailand) and Dakar (Senegal) that education is a fundamental human right and a public good.¹⁴ The Forum plotted a way that is in sync with the ever-changing times and dedicated to ensuring that all children, young people and adults are equipped with knowledge and skills needed to live with dignity and contribute to their communities.¹⁵ The WEF accentuated a child-centred approach, where the child is prioritised in the education for all agenda.¹⁶ The WEF emphasised the importance of education as a key driver of economic development. Despite government efforts, colonial legacies still linger around Zimbabwe's education system.¹⁷ It is against this background that the authors seek to unearth the education reforms in Zimbabwe from 2015 to 2024, bearing in mind the human rights implications for learners, educators and parents/guardians. It should be noted that this research will only focus on the Continuous Assessment Learning Activity (CALA) and heritage-based education curriculum.

2 THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM DURING THE COLONIAL ERA IN ZIMBABWE AND THE TRANSITION TO POST-INDEPENDENCE EDUCATION

Zimbabwe was under British rule from 1890 until gaining independence in 1980 after a prolonged war of liberation. The colonial educational system was characterised by racial bias and the exploitation of education for the African majority.¹⁸ The 1899 Education Ordinance created distinct systems of education, one for whites and the other for blacks.¹⁹ The system for European students was deliberately crafted to favour an elite ruling class that exploits Africans.²⁰ Its objective was to impart European children with knowledge and skills required to be superior and effective rulers over Africans.²¹ There was a belief among white people that blacks were intellectually inferior and that they were only effective in the execution of manual and repetitive labour tasks.²² Hence, education was only made accessible to very few black children. A separate curriculum was offered to the poorly-funded schools they attended compared to the

14 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation World Education Forum 2015 final report.

15 As above.

16 Mapendere & Masvimbo (n 10) 233.

17 Gomba (n 6) 79.

18 CJM Zvobgo 'African education in Zimbabwe: the colonial inheritance of the new state, 1899-1979' (1981) 11 *African Issues* 13.

19 As above.

20 Chimbunde & Moreeng (n 4) 3.

21 As above.

22 Shizha & Kariwo (n 7) 18.

predominantly white schools.²³ The education offered to Africans prepared them to be employees of the colonialists. The extent of racial discrimination and unfair provision of social services such as education led to a protracted war of liberation, which gave birth to Zimbabwe's independence in 1980.²⁴

The post-colonial government 'inherited a system of education that was racially biased and unequal in both governance and quality. The colonial Rhodesian government made European education compulsory and universal, and spent as much as 20 times more per European child than the African child.'²⁵ To eliminate the imbalances created by the colonial administration, a number of educational reforms had to be introduced to make education accessible to every citizen. The government understood that education was the substratum for political transformation and socio-economic development.²⁶ Public schools were made available for all and priority was placed on teacher training, setting a good example for other African countries.²⁷ The first 15 years of independence focused on massive expansion of Zimbabwe's education system.²⁸ However, in the early 2000s the situation changed for the worse as a result of political, economic and financial crises, which had a detrimental effect on the education system. Lack of funding for education as a result of the economic adjustment programmes of the 1990s and early 2000s was worsened by the economic collapse that followed the fast-track land reform programme initiated by the government in 2000.²⁹ The government recognised the need for an ambitious education reform that would benefit all children and save the country from its economic woes. In an effort to improve the quality of education, among other policies, the government adopted the CALA and heritage-based education curriculum.

3 ORIGIN OF COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

The origin of competency-based learning was a conference that was held in Incheon, Korea in 2015 where the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action of 2015 was adopted.³⁰ After this conference, Zimbabwe began the roll-out of its curriculum reform and commenced implementation of the CALA.³¹ Historically, competency-based

23 GY Kanyongo 'Zimbabwe's public education system reforms: successes and challenges' (2005) 6 *International Education Journal* 65.

24 Shizha & Kariwo (n 7) 25.

25 As above.

26 Mapolisa & Tshabalala (n 1) 2255.

27 Gory and others (n 2) 145.

28 Mapolisa & Tshabalala (n 1) 2255.

29 Shizha & Kariwo (n 7) 3.

30 Mapendere & Masvimbo (n 10) 234.

31 As above.

education (CBE) emerged in the United States in the early 1970s.³² European countries such as the United Kingdom and Germany followed suit and embraced the CBE in the 1980s.³³ In the 1990s Australia adopted the competency-based curriculum (CBC). The French community of Belgium adopted competences into its education curriculum in 1994 and 2001.³⁴ In British Columbia and Scotland, there have been moves toward extensive implementation of the CBE.³⁵ Competency-based policies were also introduced in Luxembourg, Mexico, Japan, Vietnam and Kazakhstan.³⁶ In Finland and New Zealand, the policy and practice have both shifted to adopt CBE in their systems.³⁷

The rapidly-changing world has caused most countries to realise the need to revamp their education systems and implement key competencies that are required in the job market. For a long time, the content-based curriculum has been blamed for producing individuals with inadequate skills that deviate from real-life experiences. In Africa, at least half of the countries adopted CBE.³⁸ Zambia, Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria and South Africa are some of the countries that have adopted this innovative policy into their education systems.³⁹ South Africa first adopted the CBC in 1998 to equip its citizens with employable skills needed to address contemporary issues.⁴⁰ Nigeria went on to change its curriculum from content to competency-based learning, after introducing universal basic education in 2004.⁴¹ Other countries that adopted competency-based learning include Benin, Djibouti, Gabon, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal and Tunisia.⁴² Algeria adopted competency-based learning but has not yet implemented it in classrooms.⁴³ Zimbabwe was lagging behind since it was relying on its traditional curriculum.⁴⁴

32 SC Komba & M Mwandanji 'Reflections on the implementation of competence based curriculum in Tanzanian secondary schools' (2015) 4 *Journal of Education and Learning* 73.

33 As above.

34 Mapendere & Masvimbo (n 10) 234.

35 D Carlgren 'Competency-based curriculum transition: a conceptual framework' (2020) 6 *Journal of Competency-Based Education* 1.

36 Mapendere & Masvimbo (n 10) 234.

37 Carlgren (n 35) 2.

38 Mapendere & Masvimbo (n 10) 235.

39 FY Akinrinola and others 'Competency-based education in Africa: exploring teachers' perceptions, understanding, and practices' (2020) 2 *Teacher Education Through Flexible Learning in Africa* 2.

40 Komba & Mwandanji (n 32) 74.

41 Akinrinola and others (n 39) 2.

42 Mapendere & Masvimbo (n 10) 235.

43 As above.

44 As above.

4 THE 'BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD' AND THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

The 'best interests of the child' is a guiding principle that ensures that decision makers prioritise the rights, needs and futures of children. In other words, the 'best interests' refers to the well-being of the child.⁴⁵ When making decisions regarding children, the government must assess whether its decision will be in the best interests of the child. Various international and regional instruments give children the right to have their best interests considered in all decisions and actions pertaining to their well-being and welfare. The right to education is enshrined in numerous human right treaties such as the 1960 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Convention against Discrimination in Education (CADE); the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).⁴⁶ CRC is the main legal instrument on the protection of children.⁴⁷ The Committee on the Rights of the Child monitors its implementation.⁴⁸ The best interests of the child ensure the full and effective enjoyment of all the rights preserved in CRC. ICESCR, CRC and CADE lay out the aims of education from a human rights perspective, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child recapitulates these as holistic development of the individual.⁴⁹ Article 3(1) of CRC points out that the best interests of the child shall take centre stage in all actions affecting children.⁵⁰ The right to education is also guaranteed in African human rights instruments, including the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Children's Charter) and 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Charter). Furthermore, the right to education is stressed in the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) that calls for 'inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' by 2030.⁵¹ Education in the best interests of the child promotes the principle of equal educational opportunity.

45 The 'best interests' principle is one of the fundamental principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by many countries.

46 UNESCO & Right to Education Initiative *Right to education handbook* (2019).

47 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees *UNHCR guidelines on determining the best interests of the child* (2008).

48 UNESCO & Right to Education Initiative (n 46).

49 As above.

50 Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990).

51 See Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (2016), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656> (accessed 15 October 2024).

5 EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT IN ZIMBABWE

The Zimbabwean educational system is managed by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development. The former is in charge of primary, secondary and non-formal education and the latter oversees tertiary education. The education system comprises primary, secondary and tertiary education. Primary education is made up of nine years of education; secondary education consists of four years of lower secondary education and two years of upper secondary education.⁵² The Constitution and the Education Amendment Act (2020) influence the legal environment.⁵³ The international and regional policy framework includes the United Nations SDGs, 2015-2030; African Union (AU) Agenda, 2063; Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA), 2016-25; and Southern African Development Community (SADC) frameworks.⁵⁴ Zimbabwe's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2021-2025), implemented by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in line with the National Development Strategy (NDS 1 2021-2025) aims to safeguard universal education coverage.⁵⁵

According to the ESSP, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education as the duty bearer on enjoyment of the right strives to ensure the realisation of the right to education in Zimbabwe.⁵⁶ The Ministry's goal is to ensure children's access to quality, inclusive and equitable education. This is in compliance with article 26 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Universal Declaration); article 13 of ICESCR; article 17 of the African Charter; article 11 of the African Children's Charter; and sections 75(1)(a) and (b) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

The importance of the right to education in Zimbabwe is evidenced by its prioritisation in the NDS 1.⁵⁷ The NDS 1 gives the ministry the mandate to provide quality, equitable and inclusive education in the country. The government prioritised four focus areas in its quest to ensure effective implementation of its mandate. These areas are education infrastructure; curriculum and assessment frameworks; adequate safeguarding and learners' support with emphasis on regular and reliable provision of school feeding and nutrition; as well as

52 Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education 'Education sector strategic plan 2021-2025' Cadena International Development Projects.

53 As above.

54 As above.

55 Amh Voices 'Letters: Why Zimbabwe's education system is in decline' *The Standard* 10 March 2024, <https://www.newsday.co.zw/thestandard/standard-people/article/200024164/letters-why-zimbabwes-education-system-is-in-decline> (accessed 16 August 2024).

56 Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (n 52).

57 As above.

enhancing the capacity of teachers through continuous professional development.⁵⁸

These efforts are being undermined by several challenges that include inadequate education financing; multiple humanitarian challenges such as floods, cyclones, droughts and diseases; limited institutional capacity, the impact of COVID-19; as well as other socio-economic barriers that militate against attainment of quality, equitable and inclusive education for all children.⁵⁹ COVID-19 cost the education sector massive learning time that needed to be redeemed through catch-up strategies such as compression of syllabi and modification of the assessment system.⁶⁰

Of concern also has been the high school drop-out rates. Between 2015 and 2019 drop-out rates for primary schools ranged from 2 to 3 per cent, while for secondary schools it ranged from about 3 to 4 per cent of the total enrolments.⁶¹ The major reasons that were identified for learners dropping out of school included financial constraints, absconding, special needs and learning difficulties, illness and death.⁶² The Basic Assistance Education Module (BEAM) was introduced to pay tuition fees for indigent learners, but the government has been struggling to provide funds to schools accommodating learners covered by BEAM.⁶³ Regarding special needs education, some schools have multi-disability resource centres to cater for learners with differing special needs, but these are not found in all schools, creating an inclusivity gap.⁶⁴

All these challenges that are faced by the education sector can be mitigated by adequate funding so that interventions are put in place to ensure that the government's priorities are not derailed. However, the ministry's projected budget of US \$5 089 billion for the period 2021-2025 is inadequate to cover all the needs of the ministry that relate to the focus areas discussed above as well as other costs such as text books and other learning materials; information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure; upgrading and installation in areas without internet connectivity; the provision of ICT hardware; the setting up of computer laboratories at all schools; as well as capacity building of teachers.⁶⁵

58 As above.

59 As above.

60 As above.

61 As above.

62 As above.

63 As above.

64 As above.

65 As above.

6 THE CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND HERITAGE-BASED EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The concept of CALA was implemented by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in 2021 across all levels of Zimbabwe's education. The CALA programme was part of the 2015 new curriculum but was set aside due to the unavailability of resources.⁶⁶ The CALA aimed to provide a continuous assessment approach to learning. CALA is defined as 'any educational activity that demands students to demonstrate and perform their understanding, proficiency and knowledge of any subject they are learning'.⁶⁷ The CALA component was incorporated into the national education model in order to contribute to learner's assessments at the grade 7, form 4 and form 6 final examinations. CALA was created as a response to the recommendations of the 1998 Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training, which advocated a practice-based educational system.⁶⁸ It contributed 30 per cent to the students' final assessment marks, while the knowledge evaluated during examinations contributed 70 per cent to the final marks.

CALA encompasses learning activities or assessment that require learners to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and ability.⁶⁹ The main goal of CALA was to produce tangible products that can act as evidence of learning.⁷⁰ Education that is only narrowed to the classroom and disengaged from the environment is irrelevant because it fails to equip students with vital work ethics and basic skills.⁷¹ Curriculum innovations and reviews are crucial prerequisites that convert educational pedagogies into new methodical paradigms connected to learner experiences linked to the corporate world.⁷² However, the CALA programme faced challenges and massive pushback from learners, educators, parents/guardians and various stakeholders who felt that the approaches and methods used in implementing the programme were not realistic. The CALA curriculum failed to meet the expectations of various stakeholders despite the planners' vision of it serving as a method to transform lives of learners through active participation and innovation.⁷³

The curriculum was criticised by educators, learners and parents for failing to provide training to familiarise them with it and for being

66 Zimsec Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA) tips, <https://www.pressreader.com/zimbabwe/sunday-news-zimbabwe/20220220/282024740697459> (accessed 8 August 2024).

67 C Makamure & ZM Jojo 'The role of Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA) in enhancing mathematics competency and proficiency in secondary school learners' (2023) 7 *Mathematics Education Journals* 1.

68 Mapendere & Masvimbo (n 10).

69 Zimsec (n 66).

70 Makamure & Jojo (n 67) 3.

71 As above.

72 Mapendere & Masvimbo (n 10) 234.

73 As above.

financially demanding.⁷⁴ Hence, the CALA programme was seen as burdensome by various stakeholders. Formal complaints were made by stakeholders regarding their dissatisfaction with CALA at curriculum review meetings, but the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education was not at liberty to share the minutes with stakeholders. The handling of CALA by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education sparked discontent among teachers, who play a crucial role in its implementation.⁷⁵ The CALA component was a good programme. However, introducing it to school examinations without training educators resulted in a chaotic implementation due to their limited knowledge about the model. The exclusion of teachers in the curriculum preparation stages causes teachers to not fully understand the curriculum.⁷⁶ The Curriculum Development and Technical Services unit has a mandate 'not just to produce curriculum documents but to interface with teachers who interpret and implement those documents by engaging them in professional dialogue'.⁷⁷

In 2024 the government made changes to the education curriculum, with CALA being replaced by the school-based projects with an emphasis on students focusing on practical aspects at school.⁷⁸ The transition from the CALA programme to school-based projects was a decisive change in Zimbabwe's education system. The school-based projects were adopted to improve practical learning and remove the burden on learners and teachers.⁷⁹ The heritage-based education 2024-2030 curriculum framework aims to transform the education system and to equip students with relevant skills, knowledge and values critical for national development.⁸⁰ The goal of the revised curriculum is to foster critical thinking, innovation and creativity. The learners should be able to provide goods and services needed in the community they serve by the time they complete the ordinary level.⁸¹

74 M Sibanda 'Govt to revisit Cala' *Newsday* 3 November 2022, <https://www.newsday.co.zw/local-news/article/200002960/govt-to-revisit-cala> (accessed 8 August 2024).

75 Mapendere & Masvimbo (n 10) 237.

76 A Mufanechiya & T Mufanechiya 'Selected primary school teachers' perceptions of implementing the competence-based curriculum in Zimbabwe: heartaches and opportunities' (2020) 1 *Journal of New Vision in Educational Research* 407.

77 As above.

78 I Zhakata & M Mashandure 'No CALA, no results for "O" and "A" level learners' *The Herald* 7 August 2024, <https://www.herald.co.zw/no-cala-no-results-for-o-and-a-level-learners/> (accessed 7 August 2024).

79 Zviko 'From CALA to school-based projects: what parents and students need to know' <https://zimprofiles.com/from-cala-to-school-based-projects-what-parents-and-students-need-to-know/> (accessed 8 August 2024).

80 E Huni 'Zimbabwe introduces heritage-based education curriculum with subject cap for O and A-levels', <https://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/news/170234-zimbabwe-introduces-heritage-based-education-curriculum-with-subject-cap-for-o-and-a-levels.html> (accessed 9 August 2024).

81 Zviko (n 79).

The heritage-based education is supported by five pillars, namely, 'programmes/learning areas infrastructure; staffing infrastructure; physical and digital infrastructure; legal and regulatory infrastructure; and financial infrastructure'.⁸² The curriculum has the potential to prepare students to become employable or entrepreneurs in the future. The heritage-based education gives more priority to vocational skills and technological proficiency, hence aligning with Goal 2 of the AU Agenda 2063. This goal emphasises well-educated citizens and skills revolution reinforced by science, technology and innovation.⁸³ To leave no one and no place behind, the government is focused on ensuring the provision of conducive teaching and learning infrastructure in marginalised areas such as rural areas, farming communities and new resettlement areas.⁸⁴

7 THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN CAPITAL

The significant role of human capital development in the discourse of sustainable economic growth has been widely acknowledged by economists since the eighteenth century.⁸⁵ Human capital can be defined as the knowledge, skills, competencies and abilities of individuals, and the understanding attained through education, training and work experience.⁸⁶ In the eighteenth century Adam Smith ushered in an improvement in human capability central to production, and the term 'human capital' was introduced by Theodore W Schultz.⁸⁷ In the early 1960s the theory was established as a field of inquiry.⁸⁸ Adam Smith stressed the importance of education, particularly the role of acquired and useful abilities of members of society in his concept of fixed capital.⁸⁹ The idea was supported by Alfred Marshall, who highlighted the importance of education as a national investment.⁹⁰ According to Professor Gary Stanley Becker, a winner of the 1992 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Science, education and training are

82 'The Zimbabwe new education curriculum for 2024 to 2030 unveiled', <https://zimsake.co.zw/notes/the-zimbabwe-new-education-curriculum-for-2024-to-2030-unveiled> (accessed 15 August 2024).

83 Goals and priority areas of Agenda 2063, <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/goals> (accessed 10 August 2024).

84 B Chidakwa 'Govt scraps CALA, introduces school based projects' *The Herald* 28 February 2024, <https://www.herald.co.zw/govt-scraps-cala-introduces-school-based-projects/> (accessed 8 August 2024).

85 S Abel, N Mhaka & P le Roux 'Human capital development and economic growth nexus in Zimbabwe' (2019) 23 *Southern African Business Review* 1.

86 T Sultana, SR Dey & M Tareque 'Exploring the linkage between human capital and economic growth: a look at 141 developing and developed countries' (2022) 46 *Economic Systems* 3.

87 N Wuttaphan 'Human capital theory: the theory of human resource development, implications and future' (2017) 18 *Rajabhat Journal of Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences* 240.

88 SR Sweetland 'Human capital theory: foundations of a field of inquiry' (1996) 66 *Review of Education Research* 341.

89 Abel & others (n 85) 2.

90 As above.

important investments in human capital.⁹¹ A higher level of education and training leads to an increase in wages and salaries, and people with advanced skills and knowledge have better chances to secure good jobs.⁹²

The human capital theory states that investing in people results in economic benefits for individuals and society.⁹³ The theory emphasises the importance of formal education in transforming a population's productive capacity. McConnell and others, cited by Wuttaphan, state that 'a more educated, better-trained person is capable of supplying a larger amount of useful productive effort than one with less education and training'.⁹⁴ As individuals obtain skills and knowledge, it makes them more valuable to the economy. Education is a prime human capital investment because it tends to effect a control on population growth and improves quality of life.⁹⁵

The 2021 World Economic Forum Human Capital Index shows that, on average, the world has developed 62 per cent of its human capital and neglected 38 per cent of its talent.⁹⁶ Low literacy and education levels pose significant obstacles to human capital development in the Global South.⁹⁷ To address the challenge of low literacy and education levels in developing countries, several policy interventions have been proposed.⁹⁸ Human capital development is essential in developing countries as gaining knowledge and skills leads to economic growth and development.⁹⁹ Countries in the Global North, such as Finland and South Korea, are moving forward due to huge technological investments and innovation.¹⁰⁰ In sub-Saharan Africa, 47 per cent of the population is underdeveloped. The majority of African students pursue social science, business and law, while only 4 per cent study engineering, manufacturing and construction, and a mere 2 per cent show interest in agriculture.¹⁰¹

The Zimbabwean government's central focus has been on the production of highly-skilled manpower following its policy of widening

91 GS Becker 'Human capital: a theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education' (1993) 3.

92 Wuttaphan (n 87) 242.

93 Sweetland (n 88) 341.

94 Wuttaphan (n 87) 242.

95 Sweetland (n 88) 341.

96 R Zvendiya 'New perspectives: investing in human capital to support structural transformation of Zimbabwe' *The Standard* 11 December 2022, <https://www.newsday.co.zw/thestandard/standard-people/article/200004841/new-perspectives-investing-in-human-capital-to-support-structural-transformation-of-zimbabwe> (accessed 10 August 2024).

97 M Entekhabi 'Human capital in developing countries: common challenges and the path forward' (2023) 1 *Journal of Emerging Trends in Marketing and Management* 18.

98 As above.

99 As above.

100 T Ncube 'Zimbabwe must use education for nation building' *Newsday* 8 February 2024, <https://www.newsday.co.zw/opinion-analysis/article/200022817/zimbabwe-must-use-education-for-nation-building> (accessed 14 February 2024).

101 Zvendiya (n 96).

access to education adopted in 1980.¹⁰² The Transitional National Development Plan cited by Shizha and Kariwo states that

the government recognises that education is a basic human right. It also recognises that education is an investment in human capital, which sustains and accelerates the rate of economic growth and socio-economic development. The challenge for Zimbabwe is not only one of redressing the educational qualitative and quantitative imbalances in the inherited system but also that of meeting the exceedingly large demands with limited resources.¹⁰³

Due to economic hardships, many professionals, including educators, have left the country in search of greener pastures. Zimbabwe has become a training ground for human resources for other nations. In return, Zimbabwe has benefited from the emigration of intellectuals through remittances in foreign currency back into the country.¹⁰⁴

8 FINDINGS

This part discusses the findings relating to the government's position on the benefits of the education curriculum reform as well as the human rights implications on educators, learners, parents or guardians. The findings are categorised in terms of the implications on each of the mentioned groups.

8.1 The government's position on the human rights benefits of the new curriculum

The thirty-seventh summit of the AU was held from 17 to 18 February 2024 under the theme 'Educate an African fit for the 21st century: Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa'. The government of Zimbabwe has touted the country's new curriculum's thrust as being in tandem with the above-stated AU theme in that it seeks to empower learners with both theory and practical learning, including digital knowledge that are crucial in the twenty-first century. Informed by the AU Agenda 2063, its own Vision 2030 and NDS 1, the Zimbabwean government acknowledged that education is both a human right as well as a means of realising other rights by adopting the heritage-based education curriculum for both primary and secondary school levels.

Education must grow out of the environment and the learning process must speak to the needs of society, hence the need for a home-grown curriculum instead of relying on foreign designs.¹⁰⁵ That is the reason why in 2015 the government, through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, adopted a competency-based curriculum

102 Shizha & Kariwo (n 7) 11.

103 As above.

104 As above.

105 W Rodney *How Europe underdeveloped Africa* (2018).

framework for primary and secondary education (2015-2022), which was a product of a multi-stakeholder consultative process. The new curriculum was influenced by findings from the Nziramasanga Commission Report on curricular reform that was published in 1999, which placed emphasis on competency-based learning.¹⁰⁶ The first education sector analysis was conducted in 2014 after commissioning of the national consultation for curriculum review. In 2015 the new curriculum framework was finalised and approved after adoption of the curriculum review narrative report published (2014-2015). From 2016 to 2022 implementation of the new curriculum commenced.

In 2016 syllabus development began as well as year 1 training of ECD A, Grades 1 and 3 and Forms 1, 3 and 5 teachers. In the same year the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2016-2020) was developed and adopted to guide the curriculum reform process. In 2017 there was implementation of the curriculum in grades of year 1 trained teachers as well as year 2 training of ECD B, Grade 2, Form 2, 4 and 6 teachers. In 2018 there was implementation of the curriculum in grades of year 2 trained teachers as well as year 3 training of grade 4 and form 4 teachers and supervisors. In 2019 there was implementation of the curriculum in grades of year 3 trained teachers and year 4 training of ECD B, Grade 5, form 4 and 6 teachers. In 2020 there was implementation of the curriculum in grades of year 4 trained teachers, year 5 training of grade 6 teachers and supervisors as well as the second Education Sector Analysis. In 2021 there was implementation of the curriculum in grades of year 5 trained teachers, year 6 training of Grade 7 teachers and supervisors as well as curriculum review. In 2022 there was implementation of the curriculum of grades of year 6 trained teachers and some improvements in the curriculum as the implementation continued until 2030. Another curriculum review took place in 2023 resulting in adoption of the heritage-based curriculum.¹⁰⁷

The government of Zimbabwe's basis for adopting a heritage-based education was said to be for the purpose of preserving the country's heritage, which is a vital link to the nation's cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational and economic legacies. The heritage-based curriculum is an educational method that assimilates culture and heritage into the teaching and learning process.¹⁰⁸ The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has indicated that the thrust of the curriculum is to impart on learners leadership and problem-solving skills, business and financial literacy, entrepreneurial skills and a sense of patriotism and ubuntu. Through heritage-based learning, Zimbabwe will produce graduates who are proud of their identity and participate peacefully in sustainable development as opposed to producing graduates with theoretical prowess.

106 CT Nziramasanga 'Zimbabwe: report on the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training' (1999).

107 Government of Zimbabwe *Curriculum framework for primary and secondary education 2015-2022* (2015).

108 G Manyeruke 'Heritage-based curriculum preserves culture, identity' *The Sunday Mail* 17 March 2024, <https://www.sundaymail.co.zw/heritage-based-curriculum-preserves-culture-identity> (accessed 15 August 2024).

It is hoped that through this unique education curriculum, which emphasises the use of cutting-edge technology and innovation, learners are being capacitated to contribute to the country's development during and after completion of their studies. This will be achieved through incorporation of the cultural, historical and social contexts into the learning process so that the learners have a deeper understanding of their heritage and its relevance to the subject matter. The contextualisation of knowledge in local heritage will allow the grounding of academic concepts and enhance practical application of knowledge.

8.2 Human rights implications of the curriculum reform for educators

The researchers noted that the curriculum review that commenced in 2015 entailed concurrent training of educators and implementation of the introduced curriculum, which created strain on the educators whose workload increased exponentially due to the changes in teaching and learning approaches. The new curriculum introduced inquiry-based teaching approaches that sought to shift teaching practices from the traditional rote-learning lecture and drill to more learner-centred approaches where pupils are afforded the opportunity to develop their creativity, express their ideas, collaborate with one another and learn by doing. The learner-centred approach came with supervised school-based projects.¹⁰⁹ While commendable, these projects also further increased the workload of educators especially those at public schools whose classes can have more than 50 learners. Due to the high pupil-teacher ratio, it was said to be difficult to devote adequate time to supervise the projects of each learner in such a big class, especially those with learning challenges who require more attention and assistance.

This is why some educators ended up devoting their personal time to assist learners who required further coaching and charging a fee for what they call extra lessons or extra work. The fees for extra lessons range from US \$1 per day or US \$3 per week, depending on the teacher's proficiency and area where the school is located. During school holidays, educators were said to be conducting private vacation lessons at their homes or rented premises. These vacation lessons used to be conducted at schools but the government has prohibited teachers from conducting extra lessons and vacation school for non-examination classes.¹¹⁰ The Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) has been making arrests to deter teachers from conducting

109 F Moyo 'New school curriculum with practical focus earns mixed reviews in Zimbabwe' (2017) *Global Press Journal*.

110 P Manase 'Govt gets tough on paid-for extra lessons' *H-Metro* 19 March 2024, <https://www.hmetro.co.zw/govt-gets-tough-on-paid-for-extra-lessons/> (accessed 15 August 2024).

these out-of-school learning arrangements.¹¹¹ However, some parents aided and abetted the practice of extra lessons and private vacation lessons on the basis that the new curriculum was work intensive and had too many learning areas that could not be covered during normal learning time, hence, the need for extra coaching.

8.3 Human rights implications of the curriculum reform for learners

Article 17 of the African Charter and article 11 of the African Children's Charter provide for the right to education for every individual and every child, respectively.¹¹² The Children's Charter reiterates that the education of the child should be directed to the promotion and development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. This should be achieved through fostering respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; the preservation and strengthening of positive African morals, traditional values and cultures; self-reliance; fostering unity, peace and inclusivity; the preservation of national independence and territorial integrity; the promotion and achievements of African unity and solidarity; the development of respect for the environment and natural resources; as well as the promotion of the child's understanding of primary healthcare.

It is pertinent to note that the African Children's Charter places an obligation on the state to promote and protect the right to education. In Zimbabwe the state has taken the lead in facilitating the building of a resilient education system by adopting an empowering and inclusive heritage-based education curriculum after review of CALA.

It is commendable that Zimbabwe's new curriculum covers all the critical aspects of education provided for in the African Children's Charter such as fostering respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; the preservation and strengthening of positive traditional values and cultures; self-reliance; fostering unity, peace and inclusivity; the preservation of national independence and territorial integrity; the promotion and the development of respect for the environment and natural resources; as well as the promotion of the child's understanding of primary healthcare. All these aspects are covered in subjects such as heritage, family, religion and moral education as well as agriculture, science and technology. The curriculum has also mainstreamed human rights, gender, disaster preparedness, human sexuality, woodwork, environmental issues and conflict management, which makes it a holistic empowerment tool.

111 B Ndlovu 'Corruption charges for teachers demanding extra lessons fee' *Sunday News* 23 April 2023, <https://www.sundaynews.co.zw/corruption-charges-for-teachers-demanding-extra-lessons-fee/> (accessed 15 August 2024).

112 See African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (adopted by the Organisation of African Unity in July 1990, entered into force 29 November 1999); African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (adopted 27 June 1981, entered into force 21 October 1986).

The shift to the heritage-based education curriculum is to ensure that learners acquire life-enhancing skills, values and attitudes by producing goods and services that are useful to the economy, based on the country's heritage and natural resources.¹¹³ Mainstreaming cultural heritage in the education system ensures the consistent socialisation of every child and youth in the morals and traditional values acceptable by the nation.

Unlike the colonially-influenced education curriculum, which emphasised rote learning with minimum practicality, CALA brought in practical aspects of learning. However, one of its main shortcomings was the increased workload for the learners. From infant level (ECD A) to grade 7, learning areas were reduced from 11 to six. At secondary level, the core and compulsory learning areas were reduced from seven to five. Learners at secondary school level are supposed to study at least three electives from the following disciplines: the sciences, languages, humanities, commercials, technical and vocational, physical education and arts. This diversity in terms of electives caters for differences in talent and ability. Of note also is the adoption of an inclusive and integrated approach that caters for learners with special needs through the provision of assistive devices as required by article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which guarantees the rights of children with disabilities, and article 9(2)(h) on accessibility including access to assistive devices and technologies.

The curriculum review process did not only focus on reduction of learning areas but also included a review of the assessment modalities and tools.¹¹⁴ CALA had several projects that needed to be done at home after a full learning day, affecting the learners' need for rest, play and recreation, which are necessary for a child's well-being. The newly-introduced school-based projects emphasise the observation of the learner while carrying out the practical aspects at school. The carrying out of projects at school eliminates the possibility of parents or guardians doing projects for the learners at home or buying the practical work models from craftsmen.

8.4 Human rights implications of the curriculum reform for parents and guardians

The African Children's Charter places the primary responsibility to fulfil the right to education on the state, but parents and guardians also have a secondary duty to ensure that children have access to quality education. In relation to the CALA programme, parents expressed dissatisfaction because they were not informed about its importance,

113 N Tshili 'Government backs heritage-based education' *Chronicle* 18 March 2024, <http://www.chronicle.co.zw/government-backs-heritage-education/> (accessed 15 August 2024).

114 'Revised curriculum will enhance quality education delivery' *The Sunday Mail* 10 March 2024, <https://www.sundaymail.co.zw/revised-curriculum-will-enhance-quality-education-delivery> (accessed 8 August 2024).

and a majority of them failed to comprehend it.¹¹⁵ Parents and guardians of primary and secondary school students raised concern over the programme, saying that it was elitist, making it difficult for children to have interest in schoolwork.¹¹⁶ The introduction of the new curriculum brought unexpected economic commitments to some parents and guardians, especially those from the older generation who were not familiar with the new curriculum content and learning approaches. The homework load of learners increased such that parents and guardians had to become 'second teachers', otherwise the learners could not do the homework on their own due to its complexity. Parents and guardians with access to internet services or data bundles were spared physical research work since the learners could carry out online research on their own, but this meant increased costs for internet services to cater for homework research and receiving online homework.

Apart from the high costs of data, there was also a need for electronic gadgets such as tablets or I-pads for use to conduct research and receive online homework. In particular, parents were against the CALA programme because most of them could not afford materials needed by learners to successfully carry out projects.¹¹⁷ Some parents and guardians indicated that they could not afford to buy electronic gadgets for the learners, with the result that educators sent online homework on their cellphones and if they delayed in receiving them, this affected the learners' timely completion of homework, resulting in both the parents or guardians and the learners going to sleep late so that the homework could be ready the next day. The failure to avail electronic gadgets and internet connectivity affected the quality of work of some learners, especially those from the rural and farming communities. This was evidenced by the poor pass rates in some of these communities where some schools had zero per cent pass rate.¹¹⁸

The authors also noted that some learning exercises given to children are beyond their knowledge capacity levels, such that teachers request parents to do the exercises for them, especially the practical work. The children gain marks for the work done by parents on their behalf, which is not a form of learning at all. At times teachers give children exercises on topics they have not yet covered, putting mental strain on some parents who learnt the old curriculum and are not familiar with the learning areas of the new curriculum.

The curriculum review that reduced learning areas and introduced school-based projects was well received by most parents whose economic rights had been negatively affected by CALA, which required investment of substantial financial resources in buying the numerous text books for the new curriculum as well as electronic gadgets and

115 Mapendere & Masvimbo (n 10) 236.

116 Sibanda (n 74).

117 As above.

118 'Zero per cent pass rates in schools to be probed' *The Sunday Mail* 11 February 2024, <https://www.sundaymail.co.zw/zero-percent-pass-rates-in-schools-to-be-probed> (accessed 8 August 2024).

internet data bundles. Some schools required different books for each subject such as Ventures, Plus One, CPS, Red Spot and Work books, which are costly. The prices of the main text books ranged from almost US \$4 to US \$14 depending on the grade, publishing house and retail book shops.¹¹⁹

9 CONCLUSION

The government did not adequately interrogate the human rights implications of the increased workload on the educators, learners, parents and guardians as well as the high costs of learning materials. Too much homework in many learning areas per day affected the children's rights to recreation and enjoyment of childhood. Article 19 of the African Children's Charter gives children responsibilities towards their families and communities. Learners living far away from schools, especially in rural areas, are therefore expected to perform household chores when they get home, but due to the many learning areas, they tend to arrive home late with a lot of homework to be done and to be ready for submission the following day. The failure to balance the school work load and household chores could be one of the contributors of the zero per cent pass rate in rural and other marginalised schools discussed earlier in the findings. Such onerous school and home responsibilities left the children with very little or no time to play and do revision in preparation for the next learning day, thus further compromising the pass rates.

Marginalised and vulnerable children cannot afford to buy the numerous textbooks that are required as well as components for the CALA activities, compatible electronic gadgets and internet data bundles for research, costs for extra lessons and the exclusion of children who cannot pay for extra lessons. Compatible electronic gadgets cost between US \$200 and US \$300,¹²⁰ depending on brand, ram size and performance. Eight gigabytes of data cost almost US \$16 (ZWL 222 684),¹²¹ depending on the internet service provider. A lack of these devices and wifi impact on the quality of homework and a child's academic performance.

The divide between the rich and the poor has been amplified since well-to-do parents are shunning the ZIMSEC-examined curriculum in preference for the Cambridge-based curriculum, which does not have CALA, and the heritage-based education curriculum. Segregation on the basis of economic status has been revived just like it was during the colonial period where there was education for the marginalised indigenous people and for the Europeans.

119 College Press New curriculum text books price lists, <https://www.collegepress.co.zw/files/USD%20Primary%20Pricelist.pdf> (accessed 14 August 2024).

120 Fusertech price of 64 Gig Samsung tablet, <https://fusertech.co.zw/product/samsung-smx2054gb64gb-10-5tablet/> (accessed 14 August 2024).

121 Econet Wireless Zimbabwe price of data bundles, <https://www.econet.co.zw/data-bundles/> (accessed 14 August 2024).

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study indicated that there were concerns regarding the implementation of CALA and the new heritage-based education curriculum. Child rights advocates recommended the inclusion of the voices of children with the capacity to appreciate curriculum development issues in consultations on relevance, inclusivity and effects on their well-being and enjoyment of childhood since children have a mantra that says ‘nothing for us without us’.

The government of Zimbabwe should consider the cost implications of implementing the new curriculum on parents and guardians and mobilise adequate resources for procurement of learning materials and internet connection at schools since most, if not all, government schools have no textbooks and each child should bring their own books from home.

The government through the relevant ministry must arrange workshops to cultivate positive perceptions on the new curriculum. The government should invest in the training of educators and impart them with the necessary skills, thus improving the quality of education. The government must also improve the welfare and working conditions of teachers. There is also a need to make the curriculum inclusive by ensuring that no place or individual is left behind in the education system.

The government should further collaborate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector to improve the country’s education system. In the future, intensive training should be done prior to the introduction of a new curriculum. The government should also invest in the education of parents/guardians on the importance of curriculum reforms since the majority of them do not understand these changes.