

Museums as Pedagogical Spaces in the Implementation of Zimbabwe's Heritage-Based Curriculum: Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

Through the Secretary's Circular Number 4 of 2024, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe announced the adoption of the Heritage-Based Curriculum Framework for 2024-2030. This program stands aligned with Vision 2030 and is aligned with the National Development Strategy One (1) and Two (2). Its fundamental principle is to create an education system that leverages on heritage-based education to produce goods as well as services in the economy's value chain. This adopted new approach in Zimbabwe's education system presents an opportunity for museums as well as heritage sites to serve as complementary learning spaces that improve the effective application of heritage-based learning. Museums offer students an opportunity to handle as well as study real objects and artifacts, which fosters problem-solving as well as interaction with others, thus making them valuable supplementary learning spaces. If properly utilised, museums have the capacity to enrich education by providing the much-needed access to history, culture, and heritage-based technology and innovation. Engagement with museum artifacts enhances students' interest as well as improving learning outcomes across varied subject areas. This study thus explores how heritage sites, museums as well as monuments can enhance heritage-based learning, mostly in secondary schools, given the challenge that most teachers as resource persons in these schools are mainly trained not in history or heritage disciplines. This research therefore investigates the perceptions of secondary school teachers in Masvingo urban government schools in regards to the use of museums and heritage sites as complementary learning spaces. Through the use of qualitative research methods, this study reveals that regardless of existing challenges, teachers have a positive perception of museum-based learning, recognising its role in fostering fact-based education and providing a dynamic, hands-on teaching and learning environment. This then highlights the potential need for museums and heritage sites to effectively support the demands of Zimbabwe's heritage-based curriculum (2024-2030).

Keywords: museum learning; teacher perceptions; heritage-based curriculum framework; heritage-based education; complementary learning spaces

Introduction

The philosophy of Zimbabwe's recently launched heritage-based curriculum (HBC) framework 2024- 2030 is to produce an end product of young people who can think beyond the confines of the given curriculum, who are innovative, critical, and creative learners that can help proffer solutions to contemporary challenges in society (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2024).

For this reason, the view that education and training should only be executed in the school environment has lost its validity. The concept of education is not limited to the classroom setup, but is rather considered a lifelong, ongoing activity that goes beyond the formal school classroom. Teachers in secondary schools are struggling to effectively teach heritage-based subjects due to limited knowledge resources, inadequate training, and a lack of engaging teaching materials (Chiripanhura, 2022). This has led to a teaching and learning gap in the students' competencies and appreciation of cultural heritage studies. Heritage sites as well as museums, which house the invaluable historical and cultural artifacts, possess the potential to bridge this gap by providing spaces for hands-on learning experiences that complement traditional classroom teaching. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe Secretary's circular no. P.54 released on the 30th of June 2023 stressed the deliberate need to strike a balance between theory and practice, with special emphasis on educational tours to provide an in-depth learning experience for learners. The same circular encourages schools to augment their classroom teaching with outdoor learning, which involves educational tours to museums as well as heritage sites. This study, therefore, examines how museums can be strategically incorporated into the curriculum in order to support teachers while enriching students' understanding of heritage-based learning, hopefully through real-time remote access. Furthermore, it also explores the potential of heritage sites as well as museums in enhancing heritage education in schools. Given the challenges that teachers face in delivering heritage-related content, this study explores how these resources can serve as effective supplementary educational learning tools. Through integrating museums as well as heritage sites into the mainstream curriculum, this research aims to provide practical solutions for making heritage education more appealing, informative as well as being readily accessible. It also advocates for their inclusion as alternate learning platforms in the implementation of the Heritage-Based Curriculum Framework 2024-2030.

Wan Salaiman, Mahbob, and Azlan (2017) defined out-of-classroom learning as the learning that transpires outside the walls of a schoolroom, frequently employing real-world environments, community centres, or other locations to provide real learning experiences that are more interactive as well as engaging than the usual classroom teaching and learning. Simplified, it is learning that transpires virtually and physically, supplementing what is learnt inside the four walls of a traditional classroom. This method of learning is characterized by three main domains, namely knowledge, attitude, and skill. Out-of-classroom education in museum institutions fulfils the three learning domains: knowledge, attitude, and skills, making it a satisfying educational method in implementing Zimbabwe's heritage-based learning. In the knowledge domain, students gain that deeper understanding through engaging with authentic artefacts and curated narratives that connect the theory to the lived experience, guaranteeing better comprehension as well as knowledge retention. The attitude domain is satisfied as students develop appreciation,

pride and respect for cultural diversity, nurturing identity formation as well as positive values towards heritage.

Meanwhile, the skills domain is addressed through participatory activities, which include observation, interpretation, communication, and the utilisation of digital tools, which boost practical competencies applicable in academic and community contexts. When combined, these domains create what is called a holistic reward where students not only acquire knowledge but also internalise values while developing transferable skills, thereby transforming heritage education from rote learning to a meaningful, lifelong experience.

The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Welsh, 2006) encourages out-of-classroom learning. The argument being that such learning helps develop lively learners. Students begin to see that community problems are multifaceted and that solutions are often diverse. Outside learning, hence, equips learners with hands-on knowledge grounded in real experiences. Such students are better prepared to address the actual challenges and more often develop a stronger sense of community belonging as well as responsibility. In addition, out-of-classroom learning shapes soft skills that extend beyond the subject content. This amalgamation nurtures both academic competencies and social accountability. In addition, out-of-classroom learning builds on soft skills that extend beyond the subject content. Wan Sulaiman et al. (2017) state that outdoor participation cultivates critical thinking, motivation, time management, communication, teamwork, as well as professional judgment. These are all competencies that formal classrooms alone cannot instill fully. Furthermore, out-of-classroom learning provides platforms for socialization and personal development. Learners gain well-being, trust, respect for the setting, and skills for social integration (Wan Sulaiman et al., 2017). The classroom without walls, consequently, becomes a fertile ground for all-inclusive learner growth. The out-of-classroom learning experience can happen within diverse locations. Among them are field trips to museums, historical sites, nature reserves, local businesses, as well as virtual experiences online. Zimbabwe is home to varied heritage which encompasses cultural, historical, natural, tangible, and intangible artifacts. These heritage sites and museums play a very crucial role in heritage-based learning, offering valuable opportunities for education, cultural preservation, as well as community engagement. Additionally, museums serve as important informal learning institutions. They bridge the school curriculum and complement formal education by providing additional training opportunities. As clearly spelled out in the Zimbabwe Heritage Studies Syllabus (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Volume 1, 2015), museums and heritage sites are recognised as key learning spaces that connect classroom knowledge to lived cultural experiences. Lessons that are verbally delivered in schools can be reinforced in museums through the utilisation of tangible object materials. This teaching approach thus, strengthens understanding thereby ensuring that abstract concepts are decoded into concrete learning experiences.

This gives learning a whole new approach and meaning, which is object-based. In this way, students participating in education in museums do not only get the knowledge of a particular course, but they also enrich their lives by utilising a variety of cognitive skills in combination with real-life experiences (Falk & Dierking, 2000).

Museums are places suitable for cognitive, emotional, and kinesthetic orientations for children (Hein, 1995). Cognitive capacity building in museums includes strengthening the child's or student's intellectual abilities through experiential and practical education that stimulates observation, analysis, and critical thinking. Through engaging with real objects and interactive displays, scholars connect abstract ideas to the tangible experiences, thereby enhancing memory retention and problem-solving skills. This procedure not only supports what they learn in school but also nurtures curiosity, creativity, as well as the ability to apply knowledge in meaningfully diverse contexts (Hein, 1995). Though the role of museums as learning spaces is irrefutable, their effectiveness in aiding the implementation of Zimbabwe's heritage-based curriculum is hinged heavily on teachers' innovations to engage meaningfully with these resources. Zimbabwean schools have a tradition of facilitating visits to museums and heritage sites, often in line with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's policy as outlined in the National Heritage Studies curriculum document, excursions to such spaces is recommended. Nevertheless, these visits often lack structure as well as alignment with curricular goals as stipulated by the ministry. Without clearly set objectives or integration into the school lesson plans, scholars often experience these trips as casual tourism rather than purposeful learning opportunities. This gap between policy intent and classroom practice underscores the need for structured frameworks to help educators connect museum resources directly to curriculum outcomes. This study, therefore, argues for the need to integrate museums as complementary learning platforms in the implementation of the Heritage-based Curriculum Framework 2024-2030. At face value, Zimbabwe's heritage sites and museums are well-positioned to complement the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's heritage-based curriculum framework. However, in reality, it might not be the case. It is against this background that this research sought to gather the views of teachers about the contribution of these heritage spaces in reinforcing student understanding of concepts taught in class; providing learning experiences in real-life situations; making learning more meaningful and enjoyable, and enabling students to think and master knowledge through contextualised experiential learning, among other things.

Background to the study

Reforms in the education systems are globally a common routine. These reforms are important as they aim to address the shifting needs of society and prepare students to face the challenges of the future, as well as create a more dynamic, inclusive, and forward-looking education system that will prepare learners for a rapidly evolving world. Vasquez-Martinez (2013) defines educational reforms as changes and transformations in the

scholastic system in relation to such factors as educational philosophy, student policy, curriculum, pedagogy, didactics, organisation, management, financing, and links with national development in this century.

Upon attaining independence in 1980, Zimbabwe reformed its educational systems to align them with new post-colonial national goals. Before independence, Zimbabwe's (then Rhodesia later briefly Zimbabwe-Rhodesia) education system was predominantly Eurocentric. It operated a two-tier system, similar to that of South Africa, with one system designed for Africans and another for Europeans (Whites). Importantly, the Rhodesian settlers did not identify themselves as Africans but rather as Europeans. The aim was to perpetuate the subordination and silencing of the African child's psyche. The education system during the colonial era was designed to serve the interests of the White minority while segregating the Black majority (Atkinson, 1972; Zvobgo, 1994). The education available for the Blacks was underfunded and mainly focused on providing basic literacy, numeracy, and minimal vocational training to match labour requirements for the colonial economy (Zvobgo, 1994). Hoagland (2020) and Naude (2019) are of the view that the colonial education system was meant to ensure that the colonised became appendages of the coloniser. Dei (2012) accentuates that the British colonial masters used the Western education system to enculturate Eurocentric ideologies with a strong negation of the Zimbabwean and other indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous Zimbabwean beliefs, values, nuances, and mores were relegated to paganism.

After independence, motivated by the need to decolonise the education system and redress colonial injustices, the Zimbabwean government introduced several educational reforms. These reforms positioned education as a key instrument for national development, social equity, and empowerment. During the first decade of independence, educational reforms implemented were oriented towards socialism (Dorsey, 1989; Mudavanhu *et al.*, 2025). Another set of educational reforms in Zimbabwe came in 2017 through the competency-based curriculum, which had been adopted in 2015. The reforms informed by the 1999 Nziramasanga Commission of Enquiry Report were necessitated by Zimbabwe's desire to align its education to the 21st century skills and national development goals (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015). Amongst other tenets, the competency-based curriculum stressed more on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), heritage and cultural studies, as well as the production of goods and services. The emphasis is on skills development for production which marked a major shift from the preceding curriculum, which emphasised more on knowledge acquisition over practical application. The framework stressed the need for learners to demonstrate competencies through practical tasks that integrate knowledge, skills, and values. It was through this curriculum that the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) introduced the component of continuous assessment in the form of continuous assessment learning activities (CALAs), which contributed 30% to the final exam marks for Grade 7, O-Level and A-Level learners (MoPSE, 2015). Mwembe and Moyo (2024) are of the view that CALAs operationalised the competency-based approach by aligning assessment with real-world problem solving.

The end of the competence-based curriculum in 2023 ushered in the heritage-based curriculum (HBC) framework, which will guide Zimbabwe's primary and secondary education from 2024 to 2030. Among other issues, the HBC makes Heritage Studies one of the five (5) core subjects at O-Level, implying that all secondary learners from form one (1) to form four (4) are expected to study the subject. Previously, Heritage Studies had been an elective for the same learners, and a sizeable number of schools were not offering it, citing lack of teachers, compounded by the inavailability of textbooks. Some schools offering the subject relied on a history teacher whose teaching was driven by their 'love for heritage' (Chiripanhura, 2022). Announcing the adoption of the HBC framework, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education stressed that it builds on the strength of the competency-based curriculum (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2024). This curriculum is implementing reforms in primary and secondary education whose overall goal is to produce highly competent pupils with a Zimbabwean outlook to work in an innovative and knowledge-driven economy. In line with Zimbabwe's National Development Strategy One (1) and Two (2) of becoming an empowered and prosperous upper middle-income society by 2030, these reforms have led to an innovative, heritage-based curriculum which is in line with the Education 5.0 model. Education 5.0, introduced in 2018 by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development, is the philosophy guiding Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education.

As stipulated in the MoPSE Secretary's Circular, Number 4 of 2024, the aim for the new heritage-based curriculum is to promote and cherish the Zimbabwean identity; to prepare pupils for life and work in an innovation and knowledge driven economy that fosters life-long learning; prepare pupils for participatory citizenship, instill peace and sustainable development; prepare and orient pupils for participatory leadership and voluntary service and to strengthen measures to mold the pupils to cherish and practice the Zimbabwean philosophical orientation of Unhu /Ubuntu (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2024, p. 3). As derived from its aims, this Heritage-based curriculum seeks to foster lifelong learning and prepare pupils for participatory leadership while at the same time facilitating the sustainable development of the Zimbabwean economy. It also seeks to foster the Zimbabwean and Bantu philosophy of Ubuntu, a philosophy that is bound to encourage peace and participatory citizenship. This curriculum is influenced by the understanding that every successful civilisation value and emulates its culture and identity; hence, culture and heritage are integrated in the teaching and learning process within the heritage-based curriculum. The ambition for Zimbabwe's new curriculum that will be of the "self-aware learning child," through an indigenous paradigm becomes less feasible with the continued marginalisation of the teaching and learning of African languages and literatures. Languages are repositories of culture, identity, histories and African indigenous knowledge systems, but their marginalisation and dependence on the dominant language of English tends to estrange our children from African worldviews and cultural values that are found in local African languages, such as Shona, Ndebele, Tonga, and Kalanga. According to Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o, "education in colonial languages alienates Africa to Africa and is an impediment to the decolonisation process" (1986, 139).

It is in this light that the curriculum's goal of "heritage education" seems an impediment with the use of English to teach most subjects in our schools and neglect of the vernacular African languages. This in turn may contribute to hindering the restoration of African institutions and knowledge systems, as is the vision of the curriculum reforms with the limited teaching of African literatures, whose histories, oral traditions, philosophies and experiences inform African identities and realities. The prevailing societal value attached to English has further aggravated the challenge of teaching of African languages in our schools since it signifies prestige and economic opportunities. The effective implementation of this curriculum to fulfil its decolonising objective necessitates enhanced support to the teaching of African languages and literatures, through various initiatives that include policy implementation, teacher training, adequate resources and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems at all educational levels.

The 2024 curriculum innovation in Zimbabwe is part of an ongoing process of educational reforms that have evolved since the country's independence in 1980. In earlier years, the government of Zimbabwe put priority on expanding access to education, mainly for the marginalised and vulnerable communities, and introduced free primary education. Over the subsequent decades, curriculum reforms increasingly were focused on integrating African heritage and local knowledge while adapting to global trends in education. The 1990s and 2000s witnessed a shift towards skills-based education, as well as a bias towards technical and vocational training to fulfill the demands of a growing economy and society. These changes were aimed at creating a more inclusive and responsive education approach that left no one behind, setting the stage for inclusive reforms.

Theoretical framework

Jean Piaget's constructivist theory propounded in 1952 is foundational in giving insights into how learners develop knowledge through active processing with the environment. Piaget avows that learning does not exist in the form of passively receiving information from the environment, but it is rather an active process whereby the learner interprets and reorganizes experiences to create meaning for themselves (Waite-Stupiansky, 2022). This means that knowledge is therefore constructed and not transmitted. Therefore, effective learning environments need to encourage inquiry, interaction, and reflection to stimulate learning (Waite-Stupiansky, 2022). Constructivism, therefore, places great emphasis on learner-centered pedagogies that aim to foster exploration, problem-solving, and negotiation of understanding continuously.

The principles of constructivism take particular importance in a heritage-based curriculum. Non-formal educational spaces, such as museums and heritage sites, offer immense experiential opportunities wherein learners engage in cultural narratives, material artifacts, and historical interpretation in an interactive format. The principles of constructivism take particular importance in a heritage-based curriculum.

Non-formal educational spaces, such as museums and heritage sites, offer immense experiential opportunities wherein learners engage in cultural narratives, material artifacts, and historical interpretation in an interactive format. It is not a case of receiving historical facts but one in which students actively build meaning over cultural heritage through observation, dialogue, and hands-on activities. These experiences thus foster sophisticated order thinking skills, for instance, critical analysis, creativity, as well as contextual reasoning, with an added capacity for entrepreneurship and innovation because of real-world engagement. For instance, museum tours that are guided or rather participatory heritage-based workshops inspire students to interpret cultural objects in a collaborative approach: exchanging perspectives as well as negotiating meaning amongst peer and educator participants (Canocchi, 2025). This is in line with the views of Piaget, who viewed social contact with others as essential to cognitive development, whereby students test and further hone their ideas through dialogue. Therefore, a heritage-based curriculum becomes a dynamic platform where students connect individual experiences to shared cultural memory and improve their understanding of identity, history, and community.

Nevertheless, while Piaget's constructivism provides a sound pedagogical basis, it is necessary to include various theories representative of African epistemologies as well as learning values. The philosophy of Ubuntu serves as a culturally situated complement. Ubuntu reflects on relationality, a communality of interdependence, and the fact that individual identity is constituted in a shared social existence, in other words, "I am because we are" (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019). In education, Ubuntu shows the significance of community, teamwork, empathy, and the production of knowledge together, reinforcing that learning cannot be solely individual but always social as well as collective. Situated within a heritage-based curriculum, the incorporation of Ubuntu reinforces cultural relevance and pedagogical resonance. It provides educators with the opportunity to position African worldviews, affirming indigenous knowledge systems, and engaging learners with heritage not simply as historical content but rather as lived cultural inheritance. This approach engenders a sense of belonging, identity affirmation, as well as cultural pride whereas fostering socially responsible students who comprehend their position in relationship to a broader community. The fusion of constructivist theory and Afrocentric perspectives with particular reference to Ubuntu, offers a holistic framework to the heritage-based curriculum. It leverages the experiential fruitfulness of museums and heritage places while rooting education in communal and culturally responsive values. Such teachers are in a position to create learning experiences that are considered deep, meaningful, identity-conscious, and social. This combined approach fosters not only deeper knowledge building but also equips learners for lively contributions to cultural conservation along with sustainable community development.

Role of museums and heritage places in education

Museums serve as key information centres; museum education must enable effective student education. Museums deliver accessible, inclusive, and high-quality learning while contributing towards research, innovation, and economic restoration through various exhibitions and outreach programmes (Chitima, 2021).

Following the educational reforms initiated by the Zimbabwean government in 1980, there was an 80% increase in the number of Black children visiting museums for educational purposes (Pwiti, 1994). As a result, students have become the primary audience for museums and heritage sites in Zimbabwe (Chitima, 2021). It is against this background that this research explores the criteria and extent to which museums and heritage sites can be effectively utilised to complement learning environments in support of Zimbabwe's heritage-based curriculum.

The concept of education is not just a notion to be limited to schools, but is considered an ongoing activity in all areas of life. Although schools have an important responsibility to provide students with gains towards the goals in the curriculum and syllabus, Ramey-Gassert et al. (1994) argue that formal school learning environments are often disconnected from real-world events and objects. The classroom setup, although invaluable and irreplaceable, might not be adequate in moulding a creative and innovative student who is ready for participatory leadership. It is, therefore, useful to have different learning environments to support the life-long dimension of this new curriculum framework. To effectively impart real-world knowledge to students, experts advocate for learning to take place outside of the school setting in a meaningful environment that reflects the way knowledge will ultimately be used (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). Although there are different non-formal education contexts, the role of the museum is evident in terms of tangible and direct clarification of the correct positioning and correlation of concepts. Museums can be used to introduce students to many aspects of the real world through the use of tangible evidence. Gardner (1991) argues that museums constitute out-of-school learning environments that engage students, stimulate their understanding, and encourage independent learning. Falk and Dierking (2000) describe museums as "formally informal" educational spaces, meaning they provide structured learning experiences while allowing students to explore at their own pace. In Zimbabwe's secondary school curriculum, heritage education is a core subject aimed at preserving cultural identity and promoting national consciousness.

While making an analysis of museum missions, Zeller (1989) brought out three major philosophies that served as foundations of much of museum practices, namely the educational museum, the aesthetic museum, and the social museum. While museums certainly serve aesthetic and social purposes, the educational philosophy is the most comprehensive tenet of modern museums, as even the aesthetic and social benefits are of a long-term nature.

Most individuals' first learning experiences are in informal spaces, such as museums, making their contribution to a student's sense of identity and their educational trajectory indispensable (Crowley & Jacobs, 2002; Crowley et al., 2014). In the Zimbabwean education system, museums and heritage sites align quite well with the heritage-based curriculum of the nation, whose intention is to raise cultural fluency and national identity. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) contends that Africa's post-colonial education systems need to give precedence to indigenous knowledge systems while delinking from Eurocentric perspectives. Recent studies, particularly by Marovah and Ncube (2024), highlight the critical role of museum education in the implementation of the heritage-based curriculum by instilling a sense of ownership and belonging through visiting learners.

The study emphasizes how museums, beyond serving as spaces for preserving heritage, can be dynamic educational platforms that complement the classroom learning. Museums avail opportunities for students to connect the theoretical with the practical aspect, and they help convey intangible heritage, for example, oral histories as well as traditional art forms, that are not easily captured through the conventional traditional teaching methods. Through the integration of such content into our curriculum, museums make intangible heritage available and relevant, preserving it for future generations. Overall, incorporating alternate learning environments such as museums and cultural centres into the heritage-based curriculum frameworks is essential for creating an enriched, contextualised, and interactive educational experience. This method not only deepens scholars' understanding of their heritage but also guarantees that education remains very vibrant, engaging, and connected to local communities, thus complementing learning spaces in implementing Zimbabwe's heritage-based education.

The use of museums and heritage places as educational resources provides for interdisciplinary education. Eshach (2007) states that non-formal learning places, such as museums, facilitate cross-disciplinary learning through the effective inclusion of history, geography, art, and social studies. In the Zimbabwean context, heritage places like Great Zimbabwe, Khami Monuments, and the country's national museums provide inclusive histories that can be utilised as teaching materials across varying disciplines. This integrated method to learning guarantees that scholars cultivate a higher sensitivity to the interrelatedness of the varying fields of study, thus enhancing their analytical capabilities and problem-solving skills. This notable inclusion of museum tours and heritage site visits within the learning curriculum allows for the learners to acquire direct knowledge of Zimbabwe's rich historical and cultural heritage, thus facilitating a proper interaction with indigenous knowledge systems. This methodology is in line with the general visions of heritage-based curriculum, which includes incorporating innovation as well as experiential learning for a more effective learning experience (Chitamba and Chitamba 2025). Currently, teachers are faced with an array of challenges in delivering the heritage-based curriculum effectively, ranging from the lack of suitable training, insufficient resources, and limited availability of relevant teaching resources.

According to (Chitamba and Chitamba 2025), a high percentage of teachers are challenged in relating heritage material to students due to a lack of educational resources and weak teacher training in heritage education. Museums and heritage sites serve an imperative purpose of reducing the aforementioned challenges through providing structured and guided learning opportunities for enriching classroom learning. Hooper-Greenhill (2007) emphasises the role of museums in facilitating inquiry-based learning and critical thinking in students because they stimulate analysis, interpretation, and identification of connections between historical events and modern issues.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to foreground the voices of Heritage Studies and History secondary school teachers practising in government schools in Masvingo urban. The rationale behind adopting the qualitative paradigm was that teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the usefulness of museum spaces and heritage sites as complementary learning environments are shaped by multiple factors that require in-depth exploration and interpretation. In addition, the study sought to explain current museum educational programs and capture teachers' critiques on whether such programs enhance learners' comprehension of theoretical concepts taught in the classroom.

The research targeted six purposively selected government secondary schools in Masvingo urban. The choice of these schools was influenced by their proximity to the researcher, which reduced travel costs, as well as their established history of organising educational tours. At these schools, 30 participants were selected which included teachers responsible for teaching History and Heritage Studies, as well as those who had at some point accompanied learners on excursions. They were selected basing on their knowledge on the subject area equally among the selected schools. Headmasters, museum and monuments staff, and selected learners who had participated in excursions were also included to broaden the spectrum of perspectives and ensure that missing voices were captured. These were selected randomly across the various school selected. Data was obtained through a mixed method approach. The researchers distributed the questionnaire through Google forms; printed questionnaire copies were distributed by hand to the teachers based on availability and interest of teachers. Semi-structured interviews were performed between teachers, headmasters in both face-to-face interview and online interviews based on the availability and willingness of the participants. Ethical consideration was adhered to as the researchers obtained informed consent from all participants who volunteered to take part in the research.

They also assured the participants of their privacy and confidentiality and anonymity of the research work, and that they could withdraw from the research any time, they choose to. Those participants who agreed to participate the researcher asked them to sign consent form if not they can share information without recorder in that situation; detailed field notes were taken, so as to allow participants to express themselves fully without any form of anxiety. The questionnaire was formulated by the researcher and covered two sections. The first section sought to deduce teachers' understanding of the Heritage-Based Curriculum Framework (2024-2030), while the second gathered teachers' opinions about museums and heritage spaces as complementary learning environments.

Questions were both open- and closed-ended to allow for descriptive statistics while still providing space for qualitative elaboration. This triangulated approach ensured that the study not only documented teachers' perceptions but also contextualised them against institutional practices, museum programming, and learners' experiences.

School	Respondents		H	Total
	Teachers from the organizing committee /accompanied learners on tours	Other teachers who teach Heritage/History		
Victoria High	3	2		5
Rujeko Secondary	3	2		5
Masvingo Christian	3	2		5
Mucheke 1 High	3	1		4
Mucheke 2 High	3	2		5
Masvingo Day School	3	1		4
Total	18	10		28

In the case of schools, a maximum number of five (5) teachers were selected as target respondents. This choice was necessitated by the researchers' intention to explore the factors considered by school trip organizing committees when deciding upon the destinations for educational tours. A purposive sampling technique was used to select those teachers who had accompanied learners on educational tours so as to get them to share their knowledge and experience in organizing and supervising trips to museums and heritage sites. In all, a total number of eighteen (18) teachers attended the survey and shared their knowledge of the educational benefit of the tours and perceptions of heritage-based learning. History and heritage studies teachers were targeted for this study given their presumed expertise of museum and heritage-related curriculum. In addition to the teachers, the heads of the selected schools, who had a supervisory role to sanction such tours, numbering ten (10) and five learners each from every targeted school to a total of 15 were purposively selected to offer a firsthand insight into the role of museum education. Fifteen (15) personnel of each institution, who were involved in organization of educational visits, were also selected for the study. A combination of the data from each data collection method was thematically analyzed after being processed by coding for any similarities or differences, which might have appeared in the course of the research.

School	Teachers from Organising Committee / Accompanied Learners on Tours	Heritage/History Teachers	School Heads	Learners	Museum Staff	Total Respondents per Category
Victoria High	3	2	2	3	–	10
Rujeko Secondary	3	2	2	2	–	9
Masvingo Christian	3	2	2	2	–	9
Mucheke 1 High	3	1	1	3	–	8
Mucheke 2 High	3	2	2	3	–	10
Masvingo Day School	3	1	1	2	–	7

Museum Staff	–	–	–	–	15	15
Total	18	10	10	15	15	68

Research Findings

Teachers' Comprehension of the Heritage-based Curriculum

Responses from teachers showed different levels of understanding of the heritage-based curriculum introduced for 2024-2030. Teachers from the various school organizing committees presented a broad consciousness of their requirements, particularly their emphasis on experiential learning through museum and heritage place visits. They however, highlighted gaps in the implementation, specifically the lack of funding to go towards the trips, as well as clear guidelines. A respondent noted, *"We entirely understand the requirements of the curriculum, which is to engage directly with heritage sites, but with a lack of proper funding and guidelines, excursions remain difficult to organise"* (Respondent 1, School Organizing Committee, 2024).

Teachers who have once accompanied students on museum visits provided a more practical perspective. They confirmed that visits improved engagement but complained about the absence of structured lesson plans. *"The new curriculum promotes and provides for hands-on learning, which is good, but when we take our students to museums, there is no structured framework to guide our lessons"* (Respondent 2, Accompanying Teacher, 2024). This observation echoes the Curriculum Framework, which emphasizes the need for curriculum-aligned activities to support experiential learning.

Across the various groups, teachers emphasised the need for professional training. While the majority grasped the philosophy of the HBC, they lacked clarity on classroom implementation. One teacher explained, *"... affirmative, I know what the circular states. The issue for me, however, is how to decode that in the classroom"* (Respondent 4, School Organising Committee, 2024). Educators related these challenges to marginal orientation efforts, despite MoPSE delivering official circulars such as Secretary's Circulars Nos. 4, 9, 10, and 15 of 2024. Though a training workshop was held in Masvingo Province at Victoria High School in 2024, it was compact and only reached a few teachers. Therefore, most educators depend on documents without a guided interpretation.

Efforts by MoPSE to Orient Teachers

Teachers consistently uttered that MoPSE's efforts to orient them were insufficient. They admitted receiving circulars and the *Learning and Assessment Teacher's Guide*; nevertheless, they emphasised a lack of professional development programs for capacitation. Teachers maintained that such documentation provided philosophy but not the practical tools needed. One respondent stated, "*We need capacity-building workshops that clearly speak to the expectations; or else, each school will interpret this circular differently*" (Respondent 1, School Organising Committee, 2024).

Teachers who had partaken in these museum visits stressed that while this curriculum prioritises experiential learning, the MoPSE had not introduced structured courses to support educators. This echoes what Chitamba and Chitamba (2025) defines as the "implementation gap" in Zimbabwe's Heritage-Based curriculum reforms, where teachers are left to interpret policy independently.

Teachers' and Headmasters Perceptions of Museums and Heritage Sites

Teachers generally observed that museums and heritage places are crucial spaces for heritage education. School organising teams emphasised their role in offering tangible, real-world encounters within a historical context. As stated, "*Heritage like Great Zimbabwe provides for students to interrelate with history in a way textbooks cannot*" (Respondent 1, 2024).

Tutors who had escorted learners echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that museums make learning memorable as well as interactive.

"Scholars become more engaged when they see and touch historical artefacts. This makes learning more practical and memorable" (Respondent 2, Teacher, 2024). They also viewed museums as spaces that encourage critical thinking through practical learning experiences. Though, they complained that exhibits were seldom tailored to the curriculum content. One respondent remarked, "*Museums are treasured, but they do need to tailor make their exhibitions to suit curriculum content so that visits are not just regular sightseeing trips*" (Respondent 3, 2024).

Preparation for Visits: Expectations vs. Reality

The organising committees stated that planning museum as well as heritage sites visits requires complex logistical issues which including transport, permissions, and coordination with museum personnel. They often negotiated reduced fares for entrance or sought external support due to limited school funds. Tutors also stated preparing students in advance, but noted the absence of structured preparatory materials.

Teachers usually expected interactive, curriculum-linked experiences from the museum institutions. Instead, they often found exhibits fixed and guides rushed. *"We expected museums institutions to provide structured programs linked to the heritage-based curriculum, but mostly students just walk around looking at displays that have no relation to the classroom content"* (Respondent 4, 2024). Approximately 25% of teachers, however, voiced satisfaction, praising museum personnel who provided comprehensive explanations. These varied responses highlight the need for closer cooperation between schools and museum institutions.

Improvements Needed for Museums as Learning Spaces

Teachers pointed out several areas that need improvement. They called for the need for curriculum-aligned exhibits, age-specific programs, as well as interactive learning tools. They recommended affordable entry fares, transport subsidies, and inclusive admission for students with disabilities. Tutors also emphasised the serious need for well-trained museum personnel and interactive technologies namely augmented reality and virtual tours. *"Scholars often find the traditional museum displays boring; incorporating technology would make the experience more engaging"* (Respondent 5, Headmasters, 2024).

They in addition proposed structured communication amongst museums institutions and schools, including pre-visit guides and post-visit assignments. Such partnership would make heritage-based learning continuous rather than episodic.

Integrating Museums into the Curriculum

Teachers recommended that museums and heritage sites be formally integrated into the national curriculum. They suggested that the MoPSE work together with museum institutions to develop subject-specific learning modules, planned pre-visit assignments, and post-visit activities. *"If the museum visits carried on were part of the curriculum with the standard learning objectives, schools would prioritise them rather than treating them as optional trips"* (Respondent 6, Teacher, 2024).

Tutors supported the use of digital technologies to broaden access. The suggestion was online videos, virtual tours, and live video conferencing with curators. These solutions reduce costs relating to transport, food, and accommodation while addressing crowding issues. *"Most rural schools cannot pay for trips to museums, but online access to exhibitions would bridge that gap"* (Respondent 7, Headmaster, 2024).

Computer-mediated communication tools such as the email, SMS, WhatsApp, chat boards, LinkedIn, as well as voice calls were identified as effective in networking with teachers, learners, and also museum staff. The omnipresence of smartphones provides for opportunities for both synchronous and asynchronous learning. Incorporating these tools enhances communication and democratize access to heritage education.

Summary of Findings

The findings above clearly indicate that while teachers in Masvingo Urban School recognise the potential for museums institutions and heritage sites in supporting the HBC, several restrictions hinder full integration. The teachers have an overall awareness of the curriculum's philosophy however lack training and support for implementation. The MoPSE has disseminated various policy documents but has delivered limited orientation. Museums are valued as complementary spaces for students, but their efficiency is being reduced by logistical challenges, which include the lack of structured programs, and weak alignment with the Heritage Based curriculum content. Teachers recommended curriculum integration, digital access, and stronger collaboration amongst stakeholders to maximise educational benefits. The research findings also revealed that Zimbabwe's secondary school teachers view significant potential in integrating museums institutions and heritage sites into the national curriculum. They, though, emphasised the need for a structured curriculum alignment, advocating for partnership amongst the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and museums to develop subject-specific learning modules. They also suggested the provision of standardised educational materials, for instance worksheets as well as study guides, in an attempt to ensure that museum visits are academically enriching, engaging and recreational.

Educators who accompanied students for museum visits emphasized the need for structured pre-and post-visit activities to enhance the learning outcomes. They also recommended research assignments or tasks before and after visits as well as guided discussions, reports, or projects afterwards to reinforce concepts. Moreover, they stressed the significance of interactive, engaging museum tours led by knowledgeable personnel.

Teachers in their focus group discussions emphasised the need for digital learning tools, including virtual tours and online educational resources, to provide for the access to students who cannot visit museums physically because of varied reasons. They also suggested project-based learning approaches, where students actively engage with museum specialists and conduct field research to deepen their comprehension of heritage studies.

The indicates that while museums and heritage places have great educational potential, their impact is limited due to lack of structured integration into the heritage based school curriculum. Teachers intensely believe that museum visits should be formalised with clear cut learning objectives and well-defined activities that link directly to subjects being offered in schools like history, geography, and science. Furthermore, better coordination between schools and museums, institutions along with improved accessibility through virtual resources, will ensure that students from all diverse backgrounds benefit from these learning spaces.

In order to maximise their role as complementary learning spaces, museum institutions need to adopt innovative teaching methods, which include interactive exhibits, digital archives, and project-based learning. Addressing these logistical barriers, such as transport costs and scheduling challenges, will further encourage schools to utilise museums for their educational excursions. Ultimately, a more strategic and structured approach will position museums and heritage sites as crucial components of Zimbabwe's secondary school education system.

Discussion of Findings

The outcomes of this research highlight the significant role being played by museums and heritage places in complementing Zimbabwe's heritage-based curriculum. The study established that tutors recognise the value of these spaces in providing experiential learning, that fosters critical thinking, and enhancing students' understanding of national identity. This is in line with Chitima (2025), who contends that school visits to museums deepen students' appreciation of their heritage by providing hands-on engagement with artifacts. However, this research also revealed a gap in implementation strategies, with many teachers citing lack of structured learning frameworks that guide these visits. Hooper-Greenhill (2007) emphasises that for museums to serve as efficient educational tools, their exhibitions must be tailor made to curriculum objectives, a need that remains largely unsatisfied in Zimbabwe.

A major obstacle identified in this study is the insufficient orientation of tutors to the HBC. Despite the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education delivering a handful of curriculum materials, teachers hinted that there had been no formal workshops or training sessions in helping them translate the curriculum's philosophical grounding into practical teaching methods. This also reflects on similar findings by Falk and Dierking (2013), who stresses that the successful curriculum implementation requires both clear policy direction as well as capacity-building initiatives for teachers.

Without organized professional staff development, teachers remain uncertain about how to integrate museum visits effectively in their teaching and learning, resulting in inconsistencies in how these schools implement the curriculum.

Furthermore, outcomes of this research showed that tutors who had accompanied students on museum visits generally perceived the experience as beneficial but lacked structured educational engagement. While scholars gained exposure to historical artifacts, the absence of a guided learning framework diminished the academic value of these museum visits. This is consistent with Chitima (2021), who claims that decolonising museum education involves aligning their exhibitions with school curricula and incorporating interactive learning techniques.

Teachers in this study stated that museum visits often turned into passive sightseeing experiences rather than well-structured learning opportunities that are aimed at enhancing students' analytical and critical thinking skills.

Another significant issue raised by respondents was the issue of logistical and financial constraints that hinder frequent museum and heritage visits. School committees reported challenges in securing transportation and funding, which limited student access to heritage sites despite their recognised educational value. Achille and Fiorillo (2022) notes that effective heritage education requires a collaborative approach between schools, museums, and policymakers to ensure that resources are allocated for meaningful student engagement. Tutors in this study suggested that the MoPSE should introduce subsidised programs or partnerships with these museums to in order to facilitate more frequent visits and provide educational materials that align with the HBC.

This study confirms that while teachers really appreciate the role of museums and heritage sites in enhancing heritage education, several barriers hinder their full integration into Zimbabwe's heritage-based curriculum. The lack of teacher capacitation, financial constraints, and unstructured museum learning experiences contribute to the underutilization of these spaces. Drawing on the literature consulted for this study, it is evident that for museums to function as effective complementary learning spaces, there is a need for curriculum-aligned exhibitions, teacher capacity-building programmes, as well as increased governmental support. Addressing these challenges would definitely enhance the educational value of museum institutions, ensuring that the HBC achieves its goal of fostering national identity, critical thinking, as well as innovative learning approaches and provision of goods and services.

Conclusions

This study has established that museums and heritage places significantly contribute to the Zimbabwean secondary school curriculum through providing an experiential learning experience that improves students' comprehension of cultural heritage. Teachers appreciate the potential of these sites; nonetheless, they are confronted by various limitations in their utilisation stemming from the lack of training, funding, as well as the absence of an organised educational program from the museums.

This research highlights that while the MoPSE has adopted the heritage-based curriculum, the teachers are still not well-equipped for its implementation due to a lack of capacity-building initiatives emanating from the education sector. The lack of workshops and professional development initiatives has resulted in none uniformity in the ways that schools integrate museum visits into their new curriculum.

In the absence of well-structured support, the potential of museums as complementary learning spaces remains largely untapped. Additionally, the study stresses the need for greater cooperation amongst museums and schools to create interactive, curriculum-driven programmes that foster critical thinking and profound reflection on heritage artifacts. Financial and logistical constraints are also significant deterrents to regular museum visits, thus requiring government and corporate sponsorship to subsidise these heritage education-related efforts.

Therefore, for the heritage-based curriculum in the Zimbabwe context to be effectively rolled out, MoPSE, museums and tutors must join forces towards creating a conducive environment for heritage-based education. Surmounting these challenges presented in this study through capacity building, increased financial support, as well as innovative learning approaches may guarantee that Zimbabwean learners study their history and live it meaningfully. Through greater incorporation of museums and heritage sites into the school system, Zimbabwe can potentially raise a generation of students with a strong attachment to their cultural heritage, along with the critical thinking that is needed for national development.

Recommendations

From the results of this research, a list of recommendations is given to improve the incorporation of museums and heritage sites in the implementation of Zimbabwe's heritage-based curriculum.

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) ought to establish organised training programs for educators in order to capacitate them with comprehensive knowledge regarding the aims as well as implementation procedures regarding the HBC. Falk and Dierking (2013) posit that the success of a curriculum relies on the readiness of its educators. The staff development, workshops, and seminars should be organised to prepare instructors with the required competencies essential to enhance the learning benefits derived from museum excursions.

Secondly, cooperation between museums and educational organisations is necessary to create systematic and curriculum-based educational programs. Chitima (2021) thinks that the decolonisation of museum education involves creating exhibitions that are aligned with school curricula, alongside the adoption of interactive learning methodologies. Museums ought to collaborate with educators in designing led learning experiences that surpass observation, such that the learners get to engage actively with historical objects and participate in critical thinking exercises.

Thirdly, funds should be secured from Government to schools to enable constant visits to the museum by the students. MoPSE needs to implement subsidy schemes or consider collaborations with cultural institutions and business sponsors to grant schools affordable entry to museums. According to Achille and Fiorillo (2022), sustainable cultural heritage education needs resource mobilisation and collaboration among stakeholders. Additionally, schools should consider fundraising activities to fund cultural heritage learning endeavours.

In addition, museum visits need to be better planned by the school administration. Committees that organise schools need to be provided with administrative support to enable them to plan school visits with ease through engaging ancillary staff. This includes arranging transport, negotiating for reductions in admission charges, and developing pre-visit and post-visit learning resources to enable such visits to be more effective. As Hooper-Greenhill (2007) emphasises, experiential learning works best if there are formal frameworks to guide students through the learning experience.

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