



# The Paradox of Administrators in Managing the Implementation of the Heritage-Based Curriculum in Early Childhood Development Settings in Zvishavane District

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**Abstract:** *This study explores the paradox of School Heads in managing the implementation of the Heritage-Based Curriculum in Early Childhood Development (ECD) settings in Zvishavane District, Zimbabwe. The Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) emphasises integrating local cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge and community traditions into early learning to foster identity, values and holistic development. Using a qualitative research approach and a case study design, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with five School Heads, ten Teachers-in-Charge (T-I-Cs) completed questionnaires and classroom observations were done in five schools in the target district. The findings indicate that school administrators face challenges including inadequate resources, limited training in heritage-focused pedagogy, balancing administrative and teaching responsibilities and insufficient policy support. The study recommends targeted professional development for school administrators, enhanced resource allocation and strengthened policy frameworks to support effective strategies to manage the implementation of the HBC in ECD environments. The research contributes to understanding the contextual realities of heritage-informed early childhood development programmes in Zvishavane and Zimbabwe at large and offers practical recommendations for sustainable HBC implementation in ECD environments.*

**Keywords:** *Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC), Early Childhood Development (ECD), Administrators, Curriculum Implementation, Managing Curriculum Implementation.*

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## 1. Introduction

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a critical foundation for lifelong learning, equipping children with cognitive, social, physical and emotional skills that underpin future academic success. In Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) adopted the Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC),

integrating local cultural values, and indigenous knowledge and community traditions into early learning. HBC aims at preserving cultural heritage while fostering holistic development among young learners (Chitamba & Chitamba, 2025). ECD centres are therefore expected to serve as platforms where children learn about their cultural identity through storytelling, traditional songs, games and community-based learning activities. School administrators, especially School Heads and T-I-Cs are

central to the implementation of the HBC, as they lead the managerial and administrative responsibilities, coordinate teachers and ensure adherence to national policies. However, the practical application of this curriculum poses a unique paradox of school administrators. Limited resources, lack of formal training in heritage pedagogy and administrative workload can hinder the effective implementation of culturally responsive activities creating a paradox for administrators (Mwaruta, Muchandiona & Machiridza, 2025). Understanding this paradox is essential to developing targeted strategies that enhance leadership, resource management and teaching practices in ECD settings across Zimbabwe.

The global landscape of ECD is increasingly emphasizing the adoption of education curricula that are culturally responsive, preserve heritage and support the formation of identity in young learners (Chimbi & Jita 2023; Masika, 2020; Makunja, 2016). Muchandiona, Mwaruta and Chiromo (2025) agree that integrating local culture, community traditions and indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) into early learning environments is central for foundational education which promotes holistic child development. In high-income countries, the inclusion of cultural narratives and local histories enhances learner engagement, creativity, innovation and social cohesion, while fostering a sense of belonging and identity among children (Kangas, 2021; Flear, 2020). This pedagogical orientation contrasts with traditional, universalised curricula by prioritising the child's cultural context, thus requiring school leaders to adopt approaches that extend beyond conventional administrative responsibilities. In such environments, effective leadership demands balancing the promotion of pedagogical innovation with administrative oversight, ensuring that teachers are supported to implement culturally relevant content while managing organisational resources and adhering to educational standards (Mwaruta, et al 2025; OECD, 2020). Leadership under these models often reflects transformational qualities, motivating educators to embrace the curriculum's cultural mission and facilitating a shared commitment to heritage-informed pedagogy.

Across Africa, the push for heritage-informed curricula is shaped by the broader objective of decolonising education and fostering indigenous national identity. This approach seeks to replace colonial-era knowledge frameworks with locally relevant and sustainable content. However, the operationalisation of heritage-based education is frequently faced with a number of structural and resource-related barriers (Chimbi & Jita, 2023). Evidence from Kenya, South Africa, Botswana and Malawi indicates that school leaders face chronic shortages of teaching materials, limited professional training tailored to heritage pedagogy and high administrative workloads that reduce their

capacity to oversee curriculum implementation effectively (Muchandiona & Manyumwa, 2024; Mbugua, 2022; Phiri, 2021). Equity disparities exacerbate these difficulties, particularly in rural and peri-urban schools, where inadequate infrastructure, scarce learning resources and the absence of continuous professional development constrain the delivery of culturally responsive practices. Within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique and Namibia have actively promoted the integration of IKS into early childhood education. Regional research highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by school administrators who are required to simultaneously ensure curriculum compliance, supervise teachers and engage with local communities, often in the absence of clear policy guidance specific to the ECD sector (Naidoo, 2021; Banda, 2020). These systemic limitations result in inconsistencies in the implementation of HBC across different geographic and socio-economic contexts.

In Zvishavane District in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe, the HBC has been explicitly developed to embed cultural values, oral traditions and local knowledge in early learning experiences (Muchandiona et al, 2025; Mugabe, 2021; Chireshe, 2020). HBC represents a deliberate national strategy to safeguard cultural continuity from the earliest stages of formal education. Nevertheless, school administrators encounter multiple barriers that constrain effective management of the implementation of the HBC in ECD environments. The dual demands of administration and teaching duties for T-I-Cs and some School heads impose additional strain, diverting attention from critical pedagogical oversight and quality assurance. Policy gaps, including limited guidance and insufficient professional development opportunities, further exacerbate these management challenges, leaving school administrators without the necessary institutional support to implement the HBC effectively. As Moyo (2022) emphasises, these constraints are particularly pronounced in rural areas such as Zvishavane, where infrastructural and logistical limitations heighten pressures on school administrators. The cumulative effect of these factors creates a paradox in managing HBC in ECD environments.

Schools in the Zvishavane District grapple with the implementation of Heritage Based Curriculum (HBC), an educational approach that integrates local cultural knowledge, values, traditions and community experiences into teaching and learning in order to promote identity formation and holistic child development. Within the Zimbabwean education system, the Heritage Based Curriculum seeks to reconnect learners with their cultural roots while developing competencies, skills and values that are relevant to national development. However, school heads who are responsible for leadership, supervision and

resource allocation often struggle to effectively support the implementation of this curriculum due to inadequate training, negative attitudes, limited financial resources, pressures of globalisation and resistance to culturally responsive pedagogies. Although the Heritage Based Curriculum promises to promote decolonised education in Zimbabwe by centering indigenous knowledge systems, administrative challenges such as bureaucratic inertia and the prioritisation of compliance over innovation continue to hinder effective implementation. This paradox is reflected in low curriculum fidelity, teacher demotivation and sub optimal learning outcomes for children, thereby exacerbating educational inequalities in Zvishavane District. The current study therefore seeks to unpack this paradox and generate insights that can inform educational leadership practices by school administrators, instructional practices by ECD teachers and policy reforms by education policy makers. The study is structured and guided by the main research question and the following sub research questions.

## 1.2 Main research question

- What paradox do school administrators face in managing the implementation of the Heritage Based Curriculum settings in Early Childhood Development in Zvishavane District?

### Sub-research questions

1. What are administrators' knowledge levels regarding the implementation of the HBC in ECD environments?
2. How do administrative knowledge about HBC in ECD environments influence curriculum fidelity and teacher efficacy?
3. Which strategies can be employed to address these paradoxes for the sustainable implementation of HBC in ECD environments?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical framework

The study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which posits that child development occurs within multiple interrelated environmental systems, ranging from immediate microsystems such as family and school, to broader macrosystems including culture, policies, and societal norms (Tudge et al., 2009; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This framework is particularly relevant to understanding the paradox in the management and implementation of the HBC in ECD environments, as

School Heads and T-I-Cs operate at the intersection of these layers, mediating interactions between teachers, learners, parents and the wider community. The theory highlights how environmental factors, such as resource availability, community engagement and policy support, directly influence the effectiveness of curriculum implementation and leadership practices. By situating School Heads and T-I-Cs within these interdependent systems, the study recognises that challenges such as inadequate teaching materials, insufficient professional training, parental perceptions and policy gaps are not isolated issues but are embedded within complex socio-ecological structures that creates a paradox in leadership decisions and educational outcomes.

Complementing the ecological perspective, Transformational Leadership Theory provides an explanatory lens for examining how school administrators can motivate, inspire and guide educators in adopting heritage-responsive practices despite structural constraints (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Transformational leaders focus on intellectual stimulation, individualised support and fostering a shared vision, which is crucial in ECD centres implementing culturally responsive curricula. In the context of Zvishavane District Schools, where resources are limited and systemic support is inconsistent, school administrators, adopting transformational strategies can enhance teacher commitment, encourage innovative classroom practices and strengthen community engagement in heritage-based learning. Integrating these two theoretical perspectives enables a comprehensive understanding of both the environmental pressures and leadership approaches that influence how ECD centres under the HBC are managed. This dual theoretical lens provides a robust framework for analysing the intersection of structural constraints, leadership practices and pedagogical outcomes in Zvishavane District.

### 2.2 Empirical Literature

#### 2.2.1 Overview of Heritage -Based Curriculum (HBC)

The HBC in Zimbabwe is designed to preserve and promote IKS, cultural values and local traditions within the ECD framework. It reflects a national commitment to instilling a strong sense of identity, social cohesion and cultural awareness among young learners (Muchandiona et al, 2025; Mugabe, 2021; Chireshe, 2020). The curriculum integrates oral histories, traditional storytelling, indigenous songs, local art forms and community customs into classroom activities, ensuring that ECD learners engage with their cultural heritage from an early stage of

education. This approach aligns with global trends in culturally responsive education, which emphasise the significance of learners' social and cultural contexts in shaping cognitive, emotional, physical and social development (Kangas, 2021; Fleeer, 2020).

Implementation of the HBC requires school administrators and educators to mediate between traditional educational standards and culturally grounded learning objectives. In practice, this involves selecting and adapting teaching materials that reflect local heritage, designing age-appropriate activities that promote experiential learning and fostering inclusive classroom practices that accommodate diverse learners (Muchandiona, 2025; Moyo, 2022; Ndlovu, 2021). The curriculum is structured to encourage community participation, with parents, elders, and local leaders contributing knowledge and resources, thereby strengthening the connection between schools and the surrounding community. Research indicates that such involvement not only enriches learners' understanding of their cultural environment but also enhances their social skills, empathy and collaborative abilities (Mpofu, 2021; Banda, 2020).

Despite its conceptual strengths, the implementation of HBC faces several practical challenges in Zvishavane District. A number of schools in Zimbabwe, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas, experience shortages of culturally relevant teaching materials, limited professional development opportunities for educators and insufficient infrastructure to support interactive and experiential learning (Moyo, 2022; Mugabe, 2021; Chireshe, 2020). These constraints hinder the consistent application of heritage-based pedagogies and place significant demands on school administrators, who have to manage curriculum compliance while addressing resource gaps and community expectations. Furthermore, policy guidance for implementing the HBC in ECD environments is often fragmented, leaving schools to interpret and adapt the curriculum independently, which result in inconsistencies across different learning centres (Ndlovu, 2021).

The HBC in Zimbabwe represents a deliberate effort to align ECD programmes with national cultural priorities while fostering inclusive, socially responsive learning environments. Its success depends on effective leadership, resource availability, teacher competence and sustained community engagement. Empirical evidence highlights the importance of equipping school administrators with the knowledge, skills and resources needed to operationalise the HBC effectively, ensuring that ECD learners develop both academic competencies and cultural literacy (Mupfiga and Matsi, 2022; Chikasha, 2022). The curriculum therefore serves as both a pedagogical framework and a

social strategy for cultivating culturally grounded, resilient and socially aware learners in Zimbabwe.

### **2.2.2 Challenges encountered by school administrators in the implementation of the HBC in ECD environments**

Globally, school administrators in ECD environments face complex challenges in implementing curricula that are culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate. Studies from Finland, Canada and the United Kingdom indicate that school leaders must balance administrative oversight with supporting teachers to integrate local culture, values and heritage into daily classroom practice (Kangas, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020; Dalli et al., 2017). Leaders contend with resource allocation, staff mentorship and ensuring adherence to national standards, while also navigating the expectations of parents and communities. Research shows that even in well-resourced contexts, school administrators face challenges related to sustaining teacher professional development, providing equitable access to learning materials and fostering inclusive learning environments that respect cultural diversity (Mwaruta et al., 2025; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2019; Penn, 2018). These global insights suggest that curriculum management is never purely administrative but involves ongoing negotiation between pedagogy, resources and cultural responsiveness.

In Africa, challenges faced by school administrators are compounded by historical inequalities, socio-economic disparities, racism and limited educational resources. Research in Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and Malawi demonstrate that school leaders are mandated to manage multiple responsibilities, including supervising teachers, ensuring community participation, and addressing resource shortages while promoting culturally relevant pedagogy (Mbugua, 2022; Phiri, 2021; Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2020). School administrators often lack targeted professional development for heritage-informed curricula, which reduces their capacity to guide teachers in incorporating IKS, oral traditions and local values into classroom practices (Olufemi & Okonkwo, 2019; Chigona & Chetty, 2017). Leaders are also confronted with high administrative workloads, which limits the time available monitoring the implementation of the HBC and offer proper teacher support. The studies indicate that in African contexts, effective leadership requires balancing structural constraints with innovative strategies to integrate heritage content and maintain educational quality.

In Southern Africa, studies from South Africa, Zambia, Namibia, and Botswana highlight specific operational and systemic challenges for school heads managing heritage-

based curricula. Leaders navigate limited teaching materials, insufficient funding and inadequate professional support while overseeing both administration and classroom quality (Naidoo, 2021; Banda, 2020; Maphosa and Shumba, 2019). In South Africa, school heads are tasked with coordinating teacher engagement, community involvement and learner assessment in environments where infrastructure is often underdeveloped and resources are scarce (Mpofu, 2021; Naidoo, 2021). In Zambia and Namibia, the demands of integrating local culture into early learning are heightened by the need to collaborate with parents and community leaders, address teacher absenteeism and manage logistical barriers. Research across Southern Africa indicates that school administrators face persistent pressures to implement heritage-based education while managing structural deficiencies that undermine the effectiveness of curriculum delivery.

In Zimbabwe, primary school heads encounter multiple challenges when managing the implementation of the HBC in ECD environments. Leaders are responsible for supervising teachers, ensuring the use of culturally relevant teaching materials, and engaging communities to reinforce heritage values (Moyo, 2022; Chireshe, 2020; Mugabe, 2021). Research shows that most school heads struggle with insufficient resources, including textbooks, learning aids and classroom equipment, which limits the proper implementation of the curriculum (Chikasha, 2022; Ndlovu, 2021; Matsika, 2020). There is also a widespread lack of formal training in HBC for school heads and teachers, reducing the quality of curriculum delivery and teacher guidance (Mupfiga and Matsi, 2022).

### **2.2.3 How school administrators navigate their responsibilities**

Kurobali (2020) argues that school leaders operate at the intersection of policy reform and cultural preservation, especially where education systems seek to embed local knowledge and IKS into formal instruction. International studies reveal that leadership in ECD contexts involves negotiating curriculum compliance, accountability mechanisms and stakeholder expectations while nurturing culturally meaningful learning experiences (Gauvain, 2021; Epstein, 2021). Scholars such as O'Connor and McCartney (2020) emphasise that effective leaders prioritise collaborative partnerships with families and local institutions to ensure that learners experience a seamless integration of cultural identity and academic development. This global perspective shows that navigating administrative pressures alongside cultural and community directives is central to successful early childhood leadership.

Across the African continent, educational leadership within culturally oriented curricula is shaped by the need to honour IKS while implementing modern school governance demands. Mbugua (2022) notes that African school administrators often serve as cultural mediators who work closely with elders, parents and community leaders to preserve heritage within ECD environments. However, such efforts occur alongside challenges including limited resources, evolving policy frameworks, and community expectations of cultural alignment (Mpofu, 2021). Ochieng (2020) found that in Kenya, school leaders who integrate local traditions, storytelling and community participation in learning environments foster greater acceptance and identity development among learners. At the same time, they must balance bureaucratic reporting requirements and instructional supervision mandated by government authorities. Thus, African literature demonstrates that leadership in culturally responsive ECD settings requires navigating complex social, cultural, and administrative realities simultaneously.

In Southern Africa, school leadership in heritage-centred ECD programmes requires a deliberate balance between national curriculum policies and local cultural values. Research from South Africa shows that school heads who mobilise parents, traditional leaders, and cultural practitioners enhance the authenticity of early learning and strengthen learner cultural competence (Naidoo, 2021). Similarly, Phiri (2021) reports that Malawi's ECD leaders must foster community participation while addressing administrative obligations such as teacher supervision, reporting structures, and performance standards. Scholars like Fler (2020) highlight that success in this region depends on leaders who understand cultural knowledge transmission and can embed local language, rituals, and customs into daily learning routines without neglecting formal pedagogical expectations. Therefore, Southern African literature underscores that leadership in heritage-informed ECD settings requires culturally sensitive decision-making, community collaboration, and adaptive administrative management.

In Zimbabwe, the implementation of the HBC places school heads at the forefront of integrating cultural knowledge systems with formal teaching standards in ECD centres. Ndlovu (2022) notes that Zimbabwean school administrators must interpret national policy directives while also respecting community expectations for cultural continuity and indigenous language promotion. Literature shows that school heads engage cultural custodians, village leaders, and parents to enrich learning experiences, yet they simultaneously confront resource shortages, administrative reporting demands, and teacher capacity gaps (Chiwandire, 2023; Banda, 2021). Moyo and Dube (2021) observe that effective heads organise cultural events, incorporate local

artifacts and oral history, and support teachers to implement heritage-aligned activities while maintaining Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education standards. Zimbabwean evidence highlights that leadership in heritage-based ECD settings is a dynamic process requiring strategic negotiation, community partnerships and culturally grounded instructional support.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Design

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to deeply explore the paradox of administrators in managing the implementation of the HBC within ECD settings in Zvishavane District. Qualitative methodology was selected for its strength in capturing rich, contextual data on subjective experiences, perceptions and processes, ideal for unpacking administrative paradoxes like resistance, lack of knowledge, resource dilemmas and cultural tensions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Qualitative inquiry excels in interpretive depth, revealing 'why' and 'how' administrators navigate HBC amid Zimbabwe's decolonising reforms (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This approach aligns with constructivism, prioritising participants' emic perspectives in ECD contexts shaped by Shona heritage and policy gaps (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Its emergent nature suited Zvishavane's socio-economic realities, including mining influences and scarcity, yielding thick descriptions transferable to similar districts (Bak, 2020).

The research employed a multiple case study design, examining five purposively selected ECD environments in Zvishavane District Primary Schools as bound cases of administrative paradoxes in HBC roll-out (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995). This design facilitates holistic, context-embedded analysis of phenomena like policy-practice disconnects through cross-case synthesis (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Data collection spanned three months (September–November 2025), using triangulated instruments for trustworthiness (Patton, 2015): semi-structured interviews with five School Heads, probing decision-making paradoxes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015); semi-structured questionnaires completed by 10 T-I-Cs, eliciting implementation views via Likert items and open responses (Cohen et al., 2018); and non-participant observations in five ECD environments, capturing HBC practices like heritage activities, 4 sessions per site (one hour each) using a structured protocol (Angrosino, 2007). Interviews (30–45 minutes) were audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed via NVivo following Braun and Clarke (2021, 2006).

Ethical rigour followed research guidelines and Belmont Report principles (1979), prioritising autonomy, non-maleficence, and justice (Resnik, 2018). Informed consent/assent was secured in English/Shona, outlining voluntary participation and withdrawal rights (British Educational Research Association, 2018). Anonymity was maintained; data stored securely with two-year retention before destruction (Saunders et al., 2019). Risks like discussing failures were mitigated via counselling referrals and debriefs (Orb et al., 2001). No coercion via incentives; power dynamics addressed through reflexivity (Berger, 2015). Clearance from Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, ensured cultural sensitivity, with reciprocal dissemination to stakeholders.

#### 3.2 Data presentation and analysis plan

Data were presented and analysed thematically to illuminate emergent patterns, contradictions and contextual meanings. Raw data from semi-structured interviews with five School Heads, semi-structured questionnaires from ten T-I-Cs and non-participant observations across five ECD environments undergo rigorous transcription and familiarisation, with audio recordings verbatim-transcribed in NVivo 14 software for systematic organisation (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2006). Presentation employed a multi-layered structure: descriptive narratives and verbatim excerpts organised by thematic maps, matrices and verbatim quotes to enhance clarity and allow cross-case comparisons (Miles et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). Triangulation across instruments validated patterns like, converging T-I-C questionnaires and observations on resource paradoxes, enhancing credibility, while member-checking via feedback sessions with School Heads ensures respondent validation (Birt et al., 2016; Chiromo, 2009). Reflexivity, documented in an audit trail, addresses researcher bias as a Zimbabwean academic familiar with ECD policy (Berger, 2015). Cross-case synthesis highlighted district-wide paradoxes within the district. Transferability is bolstered by thick contextual vignettes, while dependability is confirmed through peer-debriefing with two education scholars (Patton, 2015). This iterative, transparent process ensures findings robustly address the main research question, paving the way for conclusions and recommendations drawing grounded in empirical paradoxes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Challenges in implementing the HBC

In the general view of the school administrators, managing the implementation of the HBC in Zvishavane District

presents multiple challenges that affect learner development and learning. One School Head highlighted that: *'Implementing the heritage-based curriculum is difficult when there are insufficient teaching materials that reflect local culture and traditions'* (Head Teacher 1). Another Head argued that: *'Teachers often struggle to deliver lessons as intended because the resources required are limited or unavailable'* (Head Teacher 2). These statements indicate that resource inadequacy remains a major obstacle to effective management, particularly in rural schools where access to culturally relevant teaching aids is constrained.

School Administrators also identified lack of formal training as a significant barrier in the implementation of the HBC in ECD environments. One participant explained that: *'Most school leaders and teachers have not received specialised training in heritage-based pedagogy, making it challenging to guide classroom activities effectively'* (Head Teacher 3). School Head 4 remarked that: *'Even when we try to support teachers, our own understanding of the curriculum is limited, which affects the quality of implementation.'* Such responses highlight that professional development gaps do exist and are hindering both administrative oversight and pedagogical guidance in the implementation of the HBC in ECD environment.

Administrative workload was another issue which was reported by all the Schools Heads who were interviewed. School Head 5 argued that: *'Balancing daily administrative duties with the supervision of how ECD teachers are implementing the HBC is too taxing. Office administration leaves us with little or no time to monitor teaching quality, especially this HBC where we still need to learn more about it. We are still trying to understand it and supervising teachings is too demanding as novices in the area (HBC).'* School Head 2 seconded that: *'The dual role of managing school operations while ensuring curriculum fidelity is overwhelming and affects our ability to provide consistent support to teachers.'* These comments demonstrate that the combined responsibilities of administration and pedagogy create time constraints that compromise effective management of curriculum implementation.

Policy and structural constraints also emerged as other challenges faced in the target district. School Head 1 indicated that: *'There is limited guidance from the ministry on how to implement heritage-based practices, so each school develops its own approach.'* School Head 2 added that: *'Without clear policies or support frameworks, some practices are inconsistently applied, which affects inclusivity and learning outcomes.'* These statements indicate that weak policy frameworks and inadequate professional support that exacerbate policy-

implementation gaps, particularly in under-resourced areas, as confirmed findings by Mugabe (2021) and Chireshe (2020).

The findings indicate that the challenges faced by School Heads are multidimensional, encompassing resource limitations, inadequate professional training, administrative burdens and weak policy frameworks. These findings suggest that the effective implementation of the HBC is constrained by structural and systemic factors rather than individual shortcomings. As noted by all School Heads, the scarcity of culturally relevant teaching materials impedes curriculum fidelity, which aligns with Muchandiona (2025), Muchandiona et al., (2025) and Mugabe (2021), who highlight resource inadequacy as a common barrier in Zimbabwean ECD settings. Similarly, gaps in professional development, reported by School Heads 3 and 5, reflect broader regional trends observed in Southern Africa, where Mbugua (2022) and Naidoo (2021) emphasise that insufficient training undermines curriculum implementation and school leadership effectiveness.

The dual administrative and pedagogical responsibilities described by all the five School Heads resonate with findings by OECD (2020), which note that managing both operational duties and instructional supervision places considerable strain on ECD managers. Finally, policy ambiguities, highlighted by School Heads 1, 3 and 4 illustrate that without clear government guidance or structured support, the translation of curriculum philosophy into classroom practice remains inconsistent, supporting Hornby (2018) and Phiri (2021), who argue that strong policy and institutional backing are essential for sustainable educational outcomes. These interpretations collectively underscore that enhancing school leadership in the implementation of the HBC in ECD environments requires targeted interventions, including resource provision, structured training, workload management and formalised policy guidance to enable effective curriculum delivery and inclusive learning environments.

## **4.2 How School Administrators navigate administrative and community expectations**

Data from the interviews revealed that School Heads frequently balance multiple demands while implementing the HBC in ECD settings. School Heads emphasised that administrative duties, including teacher supervision, record-keeping, management of school programmes and curriculum compliance, often compete with efforts to ensure culturally responsive classroom practices. School Head 5 explained that: *'I spend a lot of time managing schedules and reports, but I also need to ensure that*

*teachers include local stories and songs in their lessons.'* School Head 2 seconds that: *'Community expectations are high; parents and elders want their children to learn about traditions, but I also have to meet government reporting requirements.'* These responses indicate that School Heads are required to simultaneously satisfy institutional, pedagogical and community priorities, often under resource and time constraints.

Observations conducted supported these interview findings. In several schools, School Heads actively coordinated cultural activities while monitoring classroom routines and administrative tasks. For example, during a storytelling session led by community elders, one of the School Heads at a particular school was observed ensuring that lesson objectives were met, materials were prepared and learners were engaged appropriately. This dual focus demonstrates that School Heads are not only curriculum implementers but also mediators between policy requirements, community expectations and classroom realities.

The interpretation of this data shows that the ability of School Heads to manage the implementation of the HBC in ECD settings effectively depends on their capacity to integrate administrative responsibilities with culturally grounded practices. Global research supports this finding, suggesting that educational leaders in heritage-focused programmes must balance organisational management with pedagogical innovation to ensure meaningful learning outcomes (OECD, 2020; Bass & Riggio, 2028). African studies highlight that headmasters in Kenya, Malawi, Botswana and South Africa negotiate community engagement while fulfilling formal administrative roles, emphasising the dual accountability to both the institution and the local culture (Mbugua, 2022; Naidoo, 2021; Phiri, 2021). In Zvishavane District, these findings underscore that without structured support systems, including professional development, resource provision and policy guidance, School Heads struggle to meet the expectations of all stakeholders while maintaining quality heritage-informed education.

### **4.3 Strategies for enhanced school leadership**

In the interviews, School Heads emphasised the importance of targeted professional development to strengthen leadership and ensure effective implementation of the HBC in ECD settings. Participants highlighted that workshops, mentoring programmes and structured training in HBC teaching are essential. One participant noted: *'Structured workshops in heritage pedagogy improve our understanding of local curriculum content and help us*

*guide teachers more effectively'* (School Head 4). School Head 2 explained that: *'Mentoring from experienced colleagues allows us to model inclusive classroom practices and support teacher development.'* These statements indicate that professional development equips School Heads with the knowledge and skills required to oversee heritage-based programmes, enhance pedagogical oversight and foster culturally responsive teaching.

The need for collaboration with local communities was highlighted as a critical strategy to enrich ECD teaching materials and activities. Several participants stressed that engaging elders, cultural custodians and parents contributes authentic resources and supports meaningful HBC learning. T-I-C 2 and 3 highlighted that: *'Partnering with community elders helps us access stories, songs and local practices that enrich our teaching. It also encourages parents to be involved in their children's learning.'*

Questionnaires confirmed that ECD environments that incorporate community-led storytelling, traditional songs and locally relevant cultural activities displayed higher levels of learner engagement, cooperative play and interaction grounded in local culture. These findings show that community collaboration not only improves the quality of HBC content but also strengthens parental involvement and cultural inclusivity in ECD classrooms.

T-I-Cs also emphasised the role of policy support and systemic backing in ECD environments. Participants reported that clear guidance from educational authorities, formal recognition of heritage-based initiatives and resource allocation are crucial for consistent curriculum implementation. T-I-Cs 1, 4 and 5 wrote that: *'Without clear guidelines and resources from MoPSE and School Development Committee (SDC), ECD departments struggle to maintain the quality of HBC activities'* Observations corroborated that centres with supportive policy frameworks demonstrated better organisation, sufficient teaching materials and structured schedules for cultural and heritage-focused activities.

The interpretation of these findings indicates that effective leadership in the implementation of HBC in ECD environments depends on an integrated approach. Professional development, community collaboration and policy support work synergistically to enable School Heads to monitor the implementation of the HBC, while managing administrative responsibilities. These findings align with global and regional literature emphasising the importance of leadership capacity, participatory approaches and systemic support in educational settings (Mbugua, 2022; Phiri, 2021; OECD, 2020; Bass & Riggio, 2018). In Zvishavane District, the evidence suggests that school administrators require both localised and

institutional support to foster culturally responsive, inclusive and sustainable implementation of the HBC in ECD environments

## **4.4 Discussion of findings**

### **4.4.1 Management challenges faced by school administrators in ECD environments**

The study confirms that school administrators in Zvishavane face multi-dimensional challenges in monitoring the implementation of the HBC in ECD environments. Limited resources, insufficient training and administrative pressures mirror global patterns of ECD leadership challenges, as reported in Finland and Australia (Kangas, 2021; Fler, 2020). Regionally, Southern African studies indicate contextual barriers, including rural isolation, cultural expectations, lack of resources and inadequate policy support (Mbugua, 2022; Naidoo, 2021). These constraints hinder school administrators' ability to ensure that ECD teachers deliver culturally responsive pedagogy consistently, reflecting structural limitations within Zimbabwean ECD centres (Moyo, 2022).

### **4.4.2 Strategies for strengthening school administration**

Findings indicate that strengthening school administration requires integrated approaches combining professional development, positive attitude, multi-stakeholder partnerships and policy support. School administrators who receive targeted training and mentoring demonstrate improved curriculum implementation and teacher support (Muchandiona et al., 2025; OECD, 2020; Bass & Riggio, 2018). In Zvishavane, school administrators emphasised the need for culturally relevant materials, parental and community involvement and formal policy frameworks to support sustainable implementation of the HBC in ECD environments. This aligns with research suggesting that leadership capacity, resource availability and policy alignment are critical to effective management of the implementation of the HBC in ECD classrooms (Mugabe, 2021; Chireshe, 2020).

School administrators are central to promoting social inclusivity in the implementation of the HBC in ECD environments. As noted by Hornby (2018), school administration is critical in creating environments where learners develop social competencies such as empathy, cooperation, self-respect and respect for others. School administrators in this study indicated that their role extends beyond administrative tasks to include modelling inclusive behaviour, mentoring teachers, resource mobilisation, and

community empowerment, and ensuring classroom practices encourage collaboration among learners. Observations revealed that in schools where school administrators were actively engaged in guiding their members of staff, ECD teachers exhibited higher levels of peer interaction and fewer incidents of exclusionary behaviour. These outcomes align with Epstein (2019), who argues that active administration strengthens school-family-community partnerships and fosters inclusivity. In several schools in the district, limited school administrator involvement in ECD programmes resulted in inconsistent inclusivity, demonstrating that administration engagement is a decisive factor in promoting socially inclusive learning environments in primary schools.

Naidoo (2021) highlights that in Southern African, resource scarcity, particularly in rural settings, constrains access to teaching aids, heritage artifacts, and materials essential for inclusive learning. School administrators in the district reported that limited financial support and heavy administrative workloads restricted their capacity to mentor ECD teachers or monitor classroom inclusivity. These constraints are consistent with Mbugua (2022), who notes that African school administrators face systemic challenges that impede effective curriculum implementation. This study also concurs with Kangas 2021's assertion which claims that effective school administration is key in overcoming resource limitations in schools. In Zimbabwe, structural support, policy guidance and community collaboration were noted as necessary in complementing school administration, indicating that systemic factors critically influencing the implementation of HBC in ECD environments.

Community engagement emerged as a key mechanism for enhancing inclusivity within ECD environments, which is central for the implementation of the HBC. As reported by Bass and Riggio (2018), transformational school administration involves mobilising community resources to enrich educational experiences. School administrators collaborated with local leaders, elders and parents to incorporate cultural stories, songs, games and traditions into classroom activities, thereby strengthening ECD learners' cultural knowledge and promote peer interaction. Observations confirmed that centres with high community participation offered richer, and more inclusive learning experiences. Nevertheless, participation varied due to socio-economic barriers, including parents' work obligations and limited transportation access. These findings correspond with Phiri (2021), who observed that rural African ECD programmes often face uneven community involvement. Furthermore, the results challenge assumptions in some global studies that community engagement is automatically achieved through leader-initiated programmes, demonstrating that

contextual barriers have to be addressed to realise effective participation.

Teacher professional development was identified as a critical factor in supporting inclusive practices. As noted by OECD (2020), continuous capacity building equips ECD teachers to be able to implement curriculum objectives effectively. School administrators who are empowered provided mentoring, workshops and coaching, leading to more consistent application of inclusive practices and culturally responsive pedagogy. Observations indicated that schools with structured professional support had teachers confident in managing diverse learning needs and implementing the HBC, while in schools in centres lacking professional development, inclusive practices were inconsistent, and supporting the view that administration alone is insufficient without structured teacher support. These findings align with Kangas (2021) and Chireshe (2020), but they also highlight divergence from research suggesting that teacher motivation alone ensures inclusivity, emphasising that professional development is essential for translating HBC into effective classroom practices.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the successful management of the Heritage Based Curriculum within Early Childhood Development centers is deeply dependent on the synergy between school leadership, community involvement, and structured professional support. Evidence gathered during this research indicates that when school administrators actively bridge the gap between institutional goals and local cultural knowledge, learners benefit from a more inclusive and meaningful educational experience. The integration of indigenous songs, stories, and games not only preserves cultural identity but also serves as a critical pedagogical tool that aligns with the national framework of Education 5.0. However, the study also reveals that socio-economic barriers and geographical isolation continue to hinder the full realization of these objectives, particularly in rural settings.

Professional development emerged as a non-negotiable pillar for effective curriculum implementation. While teacher motivation is an asset, it is clear that without continuous capacity building and mentorship from empowered administrators, inclusive practices remain inconsistent. The findings highlight that school heads who provide workshops and coaching create an environment where facilitators feel confident managing diverse learning needs and implementing heritage informed activities. This

confirms that leadership is not merely about oversight but involves the active creation of a supportive ecosystem that translates policy into classroom reality.

Finally, the research underscores the necessity of moving beyond leader-initiated programs toward genuine community partnerships. The involvement of elders and local resource persons is not just a supplementary activity but a core requirement for a curriculum that claims to be heritage based. While barriers such as transportation and work obligations remain, the development of flexible participation strategies is essential to ensure that all learners have access to a rich, inclusive, and culturally responsive education. In summary, the transformation of Early Childhood Development in Zvishavane and across Zimbabwe requires a holistic approach that integrates leadership development, community collaboration, and robust policy support to overcome contextual challenges.

### 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several strategic interventions are recommended to strengthen the management of the implementation of the HBC:

1. First, targeted professional development programmes for school administrators should be prioritised. Such programmes could include workshops, mentoring and continuous capacity building in heritage-informed pedagogical practices, leadership and classroom supervision.
2. Second, collaboration with local communities should be systematically encouraged. School administrators need to partner with community elders, cultural practitioners, parents and local resource persons to access stories, songs, games and traditional practices that enrich heritage-based learning. Such partnerships not only enhance the curriculum content but also increase parental and community investment in the educational process.
3. Thirdly, policy support and formal recognition of heritage-based initiatives are essential. Education authorities should provide clear guidelines, allocate resources and establish monitoring mechanisms to ensure consistency in curriculum implementation across urban and rural centres. According to OECD (2020), policy frameworks that explicitly support leadership, resource allocation and accountability systems contribute significantly to sustainable educational outcomes. Implementing these recommendations would provide administrators in primary schools with structured guidance, practical resources and community support to address the paradox

identified in the study. Finally, flexible participation strategies need to be developed to address contextual constraints such as economic pressures, geographical isolation and infrastructural limitations. Capacity-building initiatives could incorporate digital training modules, mobile workshops and locally adapted teaching materials. Such interventions would ensure that school administrators can manage inclusive, heritage-informed ECD programmes effectively, even in resource-constrained settings.

These recommendations collectively emphasise the integration of leadership development, community collaboration, policy support and contextual flexibility as foundational strategies for improving HBC in ECD environments in Zvishavane and Zimbabwe at large.

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