

Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework As An Image of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education Recommendations

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Abstract

Zimbabwe needs to transform its curriculum to one that meets local and global relevance. Against this background, this paper's primary concern was to understand the link between the curriculum framework (2015-2022) and some of the recommendations advanced by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education (1999). A systematic review approach guided the analysis and discussion of the source data. This analysis counts on key bibliographic databases: Science Direct, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar through a huge quantity of research papers. This qualitative content analysis was conducted to conceptualize the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education report's recommendations on high school education, as the pillar of the curriculum framework (2015-2022). In addition, continuous assessment was discussed as a pedagogical issue in the context of the curriculum framework (2015-2022). It can be concluded that the existing link between the Presidential Commission on Education and Training recommendations and the curriculum framework (2015-2022) has created the basis for the inclusion of continuous assessment in learning activities in high schools. Based on the conclusions the researchers recommended the need to employ multi-modalities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the new approach in learning activities in high schools.

Keywords: *Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education; Curriculum Framework; Image; Zimbabwe*

INTRODUCTION

In developing countries, attempts to broaden the context of education have been accompanied by curriculum transformations (Matsika, 2012). Such a desire to transform the curriculum has been an upshot of the necessity to include relevant contexts in learning activities in high schools. Thus, in Zimbabwe education forms the mainstay for socio-economic transformation, though the curriculum is largely based on the scientific knowledge systems, representative of alien worldviews (Machingura & Mutemeri, 2004; Ndlovu et al., 2019). This was so, since education policies were grounded in the controversial colonial system of governance that perpetuated the legacies of pyramidal structure and unequal investments along racial lines (Ngwenya, 2020). These discrepancies created gaps, which pushed the Zimbabwean government to adopt curriculum transformations meant to disregard the legacy of the colonial regime (Ngwenya, 2016). These curriculum reforms interrogated the relevance of Western knowledge and values to the Zimbabwean context (Mugwisi, 2017).

In their studies (Gomba, 2018; Makuvaza, 2010; Sibanda & Young, 2020) in their findings postulated the need for the government to come up with the means and ways of transforming the citizens; mindsets towards the policies that were being implemented in education. In this context, the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education was set up with a mandate the re-looking and reflect upon the education system (Kadziya & Ndebele, 2020). This was all done with the view to safeguard the education system's continual significance in the

context of the transforming socio-cultural settings after the realization that the post-colonial education system had been without a noticeable philosophy following the demise of socialism in the mid-80s (Makuvaza, 2007; Uledi & Hove, 2021). This informed the commission's desire to recommend a philosophy that appraises both theory and practice in primary and high education, among others. Amongst the recommendations of interest to this discussion are in chapter 15 'secondary education' (Chigwida & Modiba, 2024). It had the following as one of the terms of reference: 'to review the philosophy, content, and thrust of formal education with the view to prepare students for high-skill careers of the future' (Nziramasanga, 1999). It is against the background that this article was motivated by the need to contribute to the current discourses on continuous assessment through the interrogation of the link between the Presidential Commission Inquiry into Education, and the curriculum framework (2015-2022).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study was grounded in a systematic review approach focusing on key bibliographic databases including Science Direct, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar (Kitchenham et al., 2009). The decision was made with the view to create a review that met the requirements of the issue under investigation (Synder, 2019). Specifically, the search targeted 'assessment*' OR 'continuous assessment*' OR 'formative assessment*' AND 'pedagogy*' OR 'teaching*' OR 'learning*' OR 'curriculum framework (2015-2022) *' OR 'Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education*' OR 'Zimbabwe*' used in the title, abstract, keywords and references.

From 2015 to 2024, a total of 120 English articles, related to curriculum framework (2015 - 2022) were extracted from the targeted bibliographic databases. These identified articles were scrutinized and 35 were removed because of irrelevance in terms of discussed items, and methodology. In addition, 25 articles were further removed since their research questions covered issues that were irrelevant to the concern of this study. Finally, 60 articles were selected to be discussed in detail. The extracted data was analysed according to emerging themes, within the confines of ethical considerations. This selection process is shown in Figure 1.

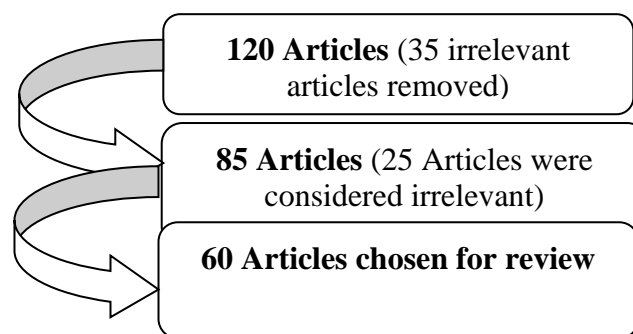


Figure 1: Article selection process

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The social trajectories and realities that surfaced in post-colonial Zimbabwe have influenced a shift from curriculum abstraction to a more contextualised curriculum that spoke to local needs and global germaneness or relevance (Bhebhe, et al., 2014). It is in this context that this section interrogates the following issues concerning the implementation of the curriculum framework (2015-2022).

Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education recommendations as a pillar for the implementation of a curriculum framework (2015- 2022)

Zimbabwe in an attempt to revamp its education system, set up the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education (1999) report's recommendations with the sole mandate to interrogate its relevance (Bhebhe, Bhebhe & Nikisi, 2015). In its findings, the Commission noted that secondary school education was more academically oriented, with less relevance to practice and the world of work (Risiro, 2021). However, this has been difficult to shake off due to the disparities that were shaped by the colonial education system. It is against this background that Chapter 15 of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education stresses the need for secondary school teaching and learning activities to be grounded in a drive that nurtures the link between theory and practice (Moyo, 2024).

In other words, the education system has to equip students with relevant knowledge, skills, and values desired for life and work. Hence, these recommendations advanced the need for a curriculum, which prepares students for their responsibilities in an environment that allows them to explore real-life situations (Mufanechiya & Mufanechiya, 2020). It is such ideas that create a mirror through which the researchers reflect on the philosophy guiding curriculum framework (2015-2022). The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education based on the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education (1999) report's recommendations embarked on a review of the high school curriculum (Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2021).

The commission's findings brought to light that curriculum implementation has been attributed to many factors including funding, obsolete educational facilities, high turnover, and inadequate qualified teachers among others (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2014). Hence, the curriculum framework (2015-2022) framework with emphasis on heritage was adopted with the target of proffering far-reaching solutions to the socioeconomic, cultural, and political challenges that are devilling society (Bhurekeni, 2020). This thought was based on functional curriculum theory which is premised on the belief that students should have a wide pool of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to become fully participating citizens of a given society (Harris & Burn, 2011). In this case, the curriculum framework (2015-2022) was a package of experiences that students require for all-round development (Lopes, 2016).

In other words, it entails specifications about the practice of learning that translate educational ideas and hypotheses testable in practice as experienced by the students (Esau & Mpofu 2017). These experiences comprise knowledge of or skills of something that students are exposed to during their interactions with the environment (Priestley, 2011). In light of this, curriculum is an important element of education in which the overall objectives of education depend largely on the nature of the curriculum. In this context, the curriculum framework (2015-2022) was expected to redress the curriculum imbalances and its deficiencies in producing a basic education product capable of contributing towards society's socioeconomic transformation. Hence, the curriculum framework emphasized the need for access to a variety of knowledge, techniques, ideas, and practices (Ahmadi & Lukman, 2015).

Therefore, the curriculum framework (2015-2022) was premised on enhancing the validity of assessment; integrating content, pedagogy, and assessment; and emphasising the formative function of assessment. This enabled students to be engaged in innovative hands-on

activities so that they could contribute to the provision of solutions to problems in their context (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). It is against this background that this framework embraced a combination of continuous assessment (formative assessment) and summative assessment (high stakes national public examinations) at the end of the cycle (either Ordinary or Advanced Level). **Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education's recommendation on continuous assessment as a pedagogical issue in curriculum framework (2015 - 2022)**

The thrust of the curriculum framework (2015-2022) on assessment has shifted from assessment of learning (summative) to assessment for learning (continuous assessment) (Abejehu, 2016). Thus, formative assessment is now considered an indispensable element of primary and high school education (Bashitialshaaer et al., 2021). In other words, it is used to guarantee the quality of competencies of Ordinary and Advanced Level certificates. In addition, for teachers, this continuous assessment can be used as an investigation tool to find out what their students know and can do, and what preconceptions or gaps they have. Therefore, continuous assessment can be used as a learning approach in depicting the full range of sources and methods that can be used to plan and monitor instruction and establish a suitable learning culture (Kasowe, 2018).

The teaching methods are student-centred and engage the students in their needs and interests. Thus, this entails the application of knowledge, skills, and attitudes adequately in numerous defined real-life contexts as students interact with resources and construct meaning out of them (Njeng'ere, 2017). They include but are not limited to; creating contexts where students think critically, be innovative, solve real-life problems, and experiment with new ideas, projects, and field tours (Alharthi, 2022). The continuous assessment model is, thus, designed to make high school curricula more meaningful and useful to the Zimbabwean context and help solve a myriad of economic and social problems. Thus, the aim of this education does not only include teaching knowledge and knowledge accumulation but also how students learn specific content, apply various skills, adapt to new changes and challenges, and solve problems (Havenga, 2015). In this context, teachers need to infuse creativity and imagination in designing continuous assessment rubrics.

Research-based approaches are important for nurturing communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. These provide students with more comprehensive learning to be able to use competences obtained in school (knowledge, skills, etc.) for problem-solving in real life. It must be noted, however, that research-based learning is greatly dependent on well-structured assessment as regards defining learning tasks and the evaluation of learned content. Competence diagnostics, through which teachers and students can find out to what degree an individual's competence is developed, plays a vital part, which leads to the development of a competitive model as a diagnostic instrument (Upheus, 2010). Evaluation and self-evaluation of performances provide a basis for the individual student's results (portfolio), which can also serve as an incentive for further work.

This uses multiple methods to minimise the weaknesses of individual methods as it monitors activities throughout the entire duration. In addition, it is expected to be flexible, fair, transparent, valid, and reliable and to differentiate. Hence, the adoption of the curriculum framework (2015-2022) brought in continuous assessment as a new dimension in students' evaluation process. This form of assessment provides cumulative information about the student's individual progress in formative and summative assessments as they execute tasks in their different learning areas (Alufohai & Akinlosotu, 2016). Since it is systematic, comprehensive, diagnostic, and cumulative, it provides teachers with evidence of how each student is responding to the demands of the curriculum framework (2015-2022). In this context, teachers specify in advance what should be assessed, the time of assessment, and the type of assessment tools with the view to finding out what they know, understand, and can do (Rana & Zubair, 2019).

It takes into account learning activities such as projects, portfolios, written work, presentations, and many more that require students to perform and demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, and proficiency (Sibanda & Marongwe, 2022). It is, therefore, a mechanism whereby the final grading of the student's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning systematically takes account of all their performances during a given period of schooling (Makuvire et al., 2023). This individualized feedback recognizes students' achievements and enables them to keep track of their progress (Nyamudzodza et al., 2021). Hence, this is a low-stakes assessment instead of a once-off assessment in the form of an examination at the end of a course (Bjælde et al., 2017).

Through, this process, students are groomed to know and practice life skills through set standards, thus generating new relevant knowledge (Israel, 2005). Under this scenario, teachers need appropriate competencies to prepare instruments for formative assessment (Carl, 2017). In other words, this enhances the measurement of students' outcomes and makes it possible for them to obtain direct feedback that is systematic, comprehensive, cumulative, and guidance-oriented in nature (Mahlangu & Makwasha, 2023). Hence, it is a mechanism whereby the final grading of the students methodically takes into account all their performances during a given period of schooling (either Ordinary or Advanced Level). This was targeted at finding out what an Ordinary or Advanced Level student has gained from learning activities in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

CONCLUSION

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education announced reforms, which included a transformation in content partly based on the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education's recommendations. This promoted the transformation of the teaching and learning approach to one that is student-centred. This was seen as being in a position to expose students to activities that enable them to acquire relevant knowledge, skills, and values as they interact with their environment. In addition, students' performance in these activities can be assessed through both the formative and summative assessments. This transformation was grounded in the pillars of the curriculum framework (2015-2022), the inevitable pedagogical issues, and assessment in the context of the adopted framework. It is in this context that this discussion concluded that there exists a link between the curriculum framework (2015-2022) introduced by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the recommendations from the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education. Since students have varying backgrounds, it is recommended that teachers employ multi-modalities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the new approach in learning activities

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