

## Addressing the Skills Gap: A Comparative Analysis of the 2013 and 2023 Curriculum Frameworks for Zambia

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### Abstract

This paper shares results of a comparative analysis of the 2013 and 2023 curriculum frameworks in Zambia, focusing on their effectiveness in addressing the prevailing skills gap that hampers economic growth. The skills gap in Zambia has been identified as a significant barrier to achieving the nation's economic aspirations, with various sectors experiencing a shortage of qualified labor (ZAM, 2023). The analysis highlights the evolution of the curriculum frameworks over the past decade, examining the Rationale and role of philosophy in shaping education in Zambia. Key findings indicate that while the 2013 framework laid the groundwork for technical and vocational education and training (TVET), the 2023 framework introduces more robust mechanisms for stakeholder engagement, emphasizing collaboration between educational institutions and industry players (World Bank, 2022). This study also identifies critical areas where the current curriculum still falls short, particularly in fostering digital skills and addressing the misalignment between training programs and labor market needs (Aspyee, 2023). The paper concludes with recommendations for enhancing curriculum responsiveness to emerging economic trends, thereby equipping Zambian youth with relevant skills to engage meaningfully in the workforce and contribute to sustainable economic development.

**Key words:** *Curriculum, Framework, Philosophy, Skills and Education.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION.

Zambia, like many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, has faced significant challenges in developing an educational system that aligns with the ever-changing demands of the labor market. A critical issue at the heart of Zambia's economic development is the skills gap the disparity between the skills students acquire through formal education and the skills employers seek in the workforce. Over the past decade, Zambia has been making concerted efforts to bridge the skills gap that has long existed within its education system. The skills gap, which refers to the mismatch between the qualifications and competencies possessed by job seekers and those required by employers, has been a significant challenge for the Zambian workforce. This gap has been a longstanding problem, contributing to high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment. To address this, the Zambian government, through the Ministry of Education, has over the years sought to reform its education system (Banda & Mpolomoka, 2023, Chanda, et. al., 2024), with an eye toward increasing employability and aligning educational outcomes with the needs of the economy. This has been reflected in changes to Zambia's Curriculum Frameworks the guiding documents for the country's educational content and approach. The two pivotal frameworks that mark significant points in Zambia's educational evolution are the 2013 Curriculum Framework and the 2023 Curriculum Framework.

### 2. THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN SHAPING EDUCATION IN ZAMBIA.

Philosophy plays a crucial role in shaping the education system in Zambia, influencing curriculum development, teaching practices, and educational policies. The significance of philosophy in this context can be explored through several key dimensions.

Philosophy provides foundational principles that guide the Zambian education system, emphasizing the importance of holistic development. Influenced by philosophers like Aristotle, the Zambian educational framework seeks to cultivate not only intellectual capabilities but also ethical values and social responsibility. Aristotle's belief that education is central to achieving a fulfilled life resonates within the Zambian context, where educators are encouraged to infuse their teaching with a clear philosophy of life that promotes human

flourishing (Mufulira College of Education, 2015; Banda, et. al., 2023).

The philosophical orientation of education directly affects curriculum design and structure in Zambia. Various educational philosophies such as essentialism, progressivism, and constructivism inform decisions about what subjects to include and how they should be taught. For instance, a curriculum influenced by progressive philosophy may prioritize experiential learning and critical thinking skills (Ogwara et al., 2013). This approach is vital for preparing students to engage meaningfully with their communities and address contemporary challenges. Additionally, Philosophy plays a significant role in embedding societal values into the curriculum. In Zambia, there is a strong emphasis on promoting cultural awareness, national pride, and ethical behavior through education. This reflects a philosophical commitment to fostering civic engagement and preparing students to contribute positively to their communities (Field, 2005; Mainde, et. al., 2021; Mainde, et. al., 2022). The integration of these values helps create a sense of identity and belonging among students.

Continuous Reflection and Adaptation is another aspect of significance on the role philosophy has played in shaping education in Zambia. This can be noticed in the dynamic nature of how philosophy encourages continuous reflection on educational practices and policies. As societal needs evolve, philosophical inquiry allows educators and policymakers to reassess educational goals and adapt the curriculum accordingly. This adaptability is essential for addressing contemporary challenges in education and ensuring that it remains relevant (Burnside, 2016; Mpolomoka, 2024). For example, the introduction of comprehensive sex education in response to public health concerns can be seen as a philosophical shift towards prioritizing student well-being.

The impact of historical philosophers such as Plato also shapes the Zambian educational landscape. Plato's emphasis on the pursuit of truth and knowledge informs evaluation systems within the Zambian curriculum, encouraging critical analysis rather than rote memorization (Academia.edu, 2024). His ideas highlight the importance of education as a means to escape ignorance and develop informed citizens.

As of above, it can be deduced that philosophy is integral to shaping education in Zambia by guiding educational principles, influencing curriculum design, integrating societal values, and promoting continuous improvement. By grounding educational practices in philosophical thought, Zambia can create a more coherent and responsive educational system that effectively meets the needs of its learners and society. The ongoing dialogue between philosophy and education ensures that Zambian students are not only equipped with knowledge but also with the ethical frameworks necessary for contributing positively to their communities.

### **3. PHILOSOPHICAL RATIONALE BEHIND THE 2013 CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK**

The 2013 Curriculum Framework was introduced with the intention of reforming Zambia's education system, addressing the significant weaknesses in the previous curriculum. The framework was rooted in a philosophy that sought to improve the quality of education by focusing on fundamental academic skills and the development of a holistic student who could contribute meaningfully to society. To realize its focus the curriculum was guided by philosophical reasoning which included the following

#### **3.1 Humanism and Holistic Education**

At the core of the 2013, curriculum's philosophical rationale was humanism, which emphasizes the development of the whole individual. Humanism in education focuses on nurturing a well-rounded individual who can contribute to society in various dimensions intellectually, socially, and emotionally. This is reflected in the curriculum's emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy, which are considered essential for the development of further academic abilities. By focusing on these fundamental skills, the curriculum sought to provide all students, regardless of their background, with the essential tools they would need to succeed in education and in life.

#### **3.2 Lifelong Learning and Empowerment**

The 2013 curriculum also embraced the concept of lifelong learning, which posits that education should not merely prepare individuals for formal employment but should encourage the continuous development of skills throughout life. This was reflected in the curriculum's focus on the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills, which are crucial for adapting to a constantly changing world. By fostering these skills, the 2013 curriculum sought to empower students to become lifelong learners capable of navigating various challenges in the workforce and society.

#### **3.3. Inclusivity and Equality**

The 2013 curriculum also had an inclusive and egalitarian philosophy. It aimed to provide equal educational

opportunities to all students, irrespective of gender, disability, or socioeconomic background. This was seen in the curriculum's intent to provide education to a wider array of learners, including those in rural areas and marginalized communities. Through its emphasis on basic education and the development of foundational skills, the 2013 framework aimed to bridge the educational divide and enable all students to access opportunities in the labor market.

#### **4. KEY FEATURES OF THE 2013 CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK**

**Focus on Basic Literacy and Numeracy:** The 2013 curriculum aimed to strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy, ensuring that students developed the basic skills required for further academic study and daily life. These basic skills were deemed crucial for bridging the skills gap in Zambia, as poor literacy and numeracy rates have long been recognized as major barriers to employability.

**Introduction of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET):** One of the hallmark features of the 2013 curriculum was the inclusion of TVET elements. The curriculum aimed to provide students with practical, hands-on skills alongside traditional academic subjects. The hope was to allow students to acquire skills that were directly relevant to the job market, especially in fields like agriculture, manufacturing, and construction.

**Emphasis on Soft Skills:** The curriculum also sought to enhance the development of soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, and teamwork. These skills are crucial in the workplace, and their inclusion aimed to produce more well-rounded graduates capable of thriving in collaborative, modern work environments.

#### **5. PHILOSOPHICAL RATIONALE BEHIND THE 2023 CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK**

The 2023 Curriculum Framework was developed in response to the changing demands of the labor market and the realization that the Zambian education system needed to be more responsive to the rapid technological, economic, and social changes occurring globally. It represents a shift toward more practical, vocational, and industry-relevant education, which is designed to equip students with the skills necessary to thrive in a competitive and technology-driven world.

##### **5.1 Pragmatism and Employability**

The philosophy of pragmatism underpins the 2023 curriculum. This philosophy emphasizes the need for education to be practical, relevant and focused on real-world problem solving. This philosophical orientation is reflected in the curriculum's focus on technical and vocational education and training (TVET), industry-specific skills, and the integration of entrepreneurship and digital literacy. By aligning education with the needs of the labor market, the 2023 framework seeks to prepare students for immediate employment or self-employment upon graduation.

In addition, the curriculum is particularly concerned with employability and economic development. It recognizes that in order for Zambia to develop economically, the education system must train a workforce with the technical skills that are in demand across various sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, technology, and energy. This is a shift from the more theoretical focus of the 2013 curriculum, which, while important for academic development, did not sufficiently prepare students for direct entry into the workforce.

##### **5.2 Constructivism and Active Learning**

Another important philosophical element of the 2023 curriculum is constructivism, which emphasizes student-centered and active learning. Constructivist approaches to education argue that students learn best when they actively engage with the content, work collaboratively with others, and apply what they have learned in real-world scenarios. The 2023 framework encourages project-based learning, internships, and hands-on activities that promote deep learning and problem solving. These strategies allow students to construct knowledge through direct experience, facilitating a more engaged and practical form of education.

##### **5.3 Lifelong Learning and Continuous Adaptation**

Like the 2013 curriculum, the 2023 framework also emphasizes lifelong learning, but with a more pronounced focus on adaptability to technological changes. The rapid pace of digital transformation and globalization means that the skills required in the job market are constantly evolving. The 2023 curriculum's integration of digital literacy, critical thinking, and creative problem solving aims to equip students with the intellectual tools necessary to continuously adapt to these changes throughout their careers. This philosophy of continuous adaptation aligns well with the demands of the modern, rapidly changing world of work.

#### **5.4 Equity and Social Responsibility**

In addition to focusing on economic outcomes, the 2023 curriculum maintains a commitment to social equity and responsibility. It recognizes that for Zambia to achieve sustainable development, education must serve the needs of all communities, including marginalized and rural populations. While the focus has shifted to employability, the curriculum still promotes inclusive education, aiming to provide opportunities for all students, regardless of their background, to succeed in the modern workforce.

### **6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS IN THE 2013 AND 2023 CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS**

The evolution of educational frameworks reflects changing societal needs, pedagogical theories, and philosophical underpinnings. The 2013 Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (ZECF) and the 2023 ZECF present distinct philosophical ideas that guide educational practices in Zambia. This analysis explores the foundational philosophies, structural changes, and curricular emphases of both frameworks.

The 2013 framework was primarily grounded in Outcome-Based Education (OBE), which emphasizes achieving specific learning outcomes. This approach aimed to nurture holistic development by focusing on knowledge acquisition, skills, and values necessary for self-reliance and socio-economic emancipation (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2013). The curriculum sought to provide a balanced education that integrated academic and vocational pathways, catering to diverse learner needs.

In contrast, the 2023 framework shifts towards a Competence-Based Education (CBE) model. This transition reflects an alignment with global educational trends and a response to identified gaps in the previous curriculum. The CBE approach emphasizes the development of competencies that are relevant to real-world applications, fostering critical thinking, problem solving, and adaptability among learners (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2023). It integrates emerging issues such as climate change, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship into the curriculum, thereby promoting a more holistic educational experience. It is worth noting that both the 2013 and 2023 curriculum frameworks represent important stages in Zambia's efforts to address the skills gap and improve the education system. Additionally, the 2013 and 2023 curriculum frameworks share certain philosophical principles, such as a focus on holistic education and lifelong learning, but they diverge in their emphasis and practical applications.

In terms of philosophical principles, the 2013 curriculum, it was grounded in humanistic principles, aiming to develop well-rounded individuals capable of lifelong learning. However, it struggled with aligning educational outcomes with the practical needs of the labor market. The 2023 curriculum, by contrast, is driven by a pragmatic and constructivist philosophy, focusing on equipping students with the practical, industry-relevant skills required in today's job market. The success of the 2023 framework will depend on overcoming implementation challenges such as teacher training, infrastructure, and ensuring equal access to educational resources. If effectively implemented, the 2023 curriculum could go a long way in bridging Zambia's skills gap and preparing the next generation for the demands of the modern world.

While both the 2013 and 2023 Zambia Education Curriculum Frameworks (ZECF) aim to improve educational outcomes, each has its shortcomings that affect their effectiveness and implementation.

The shortcomings of the 2013 Curriculum Framework range from overemphasis on Outcomes, integration Challenges, limited Vocational Pathways, inadequate teacher training and assessment limitations. The focus on Outcome-Based Education (OBE) often led to a narrow interpretation of success, where teaching was primarily aimed at achieving specific learning outcomes rather than fostering critical thinking and creativity (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2013). This resulted in rote learning and a lack of deeper understanding among students.

The integration of subjects, while intended to promote interdisciplinary learning, often resulted in confusion and a lack of clarity in subject content. Teachers struggled to effectively deliver integrated lessons, leading to gaps in knowledge and skills (Chanda & Mumba, 2018). Although the curriculum aimed to provide both academic and vocational pathways, the vocational aspect was often underfunded and poorly implemented. Many students did not have access to quality vocational training, limiting their future employment opportunities (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2013). Additionally, teachers were not adequately trained to implement the OBE approach effectively. Many educators lacked the necessary skills and resources to assess student outcomes properly, which hindered effective teaching practices (Mwanza & Munsaka, 2016). The other notable challenge was the assessment methods used were often not aligned with the intended outcomes of the curriculum. Standardized testing did not adequately measure students' competencies or skills, leading to a misalignment between teaching

and assessment (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2013).

Despite some of these challenges being addressed in the 2023 curriculum framework, also faces some possible shortcomings that needs to be aware of. The transition from OBE to a Competence-Based Education (CBE) model has faced significant implementation challenges. Schools often lack the necessary resources and infrastructure to support this new approach effectively (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2023). The restructuring of subjects into distinct disciplines may lead to an overly complex curriculum that overwhelms both students and teachers. This complexity can hinder effective teaching and learning processes (Chanda & Mumba, 2018).

Equity Issues are some of the possible challenges that the 2023 curriculum may face. There are concerns that the emphasis on specialized knowledge may exacerbate inequalities in access to quality education. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may struggle to access specialized programs or resources necessary for success in a competence-based system (Mwanza & Munsaka, 2016).

Teacher Preparedness is another prospective challenge to be faced. Similar to the previous framework, there are ongoing issues with teacher training and preparedness for implementing CBE effectively. Many educators require additional professional development to adapt their teaching methods to this new paradigm (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2023).

While CBE aims for more relevant assessments, there is still a lack of clear guidelines on how competencies will be assessed in practice. This ambiguity can lead to inconsistencies in evaluation across different schools and regions (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2023).

Both the 2013 and 2023 Zambia Education Curriculum Frameworks have notable shortcomings that affect their implementation and overall effectiveness. Addressing these issues is crucial for ensuring that educational reforms lead to meaningful improvements in student learning outcomes and prepare learners for future challenges.

## **7. STRUCTURAL CHANGES**

The 2013 Curriculum Framework was primarily based on Outcome-Based Education (OBE). This approach emphasizes achieving specific learning outcomes, focusing on what learners should know and be able to do by the end of their education. The key philosophical tenets included holistic development, self-motivation and lifelong learning and integration of knowledge and skills

The framework aimed to nurture the holistic development of individuals, promoting not only academic knowledge but also social and emotional skills (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2013). It also sought to produce self-motivated, lifelong learners who are confident and productive individuals capable of adapting to societal changes (Zulu, 2015). Furthermore, the curriculum emphasized integrating knowledge with practical skills to prepare students for real-world challenges, fostering independence and self-reliance (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2013).

However, the 2023 Curriculum Framework shifts towards a Competence-Based Education (CBE) model. This transition reflects a response to the limitations identified in the previous framework and aims to align with global educational trends. Key philosophical aspects focus on competencies, alignment with global Standards and emerging issues integration. The CBE model emphasizes developing competencies that are applicable in real-life situations, fostering critical thinking, problem solving, and adaptability among learners (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2023). In addition, the framework aims to align Zambia's education system with international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union Agenda 2063, promoting a more globally competitive educational environment (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2023). Furthermore, it incorporates contemporary issues such as digital literacy, climate change, and entrepreneurship into the curriculum, reflecting an understanding of the complexities of modern society (Zambia Ministry of Education, 2023).

Table 1.0: Comparatives of the 2013 to the 2023 Curriculum Frameworks, Zambia

Feature	2013 Curriculum Framework	2023 Curriculum Framework
<b>Educational Approach</b>	Outcome-Based Education (OBE)	Competence-Based Education (CBE)
<b>Focus</b>	Holistic development	Competency acquisition
<b>Assessment Methods</b>	Primarily standardized testing	Varied assessments aligned with competencies
<b>Integration of Subjects</b>	Integrated subjects	Distinct subjects with specialized focus
<b>Alignment with Global Trends</b>	Limited	Strong emphasis on global alignment

According to table 1.0 above, the transition from the 2013 to the 2023 Curriculum Frameworks in Zambia marks a significant shift in educational philosophy from an outcome-based focus towards a competence-based model. While the former emphasized holistic development and integration of knowledge with practical skills, the latter prioritizes competency acquisition relevant to real-world applications. This evolution reflects a broader understanding of educational needs in a global context and aims to prepare Zambian learners for future challenges.

The information in the table highlights a significant evolution from the 2013 Curriculum Framework to the 2023 Curriculum Framework, reflecting changes in educational priorities and approaches. In 2013, the curriculum was rooted in Outcome-Based Education (OBE), which focused on achieving specific learning outcomes and holistic development, aiming to nurture well-rounded individuals across intellectual, emotional, social, and physical domains. Assessment methods at the time were primarily based on standardized testing, often emphasizing theoretical knowledge and rote memorization. Subjects were integrated, promoting interdisciplinary learning and connections between different fields. However, the 2013 framework had limited alignment with global trends, suggesting a more localized or traditional approach to education.

In contrast, the 2023 Curriculum Framework has shifted to Competence-Based Education (CBE), emphasizing the acquisition of specific competencies and skills that are directly applicable to real-world challenges and careers. The focus has moved from holistic development to competency acquisition, prioritizing mastery of practical and specialized knowledge. Assessment methods have also evolved, becoming more varied and aligned with competencies, including practical, project-based, and performance-based evaluations. Subjects are now more distinct, with a specialized focus.

## 8. A HUMANIZED REFLECTION ON THE CHALLENGES OF THE 2013 CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

In Zambia, education reforms have been a continuous journey toward solving the skills gap that has long hindered the country's growth and development. The 2013 Curriculum Framework, while revolutionary in its intent, faced several significant challenges that impeded its full implementation and impact. Despite its ambitions to modernize the education system and prepare students for the workforce, there were several areas where the framework did not work as expected. These challenges reveal deep systemic issues that hindered the curriculum's success in achieving its goals, and understanding them requires a closer look at the realities faced by teachers, students, and schools across Zambia.

### 8.1 Teacher Training and Preparedness: The Missing Link

A critical challenge for the 2013 curriculum was the lack of sufficient teacher training. The curriculum introduced new pedagogical approaches, including student-centered learning, project-based activities, and an emphasis on competency-based education. However, many teachers, particularly those in rural areas, were not adequately prepared for this shift. A 2014 report from the Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT) highlighted that the bulk of Zambia's teaching workforce had not received proper training in the new curriculum's methods (ZNUT, 2014). Teachers were expected to move away from traditional lecture-based teaching to fostering skills like critical thinking and problem-solving in their students, but they were often left without the professional development or resources needed to make this transition.

As a result, many teachers fell back on the old teaching methods, relying on rote memorization and lectures. This disconnect between the curriculum's vision and teachers' capabilities meant that students often did not

experience the interactive, practical learning that the curriculum envisioned. Teachers, especially in remote areas, struggled with not just the new teaching techniques but also with the lack of teaching materials, making it difficult for them to engage students in active learning (Chirwa, 2017).

### **8.2 The Resource Gap: A Major Roadblock**

The 2013 curriculum emphasized practical skills and technical education, with a focus on equipping students with competencies that could directly lead to employment. However, this vision was hindered by the lack of resources in schools, particularly in rural and underfunded urban areas. Many schools were ill equipped to implement the curriculum's focus on vocational training and hands-on learning. Workshops, laboratories, and digital equipment needed to provide students with practical exposure were often unavailable (World Bank, 2016).

In rural schools, the situation was even direr. Many lacked the basic infrastructure, such as classrooms, electricity, or access to computers and the internet. Without these essential tools, students could not engage with subjects like information technology, agriculture, or engineering in the way that the curriculum intended. This gap not only affected the quality of education but also deepened the divide between urban and rural areas, leaving rural students with fewer opportunities to gain the skills needed for today's labor market. As a result, while the curriculum aspired to provide holistic education, it inadvertently exposed the disparities within the education system. Urban schools, with better access to resources, were able to implement the curriculum more effectively, while rural schools were often left behind, struggling to deliver even basic education (Kamwendo, 2018).

### **8.3 TVET: Aspirations versus Reality**

The 2013 curriculum aimed to promote Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a core component of the education system. It recognized the need for a skilled workforce capable of supporting Zambia's economic growth. Unfortunately, the delivery of TVET was inconsistent across the country, and many students found that the emphasis on vocational education did not translate into practical, marketable skills. Schools that offered vocational training often lacked the necessary equipment or infrastructure to provide effective training in areas like carpentry, welding, and electronics (Mwanza, 2015).

Even more concerning, many students and parents in Zambia still viewed TVET as a secondary option, a stigma that persisted despite the curriculum's push for practical skills development. This cultural bias against TVET contributed to low enrollment in vocational programs and limited students' exposure to hands-on learning. Teachers, too, struggled with the lack of specialized training in vocational subjects, further hindering the effectiveness of TVET implementation (Zambia Education Sector Analysis, 2019).

### **8.4 Regional Disparities: Uneven Curriculum Delivery**

Zambia's geographical disparities played a significant role in the uneven delivery of the 2013 curriculum. While urban schools in Lusaka, Kitwe, and other major cities had access to better resources and trained educators, many rural schools were faced with overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching materials, and a lack of teacher training. As a result, the curriculum's implementation was uneven, and the quality of education varied drastically from one region to another.

In a 2017 report, the Ministry of Education acknowledged that there were significant gaps in curriculum delivery, particularly in rural areas, due to limited resources and teacher shortages (Ministry of Education, 2017). This unevenness led to inequities in educational outcomes, contributing to a widening gap between students in rural and urban settings. Students in rural areas were less likely to have access to the hands-on, industry-relevant training that the curriculum promised.

### **8.5 Overloaded Curriculum: Too Much to Learn, Not Enough Depth**

While the 2013 curriculum sought to introduce a holistic education model that emphasized both academic knowledge and practical skills, it ended up overloading students and teachers with an excessive number of subjects. This created a situation where the curriculum was too broad to be effective. Teachers were expected to cover a wide array of subjects, leaving little time to delve deeply into key areas of learning. In many cases, this led to shallow learning experiences, where students could only skim the surface of subjects rather than gaining deep knowledge or expertise (Chirwa, 2017).

The overload of content also caused stress for students, as they struggled to keep up with the volume of material, often at the expense of developing critical skills such as problem solving, teamwork, and creativity. The emphasis on learning outcomes rather than competency-based assessments further deepened the problem, as teachers focused more on ensuring that students could pass exams rather than on equipping them with real-world

skills.

The other challenge was over-Emphasis on Theoretical Knowledge and Lack of Focus on Soft Skills. While the 2013 curriculum made strides toward emphasizing practical skills, it retained a significant focus on theoretical knowledge. The shift toward competency-based education was not fully realized, and many students continued to experience an education that was largely theory-driven rather than grounded in practical, real-world experiences. Additionally, the emphasis on soft skills, such as teamwork, communication, and critical thinking, was not consistently integrated into classroom practice. While these skills were included in the curriculum's objectives, the lack of sufficient teacher training and the ongoing reliance on traditional teaching methods meant that they were not always actively taught or assessed in the classroom. This left a gap in the holistic development of students, as the skills needed to thrive in the modern workplace were not always emphasized alongside academic knowledge.

This overemphasis on covering a large amount of content, without the necessary resources or time, resulted in shallow learning experiences for students. Instead of developing mastery in a few key areas, students often moved from subject to subject without gaining a deep understanding of the material. The curriculum's breadth sometimes came at the cost of depth in key subjects, especially in vocational training, where hands-on, practical skills should have been prioritized.

### **8.6 Resistance to Change: Cultural and Societal Barriers**

Despite the promising nature of the 2013 curriculum, there was significant resistance to change from various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and the broader community. Teachers, particularly those who had spent years using the previous curriculum, were hesitant to embrace new teaching methods that emphasized student-centered learning and active engagement (ZNUT, 2014). Many were not convinced that these methods would be effective in the Zambian context, where cultural norms still favored more traditional, authoritarian approaches to teaching.

Moreover, there was a societal bias against vocational training, which was seen by many as a last resort for students who were not academically inclined. This perception was at odds with the curriculum's aim to promote vocational education as a valuable pathway to employment. Parents often preferred that their children pursue academic subjects, leading to a lack of engagement with the curriculum's focus on technical and vocational education.

The 2013 Curriculum Framework was ambitious and well intentioned, with a focus on bridging the skills gap, enhancing employability, and modernizing the education system. However, its implementation faced significant challenges, from insufficient teacher training and inadequate resources to regional disparities and cultural resistance. These challenges meant that, despite its potential, the curriculum's impact was uneven, particularly in rural areas where students struggled the most to benefit from its reforms.

The lessons learned from these challenges have played a crucial role in the development of the 2023 Curriculum Framework, which seeks to build on the strengths of the 2013 curriculum while addressing its shortcomings. As Zambia continues its educational journey, it will need to focus on teacher empowerment, resource allocation, and overcoming societal biases to ensure that its education system equips all students with the skills they need to thrive in the 21st century.

## **9. ADDRESSING THE SKILLS GAP: KEY FEATURES OF THE 2023 CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK ADDRESSING THE 2013 CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK CHALLENGES.**

The 2023 Curriculum Framework introduces several transformative features designed to address the limitations of the 2013 framework and bridge the growing skills gap in education.

In as much as the humanistic and inclusive philosophy of the 2013 curriculum was well intentioned, it faced challenges in implementation. Issues such as insufficient teacher training, inadequate resources, and logistical difficulties in rural areas hindered the widespread realization of these ideals. The curriculum's focus on general education did not always lead to the development of the practical skills needed for direct entry into the workforce. In addition, despite its noble intentions, the 2013 curriculum faced significant implementation challenges. Insufficient teacher training, inadequate resources and logistical difficulties in rural areas hindered its effectiveness (Chirwa, 2017; Ngambi, et. al., 2020; Mainde, et. al., 2021). While the curriculum emphasized general education, it often fell short in equipping students with the practical skills needed for direct workforce entry.

By shifting from Outcome-Based Education (OBE) to Competence-Based Education (CBE), the new framework prioritizes the development of practical, real-world competencies over theoretical knowledge. This change directly tackles the 2013 framework's challenge of producing graduates who, despite achieving holistic development, often lacked the specialized skills required in a rapidly evolving job market. Additionally, the 2023 framework replaces the reliance on standardized testing with varied, competency-aligned assessments, ensuring that students are evaluated on their ability to apply knowledge in diverse contexts. The move from integrated subjects to distinct, specialized disciplines further equips learners with deeper expertise in specific areas, addressing the need for focused skill acquisition. Finally, the strong emphasis on global alignment ensures that the curriculum prepares students to meet international standards and compete in a globalized economy, overcoming the 2013 framework's limited connection to global trends. Together, these key features of the 2023 framework aim to create a more responsive, practical, and globally relevant education system that effectively addresses the challenges of the past. Some of the key solutions of the 2013 curriculum framework are outlined below.

*Emphasis on Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) Across All Levels:* The 2023 curriculum places an even greater emphasis on TVET compared to its predecessor. It integrates TVET into the curriculum from an earlier age, ensuring that students acquire marketable, hands-on skills much earlier in their education. By providing students with vocational training opportunities across a range of industries from construction and engineering to information technology and agriculture, the framework aims to directly address the employment needs of Zambia's fast-growing sectors.

*Introduction of Industry-Specific and Sectoral Skills:* The 2023 curriculum aligns itself closely with Zambia's economic priorities, specifically targeting sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, construction, mining, and information technology. The curriculum introduces more specialized content tailored to the skills needed in these key sectors, ensuring that students are trained for the specific demands of Zambia's labor market.

*Focus on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills:* One of the most significant advancements in the 2023 curriculum is its inclusion of 21st-century skills. These include critical thinking, creativity, digital literacy, problem solving, collaboration, and innovation. The 2023 framework acknowledges that, in the face of rapid technological advancement, simply knowing the content is no longer enough. Students must be equipped with the ability to think critically, adapt to new technologies, and work collaboratively. These skills are essential for navigating the complexities of the modern workforce, especially in a globalized and digitally driven economy.

*Competency-Based Education and Personalized Learning:* The 2023 curriculum moves away from traditional methods of education that emphasize memorization and rote learning. Instead, it adopts a competency-based approach, where student's progress based on their ability to demonstrate specific skills and knowledge. This shift allows for more personalized learning, catering to individual strengths and needs. It also encourages a focus on practical applications, with students learning through real-world projects and problem-solving tasks.

*Digital Integration:* A key feature of the 2023 curriculum is the integration of digital literacy into all aspects of education. In an increasingly digital world, the ability to navigate technology is paramount. The curriculum seeks to ensure that all students, regardless of their future career path, are equipped with the skills to use modern technology effectively. This includes training in digital tools, coding, and understanding how technology can be applied across different sectors.

While the 2023 curriculum represents a significant step forward in addressing Zambia's skills gap, its successful implementation is not without challenges. The country still faces issues such as inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, and limited access to educational resources in rural areas. The integration of technology into the classroom, while essential for 21st-century skills, may also be hindered by the digital divide that exists between urban and rural areas.

Moreover, ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant to the ever-evolving job market requires continuous collaboration between educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and the government. As the world of work continues to change, there is a need for an education system that can adapt quickly and effectively to these changes.

Zambia's shift from the 2013 to the 2023 curriculum framework marks a crucial development in addressing the skills gap that has long plagued the country's education system. The 2023 curriculum's focus on technical

education, industry alignment, and the development of 21st-century skills is a step in the right direction, ensuring that Zambia's future workforce is better equipped to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. However, its success will depend on overcoming significant challenges related to infrastructure, teacher training, and resource availability. If these challenges can be addressed, the 2023 curriculum has the potential to help bridge the skills gap and foster a more skilled, competitive, and resilient workforce in Zambia.

## 10. CONCLUSION

Zambia's transition from the 2013 to the 2023 curriculum framework reflects a concerted effort to bridge the skills gap and align education with labor market demands. The 2023 framework's focus on technical education, industry relevance, and 21st-century skills positions Zambia to cultivate a skilled and competitive workforce. However, overcoming implementation challenges will be critical to realizing its potential and ensuring equitable access to quality education for all Zambian learners.

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