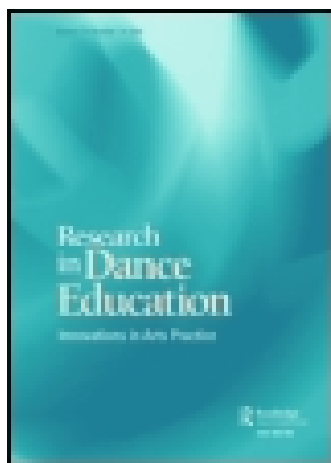


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Traditional African dance education as curriculum reimagination in postcolonial Zimbabwe: a rethink of policy and practice of dance education in the primary schools

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This paper examines the teaching and learning of traditional dance at primary school level in Zimbabwe as a key aspect of postcolonial curriculum reimagination within the broader project of reclaiming a nation's heritage. The paper used the survey design to determine how a cohort of primary school teachers understood traditional dance and how they taught and practiced it in primary schools in Zimbabwe. The paper found that although the teachers had relatively fair knowledge of the most popular dances, they had very low competency levels to demonstrate how the dances were performed and done, thus limiting its practice. The paper thus concluded that the teachers were inadequately prepared to teach traditional dances in the primary school partly because of a general reluctance to utilise indigenous knowledge systems as a basis of socially responsive curriculum practice. It is recommended that there be a policy rethinking that should place greater value on dance education as distinct from Music education as well as an improvement in teacher preparation and methods in order to work towards critical postcolonial dance recovery.

Keywords: traditional dance education; critical postcolonial dance recovery; education policy; Zimbabwe; indigenous knowledge

Introduction

This paper examines the teaching and learning of traditional dance at the primary school level in Zimbabwe as a key aspect of postcolonial curriculum reimagination within the broader project of harnessing dance practice in order to reclaim a nation's heritage. Traditional dance education in Zimbabwe could be considered as a key fund of knowledge within the paradigm of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) that are aimed at challenging dominant Eurocentric meaning-making systems (Banks 2010b; Shizha 2013). The paper thus views the practice of dance education as a fundamental curriculum issue that has implications for socially just pedagogies (Moje 2007) in the postcolonial state. This could help ensure that schools become 'cultural spaces and centres that provide strategies to reclaim African cultural identities to counteract threats of cultural identity loss' (Shizha 2013, 7) occasioned by experiences of colonialism. For extant in traditional dance, are African IKS which could provide alternative narratives through which Africans may contest received dominant narratives. So traditional dance education, when conceived as a 'critical

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postcolonial dance recovery' pedagogy (Banks 2009, 357) may function as a discursive pedagogy in favour of decolonising the African mindset (Wa Thiongo 1986). Decolonising the mindset remains an ongoing project in the African person's assertion of independence. Shizha (2010, 33) reminds us that 'the colonization of African knowledge spaces by Western knowledge [...] is very problematic. African narratives have been marginalized and deemed irrelevant when in actual fact they are the bedrock of African people's essentiality and identity.' Seen in this light, traditional dance practice is political and emancipatory in that it forwards an epistemology of dance that challenges Western styles of dance, being an embodied practice of spiritual and philosophical knowledge that is uniquely African (Banks 2010a, 27). Traditional dance education thus ought to be the starting place for students and teachers to uncover the Afrocentric paradigm that couches events from the African perspective. Its practice within mainstream school curricula would thus reflect an affirmation of African ways of knowing and provide a means of contesting Eurocentric hegemonies that undermine the indigenous peoples' practices, skills, insights and pride (Shizha 2013). This envisioning of traditional dance as a decolonising pedagogy is anchored in the Afrocentric paradigm which is 'a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person' (Asante 1991, 172). Asante (1991, 172) explains that Afrocentricity is a theory which studies 'ideas and events from the standpoint of Africans as the key players rather than victims' thus providing the conceptual means for 'breaking the bonds of Western domination in the mind.' It is imperative that we acknowledge that in Africa, 'there is no pure, often romanticized past to return to' (Wane 2013, 94). Consequently, traditional dance is in itself a highly contentious issue that is characterised by definitional problems, overlaps, fluidity and hybridity (Craighead 2006, 19). Furthermore, traditional African dance is 'not fixed to an essentialist past but [is] subject to continuous play of history, culture and power' (Opondo 2006, 62). As Rani (2012) illustrates, the advent of modernity and migration has transformed traditional African dance resulting in mixing and adaptation. Thus, the paper acknowledges that traditional African dances, contentious as they are, (Rani 2012) could be the bedrock of a decolonizing African pedagogy.

Therefore, if students and teachers studied and performed traditional dances as part of the curriculum, they might interact with the knowledge embodied within the dance structures. Such knowledge would be experienced temporally, spatially and contextually as a basis to contest received dominant narratives. Thus, the paper argues that Zimbabwe's post-independent education system could benefit students and teachers if it introduced a fully fledged curriculum that promotes dance education as a subject on its own and not as an appendage of Music education as is currently the case. Our analysis is predicated on the central tenet of a socially just pedagogy which demands that what is taught in schools should be culturally relevant to and affirming of the students' lived realities (Moje 2007). For curriculum should be both a social reality that schools reflect as well as an underlying reality that reflects human concerns and their relationships in the world (Macdonald 1986, 206). Traditional dance education would therefore constitute an expression of a cultural heritage as well as a countercultural response to colonialism (Gonye 2013, 69). In New Zealand, for example, traditional dance education is considered as fundamental 'to the education of all students' as it constitutes not only a 'significant way of knowing, with a distinctive body of knowledge to be experienced, investigated, valued and shared,' (New Zealand, Ministry of Education 2000, 19) but is also a

'reflection of cultural politics and the political choreography of identities' of peoples and nations (Banks 2013, 28). Similarly, in South Africa, following the end of apartheid in 1994, Dance Education in 'schools' became 'embedded in the Learning Area, Arts and Culture', with clear emphasis on the importance of dance for all school children (Friedman 2009, 133). This necessitated the inclusion of more African dances, alongside ballet and contemporary dance, and viewing traditional African dances in more positive light. In contrast, post-independent Zimbabwe has seemingly been unable to implement such a progressive dance policy. Thus, the paper argues that the introduction of dance as a stand-alone subject in primary school curriculum in Zimbabwe could help rescue the postcolonial curriculum from the tentacles of neocolonialism (Shizha 2013) while also affording dance education practitioners and students opportunities to appreciate dance as an identity marker and formulator.

The paper resituates traditional dance education as essentially political in that, like all dance, it symbolises 'what defines us as a nation, a generation, a gender, a person' (Hanna 1999, 12). Traditional dance involves a political performance of the nation's 'tragic histories, pain, joy and triumphs' through bodily movements (Banks 2013, 28). Such performance, because it is grounded in indigenous knowledge of the people, offers potential for '(re)claiming one's lost culture' (Wane 2013, 94). Arguing for African IKS, Shizha (2013, 7) reminds us that the 'narratives of the nations are told and retold in African histories, literatures, and popular culture.' and that these narratives 'represent the shared experiences that give meaning to the African society.' It is for this reason that traditional dance in Zimbabwe has a diplomatic and political function (Gonye 2012, 14) when performed by cultural ensembles and school children as part of the etiquette of showcasing the nation's heritage to visiting dignitaries and foreign heads of state. This is because traditional dance is embedded in culture and society and thus often reflects a people's beliefs and social values, how the people are organised and how they move in other activities (Hanna 1999, 12). Despite this sociopolitical significance and educational potential, traditional dance education in Zimbabwe remains confined to the margins of the school curriculum. Thus, the potential of traditional dance education as a vehicle for the social reimagining of the nation's past, its transformations and what it aspires to be in the future is immense and merits investigation, particularly as to how it is conceptualised at the curriculum policy level and enacted in practice.

The practice of traditional dance as Asante (2000, 7) points out 'is part of a process that is ongoing and connected in such a way that it is inseparable from other phenomena in society.' In this way, social, religious and work activities in Africa were accompanied by dance and not followed by dance as a leisure activity to be performed when so-called 'real work' is finished, as in the West (Asante 2000). Dance was thus conceived as a carrier of shared meanings (Rani 2012) which could, however, be harnessed in the contemporary school curriculum to provide a social cohesion that defines a people. In the case of Zimbabwe, Muponde (2010, 118) argues that traditional dances and Shona song-dramas 'border on the timeless and mythopoetic' in ways that provide what may, for the postcolonial state, be 'an entrance of the "post" on the imagination as well as on critical practice.' That potential in traditional dance education to provide the formerly colonised nations a vehicle for 'reclaiming their lost culture' (Wane 2013, 94) is echoed by Risner (2010, 113) who reminds us that, 'dance education matters' because, as Banks (2009, 357) argues elsewhere, it 'plays a key role for people to take back ownership of their

expressive cultures and spiritual life.’ The same potential could be drawn on by teachers as an epistemological resource and tool for self-determination (Banks 2009, 357). However, the teaching of traditional dance in Zimbabwe remains subsumed in the Music syllabus of the primary school curriculum and is not a stand-alone subject (Music syllabus 1989, 2; Revised 2009). This is exacerbated by a postcolonial school curriculum that continues to value Western academicism more than indigenous ways of knowing as well as a seeming absence of educational practitioners who can impart these various dance skills to students. Although in Zimbabwe national interest in traditional dance teaching is often temporarily resuscitated in commercially driven annual *Jikinya* dance competitions and *Jerusarema-mbende* festivals where primary schools compete in performing traditional dances, the interest fizzles out soon after the competitions. The result is that there is no sustained formal involvement in the teaching of traditional dances outside the selected few participants. Thus, the curricular value of traditional dance education is lost to the majority of students and teachers. Moreover, since it is not examinable at either primary or secondary school level, teachers and schools are likely to pay fleeting attention to the teaching of dance.

It is against the above backdrop that this paper observes that traditional dance education in Zimbabwe continues to experience a marginalised and undervalued place in the primary school curriculum as a result of, among other factors, the dominance of Western epistemologies that were entrenched by colonialism. Such a scenario is what the proponents of Afrocentric pedagogy reject as a form of ‘cultural invasion’ that is perpetuated by the complicity of the African neo-colonial admirers of Western culture (Asante 2007; Mazama 2001). As Banks (2009, 358) argues, traditional dances had been ‘legislated or controlled by dominant political systems as part of the grand design of the mis-education of colonised people.’ In agreement, Nompula (2011, 370–371) asserts that in South Africa, indigenous African music and culture were perceived as ‘proletarian, evil and unacceptable for worship’ as missionaries and the colonial governments viewed ‘African ways of knowing, their cosmology, their spirituality and their ontological existence as “barbaric,” “backward” and “unscientific.”’ (Shizha 2013, 8). This practice alienated Africans from their music and dance as Moyana (1989, 52) observes as regards the Rhodesian education which distanced ‘the subject matter of school from the home, the culture and the country of the oppressed.’ The advent of independence in Africa had promised the dawn of cultural reaffirmation of those issues that were essentially African, such as dance practices. Yet, it seems little has changed, particularly in Zimbabwe as traditional dance education is undervalued in the postcolonial curriculum, hence the significance of this study.

In Zimbabwe, however, there has been the recognition of the link between cultural reclamation and educational practice in general. For example, the National Cultural Policy Document of Zimbabwe (2007, 5) recognises the importance of reclaiming national culture since ‘Colonialism [had] wanted to create a black man with foreign cultural traditions.’ It foregrounds the promotion of the nation’s cultural heritage as a unifying factor in nation building and expressly states that school ‘curricula should be designed in a manner that enables the arts to occupy a significant part in order to ensure the holistic development of the child’ (National Cultural Policy Document of Zimbabwe 2007, 5). Theoretically, this policy framework has created space for the inclusion of a vibrant dance education in the curriculum.

However, in practice, dance education remains subsumed in Music. As a result, the knowledge embodied in traditional dance is lost to the students. Thus, postapartheid South Africa through the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Grades 10–12: Dance Studies (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education 2011) on the teaching of dance studies provides lessons for post-independence Zimbabwe. CAPS, reaffirms the values of diverse South African IKS as it provides a framework for ‘valu[ing] indigenous knowledge systems: acknowledging the rich history and heritage of this country as important contributors to nurturing the values contained in the Constitution’ (2011, 5). However, the paper hastens to note that mere inclusion of African dance in the curricula of post-independent countries needs to be problematised to show whose group interests inclusion really serves as reminded by Friedman’s (2009) question ‘whose dances are we teaching?’

As noted above, the marginalisation of dance education is occurring at the curriculum policy level in postcolonial Zimbabwe. For example, the primary school Music Syllabus (1989, 2; 2009, 1) makes negligible reference to dance in its aims as follows: to ‘develop leadership qualities as a result of performing as lead singers in choirs, as dance leaders in dance troupes etc.’ The syllabus (1989, 9–10) does list at least forty-eight types of traditional dances that teachers could teach starting from Grade four to seven. However, one may wonder as to the likelihood of all these dances being taught to pupils and whether each of these dances (especially within its own social context) could be accorded enough time for pupils to appreciate and master it. In addition, the syllabus also alludes to the possible teaching approaches that teachers may use to teach dance. The policy implications are that there be an in-depth research into both the policy context of dance education as well as its practice in the primary school. It is in view of this apparent problematic role of dance education that this paper examines both the policy context of dance education in Zimbabwe and primary school teachers’ understandings of and their capabilities in teaching traditional dance. Thus, the main research question that the paper addresses is how is traditional dance education conceptualised and enacted by a cohort of in-service teachers who studied for a Bachelor of Education degree (Primary) at Great Zimbabwe University? The following sub questions are developed:

- What does the education policy perceive as the place of dance in the Zimbabwean primary school curriculum?
- Do primary school teachers in Zimbabwe have requisite knowledges of traditional dances so as to teach the diverse dances in ways that may result in meaningful teaching/learning of dances?

In order to situate the above questions within their context, the paper first discusses the conceptual framework. The second part critically reviews the place of traditional dance education in the primary school curriculum with particular focus on the educational policy framework for dance education in Zimbabwe. The third part describes the research methodology and the fourth presents the findings while the fifth discusses the findings in the context of the international practice in dance education. The paper concludes by discussing the place of traditional dance education in a rapidly globalising world.

Conceptual framework

A postcolonial theoretical framework, hinged on Afrocentric ideas, enables us to engage with the Eurocentric anthropological conceptions of dance that guide both colonial and postcolonial curricula in Zimbabwe. Literature abounds on colonialism and its education systems' deliberate denigration and sidelining of African dance and music to be replaced by what was and still is perceived as the culturally refined Western harmonies and dances (Asante 2000; Falola and Fleming 2012; Wa Thiongo 1993). Conceptions of a backward Africa were informed by social science disciplines that encouraged, as Mlambo (2006, 164) opines, 'the development of a world view in which the superiority of Western culture, institutions and knowledge over the institutions, culture and "knowledges" of other societies was unquestioned.' The imperative for a socially just pedagogy invites an adoption of perspectives and pedagogies that seek to decolonise knowledge, freeing the formerly colonised from the contestable assumption that the West produces and distributes all forms of knowledge (Said 1978). It is Mazama (2001, 387) who clarifies Afrocentric positionality as follows: 'Afrocentricity contends that our main problem as African people is our usually unconscious adoption of the Western worldview and perspective and their attendant conceptual framework.' Therefore, of particular significance are Banks' (2007, 2009) deconstructive views that exhort self-definition through cultural performance and dance. Banks (2013, 31) posits that revitalising traditional dance entails reclaiming indigenous epistemologies and 'asserting indigenous worldviews.' She argues that dance be perceived as 'cultural knowledge' and, as such, to conceive African dance 'as knowledge is a direct challenge to Eurocentric, Western epistemic assumptions that champion empirical, proof-based, objective knowledge' (Banks 2010b, 11). It is therefore possible for the Zimbabwean school to provide the study of formally marginalised Zimbabwean traditional dances as sites of redefinition or self-definition, exercises hitherto forestalled by a national unwillingness to accept such dances as constituting ongoing contemporary cultural identities, not vestiges of an irreclaimable past.

Asante's (2000) explanation of the circumstances of Zimbabwean dance under colonialism enables a conceptualisation of dance as both meaningful content and liberating pedagogy. Zimbabwean traditional dance plays a crucial role in Zimbabwean 'African' cosmology despite attempts by Western writers and colonial authorities to marginalise it (Asante 2000, 3). Such attempts to marginalise the dances were unfortunate, given the pedagogical potential of dance where 'the creative and aesthetic functions of African dance are so intricately and paradigmatically linked with religious and social functions' (Asante 2000, 3). What this means is that the colonial avoidance of such cultural forms entails the non-inclusion of dance in the western-biased curriculum, a factor that denies black Zimbabwean students the opportunity to learn about their country's spiritual and social realities while enjoying the aesthetics of their dances. Banks (2007, 17–18) thesis that 'African dance pedagogy' can be used 'to challenge colonial legacies and decolonize the body from cultural and political oppression' is therefore useful as a lens to interrogate the place and practice of dance education in the Zimbabwean primary school.

Colonial education was something the Europeans thrust upon the Africans and not what the Africans chose for themselves. Colonial education disorientated the colonised student from his or her culture and social worldview (Carnoy 1974; Shizha 2013). Such colonial education, with its bias against African knowledge

systems such as dance, was fed on the Eurocentric worldview that conceived the world in bifurcated terms where European culture was superior to non-European culture. According to Mlambo (2006, 166), ‘Colonial education was, in most cases, education for subservience and subjection rather than for emancipation and empowerment.’ The education system therefore served only the interests of the colonialists, especially European economic and political agenda. That is why Zimbabwean postcolonial educationists, Shizha and Kariwo (2011, 14), exhort that the nation adopts a cultural nationalist stance whereby ‘as Africans, we need to invent ways of rewriting or changing those dominant narratives and deconstruct “White” superiority and the misrepresentation of indigenous people and their cultures.’ Such an observation is a call upon curricularists to develop relevant traditional dance pedagogy as part of the broader project of reclaiming the nation’s heritage and charting its future.

The attitudinal problems Zimbabwe and Africa face regarding traditional dance can be traced to the cultural egotism of colonialism and Christianity. Mlambo (2006, 164) argues that colonialist enlightenment influenced the Europeans to adopt ‘an arrogant self-image and belief not only in the superiority of their institutions and culture but also in the universality of their tenets and beliefs.’ Discussing the unholy alliance between religion, education and colonialism, Mlambo (2006, 165) observes that:

in converting the Africans to Christianity, missionaries, at the same time, helped destroy the African people’s belief systems and world view and, through the schools they set up, imparted Western norms, tastes and standards. The Africans’ belief systems and culture were subjected to relentless attack.

This is why the deconstructivist postcolonial and Afrocentric approaches would be suitable paradigms through which to contest the attitudinal problems Zimbabwe and Africa face regarding traditional dance education and practice.

Traditional dance education as pedagogy in the primary school

In rethinking the place of dance education in the Zimbabwean primary school, the paper is informed by Hong-Joe’s (2002, 46) assertion that ‘dance has the possibility of being seen as a unique area of learning that encompasses all of the traditions, purposes, practices and contexts of dance both past and present as artistic, aesthetic, and cultural education.’ As Sansom (2009, 161) elaborates, ‘dance, as an embodied understanding of ourselves, can connect to a moral and ethical pedagogy that not only honors the life of the child but also makes possible a new way to envisage being human.’ Thus, the critical question that Risner (2009, 1) posits as, ‘What’s worth learning in dance and why?’ challenges us to rethink the pedagogical value of advocating for the increased visibility of traditional dance in the Zimbabwean primary school curriculum. We therefore reimagine, at a conceptual level, what visceral connections students in Zimbabwe could make to their lived experiences as they learn about and participate in traditional dance practices such as *Jerusarema*, *Mhande*, *Mbakumba* and *Isitshikitsha*. Asante (2000) points out that ‘all traditional dances in Zimbabwe acknowledge the ontology of Zimbabwean culture and thus, subscribe to the religious beliefs of the Shona and Ndebele.’ Therefore, it can be seen that Zimbabwean traditional dances embody the worldview of their people which include their religious beliefs, among other facets of their lives. The ability to master and creatively exhibit the existing dance techniques is what Pakes (Pakes

2003, 127) calls original embodied knowledge, a hallmark of a socially responsive dance curriculum.

Asante (2000, 8) classifies Zimbabwean traditional dances into three categories, namely 'ritualistic, commemorative and griotic.' Thus, traditional dances in each of these three contexts were performed to, respectively; 'enforce and affirm the belief system of the society', comment on the 'political and social trends of the times,' and, perform the history of the nation. It therefore appears that traditional dance was not just bodily movement but the expression of meanings as experienced in the lives of the people. Thus, the challenge today is how to translate this knowledge that is embodied in traditional dance into school knowledge that resonates with the lived realities of students and teachers in contemporary Zimbabwe and is amenable to formal assessment. However, the school curriculum as presently constituted seems not to tap on the students' cultural capital (Bourdieu 1990) as it allocates minimal space to traditional dance education. This is particularly true of students who live in rural and farming areas where cultural practices remain fairly strong. This implies that the curriculum in Zimbabwe fails to fulfil that mandate of being a selection from the culture of a society in which it embedded (Lawton 1975).

It seems in Zimbabwe, political will (at the policy level) to promote traditional dance is lacking. Even in the revised Primary School Music Syllabus (2009), dance education continues to play a subordinate role to the elaborate teaching of Music. The objectives stated in the syllabus focus specifically on developing skills such as singing, playing musical pieces, interpretation and transcribing of musical notations, writing musical skills and researching on music among others (2009, 2). Out of the seventeen objectives stated, only one focuses specifically on dance education as follows: 'to design dance sequences or choreography dances from songs taught in class.' This contrasts with policy initiatives in Aotearoa, New Zealand, where dance education has been made a distinct subject in its own right (Sansom 2009). New Zealand, like Zimbabwe, has a colonial past, but the curriculum reform introduced by the state of Aotearoa demonstrates what can be achieved where there is political will. For example, in New Zealand, dance education has become a distinct body of knowledge with its place in the primary school curriculum clearly linked to the overall goals of learning. The 2007 Policy states that:

Dance is expressive movement that has intent, purpose and form. In dance education, students integrate thinking, moving and feeling. They explore and use dance elements, vocabularies, processes and technologies to express personal, group and cultural identities, to convey and interpret artistic ideas and to strengthen social interaction. Students develop literacy in dance as they learn about, and develop skills in, performing, choreographing and responding to a variety of genres from a range of historical and contemporary contexts. (New Zealand, Ministry of Education 2007, 20)

The above citation illustrates the differences in approach between a more proactive New Zealand Ministry that values the aesthetic, cognitive and pedagogic value of dance, in its holistic sense, and a Zimbabwean rhetorical approach that marginalises dance education. It is for this reason that Sansom sees the New Zealand policy as 'an empowering and holistic curriculum underpinned by principles and goals rather than being content driven' (Sansom 2009, 161). It in view of this development that Zimbabwe appears to be failing at the policy level to reframe traditional dance education as having a potential to raise awareness about the heritage of the nation. In the following section, the paper discusses the methodological approach that was used.

Methodology

We followed a descriptive survey in this research where our interest was to describe and interpret the current state of dance education in Zimbabwean primary schools with a view to recommend intervention measures that could benefit dance practice. Our interest was to gather information which would allow us to explain the status and reception of traditional dance in 2014, thirty-four years after independence from Britain following a liberation struggle that was culturally inspired by dance (Gonye 2013). We targeted Zimbabwean primary school teachers, particularly those undertaking an in-service professional upgrading degree course at Great Zimbabwe University in Masvingo province. In-service primary school teachers were targeted because they are already teaching in Zimbabwean primary schools where they are all expected to teach Music, a subject wherein dance is currently subsumed in Zimbabwe.

Purposive and convenience sampling whereby all the nine administrative provinces of Zimbabwe were represented was applied with a 2014 class of ninety Bachelor of Education (primary) (B.Ed) students learning at Great Zimbabwe University. The University was chosen because this is where the researchers work. Identifying students from the various administrative provinces was easy because Great Zimbabwe University, as a state university, has a policy that ensures that student enrolment is nationally representative. Through further purposive sampling, sixty-three respondents were requested to complete a questionnaire while the remainder of twenty-seven were requested to attend focus group meetings in three separate groups of nine members each. A total of fifty-six respondents, however, returned the completed questionnaire.

The questionnaire sought to establish the primary school teachers' knowledge of each of the dances listed in the syllabus and which dances the teachers could demonstrate in class. The focus group discussions were designed to engage the primary school teachers on the issue of the general state of dance studies at primary level, challenges therein as well as the way forward. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for analysis from both questionnaire and focus group. Data from questionnaire were collated so that data reduction and coding of quantifiable responses and analysis of free responses could be made. Based on the frequency tallies, results were presented in figures and statistical tables.

For focus group discussion, mostly qualitative data were recorded (as participants' utterances) from the three groups for comparative analysis. The content analysis method was used to come up with a summarised overview of respondents' assessment of the status and challenges of dance education. An analysis of the responses showing the most recurrent utterances from the three groups was made, and the results are presented in thick descriptions.

Findings and analysis

The findings of this study comprise the data that were gathered through the questionnaires as well as the focus group interviews. The aim was to find the levels of Zimbabwean teachers' knowledges and capabilities in teaching traditional dance education at primary school level. The respondents were asked to mark differently from a given list of forty-eight types of traditional dances (a) all the dances they generally knew, and, (b) all the dances that they could confidently demonstrate to

the class. On the basis of the respondents' responses the most recurring dances, those that they could demonstrate and those they could not demonstrate, were identified. The results are summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 illustrates the fifteen most recurring dances known by the respondents.

Table 1 illustrates the fifteen most popular dances (based on respondents' views) out of the forty-eight that are listed in the national syllabus. The table illustrates the various levels to which recommended traditional dances are known by teachers. The purpose of each dance is briefly explained and the percentage of the respondents is stated alongside.

As can be inferred from the above table, forty out of fifty-six respondents (71.7%) knew the most popular dance (by respondents' views), and therefore one most likely to be taught, while sixteen (28.3%) had no knowledge of the dance.

Table 1. Top 15 dances known and not known by the respondents ($N = 56$).

Type of dance	Original and current purpose of dance	Known		Not known	
		Number	%	Number	%
Mhande	A ritualistic rain-making and hunting dance, now a competition and entertainment dance	40	71.4	16	28.6
Muchongoyo	A war dance, now a competition and political celebration dance	40	71.4	16	28.6
Jerusarema	A courtship dance now performed for political and griotic purposes	32	57.1	24	42.9
Mbakumba	Commemorative and entertainment dance after harvesting. Retains purpose but now embraces politico-cultural functions	27	48.2	29	51.8
Jiti	Commemorative bridal dance. Retains purpose but makes use of modern instruments	27	48.2	29	51.8
Amabhiza	Ritualistic spiritual dance, now celebratory dance, e.g. after harvesting	25	44.6	31	55.4
Isitshikitsha	Commemorative dance performed at weddings/school prize giving ceremonies	22	39.3	34	60.7
Ngororombe	Commemorative dance emphasising skills, retains purpose but performance contexts expanded	20	35.7	36	64.3
Ingquzu	Commemorative dance performed at weddings/school prize giving ceremonies	19	33.9	37	66.1
Chinyambera	Ritualistic hunting dance now for entertainment	15	26.8	41	73.2
Amatshomana	Ritualistic possession dance in ancestral worship, retains purpose but can now be performed in town	15	26.8	41	73.2
Majukwa	Ritual hunting dance, can now be performed for entertainment	15	26.8	41	73.2
Imbube	Commemorative dance performed at weddings/now griotic, associated with nation	14	25	42	75
Zvipunha	Ritual possession dance in honour of female spirits, retains meaning	12	21.4	44	78.6
Sangoma	Ritualistic dance for divination and healing retains purpose	12	21.4	44	78.6

Table 2. Teacher competencies in demonstrating dances by type.

Type of dance	Able to demonstrate		Unable to demonstrate	
	Number	%	Number	%
Mhande	20	35.7	36	64.3
Muchongoyo	18	32.1	38	67.9
Jerusarema	16	28.6	40	71.4
Mbakumba	10	17.9	46	82.1
Jiti	10	17.9	46	82.1
Amabhiza	12	21.4	44	78.6
Isitshikitsha	11	19.6	45	80.5
Ngororombe	7	12.5	49	87.5
Ingquzu	10	17.9	46	82.1
Chinyambera	4	7.1	52	92.9
Amatshomana	5	8.9	51	91.1
Majukwa	5	8.9	51	91.1
Imbube	6	10.7	50	89.3
Zvipunha	12	21.4	44	78.6
Sangoma	4	7.1	52	92.9

Interestingly, *Jerusarema*, a dance which has attained world cultural heritage status, is not known by twenty-four out of fifty-six respondents (42.9%). While this suggests the multicultural condition of the nation, it also underlines the dangers of any arbitrary prescriptive inclusions of dances to be taught. However, of the forty-eight dances provided in the syllabus, six proved to be completely unknown by all the respondents while eight were known by just one respondent each, hence the need for teacher training institutions to address this apparent knowledge deficit among teachers.

Table 2 shows teacher competencies in demonstrating the listed traditional dances by type.

The above table illustrates that the most known dance could only be demonstrated in class by twenty (35.7%) respondents out of fifty-six, meaning that thirty-six (64.3%) out of fifty-six could not demonstrate the dance. Out of the forty-eight listed dances, fifteen could not be taught in a demonstrative way by all fifty-six respondents.

The results show that generally, many respondents have a low knowledge of most of the dances they are expected to teach pupils in the primary schools. This could mean that in our Zimbabwean primary schools, we may have teachers whose knowledge levels regarding traditional dance are lower than those of their students. It therefore becomes difficult for such teachers to ask pupils to identify the various traditional dances, describe or simulate the routine, let alone engage with the social, religious or ritual significances of the identified dances.

The results also show that fewer and fewer respondents can demonstrate the listed dances in class. The numbers of respondents who cannot demonstrate any particular dance are much more than those who can demonstrate dance steps in every case. This could mean that some teachers may not even be able to practically assist the pupils master the dance sequences and moves of the few dances they may know. The implication is that we may end up having pupils who never learn anything useful about the performance of and the contextual significance of the traditional dances from their teachers.

The focus group discussions revealed some important insights into the general state of dance studies at primary school level in Zimbabwe, the challenges therein as well as the way forward. All groups noted that most of the time they teach pupils how to sing, compose and describe traditional music rather than teach the various dances, thus confirming that dance was an appendage of music as indicated in the syllabus. Group members also noted that at upper primary level (Grades 6 and 7), teachers and schools pay more attention to examinable subjects rather than these arts and practical subjects including dance. As one respondent put it:

We would rather concentrate on examinable subjects because to go to secondary school you need to pass examinable subjects such as Maths and English.

Group members noted the lack of textbooks in dance to bolster their lack of personal knowledge, which meant inviting experienced resource persons to provide the necessary teaching expertise. As another respondent commented, dance education was not really afforded enough time. In her view, the hype on traditional dance becomes:

only serious when schools prepare for cluster or zonal competitions. Otherwise, dance is seen as a hobby for social clubs in the schools.

Other issues that were voiced by the groups were that some students were not allowed to participate in traditional dances. This view was summed up by two respondents who remarked as follows:

I teach at a church school where the responsible authority does not allow traditional songs and dances.

I know some of the listed dances in the syllabus, but because of the religious beliefs of the feeder community, the dances are not performed at school.

Discussion: reflections on traditional dance as pedagogy in postcolonial curricula

The emerging trend from the above data is that there is low level of conceptualisation of the value of traditional dance as critical to the postcolonial and Afrocentric project. The lack of policy commitment to the teaching of dance education evident in dance education being an adjunct to the Music subject, which on its own is not examined at the primary and secondary school levels, demonstrates its low status in the Zimbabwean curriculum. This is in contradistinction to the Afrocentric view of reclaiming the nation's heritage and identity through curriculum reimagination which foreground indigenous knowledges, particularly traditional dance. However, such reclamation moves need to be understood in a context of Opondo's (2006, 62) argument that dance as indigenous knowledge does not remain in a fixed, stable site but obtains in spaces fraught with change and power contestations. Thus, emphasis for a knowledge and reclamation of traditional dances should not be a backward gazing to 'authentic' traditional dances but an acknowledgement of traditional African dances in hybrid form and changed contexts (Rani 2012).

Afrocentric dance theorists such as Asante (2000) and Banks (2009) conceive of dance as embodying salutary African values and belief systems. It was these beliefs and values as embodied in traditional dance that were directly challenged through conversion to Christianity. Like everywhere in the colonial world, Christianity denigrated Zimbabwean traditional religion and dance. As Asante (2000) and Mataga (2008, 96) note, missionaries had influenced the colonial administration to ban

Mbende dance (also known as *Jerusarema*), a traditional dance which was later listed on the UNESCO Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity list in 2005. Reasons for banning the dance were the typical Eurocentric conceptualisations of African dance as immoral, ‘lustful’ or ‘lascivious’ (Asante 2000; Gonye 2012; Mataga 2008). Buttressing this colonial epistemological conspiracy, Asante (2000, 4) observes that in colonial Zimbabwe, ‘there was a great reluctance from the viewpoint of explorers, missionaries and colonialists to consider African dance as dance. Numerous European observers saw African dance as “wild” and “exotic,” with little aesthetic value.’ Thus, current attempts to teach traditional dance education in postcolonial Zimbabwe seem to falter on Christian-inspired beliefs that continue to portray traditional dance as heathen practice not fit for the contemporary school. Hence, the imperative for an Afrocentric pedagogy is to disabuse stakeholders in education of the vestiges of colonial orientalism which continue to denigrate everything that is African while parading Western values as universal and moral. This could be done through a pedagogy that challenges ‘deficit thinking and pathological descriptions of the formerly colonized and reconstruct a body of knowledge that carries hope and promotes transformation and social change among the historically oppressed’ (Mazama 2001, 387). Such a pedagogy could be at once liberating and empowering in that it would allow students to draw on their lived experiences either to conform to or subvert the status quo. To begin with, both teachers and students should appreciate that dancing in one or many of their African styles constitutes them as performing their own cultures alongside a plethora of worldly performers. Thus, traditional dance education, as Banks (2013) reminds us, is an embodiment of knowledge which contests Eurocentric views of knowledge and is thus ideally suited to function as a tool within the Afrocentric project of recentring Africa’s contribution to global culture.

Research has shown that students could learn about their own people’s culture, religion, politics and gender through dance and that, through dance, concepts of other curriculum subjects could be taught better (Hanna 1999). In fact, Hanna (1999, 65) observes that ‘teachers can use dance as a unique vehicle for integrating teaching and learning across curricula.’ That is why this paper argues for the possibilities of engaging dance classes as both personally liberating and cognitively empowering in a postcolonial context whose contradictions regarding the contested nature of national culture (Fanon 1963; Wa Thiongo 2009) have not been fully resolved. Despite Zimbabwe’s education system playing a significant role in raising awareness about the need to preserve national heritage, its role in popularising the dances Zimbabwe considers as national heritage seems unfulfilled because of lack of teacher expertise, lack of policy, non-assessment and a pre-service teacher education that fails to apprentice student teachers to master-traditional dance educators as illustrated in this paper’s findings. As the percentage of teachers who can ably demonstrate such dances is very low (35.7% for the most popular dance), it can be inferred that the majority of teachers can hardly engage in meaningful teaching of traditional dances. This is indicative of the problem of depleted cultural capital in as far as indigenous dance knowledges are concerned. Thus, the question arises as to how such teachers can work as cultural workers in promoting a culture that they themselves may not know.

Overall, it appears that the dances that are considered the nation’s heritage seem to be consigned to the fringes of the Zimbabwean Primary School Music Syllabus, where there seems to be neither the political will nor the qualified manpower to

transform policy intentions into action. This is despite traditional dance being continually harnessed for political and social functions (Gonye 2013). It is in view of these apparently undervalued and underappreciated states of traditional dance education and knowledge in Zimbabwe that this paper makes the following recommendations:

- Implement a proactive education policy that takes pride in the teaching of the nation's traditional dances. This requires separating dance from Music and clearly articulating the values of dance education as part of the holistic development of the individual child. The case of New Zealand and South Africa is illustrative in this regard.
- Address the perceived low levels of teacher knowledges and competencies as revealed in this study. This entails upgrading the quality of teacher preparation as regards traditional dance education at both pre-service and in-service levels.
- Make use of dance specialists and resource persons who are readily available in Zimbabwean communities.
- Apprentice dance educators to dance resource persons as part of their pre-service teacher education.
- Record and document the traditional dances using the latest media technologies so that the dances and the embodied knowledge are preserved for future generations.
- Design innovative approaches to the teaching of traditional dances such as recording pupil performances and using these to aid teaching and coaching.
- Design Afrocentrically based assessments along with the pedagogy of teaching traditional dances.

However, the researchers acknowledge the limitations and contradictions that may affect the findings of this paper. For instance, Zimbabwe is a multicultural society whose teachers come from areas that may know one and not the other of the listed forty-eight dances. Such teachers may be deployed for teaching into a district that has its own traditional dances different from those they may know. Furthermore, the research acknowledges that culture is dynamic and as such it may be difficult today, to teach appreciatively, some of the dances and their social meanings since some of the social and cultural practices that attended the dances have changed. Such an acknowledgement of multiculturalism and change should not diminish the imperative for an Afrocentric dance pedagogy.

Conclusion

This paper has contended that traditional dance education in Zimbabwe's primary school system has a pivotal role to play in the holistic development of students as people who could be able to reclaim their cultural heritage. However, in practice, it has been realised that teachers lack the requisite knowledge and competencies to teach traditional dances in meaningful ways. In addition, the vestiges of colonial education system have been seen to still hold sway in the curriculum reimagination of the postcolonial nation. The paper has argued that a traditional dance pedagogy that draws on Afrocentric epistemology has the potential to provide Zimbabwean students the cultural arsenal to redefine themselves as Zimbabweans in a globalising world. When all is said and done, if in a Mathematics syllabus, pupils can be taught

addition, subtraction, multiplication and division over many years; if in Geography, pupils are taught about climate, physical, human and settlement geography; and if in Language, pupils are taught about parts of speech, written, oral forms and registers all in the desire to link these subjects to human existence, then learning and performing traditional dance styles would similarly enable pupils to understand better their identity, nation and human existence. Learning and engaging in such performances would arm them with the confidence and conceptual tools to confront and deconstruct the dominant Eurocentric narratives. Zimbabwean students, like their Western counterparts, are entitled to a socially just curriculum which could be achieved by availing to them those traditional dances that may lead to their appreciation of their African and Black heritage in a globalising world whose culture tends to be hegemonic.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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