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Research Article


Revitalising Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in ECD Environments: A Pathway to Heritage Preservation in Mazvihwa Community of Zvishavane District

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Abstract	Manuscript Information
<p>This study explores revitalising Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in Early Childhood Development (ECD) environments as a strategy for heritage preservation in Mazvihwa community of Zvishavane District. The study merged the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Theory and the Heritage Preservation Theory (HPT) forming the crux under which the theoretical framework for this research was built upon. IKS Theory (Dei, 2012; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999) emphasises on the importance of IKS in preserving cultural heritage and promoting sustainable development in diverse cultural contexts, while Heritage Preservation Theory (Lowenthal, 2015) highlights on the need to preserve cultural heritage for the benefit of the present and future generations to come. A qualitative research approach that embraced a descriptive survey design was employed as the research methodology for the study. Purposive sampling was done to come up with a sample of 10 ECD practitioners, 10 community leaders, and 10 ECD learners from the Mazvihwa community, totaling to a sample of 30 respondents. The findings of this study reveal that IKS are crucial for heritage preservation, and ECD environments provide a fertile ground for their revitalisation. The study recommends the need to integrate IKS into the ECD curricula, capacity building for ECD practitioners, and community engagement and participation in cultural heritage preservation efforts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISSN No: 2583-7397 ▪ Received: 28-01-2025 ▪ Accepted: 27-02-2025 ▪ Published: 25-03-2025 ▪ IJCRM:4(2); 2025: 92-100 ▪ ©2025, All Rights Reserved ▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes ▪ Peer Review Process: Yes
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KEYWORDS: Revitalising, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), Early Childhood Development (ECD) Environments, Heritage Preservation, Mazvihwa Community.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the recent years, there has been a growing concern on the global perspective about the depletion of cultural heritages across

the planet earth. The world is ever-changing and in course, cultural heritages in their diverse forms are depleting, risking total eradication from the face of the earth if proper precautions

are not put in place in time. As how human beings live are ever-evolving due to globalization, digitalization, and climate change, cultural heritage among human beings is greatly eroded by this evolution (Lawanda, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 1970's World Heritage Convention, which was later adopted by United Nations in 1972, highlighted on the need to appreciate and preserve unique and irreplaceable world cultural heritages in their diverse forms, for the benefit of the present and future generations to come. A number of nations globally had been emphasising on the need to recognise and appreciate the importance of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), as efforts to preserve cultural heritages locally. United Nations (UN), through UNESCO, has been recognising and respecting the rights of indigenous people to their cultural heritage, including their IKS. The efforts made by UN are not winning much in the area of heritage preservation and promotion of IKS (UNESCO, 2021). Failure by world nations to sustainably preserve cultural heritages is evidenced across the global communities, where there is high rise of cases of inhuman and indecorous behaviours among the young generation making a number of nations ungovernable. Moral decadence is galloping the sense of humour among humanity across the world. If corrective measures are not put in place now, the world will become unruly and governable, with a generation with no sense of humour, respect for human rights and / or cultural identity at all. As a continent, Africa is trying to acknowledge and appreciate the importance of IKS in preserving the continental cultural heritages. These efforts are entrenched in the African Union's Agenda 2063, which aims at preserving the African cultural heritage (African Union, 2015). This notion is also supported by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which seeks to recognise, accept, and appreciate the rights of the African people, respecting their cultural heritage, including their indigenous knowledge systems, which are critical for transmitting such heritages from one generation to the other. In the Zimbabwean context, as part of heritage preservation efforts, the Zimbabwean government established the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, whose mandate is to preserve and promote the country's cultural heritage, including strengthening its IKS (National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, 2020). In 2024, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education adopted a Heritage-Based Curriculum from ECD level, which also recognise the importance of incorporating IKS in the country's education sector to promote the ubuntu/hunhuism philosophy, in a bid to promote cultural heritages among humanity and all cultures across the nation. Mazvihwa community is located in Zvishavane District in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. Like many other rural communities in Zimbabwe, this community, has a rich cultural heritage, with a strong emphasis in IKS that are relevant to ECD. IKS are vital for preserving cultural heritages, and their revitalisation in ECD environments is crucial for the proper transmission of cultural values and practices to future generations at a tender age. Kirova & Henning (2018) believe that incorporating IKS in the teaching and learning process in ECD settings has the potential for improved academic

performance, cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development among ECD learners. However, IKS are on the verge of extinction due to globalization, urbanization, climate change, and the dominance of foreign cultures and approaches to education, thereby risking the cultural heritage of the indigenous people.

Problem Statement

The Mazvihwa community is facing a critical challenge in preserving its cultural heritage and identity due to the suppression and limited recognition of IKS by the current education systems. The community's unique cultural practices, traditions, beliefs and values are being lost, particularly among the young people, due to cultural pollution which had seen foreign cultures taking precedence and dominating in the education sector. Despite the importance of IKS in promoting cultural diversity, inclusivity, their relevance and possible benefits in education, the current ECD curriculum in Zimbabwe also does not fully incorporate them, resulting in cultural disconnection between the community's rich cultural heritage and the modern education system.

Main Research Question

How can IKS be capitalized for cultural heritage preservation in ECD environments in the Mazvihwa community of Zvishavane District?

Sub-Research Questions

- i. How do ECD practitioners in the Mazvihwa community perceive the importance of IKS in ECD environments for cultural heritage preservation?
- ii. What strategies can be employed to revitalize IKS into the ECD curricula and practices for effective cultural heritage preservation?

By addressing these research questions, this study would contribute to the development of culturally responsive ECD programmes that are tailored to promote cultural heritage preservation, community empowerment, and inclusive education in Mazvihwa community and beyond for sustainable development.

Definitions

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS): Indigenous knowledge systems refer to the unique knowledge, beliefs, traditions, and practices of indigenous communities.

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT): Culturally responsive teaching refers to teaching practices that adhere to the cultural backgrounds and experiences of learners in cultural contexts.

Early Childhood Development (ECD): Early childhood development refers to the process of growth and development that occurs from birth up to 8 years of age.

Heritage Preservation refers to the process of initiating and taking action to protect cultural heritage so that it does not deplete for the benefit of the present and future generations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

IKS are believed to be essential for the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2019). ECD environments provide a critical platform for the revitalisation of IKS, as they lay the foundation for future learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978). However, in the Zimbabwean context, the integration of IKS into ECD curricula for the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of sustainable development is facing myriad challenges due to the dominance of foreign knowledge systems in education practices and the lack of capacity among ECD practitioners. In a bid to unpack issues on cultural preservation through the use of IKS, this study merged the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Theory and the Heritage Preservation Theory (HPT), forming the crux under which the theoretical framework of the study was built upon.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Theory

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Theory (Dei, 2012; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999) emphasises the importance of IKS in the preservation of cultural heritage and promotion of sustainable development. IKS refers to the unique knowledge, traditions, beliefs, and practices of the indigenous people in communities, which were developed over a long period and are handed over from generation to generation through interactions within their natural environments, maintaining the relevance of cultural heritage within their society. In epitome, IKS is a holistic and integrated approach aiming at understanding the world while recognizing the interconnectedness of human beings and their natural environment (Berkes, 1999). This theory is deeply rooted in the cultural, geographical, and historical context of the indigenous people in communities. IKS enables the transmission of cultural heritage through oral tradition, games, and storytelling while emphasizing the importance of language, culture, and the co-existence of all members of the community. Kincheloe (2006) & Deloria (1992) argue that IKS are often spiritual and philosophical, and they recognize the sacred and spiritual dimensions of the lives of people in the natural world. This theory promotes a holistic and integrated approach to education, which is essential in ECD environments, where ECD learners learn through stories, songs, and play and develop in a holistic and integrated manner within the cultural expectations of their communities.

Heritage Preservation Theory (HPT)

Heritage Preservation Theory (HPT) emphasises the importance of preserving cultural heritage for the benefit of future generations. HPT recognizes the importance of IKS in preserving cultural heritage, the importance of community participation in preserving cultural heritage, the importance of inter-generational transmission of cultural heritage and the importance of preserving cultural heritage for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2019; Lowenthal, 2015 & Kreps, 2003). HPT was rendered by the researchers to be highly applicable to this study, for its ability to explore on the role of IKS in ECD environments for heritage preservation in human communities. The theory

provides a framework for understanding the importance of preserving cultural heritage, recognising the role of IKS, and emphasising community participation and inter-generational transmission within ECD environments.

Conceptual framework for the study

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) → Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) → Early Childhood Development (ECD) → Heritage Preservation.

The role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in ECD settings

Research has shown that incorporating IKS into education practices in ECD environments is key in preserving cultural heritage and enhancing cultural relevance, improving academic outcomes, and promoting community engagement (Lowenthal, 2015; Dei, 2012 & Gay, 2010). IKS play a vital role in cultural resource management, practices and transmission, and language preservation which in totality give people an identity. According to Dei, (2012); Semali & Kincheloe, (1999), IKS promote integrated, contextual and experiential learning where learners learn through direct experiences, opening avenues for them to observe and participate in cultural activities through direct interaction with their immediate environment. However, there is need for more research on effective strategies to integrate IKS into the educational practices in ECD environments for effective heritage preservation and sustainable development in Mazvihwa community, hence this study was a necessity.

Challenges and opportunities for preserving cultural heritage

The preservation of cultural heritages worldwide, through the utilization of IKS, is threatened by numerous factors which include globalization, modernization, colonial legacy, and climate change. World cultural heritages are under threat due to the rapid pace of life, urbanization and development of urban culture, and rapid technological and economic growth (Alivizatou, 2011 & Loh, 2001). Today's ECD learners represent the computer generation who are brought up with infinite advanced technologies. They spend most of their time surrounded by a variety of digital devices; using computers, playing video games, listening to digital music players, watching video cams and televisions, using cell phones, and other vast tools of the digital age. They spend more than half of their day interacting with digital technology and less socializing with peers and elders in the community (Prensky, 2001). The habit of over-reliance on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced technological use in the education sector is greatly downplaying the importance of IKS in heritage preservation in communities. Manaf, & Ismail, (2010) concord that digitalization had triggered the adoption of foreign and new cultures among the students, which saw the cultural heritages of vast communities being neglected and disappearing from the face of the earth at a glimpse of an eye. However, there also stands opportunities for preserving cultural heritages and promoting IKS in ECD settings, such as community-based education programmes and cultural revitalization initiatives. Preserving cultural heritage has

potential to boost the tourism industry, through cultural festivals. Chimuka (2015) argues that sustainable heritage preservation paves the way for cultural entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism. Lawanda, (2019) supports that digital archives can be capitalized for preserving cultural heritages such as language, artifacts, documents, and oral history for the benefit of the current and future generations.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study explored a complex phenomenon and to gain a nuanced understanding on the utilization of IKS in cultural heritage preservation contextually, hence qualitative research approach, infusing a descriptive survey design was rendered appropriate. Bak (2020) alludes that the qualitative research approach focuses on gathering and analyzing non-numeric data in a bid to understand social issues affecting humanity in their natural environments. This methodology helped the researchers to gain insights into the experience of different groups of people, their perceptions, and behaviors relating to heritage preservation through IKS in Mazvihwa community. Purposive sampling was done to ensure that the right people provided key information on the topic under study. The participants who availed information for answering research questions included 10 ECD practitioners, 10 community leaders, and 10 ECD learners, making a total sample of 30 informants. Data were collected from the respondents through interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. ECD educators completed questionnaires, community leaders participated in interviews, and ECD learners participated in focus group discussions.

4. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The study reveals that IKS are crucial for heritage preservation, and ECD environments provide a fertile ground for their revitalization towards sustainable development. The results obtained are presented and discussed below under different themes.

The Role of IKS in ECD Settings

The role of IKS in ECD environments emerged to be a pertinent theme of greater significance in this study. The study found out that ECD practitioners in Mazvihwa community have a positive attitude toward the integration of IKS into the ECD curricula. However, it came to light that a number of these practitioners lack the know-how to integrate IKS into their day-to-day teaching practices, and community engagement and participation in heritage preservation issues were also very limited.

From the interviews conducted, the use of traditional games such as *tsoro*, *nhodo*, *dunhu*, *hwishu*, and *mahubwe* were mentioned as part of IKS practices and were well acknowledged by the local leaders who genuinely believed that every traditional game is culturally rich and central in heritage preservation in Mazvihwa community. Most respondents indicated that IKS has an indispensable place in facilitating the socio-economic development among ECD learners. Capitalizing on traditional games was understood as a socializing agent where IKS

influence young children in the community to come together, play, learn, and share their cultural values and heritages interestingly. From the collected data, what was abundantly clear was that IKS are pivotal for the transmission of cultural heritages from one generation to the other. One of the village heads argued that:

ECD learners by their childish nature, love to play especially when they are truly supported by adults, they become more active and engaged in play. Due to the ECD learners` urge to play, ECD educators need to capitalize on numerous traditional games to transmit our cultural heritage to this young generation, so that it's easy to preserve our cultural heritage with ease. ECD settings in the Mazvihwa area are still better off in terms of upholding cultural traits because most families do not own advanced digital technological devices which quickly capture the attention of young children and divert their way of life to a modern culture. Despite the coming of digital technology in people's lives, most traditional leaders in our area are mature enough and are trying their best to make sure that the cultural heritage and sites in the area are preserved in their original state.

Another village leader concurred that:

IKS are essential in educational practices in ECD. They help our young children to develop a sense of cultural identity and pride. Our forefathers passed down their culture, knowledge and traditions to us, and it's now our responsibility to also pass them down to our children and grandchildren.

From the focus group discussions done with ECD learners, respondents were in agreement that they love games and they learn and understand well when taught through games. One of the ECD learners said:

I like playing different games and games are very interesting. Our colleagues who do not actively participate in academic lessons are also active participants in a lot of games. If games are used in class, everyone is usually happy and active throughout the lesson, making the learning process more interesting, enjoyable, and fruitful.

ECD educators agreed that traditional games in ECD settings can be capitalised to promote equity and equal access to education among all diverse ECD learners. Eight out of ten of the ECD teachers were in agreement that traditional games are one of the IKS practices that is key in passing on cultural heritage from one generation to another, hence, cultural preservation is inevitable in ECD settings in the Mazvihwa community.

The sentiments made by village leaders, ECD learners, and ECD educators were incompatible with the claims made by William (2015), Maunganidze (2016), Chireshe (2019) Madondo (2020) & Moyo (2020) who echo that capitalizing traditional games in ECD environments offers avenues for enhancing learners` cognitive development, socio-emotional growth, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and imaginative skills. All

the pointers were very clear to support that various traditional games are key in heritage transmission in ECD settings of Mazvihwa community for sustainable cultural heritage preservation.

How Mazvihwa community perceive the value of IKS in preserving cultural heritage?

The majority of the participants who include emphasised that the IKS are critically important in preserving cultural heritage in the community under study. They all agreed that IKS have cultural significance, which is central for passing down cultural orientations, values, beliefs, traditions, and practices from one generation to the other. The cultural significance of IKS was rendered a valuable resource for cultural heritage preservation in ECD education. Village leaders agree that IKS provides a framework for comprehending and addressing local cultural, economic, environmental and social challenges that are encountered by the people of Mazvihwa community. Through proper utilisation of IKS in ECD environments, IKS were believed to give learners room to learn about the importance of cultural preservation, sustainability, and community collaboration. One village leader says:

IKS is our lifeblood. They make us who we are. Embracing IKS is not merely about preserving our cultural heritage as a people, but also delves into how to promote our cultural identity. Our children must know our history, where they come from and what makes them unique, so that they can shape their future basing on our unique cultural heritage.

UNESCO (2019) seconds this notion by saying; IKS are essential in promoting inclusivity in educational settings, cultural diversity, and tolerance among the learners. Furthermore, Chamuka (2015) & Lawanda (2019) concur that capitalising IKS in educational institutions provides a framework for addressing local environmental and social challenges, promoting sustainable development and community engagement. One of the ECD educators posited that:

'IKS are essential in ECD environments because they help ECD learners to develop a sense of cultural identity and pride. As educators, we try to incorporate IKS into the curriculum through storytelling, singing, and dancing. Embracing IKS in the ECD curriculum goes beyond just teaching ECD learners about their cultural heritage; but includes triggering critical thinking and problem-solving skills in a bid to enhance creativity and proffer solutions to real-life problems in the community.'

On the other side, another ECD learner highlighted that: *I like learning about my culture and other cultures in our community. It makes me feel proud to be who we are. I like singing and dancing with my friends. We have very interesting traditional songs and dances which we learnt from our parents and other elders in the community. We also learn from our peers, and they also learn from us; we love our cultural traits.*

Another ECD learner added that:

I like listening to stories about our ancestors. Some of these stories touch my soul and make me feel more connected to them. I like learning about our traditions and customs. Some stories we hear from our elders are sarcastic and unbelievable.

Harnessing IKS provisions is liable to promote sustainable tourism. Through embracing IKS, ECD learners are empowered to think creatively, preserve heritage sites, initiate community-based tourism, showcase their rich cultural skills during cultural events and festivals, promote traditional crafts and artisans, and capitalise on eco-tourism, which are key elements in attracting tourists to the Mazvihwa community. ECD learners learn about the importance of innovation and entrepreneurship through IKS, which is a vital component for sustainable tourism for the benefit of the local people and community. Chikunda & Mhishi (2018) allude that IKS are of paramount importance in preserving the cultural heritages in Zimbabwe, including traditions, customs, and heritage sites that attract tourists from around the world.

The African Union's Policy Framework for Pastoral Policy (2010) emphasises the importance of IKS in promoting cultural heritage and identity among indigenous people in various communities. This policy framework recognises IKS as a vital component of African cultural heritage and encourages all African states to preserve and promote such heritages for the benefit of infinite generations to come (African Union, 2010). Respondents for this study argued that IKS are vital in preserving cultural heritage and promoting diverse cultural identities for sustainable development in Mazvihwa community, which cannot be over-emphasised.

Challenges faced in embracing IKS for cultural heritage preservation.

Embracing IKS for the preservation of cultural heritages in Mazvihwa community is facing significant challenges, thereby threatening the sustainability of cultural heritage preservation and eroding cultural identity. All the respondents identified several challenges encapsulated in embracing IKS, acting as hindrances to sustainable cultural heritage preservation in Mazvihwa community.

Lack of documentation

Much of the cultural heritages in Mazvihwa community were alleged to be passed down from one generation to the other through oral tradition. All the respondents agreed that when information is not documented for proper referencing, preserving it becomes a major challenge since several infiltrators come along the way and distorted information is passed to the other generation. In this case, the culture that is inherited by new generation from their fathers is not the proper culture in its original state, but a new culture that is not a replica of the traditional culture that is expected to be preserved. One Village Head's assertion was that:

'The biggest challenge that we face in Mazvihwa community is the lack of proper documentation of IKS and our cultural heritage as a people. The culture that was passed on to us by our fathers was infiltrated by some impurities and the same continues to happen to generations to come because we don't have anywhere to refer to due to lack of documentation. When we are not very sure about certain issues we encounter, we say what we think we are at times wrong. IKS are depleting bit by bit. When elders pass away, their knowledge is also lost forever. This is why we have very limited people who still respect our traditional ways of doing things. Most of us were never educated properly about our cultural heritage, and we inherited foreign religions and cultures while shunning our traditions and culture was valued and rendered sacred by our forefathers.'

Colonial legacy, cultural appropriation, and modernization

It emerged from the respondents that there has been cultural appropriation and exploitation of IKS by external parties, which greatly impacted the cultural heritage of Mazvihwa community negatively. Colonialism was a major blow to the cultural heritage preservation of this society. One of the old men among the Village Heads echoed that:

'The colonial masters in Zimbabwe brought about their way of doing things as per their cultural beliefs, which forced the indigenous people to abort their cultural heritage and adopt foreign ways of doing things. Due to cultural pollution and modernisation, our young people are more interested in foreign cultures than their cultural heritage. The introduction of new and advanced ways of communication is also greatly diverting the minds of our children. They spend most of their time on technological devices, which are always promoting foreign cultures more than local cultures. In turn, our cultural heritage is disappearing bit by bit.'

It was agreed by the majority of the respondents across all the consulted groups that colonialism disrupted IKS and imposed foreign knowledge systems, which now dominate the Mazvihwa community. Because of the colonial legacy, the cultural heritage of the indigenous people in Mazvihwa community is greatly suppressed and marginalised, leading its depletion at a fast rate. The majority of the young generation were reported to be somehow unwilling to embrace IKS as part of their lives due to foreign cultural dominance, making it difficult to preserve and promote IKS for the preservation of cultural heritages in the community. According to Chiwara (2020), there is limited sensitivity among the indigenous people in several societies in Africa to ensure that IKS are respected in efforts to preserve cultural heritages due to modernisation and the promotion of the colonial legacy. Several African youths are becoming more culturally insensitive and disrespectful of the traditional practices and protocols, as was the case among our forefathers. The education system in Zimbabwe tends to promote foreign languages more than locals. For any Zimbabwean to be employed in most public sectors or train for several courses, foreign language subjects are seen to be key, such as English,

while locals like Shona, Ndebele, Tonga, Chewa, and others are given less recognition. To add on, in most courses that are done by students in universities and colleges, foreign languages are the medium of instruction, yet the cultural heritage of a people is also entrenched in their language.

Limited resources

It emerged from this study that the preservation of cultural heritage in Mazvihwa community is also being negatively affected by limited resources. ECD educators indicated that there is insufficient funding, limited infrastructural facilities, and very limited human resources to promote cultural heritage preservation through IKS. This was in line with the report by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) (2019), which clarified that Zimbabwe is struggling to preserve its cultural heritage due to inadequate financial resources and infrastructure. Moyo and Ndhlovu (2020) second that developing countries like Zimbabwe often depend on external aid and resources which act as a hindrance in cultural heritage preservation. Limited access to digital technology is also making it hard for the Mazvihwa community to preserve its cultural heritage. One of the ECD educators echoed that:

'We lack the resources and infrastructure to effectively preserve and promote IKS in our community. We need support from the local leadership, especially elders, government, and other stakeholders, to preserve the cultural heritage for this society for sustainable development. Several educators also lack enough indigenous knowledge about IKS in this society, hence, more empowerment is needed on utilising IKS for cultural heritage preservation.'

Strategies for revitalizing IKS for sustainable cultural heritage preservation.

Revitalising IKS for cultural heritage preservation in Mazvihwa community requires a multi-faceted approach for sustainability. Respondents agreed that stakeholders such as District Schools Inspectors, School Heads, ECD educators, community leaders, parents/guardians, ECD learners, and policymakers need to work together in harmony for a unified goal. One of the ECD educators argued that:

'We need to involve our local community leaders and members in the development of IKS-based educational materials and programmes. This will help ensure that our educational programmes are relevant and effective to address the problems of the local people contextually.'

The respondents argued that there is a need to document our cultural heritage so that it is easy to preserve. Community elders and leaders were believed to be vital in taking a central role in the documentation process about their local cultural heritages. ECD educators also suggested that there is a need to embrace the use of advanced technologies in the preservation of cultural heritages in Mazvihwa community. It was believed that if effectively utilised by the local people, technological devices are

effective for cultural heritage preservation while protecting them from external exploitation and ensuring that indigenous communities have control over their IKS and cultural heritage. Moyo & Ndhlovu (2020) allude that if local people are in charge of their cultural heritage preservation, they can strike a balance between preserving traditional IKS practices while embracing innovation, digitalisation and modernisation and at the same time moving together with the demands of the current world of affairs. The respondents agreed that there is need to formulate educational policies to support the preservation of cultural heritages in Zvishavane community. Community leaders indicated that IKS practices and traditions are tied to specific languages and cultures which need to be promoted by the Zimbabwean educational policies. If not protected and promoted by educational policies, most IKS are currently endangered and will soon cease to exist. The need to incorporate IKS for heritage preservation into the ECD formal education system was seen as a necessity so that ECD learners are taught in a culturally sensitive and accurate manner from this tender age. Another ECD learner supported that:

‘There is need to ensure that there is enough funding to support our cultural heritage preservation education and programmes and to ensure that all the infrastructure and resources needed are readily available at our school.’

The need to avail all the necessary resources for cultural heritage preservation in ECD settings; including infrastructural facilities, human resources, monetary resources and ICT resources was deemed a priority for sustainable development in Mazvihwa community.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the significance of IKS in preserving the cultural heritage of the Mazvihwa community. The findings indicated that IKS are key in cultural heritage preservation, which is central in enhancing learners` cognitive development, socio-emotional growth, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and imaginative skills in the cultural context of the people of Mazvihwa community. Preserving cultural heritage has cultural significance, which paves avenues for addressing local environmental, cultural, economic, and social challenges, thereby promoting sustainable development, community engagement, and passing down cultural orientations, values, beliefs, traditions, and practices from one generation to the other. IKS are essential for promoting inclusivity in ECD settings, cultural diversity and tolerance among the learners. Despite the importance of IKS and the efforts to embrace them for cultural heritage preservation in Mazvihwa community, multitudinous challenges are being faced that threaten sustainability in cultural heritage preservation, thereby eroding cultural identity of the community. Major challenges noted include: lack of documentation for indigenous cultures and IKS; colonial legacy, cultural appropriation and modernisation which suppress IKS and cultural heritages; lack of resources and infrastructure to expedite IKS in cultural heritage preservation

programmes; lack of educational policies to promote IKS in the preservation of cultural heritages and lack of proper community engagement in heritage preservation programmes in schools. Strategies to revitalise IKS for cultural heritage preservation need to be embraced where multi-stakeholder collaboration is prioritised for sustainable heritage preservation through properly embracing of IKS in ECD education and programmes.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively revitalise IKS in the preservation of cultural heritage in Mazvihwa community, there is a need to integrate IKS into the ECD curricula. There is a need for stakeholder empowerment, especially ECD teachers, to be able to incorporate IKS into their teaching practices for heritage preservation and support them through availing all other necessary resources and infrastructure needed for the process. There is also a need to embrace advanced technologies in the documentation, entrepreneurship, and innovation of cultural heritages and move with the current demands of the digital world. Community-based initiatives and programmes also need to be developed for the promotion of IKS for effective cultural heritage preservation in the community. It is of paramount significance to involve village leaders and community members in promoting IKS in cultural heritage preservation in the ECD environments of the Mazvihwa community.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The researchers declare that all ethical approvals were sought, and participants` consent was obtained before they participated in this study.

Consent for publication

This manuscript contains some humanistic data; hence, consent to publish this work was sought from the appropriate individuals. No real names of individuals were used in this study hence, respondents remained anonymous.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Authors` contributions

The Authors of this article are provided in a rank, indicating varied input they made in this research, with the first one being be corresponding author. The corresponding author took responsibility for this article and agrees that the article was never published in any journal before and was not currently under review in any journal during the time of submission to this journal. All questions about this article should be directed to the corresponding author, who will address them on behalf of all other authors.

Data availability

The authors give the journal the authority to make data from this study available for public consumption. Scholars and other researchers are free to make reference to this work openly. The authors reserve the rights for direct reproduction or extensive extractions of this work or its part without giving authority in written form. Upon publication, the work will also be found at the Midlands State University repository for free.

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