

## FOSTERING CREATIVE LEADERSHIP ABILITIES IN ZIMBABWEAN TEACHER EDUCATION THROUGH 21ST CENTURY ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

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**Abstract.** *Within the framework of Zimbabwean teacher education, this research project intends to explore the function of 21st century assessment procedures in nurturing and augmenting creative leadership abilities. Educators must cultivate inventive leadership abilities to effectively navigate the unparalleled obstacles of the technologically advanced 21<sup>st</sup>- century. Given the speed at which technology is developing and the dynamic needs of the global labour market, educational systems must ensure that aspiring educators possess the knowledge and abilities needed to lead and innovate in the classroom. Pre-service teachers in Zimbabwean teachers' colleges must acquire creative leadership abilities to be prepared for their future roles. to become instructors who are revolutionary and successful. The capacity to introduce a novel approach, service, idea, referred is an innovative leadership quality. Interviews, observations, and document analysis were research instruments used in this interpretive case study to collect data from pre-service teachers and teacher educators at a Zimbabwean Teacher College. The participants were chosen on purpose. The education system in Zimbabwe is results-driven and exam-oriented, according to research findings., Assessments of learning which encourage memorization and concept repetition are emphasised instead of transformative assessment. Recommendations call for a paradigm shift in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices in teacher education.*

**Key words:** *Fostering, Leadership, Innovation, Innovative leadership, Innovative leadership abilities, Teacher education, 21<sup>st</sup> century assessment practices.*

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### Introduction

This paper seeks to further the current conversation about creative leadership abilities and teacher education by emphasising the role that assessment procedures can play as a change agent. Zimbabwean teacher education programmes can better prepare teachers for success in the contemporary educational environment by implementing cutting-edge evaluation techniques. In the end, this will support the development of a new wave of creative leaders capable of spearheading changes in education and improving learning outcomes for students

In this third decade of the twenty-first century, world issues like health crises, technological advancement, and climate change are just a few of the urgent worries. The obstacles call for creative leadership abilities. In contrast to the conventional emphasis on substantive information, teacher education should cultivate 21st -Century competencies, or "the knowledge, skills, and expertise" (Battelle for Kids, 2019, p. 3). With these competencies, teacher education institutions may advance the nation's industrialization and socioeconomic transformation agendas in alignment with Vision 2030, as well as the 2030 Global Sustainable Development Goal (UNESCO, 2022). 21<sup>st</sup>- century evaluation techniques are necessary for the development of 21<sup>st</sup>- century competencies.

The 21st century has seen a change in assessment procedures to better reflect the skills required for success in the contemporary world as well as the shifting nature of education. Authentic assessment procedures that emphasise relevant, real-world assignments that mirror the abilities and knowledge students require to succeed outside of the classroom are imperative for teacher education institutions to implement. It incorporates projects, presentations, portfolios, simulations, and performance-based evaluations in addition to standard tests and

quizzes (Koh, 2017). Because it challenges students to do exemplary activities that indicate their deep understanding, higher-order thinking, and sophisticated problem-solving, authentic assessment is "a true test" of intellectual success or aptitude. Real-world difficulties and "standards of performance" that specialists and professionals—such as scientists, writers, surgeons, and educators—generally encounter in their field are replicated in authentic activities (Koh, 2017). Assessment procedures for the twenty-first century should encourage students to absorb material in-depth and to demonstrate their mastery of twenty-first-century skills (Koh, 2017). 21st-century leadership abilities are creative.

Teacher education institutions continue to assess 21st-century skills using 20th-century assessment models, even though 21st-century assessment practices are crucial for developing innovative leadership skills like critical thinking, creativity, communication, and teamwork (Care et al., 2018). The use of standardised, high-stakes testing is overused. Memorization, essay writing, individual mastery of assigned material, and formulaic problem-solving are frequently prioritised in assessment and instructional strategies (Milligan, 2020a).

The assessment of learning remains the prevailing discourse, encompassing matters of measurement, certification, quality assurance, policy formation, and so forth (Care et al., 2018, Lucas, 2021). The focus is on the objective world. There is concern that some teacher educators teach for examination and fail to develop innovative leadership skills (the four Cs) in pre-service teachers because the Zimbabwean education system is preoccupied with measurable, objective reality (hard skills) and the issue of certification (Moyo & Hadebe, 2018, Nziramasanga, 1999, Primrose & Alexander, 2013). The pen-and-paper paradigm of assessment does not lend itself well to the capabilities and dispositions needed in the twenty-first century. This unquestionably demonstrates how our assessment system overlooks the development of creative leadership skills (Lucas, 2021).

To successfully build innovative leadership skills, new, durable assessment methods that emphasise mastery of general competencies must be implemented. Conventional evaluation techniques, including written exams, typically evaluate only the most basic information. They frequently overlook assessing the critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities that are necessary for efficient instruction. Furthermore, they might miss candidates' capacity to use theoretical knowledge in real-world teaching situations. The development of competent and well-rounded instructors is hampered when these approaches are the only ones used. Conventional evaluation techniques fall short of developing creative leadership abilities in teacher candidates.

With this context in mind, the study aimed to:

- Assess how innovative leadership abilities are now taught in Zimbabwean teacher preparation programmes.
- Examine how assessment procedures help Zimbabwean educators develop creative leadership abilities.
- Determine which efficient evaluation techniques to include in teacher preparation courses to foster creative leadership abilities.

This is an interpretive case study of a teacher education institution in Zimbabwe.

## **Literature review**

To truly understand what innovative leadership entails, one must first grasp the concepts of innovation and leadership. Alharbi (2021) defines leadership as the ability of a person to encourage, assist, or convince others to make a positive contribution to the success and effectiveness of the organisation they are a part of. Blagoev & Yordanova (2015) define leadership as the ability of one individual to bring concepts to life. The ability to influence

others is the primary attribute of leadership. Leadership is the ability to motivate people to give their all at work to accomplish a goal.

Teachers are leaders who inspire their students to work hard to accomplish goals. When one thinks creatively, something new and better is produced. Innovation can originate from "invention" (a completely new object) or "iteration" (a modification of an existing item that does not fit the definition of "new and better") (Sen & Eren, 2012). Therefore, the capacity to both think and persuade people to generate "new and better" ideas to advance towards successful outcomes is known as innovative leadership. This is the capacity to produce anything by adopting an alternative perspective. According to Sen & Eren (2012), creative leadership is the process of presenting a novel approach, good, service, strategy, or concept to meet people's demands and address present and potential issues. As leaders, educators need to acquire creative talents so they can address previously unheard-of problems in the technologically advanced 21st century.

For pre-service teachers to:

- facilitate improvements in teaching and student learning;
- develop school organisation through management and administration;
- improve relations and collaboration with various stakeholders; and
- serve as role models and leaders referred,

teacher education institutions should provide them with innovative teacher leadership skills (Abidin et al, 2016). Based on the four points above, a comprehensive approach involving curriculum design, experiential learning, professional development, mentoring, collaboration, reflective practice, and contextual relevance is needed to help pre-service teachers at teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe develop innovative leadership skills. Above all, the key to a successful education is assessment.

Among the top ten innovative leadership skills that are essential in the knowledge economy are the four Cs: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (Chandra & Tangen, 2018; Baghetto & Kaufman, 2016; Guo, 2016; Plucker, Kaufman & Baghetto, 2016, UNESCO, 2015, Robles, 2012). Because of their significance in the 21st century, Kivunja (2015) refers to the four Cs as 21st-century super talents. In this sense, to develop creative leadership abilities in students, Zimbabwean teacher education must embrace pertinent 21st-century evaluation techniques. According to Urbani, Roshandel, Michaels, and Truesdell (2017), current educational practices should move away from fact memorising and rote learning and towards developing 21st-century skills including creativity, critical thinking, communication, and teamwork.

According to the P21 framework, creative leadership abilities are essential competencies for the twenty-first century. These abilities foster adaptability and flexibility. These abilities make it possible to acquire essential knowledge abilities. However as was discussed previously, the development of creative leadership abilities is still in its early stages (Greenburg & Nilsen, 2014). Prioritising innovative leadership skills—the essential competencies of the twenty-first century—requires a lot.

Education systems have adapted to the changing goals of education by incorporating a wider range of abilities into their curriculum declarations and policies (Care et al., 2018). This begs the question of what part teacher education plays in developing pre-service teachers' capacity for creative leadership. It is undeniable that teacher educators know far more about teaching mathematics and languages than they do about teaching cooperation, creativity, and innovation. This policy change is necessary, but many nations are not putting it into practice. To teach 21st-century abilities, they continue to use assessments and teaching strategies from the 20th century (Care et al., 2018). It was discovered that the majority of teacher educators still use the traditional teaching approach. As a result, learning becomes extremely limited and

student participation in learning activities is delayed. This indicates that a change in pedagogy is required.

Sustainability in evaluation is necessary for the development of innovative leadership abilities. Sustainable assessment is that which considers not just the "content," but also the learning processes and how students will continue to learn after the assessment. It helps shape a competent individual who can operate professionally and make an educated contribution to society as a citizen (Lucas, 2021). Sustainable evaluation encourages continuous learning. It is imperative for teacher educators to familiarise themselves with different types of assessment and adopt suitable assessment procedures which promote the development of the innovative leadership skills.

Lucas (2021) identified three types of assessment which include assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning. The purpose of assessment for learning is to provide educators with data so they may adapt and differentiate their instruction. It recognises that every learner has unique learning styles. It acknowledges that many pupils follow dependable patterns and pathways. This kind of evaluation values each person's individuality. The one-size-fits-all approach to education harms students because it ignores individual differences and measures their abilities using uniform criteria, rather than promoting sustainable assessment. Because it encourages individual uniqueness, autonomous learning—where people actively participate in their experiences rather than being estranged from them—promotes the development of creative leadership abilities. This is because learners actively and autonomously create new knowledge by assessing fresh data and revising previously acquired knowledge (Golder, 2018).

Assessment for learning is similar to assessment as learning. Assessment for learning is a process of developing and supporting metacognition for students. Metacognition is a process where an individual wants to know how one comes to know what one knows. It is concerned with the source of knowledge and the process by which one comes to know what one knows (epistemology). It focuses on the role of the student as an active and critical connector between assessment and learning (Lucas, 2021). This promotes critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication skills (innovative leadership skills). This is necessitated by active engagement of the learner in acquiring information.

Assessment of learning is summative in nature and is used to confirm what students know and can do, to demonstrate whether they have achieved the curriculum outcomes and occasionally how they are placed in relation to others (Carl & Katz, 2006 as cited in Lucas, 2021). Assessment of learning is summative in nature and mostly carried at the end of the programme, course or unit.

Assessment of learning tests students' ability to remember and write about something rather than apply or do the thing they have been learning (Lucas, 2021). The majority of current assessment practices rely on traditional formats. The traditional format does not capture the processes that underlie the complex skills sets which need to be stimulated, elicited, modeled and demonstrated, and applied to novel situations (Mueller, 2005; Whitlock & Nanavati, 2013; Care et al. 2018). This shows that this type of assessment does not augur well with the development of innovative leadership skills.

Because they encourage the development of information, skills, and talents or dispositions important to the twenty-first century, assessment as learning and assessment for learning are pertinent in the modern day. During the teaching and learning process, teacher educators use constructivism, a philosophy that emphasises that students are active participants with the inclination to learn and rejects the idea that they are empty vessels. They do not passively absorb information; instead, they independently produce it when they are placed in an environment that supports them. People construct their representations and add new information to their prior knowledge as they engage with the world and think back on those

interactions (Golder, 2018). In addition to testing, assessments should include student work, observations, and worldviews. According to Golder (2018), the process is more significant than the final output, and the teacher's major duty is to establish and uphold a collaborative atmosphere for problem-solving where students are free to construct their knowledge with the teacher serving as a guide and facilitator.

Numerous evaluation strategies can be identified from the three categories of assessment that have been presented. Formative evaluation is used. Formative assessment is a continuous procedure that gives students feedback at every stage of their education.

Students can make modifications and advance in their learning by using it to assist discover areas of strength and areas that want work. Instead of depending exclusively on grades or standardised tests, competency-based assessment focuses on evaluating certain skills and competencies. It places a strong emphasis on mastery and the display of unique knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to succeed in a given field or subject (Golder, 2018). Online tests, interactive simulations, virtual laboratories, and multimedia projects are examples of digital evaluations. They offer chances for adaptive and customised examinations based on the requirements of each student. The three categories of assessment are represented by the assessment strategy examples that are provided.

### Theoretical framework

The study's context is provided by a set of concepts, theories, and presumptions that make up the theoretical framework. A theoretical framework in a study is a theory (or theories) that represents the core values of the researcher(s) and serves as a clear guide or lens through which the study will interpret fresh data (Nhan, 2020). The Constructivist theory of learning informs this study.



Figure 1 The Constructivist theory (Golder, 2018)

Constructivism is a theory of learning that places a strong emphasis on how actively students construct their own understanding. Learners don't just absorb information; instead, they process it through reflection, build mental images, and add new information to existing schemas. Deeper comprehension and learning are encouraged by this.

The principal proponents of this idea are Lev Vygotsky (1978) and Jean Piaget (1970, 1977) as cited in Golder (2018). Vygotsky calls social constructivism the field in which he works. Vygotsky thought social and cultural influences had an impact on cognitive development. He placed a strong emphasis on the contribution that social interaction makes to children's mental development, including speech and reasoning.

The assumptions of Piaget's Cognitive Constructivism theory about how individuals acquire and produce knowledge are quite similar to those of Vygotsky's theory. According to Vygotsky, the social context of learning is more significant. In Piaget's approach, the instructor has a limited role, whereas in Vygotsky's view, the teacher plays a large part in learning. Active participation, experiential learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, and teamwork are characteristics of learning activities in constructivist settings. Through the integration of assessment as a learning process, these learning activities foster assessment as learning and assessment for learning (Assessment of/as/for learning, 2017 March)

To help pupils develop their ideas, opinions, and conclusions, the teacher assumes the position of a co-learner throughout the learning process. As a knowledge provider, the teacher's job is to lead, assist, coach, provoke, and co-explore in ways that let students think critically and creatively and analyse and synthesise ideas. To implement constructivist pedagogies, teacher educators must renounce philosophic and later realistic conceptions of epistemology.

The investigation was framed using Constructivist theoretical framework as a lens. Teacher educators should make sure they have established assessment models that are in line with constructivist theory to enable students to actively participate in the learning process.

## **Methodology**

An interpretative exploratory case study research design was used in the investigation. It was a case study of a Teachers' College in Zimbabwe. The investigator employed an exploratory case study that bore similarities to the intrinsic case study that Janson & Christensen (2014) had uncovered. When a researcher looks into a little-known topic using a single case study, it's called exploratory or intrinsic research (Janson & Christensen, 2014). According to Yin (2009), this type of case study is employed when there is a dearth of material or literature on the research topic, or when the topic is still relatively new. Little is known about the assessment procedures that Zimbabwean teachers' colleges can use to develop creative leadership abilities.

The population under investigation consists of 95 teacher educators and 600 pre-service teachers. Forty-five pre-service teachers and ten teacher educators from various disciplines were chosen using stratified purposive sampling. To gather information from the participants, the study instruments included focus group discussions, direct observation, and document analysis. Ethical considerations were adhered to. The researcher provided careful consideration to the welfare and rights of study participants. The four guiding principles that Tom Beauchamp and Jim Childress devised served as a guide for the researcher (Briki and Green, 2007). The four guiding concepts were non-maleficence, which is about doing no harm, autonomy, which deals with respecting each person's right, and justice. Maleficent conduct is a crucial research behaviour that involves refraining from inflicting physical or psychological harm on respondents, as well as from dehumanising, demeaning, and revealing sensitive information about participants that may have an emotional impact on them (Leavy, 2017, Creswell, 2014).

To interpret, evaluate, present, and discuss the study findings, the thematic approach and the constant comparative analysis method were employed. The continual comparative approach, as defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), is "a research design for multi-data sources in which the formal analysis begins early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of data collection."

## **Data presentation and analysis**

### **The current state of innovative leadership skills in Zimbabwean teacher education**

The notion of "innovative leadership skills" was not widely understood by pre-service teachers and certain teacher educators, according to the researcher's lecture and lesson observations of teacher educators and pre-service teachers, document analysis, and focus group talks with participants. Even if some of them defined the notion accurately, they found it difficult to define. Both teacher educators and pre-service teachers claimed not to be familiar with these abilities. They were proficient in essay writing, reading, writing, and listening. Pre-service teachers were not aware of innovative leadership skills, particularly the four Cs, as evidenced by their ignorance of the fact that the aforementioned abilities are characteristics of communication skills. The insufficient definition of the notion demonstrated that innovative leadership abilities were not sufficiently prioritised in Zimbabwean teacher education.

The college's basic values, which include professionalism, patriotism, inclusivity, entrepreneurship, communication skills, and Unhu / Ubuntu, were implied to have innovative leadership skills, according to the documents consulted (ATP handbook, 2020, Mutare Teachers' College Strategic Plan Booklet, 2015 - 2021, TP Supervision Critiques, 2021). Pre-service teachers were not introduced to the idea of these qualities as innovative leadership skills.

Teacher educators were able to describe innovative leadership qualities, even while pre-service teachers were unable to do so. They described generic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal skills as the foundation of innovative leadership. Teacher educators noted that because these common abilities were not taught, evaluated, and tested like hard skills, it was difficult to describe them. They were included in routine teaching and learning activities but were not given special attention. It was implied that while hard skills are important for teaching, innovative leadership qualities were not given the same priority in Zimbabwe's secondary teacher education system.

Without critical thinking, creativity, cooperation, and communication, teaching and learning cannot occur. Everything that is learned in college incorporates these talents. The results show that Zimbabwean teacher education has not yet embraced Chu's 2017 model of the 3 Rs x 7Cs, which stands for Critical Thinking and Problem-solving, Creativity and Innovation, Collaboration, Teamwork and Leadership, Cross-cultural Understanding, Communication and Media Fluency, Computing and ICT Fluency, Career and Learning Self-reliance. The formula serves as a guide for educational institutions, assisting them in integrating hard and innovative leadership skills into the process of teaching and learning. The inability to use the formula demonstrates that Zimbabwe's secondary teacher education system does not sufficiently foster the development of innovative leadership qualities.

The four Cs—critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication—were defined by teacher educators and pre-service educators. Pre-service teachers were unaware of the term that is frequently used in Zimbabwe, despite the fact that the four Cs are referred to differently depending on the situation. These were referred to as innovative leadership capabilities, generic skills, or transversal skills by Johani and Bhebe (2016) in the context of Zimbabwe. According to Voogt et al. (2013), the term "21st Century skills" is more common in North America, whereas "21<sup>st</sup>- Century competencies" is more common in Europe. Some simply refer to them as entrepreneurial abilities (Macquitt, 2017). The four Cs are referred to as key competences in Australia, Denmark, process independent qualifications; Finland, framework for evaluating educational achievements; France, transferable competencies; Germany, crucial qualifications; Canada, prosperity plan. The four Cs—Malaysia, soft skills; the Netherlands, core competencies; New Zealand, essential skills; Singapore, critical enabling abilities—are referred to as transversal competencies in Italy. Critical cross-field outcomes in South Africa, transdisciplinary aims in Switzerland, and the United Kingdom Interpersonal

skills, employability abilities, required skills for the United States, and workplace knowledge (Wellington, 2015). The lack of a commonly accepted phrase for innovative leadership skills in Zimbabwe compels one to argue that the importance and advancement of these talents in Zimbabwean teacher education are affected by the lack of a defined label for these competencies.

The lack of a common term for creative leadership abilities in Zimbabwe has a negative impact on the advancement of those abilities in teacher preparation. Aside from that, it suggests that innovative leadership abilities are not given priority in Zimbabwean teacher preparation programmes.

Mutare Teachers' College did not have an inventive leadership skills development policy, according to the researcher's conversations with teacher educators and pre-service teachers, observations of lessons, and analysis of the college's papers. Teacher educators made it very evident that the departmental rules in place may alter because they said nothing about the core competencies and abilities required for the 21st century economy. This demonstrates unequivocally how the lack of the policy fosters the development of creative leadership abilities vicariously.

### **Assessment practices fostering innovative leadership skills among pre-service teachers in Zimbabwe teacher education**

It was found that teacher educators and pre-service teachers could differentiate between formative and summative evaluation. Formative assessments are weighted thirty percent (30%), while summative assessments are weighted seventy percent (70%), per college norms. A continual process, formative assessment provides students with feedback at every level of their study. By employing it to help identify areas of strength and areas that require improvement, students can make adjustments and progress in their learning. Real learning happens at this formative assessment stage. Assessments should comprise student work, observations, and worldviews in addition to testing. The process is more important than the result, according to Golder (2018), and the teacher's main responsibility is to create and maintain a collaborative environment for problem-solving where students are free to construct their knowledge with the teacher acting as a guide and facilitator. Pre-service teachers develop their creative leadership skills in this way.

The fact that formative assessment is given less weight than summative evaluation suggests that Zimbabwean teacher preparation is focused on exams and results. Hard skills that can be measured are prioritised. The development of innovative leadership skills is not a good fit for summative evaluation. It helps with rote learning. Instead of comprehending, remembering, or implementing, the emphasis is on summarising, and identifying flaws rather than making improvements (Lucas, 2021). To teach 21st-century abilities, teacher education institutions continue to use assessments and teaching strategies from the 20th - century (Care et al., 2018).

### **Efficient assessment techniques that can be integrated into teacher preparation courses to foster innovative leadership skills**

Formative assessment is the ideal assessment approach that ought to be used, according to pre-service teachers and teacher educators. They ought to consider factors other than final grades. Formative assessment involves several activities such as building new models, debating, field excursions, and peer teaching. Teacher educators noted that their tasks are practically oriented on formative assessment. Students learn critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, and innovative leadership abilities through hands-on experiences.



Through trial and error, creative leadership abilities are built in this authentic learning environment. Instead of asking students to apply or perform the material they have been learning, assessments of learning focus on their memory and writing skills (Lucas, 2021). The development of critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, and communication skills—all of which are necessary for innovative leadership—is not supported by this kind of evaluation. Summative assessments are used to evaluate learning, and formative assessments are used to test learning. The concept of assessment for learning recognises that every student learns differently. It acknowledges that many pupils follow dependable patterns and pathways. This kind of evaluation values each person's individuality. Pre-service teachers build and reconstruct meanings in diverse ways in this regard, and they also develop creative leadership abilities in the process. Instead of absorbing knowledge passively, learners create it.

### **Recommendations**

- There is need for 360- degrees review of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment procedures in order to realign the curriculum with the requisite 21<sup>st</sup> century skills
- There is need for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century assessment policy which strengthens the development of creative leadership abilities.
- Formative assessment to be credited more marks because this is where actual learning takes place. Teacher educators and pre-service teachers bridge the gap between theory and practice. Everything is linked to real life situation.
- Engage teacher educators in staff development programmes to familiarize them with 21<sup>st</sup> Century assessment practices.

### **Conclusion**

According to a study on developing innovative capabilities in pre-service teachers in Zimbabwean teacher education programmes, results showed that these skills are vicariously developed. Teacher education institutions are currently transitioning from a transmission model of instruction to a transformative model. Transformative assessment procedures ought to be given top priority by teacher education institutions to provide pre-service teachers with cutting-edge leadership competencies. It is important to embrace assessment as learning and assessment for learning strategies that support real-world learning. Assessment of learning should not be done conventionally. Evaluation of learning encourages concept memory and recitation. This inhibits critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, and communication abilities. The fundamental competencies of innovative leadership are these 21<sup>st</sup>- century skills. Leadership abilities are crucial for equipping aspiring educators with the knowledge and abilities needed to design and execute innovative curricula and bring about the required adjustments. Hence, there is need for a paradigm shift in terms of content, assessment and teaching methodologies for teacher education institutions to foster innovative leadership skills in pre-service teachers.

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