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### **Innovation and Industrialisation through Assessment Reforms in Higher Education in Developing Countries: A Case Study of Zimbabwe**

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**Christopher Zishiri<sup>1</sup>**

*Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Foundations,  
Midlands State University, Zimbabwe*

*zishiri@staff.msu.ac.zw*

ORCID: 0000-0003-1959-2563



**Leo Mataruka<sup>2</sup>**

*Department of Finance and Banking, Faculty of Commerce, Innovation and  
Technology, Catholic University of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe*

*lmataruka@cuz.ac.zw*

ORCID: 0000-0001-6589-7216

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#### **Abstract**

This qualitative study explored the transformative potential of assessment in higher education, catalysing innovation and driving industrialization in developing countries. Drawing on the Diffusion of Innovation Theory and the Triple Helix Model, the paper examined how assessment reforms in higher education in Zimbabwe, can ignite innovation and industrialization, offering a beacon of hope for similar contexts in the African continent. The study

collected data from relevant documents and thirty (30) participants through interviews and focus groups. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Findings show that traditional assessment methods were inadequate in producing innovative minds among students. This underscores the need for a paradigm shift in assessment approaches employed in higher education. The study recommends the use of competency-based assessment methods, which hold positive implications for developing countries seeking to foster innovation-led industrialization.

**Keywords:** *Traditional assessment methods, assessment reforms, competency-based assessment.*

## Introduction

Higher education institutions are crucial for promoting innovation and industrialization, particularly in developing countries like Zimbabwe. However, the current educational landscape is fraught with challenges, including outdated assessment methods that rely heavily on rote memorization and standardized testing. These traditional approaches fail to cultivate essential skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and practical application, leaving graduates unprepared for the demands of the modern workforce (Schutte, 2024; George, 2023). This inadequacy contributes to high unemployment rates among graduates. Additionally, the shift to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic has further revealed the deficiencies in infrastructure and digital literacy, emphasizing the urgent need for reforms in assessment practices to better align with contemporary educational and labour market needs (Brenya, 2024; Natalie and Mario, 2023).

In response to these challenges, there is increasing recognition of the value of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) modules as a bridge between academic knowledge and practical experience. WIL provides students with real-world opportunities to apply theoretical concepts, thereby enhancing employability and fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship essential for industrialization (Piper et al., 2023). To support these advancements, higher education institutions must prioritize assessment reforms that focus on skills development and practical competencies rather than traditional academic metrics. Recent findings highlight that innovative assessment methods, including project-based assessments and collaborative learning experiences, can effectively prepare graduates for the evolving economy (Aithal and Maiya, 2023).