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Ability to Learn and Adapt: The Story of the Revised Learning Model in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

It needs no contestation that it is those institutions and nations that refuse to remain tied to tradition that survive the turbulency, volatilities and ambiguities in their environments. The way things have always been has proved to be not always the best way out of situations and neither is it the answer to problems that they face as they traverse through life. As the variables within environments mutate, progressive institutions inevitably need to keep pace. The need to align with the wind, demands and expectation of the times. Gone are the times when the institutions could just survive even with minimal effort. Without the prowess to recalibrate, refocus and reengineer survival would be marred by numerous impediments.

Keywords: Learning model, Ability to learn, Ability to adapt, Education 5.0 model.

Introduction

Despite the substantial number of educated graduates produced by the education system, many individuals have struggled to find suitable employment opportunities within Zimbabwe. This disconnect has prompted a significant portion of graduates to seek careers abroad, driven primarily by the limited availability of positions in the local job market (Chikanda, 2017) ^[1]. For those who choose to remain in the country, securing work has often been fraught with significant hurdles, especially as the economy remains unable to absorb the ever-increasing number of graduates, leading to a saturated labor market. The implications of this scenario are profound. Graduates, equipped with knowledge and qualifications, find themselves in a position where their skills are not adequately matched with the demands of available jobs. This misalignment between education and economic needs has created a pressing need for reform. As the country grapples with these challenges, it becomes clear that a comprehensive reimaging of the education system is paramount.

In response to the mounting educational and economic challenges, the Second Republic, which came to power in 2017, sought to revitalize the education landscape of Zimbabwe. This effort culminated in the creation of the Education 5.0 philosophy, which aims to address the inadequacies and gaps of the previous system. Education 5.0 prioritizes innovation, entrepreneurship, and practical skills

development, focusing on equipping graduates not just for employment, but to thrive in an increasingly dynamic job market. At its core, Education 5.0 promotes a holistic, application-based approach to learning (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2023) ^[3]. Rather than merely producing graduates who are job seekers, the philosophy encourages the cultivation of innovators and entrepreneurs who can identify and seize opportunities in the marketplace. By amplifying this strategic shift, Zimbabwe envisions an educational future that is closely aligned with global trends and the local economy's pressing needs.

The transformative vision of the Education 5.0 philosophy centers around empowering individuals to conceive and develop sustainable innovations that address local challenges. This shift attempts to reframe the purpose of education from a mere focus on academic achievement to the nurturing of creativity and entrepreneurship. Central to this approach is the establishment of dedicated spaces for innovation within higher learning institutions across Zimbabwe. These innovation hubs serve as incubators that provide resources, mentorship, and collaborative environments where talented Zimbabweans can explore and develop their ideas (Chikanda, 2017) ^[1]. Within these spaces, aspiring entrepreneurs and inventors are encouraged to brainstorm and refine concepts that can evolve into practical goods and services. This nurturing of individual creativity not only empowers students but also fosters collaboration among students, faculty, and

industry stakeholders.

As this paradigm shift unfolds, universities and higher education institutions have begun to recognize their pivotal role in contributing to the national narrative. These institutions have aligned their efforts with the National Development Strategy 2 agenda and Vision 2030. The recognition of this responsibility has galvanized educators and students alike, encouraging a sense of ownership and commitment to national goals. Embracing a heritage-based model, many universities have successfully transitioned from a purely theoretical approach to a more practical application of knowledge (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020) [6]. This transition is exemplified by the numerous products and innovations that have been patented, showcasing a tangible shift towards solving real-world challenges. Universities are increasingly focused on creating graduates who can not only adapt to but also lead within an ever-changing global landscape.

The revival of Zimbabwe's education system is now more vigorous than ever, particularly regarding the emphasis on innovation as a foundational aspect of education. This renewed focus dovetails with national aspirations to industrialize and modernize the economy, promising significant improvements in the livelihoods of many citizens (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2023) [3]. The potential for job creation within these newly emergent industries offers a glimmer of hope for addressing the high unemployment rates that have long plagued the country, especially among the youth. Through the lens of Education 5.0, the government envisions an empowered upper-middle-income society, where individuals are equipped with the necessary skills and innovative mindsets to participate meaningfully in the economy. This shift not only seeks to alleviate the immediate challenges of unemployment but aims to foster a culture of entrepreneurship and proactive innovation among Zimbabweans.

In 2025, during the 3rd Annual Presidential Innovation Fair held in Harare, Dr. F. Shava, the Minister of Higher Education and Technology, eloquently conveyed an entrepreneurial vision that embodies the essence of Education 5.0. He described learning centers as evolving into "factories" that actively produce solutions to socio-economic challenges confronting Zimbabwe. This metaphor encapsulates the transformative intent behind Education 5.0, which seeks to repurpose educational institutions from traditional centers of learning into dynamic organizations that genuinely engage with and address real-world problems (The Herald, 12 December 2025).

Dr. Shava's remarks highlighted a significant paradigm shift in the educational landscape. Education has long been viewed primarily as a path to academic success and, consequently, employment. However, the Education 5.0 framework proposes a more active role for institutions, encouraging them to innovate and produce tangible solutions that cater to the specific needs of society (The Herald, 12 December 2025). This transformation positions education as a catalyst for socioeconomic development, emphasizing the potential of learning environments to generate groundbreaking ideas and initiatives that drive progress. Central to Dr. Shava's message was the critical importance of local innovation. He echoed the sentiments of early African leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, who championed the idea of "African solutions to African problems." This philosophy posits that sustainable and effective solutions are best developed by those who are intimately acquainted with the local context—those who

navigate daily challenges and understand the nuances of their communities. By leveraging their unique insights and experiences, Zimbabweans can craft innovative products and services tailor-made to meet their specific needs.

This focus on local innovation not only addresses immediate challenges but also aligns Zimbabwe with a broader continental aspiration for self-reliance and sustainability. By nurturing local talent and solutions, the nation aims to build a resilient economy capable of standing on its own merits. The vision of empowerment through education envisions a future where local talent is celebrated, fostering a culture that encourages the youth to recognize their potential for positive societal contributions (Gopo & Rusike, 2023) [5]. The Education 5.0 initiative also aims to instill a sense of hope and possibility among young people in Zimbabwe. By empowering them to engage in problem-solving within their communities, the initiative reinforces the belief that individuals can make meaningful contributions to society. This cultural shift encourages youth to aspire to be changemakers rather than passive recipients of education (Ndhllovu & Dube, 2022) [10]. As they engage with the challenges around them, they increasingly view themselves as capable of driving local developments.

The emphasis on local talent and solutions promotes a conditional change in mindset, where innovation becomes synonymous with empowerment. As the Education 5.0 philosophy takes root, it cultivates an environment conducive to entrepreneurship. Young people are encouraged to conceive and develop innovative solutions that address local challenges, thus aligning their aspirations with the socio-economic needs of their communities (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020) [6]. The Education 5.0 framework envisions an educational landscape that is responsive, inclusive, and geared toward sustainable development. It underscores the importance of aligning educational objectives with the evolving needs of the economy. By fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, Zimbabwe aims to create an ecosystem where education is not merely a means to an end but a dynamic process that drives social progress (Maposa & Mpofu, 2021) [7].

Institutions of higher learning are called to engage actively with their communities to assess and identify specific needs. This engagement is vital for fostering an environment where innovation thrives (Zvobgo, 2020) [11]. Understanding community needs enables educational institutions to develop products and services that align closely with consumer expectations. When this alignment occurs, it boosts citizen satisfaction—an essential component for building trust and loyalty towards institutional brands. Consumer satisfaction is not just an abstract metric; it has tangible implications for the growth and stability of educational institutions. Improved consumer satisfaction fosters loyalty (Maposa & Mpofu, 2021) [7]. When students and communities are satisfied with the goods and services offered, they are more likely to remain loyal, leading to increased enrollment, repeat engagements, and a strong sense of belonging.

This loyalty holds significant value for producers including educational institutions. A loyal student base not only secures ongoing revenue but also enhances profit margins, allowing institutions to reinvest adequately in their programs, facilities, and research initiatives (Gopo & Rusike, 2023) [5]. As profit margins improve, institutions are better equipped to innovate, adapt, and expand their offerings. To facilitate the transformation envisioned by Education 5.0, institutions should implement a comprehensive strategy that moves

beyond theoretical frameworks. This requires collaborative engagement with local communities, industries, and stakeholders to shape curricula that meet actual needs. These programs should foster practical skills in fields such as entrepreneurship, technology, and innovation.

As universities serve as hubs for innovation, they can create incubating platforms that empower young entrepreneurs to explore and develop their ideas. This approach nurtures individual creativity while fostering teamwork and collaboration. By providing adequate resources, mentorship, and a conducive environment for innovation, institutions can transform aspiring innovators into entrepreneurs capable of offering practical solutions. As the Education 5.0 philosophy takes shape, cultivating a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship becomes critical (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2022) [10]. The emphasis on local talent aligns with a broader objective of empowering communities, propelling both individual and national economic development. Educational programs that prioritize problem-solving, creativity, and real-world application can serve as catalysts for transforming the educational experience into one that actively prepares students for the challenges they will face (Maposa & Mpofu, 2021) [7]. This focus not only equips students with the necessary skills but also instills in them a mindset geared towards innovation and self-reliance.

The broader implications of this educational transformation extend beyond individual empowerment to encompass national development. By fostering a generation of problem-solvers, Zimbabwe positions itself to tackle socio-economic challenges more effectively. The potential for homegrown innovations to be developed and thrive within local contexts represents a crucial step towards achieving sustainable development. As local talents emerge as leaders in innovation, they contribute to building a stronger economy based on self-reliance and creativity (Gopo & Rusike, 2023) [5]. This shift not only reduces reliance on foreign solutions but also establishes Zimbabwe as a source of innovative products and services that can be beneficial to other countries facing similar challenges. Investing in higher education and innovation significantly contributes to job creation, fostering a cycle of growth that benefits the entire community. As institutions thrive and expand, they create new employment opportunities that empower local populations. An empowered community is more likely to engage in constructive activities and pursue progressive initiatives, reducing the likelihood of falling into cycles of crime and criminality.

In this framework, President Cde E.D. Mnangagwa highlighted the significance of this dynamic during the 3rd edition of the 2025 Presidential Innovation Fair Award Ceremony. He emphasized that building strong, innovative institutions not only addresses consumer needs but also plays a crucial role in reshaping the socio-economic landscape of the nation. The collaborative efforts between educational institutions and local communities lay the groundwork for a brighter, more prosperous future in which everyone can thrive (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2022) [10]. Furthermore, these innovations and partnerships not only enhance individual opportunities but also promote social cohesion and community development. By aligning educational objectives with local needs, institutions can create relevant programs that equip individuals with the skills necessary to succeed in a rapidly changing economy. Ultimately, fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration is essential for sustainable growth. As educational institutions and communities work together, they can develop solutions tailored to local

challenges, paving the way for transformative change (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2022) [10]. This shared commitment to empowerment and progress ensures that the benefits of growth are widely distributed, fostering a more resilient and prosperous society for all. President Cde E.D. Mnangagwa had this to say:

As we look back at the milestones in the education sector since the adoption of the Heritage Based Education 5.0 model, under the Second Republic particularly in institutions of Higher learning, our nation has every reason to be proud. Universities and tertiary institutions continue to transform graduates from being mere employment seekers to individuals with skills to produce goods and products that meet the needs of our economy while becoming employment creators. The worth of nation building requires imagination and the will to act. Let us convert ideas into companies, prototypes into experts and a wider range of products and services that benefits the majority of the people. (The Herald, 12 December 2025).

Methodology

The paper was informed by a range of works produced by various scholars from related fields. Additionally, interviews were conducted with officials from institutions of higher learning and citizens who have been monitoring the progress of the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1). This strategy concluded in December 2025, setting the stage for the implementation of the National Development Strategy 2 (NDS2). The engagement with scholars provided a robust theoretical framework for the study, ensuring that the findings are grounded in established research. The interviews with higher education officials offered insights into the challenges and successes experienced during the NDS1 period, shedding light on the implications for policy and practice as the transition to NDS2 commenced. Furthermore, gathering perspectives from citizens allowed for a comprehensive view of the strategy's impact at the grassroots level, highlighting both accomplishments and areas needing improvement.

By integrating scholarly literature with firsthand accounts, the paper aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the developments leading up to NDS2. These combined insights will contribute to a deeper analysis of how previous interventions can inform future initiatives, ensuring that the objectives of the new strategy are effectively addressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018) [2]. This holistic approach underscores the importance of collaboration between academic research and community insights in shaping meaningful national development.

Findings and Discussions

The literature reviewed indicates that education reform in Zimbabwe has experienced significant transformation over recent years, yielding positive outcomes that have gained recognition both domestically and internationally. This evolution in the education system has produced tangible benefits, which stakeholders—including educators, students, and local communities—can readily attest to, marking a notable paradigm shift in the country's education sector. Institutions of higher learning have actively participated in showcasing their innovations through prestigious platforms such as the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair, held annually in Bulawayo, and the Zimbabwe Agricultural Show in Harare. These events provide universities an opportunity to exhibit the results of their efforts from various innovation hubs, garnering interest from citizens and industry professionals

alike (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020)^[6]. The reception of these innovations has been overwhelmingly positive, highlighting a growing appreciation for locally sourced solutions to local challenges.

One notable example of such innovation is Amarula wine, produced from the Mapfura fruit, which was traditionally viewed merely as fodder for livestock. This shift in perception has opened up significant economic opportunities for communities, particularly in Mwenezi, Masvingo Province, where many residents are now engaged in the production and distribution of this locally crafted beverage. By capitalizing on available resources, the initiative not only generates income for families but also fosters community resilience and emphasizes self-sufficiency. In addition, the Chinhoyi University of Technology has garnered attention for its groundbreaking artificial insemination program aimed at improving the national cattle herd's genetics. This initiative focuses on enhancing the quality of livestock by increasing calving rates through crossbreeding local hardy cattle breeds with selected superior bulls' semen. As noted by Mpofu (2020)^[8], this program is poised to significantly elevate agricultural production standards and is already yielding reliable results for farmers.

Interviews conducted with various stakeholders reveal a strong consensus regarding the critical importance of fostering innovation within the nation. Many voices from the academic and agricultural sectors emphasize that the current level of innovation deserves further support, recognition, and celebration. They argue that making these innovations more visible and accessible can catalyze further growth and development within Zimbabwe. Further consideration of the potential impact of these innovations suggests that commercialization plays a crucial role (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2023)^[3]. For innovators, transitioning patents and prototypes into market-ready products is essential for effectively transforming lives and livelihoods. This transition involves several steps, including securing financial backing, gaining market access, and obtaining support from both private and public sectors. When graduates and innovators see their ideas materialize, it not only directly benefits them but also uplifts their families and communities, fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and resilience.

Importantly, the transition from innovation to commercialization is not merely an individual endeavor. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders including government bodies, academic institutions, and private enterprises are critical for creating an effective ecosystem that nurtures and facilitates innovation. For instance, educational institutions can play a significant role by integrating entrepreneurship education into their curricula, equipping students with the skills necessary to commercialize their ideas (Gopo & Rusike, 2023)^[5]. Through fostering an environment that encourages experimentation and embraces failure as a stepping stone to success, universities can empower students to explore their entrepreneurial potential. Support from local and national governments is also paramount in this process. Policymakers can implement frameworks that support innovation through grants and funding aimed at startups, alongside incentives for private companies collaborating with educational institutions. Building networks that connect innovators with experienced mentors in industry as well as access to financial resources ensures a smoother pathway from concept to market.

The overall climate of entrepreneurship is further enhanced through public awareness campaigns that promote local

innovations and collaboratively educate communities about the importance of supporting homegrown solutions. When citizens recognize and appreciate the value of local products, they are more likely to patronize them, leading to increased economic activities that benefit the community as a whole. It is also crucial to acknowledge the gender dimensions associated with entrepreneurship and innovation (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2022)^[10]. Encouraging the participation of women in innovation not only contributes to equity but also drives economic growth by tapping into a broader pool of ideas and solutions. Initiatives aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs through targeted support programs can foster a more inclusive innovation landscape.

Acknowledging the advancements brought about by these innovations cultivates an environment that values creativity and practical solutions. Awards and accolades for successful projects inspire future generations to envision a future where education and innovation are interconnected (Gandiya, 2018)^[4]. This collaborative spirit among institutions, local communities, and government entities enhances productivity while closely aligning with national sustainable development goals. By fostering a culture of recognition and support, Zimbabwe can encourage ongoing innovation, empowering individuals and communities to address local challenges effectively. This synergy not only promotes growth but also ensures that sustainable practices are integrated into the educational framework, ultimately contributing to the nation's development. By championing such initiatives, Zimbabwe paves the way for a brighter future rooted in creativity, collaboration, and sustainable progress. Acknowledging the centrality of Education 5.0 the President also said:-

On its part my government recognizes that it is only through the requisite and increased investments in the Technologies, Science and Innovation that Zimbabwe can accelerate the ongoing transformation towards vision 2030.

The urgency for innovation in education has reached unprecedented levels, highlighting the need for educators at all levels to actively embrace innovative practices. As advancements in science and technology rapidly reshape the landscape, educators should adapt their teaching methods and curricula to ensure that students acquire the relevant skills and knowledge necessary for the future (Gandiya, 2018)^[4]. This imperative underscores the importance of staying up-to-date with the latest developments, ensuring that educational institutions produce graduates who are both competent and future-ready. To facilitate effective learning and adaptation within this evolving educational framework, collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders is essential. A respondent emphasized the need for developing enduring innovation ecosystems, where collective efforts can foster an environment that nurtures creativity and sustainable growth. Such collaboration is not merely advantageous; it is crucial for maintaining the nation's competitive edge in an increasingly globalized world.

Dr. F. Shava, Zimbabwe's Minister of Higher Education, articulated a transformative vision for education during this critical juncture. As reported by Debra Matabvu in *The Herald*, he stated, "We have moved from Education for Employment to Education for Empowerment and Industrialization." This significant shift marks a departure from traditional educational paradigms, positioning Zimbabwe's educational framework as a source of national pride. The emerging Heritage-based Education model is seen as a game changer, addressing not only immediate employment needs but also promoting empowerment and

industrialization among the populace (The Herald 12 December 2025).

The ethos of Education 5.0 resonates broadly throughout the nation, reflecting a widespread acknowledgment of its potential to recalibrate the trajectory of education in Zimbabwe. Graduates are increasingly viewed as future innovators who can reshape industries and contribute meaningfully to economic revitalization. This new educational paradigm nurtures an appetite for retooling and revitalizing various sectors, offering solutions that are innovative and deeply rooted in local contexts. The shift in educational philosophy has profound implications for the nation (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2023) [3]. By moving beyond a focus solely on employment preparation, education can inspire graduates to become active participants in the economy as innovators and entrepreneurs. This perspective fosters resilience and adaptability, equipping students to confront the complexities and challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Moreover, the integration of innovation into education encourages students to think critically and creatively, empowering them to identify and address pressing societal issues. As graduates begin to see themselves as change-makers, they are more likely to pursue entrepreneurial ventures that contribute to local and national economies (Gopo & Rusike, 2023) [5]. This entrepreneurial spirit is integral to building a culture of innovation that can drive sustainable development. The establishment of innovation hubs within educational institutions exemplifies this transformative approach. These hubs serve as incubators for emerging ideas and projects, providing students with access to resources, mentorship, and collaborative spaces to develop their concepts further. Through hands-on experience and engagement with real-world challenges, students can acquire practical skills that enhance their employability and entrepreneurial potential.

Furthermore, fostering an environment that promotes interdisciplinary collaboration can lead to the cross-pollination of ideas, creating richer learning experiences for students. When educators from different fields collaborate, they can introduce students to diverse perspectives and methodologies, broadening their understanding of complex issues and improving their problem-solving abilities. The role of local communities in this educational reform cannot be understated (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2022) [10]. Community involvement is vital for ensuring that educational initiatives align with the real needs and aspirations of the population. By engaging local citizens in the educational process, institutions can better understand the challenges faced and develop targeted solutions that resonate with the community's unique context. This approach not only enhances the relevance of educational offerings but also fosters a sense of ownership among community members, further motivating them to participate actively in collaborative projects and initiatives. As education evolves in Zimbabwe, the focus on empowerment and industrialization positions the nation to harness its latent potential fully. This holistic approach to education can bridge the gap between learning and application, creating a robust pipeline of skilled individuals ready to contribute to the economy (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2023) [3].

Recommendations

To enhance the ability to learn and adapt in Zimbabwe, it is recommended that higher education institutions prioritize

partnerships with local industries and communities. By collaborating closely with employers, educational institutions can ensure that curricula are aligned with real-world needs, thereby bridging the gap between education and employment. Implementing regular feedback mechanisms that involve both students and industry stakeholders will help institutions remain responsive to dynamic job market demands. Moreover, the establishment of advisory boards comprising representatives from various sectors can offer valuable insights, ensuring that educational programs cultivate the skills and competencies that are critical for success in the evolving economic landscape.

Furthermore, a strong emphasis should be placed on fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation among students. This can be achieved by expanding innovation hubs and incubators across universities, providing not only the necessary physical space but also mentorship and access to financial resources. Developing targeted training programs in entrepreneurship and practical skills will empower students to translate their ideas into viable businesses, thereby addressing local challenges and contributing to economic growth. By cultivating an environment where experimentation and creativity are valued, Zimbabwe can nurture a new generation of innovators capable of driving sustainable development and positioning the country as a leader in self-reliance and local solutions.

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