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# Context Matters

## — RESEARCH GRANTS —

### 2022-2024 Context Matters Awarded Grants (Round 5)

**Research title:** Enhancing Learner-centred Practices Among Pre-service trainee-teachers Through the use of Mobile Devices as Learning Tools in Malawi

**Principle Investigator:** Dr Andrew Chimpololo, School of Education, Communication and Media Studies, Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences Blantyre, Malawi.

**Co-Researcher:** Dr. Florence Thomo, Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences, Mathematical Sciences Education Department

**Research location:** Domasi, Malawi

**Research dates:** March 2023 – December 2024.

#### **Research Summary:**

Secondary education in Malawi faces numerous challenges, many of which are deeply intertwined with the quality and preparation of teachers. According to the Malawi Education Sector Performance Report, a staggering 60% of secondary school teachers in Malawi are unqualified (Ministry of Education, 2015). This crisis prompts the government to hire underqualified and untrained teachers to fill critical staffing gaps at the secondary level (Malawi Ministry of Education, 2015). In Malawi, the pre-service training of secondary school teachers primarily takes place at institutions like Domasi College of Education. However, these aspiring teachers grapple with two overarching challenges plaguing all levels of education in the country: underfunding and outdated teaching methodologies. Allocations from the national budget for teacher education remain largely inadequate, and the subpar learning environments within these institutions hamper teacher preparation and discourage potential student-teachers from enrolling. Despite these, there exists a conspicuous disconnect between education policy and classroom practice regarding learner-centred education in Malawi. Although government policies and donor-funded programs advocate for learner-centred approaches, the education system remains predominantly teacher-centred. Learner-centred approaches, hailed for their ability to foster learner independence, motivation, and control over the learning process, offer a promising pathway forward. Heutagogy, a learner-centered approach wherein learners define their own learning paths and identify suitable learning styles, holds significant promise in this context. In addition, mobile devices emerge as a potent tool to facilitate heutagogical practices among trainee teachers, enabling them to operate independently and access online educational resources, especially in the face of acute teacher shortages and resource constraints.

Accordingly, the aim of this research is to examine the mediation of heutagogical practices through the use of mobile devices among female trainee teachers in pre-service teacher education at Domasi College. To achieve this aim, the study will attempt to address the following research questions pertaining to the extent to which mobile devices are used for academic purposes among female trainee-teachers; any heutagogical practices emerging among the participants; the influence of mobile device usage on heutagogical practices; and effects of an intervention on the female trainee teachers' intention to use mobile devices in their teaching. This

research will encompass three main phases: situational analysis, intervention, and follow-up. Data collection will employ a multifaceted approach, including two questionnaire surveys, semi-structured interviews with trainee teachers, and participant journals.

This study contributes invaluable insights into the application of heutagogy in teacher training, particularly in light of the challenges faced by Domasi College of Education, and teacher professional development in Malawi. Furthermore, by harnessing the potential of mobile devices, this study seeks to drive a shift in teaching and learning practices within the college towards learner-centred approaches. In an era marked by evolving educational paradigms, the exploration of heutagogical learning supported by mobile technology holds the promise of transformative change in Malawi's teacher education landscape.

**Dr. Andrew Chimpololo** is the Manager of the Institute of Continuing Education (ICE) and a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education and Media Studies at the Malawi University of Business and Applied Studies (MUBAS). He holds a PhD in Education and Communication from Rhodes University South Africa, specializing in the Application of Mobile Communications in Education and an MA in Applied Linguistics from the University of Otago, New Zealand. His research interests are diverse and encompass critical areas such as Open, Distance, and e-Learning (ODeL), heutagogy, mobile learning, Communication for Development (C4D), Social and Behavioural Change (SBC), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TEVET), and teacher education.