

**BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION**



**FACULTY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION  
DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT  
STUDIES**

**Essay Assessment Practices Among Humanities and Social Sciences  
lecturers at two selected Universities in Zimbabwe.**

by

**Machona Liberty**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO CURRICULUM AND EDUCATIONAL  
MANAGEMENT STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENT OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE EDUCATION  
DEGREE IN MEASUREMENT, ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION STUDIES**

**AUGUST 2024**

**RELEASE FORM**

**NAME OF STUDENT:** Machona, Liberty (B231199B)

**DISSERTATION TITLE:** Essay Assessment Practices Among Humanities and Social Sciences lecturers at two selected Universities in Zimbabwe.

**DEGREE TITLE:** Masters of Science Education in Measurement, Assessment and Evaluation

**YEAR GRANTED:** 2024

Permission is hereby granted to Bindura University of Science Education Library to produce single copies of this dissertation and to lend and sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purpose only. The author reserves other publication rights and neither the dissertation nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

**PERMANENT ADDRESS:** 11880, Greenside Mary Mount, Mutare

**SIGNED:** 

**DATE:** 09/09/24

## DECLARATION

I, Machona Liberty, hereby declare that, except for references to other people's work which is duly acknowledged, this dissertation is my original work which was never submitted to any other institution before.


**Signed:** 

**Date:** 09/09/2024

**Student)**

## APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read and recommend to Bindura University of Science Education for acceptance, a dissertation entitled Essay Assessment Practices Among Humanities and Social Sciences lecturers at two selected Universities in Zimbabwe. Submitted by Machona Liberty (B231199B) in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Masters of Science Education in Measurement, Assessment and Evaluation.

**Student** 

**Date: 09/09/2024**

**Supervisor** 

**Date: 10/09/2024**

**(Dr. D. Dziva)**

**Department Chairperson** 

**Date: 10/10/2024**

**(Dr. Y. Mudavanhu)**

## **DEDICATION**

To Munyaradzi, my partner in life and in learning. This dissertation is a reflection of our shared journey of growth and discovery.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is a testament to the power of collaboration, a journey fueled by the unwavering support of many incredible individuals.

First and foremost, I extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. D. Dziva. His guidance has been more than just expert advice; it's been a masterclass in navigating the complexities of research. His unwavering encouragement, insightful feedback, and willingness to challenge me to reach my full potential have been instrumental in shaping this work.

To Dr. P. Chikuvadze, my sincere thanks for your insightful comments, encouragement, and suggestions. Your expertise and perspectives have truly enriched the quality of this research, pushing me to think critically and explore new avenues.

To Faith, Mercy, and Gramma, my heart overflows with gratitude. Your unwavering support and belief in my abilities have been a constant source of strength. Your encouragement and assistance have made this challenging endeavor feel less daunting and more fulfilling.

To my family and friends, thank you for your unwavering love, patience, and understanding. Your constant support has been my bedrock, a source of motivation that kept me going even when the path ahead seemed unclear.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to Munyaradzi, my wife. Your love and unwavering belief in me have been the driving force behind this journey. Thank you for being my partner, my confidante, and my biggest cheerleader.

This dissertation is more than just a culmination of my efforts; it's a reflection of the incredible network of support that has surrounded me. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study, grounded in Constructivist Theory and the Education 5.0 framework, examined the alignment of essay assessment practices among 52 lecturers, representing approximately 30% of the total faculty in the DoHSS at two Zimbabwean universities. In the context of Zimbabwe's, HE reforms aimed at fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and critical thinking, significant gaps persisted in the application of contemporary assessment methods. The research addressed these gaps by exploring how current practices aligned with constructivist principles and the objectives of Education 5.0, which seeks to enhance the outcomes of HE and prepare graduates for the demands of a rapidly evolving socio-economic landscape. A mixed-methods approach was employed in the study, combining quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential, while qualitative insights were derived from thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with a subset of 15 lecturers. This integration provided an opportunity to investigate and evaluate essay assessment practices and the challenges related to the alignment of assessment practices with the principles of Constructivist and Education 5.0 framework. The findings revealed that while lecturers acknowledged the importance of constructivist principles, such as student-centered learning and active engagement, their assessment practices remained predominantly traditional, relying heavily on rote memorization, in addition lecturers experienced challenges in aligning their assessment practices with constructivism and education 5.0 framework. Key challenges revealed in the study included insufficient training in modern assessment techniques, inadequate access to resources, and institutional policies favoring conventional evaluation methods. In response, the study recommended developing targeted professional development workshops focused on practical applications of constructivist assessment techniques, alongside institutional policy reforms to support the implementation of diverse assessment methods. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. The study suggested that future research should investigate the long-term effects of these professional development initiatives on lecturer practices and student learning outcomes, as well as explore student perspectives on assessment methods. Ultimately, by enhancing the alignment of assessment practices with contemporary educational goals, this research contributed valuable insights into improving higher education in Zimbabwe, fostering a more effective and equitable learning environment that better prepares students for the complexities of the 21st century.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

RELEASE FORM.....	i
DECLARATION.....	ii
APPROVAL FORM.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
LIST OF TABLE.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
ACRONYMS.....	xi
THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING.....	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background to the Study.....	2
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	4
1.3 Research Questions.....	5
1.4 Objectives of the Study.....	5
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	6
1.6 Limitations of the Study.....	7
1.7 Delimitations of the Study.....	9
1.8 Assumptions of the study.....	10
1.9 Definition of Key Terms.....	12
1.10 Summary.....	14
CHAPTER TWO.....	16
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	16
2.0 Introduction.....	16
2.1 Theoretical Framework.....	16
2.2 History of Essay Assessments.....	19
2.3 Essay Test Item Construction.....	23
2.4 Essay Test Item Administration.....	27
2.5 Essay Item Scoring.....	28
2.6 Essay Item Interpretation.....	31
2.7 Essay Item Assessment Practices in Zimbabwean HEIs.....	32
2.8 Factors Influencing Essay Item Practices.....	36
2.9 Summary.....	38

CHAPTER THREE.....	42
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	42
3.0 Introduction.....	42
3.1 Research Paradigm.....	42
3.2. Research Approach.....	44
3.3 Research Design.....	48
3.4 Population and Sample.....	51
3.5 Research Instruments.....	53
3.6 Data Collection.....	55
3.7 Data Analysis Techniques.....	56
3.8 Ethical Considerations.....	60
3.9 Summary.....	63
CHAPTER FOUR.....	65
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....	65
4.0 Introduction.....	65
4.1 Response Rate and Demographics.....	66
4.2 Current Essay Assessment Practices.....	71
4.3 Similarities, Differences, and Challenges in Essay Assessment Practices.....	86
4.4 Alignment of Essay Assessment Practices with Constructivism and Education 5.0..	98
4.4.1 Self-directed Learning and Reflective Feedback.....	104
4.4.2 Fostering Reflection and Exploration.....	106
4.4.3 Authentic and Relevant Assessments.....	107
4.5 Strengths and Limitations of scoring and interpretation.....	108
4.6 Skills Gaps, Training and Capacity Development Needs.....	120
4.7 Summary.....	129
CHAPTER FIVE.....	133
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	133
5.0 Introduction.....	133
5.1 Summary.....	133
5.2 Conclusion.....	135
5.3 Recommendations.....	137
REFERENCES.....	139
APPENDICES.....	160
Appendix A:.....	160
Appendix B:.....	161

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Distribution of Lecturers by gender.....	67
Distribution of Lecturers by Work Experience.....	67
Distribution of Lecturers by Institution.....	69
Distribution of Lecturers by Disciplines in DoHSS.....	70
Essay Test Item Assessment Practices.....	71
Differences in Essay Test Assessment Practices between the Two Universities.....	73
Lecturers' Practices Regarding Student Choice in Essay Assessments by Gender.....	75
Item Reliability Statistics for Student Choice and Engagement in Essay Writing.....	84
Assessment Methods utilized by lecturers in the two universities.....	87
Comparison of Assessment Methods used by lecturers.....	95
Correlation Assessment Practices Aligned with Constructivism and Education 5.0 Principles.....	99
Limitations in scoring and interpretation.....	108
Mean Differences in Assessment Challenges by University.....	116

## LIST OF FIGURES

Theoretical Framework of the study.....	19
Sequential Explanatory Research design.....	51
Distribution of Work Experience by Gender.....	68
Distribution of Lecturers by University and Gender.....	69
Choice of Essay Topic by Gender.....	78
Choice of Essay Formats by Gender.....	79
Choice of Essay Length.....	81
Opportunities to incorporate own understanding and knowledge.....	83
Exploratory and Inquiry based Assessments.....	104
Self-directed Learning and Reflective Feedback.....	105
Reflection and Exploration.....	106
Authentic and Relevant Assessments.....	107

## ACRONYMS

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
DoHSS	Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
NDS1	National Development Strategy One
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### 1.0 Introduction

This Chapter focuses on essay item construction, administration, scoring and interpretation practices among lecturers in the DoHSS at the two selected universities in Zimbabwe. The chapter is divided into several sections. The chapter addresses the background of essay item construction, administration, scoring, interpretation of scores. In addition, the chapter explains the research problem, research objectives and significance of the study in the broader context of HE transformation in Zimbabwe. The chapter concludes by focusing on research delimitations, limitations and examining the assumptions that underpinned this study.

This chapter investigates the research problem concerning essay assessment practices within the DoHSS at two universities in Zimbabwe. It explored how lecturers construct, administer, score, and interpret essay assessments, addressing the limitations associated with traditional methods that do not adequately align with contemporary educational objectives.

The chapter begins by examining the broader challenges faced by HEIs in Sub-Saharan Africa, specifically focusing on Zimbabwe. Subsequently, the chapter discusses the significance of the Education 5.0 Doctrine and its implications for aligning educational practices with national economic development goals. Following this, the theoretical framework of Constructivist Theory is explored, emphasizing its relevance to current assessment practices. Finally, the chapter outlines the research questions and objectives guiding the study, underscoring the necessity for reform in assessment practices to better equip students with the competencies required for success in a rapidly evolving economic

landscape. This chapter sets the stage for understanding the necessity of reforming assessment practices as a means to enhance educational outcomes.

## **1.1 Background to the Study**

Student assessment is a cornerstone of HE, playing a crucial role in evaluating student learning, informing teaching practices, and providing feedback for improvement (Biggs, 2014). In Zimbabwe, the DoHSS at universities holds a particularly significant position, shaping the future leaders and professionals in fields like humanities, social sciences, and religion. The DoHSS contributes 82% to the national skills requirements, highlighting its vital role in the country's development (National Critical Skills Audit, 2017).

The Education 5.0 framework, adopted by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education in 2018, emphasises a learner-centered approach that prioritises problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship (Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, 2018). This framework aims to equip graduates with the skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving economy, particularly through the use of locally available resources to generate goods and services.

However, a significant gap exists in research concerning the alignment of assessment practices with the principles of constructivism and the objectives of Education 5.0. While research has explored constructivist pedagogy in HE, the specific application of its principles within essay assessment practices, particularly in the DoHSS, remains largely unexamined (Yin, 2012). This gap is particularly concerning given the Education 5.0 framework's emphasis on entrepreneurial skills and the need for assessment methods that foster these competencies.

This lack of research understanding presents challenges in implementing assessments that effectively align with the goals of Education 5.0. Furthermore, existing assessment practices

within Zimbabwean universities often suffer from inconsistencies and biases related to language, culture, and the socioeconomic status of lecturers (ZIMCHE, 2019). These factors, coupled with large class sizes and complex interdisciplinary curricula, further complicate the efforts of lecturers to adopt innovative assessment methods (Garwe, 2014).

Zimbabwe's educational reforms, driven by the Education 5.0 framework, seek to transform the educational landscape and equip graduates with the essential skills for a dynamic economy (MoHEISTD, 2018). This research aims to contribute to this transformation by examining how essay assessment practices can be effectively aligned with the principles of Constructivism and Education 5.0 framework, fostering a more responsive educational system that meets the demands of a rapidly evolving economy.

Zimbabwe's HE is undergoing a significant transformation with the adoption of the Education 5.0 framework, which emphasises a learner-centered approach that prioritizes critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. This shift aims to produce graduates equipped with the skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing economy, particularly through the use of locally available resources to generate goods and services. However, a critical gap exists in our understanding of how to effectively align essay assessment practices with these new educational goals, particularly within the DoHSS.

The DoHSS, which contributes 82% to the national skills requirements, plays a pivotal role in shaping the country's future leaders and professionals. Yet, research has largely overlooked the alignment between essay assessment practices and the constructivist pedagogy employed by lecturers within the DoHSS, leaving a significant knowledge gap regarding the effectiveness of current assessment practices in fostering the desired graduate attributes. This gap is particularly concerning given the Education 5.0 framework's emphasis on entrepreneurial skills and the need for assessment methods that cultivate these competencies.

This study investigates the extent to which essay assessment practices, specifically reflective essays and argumentative essays, in the DoHSS align with the principles of Constructivism and Education 5.0. This misalignment could hinder the development of essential skills, such as critical thinking and problem-solving, and ultimately contribute to a workforce that is unprepared for the demands of a 21st-century economy.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Zimbabwe's HE is undergoing a significant transformation with the adoption of the Education 5.0 framework, which emphasizes a learner-centered approach that prioritizes critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. This shift aims to produce graduates equipped with the skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing economy, particularly through the use of locally available resources to generate goods and services. However, a critical gap exists in our understanding of how to effectively align essay assessment practices with these new educational goals, particularly within the DoHSS.

The DoHSS, which contributes 82% to the national skills requirements, plays a pivotal role in shaping the country's future leaders and professionals. Yet, research has largely overlooked the alignment between essay assessment practices and the constructivist pedagogy employed by lecturers within the DoHSS, leaving a significant knowledge gap regarding the effectiveness of current assessment practices in fostering the desired graduate attributes. This gap is particularly concerning given the Education 5.0 framework's emphasis on entrepreneurial skills and the need for assessment methods that cultivate these competencies.

This study investigates the extent to which essay assessment practices, specifically reflective essays and argumentative essays, in the DoHSS align with the principles of Constructivism and Education 5.0. This misalignment could hinder the development of essential skills, such

as critical thinking and problem-solving, and ultimately contribute to a workforce that is unprepared for the demands of a 21st-century economy.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. How do lecturers in the DoHSS employ essay assessments in their teaching practices
2. What are the key similarities, differences, and challenges observed in essay assessment practices among lecturers within the DoHSS?
3. What are the perceived strengths and limitations of the scoring and interpretation methods used for essay assessments in the DoHSS?
4. How do the essay assessment practices of lecturers in the DoHSS reflect the principles of Constructivism and the goals of Education 5.0?
5. What professional development and support mechanisms are necessary to facilitate the implementation of Education 5.0 aligned assessment practices among lecturers in the DoHSS?

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The main goal of this study is to investigate current practices of lecturers in the DoHSS on essay test item construction, administration, scoring and interpretation of results in HEIs in Zimbabwe. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine the alignment of lecturers' essay assessment practices with Constructivism and Education 5.0 principles.
2. Compare and identify areas for improvement in essay assessment practices among lecturers.

3. Evaluate the effectiveness of current scoring and interpretation methods for promoting desired graduate attributes.
4. Identify resources and support needed to enhance lecturers' skills in essay assessment, aligning with Constructivism and Education 5.0 principles.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is particularly pronounced in light of the ongoing education reforms in Zimbabwe, especially the implementation of the Education 5.0 framework introduced by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development in 2018. This framework emphasises innovative pedagogical approaches such as project-based learning, experiential learning, and interdisciplinary studies, which are designed to foster critical thinking, collaboration, and real-world problem-solving. By focusing on these methods, Education 5.0 aims to cultivate creative entrepreneurs who can drive the 21st-century economy, ensuring that graduates are not only knowledgeable but also equipped with the practical skills necessary for success in a competitive market. Given these transformative goals, studying essay assessment practices becomes essential to ensure that evaluations align with these new pedagogical strategies and effectively support desired student learning outcomes.

Furthermore, this study addressed the critical gap in aligning assessment practices with the principles of Constructivism, which promotes active and engaged learning. By identifying effective assessment strategies such as formative assessments, peer evaluations, and authentic assessments the research provided valuable insights into how educators could design evaluations that not only measure knowledge retention but also enhance students' critical thinking and creativity.

However, the study also recognised several challenges that lecturers experienced. Specifically, limited access to professional development opportunities hindered lecturers' ability to adopt innovative assessment methods. In addition, inadequate resources such as technological tools and support materials restricted the implementation of more engaging assessment strategies. Moreover, resistance to change from traditional assessment practices posed a significant barrier. To address these challenges, the research proposed targeted professional development programmes focused on equipping educators with the necessary skills and knowledge. In light of the research findings, it became clear that targeted skills training programs are essential for equipping educators to adopt innovative assessment practices. One of the primary recommendations was the establishment of assessment design workshops, where educators could learn to create a variety of assessment types, including formative, summative, and authentic assessments. These workshops would not only provide theoretical knowledge but also facilitate hands-on activities, allowing educators to collaborate and share best practices.

Recognizing the increasing role of technology in education, the research also highlighted the need for technology integration training. Such programs would focus on equipping lecturers with the skills to effectively use online assessment tools, learning management systems, and digital portfolios, thereby enhancing the overall assessment experience for both educators and students.

### **1.6 Limitations of the Study**

This study focused on essay assessment practices of lecturers in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (DoHSS) at two selected Zimbabwean universities. While this context provides valuable insights, it is important to note that it may limit the applicability of the findings to other academic disciplines where assessment practices could

differ significantly, such as in the sciences. Therefore, future research should consider including a wider range of disciplines and institutions to enhance generalizability.

In addition to scope limitations, the representativeness of the sample regarding lecturers' experience, age, and nationality may have influenced the results. Although efforts were made to include diverse participants, the characteristics of the sample could affect the data collected. To address this, expanding the sample size and diversity in future studies would be beneficial.

Moreover, variability in the implementation of constructivist-informed and Education 5.0-aligned assessments may have arisen from differences in lecturers' expertise and institutional contexts. While this study explored these factors, it may not have captured their full impact. Consequently, future research should investigate these contextual influences more comprehensively.

Furthermore, the study may not have identified all relevant factors affecting essay assessment practices within the frameworks of Constructivism and Education 5.0. The focus was primarily on key factors, and other influences may warrant further exploration to enrich understanding.

Lastly, challenges related to time, resource limitations, and data collection methods also impacted the study. Although strategies like data triangulation and purposeful sampling were employed to enhance credibility, these constraints may have limited the depth of the findings.

In summary, the main limitations of this study include its narrow scope, potential gaps in capturing factors responsible for choices in essay assessment methods, and challenges lecturers experienced in aligning the assessment practices to the Constructivist and Education 5.0 framework such as time, large class sizes, access to resources and professional development support from their institutions. By acknowledging these limitations, this study

lays the groundwork for future research that can expand on these findings and provide a more detailed understanding of assessment practices in the context of Education 5.0 and Constructivism.

### **1.7 Delimitations of the Study**

The study was delimited to essay assessment practices within the DoHSS at two selected Zimbabwean HEIs, one state university and one private university. This focused approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of assessment practices in distinct institutional contexts, which is crucial given the varying educational philosophies, resource availability, and institutional priorities that characterize state and private universities. By directly aligning with the research questions investigating the congruence of these practices with constructivist principles and the Education 5.0 framework, the study gained valuable insights into how these differing contexts influence assessment methodologies. This comparative lens enriched the research by highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities faced by lecturers in each institutional setting, ultimately enhancing the understanding of how institutional characteristics shape educational practices.

Additionally, the research was restricted to undergraduate programmes within the DoHSS, excluding other academic levels and disciplines. This decision facilitated a targeted investigation that addressed the practical concerns, challenges, and opportunities faced by lecturers in aligning their assessment practices with student-centered learning and the objectives of Education 5.0. Considering multiple academic levels and disciplines could have introduced complexities, such as varying assessment standards, pedagogical approaches, and student needs, which might obscure the specific issues relevant to undergraduate education. By focusing solely on undergraduate programmes, the study was able to provide a clearer and more coherent analysis of the unique dynamics at play in this context, ultimately enhancing

the relevance and applicability of the findings to the specific challenges faced by lecturers in this domain.

Moreover, the participant sample was intentionally limited to full-time lecturers currently employed at the two selected universities, regardless of their years of experience. This delimitation ensured that the study reflected the contextual and practical realities of assessment implementation, allowing for a more accurate and nuanced understanding of current practices in these institutional settings. Incorporating part-time lecturers could have introduced additional complexities, such as varying commitment levels, diverse teaching methodologies, and differing engagement with institutional policies. These factors might have obscured the specific challenges faced by full-time faculty, making it harder to draw coherent conclusions about assessment practices. Additionally, this choice provided insights into the unique challenges and opportunities encountered by lecturers in each context, enriching the comparative analysis of assessment practices. The selection of one state university and one private university further facilitated this comparative analysis, ensuring a representative sample for generalizing the research findings within the Zimbabwean HE context.

These delimitations enhanced the practicality and applicability of the study, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the alignment between lecturers' essay assessment practices in the DoHSS and the principles of constructivist learning and the Education 5.0 framework.

### **1.8 Assumptions of the study**

The study assumed that lecturers in the DoHSS possessed a foundational understanding of constructivist principles, including self-assessment, problem-solving, and critical thinking, as well as the Education 5.0 framework and its relevance to assessment practices. This assumption was crucial, as it set the stage for exploring the extent to which lecturers applied

and aligned their assessment practices with these principles and the entrepreneurial goals of Education 5.0, which aims to transform HE to meet the dynamic needs of society and the economy in Zimbabwe.

Additionally, the study presumed that lecturers were open to implementing constructivist approaches in their assessment practices. This openness was essential for examining their receptiveness to adopting new strategies that aligned with student-centered learning and the design philosophy of Education 5.0, thereby ensuring the relevance of the findings to contemporary educational reforms in Zimbabwe. Such reforms seek to create a more responsive education system that fosters innovation and entrepreneurship among students and promotes the government's transformation agenda for enhancing student outcomes relevant for producing goods and services.

Furthermore, the study assumed that participants would provide honest and accurate information about their essay assessment practices, which was vital for ensuring the validity and credibility of the research findings. The researcher also assumed a shared understanding among participants regarding the importance of aligning assessment practices with constructivist learning principles and the Education 5.0 framework. This assumption enabled a thorough investigation into the extent to which lecturers' practices reflected this understanding, thereby enhancing the study's depth and applicability within the context of Zimbabwe's educational transformation.

Finally, the study assumed that the research questions and methodology were suitable for addressing the research problem and investigating the alignment between lecturers' assessment practices and the desired principles. It acknowledged the potential for variations in essay assessment practices between the two selected universities, influenced by factors such as institutional culture, resources, policies, and lecturer autonomy. Recognizing these

contextual factors enhanced the study's external validity and its relevance to the broader Zimbabwean higher education system, particularly in light of ongoing education reforms aimed at integrating the principles of Education 5.0. This underscores the importance of these assumptions in framing the overall research context and supporting the transformative goals of the Zimbabwean education sector.

## **1.9 Definition of Key Terms**

### **1.9.1 Assessment**

Assessment is the comprehensive process of collecting and analyzing information regarding an individual's or group's knowledge, skills, abilities, or performance in a specific area. This process may involve various methods, such as tests, observations, or portfolios, to understand how well learners are achieving desired learning outcomes.

### **1.9.2 Evaluation**

Evaluation refers to the systematic approach to determining the value, effectiveness, or quality of a programme, process, or product. In the context of this study, it involves making judgments about the overall performance and impact of assessment methods, curricula, or teaching strategies based on collected data.

### **1.9.3 Item**

An item is a specific question, task, or prompt designed to measure students' knowledge, skills, or abilities in a particular subject area. Items can vary in format, including multiple-choice questions, short answer prompts, or essay questions, and are essential components of assessments and tests.

#### **1.9.4 Score interpretation**

refers to the process of analyzing and making sense of assessment results to derive meaningful conclusions about students' performance. In the context of individual items on an assessment, score interpretation involves examining students' responses to determine their strengths and weaknesses in specific content areas.

#### **1.9.5 Test**

A test is a structured method for assessing knowledge, skills, abilities, or other characteristics of students. Tests are typically standardized and can take various forms, such as written examinations, practical demonstrations, or oral assessments, to provide measurable outcomes of student learning.

#### **1.9.6 Test Construction, Creation, and Design**

These terms refer to the interchangeable processes involved in developing assessments that accurately measure the intended learning outcomes. This includes defining objectives, selecting appropriate item types, and ensuring that the test aligns with curriculum standards and effectively evaluates student learning.

#### **1.9.7 Test Administration**

Test administration encompasses the procedures for conducting and overseeing the testing process, ensuring that assessments are delivered consistently and fairly to all students. This includes managing the environment, providing instructions, and monitoring student progress during the assessment.

#### **1.9.8 Decolonization of Education**

Decolonization of education refers to a transformative approach that seeks to return educational systems to indigenous philosophies and practices. In this context, it emphasizes the importance of cultural relevance, local knowledge, and heritage in teaching and learning, aiming to empower learners and educators by valuing their backgrounds and experiences within the educational framework.

### **1.10 Summary**

This chapter introduced a research study that investigated the alignment of essay assessment practices among lecturers in the DoHSS at two Zimbabwean universities with the principles of Constructivism and the Education 5.0 framework. It emphasized the critical role of essay assessments in evaluating students' knowledge, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, particularly in the context of Zimbabwe's transition toward a more entrepreneurial and skills-based education system.

The chapter established the research problem by identifying a significant research gap regarding how lecturers adapted their essay assessment practices to align with Constructivism and Education 5.0. This misalignment was shown to hinder the effective implementation of the Education 5.0 curriculum and undermine the development of essential graduate attributes, which are crucial for the country's socio-economic progress.

To address this problem, the study outlined specific objectives, which included examining the alignment of lecturers' assessment practices with Constructivism and Education 5.0 principles, identifying areas for improvement in essay assessment practices, evaluating the effectiveness of current scoring and interpretation methods, and determining the resources and support needed to enhance lecturers' skills in essay assessment. This focus not only supports the government's transformation agenda but also aims to enhance student outcomes relevant for producing goods and services.

The chapter also detailed the research questions guiding the study. These questions focused on understanding current essay assessment practices, identifying similarities and differences among lecturers in the two institutions, evaluating the strengths and limitations of existing essay assessment administration, scoring and interpretation methods, and exploring the extent to which these practices aligned with the principles of Constructivism and the Education 5.0 framework.

The chapter concluded by discussing the study's limitations and delimitations, acknowledging potential issues with generalizability due to the specific focus on undergraduate programmes in the DoHSS at the two selected universities. It highlighted key assumptions, including the expectation that lecturers possessed a foundational understanding of constructivist principles and were open to implementing these approaches in their assessments. Recognizing these assumptions was vital for framing the overall research context and supporting the transformative goals of the Zimbabwean HE sector.

This chapter served as a foundation for the subsequent exploration of relevant literature, presented in Chapter Two. The literature review will delve into the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, examine the historical development of essay assessments, and explore empirical studies that provide insights into the alignment of assessment practices with Constructivism and Education 5.0. This comprehensive review lays the groundwork for the research methodology and data analysis presented in later chapters.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviewed available related literatures and research findings on essay test construction, administration, scoring and interpretation and its challenges in measurement and evaluation as a whole and how essay assessment practices among lecturers in the DoHSS align with the principles of Constructivism and Education 5.0 framework in Zimbabwe's HE context. Specifically, the review is structured around four key research areas, the alignment of lecturers' essay assessment practices with Constructivism and Education 5.0 principles, key similarities and differences in assessment practices among lecturers within the same department and university, the effectiveness of current scoring and interpretation methods for promoting desired graduate attributes and resources and support needed to enhance lecturers' skills in aligning essay assessment, with Constructivism and Education 5.0 principles.

#### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

This study employed a multifaceted and integrated theoretical framework to investigate the alignment of essay assessment practices with the principles of Constructivism and Education 5.0. By integrating four theoretical perspectives, the Constructivist Theory, Social Constructivist Theory, Activity Theory, and the Implementation Theory, this study provides a comprehensive and detailed perspective on the complexities surrounding essay assessment practices within the Zimbabwean higher education context.

### **2.1.1 Constructivist Theory**

Constructivist Theory served as the foundational element of the framework due to its emphasis on student-centered learning, a core tenet of the entrepreneurial goals of Education 5.0. HEIs in Zimbabwe are mandated to implement this heritage-based, goal-focused education system designed to address critical skills shortages and produce graduates capable of contributing to economic development. Constructivist Theory posits that learning is an active process wherein learners construct their own understanding through personal experiences and reflections. This theory provided the basis to examine how lecturers design and implement assessment practices that foster active learning and knowledge construction, thereby aligning with the principles of Education 5.0 (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). The application of this theory enabled the study to assess how lecturers' essay assessment practices reflect or deviate from constructivist principles, particularly in promoting student-centered learning.

### **2.1.2 Social Constructivist Theory**

In order to investigate the influence of institutional contexts, cultural norms, policies, and social interactions on lecturers' assessment practices, Social Constructivist theory was applied in this study. This theory emphasises the role of language, culture, and social interactions in shaping educational practices, which is particularly relevant in Zimbabwe, where these factors can vary significantly across individuals and institutions. The application of this theory provided an opportunity to frame and explain how social and cultural contexts impact assessment practices and influence student learning outcomes. As Wertscher (1998) asserts, this theory allows researchers to explain how social phenomena are shaped by cultural contexts. The deployment of this theory in this research provided valuable insights into the assessment practices of lecturers in the DoHSS and their implications for the quality of educational outcomes.

### **2.1.3 Activity Theory**

The research involves the analysis of complex relationships between lecturers, students, and assessment activities, in order to investigate these complex relationships, the research utilized the Activity Theory to complement the aforementioned theories. Emphasising tools, rules, community, and division of labour, Activity Theory facilitated an examination of how interactions among these elements influence assessment practices or choices. According to Engeström (1999), this theory enables the exploration of how institutional factors and community interactions shape social phenomena. In this context, the theory helped in identifying the facilitators and barriers lecturers face in aligning their assessment practices with constructivist principles and the entrepreneurial goals of Education 5.0. This alignment is crucial for optimising student-centered learning, one of the central research questions in this study.

### **2.1.4 Implementation Theory**

Finally, Implementation Theory was utilized to illuminate the challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of Education 5.0 within the DoHSS at the selected universities. Focusing on lecturers, institutional resources, and organisational factors, this theory provided a framework for examining the complexities involved in aligning assessment practices with the principles of Education 5.0. By applying Implementation Theory, the research managed to identify the challenges and opportunities that arise during this alignment process and explored strategies for mitigating challenges while capitalising on available opportunities (Fixsen et al., 2005). This analysis is vital for enhancing the relevance of current essay assessment practices in achieving the desired outcomes of the new curriculum in Zimbabwean higher education.

Overall, the integration of these four theoretical perspectives offered a comprehensive framework for analysing the alignment of essay assessment practices with the principles of Constructivism and Education 5.0. The advantages of this multifaceted approach lie in its ability to capture the complexities of assessment practices, which have a tendency to vary from one institution to the other, consider social and cultural contexts, and provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in aligning assessment practices with the entrepreneurial goals of Education 5.0. Each theory contributes uniquely to the central focus of the research, thereby facilitating a richer exploration of the research questions. The accompanying diagram below illustrates the individual contributions of each perspective, reinforcing the necessity of an integrated approach to fully comprehend the complexities of essay assessment practices in Zimbabwean universities.

**The diagram below summaries how the four theories were used to explore the research questions of this study.**

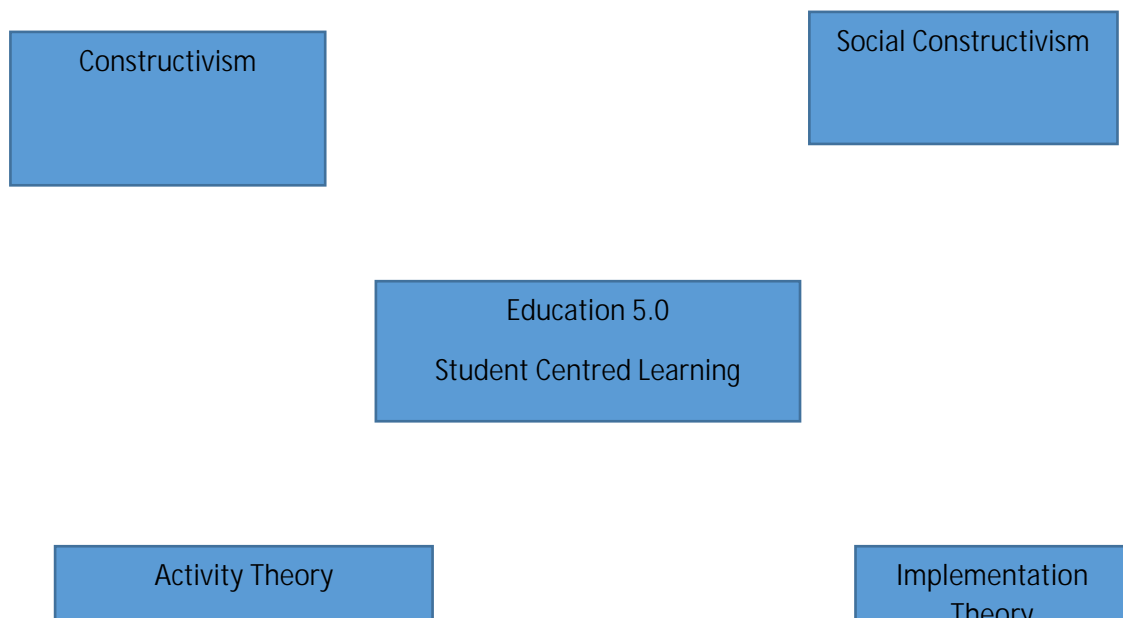


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of the study

## **2.2 History of Essay Assessments**

Essay assessments have a rich history within higher education, tracing back centuries to ancient civilizations such as China, where the Confucian examination system evaluated candidates' knowledge through essay writing. Similarly, the emergence of the first European universities in the Middle Ages relied on essay-based tests to gauge understanding in disciplines like religion, philosophy, and law (Raihan et al., 2023). This historical context underscores the longstanding value attributed to essay assessments as a means of evaluating critical thinking and intellectual capabilities.

During the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, essay assessments were further solidified as vital tools for measuring students' analytical and persuasive abilities. Scholars such as Daugherty and Lebovitz championed essay writing as a medium for self-expression and conceptual exploration (Rudolph et al., 2019). The expansion of university curricula in the 19th century, particularly in fields such as literature, history, and social sciences, led to an increased reliance on essay examinations to assess students' cognitive skills.

Despite their historical significance, essay assessments have been critiqued for issues related to bias, subjectivity, and scoring consistency. Scholars have highlighted how traditional essay prompts may restrict opportunities for students to demonstrate knowledge construction in alignment with constructivist principles (Bransford et al., 2000). In response, the 20th century saw efforts to enhance assessment objectivity through the development of scoring rubrics and the incorporation of essay testing across diverse academic disciplines, including the DoHSS.

Recent technological advancements have further transformed the administration and scoring of essay assessments, enabling larger-scale testing and providing quicker feedback via

computer-based platforms. Nevertheless, the intrinsic value of students' ability to articulate ideas, engage in scholarly discourse, and demonstrate critical thinking through essay writing remains paramount. This continuous recognition of student self-reflection essays as essential assessment tools resonates with the need to align practices with constructivist pedagogy and the Education 5.0 framework. Such alignment is central to the current study, which examines lecturers' approaches to developing, administering, scoring, and interpreting student self-reflection essays.

### **2.2.1 Types of Essay Test Items**

Essay exam items consist of open-ended questions or prompts that require students to produce written responses showcasing their knowledge, comprehension, analysis, and persuasive abilities. The two primary categories of essay exam items are restricted response and extended response formats, each serving distinct purposes and aligning differently with constructivist principles of assessment.

### **2.2.2 Restricted Response Essay Items**

Restricted response essay items provide students with specific instructions or parameters for answering a question. For instance, a prompt such as "Discuss the primary causes of climate change in a maximum of three paragraphs" limits the scope of the student's response. While this format effectively assesses factual knowledge and basic comprehension, it falls short of fostering the entrepreneurial skills and competencies outlined in Education 5.0. The rigid structure of these items may stifle creativity, risk-taking, and diverse problem-solving approaches—qualities essential for entrepreneurs navigating complex real-world challenges.

Moreover, the succinctness required in restricted responses may inhibit students' ability to engage in nuanced and multidimensional thinking, which is critical in the DoHSS disciplines.

This limitation raises important questions regarding the alignment of restricted response essay items with the entrepreneurial goals of Education 5.0, particularly how lecturers can design assessments that better cultivate the skills necessary for success in the 21st century. The study aims to explore these questions by examining lecturers' approaches to essay-based assessments and their impact on student learning outcomes within the DoHSS context.

From a constructivist perspective, restricted response essays risk promoting surface-level learning focused on memorization rather than deep engagement with ideas. This approach provides limited opportunities for students to actively construct knowledge, explore personal connections to the subject matter, and develop higher-order thinking skills. Such constraints are particularly concerning in the context of Education 5.0, where critical thinking, complex problem-solving, and adaptability are paramount. By limiting opportunities for deep engagement, restricted response essays may fail to equip learners with the competencies required for success in today's dynamic environment.

### **2.2.3 Extended Response Essay Items**

In contrast, extended response essay items offer students greater flexibility and freedom to develop in-depth, multifaceted answers. For example, a prompt such as "Analyse the impact of technology on assessment in higher education in a developing nation of your choice" encourages students to critically examine complex issues, incorporate diverse perspectives, and demonstrate skills in research, analysis, and persuasive writing all essential competencies for entrepreneurial success in Education 5.0. Extended response essays foster critical thinking, creativity, and self-reflection, helping students develop the adaptability and innovative problem-solving skills required to thrive in rapidly changing environments. The main focus of this study which aims to investigate the alignment of essay assessment

practices among lecturers in the DoHSS in Zimbabwean universities. It is also important to note that this is the direction of the current reforms in Zimbabwe's education system.

The open-ended nature of extended response essays allows students to explore real-world contexts and make meaningful connections to course content, preparing them to address complex challenges in their future careers. While challenges related to grading and feedback provision exist, the benefits of extended response essays in cultivating entrepreneurial skills make them a vital component of assessment in the DoHSS disciplines. This study investigated how lecturers in the DoHSS utilize extended response items to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes, thereby aligning assessment practices with the principles of Constructivism and the goals of Education 5.0.

The historical evolution of essay assessments, along with the distinctions between restricted and extended response formats, reveals the need for alignment with contemporary educational frameworks such as Education 5.0. By linking the analysis of essay types to the research problem, questions, and objectives, this examination underscores the importance of designing assessment practices that not only evaluate knowledge but also foster the skills and competencies essential for success in the 21st century. Through this lens, the current study seeks to contribute to the improvement of essay assessment practices in Zimbabwean HE, ultimately supporting the development of graduates equipped to navigate the complexities of today's world.

### **2.3 Essay Test Item Construction**

The construction of essay items is a critical component of assessment design, significantly influencing the validity and reliability of evaluations in HE. The central role of assessment design in cultivating and promoting essential skills and competencies makes a good case for research in this area that reveals a significant dearth in research and knowledge. As discussed

in previous sections, the limitations associated with restricted response essays and the advantages of extended response essays underscore the necessity for meticulously crafted essay prompts that foster critical thinking, knowledge production, and active learning. Available literature underscores the importance of essay item construction but reveals significant gaps in how lecturers align this with the contemporary education philosophies like Education 5.0. This is the gap that the current research seeks to address by investigating how lecturers are aligning essay item construction with the design philosophy of education 5.0 and the principles of Constructivism that promotes entrepreneurial skills and a student centered approach to learning. The available literature emphasizes the importance of creating essay prompts that are clear, specific, and relevant, aligning closely with intended learning outcomes (Clariana & Wallace, 2002; Yurdabakan, 2011). Moreover, considerations of construct validity and scoring consistency are vital to ensure that essay assessments are both valid and trustworthy (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). This research will seek to plug this gap by examining the limitations that lectures experience in utilizing scoring rubrics and interpreting scores in order to achieve scoring consistency in their teaching practices.

### **2.3.1 Construct Validity in Essay Assessments**

Construct validity refers to the degree to which an assessment accurately measures the intended skills or knowledge rather than extraneous factors. In the context of essay assessments, ensuring construct validity is essential for confirming that essay prompts measure students' understanding and analytical abilities rather than their capacity for rote memorization. For example, a prompt asking students to "List the main causes of the First Chimurenga War" may lack construct validity, as it primarily requires factual recall. Conversely, a prompt that instructs students to "Analyse the social, economic, and political

factors contributing to the outbreak of the First Chimurenga War" necessitates critical thinking and the ability to synthesise information, thereby enhancing construct validity.

To further validate essay questions, lecturers can pilot prompts with a small group of students and analyse their responses to identify any biases or ambiguities, subsequently revising the questions as needed. Additional methods, such as expert reviews, cognitive interviews, and think-aloud protocols, can provide valuable insights into the validity of essay prompts. For instance, expert panels can assess the alignment of prompts with intended learning outcomes, while cognitive interviews allow students to articulate their thought processes during the assessment, highlighting potential areas of confusion.

In the context of Education 5.0, which emphasizes developing entrepreneurial skills and competencies, the design of essay assessments must encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. Constructivist prompts, such as "Design a sustainable community, considering environmental, social, and economic factors," not only require critical analysis but also foster innovative thinking and real-world problem-solving skills. By incorporating open-ended prompts and authentic scenarios, lecturers can create assessments that are engaging and aligned with the complex skills demanded in today's educational landscape.

### **2.3.2 Principles of Essay Test Item Construction**

The development of effective essay test items is vital for evaluating students' complex learning outcomes, particularly in higher education. Mehrens and Lehmann (1991) provide guidelines for crafting essay questions that align with instructional objectives, emphasizing careful consideration and clear phrasing to elicit the desired responses from students. For instance, a well-structured essay question, such as "*Analyse the role of nationalism in the outbreak of the First Chimurenga in Zimbabwe, discussing specific events and ideologies that contributed to the war,*" clearly directs students to demonstrate their understanding of the

topic. In contrast, a poorly phrased question like, “*What happened during the First Chimurenga in Zimbabwe?*” lacks clarity and specificity, potentially leading to superficial responses that do not encourage critical analysis or problem-solving.

Jonassen (1999) advocates for constructivist-structured essay questions designed to promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and metacognition. For example, a well-structured prompt such as, “*Compare and contrast the events in Mashonaland and Matebeleland leading to the outbreak of the First Chimurenga,*” compels students to engage critically and analytically with the material. Conversely, vague prompts like, “*What do you think happened in Mashonaland and Matebeleland during the First Chimurenga?*” fail to provide clear guidance, resulting in responses that do not effectively demonstrate the desired learning outcomes.

Guidelines provided by Koksals (2004) and Sarita (2005) further emphasise the necessity of defining the behaviour or process to be exhibited, asking specific questions that require the application of essential knowledge, and necessitating precise responses. For instance, a well-constructed question in an education course might be, “*Design a lesson plan for teaching fractions to a group of 4th-grade students, including specific learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment measures.*” This question clearly outlines expectations, enabling students to demonstrate their understanding of educational principles in a practical context. In contrast, an ambiguous prompt like, “*Write about teaching,*” lacks specificity and fails to guide students effectively.

Despite existing guidelines, research indicates that essay questions are often poorly designed, leading to inconsistent and unreliable assessments (Baxter & Elder, 2001). This finding highlights the necessity for lecturers to critically reflect on their assessment practices, particularly in light of the transformations within the HE and the implementation of

Education 5.0, which promotes student-centered learning and critical thinking as essential outcomes (UNESCO, 2019). The finding further points to a need to design professional development and capacity building programmes for lecturers to upscale their skills in essay item design, construction, administration and scoring consistency through use of rubrics with defined criteria and application of technology in essay scoring and grading. This lacuna prompted the investigation of the current practices of lecturers in designing and utilizing essay test items to assess student learning outcomes and how these practices align with the principles of constructivism and the framework of Education 5.0.

The effective construction of essay test items is essential for promoting knowledge construction, critical analysis, and other skills central to constructivist learning. Lecturers must meticulously consider instructional objectives and craft essay questions that are clear, specific, and focused. The importance of this cannot be over-emphasized. Apart from developing creative thinkers and problem solvers, these assessment practices have great potential in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in students. These are the skills that enable the students to competently function in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The guidelines provided by Mehrens and Lehmann (1991), Jonassen (1999), Koksal (2004), and Sarita (2005) are crucial for designing essay items that foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and metacognitive skills. It is critical that lecturers adhere and apply these principles and guidelines in designing essay assessment items in order to enhance item reliability and validity and to achieve overall alignment with the constructivist principles and the entrepreneurial goals of Education 5.0.

#### **2.4 Essay Test Item Administration**

The administration of essay items plays a vital role in ensuring fairness, minimising bias, and promoting student autonomy and self-reflection (Yurdabakan, 2011). In the context of Education 5.0, which emphasises the cultivation of entrepreneurial skills and competencies, administrative practices must align with these educational goals (Smith, 2000). Essential

elements of effective administration include clear instructions, effective time management, and the establishment of equitable testing environments, all of which provide students with equal opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills (Kline, 2013). Furthermore, the integration of online essay management systems can enhance academic integrity and reduce bias, while offering students increased flexibility and autonomy in their assessments (Mattern & Zumbo, 2013). The central role of item administration in the assessment process prompted the investigation of lecturers' essay item administration techniques in order to gain insights into how these techniques promote fairness and student autonomy and self-reflection. However, there is a dearth of literature on essay item administration in Zimbabwe's HE. The available literatures are largely based on pre university education and lacks applicability to HE settings. It is in light of this view that this research focuses on this aspect.

#### **2.4.1 Addressing Bias through Differential Item Functioning (DIF)**

In the DoHSS, the risk of bias is heightened due to the complexity and nuance of the subject matter (Klenowski, 2013). Differential Item Functioning (DIF) analysis can be employed to identify and mitigate biases by examining performance differences among student groups on specific essay items (Mattern & Zumbo, 2013). For example, a DIF analysis may reveal that an essay question based on a historical event poses greater challenges for students from non-Western cultural backgrounds (Kline, 2013).

By implementing DIF analysis, lecturers can foster fairness and equity in assessments, ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills (Yurdabakan, 2011). This is particularly pertinent within the framework of Education 5.0, which seeks to develop competencies relevant to diverse contexts and industries (Smith, 2000). Additionally, DIF analysis promotes student autonomy and self-reflection by

establishing transparent assessment criteria and standards, thereby involving students more deeply in the assessment process (Klenowski, 2013).

## **2.5 Essay Item Scoring**

The scoring of essay items presents a complex challenge that involves subjective judgment and yet scoring occupies the center piece of assessment. Concerns regarding validity and reliability have led to the adoption of benchmark essays and inter-rater reliability tests to enhance scoring consistency (Yurdabakan, 2011). However, in HE, whilst there is limited application of inter-rater reliability tests, most HEIs apply internal and external moderation mechanisms to enhance fairness and reliability in the scoring process. Nonetheless, the establishment of clear and unambiguous scoring guidelines remains crucial to ensuring uniformity and impartiality in essay scoring (Yurdabakan, 2011). In this regard, the use of scoring rubrics has been emphasised as a pivotal means of improving grading objectivity and consistency (Broad & Datta, 2019). This is particularly significant within Education 5.0, where the focus on developing diverse skills and competencies necessitates that students take ownership of their learning and actively participate in the assessment process. In view of the above, the current research was prompted by the desire to investigate the mechanisms enforce to ensure scoring reliability and fairness in essay assessment in HEIs where grading is entirely a preserve of the lecturer.

### **2.5.1 Constructivist Approaches to Scoring**

From a constructivist perspective, the adoption of open-ended essay topics is essential for promoting critical thinking, analysis, and knowledge creation skills that are crucial for entrepreneurial success in the 21st century (Xamani, 2013). Reflective essay prompts that encourage students to critically analyse their own learning experiences have also been shown to promote deeper understanding and metacognitive skills (Yurdabakan, 2013), which are

vital for adaptability and innovation in an ever-evolving educational landscape. Research indicates that when students receive constructivist feedback, focusing on strengths and areas for improvement they demonstrate enhanced writing skills, including better organisation, coherence, and critical analysis (Ulahir, 2012; Kine & Rudolph). These skills are highly valued within entrepreneurial ecosystems hence the critical need to investigate this area and provide empirical data for enriching professional practice as well as indicating gaps for future research in educational measurement and evaluation.

The integration of authentic assessment into essay item development and scoring procedures has emerged as an effective strategy for fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and knowledge transfer to real-world situations (Pointek, 2018; Susilaningsih & Esomou). This approach aligns with the entrepreneurial objectives of Education 5.0, which emphasizes the importance of skills relevant to diverse contexts and industries (Smith, 2000). By utilizing authentic assessments, students are afforded the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills in practical scenarios, thereby cultivating the entrepreneurial mind-set essential for success in contemporary environments. However, there remains limited research in the utility of integrating authentic assessment into essay items. An area that the current study seeks to address.

### **2.5.2 Constructivist Scoring Features**

Constructivist scoring approaches prioritise student-centered learning, autonomy, and self-regulation. Common features include the use of open-ended prompts, authentic assessments, and feedback focused on areas of strength and progress. These practices emphasise the development of metacognitive skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities, actively involving students in the assessment process. By empowering students to take ownership of their learning, constructivist scoring approaches can foster deeper learning outcomes and

improved academic performance, thereby preparing students for success in the entrepreneurial landscape.

### **2.5.3 Addressing Implementation Challenges**

Despite the evidence supporting the effectiveness of constructivist scoring approaches, gaps remain in understanding their practical implementation. Key questions include: How can lecturers ensure that scoring guidelines are clear and unambiguous? How can constructive, actionable feedback be provided to students? What challenges arise when implementing constructivist scoring approaches in large-scale assessments, and how can these challenges be mitigated? This study aims to explore these questions, providing insights into the implementation of constructivist scoring approaches within the DoHSS, with a specific focus on promoting entrepreneurial skills and competencies among students.

The administration and scoring of essay items are critical components of effective assessment practices in higher education. By aligning these practices with the principles of constructivism and the goals of Education 5.0, lecturers can create assessments that not only evaluate student knowledge but also foster the skills and competencies necessary for success in the 21st century.

### **2.6 Essay Item Interpretation**

The interpretation of essay responses is a pivotal element of the assessment process, offering insights into students' knowledge construction and their understanding of complex concepts. This approach aligns closely with constructivist principles, which emphasize student-centered learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving (Jonassen, 1999). By thoroughly analysing essay responses, lecturers can discern patterns of thought, identify misconceptions, and

pinpoint areas of confusion. Such analysis can inform instructional strategies and enhance student outcomes, a central goal of Education 5.0 (UNESCO, 2019).

### **2.6.1 Constructivist Framework in Interpretation**

Constructivist theories, notably those proposed by Piaget (1950), posit that students actively construct their own knowledge through experiential learning. Consequently, the interpretation of essay responses should prioritize understanding how students build knowledge rather than merely assessing factual recall. This necessitates a shift away from traditional assessment methods that often focus on memorization towards evaluating critical thinking, problem-solving, and metacognitive skills (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Effective feedback is an essential component of the interpretation process, enabling students to revise and deepen their comprehension of complex concepts. Constructivist ideals advocate for feedback that is timely, specific, and focused on the learning process rather than solely on the final product (Hativa, 2013). Research indicates that feedback fostering self-reflection, critical thinking, and problem-solving significantly enhances student learning outcomes (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Providing opportunities for self-assessment, peer review, and constructive feedback aligns with both constructivist principles and the objectives of Education 5.0, which emphasize student autonomy and agency (UNESCO, 2019).

### **2.7 Essay Item Assessment Practices in Zimbabwean HEIs.**

Despite the critical role of essay items in evaluating student learning outcomes, there is a notable lack of research on essay assessment practices within Zimbabwean HEIs. Existing studies have primarily explored lecturers' perspectives and experiences, leaving significant gaps in understanding the comprehensive practices of constructing, administering, scoring, and interpreting essay assessments. Challenges identified in previous research include large class sizes and heavy workloads, which hinder lecturers' ability to provide meaningful

feedback and individualized attention to student essays. This situation often results in assessments that do not adequately foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial skills, which are core competencies needed in the current educational landscape. The misalignment between traditional instructional methods, which focus on syllabus completion, and the demands of contemporary educational philosophies further exacerbates these issues. Such misalignment negatively impacts skills development, particularly in the DoHSS, where a critical skills deficit of 18% has been reported. Furthermore, many lecturers lack the necessary training and experience in designing effective self-reflection essays, leading to poorly constructed prompts that do not elicit desired learning outcomes.

In addition, systemic issues such as inadequate rewards and recognition for lecturers' efforts in developing rigorous assessment practices contribute to a cycle of demotivation. With heavy teaching loads, lecturers often lack the time and incentive to refine their essay assessment practices. The absence of competitive remuneration or promotion opportunities for excellence in assessment design further perpetuates disengagement and undermines the potential for effective student self-reflection assessments.

These challenges are compounded by broader quality assurance issues within Zimbabwean HE. Garwe (2014) highlights the need for comprehensive quality management systems, including clear policies and monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective assessment practices. The lack of such systems has led to inconsistencies and shortcomings in assessment across many universities.

The urgency to address these challenges is underscored by the ongoing transformation in HE, guided by constructivist principles and the entrepreneurial goals of Education 5.0. Constructivist learning emphasises the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and

metacognitive skills, abilities essential for success in the 21st century. Similarly, Education 5.0 advocates for a shift toward student-centered, experiential learning that fosters entrepreneurial mindsets and competencies (UNESCO, 2019). However, the shortcomings in essay assessment practices observed in Zimbabwean HEIs pose significant barriers to achieving these transformative educational goals. Poorly designed essay items that fail to elicit higher-order thinking can hinder the development of the skills and entrepreneurial capabilities critical for today's students.

While prior research has identified challenges faced by Zimbabwean lecturers in developing and implementing effective essay assessments, significant gaps remain in understanding their specific assessment practices and the factors influencing these practices within the DoHSS. This study seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by conducting an investigation into the essay assessment practices of lecturers in the DoHSS at Zimbabwean HEIs.

Specifically, the study examined current essay assessment practices, the challenges encountered in designing and implementing effective assessments, and the strategies lecturers utilise to overcome these challenges. The study also explored how these practices align with constructivist principles and the objectives of Education 5.0, thereby illuminating how current assessment strategies support the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and metacognitive skills essential for student success.

By delving into these issues, the study aimed to provide valuable insights into the specific assessment behaviours and challenges faced by DoHSS lecturers, along with the contextual factors that shape their essay assessment practices. This knowledge will inform targeted interventions, training programmes, and policy reforms to enhance the quality and effectiveness of essay assessments within Zimbabwean HE.

### **2.7.1 Comparative Analysis of Essay Item Practices**

The alignment of essay assessments with learning objectives, as well as with the principles of constructivism and Education 5.0, is essential for fostering deep learning and critical thinking skills in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Zimbabwe. Despite the significance of this alignment, there exists a notable gap in research concerning how these assessments correspond with educational principles across Zimbabwean universities. This study sought to address this gap by investigating the alignment of essay assessments with the principles of constructivism and Education 5.0 at two selected universities in Zimbabwe and then generalise the findings to the broader HE landscape in the country.

The available literature emphasises the necessity of aligning assessment items with learning objectives, as this alignment is crucial for promoting deep learning and critical thinking skills (Boud, 2000; Bloxham, 2015). However, research by Mukudu (2017) indicates that many lecturers in Zimbabwean HEIs lack the training and support necessary to design effective assessments, leading to misalignments between assessment items and learning objectives. This misalignment poses a barrier to achieving the educational objectives outlined in Education 5.0, which aims to cultivate entrepreneurial skills, creativity, and innovation in students (Chakuchichi, 2019; Ministry of Higher Education, 2018).

The extent to which essay assessments align with constructivist principles and Education 5.0 can vary significantly among universities and faculties in Zimbabwe. For example, Zinyeka (2019) found that institutions like the University of Zimbabwe have made strides in aligning their essay assessments with these educational principles, whereas others, such as Midlands State University, exhibit less alignment. Variability is also observed in the use of problem-solving essay formats, specification tables, and scoring rubrics; some HEIs emphasise critical thinking and problem-solving, while others prioritise recall and memorisation

(Zinyeka, 2019). The inconsistent application of specification tables and scoring rubrics can contribute to variability in assessment quality (Nyoni, 2020). This variability seriously undermines the quality and achievement or realization of student-centred learning and entrepreneurial goals of Education 5.0.

It is argued by Moyo that Institutional policies and guidelines significantly influence assessment practices. In view of this some HEIs have established clear frameworks for assessment design, encouraging alignment with constructivist principles as a way of fostering quality, reliability and fairness in assessment, while others leave it to individual lecturers or departments to develop their own practices (Ministry of Higher Education, 2018). The latter practice increases variability in the assessment reliability and consistency as there is no institutional guidelines to harmonize assessment. The availability of lecturer support and professional development opportunities was also observed to vary widely across institutions, thus impacting seriously, the extent to which lecturers can effectively design assessments (Mukudu, 2017). This is mainly because the lecturers who are inexperienced lack institutional support and capacity building initiatives that ensure that their gaps in assessment skills are corrected.

## **2.8 Factors Influencing Essay Item Practices**

In the DoHSS of Zimbabwean universities, essay item practices encompassing construction, administration, scoring, and interpretation are shaped by a complex interplay of factors. One significant factor is the pedagogical ideologies held by lecturers. Research has indicated that those lecturers who subscribe to constructivist theories, which emphasise student-centered and active learning (Jonassen, 1999), are more likely to design essay items that stimulate critical thinking, analysis, and problem-solving. Conversely, lecturers adhering to traditional or behaviourist approaches may focus on rote memorisation and factual recall and understanding (Biggs, 2003), resulting in assessment items that prioritise information

reproduction. This research study delved into this and explored the applicability of these research findings in the education system in Zimbabwe, particularly in the DoHSS within the framework of Education 5.0.

### **2.8.1 Impact of Training and Professional Development**

Research has revealed that the availability of training and professional development opportunities also plays a crucial role in shaping lecturers' assessment practices. It is argued that Lecturers exposed to modern assessment techniques, such as competency-based or authentic assessments, are more likely to create items that evaluate higher-order thinking skills and the application of knowledge in real-world contexts (Wiggins, 1998). In contrast, those lacking such training may lean towards recall-focused questions. Research underscores the significant impact of lecturer training on assessment design and practice (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Knight, 2001). The findings of this study are expected to confirm or reject the current research findings as presented above. The investigation of essay assessment practices among lecturers in the DoHSS at two universities with different institutional contexts provides a unique opportunity for this study to further knowledge and discourse on this area. In addition, findings on this aspect will benefit HEIs through recommending targeted professional development and capacity building training programmes germane to constructivism and Education 5.0.

### **2.8.2 Institutional Policies and Norms**

Institutional policies and norms provide a foundational influence on assessment procedures in Zimbabwean universities. Institutions that prioritize student-centered learning and critical thinking encourage the design of essay items that align with these principles. In contrast, those favouring traditional or didactic methods may promote assessments focused primarily

on rote memorization (Trowler, 2010). The level of institutional support, including available resources for innovative assessment practices, also affects lecturers' choices.

### **2.8.3 Student Characteristics and Expectations**

The qualities and expectations of students in the DoHSS further shape lecturers' approaches to essay item design. Lecturers working with diverse student populations may incorporate universal design principles (Barkley, 2010) to meet varying needs and abilities. Sociocultural theories of learning suggest that students' prior experiences can impact their performance on assessments (Vygotsky, 1978). For instance, students with limited exposure to critical thinking may excel on recall-based assessments, while those experienced in analytical tasks may perform better on problem-solving-oriented questions.

### **2.8.4 Power Structures and Institutional Constraints**

Power dynamics within departments and universities can also significantly influence lecturers' assessment practices. Senior faculty or departmental leaders may exert pressure on junior lecturers to conform to specific approaches, potentially leading to a homogenization of assessment practices that stifles innovation (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). Even well-trained lecturers may encounter constraints in implementing ideal assessment methods due to institutional policies, class sizes, or workload challenges (Ramsden, 2003). For example, the desire to adopt a more student-centered approach may be hindered by large class sizes or institutional emphasis on traditional assessment methods.

## **2.9 Summary.**

This literature review has examined the theoretical framework underpinning this study, tracing the historical development of essay assessments and their various types, with a focus on the pedagogical, ideological and social factors shaping essay item construction,

administration, scoring, and interpretation in Zimbabwean universities' DoHSS. The review also explored the challenges and opportunities lecturers face in adapting essay assessment methods to the requirements of the new curriculum. The review has identified knowledge gaps and inconsistencies in aligning essay assessment practices with the principles of constructivism and Education 5.0, highlighting the urgent need for innovative, student-centered approaches that prioritise critical thinking, analysis, and problem-solving.

The literature review guided the researcher's decision to focus on student self-reflection assessments within the Zimbabwean HE context. For instance, the lack of clear evidence regarding how lecturers interpret essay responses to foster student self-reflection led to the research questions, which investigate the alignment of essay assessment practices with the principles of constructivism and Education 5.0. The review also revealed a scarcity of research on the opportunities and challenges lecturers face in implementing essay assessment practices that align with the demands of an entrepreneurial goal focused education 5.0.

This study aims to inform the development of essay assessment practices, policies, and strategies that align with the constructivist and entrepreneurial goals of Education 5.0, promoting a student-centered, skills-focused approach to learning. The findings of this study could inform the development of lecturer training programmes, revision of institutional policies, and creation of innovative assessment tools that prioritise critical thinking, analysis, and problem-solving.

The next chapter will outline the research methodology employed to investigate current essay assessment practices in Zimbabwean universities, with a focus on student self-reflection and how lecturers' practices are aligned to education 5.0. This research will examine whether lecturers in Zimbabwean HEIs utilise student-centered assessment approaches, and how their assessment practices impact student experiences and learning outcomes within the DoHSS.

Ultimately, this study will contribute to the knowledge base by providing insights into the alignment of essay assessment practices with the principles of constructivism and Education 5.0, and informing the development of innovative assessment practices that promote student-centered, skills-focused learning.

This literature review has critically examined the theoretical framework underlying this study, tracing the historical development of essay assessments and their various types within the context of Zimbabwean universities' DoHSS. It has explored the pedagogical, ideological, and social factors that influence essay item construction, administration, scoring, and interpretation. Additionally, the review has highlighted the challenges and opportunities lecturers encounter in adapting essay assessment methods to meet the requirements of the new curriculum, particularly in light of the principles of constructivism and Education 5.0.

The review has identified significant knowledge gaps and inconsistencies in the alignment of essay assessment practices with constructivist principles and the goals of Education 5.0. These gaps underscore the urgent need for innovative, student-centered approaches that prioritize critical thinking, analysis, and problem-solving skills. The literature has guided the focus of this study on student self-reflection assessments within the Zimbabwean higher education (HE) context. Specifically, the lack of comprehensive evidence regarding how lecturers interpret essay responses to foster student self-reflection has shaped the research questions aimed at investigating the alignment of essay assessment practices with these educational principles. Furthermore, the review has revealed a scarcity of research addressing the opportunities and challenges lecturers face in implementing essay assessment practices that fulfil the entrepreneurial goals associated with Education 5.0.

This study aims to contribute to the development of essay assessment practices, policies, and strategies that align with the constructivist and entrepreneurial goals of Education 5.0,

promoting a student-centered, skills-focused approach to learning. The anticipated findings could inform the development of lecturer training programs, the revision of institutional policies, and the creation of innovative assessment tools that emphasize critical thinking, analysis, and problem-solving.

The next chapter will outline the research methodology employed to investigate current essay assessment practices in Zimbabwean universities, focusing on student self-reflection and the alignment of lecturers' practices with Education 5.0. This research will examine whether lecturers in Zimbabwean HEIs employ student-centered assessment approaches and how these practices impact student experiences and learning outcomes within the DoHSS. Ultimately, this study seeks to enrich the existing knowledge base by providing insights into the alignment of essay assessment practices with the principles of constructivism and Education 5.0, thereby informing the development of innovative assessment practices that promote student-centered, skills-focused learning.

The next chapter will outline the research methodology employed to investigate current essay assessment practices in Zimbabwean universities, focusing on student self-reflection and the alignment of lecturers' practices with Education 5.0. This study will utilize a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather comprehensive data from lecturers across various universities. The quantitative component will assess the extent of alignment between essay assessments and the principles of constructivism and Education 5.0, while the qualitative interviews will provide deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities lecturers face in implementing these practices. By examining whether lecturers in Zimbabwean HEIs employ student-centered assessment approaches and how these practices impact student experiences and learning outcomes within the DoHSS, this study aims to enrich the existing knowledge base. Ultimately, the findings

will inform the development of innovative assessment practices that promote student-centered, skills-focused learning.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this study to investigate the alignment of essay assessment practices of lecturers in the DoHSS at two universities in Zimbabwe underpinned by the constructivist principles and education 5.0 framework. The chapter details the research paradigm, approach, design, population and sample, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations used in this study. This comprehensive methodology was designed to closely align with the study's theoretical framework of Constructivism and Education 5.0, ultimately aiming to enhance understanding of current assessment practices and their effectiveness in fostering student learning outcomes.

#### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

The study was grounded in the constructivist research paradigm, which aligned seamlessly with the principles of Education 5.0. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the constructivist paradigm posits that reality is socially constructed and that knowledge is co-created through interactions between the researcher and participants. This philosophical lens

was particularly relevant to the research problem, as it allowed for an exploration of the complex nature of lecturers' essay assessment practices in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (DoHSS). By focusing on how knowledge was constructed within the educational context, the research illuminated the ways in which lecturers designed and implemented assessment strategies that fostered student self-reflection and critical thinking.

Moreover, the constructivist paradigm facilitated a deeper understanding of lecturers' perceptions regarding the relevance and alignment of their practices with constructivist principles and Education 5.0. This alignment was crucial, as the new curriculum emphasized entrepreneurial skills, creativity, and problem-solving—attributes essential for preparing graduates for the 21st century. By engaging with lecturers' narratives and experiences, the research captured the nuances of their assessment practices, providing insights into how these practices could be improved to better meet educational goals.

Additionally, this paradigm allowed for an investigation into how lecturers' interactions with their social environments influenced their assessment choices and interpretations. It recognized that educational practices were not developed in isolation but were shaped by institutional contexts, peer interactions, and broader societal expectations. This perspective was important in understanding the challenges lecturers encountered and how these challenges impacted the alignment of their practices with the entrepreneurial-focused goals of the new curriculum.

The benefits of employing the constructivist paradigm in this research were manifold. Firstly, it enabled the researcher to gain rich, qualitative insights that quantitative methods alone might have overlooked, thereby addressing the research questions more comprehensively. By capturing the lived experiences of lecturers, the research highlighted specific barriers to effective essay assessment practices, as well as potential strategies for overcoming these

challenges. Secondly, this paradigm fostered an interactive relationship between the researcher and participants, encouraging dialogue that led to emergent themes and ideas that may not have been anticipated at the outset of the study.

Ultimately, by utilizing the constructivist paradigm, the research generated new insights into essay assessment practices within higher education, contributing to a body of knowledge that informed policy, enhanced teaching practices, and improved student outcomes in alignment with the principles of Education 5.0.

### **3.2. Research Approach**

The study employed a mixed-methods research approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques, which was essential for addressing the multifaceted nature of the research problem. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), this approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena by combining the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods.

In the context of this research, the mixed-methods approach was particularly relevant as it enabled the exploration of lecturers' essay assessment practices from multiple perspectives. The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews that provided rich, contextual insights into lecturers' experiences, perceptions, and the challenges they faced in aligning their practices with the principles of Constructivism and Education 5.0. These interviews facilitated a deeper exploration of the nuances underlying assessment practices, which quantitative data alone could not capture.

The quantitative component, through surveys, assessed the prevalence and patterns of specific assessment practices among a larger lecturer population. This aspect was crucial for identifying trends and establishing a baseline understanding of how widely Constructivist and Education 5.0-aligned practices were being implemented. By integrating both qualitative and

quantitative data, the research was able to triangulate findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the results.

The benefits of using this mixed-methods approach included a more holistic understanding of the research problem, allowing for the identification of specific areas for improvement in essay assessment practices. The mixed-methods design allowed for a multifaceted examination of the research problem, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to create a richer narrative. The synergy between qualitative and quantitative data enriched the analysis and facilitated the identification of specific areas for improvement in essay assessment practices. For instance, while the survey might indicate a widespread reliance on traditional assessment methods, the interviews could illuminate underlying reasons for this trend, such as lack of training or institutional support. This detailed understanding allowed for targeted recommendations that addressed both systemic issues and individual lecturer challenges, making them more actionable and relevant. The mixed-methods approach also supported the development of recommendations firmly grounded in empirical evidence. By combining the statistical significance of quantitative findings with the rich, descriptive insights from qualitative data, the study produced recommendations that were not only theoretically sound but also practically feasible. For example, if the quantitative results highlighted a lack of constructivist practices, the qualitative interviews could pinpoint the specific barriers lecturers faced, such as time constraints or inadequate resources. This duality ensured that recommendations were tailored to the actual needs and contexts of the lecturers, rather than being generic or overly theoretical. Moreover, the integration of qualitative and quantitative data enhanced the validity and reliability of the research findings. The triangulation of data sources allowed the researchers to cross-verify results, thereby bolstering confidence in the conclusions drawn. For instance, if qualitative findings revealed common themes regarding the challenges of implementing constructivist assessments, these

themes could be further examined and quantified in the survey data, establishing a stronger foundation for the study's conclusions. Finally, the mixed-methods design facilitated a more comprehensive exploration of the research questions. Each phase of research informed the other; the initial quantitative data guided the formulation of interview questions, ensuring that the qualitative phase addressed the most pressing issues identified in the survey. This iterative process enriched the overall analysis, enabling the researchers to delve deeper into the complexities of essay assessment practices and their alignment with educational frameworks.

In summary, the mixed-methods approach not only provided a holistic understanding of the research problem but also allowed for the identification of specific areas for improvement, development of grounded recommendations, enhanced validity, and a comprehensive exploration of the research questions. This methodological rigor ultimately contributed to the study's aim of generating actionable insights that could inform policy and practice in higher education assessment. Quantitative data, gathered through surveys, offered a broad overview of the prevalence and patterns of essay assessment practices among a large sample of lecturers. This data revealed trends, identifying how frequently certain practices were employed and how they aligned with Constructivist and Education 5.0 principles.

The qualitative component of the study, comprising in-depth interviews with lecturers, provided several critical benefits that enhanced the overall research findings and enriched the understanding of essay assessment practices within the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (DoHSS).

The in-depth interviews facilitated a deeper exploration of lecturers' perspectives and experiences regarding their assessment practices. Unlike quantitative surveys, which primarily capture numerical data and trends, qualitative interviews allowed participants to articulate their thoughts and feelings in their own words. This richness of data provided

contextual insights into how lecturers perceived the relevance and effectiveness of their assessment methods in relation to Constructivism and Education 5.0 principles. Such insights are invaluable for understanding the complexities of teaching practices, as they reveal the motivations, beliefs, and attitudes that underpin assessment strategies.

Furthermore, the qualitative component enabled the researchers to investigate the contextual factors influencing lecturers' assessment practices. Through open-ended questions, interviewees could discuss external challenges—such as institutional policies, resource availability, and cultural attitudes—that affected their ability to implement innovative assessment strategies. This exploration of context is essential for understanding not only the individual practices of lecturers but also the systemic barriers that may hinder effective assessment aligned with contemporary educational frameworks.

This dual approach allowed the researchers to capture not only the "what" of assessment practices but also the "why" behind them. For instance, while quantitative data might indicate a preference for traditional essay formats, qualitative insights could uncover the reasons for this preference, such as concerns over grading efficiency or perceived student preparedness. By elucidating these underlying motivations, the research provided a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and successes lecturers faced when attempting to implement constructivist and student-centred assessment approaches.

The qualitative findings played a crucial role in supporting the development of recommendations that were grounded in empirical evidence. Insights gathered from the interviews helped to identify specific areas for improvement in assessment practices, directly addressing the systemic issues highlighted in the quantitative phase. For example, if lecturers expressed a need for more professional development opportunities in constructivist pedagogy, this insight could inform targeted training initiatives. Such recommendations are

not only evidence-based but also contextually relevant, increasing the likelihood of successful implementation.

The synergy between qualitative and quantitative data enriched the overall analysis of the study. The qualitative component provided a narrative that complemented the statistical findings, allowing for a more holistic interpretation of the data. By integrating qualitative insights with quantitative trends, the researchers could draw more nuanced conclusions about the state of essay assessment practices. This integrative approach facilitated a more comprehensive exploration of the research questions, ensuring that diverse aspects of the problem were addressed.

Additionally, the qualitative data served to validate and deepen the understanding of the quantitative results. For instance, if survey data indicated a low implementation rate of constructivist practices, qualitative interviews could reveal the specific barriers lecturers faced, such as time constraints or institutional resistance. This validation process strengthened the reliability of the research findings and provided a clearer pathway for addressing identified issues.

The qualitative component of this study significantly enhanced the research by providing nuanced insights into lecturers' perspectives, exploring contextual factors, elucidating the motivations behind assessment practices, and supporting grounded recommendations. This depth of understanding enriched the analysis and facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the research questions, ultimately contributing to more informed and actionable insights for improving essay assessment practices in higher education.

### **3.3 Research Design**

The research design adopted in this study was a sequential explanatory strategy, a well-established approach within mixed methods research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018;

Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). This design was particularly suitable for the study as it allowed for the systematic collection of quantitative data in the first phase, which entailed collection of demographic data of participants, working experience, gender and methods of assessments used by lecturers. This phase was followed by qualitative data collection in the second phase. Such a sequential approach not only enhanced the depth of analysis but also provided a comprehensive understanding of the research problem related to essay assessment practices among lecturers in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (DoHSS).

In the first phase, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of 50 lecturers from three selected universities. This survey, consisting of closed-ended questions, was designed to gather quantitative data on the lecturers' methods for constructing, administering, scoring, and interpreting essay test items. The use of descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and means, offered a clear overview of prevalent assessment practices, directly addressing research questions regarding the current state of essay assessment within the DoHSS (Fowler, 2013). This quantitative foundation was crucial for identifying trends and patterns that could later be explored in greater depth.

The second phase involved semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of 30 lecturers who had completed the questionnaire. This qualitative phase was instrumental in allowing the researcher to delve deeper into lecturers' experiences and decision-making processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By exploring the underlying motivations, challenges, and contextual factors influencing their assessment practices, the interviews provided a rich narrative that complemented the quantitative findings. This dual-phase design enabled the researchers to move beyond surface-level data to uncover the intricacies of how and why lecturers employed specific assessment strategies.

One of the primary benefits of employing a sequential explanatory design was the ability to clarify and elaborate on quantitative findings through qualitative insights (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). For example, if the survey indicated a low prevalence of certain innovative assessment methods, the qualitative interviews could probe into the reasons behind this trend, revealing barriers such as lack of training or inadequate institutional support. This integration of qualitative data not only enhanced the richness of the analysis but also increased the credibility of the findings by providing context and depth to the statistical trends identified in the quantitative phase.

The sequential explanatory design also contributed to the overall validity and reliability of the research. By triangulating data sources, the researchers were able to cross-verify findings, thereby strengthening the conclusions drawn from the study (Morse, 2009). For instance, qualitative insights could substantiate or challenge quantitative results, leading to a more nuanced understanding of lecturers' assessment practices. This validation process is essential in educational research, where complexities often require a multifaceted approach to ensure accurate representation of the phenomena being studied (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006).

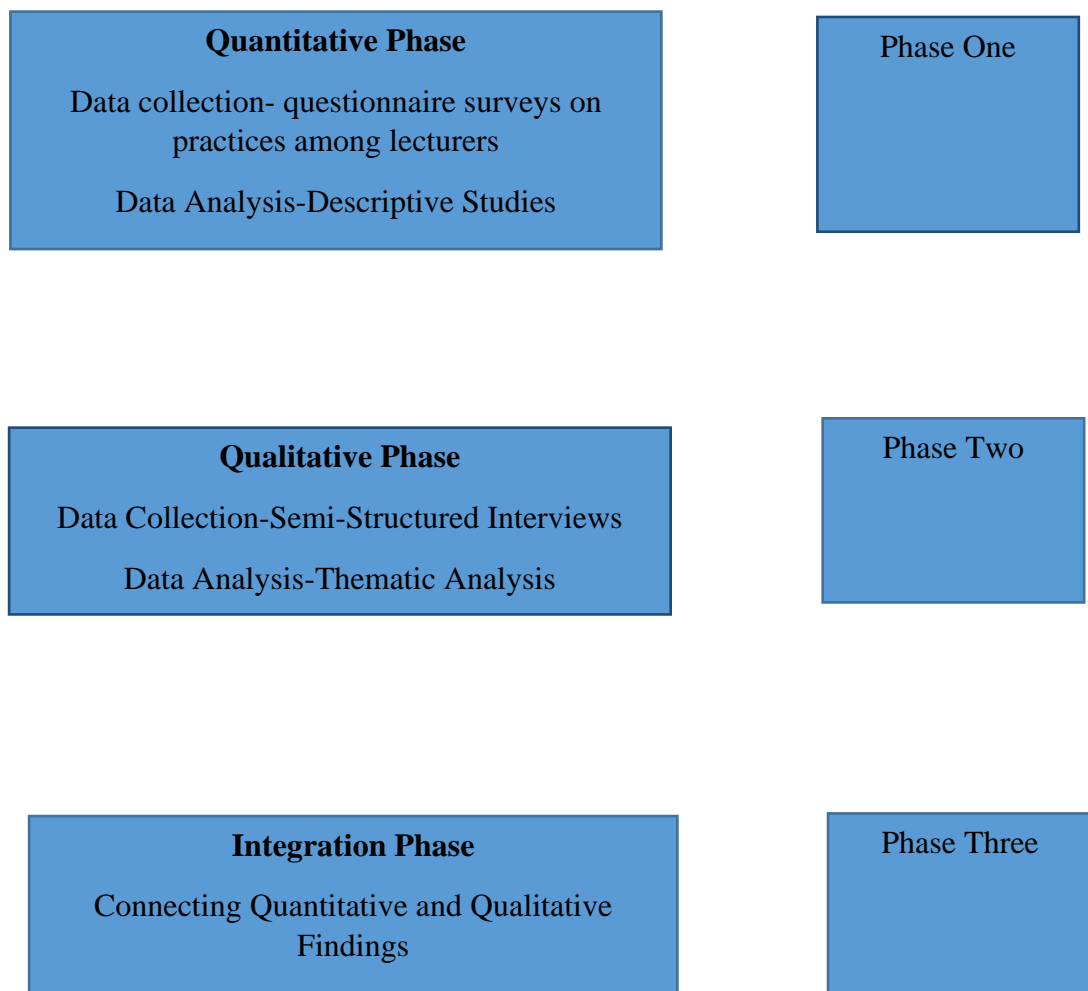
Moreover, the structured progression from quantitative to qualitative data collection provided a solid foundation for developing actionable recommendations. The insights gained from the qualitative interviews informed specific strategies for improving assessment practices, ensuring that recommendations were not only evidence-based but also contextually relevant (Creswell, 2015). By addressing both systemic issues identified in the quantitative phase and personal experiences captured in the qualitative phase, the study was able to propose comprehensive solutions that could be implemented in real educational settings.

By adopting this research design, the study effectively addressed its research questions, providing a thorough examination of essay assessment practices among lecturers in the

DoHSS. The sequential explanatory strategy facilitated a deeper understanding of current practices while also informing actionable recommendations aimed at improving assessment methods in alignment with the principles of Constructivism and Education 5.0 (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This dual approach ensured that the research findings were robust, comprehensive, and directly applicable to enhancing educational practices.

The sequential explanatory research design not only enriched the study's findings but also ensured a rigorous and coherent exploration of essay assessment practices. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the research provided a holistic view of the challenges and opportunities faced by lecturers, ultimately contributing to the advancement of assessment methods in higher education.

**The diagram below summarises the sequential explanatory strategy that will be utilised in this research:**



## **Figure 2: Sequential Explanatory Research design**

### **3.4 Population and Sample**

The target population for this study comprised all lecturers within the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (DoHSS) at three selected universities in Zimbabwe. This included faculty from cognate disciplines such as sociology, psychology, social work, international relations, political science, education, theology, and religious studies. These disciplines were specifically chosen for their relevance to the study's focus on essay assessment practices and their alignment with constructivist principles and the Education 5.0 framework.

The relevance of these disciplines to constructivism lies in their emphasis on learner-centered approaches that foster critical thinking, collaboration, and real-world application of knowledge. Constructivist pedagogy advocates for active learning—an approach that resonates with the methodologies employed in these fields. For example, sociology and psychology often require students to engage in discussions and projects that confront real societal issues, while education studies emphasize reflective practices that enhance teaching and learning. The integration of these disciplines allows for a comprehensive exploration of how essay assessments can be designed to promote deeper understanding and skill development, aligning with the core tenets of both constructivism and Education 5.0, which seeks to respond to current societal needs through innovative educational practices.

### **3.4.1 Sampling Method**

To ensure a comprehensive representation of perspectives, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants for the study. This intentional approach allowed the researcher to focus on lecturers who possess diverse experiences and insights into essay assessment practices. A total of 75 participants were recruited, comprising approximately 25 full-time, permanent faculty members from each of the three universities. Participants were required to have a minimum of two years of teaching experience, ensuring they had sufficient depth of knowledge and practical experience in assessment processes within the DoHSS.

The benefits of purposive sampling in this study were significant. By selecting participants based on specific criteria, the researcher ensured that the sample included lecturers with expertise in diverse areas relevant to the research questions. This diversity enriched the data, allowing for a broad range of perspectives on essay assessment practices. Additionally, the chosen disciplines—such as sociology, psychology, and education—are particularly well-suited for examining complex assessment strategies that reflect constructivist principles. Faculty members in these fields are often tasked with implementing innovative teaching methods that engage students in critical inquiry and collaborative learning, making their insights invaluable for understanding how essay assessments can be effectively utilized.

The study focused on three universities: a medium-sized state university, a small state university, and a medium-sized private university. This selection facilitated the exploration of potential differences in essay assessment practices influenced by institutional context, geographic location, and university mandates. The stratified sampling approach enabled the investigation of how various institutional factors, including governance frameworks and faculty development support, impacted lecturers' assessment practices. This alignment with the Education 5.0 framework, which emphasizes adaptability and responsiveness to

educational needs, further underscored the significance of including diverse academic perspectives in the research.

### **3.5 Research Instruments**

The study utilized a combination of data collection methods, including a survey questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

#### **3.5.1 Survey Questionnaire**

The primary method for quantitative data collection was a self-administered questionnaire developed by the researcher (see Appendix). This questionnaire was divided into four sections, addressing lecturers' practices related to essay test item construction, administration, scoring, and interpretation. It included a mix of closed-ended questions, such as, "On a scale of 1-5, how important are the following criteria when constructing essay test items?" and open-ended questions like, "Describe your process for deciding on the appropriate number and length of essay questions for a test." This combination allowed for the quantification of specific assessment practices while also capturing individual perspectives.

Prior to the final administration, the questionnaire was piloted with 5-7 lecturers from the DoHSS to assess clarity, validity, and reliability. The pilot phase involved cognitive interviews to identify any ambiguous or confusing questions, along with an expert review by faculty members experienced in assessment and survey design. Feedback from these evaluations informed necessary revisions, ensuring the questionnaire's effectiveness in gathering relevant data.

### **3.5.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

To further explore lecturers' viewpoints and experiences, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 40 lecturers selected from the survey respondents (see Appendix for the interview protocol). The interview guide was developed based on findings from the quantitative questionnaire, allowing for deeper exploration of emerging themes. Open-ended questions, such as, "Can you walk me through your process for scoring a student essay?" and "What do you consider the biggest challenges in interpreting essay test results?" encouraged in-depth discussion.

With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. Detailed notes were also taken during the interviews to capture nonverbal cues and contextual information relevant to interpreting the research findings. To maintain confidentiality, audio recordings were securely stored, and identifying information was removed from transcripts. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, and informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews.

### **3.5.3 Document Analysis**

In addition to the questionnaire and interviews, document analysis was employed to examine university policies, guidelines, and sample essay assessments. This analysis provided insights into formal assessment practices and institutional frameworks that influence essay assessment strategies within the DoHSS. By reviewing actual test materials and student work, the researcher was able to triangulate findings from the primary data sources, enhancing the robustness and contextual understanding of the study.

### **3.6 Data Collection**

The self-administered questionnaire was distributed to the selected sample of lecturers through online platforms and hard copies. Recognising the limitations of internet access in some institutions within the Zimbabwean higher education context, the researcher ensured equitable access by providing hard copy questionnaires for collection from designated drop-off points or through mailing. Participants were given a minimum of two weeks to complete the questionnaire, with reminder emails sent to non-responders after one week and follow-up phone calls made after ten days to encourage participation. The deadline for completion was clearly stated in the invitation letter and reminder communications.

To determine adequate completion time, the researcher considered the questionnaire's length, complexity, and the busy schedules of lecturers. A pilot test with a small group of lecturers helped refine the questionnaire and estimate the average completion time.

#### **3.6.1 Qualitative Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 15 lecturers selected from the quantitative sample based on their responses and willingness to participate. The purposive sampling criteria included lecturers with varying levels of experience in essay assessment practices and those expressing interest in innovative assessment methods. This strategy enabled the researcher to capture a diverse range of perspectives and experiences, thus enhancing the study's comprehensiveness (Patton, 2015).

Interviews were conducted in private, comfortable settings, with informed consent obtained beforehand. They were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Detailed notes were taken to document nonverbal cues and contextual information. Audio recordings were stored on a password-protected computer and deleted post-transcription to ensure data protection.

In addition to the questionnaire and interviews, the researcher may also review sample essay test items and student work from the participating institutions to provide additional context and triangulate the findings from the primary data sources. This supplementary data could offer insights into how essay assessment practices are manifested in actual test materials and student responses. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, informed by the research questions and theoretical framework, will provide a comprehensive understanding of lecturers' perspectives and experiences with essay assessment practices within the DoHSS.

### **3.7 Data Analysis Techniques**

Quantitative data from the survey were analysed using both inferential and descriptive statistics to identify patterns, trends, and correlations between variables. Inferential statistics, including t-tests and ANOVAs, were employed to find significant differences between groups and test hypotheses regarding the relationships between variables. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, summarized and described the data. Correlation analysis was also performed to examine relationships between lecturer experience levels, assessment practices, and student performance. The analysis was conducted using statistical software, such as SPSS.

This quantitative analysis facilitated the examination of the alignment of lecturers' essay assessment practices with constructivist principles and Education 5.0 (Research Question 1) by comparing the frequency of constructive assessment practices across universities. Additionally, it investigated whether lecturer experience level correlated with the use of constructive assessment practices and identified significant differences in assessment practices among lecturers with varying levels of experience (Research Question 2).

Thematic analysis was employed to rigorously examine the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, ensuring alignment with the study's constructivist framework. This methodological choice allowed the researcher to explore participants' lived experiences and perspectives, uncovering the complexities of essay assessment practices central to the research problem. The researcher immersed themselves in the data by engaging in a thorough iterative process of reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, which facilitated the identification of recurring ideas and concepts.

The analysis followed a structured process, beginning with initial coding, during which the researcher assigned codes based on the content and meaning of the text. These codes were then grouped into potential themes and sub-themes, considering factors such as frequency, intensity, and diversity.

One prominent theme that emerged was Challenges in Implementation, reflecting various barriers lecturers faced when applying constructive assessment practices. These challenges included lack of training, institutional constraints, and time limitations, which hindered their ability to adopt innovative assessment strategies.

Another significant theme was Perceptions of Effectiveness, wherein lecturers expressed their views on the current scoring and interpretation methods. Many highlighted strengths in their practices but also identified limitations that affected their ability to promote desired graduate attributes, such as critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The theme of Institutional Influence was also prevalent, revealing how university policies and guidelines either supported or hindered effective assessment practices. Lecturers noted that institutional frameworks could create environments conducive to innovative assessment or, conversely, impose rigid structures that limited flexibility.

Additionally, the theme of Pedagogical Beliefs emerged, capturing the underlying beliefs lecturers held about teaching and learning. These beliefs significantly influenced their assessment practices, particularly in how they aligned with constructivist principles.

The need for Professional Development was another critical theme, as many lecturers expressed a desire for targeted training and resources to enhance their skills in essay assessment. This theme pointed to a broader recognition of the importance of ongoing professional growth in adapting to contemporary educational demands.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed Variability in Practices among lecturers across different disciplines. This diversity highlighted how specific fields influenced approaches to essay assessment, with some disciplines embracing more innovative practices than others.

Lastly, the theme of Feedback Mechanisms was significant, focusing on the types of feedback lecturers provided to students. Participants discussed how effective feedback aligned with constructive assessment principles and its role in fostering student learning.

This thematic analysis specifically addressed Research Question 3 by evaluating the effectiveness of current scoring and interpretation methods in promoting desired graduate attributes. By exploring lecturers' perceptions of the strengths and limitations of their assessment practices, the analysis provided critical insights into areas for improvement. Additionally, it examined the challenges and barriers lecturers faced in implementing constructive assessment practices, thereby informing potential strategies for enhancement.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative data was essential for comprehensively addressing the research questions and the overarching problem of aligning assessment practices with contemporary educational paradigms. The quantitative data provided a broad overview of trends and patterns in assessment practices, while the qualitative data offered deeper insights into the underlying reasons and contextual factors influencing these practices.

Specifically, the qualitative interview data elucidated potential statistical differences in assessment practices across the universities, shedding light on institutional factors and pedagogical beliefs that contributed to variations. This directly related to Research Question 1, which sought to investigate the alignment of lecturers' assessment practices with constructivist principles and the Education 5.0 framework. To facilitate this integration, a conceptual matrix was created to illustrate the relationships between quantitative trends and qualitative themes, including the emerging themes of challenges, perceptions of effectiveness, and institutional influences. This matrix enabled a more nuanced understanding of the research questions, highlighting how statistical data correlated with participants' narratives.

Furthermore, the integration of data identified the resources and support necessary to enhance lecturers' skills in essay assessment, directly addressing Research Question 4. By synthesising findings from both data sets, the methodology helped in revealing the complexities of assessment practices and informed actionable recommendations for improving teaching and assessment strategies in higher education, thereby contributing to the resolution of the identified problem.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to the highest ethical standards to ensure the protection of research participants, the integrity of the research process, and the trustworthiness of the findings. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research, reflecting a commitment to the principles of respect, integrity, and accountability.

#### **3.8.1 Informed Consent**

Participants were provided with a comprehensive informed consent form that outlined the study's purpose, potential risks and benefits, and procedures for data handling. This form

explicitly addressed the potential risks associated with discussing lecturers' assessment practices, including concerns about academic integrity and possible negative evaluations from students. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence. This process upheld the ethical principle of autonomy, ensuring that participants made informed decisions regarding their involvement.

### **3.8.2 Mixed Methods Approach**

Given the mixed methods design of the study, particular ethical concerns arose regarding the potential identifiability of qualitative interview participants. The names of lecturers participating in the semi-structured interviews were kept confidential, with transcripts assigned pseudonyms linked to pseudonyms of the universities involved in the research. This approach provided additional safeguards for anonymity. All identifying information was removed from research instruments and data collection protocols. Audio recordings were securely stored on the researcher's password-protected personal computer, which was further secured with an additional access password. Survey data were anonymized using unique identifiers, and responses were aggregated to prevent individual identification. The names of the institutions where the research was conducted were also kept confidential, ensuring that institutional identities were not disclosed in any reports or publications.

### **3.8.3 Ethical Guidelines in Data Collection and Analysis**

Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, the study adhered to established ethical guidelines to ensure the integrity of the research. The researcher maintained transparency with participants regarding the nature and purpose of the study, fostering an environment of trust. During interviews, participants were encouraged to share their

experiences freely, with the researcher actively listening and avoiding any coercive or leading questions.

The data analysis process was conducted with a commitment to honesty and accuracy. The researcher ensured that the data analysis was systematic and rigorous, employing thematic analysis to identify key themes without misrepresenting or cherry-picking responses. All findings were reported in an unbiased manner, reflecting the true perspectives of participants and acknowledging the complexity of their experiences.

#### **3.8.4 University Ethical Review Process**

The study underwent a rigorous ethical review process by Bindura University of Science Education and received clearance from the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development's ethics boards. This review process ensured that the study adhered to ethical guidelines and regulations, safeguarding the rights and dignity of all research participants.

#### **3.8.5 Data Storage and Security**

Data collected from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were stored securely on the researcher's personal computer using password-protected files. Physical data were kept in a locked cabinet at the researcher's residence, where access was restricted to the researcher alone. Electronic data were stored on a secure server with restricted access. Any information that could trace back to participants was de-identified, and identifying information was stored separately from the main data set, thereby enhancing data protection.

### **3.8.6 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process through the assignment of code numbers to participants, the removal of identifying information from transcripts, and secure storage of data. Only the researcher had access to the data, and findings were reported in aggregate form to prevent individual identification. This commitment to confidentiality was crucial in fostering a safe environment for participants to share their experiences and perspectives, ensuring that the integrity of the research process was upheld.

### **3.8.7 Participant Comfort and Discomfort**

The study acknowledged that participants might feel uncomfortable discussing their assessment practices, particularly in institutions where creativity and transformation are highly prioritized and essential for promotion and advancement. Furthermore, participants expressed concerns about discussing challenges they encountered in implementing innovative assessment strategies, especially those linked to technology and those strongly tied to institutional contexts. Fear of victimization in the event of information leaking to management was a significant concern.

To address these ethical considerations, participants were informed of their right to skip questions or cease the interview at any time without penalty or consequence. This transparency aimed to foster a safe environment for open dialogue, allowing participants to share their experiences and perspectives without fear. By implementing these measures, the study demonstrated its commitment to upholding the highest ethical standards in research.

### **3.9 Summary**

This chapter detailed the research methodology employed to investigate the alignment of lecturers' essay assessment practices with Constructivist principles and the Education 5.0 framework. It outlined the methodological strategies used to gather and analyse data, emphasizing the study's aim to improve assessment practices and evaluate current scoring methods.

A mixed-methods approach was utilized, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. A survey was conducted to collect quantitative data regarding the prevalence of constructive assessment practices, the relationship between lecturer experience and assessment approaches, and perceptions of scoring effectiveness. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were carried out to delve into lecturers' beliefs, challenges, and pedagogical principles.

Quantitative data analysis employed inferential and descriptive statistics to identify patterns and correlations, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis to uncover experiences and contextual factors influencing assessment practices. This integration of findings provided a comprehensive understanding of the research questions addressed in this chapter.

Strict ethical guidelines were maintained throughout the research process, including informed consent, confidentiality, and adherence to the university's ethical review procedures. The careful design and implementation of the methodology, along with a commitment to ethical standards, established a robust framework for the insights generated regarding lecturers' essay assessment practices.

The subsequent chapter will present the data findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses, emphasizing the key trends, patterns, and themes that emerged from the investigation.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents, analyses and discusses the key findings derived from the data collected through questionnaires and interviews with lecturers in the DoHSS at two selected

universities in Zimbabwe. The study aimed to assess the extent to which lecturers' essay assessment practices promote critical thinking, problem-solving, self-reflection, creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, and industrialization, as envisioned by the Education 5.0 framework. This framework embodies a student-centered approach aligned with constructivist principles, which emphasize active learning and the co-construction of knowledge.

The research specifically focused on: the alignment of lecturers' essay assessment practices with constructivist principles and Education 5.0, the similarities and differences in assessment practices, associated challenges, strengths and limitations of current scoring and interpretation methods, and the training and capacity-building resources necessary for implementing Education 5.0 assessment practices.

The theoretical framework of this study draws upon constructivism as a foundational principle, supported by previous research that underscores the importance of engaging learners actively in the assessment process (Biggs & Tang, 2011; McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). By situating the research within this framework, the study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on how current practices align with contemporary educational paradigms.

The initial phase of the study employed a quantitative data collection strategy in accordance with the Explanatory Sequential Design. An electronic questionnaire was distributed to lecturers at the two selected universities to gather data on their practices related to essay test item construction and assessment methods. This phase examined demographic characteristics of the lecturers (including gender, work experience, university affiliation, and faculty) and specific practices related to essay assessment, such as frequency of use, clarity of instructions, alignment with course objectives, utilization of tables of specifications,

consideration of student knowledge levels, flexibility in responses, active response construction, student choices regarding essay topics, formats, lengths, and the inclusion of personal experiences. The quantitative data provided insights into the current state of essay-based assessment practices at the two universities.

Statistical tools employed for the analysis of the quantitative data included frequency distributions, means, standard deviations, and one-sample t-tests, conducted at a significance level of 0.05. The findings from this chapter not only reflect the current practices but also highlight areas for improvement, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on effective assessment strategies in higher education.

#### **4.1 Response Rate and Demographics**

The study population comprised 52 lecturers from the DoHSS at the two universities. A response rate of 70.45% was achieved, with 31 out of 44 targeted questionnaires completed and returned, indicating a relatively high level of engagement. This response rate likely reflects the study's relevance to the lecturers' roles amid ongoing reforms in the country's higher education system, transitioning from Education 3.0 to Education 5.0. The convenience of the electronic questionnaire and effective communication and follow-up strategies employed by the researcher may have contributed to this engagement. However, the response rate below 100% suggests that some lecturers may have been deterred by the questionnaire's length, which took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Additionally, some lecturers may not have been available or may have had limited interest in participating, which could affect the generalisability of the findings.

**Table 1: Distribution of Lecturers by gender**

Gender	Number	Percentage (% )

Female	9	29.0
Male	22	71.0
Total	31	100%

Table 1 illustrates that 9 females (29.0%) and 22 males (71.0%) participated in the study. This indicates a significant gender disparity among respondents, with a predominance of male lecturers. This gender imbalance may have implications for the applicability and interpretation of the findings, particularly in relation to how diverse perspectives are represented in assessment practices. Addressing gender disparity in future research can enhance the understanding of how different demographic factors influence educational strategies. Through these findings, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing insights into the alignment of assessment practices with constructivist principles and the Education 5.0 framework, thereby informing future educational reforms and practices.

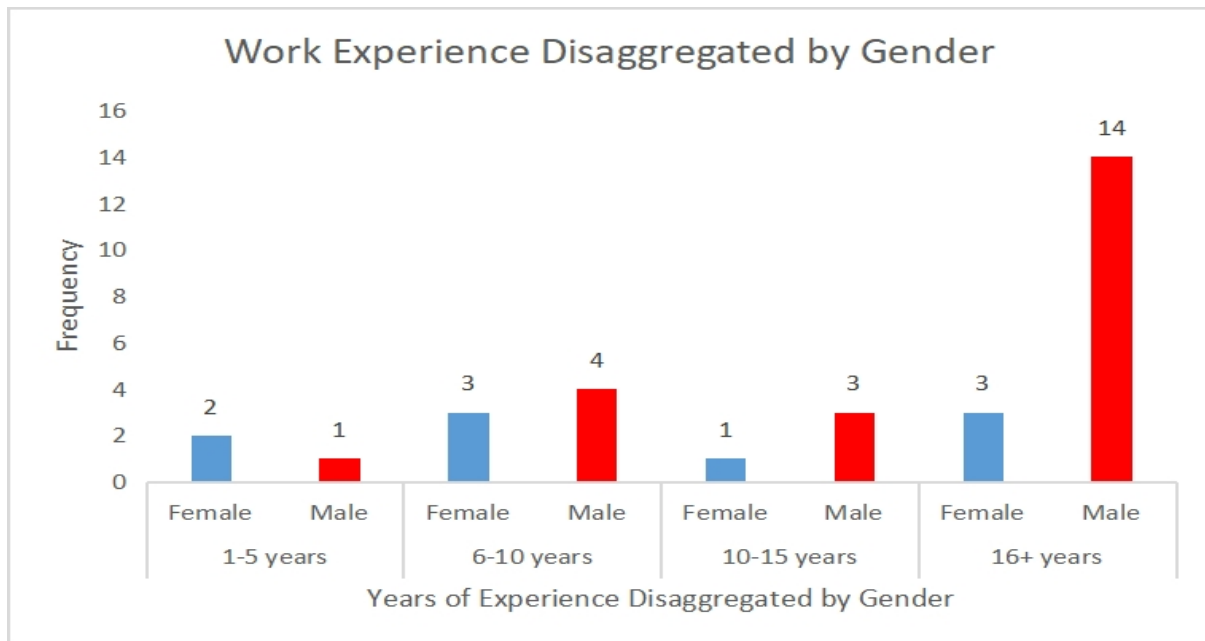
**Table 2: Distribution of Lecturers by Work Experience**

Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-5 years	3	9.7
6-10 years	7	22.6
10-15 years	4	12.9
16+ years	17	54.8
Total	31	100%

Table 2 presents the distribution of lecturers by work experience. It reveals that 3 lecturers (9.7%) have taught for 1-5 years, 7 (22.6%) for 6-10 years, 4 (12.9%) for 10-15 years, and the majority, 17 lecturers (54.8%), have over 16 years of experience in higher education. This distribution indicates a wealth of experience among the teaching staff, which is crucial for

fostering effective assessment practices aligned with constructivist principles. Experienced educators are typically better positioned to implement innovative teaching strategies that encourage active learning and critical thinking.

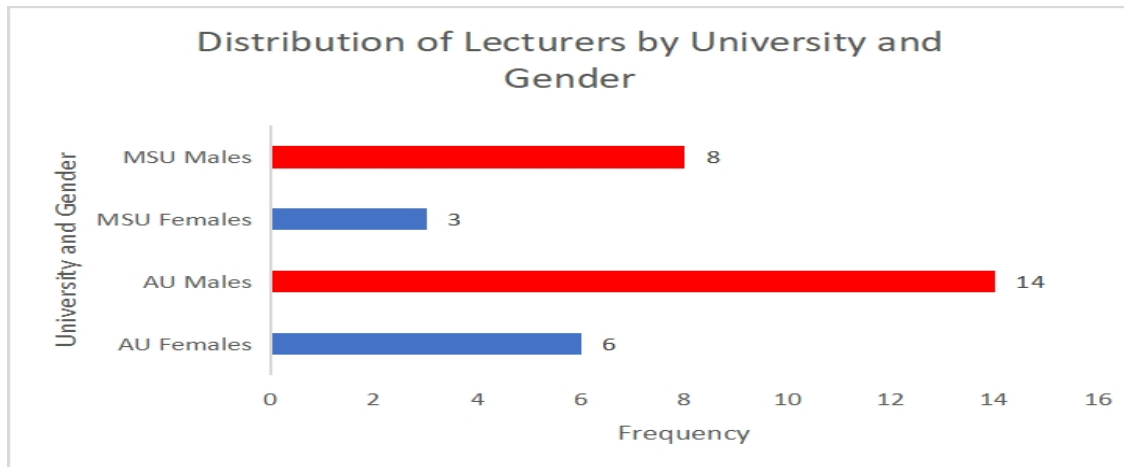
**Distribution of Work Experience by Gender.**



**Figure 3: Distribution of Work Experience by Gender.**

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of work experience among lecturers, highlighting a significant gender disparity. Males outnumber females across all experience categories, with female lecturers underrepresented in mid-level (6-10 years) and senior-level (16+ years) categories. This underrepresentation suggests potential barriers to career advancement for female educators, raising concerns about gender equity in professional development and institutional support. Such disparities can hinder the realization of the Education 5.0 framework, which emphasizes inclusivity and diverse perspectives in the learning environment, essential for fostering a holistic educational experience.

## Distribution of Lecturers by University and Gender



**Figure 4. Distribution of Lecturers by University and Gender**

Figure 2 shows the distribution of lecturers across the two universities, reaffirming the existing gender disparity. At University One, 14 out of 20 lecturers are male (70%), while 6 are female (30%). Similarly, at University Two, 8 out of 11 lecturers are male (73%), and 3 are female (27%). This trend is consistent across all experience levels, indicating systemic challenges within the academic field. The overrepresentation of lecturers from University One (64.5% of the overall sample) may skew the findings and limit their generalizability. Addressing this imbalance is crucial for promoting equitable representation and diverse perspectives, which are foundational to constructivist approaches that prioritize collaboration and shared knowledge construction.

**Table 3: Distribution of Lecturers by Institution**

Institution	Number of Lecturers	Percentage (%)
University One	20	64.5
University Two	11	35.5
Total	31	100%

Table 3 summarizes the distribution of lecturers affiliated with the two universities in the DoHSS. University One had 20 lecturers (64.5%), while University Two had 11 (35.5%) participating in the study. This predominance of responses from one institution may reflect the relative sizes of the universities and could impact the applicability of the research findings. Understanding institutional contexts is essential for interpreting the results within the broader landscape of higher education and ensuring that assessment practices are responsive to diverse educational environments.

**Table 4: Distribution of Lecturers by Disciplines in DoHSS.**

Disciplines	Number	Percentage (%)
Social Work	3	9.7
Political Science	3	9.7
Social Sciences	13	41.9
International Relations	7	22.6
French Language	1	3.2
Education	2	6.5
Portuguese	1	3.2
English Language	1	3.2
Total	31	100%

Table 4 presents the distribution of lecturers across the various disciplines in the DoHSS. The data indicates that 13 lecturers (41.9%) are from the Social Sciences, 7 (22.6%) from International Relations, and 3 (9.7%) each from Social Work and Political Science. Other disciplines, including Education, French, Portuguese, and English Language, are represented by fewer lecturers. This diverse representation enhances the study by providing a broad perspective on assessment practices, aligning with the Education 5.0 framework, which promotes interdisciplinary approaches and critical thinking.

Overall, the demographic characteristics of participants not only provide context for the findings but also underscore the need for targeted strategies to enhance gender equity and diverse representation in academic assessment practices. By illuminating these disparities, this study contributes to the literature on educational equity and effectiveness, offering insights that can inform policy and practice in higher education.

#### 4.2 Current Essay Assessment Practices

This section presents the findings of the research question ne, regarding the essay assessment practices employed by lecturers in the DoHSS at the two universities. The section further analyses and discusses findings on lecturers’ essay assessment practices and explores various aspects, including the types of essay questions used, the processes of essay item construction, administration procedures, scoring and grading methods, and the interpretation of assessment results.

##### 4.2.1 Research Question One: How do lecturers in the DoHSS employ essay assessments in their teaching practices?

The purpose of this research question was to understand the current essay assessment practices among lecturers in the DoHSS at the two universities. The inquiry sought to identify the specific methods lecturers use when designing, scoring, and interpreting essay-based assignments. Participants responded to seven items using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1).

**Table 5: Essay Test Item Assessment Practices.**

I frequently use essay test items in my	I write clear and concise directions	I write essay test items that match the	I prepare a table of specifications for test items.	I consider the knowledge level of test	I provide opportunities for students to have	I provide opportunities for students to actively
---	--------------------------------------	---	---	--	--	--

	assessments	for the entire test and sections of the test.	instructional objective		takers before construction	flexibility or choice in essay assessment parameters	construct their own understanding and knowledge
N	31	31	31	31	31	31	31
Mean	3.74	4.23	4.39	3.29	4.23	3.77	4.29
Median	4	5	5	3	5	4	5
Mode	4	5	5	4	5	5	5
Standard deviation	1.26	1.12	1.02	1.35	0.99	1.41	0.973

The data in Table 5 reveals a strong commitment among lecturers in the DoHSS to employ high-quality essay assessment practices. The survey of 31 lecturers demonstrates that a majority frequently utilise essay test items in their assessments (Mean = 3.74). Furthermore, lecturers prioritise writing clear and concise directions for the entire test (Mean = 4.23) and ensuring that essay test items align with instructional objectives (Mean = 4.39).

Notably, lecturers also exhibit a proactive approach to assessment design, preparing tables of specifications for the test items (Mean = 3.29) and carefully considering the knowledge levels of test-takers before constructing assessments (Mean = 4.23). This alignment with learners' abilities fosters a student-centered approach to assessment, consistent with the principles of constructivism, which advocate for tailoring educational practices to meet diverse learner needs.

Additionally, the findings indicate that lecturers value providing students with flexibility and choice in essay assessments (Mean = 3.77). This reflects an understanding of the importance

of allowing students to actively construct their own understanding and knowledge (Mean = 4.29), a hallmark of effective, student-centered evaluations. The consistently high mean scores and stable median and mode values across the assessed variables point to the lecturers' strong commitment to high-quality essay assessment practices. However, the standard deviations indicate some variability, suggesting that while most lecturers prioritise these approaches, there remains room for improvement and greater consistency in assessment methods within the DoHSS. Overall the data reveals a strong commitment to high-quality essay assessment practices among DoHSS lecturers. Lecturers demonstrate a focus on clarity, alignment with learning objectives, and consideration of student knowledge levels. They also value providing students with flexibility and choice, aligning with constructivist principles and Education 5.0 goals. However, while the mean scores are high, standard deviations indicate some variability in practice. This suggests a need for greater consistency in assessment methods across the DoHSS.

**Table 6: Differences in Essay Test Assessment Practices between the Two Universities. Independent Samples T-Test**

		Statistic	df	p
I frequently use essay test items in my assessments	Student's t	3.555	29.0	0.001
I write clear and concise directions for the entire test and se	Student's t	2.335	<sup>a</sup> 29.0	0.027
I write essay test items that match the instructional objective	Student's t	2.489	<sup>a</sup> 29.0	0.019

I prepare a table of specifications for test items.	Student's t		0.887		29.0		0.382
I consider the knowledge level of test takers before construction	Student's t		0.940		29.0		0.355
I provide opportunities for students to have flexibility or choice	Student's t		1.502		29.0		0.144
I provide opportunities for students to actively construct their own understanding and knowledge	Student's t		1.665	<sup>a</sup>	29.0		0.107

Note.  $H_a \mu_{\text{University One}} \neq \mu_{\text{University Two}}$

<sup>a</sup> Levene's test is significant ( $p < .05$ ), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances

Table 6 presents the results of an independent samples t-test comparing the essay item construction practices of lecturers at the two universities. The findings reveal statistically significant differences in the use of key essay assessment practices between the universities. Specifically, lecturers from University One reported more frequent use of essay test items in their assessments ( $p = 0.001$ ), clearer and more concise directions ( $p = 0.027$ ), and closer

alignment of essay test items with instructional objectives ( $p = 0.019$ ) compared to their counterparts at University Two.

However, for other assessed practices—such as preparing tables of specifications, considering the knowledge level of test-takers, providing opportunities for student flexibility and choice, and encouraging active knowledge construction—the results did not show statistically significant differences. Overall, these findings demonstrate that while there are areas of similarity in essay item construction practices across the two universities, significant differences exist in the frequency of use, clarity of instructions, and alignment with objectives for essay-based assignments.

These results highlight the need for further investigation into the factors contributing to these variations and potential opportunities for cross-institutional collaboration and sharing of best practices. Such collaboration is essential for enhancing the overall quality of essay assessment practices and aligns with the Education 5.0 framework’s emphasis on innovation and continuous improvement in higher education. Overall, statistically significant differences exist between the two universities in terms of frequency of essay use, clarity of instructions, and alignment with objectives. This highlights the need for cross-institutional collaboration to share best practices and enhance overall assessment quality.

**Table 7: Lecturers' Practices Regarding Student Choice in Essay Assessments by Gender.**

	Gender	2.a. I allow students to choose their essay topics	2.b. I allow students to choose the format of	2.c. I allow students to choose the length of	2.d. I provide opportunities for students to

		from a list	their essay (e.g.	their essay with	incorporate their
N	Female	9	9	9	9
	Male	22	22	22	22
Mean	Female	3.89	3	4.11	4.44
	Male	3.32	2.32	2.55	3.77
Median	Female	5	3	4	5
	Male	4	2	2	4
Mode	Female	5	2	5	5
	Male	4	1	2	4
Standard deviation	Female	1.76	1.32	1.05	0.726
	Male	1.46	1.21	1.3	1.15
<sup>a</sup> More than one mode exists, only the first is reported					

Table 7 reveals potential gender-based differences in how lecturers approach student choice in essay assessments. Female lecturers tend to offer more choice in essay topics (Mean = 3.89) and length (Mean = 4.11) compared to male lecturers (Mean = 3.32 and Mean = 2.55, respectively). This inclination aligns with findings from previous studies, such as those by Dee (2005) and Klein et al. (2017), which suggest that female educators are generally more supportive of student autonomy and tend to create environments that foster self-directed learning. This may be attributed to a pedagogical approach that emphasizes collaboration, empathy, and engagement, traits often associated with female teaching styles.

Both groups show similar mean scores for allowing students to choose the format of their essay (Mean = 3.00 for females and Mean = 2.32 for males), indicating that both may be less

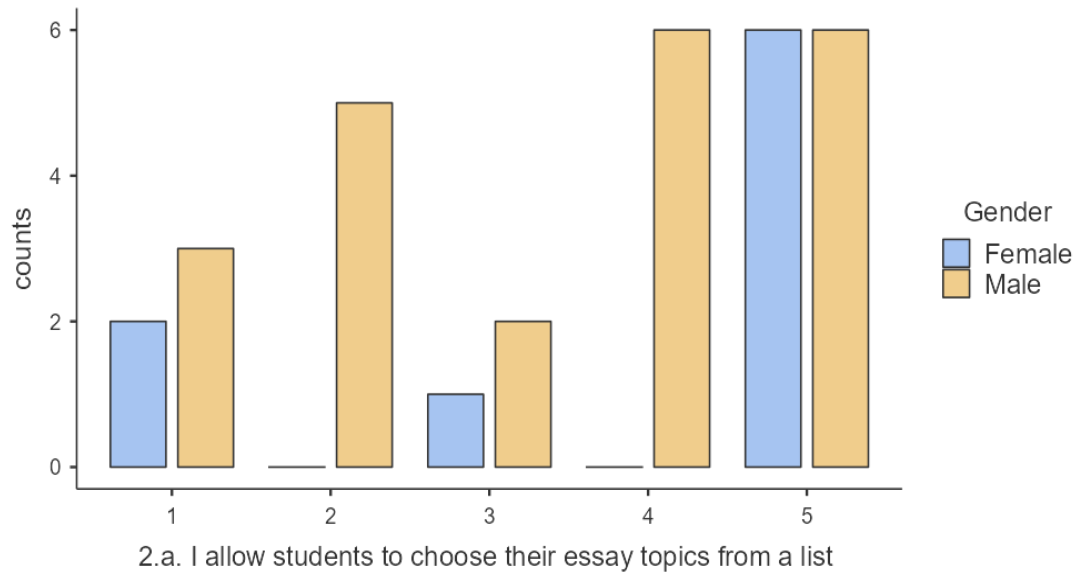
inclined to provide choice in this area. This finding is consistent with Buchmann and Fluegel (2000), who noted that traditional educational practices often limit flexibility in assessment formats, regardless of the lecturer's gender.

Furthermore, the results indicate that female lecturers are more likely to encourage students to incorporate personal understanding, knowledge, and experiences (Mean = 4.44) than male lecturers (Mean = 3.77). This difference emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and engagement in essay assessments, reinforcing the principles of constructivism, which advocates for making learning personally relevant. This trend is supported by Eagly and Carli (2003), who argue that female leaders and educators often prioritize relational and contextual learning, fostering a more inclusive space for student expression.

Further statistical analysis, such as t-tests, is required to determine if these observed differences are statistically significant and not merely due to chance.

Overall, the results reveal that on one hand female lecturers tend to offer more choice in essay topics and length, potentially reflecting a more student-centered approach. They also encourage students to incorporate personal experiences, aligning with constructivist principles. On the other hand, male lecturers show a greater tendency to allow students to choose essay formats, potentially reflecting a more open approach to creativity and innovation. These findings suggest a need for professional development initiatives that promote inclusive assessment practices across genders, ensuring that all lecturers embrace constructivist and Education 5.0 principles.

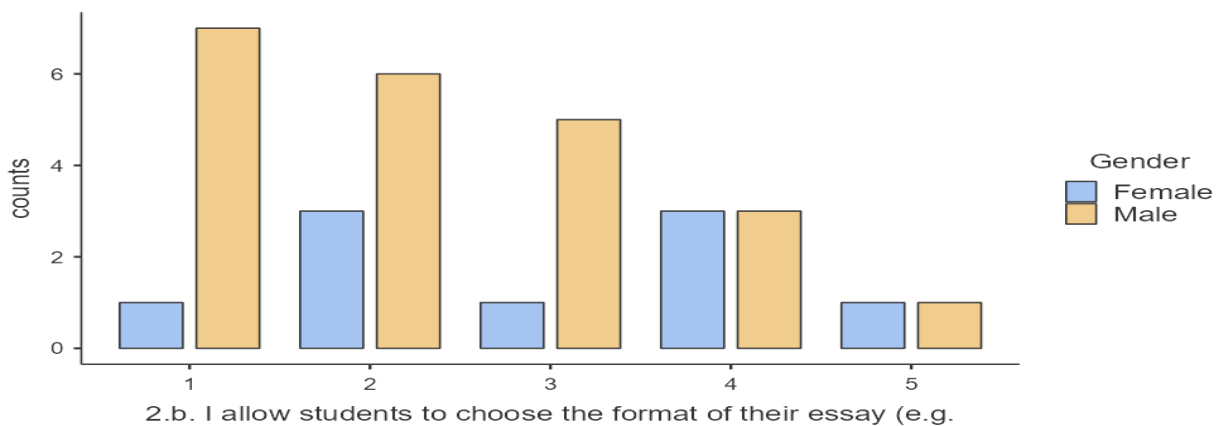
### **Choice of Essay Topic by Gender**



**Figure 5: Choice of Essay Topic by Gender**

Figure 3, illustrates the distribution of responses to the question, "I allow students to choose their essay topics from a list," by gender. The responses, measured on a scale of 1 to 5, indicate that more female lecturers allow students to select their essay topics compared to male lecturers. This trend reinforces findings from Baker and LeTendre (2005), who suggest that female educators often adopt more flexible and student-centered approaches in their teaching practices than their male counterparts.

**Choice of Essay Formats by Gender**



### **Figure 6: Choice of Essay Formats by Gender**

Figure 4 shows the distribution of responses to the question, "I allow students to choose the format of their essay (e.g., report, argumentative, etc.)," by gender. The data reveals a similar distribution of responses between male and female lecturers, with a slight tendency for male lecturers to allow students more choice in essay format. This suggests that while both groups recognise the value of format variety, male lecturers may be somewhat more open to this option, reflecting traditional pedagogical norms that sometimes favour structured formats. The findings regarding the distribution of responses to allowing students to choose the format of their essays provide valuable insights into gender dynamics in assessment practices. Specifically, the slight tendency for male lecturers to permit more choice aligns with constructivist theory, which emphasizes student agency and personalized learning. The slight tendency of female lecturers to adhere to traditional essay assessment formats aligns with traditional assessment formats that promote rote learning. However, the slight flexibility by male lecturers indicated fosters a more engaging educational experience, enabling students to express their understanding in ways that reflect their individual strengths.

Moreover, the gender difference in responses to this question may reflect social constructs influencing pedagogical practices. Social constructivism suggests that cultural contexts shape educational methods, thus, male lecturers' openness to format variety may indicate broader norms favoring creativity, while female lecturers may adhere to traditional, structured assessment expectations. This pattern underscores the importance of recognizing how institutional cultures and individual experiences inform assessment practices and therefore should be taken into consideration when designing and implementing training and capacity building programmes aimed at scaling up alignment of assessment practices with constructivist and education 5.0 framework.

The observation that male lecturers exhibit greater flexibility aligns with literature suggesting that male educators are often more open to innovative teaching strategies. In contrast, female lecturers may be more influenced by established norms prioritizing structure. This dynamic highlights the significant role gender plays in shaping assessment approaches.

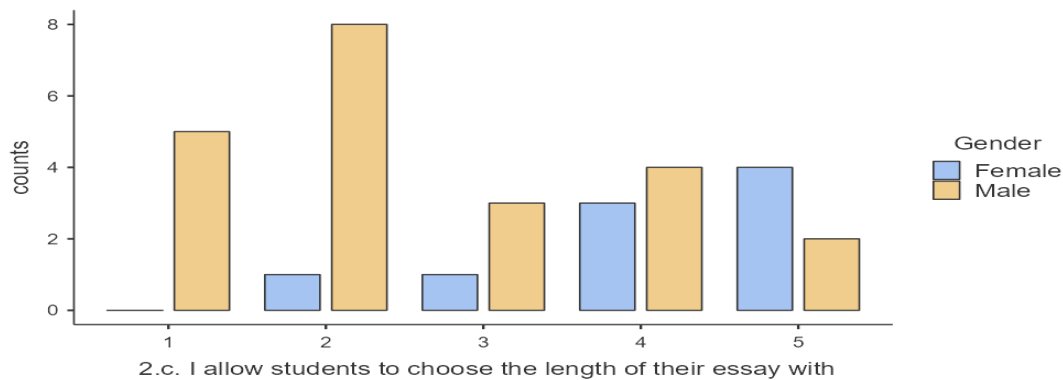
Additionally, the inclination of male lecturers to allow format choice reflects attitudes toward student empowerment and agency. While there is awareness of constructivist principles among lecturers, a gap remains in their implementation. This suggests a need for professional development initiatives to encourage inclusive assessment practices across genders, contributing to the discourse on educational equity and transformative practices in higher education.

Furthermore, the findings can be examined through Activity Theory, which emphasizes the interactions between individuals and the tools they use in educational settings. The choice of essay format serves as a tool empowering students to demonstrate understanding in diverse ways, highlighting the influence of institutional and cultural factors on these interactions. Existing literature supports these findings, noting that gender influences pedagogical approaches and can impact student engagement and outcomes. The trend of male lecturers allowing students to choose essay formats reinforces the notion that assessment practices are shaped by gender dynamics. Additionally, the literature underscores the benefits of offering varied assessment formats, which cater to diverse learning styles and enhance motivation.

The analysis of gender-based differences in permitting students to choose essay formats sheds light on the complexities of assessment practices within higher education. It illustrates the interplay between pedagogical and socio-cultural factors in shaping assessment methods. Future research should explore these dynamics further across different contexts to identify strategies for promoting innovative assessment practices that align with contemporary

educational goals. Overall, male lecturers consistently show a greater tendency to offer students choice, potentially reflecting a more flexible and student-centered approach. This aligns with the goals of Education 5.0 and the principles of constructivism.

### Choice of Essay Length



**Figure 7 Choice of Essay Length**

The graph shows the distribution of responses to the question "I allow students to choose the length of their essay within a range" by gender. The graph shows that male lecturers are more likely to allow students to choose the length of their essay within a range than female lecturers. The findings regarding the distribution of responses to allowing students to choose the length of their essays reveal notable gender differences, with male lecturers more likely to grant this flexibility than female lecturers. This observation reinforces the overall conclusions of the study about gender dynamics in assessment practices, suggesting that male lecturers may adopt a more flexible approach that prioritizes student autonomy. In contrast, female lecturers often adhere to traditional norms that emphasizes clarity and consistency, potentially limiting student choice. This gender dynamic is significant within the context of constructivist theory, which advocates student agency and personalized learning. By permitting students to choose the length of their essays, male lecturers align their practices with constructivist principles, encouraging students to take ownership of their learning. For

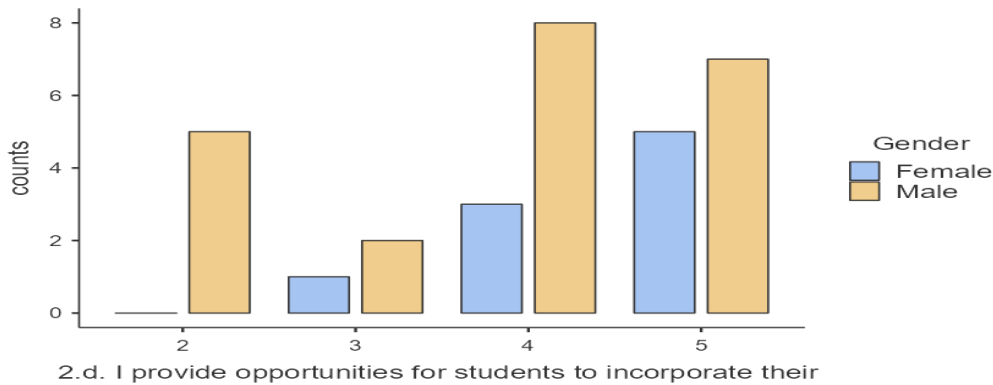
instance, allowing a student to determine the length of their essay can empower them to engage more deeply with the material, fostering critical thinking and self-reflection as they assess how much detail is necessary to convey their understanding effectively.

Moreover, this flexibility resonates with the goals of Education 5.0, which emphasizes learner-centered approaches that cultivate innovation, creativity, and problem-solving skills. By enabling students to decide on essay length, lecturers can create an environment that supports diverse expressions of knowledge. For example, a student might choose a shorter format to focus on a concise argument, enhancing their critical thinking skills, while another student may opt for a longer essay to explore a topic in depth, thus promoting comprehensive understanding.

The contrast in practices between male and female lecturers also highlights the need for targeted professional development initiatives that encourage all educators to embrace constructivist and Education 5.0 principles. By fostering a culture that values flexibility in assessment, regardless of gender, institutions can support lecturers in implementing more inclusive and innovative assessment strategies. This could involve workshops that demonstrate the benefits of allowing student choice in assessments, showcasing concrete examples where such practices have led to enhanced student engagement and learning outcomes.

Ultimately, the gender differences observed in allowing students to choose essay length serve as a microcosm of the broader trends identified in the study. They underscore the importance of integrating constructivist principles and Education 5.0 frameworks into assessment practices, promoting a shift toward more student-centered methodologies that benefit all learners.

### **Opportunities to Incorporate Personal Understanding and Knowledge**



**Figure 8: Opportunities to incorporate own understanding and knowledge**

This graph shows the distribution of responses to the question "I provide opportunities for students to incorporate their own research or experiences into their essays" by gender. The graph illustrating the distribution of responses regarding opportunities for students to incorporate their own research or experiences into their essays reveals a significant gender difference: male lecturers are more likely to offer these opportunities than female lecturers. This disparity indicates that male lecturers may prioritize flexibility and personal expression, while female lecturers tend to focus on academic rigor and standardized assessment criteria, potentially limiting individual expression. These findings reflect broader societal expectations and gender norms influencing pedagogical approaches. Male lecturers often create environments that encourage student engagement and creativity, whereas female lecturers may adhere to traditional frameworks that emphasize consistency. Despite these differences, both groups recognize the importance of student choice in the learning process.

This emphasis on student choice aligns with constructivist pedagogy, which advocates for learning experiences shaped by students' interests. Allowing students to integrate their research fosters deeper understanding and critical thinking. For instance, a student who draws on personal experiences in a reflective essay engages more meaningfully with the material, enhancing their learning outcomes.

Additionally, these findings connect with the objectives of Education 5.0, which seeks to cultivate innovative and problem-solving skills. By providing opportunities for personal expression, lecturers can help students develop competencies necessary for contemporary challenges, promoting ownership of their learning journey.

The observed gender differences suggest a need for professional development initiatives to encourage all lecturers to embrace student-driven learning. Such initiatives should highlight the benefits of integrating personal experiences into assessments, demonstrating how this practice enhances engagement and learning outcomes.

The variations in how male and female lecturers approach opportunities for student expression underscore the complexities of assessment practices in higher education. These findings highlight the importance of aligning assessment methods with constructivist principles and Education 5.0 goals, promoting more inclusive, student-centered practices.

**Table 8: Item Reliability Statistics for Student Choice and Engagement in Essay Writing**

	Mean	SD	Item-rest correlation
2a. I allow students to choose their essay topics from a list	3.48	1.55	0.346
2b. I allow students to choose the format of their essay (e.g.	2.52	1.26	0.386
2c. I allow students to choose the length of their essay with	3	1.41	0.577
2d. I provide opportunities for students to incorporate their	3.97	1.08	0.455

The data in Table 8 reveals that Item 3, "I allow students to choose the length of their essay within a range," exhibits the highest item-rest correlation at 0.577, indicating a strong connection to the overall construct of student choice and engagement in essay writing. This suggests that lecturers who facilitate flexibility in essay length are likely to engage in other practices that foster student autonomy. This finding aligns with Wiggins (1998), who posited that flexible assessment parameters significantly enhance student motivation and ownership of learning, reinforcing the importance of adaptability in educational settings.

Items 1 and 2, related to allowing students to choose essay topics and formats, show moderate item-rest correlations of 0.346 and 0.386, respectively. While these correlations are lower than that of Item 3, they still indicate a reasonable relationship to the overall construct of student choice. Research by Black and William (1998) emphasizes that providing choices in topics can lead to increased engagement and ownership, suggesting that these practices, although recognized as beneficial, may not be consistently implemented across all educational contexts.

Item 4, which allows students to incorporate their own research or experiences into their essays, has a moderate item-rest correlation of 0.455. This finding underscores the importance of integrating personal understanding as a means to enhance student engagement, echoing Carless's (2007) emphasis on the significance of personal relevance in academic writing for fostering deeper learning. Encouraging students to draw from their own experiences not only enhances the relevance of assignments but also motivates them to engage more meaningfully with the material.

The item reliability statistics indicate that allowing students to choose essay length and incorporating their understanding are more closely correlated with overall student choice and engagement than the options for topics and formats. This insight is crucial for developing a

robust measure of student choice in essay writing, emphasizing the practices that effectively enhance student autonomy and engagement.

These findings align closely with the study's theoretical framework, which incorporates constructivist principles and the objectives of Education 5.0. By focusing on student choice, these practices support individual learning pathways, such as allowing students to select topics that resonate with their interests, choose formats that suit their strengths (e.g., visual presentations versus traditional essays), or determine the depth of analysis they wish to pursue. Such flexibility fosters critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills essential for success in the 21st century.

Implications for future research include exploring the underlying factors that contribute to the variability in item correlations and reliability across different educational contexts. Investigating how institutional culture, lecturer training, and student demographics influence the implementation of flexible assessment practices could provide valuable insights. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine the long-term impacts of allowing student choice in assessments on engagement and learning outcomes.

#### **4.3 Similarities, Differences, and Challenges in Essay Assessment Practices**

**Research Question Two: What are the key similarities, differences, and challenges observed in essay assessment practices among lecturers within the DoHSS?**

The purpose of Research Question Two was to investigate the similarities, differences, and challenges in essay assessment methods among lecturers within the DoHSS. This inquiry sought to identify effective assessment strategies, explore variations in approaches among lecturers, and uncover challenges that hinder consistent and equitable implementation of assessments methods. By understanding these dynamics, the research question aimed to

propose actionable solutions for enhancing the quality and fairness of essay evaluations in the department.

Participants responded to fifteen items using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1). This quantitative approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of lecturers' perceptions regarding their assessment practices. The findings from this research question build on earlier insights regarding gender dynamics and the role of student choice in assessment, reinforcing the importance of flexibility and inclusivity in evaluating student work.

By identifying common effective methods and recognizing existing challenges, the study aims to contribute to a more coherent framework for essay assessment that aligns with constructivist principles and the objectives of Education 5.0. These insights will not only enhance individual lecturer practices but also foster a more equitable learning environment for students. Ultimately, the goal is to create a robust foundation for improving essay assessment practices across the DoHSS, ensuring that all students receive fair and meaningful evaluations of their work.

**Table 9: Assessment Methods utilized by lecturers in the two universities.**

<b>Assessment Methods Used by Lecturers.</b>				
	Mean	SD	Item-rest correlation	
Use Formative feedback during the writing process	3.52	1.36	0.220	
Use Summative grading of the final essay	3.77	1.31	0.365	
Use Rubrics with defined criteria	3.87	1.18	0.402	
Use Student self-assessment	3.26	1.18	0.664	

Provide Opportunities for peer review or feedback	3.55	1.39	0.750	
---	------	------	-------	--

The data presented in Table 9 reveals critical insights into the assessment methods utilised by lecturers across two universities, directly addressing the research problem of understanding the variations and challenges in essay assessment methods within the DoHSS, addressing directly the research problem of understanding the variations and challenges in essay assessment methods within the DoHSS. The findings regarding assessment methods utilized by lecturers in the two universities resonate strongly with earlier sections of this study, particularly those addressing the themes of student choice, engagement, and the overall quality of assessments. These correlations highlight the need for a comprehensive understanding of how various assessment practices can align with constructivist principles and the objectives of Education 5.0.

#### **4.3.1 Formative feedback during the writing process**

The Table indicates that formative feedback during the item writing process has a moderate mean (3.54), indicating that formative feedback is somewhat frequently used. The moderate mean score of 3.52 for formative feedback, combined with a low item-rest correlation of 0.220, indicates that while this assessment method is somewhat frequently employed, it lacks comprehensive integration into a cohesive assessment strategy. This observation aligns with earlier findings regarding gender dynamics in assessment practices, where male lecturers demonstrated a tendency toward more flexible and student-centered approaches. The existing literature underscores the importance of formative assessments in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes (Sadler, 1989). Constructivist pedagogy advocates for continuous feedback as a vital component of the learning process, positing that such feedback

is essential for fostering deeper student engagement and facilitating ownership of learning. The limited application of formative feedback in this context may hinder students' opportunities to reflect on and improve their work, ultimately impacting their overall educational experience. This highlights the need for further exploration into barriers that prevent the effective implementation of formative feedback and the potential benefits of integrating this practice more fully into assessment strategy.

#### **4.3.2 Summative grading of the final essay**

The table indicates that summative grading of final essay has a slightly higher mean (3.77), suggesting a relatively frequent use of summative grading by lecturers in the two universities over the other assessment methods. The mean score of 3.77 for summative grading indicates a prevalent reliance on final evaluations among lecturers, reflective of traditional assessment practices. This finding aligns with earlier observations in the literature that highlight a tension between formative and summative assessments. Sadler (1989) cautioned against an overreliance on summative assessments, arguing that such an approach can undermine the learning process by placing undue emphasis on grades rather than fostering meaningful learning experiences.

This reliance on summative grading is particularly concerning within the framework of constructivist pedagogy, which advocates for ongoing assessment as a means to support and enhance student learning. In the context of Education 5.0, which seeks to cultivate innovative and adaptive learners equipped for a rapidly evolving world, an excessive focus on summative evaluations may hinder the development of essential skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving.

### **4.3.3 Rubrics with defined criteria**

The mean score of 3.87 for the use of rubrics indicates that this assessment method is the most widely adopted among lecturers within the DoHSS. For instance, many lecturers employ detailed rubrics for essay assignments, outlining specific criteria such as thesis clarity, argument development, use of evidence, and writing mechanics. This approach provides students with a clear roadmap of expectations, allowing them to understand what is required for different performance levels.

This finding aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of clarity and consistency in assessment practices, as highlighted by Brookhart (2013). For example, one lecturer might use a rubric that assigns point values to each criterion, such as 10 points for a strong thesis statement and 5 points for proper citation format. This structured feedback helps students identify their strengths and areas for improvement.

The high frequency of rubric usage in this study correlates positively with contemporary assessment practices aimed at enhancing transparency and fairness. For instance, a common practice among lecturers is to share the rubric with students before they begin their assignments, enabling them to self-assess their work against the established criteria. This not only promotes fairness in grading but also encourages students to engage with the assessment process more actively.

From a constructivist perspective, the use of rubrics is particularly significant as they provide students with clear expectations and defined criteria for assessment. For example, a rubric used for a group project might outline specific roles and contributions expected from each student, fostering a sense of accountability and collaboration. This clarity helps students understand how their individual efforts contribute to the overall success of the project.

Moreover, this emphasis on clarity in assessment is directly relevant to the objectives of Education 5.0, which seeks to develop skills necessary for navigating complex, real-world challenges. By utilizing rubrics, lecturers can support students in acquiring critical skills such as self-regulation, reflection, and goal-setting. For instance, after receiving their graded essays along with rubric feedback, students might be encouraged to set specific goals for their next writing assignment based on the areas highlighted in the rubric, such as improving their argumentation skills.

#### **4.3.4 Student self-assessment**

The mean score of 3.26 for student self-assessment indicates that, despite its alignment with the overall assessment framework, this method is not widely utilized among lecturers in the current study. This finding resonates with Andrade (2005), who emphasized the critical role of self-assessment in fostering metacognitive skills, such as self-awareness and self-regulation. The limited application of self-assessment within the DoHSS suggests an area that warrants further exploration, particularly in identifying barriers to its effective implementation.

One significant trend revealed in the study is that some lecturers face challenges in encouraging students to engage in self-assessment, often due to students' lack of understanding of assessment criteria or their fear of being misjudged on their response. This hesitation in implementing student self-assessment may stem from students feeling unprepared to evaluate their own work accurately, which can hinder their ability to reflect meaningfully on their learning. As noted by Boud and Falchikov (2007), effective self-assessment requires not only clear criteria but also the development of students' evaluative skills, which may not be sufficiently emphasized in the current curriculum.

From a constructivist perspective, promoting self-assessment can significantly enhance student agency and responsibility for their own learning. This aligns with the goals of Education 5.0, which advocate for personalized learning pathways that empower students to take control of their educational journeys. Encouraging self-assessment practices, particularly through structured rubrics, can facilitate this process by providing students with concrete guidelines to reflect on their work. For example, if students are trained to use rubrics not only for their assignments but also for their self-evaluations, they may develop a clearer understanding of their strengths and areas for growth. This in turn inculcates a culture of self-reflection and evaluation critical in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The trend of limited self-assessment use among the lecturers at the two universities highlights a critical gap in current pedagogical practices. This gap suggests a need for targeted professional development for lecturers to equip them with strategies to implement effective self-assessment practices. Existing literature supports this direction, indicating that educators require training not only in the creation of self-assessment tools but also in fostering a classroom culture that values reflection and self-evaluation (McMillan, 2003).

Future research could focus on identifying specific barriers to self-assessment implementation, such as student perceptions, lecturer attitudes, and institutional support systems. Longitudinal studies examining the impact of self-assessment on student learning outcomes could also provide valuable insights in this area. Additionally, exploring the integration of technology in facilitating self-assessment such as digital portfolios or interactive rubrics could offer innovative solutions to enhance its effectiveness.

#### **4.3.5 Opportunities for peer review or feedback**

This item has a moderate mean (3.55) and the highest item-rest correlation (0.75), indicating that it is not only used fairly often but is also very consistent with the overall scale, making it

a highly reliable item. With a moderate mean score of 3.55 and the highest item-rest correlation of 0.750, peer review practices are relatively common and strongly aligned with the overall assessment framework in this study. This finding underscores the importance of collaborative learning and reinforces earlier discussions on the critical role of feedback in enhancing student engagement. Topping (1998) emphasizes that peer feedback not only improves learning outcomes but also fosters a sense of community among students, which is vital for academic success.

Integrating peer review opportunities can significantly promote collaborative skills and critical thinking essential competencies for preparing students to navigate future challenges. Two effective strategies for incorporating peer review into assessment practices include facilitating draft exchanges and implementing peer assessments during presentations. In draft exchanges, students provide feedback on each other's written assignments based on clear rubric criteria, which enhances both understanding and engagement with content. Similarly, during presentations, standardized peer evaluation forms can guide students in assessing content knowledge and teamwork, reinforcing collaborative skills.

However, not all literature supports the effectiveness of peer assessment. Studies by Liu and Carless (2006) suggest that peer feedback can sometimes be inconsistent and lack the depth needed for meaningful learning. They found that students may struggle to provide constructive critiques, leading to superficial comments that do not enhance learning outcomes. This indicates that while peer assessment can be beneficial, it may not universally lead to improved academic performance or satisfaction and therefore should be utilized with caution for effectiveness.

Despite these challenges, the observed trend of high engagement with peer review practices indicates a positive shift towards collaborative learning strategies within the DoHSS. This

reliance on peer assessment underscores the need for cautious and structured implementation. While peer review can foster community and enhance learning, variability in feedback quality and potential biases in evaluations remain major concerns related to this assessment practice in education.

Existing literature supports the effectiveness of peer assessment in promoting deeper learning. For instance, Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000) demonstrate that peer assessment can lead to improved academic performance and greater student satisfaction. However, the success of peer review largely depends on the clarity of the assessment criteria and the training students receive in providing constructive feedback, something lecturers may not be able to achieve given their workloads and skill sets. Ongoing professional development for lecturers is essential to ensure that students understand how to give and receive feedback accurately and rigorously.

Future research could explore the impact of peer review on student outcomes across various disciplines and educational contexts. In addition, examining factors that influence the effectiveness of peer assessment such as student readiness, lecturer guidance, and institutional support could provide valuable insights into optimizing these practices. Longitudinal studies that track the development of collaborative skills and critical thinking over time through peer review processes could further illuminate its benefits.

The findings on peer review opportunities are closely related to earlier findings regarding student choice in essay length and format, opportunities for feedback, and the balance between formative and summative assessments, as well as student self-assessment. Peer review enhances student choice by allowing them to engage actively with their peers' work, fostering a sense of ownership over their learning. When students have the autonomy to

decide on the length and format of their essays, they can tailor their assignments to better suit their learning styles, leading to more meaningful peer reviews.

Furthermore, peer review complements opportunities for feedback. The study's mean score of 3.26 for student self-assessment indicates that while self-assessment is valued, it is not widely utilized. Peer review can bridge this gap, as students who learn to critique their peers may become more adept at evaluating their own work, aligning with Andrade's (2005) findings on the importance of self-assessment in developing metacognitive skills.

The balance between formative and summative assessments is also relevant. Peer review is inherently formative, providing ongoing feedback that can inform final submissions. This aligns with the study's findings on the need for more formative assessment strategies, as iterative feedback can help students improve before final evaluations. While summative assessments provide a conclusive measure of learning, formative assessments like peer reviews enhance the overall educational experience by promoting continuous improvement.

The relationship between peer review practices and earlier findings underscores the interconnectedness of various assessment methods. By fostering student choice, enhancing feedback opportunities, and emphasizing formative assessment, peer review plays a critical role in creating a holistic and engaging learning environment. This integration supports the overarching goals of Education 5.0, aligning assessment practices with the need for students to develop skills necessary for navigating complex, real-world challenges.

**Table 10: Comparison of Assessment Methods used by lecturers**

Independent Samples T-Test				
		Statistic	df	p
Formative feedback during the writing process	Student's t	1.6	29	0.12

Summative grading of the final essay	Student's t	1.62	29	0.115
Rubrics with defined criteria	Student's t	3.11	29	0.004
Student self-assessment	Student's t	2.33	29	0.027
Opportunities for peer review or feedback	Student's t	2	29	0.055
<i>Note.</i> $H_a \mu \text{ University One} \neq \mu \text{ University Two}$				

Table 9 presents the assessment practices and the differences in their utilization by lecturers at the two universities. Table 10 presents a comparison of assessment methods utilized by lecturers at two universities, highlighting notable differences in their approaches. Lecturers at University One report a higher usage of formative feedback, rubrics, and peer review, with a mean statistic of 3.11 for rubrics and 2.0 for peer review, compared to their counterparts at University Two, which show lower averages of 1.6 for formative feedback and 1.62 for summative grading. This trend indicates a more student-centered approach at University One, emphasizing ongoing feedback and guidance by lecturers. Hattie and Timperley (2007) assert that formative assessment is essential for enhancing student learning. This is a key theme explored in this study.

In contrast to the above, the reliance on summative grading at University Two, with a statistic of 1.62, is indicative of a traditional assessment approach that prioritizes final evaluations. This finding resonates well with Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), who argue that such traditional methods can impede the development of a feedback-rich learning environment, ultimately limiting student engagement and inhibiting learning growth. This variation is

particularly relevant to the study's central research question regarding the influence of assessment practices on student engagement and outcomes.

Interestingly, preliminary results suggest that female lecturers at University One tend to offer more student choice in essay topics and length compared to their male counterparts, despite the smaller sample size for female lecturers. This observation points to potential differences in pedagogical approaches by gender, where female lecturers may embrace greater student autonomy unlike their male counterparts. Understanding these gender dynamics in assessment practices warrants further investigation to uncover how they affect student experiences and learning outcomes.

Overall, the results reveal both similarities and significant differences in essay assessment practices across the two universities, reflecting a diversity of pedagogical philosophies. These findings underscore the necessity for further exploration into the factors influencing these variations, particularly in the context of the theoretical framework that emphasizes constructivist principles. Constructivist theories, as posited by scholars like Piaget and Vygotsky, assert that learners construct knowledge through interaction with their environment and peers. The higher use of formative feedback (1.6) and peer review (2.0) at University One exemplifies this approach, fostering a collaborative learning atmosphere that encourages students to engage deeply with the material. Conversely, the reliance on summative assessments at University Two (1.62) reflects a more traditional educational paradigm, which may inhibit the development of a feedback-rich learning environment.

Several potential institutional differences may explain the contrasting assessment practices observed in the results. First, the cultural and educational philosophies prevalent at each university play significant roles. University One's emphasis on formative feedback and peer review suggests a commitment to student-centered learning, where continuous improvement

and collaboration are prioritized. In contrast, University Two may adhere to a more traditional academic culture focused on final evaluations, reflecting a long-standing pedagogical approach that values summative assessments over formative processes.

Additionally, variations in faculty development initiatives can contribute to these differences. University One may provide more robust training and resources for lecturers to implement diverse assessment strategies, empowering educators to embrace innovative practices that enhance student learning. Conversely, if University Two offers limited support for alternative assessment methods, faculty may rely on familiar summative evaluations, thereby perpetuating traditional practices.

Finally, differing student demographics and needs between the two institutions may further explain the contrasting assessment approaches. University One might serve a more diverse student population that benefits from varied assessment methods, prompting lecturers to adopt strategies that promote engagement and accommodate different learning styles. In contrast, University Two may cater to a more homogeneous student body that is perceived to thrive under traditional assessment methods, leading to a preference for summative grading.

These factors illustrate how institutional differences can shape assessment practices, ultimately affecting student engagement and learning outcomes. Addressing these disparities through targeted research and collaborative initiatives can enhance the overall educational experience across both universities, reinforcing the study's emphasis on the importance of diverse assessment strategies in fostering student engagement and success

#### **4.4 Alignment of Essay Assessment Practices with Constructivism and Education 5.0**

This section presents, analyses and discusses findings in respect of research question from indicated below.

**Correlation Matrix**

		6.a. I design assessment tasks that encourage students to explore and discover new ideas and concepts	6.b. I provide opportunities for students to engage in self-directed learning through essay assignments	6.c. I offer feedback that fosters students' ability to reflect on their learning process and make improvements	6.d. I create a learning environment that values exploration,	6.e. I incorporate authentic and relevant contexts in my essay assignments
6.a. I design assessment tasks that encourage students to explore and discover new ideas and concepts	Pearson's r	—	—	—	—	—
The results indicate a strong alignment of lecturers' essay assessment practices with these principles, as lecturers reported a high prevalence of practices that resonate with the tenets of constructivism and education etc. This finding underscores the commitment of lecturers to fostering an educational environment that promotes active engagement, critical thinking, and meaningful learning experiences.						
<b>Table 11: Correlation Assessment Practices Aligned with Constructivism and Education</b>						
<b>50 Principles</b>						
6.b. I provide opportunities for students to engage in self-directed learning through essay assignments	Pearson's r	0.883	—	—	—	—
	df	29	—	—	—	—
	p-value	< 0.001	—	—	—	—

that values exploration, e	p-value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	—	
6.e. I incorporate authentic and relevant contexts in essay ass	Pearson's r	0.618	0.718	0.691	0.704	—
	df	29	29	29	29	—
	p-value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	—
<b>Note. * p &lt; .05, ** p &lt; .01, *** p &lt; .001</b>						

Table 11 presents a correlation matrix that elucidates the relationships among five key assessment practices aligned with the principles of Constructivism and the goals of Education 5.0. The matrix includes Pearson correlation coefficients (r), degrees of freedom (df), and p-values, indicating the statistical significance of the tested principles. The results reveal significant interconnections among practices such as designing exploratory tasks, providing self-directed learning opportunities, and offering reflective feedback, all of which are crucial for fostering a student-centered learning environment.

The high correlation coefficients among these practices reinforce the alignment with Constructivist theory, which posits that learning is an active process where students construct knowledge through meaningful engagement with their environment (Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). For instance, the strong correlation ( $r = 0.883$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between designing assessment tasks that encourage exploration and providing opportunities for self-directed learning underscores the importance of creating tasks that not only engage students but also empower them to take ownership of their learning. This approach aligns with the findings of

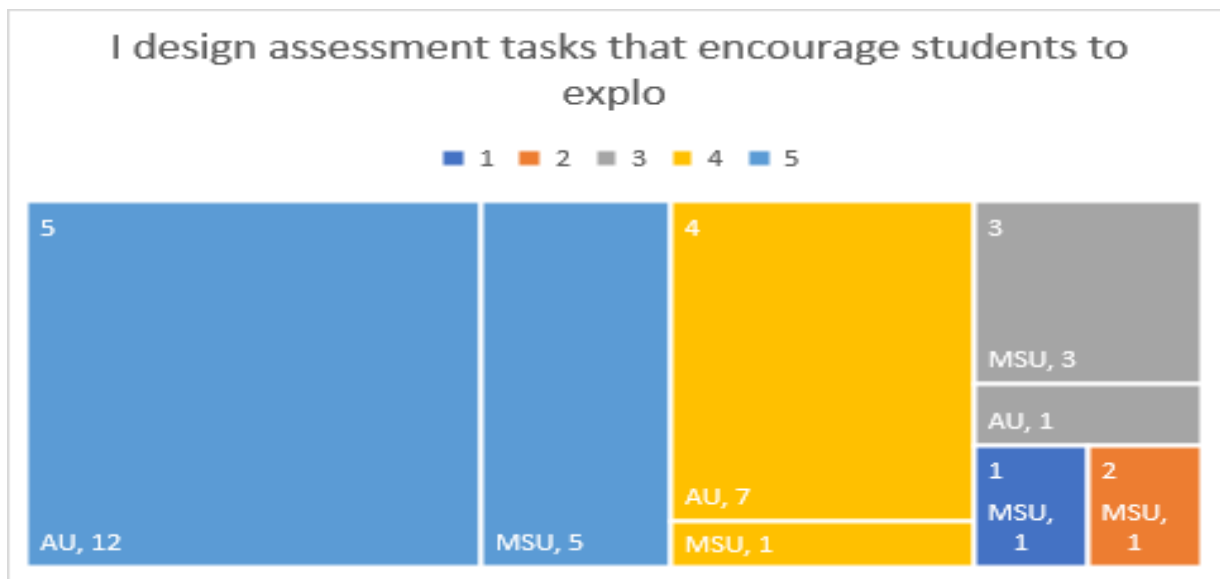
Hattie and Timperley (2007), who emphasize that effective feedback and task design significantly enhance students' learning outcomes.

Moreover, the correlation between offering feedback that fosters reflection ( $r = 0.891$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and creating a learning environment that values exploration ( $r = 0.832$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) highlights the necessity of supportive feedback mechanisms in a constructivist framework. This is consistent with Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) assertion that feedback should not only inform students of their progress but also encourage them to reflect on their learning processes, thus facilitating deeper understanding and continuous improvement.

The practice of incorporating authentic and relevant contexts into essay assessments ( $r = 0.618$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) further emphasizes the practical application of knowledge, a core tenet of Education 5.0. This principle is vital for preparing students for real-world challenges, as noted by the Australian Government's Department of Education and Training (2019), which advocates for educational practices that link academic learning with practical experiences.

The findings presented in Table 16 strongly support the research question by demonstrating that lecturers in the DoHSS are effectively aligning their essay assessment practices with the principles of Constructivism and the goals of Education 5.0. By fostering a student-centered learning environment through these interconnected practices, the lecturers contribute to a more engaging and meaningful educational experience, addressing the gaps in knowledge regarding effective assessment strategies in higher education. This alignment not only enhances student learning outcomes but also supports the broader educational objectives of adaptability and relevance in an evolving academic landscape.

#### **4.1 Exploratory and Inquiry-based Assessments**

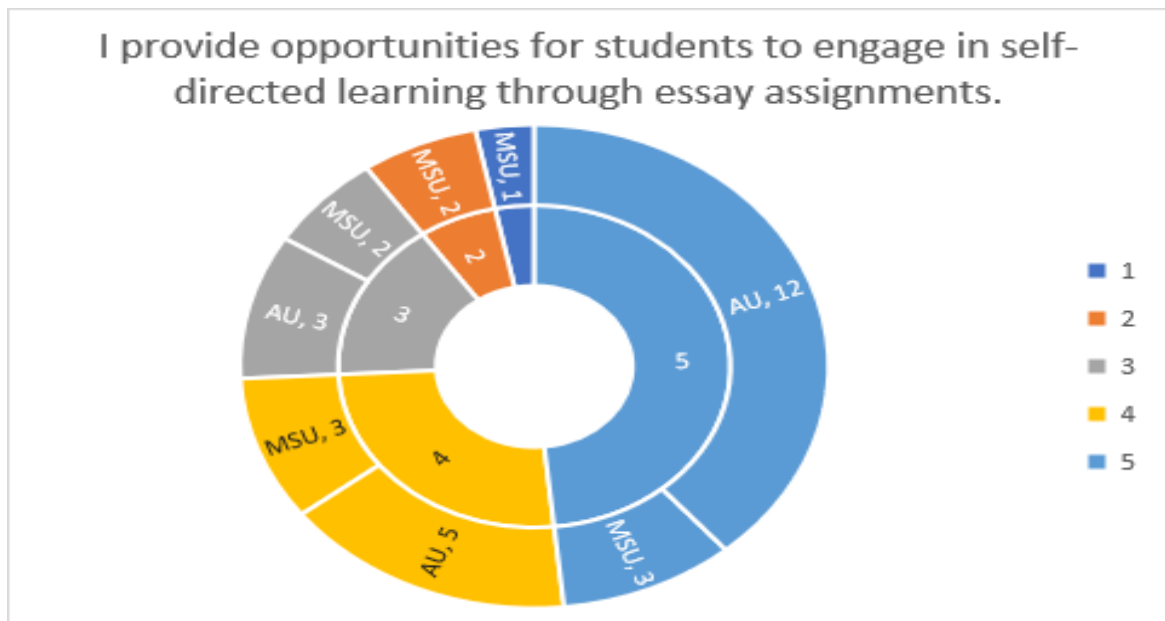


**Figure 9: Exploratory and Inquiry based Assessments**

The Tree map chart illustrates that 28.3% of the lecturers' design assessment tasks that encourage students to explore and discover new ideas and concepts. The strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.883$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between this practice and providing opportunities for self-directed learning through essay assignments suggests that lecturers who foster exploration are also likely to encourage autonomous learning. This alignment with the principles of constructivism is further supported by the very strong positive correlations between exploratory assessments and offering reflective feedback ( $r = 0.891$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicated in Table 16, as well as creating a learning environment that values exploration ( $r = 0.832$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.618$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) in Table 16, between exploratory assessments and incorporating authentic contexts in essay assignments indicates that these practices, while related, are not as strongly connected as the others. This could suggest that while lecturers are emphasizing exploration and inquiry, they may still have opportunities to better integrate authentic, real-world contexts into their assessments practices.

## 4.2 Self-directed Learning and Reflective Feedback



**Figure 10: Self-directed Learning and Reflective Feedback**

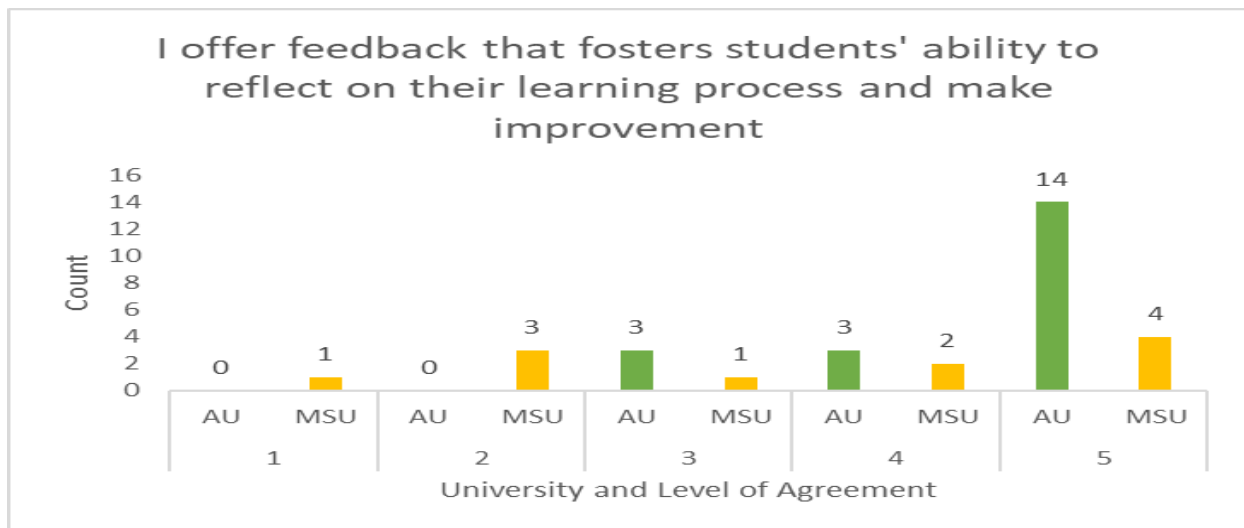
The Tree-map chart illustrates that 28.3% of lecturer's design assessment tasks that encourage students to explore and discover new ideas and concepts. This finding highlights a significant commitment to fostering an exploratory learning environment, which is a core tenet of constructivist theory. The strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.883$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between this practice and providing opportunities for self-directed learning through essay assignments suggests that lecturers who promote exploration are also likely to encourage students to take ownership of their learning.

This alignment with constructivism is further reinforced by the very strong positive correlations observed between exploratory assessments and offering reflective feedback ( $r = 0.891$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as well as creating a learning environment that values exploration ( $r = 0.832$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as presented in Table 16. These findings underscore the interconnectedness of these practices, indicating that fostering a culture of inquiry not only enhances students' exploration but also supports their ability to reflect on their learning processes—an essential aspect of both constructivist learning and Education 5.0.

However, the moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.618$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between exploratory assessments and incorporating authentic contexts in essay assignments indicates that while lecturers are emphasizing exploration and inquiry, there remains room for improvement in integrating real-world contexts into their assessment practices. This gap suggests an opportunity for lecturers to further enhance the relevance of their assessments by linking theoretical concepts to practical applications, thereby enriching the learning experience.

Overall, this exploration of inquiry-based assessments aligns with the overarching goals of Education 5.0, which advocate for learning experiences that are not only engaging but also applicable to real-world scenarios. By bridging the gap between exploratory assessments and authentic contexts, lecturers can better prepare students for the complexities of the modern world, thus reinforcing the significance of these assessment practices in fostering meaningful learning outcomes.

### 4.3 Fostering Reflection and Exploration



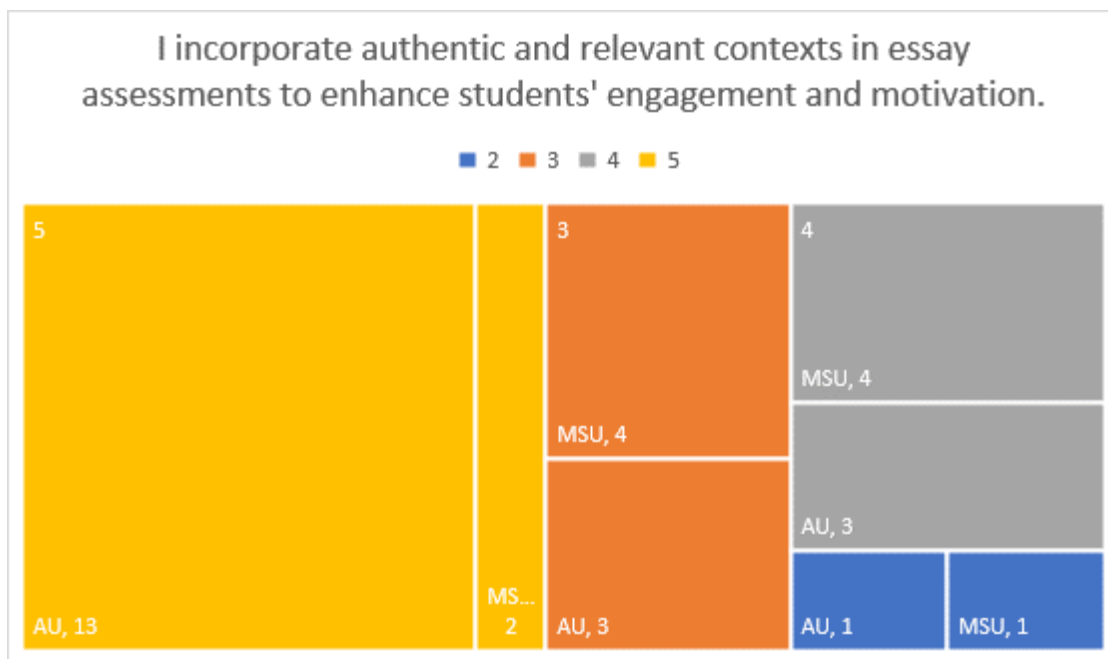
**Figure 11: Reflection and Exploration**

The clustered column chart shows that 26.8% of the lecturers offer feedback that strongly fosters students' ability to reflect on their learning process and make improvements. This practice is closely aligned with the constructivist principle of metacognition and the

Education 5.0 goal of developing self-directed learners. The very strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.902$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between reflective feedback and creating a learning environment that values exploration indicates a coherent approach to supporting students' active engagement and sense-making. Instructors who prioritize reflective feedback are also highly likely to cultivate a learning environment that encourages exploration and inquiry.

The strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.691$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between reflective feedback and incorporating authentic contexts in essay assignments suggests that these practices, while related, may not be as tightly coupled as the other connections observed in the data. This could highlight an opportunity to better integrate authentic, real-world elements into the reflective feedback process.

#### 4.4 Authentic and Relevant Assessments



**Figure 12: Authentic and Relevant Assessments**

The Tree map chart shows that 20.4% of the lecturers incorporate authentic and relevant contexts into their essay assessments, which is a key principle of constructivism and aligns with the Education 5.0 emphasis on contextualizing learning. This practice helps enhance

students' engagement and motivation by making the assessments more meaningful and applicable to their lives and future careers.

The strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.704$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between incorporating authentic contexts and creating a learning environment that values exploration suggests that these two practices often go hand in hand. Instructors who foster an exploratory learning environment are also likely to design assessments that are grounded in authentic, real-world situations.

The high percentages across these key principles, along with the strong statistical evidence of their interconnectedness, demonstrate that the lecturers in the two universities have broadly adopted assessment practices that align with the constructivist philosophy and the entrepreneurial goals of Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 model. Lecturers have adopted a student-centered approach that emphasizes exploration, self-directed learning, reflective feedback, and the integration of authentic assessments, all of which are essential for developing the innovative, industrialized, digitized, modernized, and internationally-minded professionals envisioned by the Education 5.0 model.

#### **4.5 Strengths and Limitations of scoring and interpretation**

##### **Research Question Three: What are the perceived strengths and limitations of the scoring and interpretation methods used for essay assessment in the DoHSS?**

This research question aims to investigate the perceived strengths and limitations of scoring and interpretation methods employed in essay assessment within the DoHSS. By delving into the challenges faced by lecturers such as providing timely feedback, ensuring grading consistency, and effectively utilizing rubrics this research question seeks to illuminate how these practices impact student learning outcomes. Furthermore, aligning these insights with constructivist principles emphasizes the need for assessment strategies that support active learning and collaborative engagement. Understanding these dynamics is essential for

addressing existing challenges and enhancing the overall educational experience, thereby contributing to a more effective and responsive higher education system in line with the goals of Education 5.0.

#### 4.5.1 Limitations in scoring and interpretation.

**Table 12: Limitations in scoring and interpretation.**

Independent Samples T-Test						
		Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference
4.a. I find it difficult to provide timely and meaningful feedback	Student's t	0.49	29	0.628	0.259	0.528
4.b. I struggle to maintain consistency in my grading of essays	Student's t	-1.058	29	0.299	-0.545	0.516
4.c. I find it challenging to design rubrics that accurately as	Student's t	-0.314	29	0.755	-0.164	0.52
4.d. I have limited time and resources to implement formative	Student's t	-0.742	29	0.464	-0.423	0.569
<i>Note.</i> $H_a \mu_{AU} \neq \mu_{MSU}$						
<sup>a</sup> Levene's test is significant ( $p < .05$ ), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances						

In order to establish the challenges that lecturers experience in providing timely and meaningful feedback, maintaining consistency in grading, designing rubrics and providing formative feedback an independent samples t-test was conducted. Table 12 presents a comparison of assessment methods utilized by lecturers at two universities, highlighting notable differences in their approaches. Lecturers at University One report a higher usage of formative feedback, rubrics, and peer review, with a mean statistic of 3.11 for rubrics and 2.0 for peer review, compared to their counterparts at University Two, which show lower

averages of 1.6 for formative feedback and 1.62 for summative grading. This trend indicates a more student-centered approach at University One, emphasizing ongoing feedback and guidance by lecturers. Hattie and Timperley (2007) assert that formative assessment is essential for enhancing student learning. This is a key theme explored in this study.

In contrast to the above, the reliance on summative grading at University Two, with a statistic of 1.62, is indicative of a traditional assessment approach that prioritizes final evaluations. This finding resonates well with Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), who argue that such traditional methods can impede the development of a feedback-rich learning environment, ultimately limiting student engagement and inhibiting learning growth. This variation is particularly relevant to the study's central research question regarding the influence of assessment practices on student engagement and outcomes.

Interestingly, preliminary results suggest that female lecturers at University One tend to offer more student choice in essay topics and length compared to their male counterparts, despite the smaller sample size for female lecturers. This observation points to potential differences in pedagogical approaches by gender, where female lecturers may embrace greater student autonomy unlike their male counterparts. Understanding these gender dynamics in assessment practices warrants further investigation to uncover how they affect student experiences and learning outcomes.

Overall, the results reveal both similarities and significant differences in essay assessment practices across the two universities, reflecting a diversity of pedagogical philosophies. These findings underscore the necessity for further exploration into the factors influencing these variations, particularly in the context of the theoretical framework that emphasizes constructivist principles. Constructivist theories, as posited by scholars like Piaget and Vygotsky, assert that learners construct knowledge through interaction with their

environment and peers. The higher use of formative feedback (1.6) and peer review (2.0) at University One exemplifies this approach, fostering a collaborative learning atmosphere that encourages students to engage deeply with the material. Conversely, the reliance on summative assessments at University Two (1.62) reflects a more traditional educational paradigm, which may inhibit the development of a feedback-rich learning environment.

Several potential institutional differences may explain the contrasting assessment practices observed in the results. First, the cultural and educational philosophies prevalent at each university play significant roles. University One's emphasis on formative feedback and peer review suggests a commitment to student-centered learning, where continuous improvement and collaboration are prioritized. In contrast, University Two may adhere to a more traditional academic culture focused on final evaluations, reflecting a long-standing pedagogical approach that values summative assessments over formative processes.

Additionally, variations in faculty development initiatives can contribute to these differences. University One may provide more robust training and resources for lecturers to implement diverse assessment strategies, empowering educators to embrace innovative practices that enhance student learning. Conversely, if University Two offers limited support for alternative assessment methods, faculty may rely on familiar summative evaluations, thereby perpetuating traditional practices.

Finally, differing student demographics and needs between the two institutions may further explain the contrasting assessment approaches. University One might serve a more diverse student population that benefits from varied assessment methods, prompting lecturers to adopt strategies that promote engagement and accommodate different learning styles. In contrast, University Two may cater to a more homogeneous student body that is perceived to thrive under traditional assessment methods, leading to a preference for summative grading.

These factors illustrate how institutional differences can shape assessment practices, ultimately affecting student engagement and learning outcomes. Addressing these disparities through targeted research and collaborative initiatives can enhance the overall educational experience across both universities, reinforcing the study's emphasis on the importance of diverse assessment strategies in fostering student engagement and success

Both University One and University Two lecturers reported similar difficulties in delivering timely and meaningful feedback, as indicated by a high p-value of 0.628. This suggests that both male and female lecturers perceive these challenges similarly, reflecting a collective institutional concern. This finding resonates with earlier observations regarding the significance of formative feedback in enhancing student learning, yet highlights the struggles that educators face in its effective implementation due to time constraints and heavy workloads.

The challenges of providing timely feedback are particularly relevant when considering the earlier findings on peer feedback and student self-reflection. The reliance on peer review opportunities, which were noted as a prevalent assessment practice at University One, can serve as a potential solution to the issue of timely feedback. By integrating peer feedback into the assessment process, lecturers can distribute the feedback workload among students, allowing them to engage actively in the evaluation of each other's work. This collaborative approach not only alleviates some of the pressure on lecturers but also fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility among students, aligning with the constructivist principles discussed in earlier sections.

Moreover, the challenges faced by lecturers in delivering timely feedback may also impact students' abilities to engage in meaningful self-reflection. Effective self-assessment relies on receiving constructive feedback in a timely manner, which can inform students'

understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement. If lecturers struggle to provide this feedback, students may miss critical opportunities for reflection and growth, limiting their overall learning experience. The earlier findings indicating that student self-assessment practices are not widely utilized further emphasize this point; without adequate feedback, students may find it difficult to engage in reflective practices that enhance their learning.

The shared difficulties in providing timely and meaningful feedback across both universities underscore the need for institutional support and strategies to enhance the feedback process. By investing in training for lecturers on effective feedback techniques and encouraging the use of peer feedback mechanisms, both institutions can create a more supportive learning environment. This would not only improve the quality of feedback but also promote a culture of self-reflection among students, ultimately leading to better learning outcomes.

The challenges identified in the feedback process are intricately linked to the earlier findings on formative and summative assessment practices, opportunities for peer feedback and student self-reflection. Addressing these challenges through collaborative practices and institutional support can enhance the overall effectiveness of assessment strategies, fostering a more engaged and reflective learning community.

#### **4.5.2 Grading Consistency and Gender Dynamics**

The p-value of 0.299 for grading consistency indicates that both male and female lecturers experience similar challenges with this assessment method. This consistency across the two universities points to a shared institutional concern rather than a gender-specific issue. However, when viewed in light of earlier findings regarding gender dynamics in assessment practices, a nuanced relationship emerges.

Previous sections of the study indicated that female lecturers at University One tend to offer more student choice in essay topics and length compared to their male counterparts. This greater flexibility may reflect an inclination toward a more collaborative and student-centered approach. In contrast, the challenges in grading consistency could highlight a potential tension between flexible assessment practices and the need for standardized evaluation criteria. If female lecturers are more inclined to adapt assessments based on individual student needs, this may inadvertently lead to inconsistencies in grading, particularly in a context where clear benchmarks are required.

Furthermore, the lack of significant gender differences in grading consistency suggests that both male and female lecturers face similar institutional pressures, such as high workloads and varying interpretations of assessment criteria. This shared experience may underscore a collective need for clearer guidelines and training on grading practices that can accommodate diverse pedagogical approaches while ensuring fairness and consistency.

#### **4.5.3 Rubric Design and Its Relationship to Assessment Practices**

The analysis revealed no significant difference in the perceived difficulty of designing rubrics between the two universities, reinforcing the earlier finding that rubrics are the most frequently used assessment method across both institutions. This consistency suggests a strong institutional commitment to clear assessment criteria, aligning with the constructivist theoretical framework that emphasizes transparency and clarity in the learning process.

For instance, both universities may use rubrics that outline specific criteria for evaluating student essays, such as organization, argument quality, and use of sources. However, if the rubrics are overly complex or lack clear descriptors, lecturers may struggle to apply them consistently, leading to varied interpretations of student performance. This challenge can

result in a lack of uniformity in grading, which is particularly concerning in a collaborative learning environment where fairness is essential.

While the widespread use of rubrics indicates a recognition of their value in guiding student performance, the challenges associated with rubric design point to potential shortcomings in their implementation. For example, if a rubric for a research paper does not clearly differentiate between levels of achievement (e.g., what constitutes "adequate" versus "excellent" use of evidence), students may find it difficult to understand how to improve their work. This lack of clarity can hinder their ability to engage in meaningful self-reflection and effectively use feedback to enhance their skills.

Moreover, the challenges in rubric design may also impact the effectiveness of formative feedback. If rubrics lack clarity or fail to align with learning objectives, students may struggle to utilize feedback effectively. For instance, a rubric that provides vague comments such as "needs improvement" without specific guidance can leave students uncertain about how to address weaknesses in their writing. This connection underscores the importance of investing in professional development focused on rubric design, ensuring that educators are equipped to create tools that promote both consistency in grading and meaningful student learning experiences.

The relationship between rubric design and assessment practices is crucial for supporting the constructivist principles of active learning and student engagement. By addressing the challenges associated with rubric design such as complexity, lack of clarity, and misalignment with learning objectives institutions can enhance the overall effectiveness of their assessment strategies. This, in turn, leads to improved learning outcomes and a more supportive educational environment that fosters student growth and engagement.

Lecturers at University One reported a slightly higher mean difference for the statement "I have limited time and resources to implement formative assessment," with a mean score of 3.4 compared to University Two's mean score of 2.8. This finding suggests that University One lecturers perceive time and resource constraints as a more significant barrier to implementing formative assessments than their University Two counterparts. For example, the increased workload indicated by the higher mean score may limit their ability to develop and administer formative assessments effectively, reducing opportunities for meaningful student feedback.

These findings align with previous analyses of assessment practices, which revealed a moderate level of use for formative feedback, with a mean usage score of 3.2 across both universities. At the same time, there was a strong emphasis on the use of rubrics, with an average score of 4.1 for their frequency of use. The reliance on rubrics may be a coping strategy in response to these time constraints, as clear, structured criteria can streamline the grading process. However, if lecturers are pressed for time, they may resort to using generic rubrics that lack the specificity needed to guide students effectively. For instance, a rubric that broadly categorizes performance as "satisfactory" or "needs improvement" without detailed descriptors can diminish the potential for constructive feedback and hinder student learning.

Additionally, limited resources—such as access to training, materials, or technology—can exacerbate these challenges. If lecturers lack access to professional development opportunities focused on formative assessment strategies, they may feel ill-equipped to implement effective practices. For example, without training on how to integrate peer feedback or self-assessment techniques, lecturers might default to traditional methods that do not engage students in their learning process.

The challenges reported by lecturers in providing timely feedback and implementing formative assessments highlight the need for further investigation into the factors contributing to these difficulties. Addressing time and resource constraints through institutional support such as providing dedicated time for assessment planning, access to training sessions, and enhanced resources can empower lecturers to incorporate more effective formative assessment strategies.

**Table 13: Mean Differences in Assessment Challenges by University**

Item	University		Mean Difference
	One Mean Score	Two Mean Score	
4.a. I find it difficult to provide timely and meaningful feedback	3.748	3.489	0.259
4.b. I struggle to maintain consistency in my grading of essays	3.252	3.797	-0.545
4.c. I find it challenging to design rubrics that accurately as	3.636	3.799	-0.164
4.d. I have limited time and resources to implement formative	3.377	3.799	-0.423

#### 4.5.4 Time and Resources

Lecturers at University One reported a slightly higher mean difference for the statement "I have limited time and resources to implement formative assessment," with a mean score of 3.4 compared to University Two's mean score of 2.8. This finding suggests that University One lecturers perceive time and resource constraints as a more significant barrier to

implementing formative assessments than their University Two counterparts. For example, the increased workload indicated by the higher mean score may limit their ability to develop and administer formative assessments effectively, reducing opportunities for meaningful student feedback.

These findings align with previous analyses of assessment practices, which revealed a moderate level of use for formative feedback, with a mean usage score of 3.2 across both universities. At the same time, there was a strong emphasis on the use of rubrics, with an average score of 4.1 for their frequency of use. The reliance on rubrics may be a coping strategy in response to these time constraints, as clear, structured criteria can streamline the grading process. However, if lecturers are pressed for time, they may resort to using generic rubrics that lack the specificity needed to guide students effectively. For instance, a rubric that broadly categorizes performance as "satisfactory" or "needs improvement" without detailed descriptors can diminish the potential for constructive feedback and hinder student learning.

Additionally, limited resources—such as access to training, materials, or technology—can exacerbate these challenges. If lecturers lack access to professional development opportunities focused on formative assessment strategies, they may feel ill-equipped to implement effective practices. For example, without training on how to integrate peer feedback or self-assessment techniques, lecturers might default to traditional methods that do not engage students in their learning process.

The challenges reported by lecturers in providing timely feedback and implementing formative assessments highlight the need for further investigation into the factors contributing to these difficulties. Addressing time and resource constraints through institutional support such as providing dedicated time for assessment planning, access to

training sessions, and enhanced resources can empower lecturers to incorporate more effective formative assessment strategies.

#### **4.5.5 Timely and Meaningful Feedback**

The data indicate that University One lecturers find providing timely and meaningful feedback slightly less challenging, with a mean score of 3.748 compared to University Two's 3.489. Although the t-test did not reveal a significant difference, this suggests that University One may have more resources or institutional support that facilitate the feedback process. Earlier findings in the study emphasized the importance of formative feedback for student engagement and learning, reinforcing the need for institutions to prioritize support systems that enhance feedback mechanisms. This aligns with constructivist principles, which advocate for transparent communication and ongoing interaction between lecturers and students.

#### **4.5.6 Consistency in Grading**

The mean differences indicate that University Two lecturers face greater challenges in maintaining grading consistency, with a mean score of 3.797 compared to 3.252 for University One. This suggests that University Two lecturers perceive grading consistency as a more significant issue, potentially influenced by factors such as training disparities, workload, or institutional culture. Earlier sections of the study identified gender dynamics in assessment practices, highlighting how different approaches to flexibility and autonomy may impact grading consistency. Addressing these challenges is vital for ensuring fair assessments, which is essential for fostering a trusting educational environment.

#### **4.5.7 Rubric Design**

The analysis reveals that University Two lecturers report a higher mean score of 3.799 for challenges in rubric design, compared to 3.636 for University One lecturers. This suggests that rubric design is a more pressing concern at University Two. The strong emphasis on rubrics as the primary assessment method, identified in earlier findings, underscores the need for effective rubric implementation. If rubrics are not designed with clarity and specificity, they may fail to guide student performance effectively. This aligns with the theoretical framework that emphasizes the importance of clear assessment criteria, which are crucial for fostering student understanding and engagement.

#### **4.5.8 Time and Resources for Formative Assessment**

The mean scores indicate that University Two lecturers perceive time and resource constraints as more significant barriers to implementing formative assessments, with a score of 3.799 compared to 3.377 for University One. This disparity suggests that University Two lecturers may experience heavier workloads or less access to necessary resources. Earlier findings highlighted the moderate use of formative feedback and the strong emphasis on rubrics, suggesting a need for more support in implementing effective formative assessments. Addressing these constraints is vital for enhancing the quality of formative assessments, which are essential for student engagement and learning, further reflecting the constructivist focus on active, student-centered learning environments.

While lecturers in both universities face challenges related to assessment practices, University Two lecturers consistently report higher mean scores for perceived difficulties in maintaining grading consistency, designing rubrics, and managing time and resources for formative assessments. These findings illustrate a pattern that suggests challenges may be

more pronounced at University Two, potentially influenced by factors such as workload, training, or institutional culture.

#### **4.6 Skills Gaps, Training and Capacity Development Needs**

**Research question 5: what training and capacity building resources and support do lecturers need to implement Education 5.0 assessment practices, and how can these needs be met?**

This section presents findings on the challenges and barriers faced by lecturers in aligning their essay assessment practices with the principles of constructivism and the entrepreneurial goals of Education 5.0 and the training and professional capacity development needs of the lecturers.

##### **4.6.1 Insufficient Training and Skills**

The identification of insufficient training and a lack of skills among lecturers as a major challenge is particularly noteworthy. The statistically significant difference in perceptions between male and female lecturers ( $p = 0.014$ ) suggests underlying factors that may influence how different groups experience professional development. This disparity calls for a nuanced approach to training initiatives, tailored to the specific needs and contexts of diverse faculty members.

For instance, a male lecturer from University One expressed, “I feel confident in my subject matter, but when it comes to integrating entrepreneurial elements into my assessments, I just don’t know where to start.” This sentiment reflects a common struggle among lecturers who may excel in their fields yet lack the pedagogical skills necessary to implement new assessment strategies effectively.

In contrast, a female lecturer from University Two stated, *“I often find that the training sessions are too generic. They don’t address the specific challenges I face in my discipline.”*

This highlights the need for professional development that considers the unique contexts of different academic areas and the varied experiences of lecturers.

Existing literature emphasizes that effective professional development must be responsive to the varying backgrounds and experiences of educators (Guskey, 2002). Addressing these differences can enhance the relevance and impact of training programs, ultimately leading to more effective integration of entrepreneurial elements into assessments.

A lecturer from University One added, *“If the training were more tailored to include practical examples from my field, I’d be more likely to apply what I learn.”* Similarly, a University Two lecturer remarked, *“I need workshops that focus on practical skills, not just theoretical knowledge. That’s where I struggle the most.”*

By considering these insights, institutions can develop targeted training initiatives that meet the diverse needs of faculty members, enhancing their confidence and competence in implementing entrepreneurial-focused assessments. This focused approach will not only improve teaching practices but also better prepare students for the demands of the modern workforce.

#### **4.6.2 Resistance to Education 5.0 Principles**

The resistance to adopting Education 5.0 principles identified among some lecturers and students poses significant barriers to implementation. The absence of statistically significant differences in perceptions between genders or universities indicates that this resistance is a broader cultural issue rather than one confined to specific demographics. This finding aligns with research on institutional resistance, which posits that deeply entrenched beliefs and

practices can hinder the adoption of innovative educational frameworks (Fullan, 2007). Therefore, it is crucial for institutions to engage in comprehensive change management strategies that foster a culture of collaboration, innovation, and openness to new pedagogical approaches. Engaging stakeholders in dialogue about the benefits of Education 5.0 can help mitigate resistance and facilitate smoother transitions toward these principles.

Resistance to adopting Education 5.0 principles in essay assessment emerged as a notable challenge, with reports from 5 female and 8 male lecturers indicating their concerns. This resistance can stem from a variety of factors, including entrenched educational practices, skepticism about the efficacy of new methodologies, and a lack of understanding of the principles underlying Education 5.0.

Resistance to adopting Education 5.0 principles in essay assessment emerged as a notable challenge, with reports from 5 female and 8 male lecturers indicating their concerns. This resistance can stem from various factors, including entrenched educational practices, skepticism about the efficacy of new methodologies, and a lack of understanding of the principles underlying Education 5.0.

For example, a lecturer from University One stated, *“I’ve always used traditional essay formats. It’s what I know, and I’m not sure how these new principles will work in practice.”*

Similarly, a lecturer from University Two expressed, *“The idea of integrating entrepreneurial skills into assessments feels overwhelming. I’m concerned that it will not resonate with my students.”*

The absence of statistically significant differences in perceptions between genders or between the two universities suggests that the resistance is a widespread issue, not confined to specific demographics or institutional contexts. For instance, both male and female lecturers at University One echoed similar sentiments, with one male lecturer noting, *“Adopting these*

*new principles seems like a lot of extra work. I'm not convinced it will improve student learning.*” This indicates a systemic challenge that requires institutional intervention.

To effectively address this resistance, broader strategies are required. Comprehensive workshops that introduce Education 5.0 principles alongside practical examples could help alleviate concerns. A University Two lecturer remarked, *“If we could see real examples of how these principles can be applied, I think it would make the transition easier.”* Open dialogues within academic communities about the benefits of Education 5.0 can encourage collaboration and mitigate resistance, as highlighted by a University One lecturer who stated, *“Sharing experiences could help us all feel more confident about these changes.”*

To effectively address this resistance, broader strategies are required. Comprehensive workshops that not only introduce Education 5.0 principles but also provide practical examples, such as developing case studies that align with local industries, can help lecturers visualize the applicability of these principles. Additionally, fostering open dialogue within academic communities about the benefits of Education 5.0 can encourage collaboration and mitigate resistance. For example, holding forums where lecturers can share success stories from colleagues who have successfully integrated these principles could build confidence and enthusiasm for change.

#### **4.6.3 Professional Development and Support Needs**

The study revealed a strong consensus among participants regarding the critical need for professional development resources to support the alignment of essay assessment practices with Education 5.0 principles. This need underscores the recognition among lecturers that effective implementation of new assessment strategies requires ongoing training and support. The specific areas identified as vital include:

#### **4.6.4 Workshops on Essay Design**

A significant majority of lecturers (58.1% from University One and 29.0% from University Two) expressed a need for workshops or training sessions focused on designing essay items that promote entrepreneurial skills. A lecturer from University One articulated, *“I want to create assessments that challenge my students, but I need guidance on how to do that effectively.”* This statement highlights the desire for practical, hands-on training that equips lecturers with the ability to design innovative assessments.

Conversely, a University Two lecturer remarked, *“We need more than just theory; we need workshops that show us how to apply these concepts in our assessments.”* This emphasizes the demand for workshops that bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application, ensuring that lecturers can effectively implement Education 5.0 principles in their teaching.

#### **4.6.5 Resources for Essay Assessments**

Lecturers from both universities expressed a strong need for resources and examples of essay assessments that align with Education 5.0 principles (61.3% from University One and 32.3% from University Two). A University One lecturer stated, *“Having access to a database of example assessments would save me a lot of time and inspire me to try new things.”* This underscores the importance of providing lecturers with concrete examples that can serve as models for their own assessments.

In contrast, a lecturer from University Two commented, *“I often feel lost when trying to create assessments that are relevant. Resources would be invaluable.”* This statement illustrates the frustration many lecturers feel in the absence of clear guidelines and examples,

highlighting the need for comprehensive resource materials that can aid in the development of effective assessments.

#### **4.6.6 Collaboration Opportunities**

A significant number of lecturers (58.1% from University One and 29.0% from University Two) emphasized the value of collaboration opportunities with colleagues to develop and implement effective essay assessments. A lecturer from University One expressed, *“Working together with colleagues would allow us to share ideas and develop assessments that are more cohesive across our courses.”* This indicates a strong interest in collaborative efforts that can enhance the quality of assessments.

A University Two lecturer echoed this sentiment, stating, *“Collaboration could lead to innovative approaches that none of us would think of individually.”* This highlights the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration to generate new ideas and practices that can enrich the educational experience for both lecturers and students.

#### **4.6.7 Mentoring from Colleagues**

Mentoring or coaching from experienced colleagues on essay assessment practices was viewed as a valuable support mechanism by 58.1% of lecturers from University One and 32.3% from University Two. A lecturer from University One noted, *“Having a mentor who has successfully implemented these strategies would provide me with the confidence to try new things.”* This points to the importance of mentorship in fostering a supportive environment for professional growth.

In contrast, a University Two lecturer remarked, *“I would benefit greatly from guidance and feedback from someone who has navigated these changes.”* This highlights the need for

structured mentoring programs that can provide personalized support to lecturers as they adapt to new assessment methods.

#### **4.6.8 Access to Technology Tools**

Finally, lecturers highlighted the importance of access to technology tools and platforms that can support essay assessment, particularly plagiarism detection tools (64.5% from University One and 29.0% from University Two). A University One lecturer stated, *“Plagiarism detection tools are essential for maintaining academic integrity, but I need training to use them effectively.”* This emphasizes the necessity for training that enables lecturers to utilize technology in a way that enhances their assessment practices.

Meanwhile, a University Two lecturer noted, *“Access to technology tools is crucial, but I often feel overwhelmed by the options and unsure how to use them in my assessments.”* This underscores the need for comprehensive training on technology integration that empowers lecturers to confidently incorporate digital tools into their teaching.

These findings collectively emphasize the importance of providing lecturers with access to resources, training, and collaborative opportunities to effectively implement student-centered assessment practices in their classrooms. By addressing these professional development needs, institutions can foster a more innovative and responsive educational environment that aligns with the principles of Education 5.0. Ultimately, enhancing the quality of education in this manner will better prepare students for the challenges of the modern workforce, ensuring they possess the entrepreneurial skills necessary for success in an increasingly complex world.

#### **4.6.9 Workshops on Essay Design**

A significant majority of lecturers (58.1% from University One and 29.0% from University Two) expressed a need for workshops or training sessions focused on designing essay items that promote entrepreneurial skills. One University One lecturer stated, *“I want to create assessments that challenge my students, but I need guidance on how to do that effectively.”* In contrast, a University Two lecturer remarked, *“We are not trained to design innovative assessments. Workshops would really help.”*

The implications of such workshops are profound; by equipping lecturers with the skills to design relevant assessments, they can foster a more engaging learning environment that encourages the development of critical entrepreneurial skills.

#### **4.6.9 Resources for Essay Assessments**

Lecturers from both universities expressed a strong need for resources and examples of essay assessments that align with Education 5.0 principles (61.3% from University One and 32.3% from University Two). A lecturer from University One stated, *“Having access to a database of example assessments would save me a lot of time and inspire me to try new things.”* Similarly, a University Two lecturer commented, *“I often feel lost when trying to create assessments that are relevant. Resources would be invaluable.”* The implication of having these resources readily available is that lecturers can more easily adopt and adapt best practices, leading to improved student engagement and learning outcomes.

#### **4.6.10 Collaboration Opportunities**

A significant number of lecturers (58.1% from University One and 29.0% from University Two) emphasized the value of collaboration opportunities with colleagues to develop and

implement effective essay assessments. A University One lecturer expressed, *“Working together with colleagues would allow us to share ideas and develop assessments that are more cohesive across our courses.”* A University Two lecturer echoed this sentiment, stating, *“Collaboration could lead to innovative approaches that none of us would think of individually.”* The implications of fostering such collaboration are substantial in pooling expertise and resources, lecturers can create more comprehensive assessments that reflect the interconnected nature of knowledge and skills in the 21st century.

#### **4.6.11 Mentoring from Colleagues**

Mentoring or coaching from experienced colleagues on essay assessment practices was viewed as a valuable support mechanism by 58.1% of lecturers from University One and 32.3% from University Two. A lecturer from University One noted, *“Having a mentor who has successfully implemented these strategies would provide me with the confidence to try new things.”* In contrast, a University Two lecturer remarked, *“I would benefit greatly from guidance and feedback from someone who has navigated these changes.”*

The implications of such mentoring relationships extend beyond individual development. They can foster a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration within the institution, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of education.

#### **4.6.12 Access to Technology Tools**

Finally, lecturers highlighted the importance of access to technology tools and platforms that can support essay assessment, particularly plagiarism detection tools (64.5% from University One and 29.0% from University Two). A University One lecturer stated, *“Plagiarism detection tools are essential for maintaining academic integrity, but I need training to use them effectively.”* Meanwhile, a University Two lecturer noted, *“Access to technology tools*

*is crucial, but I often feel overwhelmed by the options and unsure how to use them in my assessments.*” The implications of ensuring access to these tools are significant; lecturers can more effectively implement technology in their assessments, leading to improved student learning outcomes and greater confidence in the evaluation process.

These findings collectively emphasize the importance of providing lecturers with access to resources, training, and collaborative opportunities to effectively implement student-centered assessment practices in their classrooms. By addressing these professional development needs, institutions can foster a more innovative and responsive educational environment that aligns with the principles of Education 5.0. Ultimately, enhancing the quality of education in this manner will better prepare students for the challenges of the modern workforce, ensuring they possess the entrepreneurial skills necessary for success in an increasingly complex world.

#### **4.7 Summary**

This Chapter reveals a complex landscape of essay assessment practices within the DoHSS at the two institutions. While lecturers demonstrate a commitment to student-centered learning that aligns with constructivist principles and the Education 5.0 framework, significant variations in their specific assessment practices were observed. Notably, lecturers at University One reported a more frequent use of essay tests, clearer directions, and closer alignment with instructional objectives compared to their counterparts at University Two. This disparity raises critical questions about the factors influencing these differences and their implications for student learning outcomes.

The study identified several challenges that inhibit the effective implementation of these principles. Key obstacles include time constraints that hinder lecturers from providing timely and meaningful feedback, insufficient training on essay item construction, and a lack of

alignment with student-centered principles. Institutional barriers, such as rigid assessment structures and resource limitations, further complicate the application of innovative assessment practices. A concerning gender disparity in essay assessment practices was also noted, suggesting that not all lecturers have equitable opportunities to contribute to and shape assessment strategies.

Many lecturers expressed frustration over their inability to deliver constructive feedback due to heavy workloads and large class sizes. This challenge is compounded by a lack of access to comprehensive training on Education 5.0 scoring and interpretation practices, which could empower them to enhance their assessment methods. This finding underscores the necessity for targeted training programs designed to equip lecturers with specific competencies in scoring and interpreting assessments effectively.

To address these needs, the study highlights several essential training areas. First, training should begin with a comprehensive overview of the Education 5.0 framework, emphasizing its principles, including student-centered learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving. This foundational knowledge will help lecturers align their assessment practices with the overarching goals of the framework. Additionally, lecturers require training on designing and utilizing criteria-based scoring rubrics that enhance transparency and consistency in grading. This training should focus on how to develop rubrics that clearly articulate expectations and provide specific, actionable feedback to students.

Moreover, workshops should cover formative assessment strategies that allow for ongoing feedback throughout the learning process. Lecturers need to learn how to craft essay prompts that encourage critical thinking and creativity, as well as methods for integrating formative assessments into the overall evaluation process. Emphasizing the importance of delivering high-quality feedback that is timely, specific, and constructive is another critical aspect of the

training. Lecturers must learn techniques for providing feedback that guides student learning and encourages self-reflection.

Furthermore, it is crucial to include training on recognizing and mitigating potential biases in scoring and interpretation practices to ensure fairness and equity in assessments. Training should also explore how to use technology effectively in scoring and interpretation, including familiarization with online assessment tools and platforms that streamline the grading process and facilitate personalized feedback. Establishing a culture of sharing best practices among lecturers is essential; therefore, training programs should encourage collaboration through peer observations, discussions, and cross-institutional workshops, allowing faculty to learn from one another's experiences and successes.

The chapter concludes by emphasizing the need for continued research to understand the impact of these recommendations on student learning, particularly in the areas of problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. By addressing the identified challenges and leveraging the opportunities highlighted in this chapter, the study aims to contribute to a more equitable and effective assessment framework within the DoHSS in higher education. This, in turn, will empower students to thrive in the complexities of the 21st century, fostering a generation that is not only knowledgeable but also capable of critical thought and innovative problem-solving. Reflecting on these findings advocates for a collective commitment to improving assessment practices that align with the evolving educational.

The next Chapter, summarizes the key findings, draw conclusions based on the insights gained from this research, and propose actionable recommendations aimed at enhancing assessment practices within the DoHSS. This chapter will also address the implications of these findings for future research and institutional policies, ensuring that our efforts contribute meaningfully to the ongoing evolution of higher education assessment.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

Chapter Five serves as the culmination of this study, synthesizing research findings and their implications for educational practices in Zimbabwe. This chapter is organized into several key sections that highlight the significance of the findings within the context of the principles of Constructivism and Education 5.0 framework. The first section revisits the study's primary objectives, summarizing the main findings related to the alignment of essay assessment practices in the DoHSS at two universities in Zimbabwe. Following this, the chapter

examines critical gaps between current practices and Constructivist principles, underscoring the need for alignment with Education 5.0's transformative goals.

The chapter then offers targeted recommendations for professional practice aimed at enhancing assessment strategies, followed by suggestions for future research to further refine these practices in response to the evolving HE landscape. Through this structure, Chapter Five aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on educational reform in Zimbabwe.

## **5.1 Summary**

The study aimed to evaluate the alignment of these practices with constructivist principles and the Education 5.0 framework. A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the assessment practices. Quantitative data were collected through structured surveys administered to lecturers, which included Likert-scale items assessing their use of various assessment methods and their perceptions of student-centered practices. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, allowing for in-depth exploration of lecturers' experiences, challenges, and attitudes toward essay assessments.

Data analysis involved both statistical techniques and thematic analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends in assessment practices, while qualitative data were coded and categorized to uncover recurring themes and patterns related to the implementation of constructivist principles. This multi-faceted approach facilitated a robust analysis of the findings, ensuring a more detailed understanding of how assessment practices align with the theoretical framework.

The study revealed that lecturers predominantly relied on traditional assessment methods, emphasizing summative grading, with a notable disconnect between the reported use of formative feedback and its actual implementation in practice. Gender disparities were

observed, with female lecturers providing more choice in essay topics and demonstrating greater flexibility in their approaches. The findings indicate that University One adopts a more student-centered approach, while University Two maintains a stronger reliance on summative assessment methods.

Several challenges were identified that hinder effective assessment practices, including a lack of standardization, limited professional development opportunities, resource constraints, and difficulties in aligning assessment methods with constructivist principles and education 5.0 framework. Additionally, resistance to change and varying levels of understanding of constructivism and education 5.0 framework among lecturers further complicated the adoption of innovative assessment strategies.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study, rooted in constructivist theories and the principles of Education 5.0, contextualizes these findings. It highlights the necessity for assessments that not only evaluate knowledge but also promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-reflection, core competencies for the 21st century.

Overall, the significance of these findings lies in their potential to inform and improve essay assessment practices within the DoHSS. By addressing the identified challenges and embracing more effective, student-centered approaches, the study aims to enhance the educational experience for students and better prepare them for the demands of the modern world.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

This study provides critical insights into essay assessment practices within the DoHSS at two universities in Zimbabwe, directly addressing the research questions posed in Chapter One. The findings reveal a predominant reliance on traditional assessment methods, particularly

summative grading, which raises concerns about the alignment with constructivist principles and the Education 5.0 framework.

The research found that while some lecturers at University One demonstrated a more student-centered approach, by utilising essay tests and providing clearer instructions to students, University Two's practices leaned heavily toward summative assessments with inadequate formative feedback. This disparity supports the literature, notably Baik et al. (2015), which indicates that despite a theoretical endorsement of student-centered approaches, many institutions struggle to implement these effectively. Additionally, the disconnect between lecturers' intentions to embrace constructivism and their actual practices echoes Mook (2013), who pointed out the gap between stated beliefs and educational realities.

The findings also highlight the inherent challenges within the existing assessment culture, which prioritizes summative assessments over formative feedback, thus undermining opportunities for critical thinking and self-reflection, essential components of constructivist learning. This misalignment calls for a paradigm shift in assessment strategies, reinforcing Baik et al. (2015)'s assertion for more integrated approaches that promote engagement and active learning.

From a practical standpoint, the study underscores the urgent need for targeted professional development programmes focused on constructivist principles and the goals of Education 5.0. Specifically, training initiatives should include workshops on designing formative assessments that incorporate feedback mechanisms, as well as courses on creating rubrics that align with constructivist approaches to learning. Additionally, mentorship programmes that involve pairing experienced educators with those new to these concepts can facilitate the sharing and dissemination of best practices and foster a collaborative learning environment in higher education.

However, addressing barriers such as significant time constraints, often exacerbated by large class sizes and administrative duties, is essential. For instance, lecturers may find it challenging to allocate sufficient time for meaningful feedback on student essays when faced with grading hundreds of assignments within tight deadlines. Therefore, providing structured time within the academic calendar dedicated to assessment design and feedback, along with access to online resources and communities of practice, can further support lecturers in upscaling their skills.

Moreover, an institutional policy framework that explicitly promotes alignment with constructivist principles is crucial. This framework could include specific guidelines such as, mandatory integration of formative assessment in their course designs to ensure ongoing feedback and support for student learning, regular review and update of assessment practices based on current educational research and student feedback, ensuring that practices remain relevant and effective. Policies that encourage continuous professional development and adequate allocation of resources for training can create an environment conducive to implementing effective assessment strategies. By embedding these principles into the institutional culture, educational institutions can empower lecturers to enhance their assessment methods, ultimately leading to improved student learning outcomes.

In conclusion, the findings of this research reveal a complex interplay between theory and practice in essay assessment methods within the DoHSS. By connecting these findings to existing literature and the theoretical framework of constructivism and Education 5.0, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by educators. The implications extend beyond individual classrooms, providing a framework for transforming assessment practices in higher education. By bridging the gap between theoretical ideals and practical realities, this study advocates for a more equitable and effective assessment system

that empowers students and enhances their learning experiences, ultimately preparing them for the demands of the 21st century.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

In light of the findings from this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance assessment practices within the DoHSS in Zimbabwe's HEIs and to broaden and deepen research in essay assessment practices in He. These recommendations are designed to address the identified challenges and align assessment methods with constructivist principles and the Education 5.0 framework. Implementing these strategies will foster a more student-centered, equitable, and effective assessment system.

#### **5.3.1 Recommendations for Practice**

The following are the recommendations from this study for practice:

1. Establishing regular faculty learning communities or workshops where lecturers can share their experiences, challenges, and successes in implementing constructivist and Education 5.0-aligned assessments.
2. Implementing a systematic process for collecting and analyzing student feedback on assessments, allowing lecturers to reflect on the effectiveness of their practices and make data-driven improvements.
3. Encouraging peer observation and feedback among lecturers, providing opportunities for constructive critique and collaborative learning.
4. Offering workshops or seminars on topics, such as designing authentic assessments and marking rubrics, providing effective feedback, and using technology to support student-centered learning.
5. Creating online modules or courses that lecturers can access at their pace, allowing for flexible learning opportunities.

6. Partnering with external experts or organizations to provide specialized training on constructivist assessment and Education 5.0 principles.
7. Allocating dedicated funding for assessment-related resources, such as technology tools, assessment software, and professional development opportunities.
8. Providing release time or reduced teaching loads for lecturers to engage in assessment development.
9. Establishing an assessment centre or support unit to provide guidance and resources to lecturers on effective assessment practices.
10. Developing tailored training programmes for lecturers with different levels of experience and expertise in assessment.
11. Establishing a mentorship programme where experienced lecturers can guide and support their colleagues in implementing new assessment strategies.
12. Creating online communities or forums where lecturers can share resources, exchange ideas, and seek advice on student-centred assessment practices.

### 5.3.2 Recommendations for Future Research

The following are the recommendations from this study for future research:

1. Conduct in-depth research on essay assessment in HE to gain a comprehensive understanding of essay assessment practices on a broader scale, it is essential to conduct in-depth research involving a larger sample size. This research should focus on the following specific questions that target critical aspects of assessment practices within the DoHSS:

- 1.1 Investigate the long-term impact of implementing constructivist and Education 5.0-aligned assessment practices on student learning outcomes and graduate attributes. This inquiry should seek to determine how these assessment methods influence not only academic performance but also the development of essential skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving.

- 1.2 Explore the influence of institutional factors such as policies, leadership, and organisational culture on the effectiveness and adoption of assessment practices. Understanding how these elements shape assessment strategies will provide insights into potential barriers and facilitators within the educational environment.
- 1.3 Examining the experiences of students with various assessment approaches to understand their perceptions of effectiveness in promoting learning and personal development. This examination should consider how different assessment formats such as formative versus summative impact student engagement, motivation, and overall satisfaction with the learning process.

Conducting in depth research in these key areas in assessment, will yield valuable insights that can inform best practices and policy decisions regarding essay assessments in higher education, ultimately enhancing the learning experience for students, learning outcomes and graduate attributes.

## REFERENCES

- Amedahe, F. K. (2002). *Fundamentals of educational research methods*. Mimeograph, University of Cape Coast (Unpublished).
- Amedahe, F. K. (2004). *Notes on educational research*. Unpublished. University of Cape Coast, Ghana.
- Amedahe, F. K., & Gyimah, K. A. (2003). *Measurement and evaluation*. Cape Coast, Ghana: Centre for Continuing Education.
- Baker, E. L. (2003). Testing and assessment: A progress report. *Educational Assessment*, 7(1), 1–12.
- Boud, D. (2000). Sustainable assessment: Rethinking assessment for the learning society. *Studies in Higher Education*, 25(2), 151-167.

- Biggs, J. (2012). What the student does: Teaching for enhanced learning. *Higher Education, Research and Development*, 31(1), 1-12.
- Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2022). *Teaching for quality learning at university (5th ed.)*. Open University Press, McGraw Hill.
- Bloxham, S. (2015). Improving assessment in higher education: A systematic literature review. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 40(6), 841-856.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Cohen, L., Morrison, L., & Manion, K. (2004). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.
- Chikumbu, V., & Makuve, T. (2020). Bridging the gap: Curriculum goals and student competencies in Zimbabwean higher education. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 11(15), 60-70.
- Cooper, C., & Schindler, E. (2000). *Learner-centred assessment*. Global Learning Communities, Launceston.
- Chakuchichi, D. (2019). An investigation into the assessment practices in higher education institutions in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 41(2), 147-162.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.)*. Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.)*. Sage Publications.
- Crocker, L., & Algina, J. (2008). *Introduction to classical and modern test theory*. Language Learning.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2005). *Handbook of qualitative research (3rd ed.)*. Sage Publications.
- Frey, B. B. (2007). *An introduction to quality test construction*. Retrieved from <http://www.specislconnection.ku.edu/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/speccom/mainp>.
- Garwe, E. C. (2014). Quality assurance challenges faced by private universities in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Case Studies in Education*, 15.

- Gay, R. L. (2011). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and application (4th ed.)*.
- Klenowski, V. (2013). *Understanding assessment: Purposes, perceptions, and practices*. Open University Press.
- Kline, R. B. (2013). *Beyond significance testing: Reforming data analysis methods in behavioral research*. Routledge.
- Luescher, T. M., & Holtzhaus, S. M. (2023). Transdisciplinary and Ubuntu ethics as principles for responsive, engaged, and student-centered African universities. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa, 11(2)*, vii-xv.
- Machingura, V., Magudu, S., & Maravanyika, O. E. (2021). Evaluating critical thinking and problem-solving skills in the context of Education 5.0. *International Journal of Educational Development, 82*, 102373.
- Mattern, K. D., & Zumbo, B. D. (2013). Differential item functioning: A review and analysis of the literature. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice, 32(2)*, 21-35.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation (4th ed.)*. Jossey-Bass.
- Mukudu, H. (2017). An exploration of the relationship between assessment practices and student learning outcomes in Zimbabwean higher education institutions. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa, 15(1)*, 1-15.
- Munyoka, W., & Maharaj, M. S. (2019). Alignment challenges between curriculum and assessment in Zimbabwean universities. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 33(5)*, 86-105.
- Mupa, P., & Chabaya, R. A. (2021). Preparing graduates for the 21st century: The role of assessment in Education 5.0. *Journal of Education and Practice, 12(3)*, 44-54.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Leech, N. L., Slate, J. R., Stark, M., Sharma, B., Frels, R., Harris, K., & Combs, J. P. (2012). An exemplar for teaching and learning qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 17(1)*, 16-77. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2012.1807>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice (4th ed.)*. Sage Publications.

- Smith, E. (2000). The role of assessment in education. *Assessment in Education*, 7(1), 5-23.
- Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (2010). *Sage handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research (2nd ed.)*. Sage Publications.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.)*. Sage Publications.
- Yurdabakan, I. (2011). Essay item administration: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Measurement*, 48(2), 147-164.
- Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology Development. (2018). *Education 5.0: A framework for Zimbabwe's higher education system*.
- Moyo, S. (2018). The role of assessment in promoting deep learning in higher education: A case study of a Zimbabwean university. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 40(4), 357-371.
- Nyoni, T. (2020). An investigation into the use of specification tables and scoring rubrics in assessment practices in Zimbabwean higher education institutions. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, 18(1), 1-12.
- Zinyeka, P. (2019). The impact of institutional policies on assessment practices in Zimbabwean higher education institutions. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 41(3), 263-276.
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81-112. <https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487>
- Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011). Train-the-trainers: Implementing outcomes-based teaching and learning in Malaysian higher education. *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, 8, 1-19.



P Bag 1020  
BINDURA  
ZIMBABWE

Tel: 0271-7531 ext  
1038

Fax: 263-71-7

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT  
STUDIES

BIHDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

Date: 07 February 2024

NAME	Liberty Machona	REGISTRATION:	B231 199A
PROGRAMME	M5cEdMAE	PART	2.1

This memo serves to confirm that the above is a bona fide student at Bindura University of Science Education in the Faculty of Science Education.

The student has to undertake research and thereafter present a Research Project in partial fulfilment of the Master of Science Education Degree in Measurement, Assessment and Evaluation programme. The Research Topic is: Test Construction, Scoring and **Administration Practices** of Lectures in the Faculty of Humanities and Sciences at Higher Education Institutions in Zimbabwe.

In this regard, the department kindly requests your permission to allow the student to carry out his research in your institutions.

Your co-operation and assistance is greatly appreciated.

Thank you



---

Y. Mudavanhu (Dr.)

CHAIRPERSON - CURRICULUM AND EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES

## **APPENDIX B**



*"Investing in Africa's future"*

**AFRICA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (AUREC)**

*P.O. Box 1320 Mutare, Zimbabwe, Off Nyanga Road, Old Mutare-Tel (+263-20) 60075/60026/61611 Fax: (+263 20) 61785 Website: [www.africau.edu](http://www.africau.edu)*

Ref: AU 3400/24

5 August, 2024

Mr Liberty  
Machona C/O Africa  
University Box 1320

## MUTARE

RE: **Essay Assessment Practices among Lecturers in the Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences at two Universities in Zimbabwe**

Thank you for the above-titled proposal that you submitted to the Africa University Research Ethics Committee for review. Please be advised that AUREC has reviewed and approved

your application to conduct the above research.

The approval is based on the following.

a) Research proposal

- **APPROVAL NUMBER** AUREC 3400/24  
This number should be used on all correspondences, consent forms, and appropriate documents.
- **AUREC MEETING DATE** NA
- **APPROVAL DATE** August 5, 2024
- **EXPIRATION DATE** August 5, 2025
- **TYPE OF MEETING:** Expedited  
After the expiration date, this research may only continue upon renewal. A progress report on a standard AUREC form should be submitted a month before the expiration date for renewal purposes.
- **SERIOUS ADVERSE EVENTS** All serious problems concerning subject safety must be reported to AUREC within 3 working days on the standard AUREC form.
- **MODIFICATIONS** Prior AUREC approval is required before implementing any changes in the proposal (including changes in the consent documents)
- **TERMINATION OF STUDY** Upon termination of the study a report has to be submitted to



AUREC. Yours Faithfully

  
MARY CHINZOU

ASSISTANT RESEARCH OFFICER: FOR CHAIRPERSON AFRICA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

## **APPENDIX C**



**FACULTY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION**

**DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND EDUCATIONAL**

**MANAGEMENT STUDIES**

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

I am Machona Liberty, a final year Master of Science Education in Measurement, Assessment and Evaluation (Msc. EDMAE) degree student at Bindura University of Science Education conducting a study on the Essay Assessment Practices Among Lecturers in Humanities and Social Sciences at three selected Universities in Zimbabwe. This questionnaire is part of a research study exploring lecturers' essay assessment practices and their alignment with Constructivism and Education 5.0 principles. The findings will help

identify areas for improvement and guide the development of training and support resources for lecturers. Your participation is voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential.

**SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

Please tick [√] where appropriate, and for others you may specify by writing.

Title	Mr	Mrs	Ms.	Dr.	Prof

Gender	Male	Female

Working Experience in Higher Education	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16+ years

University	
Faculty/school/college	
Department	
Subjects Taught	

**SECTION A: ESSAY TEST ITEM CONSTRUCTION PRACTICES**

Kindly answer all the questions. Read each question carefully and respond as carefully and truthfully as possible. You may ask for assistance if you do not understand something or you are not sure how to respond. Please tick (√) in the box of your choice on the tables below. There are neither correct nor wrong answers. We seek your opinion. Your responses and details will be kept private and confidential. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, please do not write or sign your name.

**KEY.**

Strongly agree = 5

Agree = 4

Not Sure = 3

Disagree = 2

Strongly Disagree = 1

On a scale of 1 to 5 , Please tick [√] where appropriate.

Item	1	2	3	4	5
I state the purpose of every essay item before the test item is constructed.					
I frequently use essay test items in my assessments.					

I determine the format of the essay test items before the items are constructed.					
I review the items I construct at least a week after writing the item					
I write clear and concise directions for the entire test and sections of the test.					
I write essay test items which match the instructional objectives.					
I prepare a table of specification for test items.					
consider the knowledge level of test takers before constructing test items.					
I provide opportunities for students to have flexibility or choice in the essay assignment parameters.					
I provide opportunities for students to actively construct their own understanding and knowledge through the essay writing process					

2. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about incorporating student choice or flexibility in essay assignments:

**KEY.**

Strongly agree = 5

Agree = 4

Not Sure = 3

Disagree = 2

Strongly Disagree = 1

On a scale of 1 to 5 , Please tick [√] where appropriate.

<b>Item</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
I allow students to choose their essay topics from a list of options.					
I allow students to choose the format of their essay (e.g., traditional essay, research paper, creative writing).					
I provide opportunities for students to incorporate their own interests and experiences into their essays.					

**SECTION B: ASSESSEMENT METHODS**

**KEY**

On a scale of 1 to 5, Please tick [√] where appropriate.

1 = Not at all 2 = Slightly 3 = Moderately 4 = Considerably 5 = To a great extent

3. To what extent do you use the following assessment methods when evaluating student essays?

	5	4	3	2	1
Formative feedback during the writing process					
Summative grading of the final essay					
Rubrics with defined criteria					
Student self-assessment					
Opportunities for peer review or feedback					

4. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the challenges you experience in using the assessment methods listed above.

Item	5	4	3	2	1
I find it difficult to provide timely and meaningful feedback to students on their essays.					
I struggle to maintain consistency in my grading of essays.					
I find it challenging to design rubrics that accurately assess the desired learning outcomes.					
I have limited time and resources to implement formative assessment practices, such as providing feedback during the writing process.					

5. What institutional support do you need to implement the methods stated above?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
Professional development opportunities, such as workshops or training sessions, on innovative assessment methods and technologies.					
Access to resources and materials, such as textbooks, research articles, or multimedia tools, that support student-centered and collaborative learning.					
Collaboration with colleagues and instructional designers to design, implement, and assess effective essay assessments.					
Redesigning curriculum and course structures to incorporate more student-centered and collaborative learning opportunities.					

Flexibility in grading policies and assessment formats to accommodate diverse learning styles and needs.					
Support from administrators and department leaders to innovate and experiment with new assessment methods.					

**SECTION C: ALIGNMENT WITH CONSTRUCTIVISM AND EDUCATION 5.0**

On a scale of 1 to 5, Please tick [√] where appropriate.

**KEY**

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3= Not Sure 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the extent to which your essay assessment practices support students in actively constructing their own understanding and knowledge?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
I design assessment tasks that encourage students to explore and discover new ideas and concepts.					
I provide opportunities for students to engage in self-directed learning through essay assignments.					
I offer feedback that fosters students' ability to reflect on their learning process and make improvements.					
I create a learning environment that values exploration, experimentation, and inquiry.					
I incorporate authentic and relevant contexts in essay assessments to enhance students' engagement and motivation.					

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

7. Which student-centered assessment method(s) for essays do you feel most confident and prepared in implementing?

Item	Yes	No
Authentic assessments that replicate real-world situations		
Self-assessments where students evaluate their own work		
Peer assessments where students evaluate their peers' work		
Problem-based learning that encourages students to solve open-ended problems		
Portfolio assessments that showcase students' progress and development over time		

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

8. To what extent do your essay assessment prompts require students to demonstrate the following aspects of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

**KEY**

On a scale of 1 to 5, Please tick [√] where appropriate.

1 = Not at all 2 = Slightly 3= Moderately 4 = Considerably 5 = To a great extent

Item	5	4	3	2	1
------	---	---	---	---	---

Analysing and evaluating complex information and arguments					
Applying concepts and theories to real-world situations					
Creating innovative solutions to open-ended problems					
Identifying and assessing multiple perspectives on an issue					
Synthesising information from various sources to form a cohesive understanding					

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the types of formative, constructive feedback you provide and their support for students in the active construction of their knowledge and understanding.

**KEY**

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3= Not Sure 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

Item	5	4	3	2	1
I provide feedback that encourages students to think critically about their work and make improvements.					
I offer suggestions that help students connect their learning to real-world applications and contexts.					
I give feedback that highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of students' work, enabling them to build on their successes.					
I offer guidance that encourages students to self-assess and reflect on their learning process.					
I tailor feedback to students' individual needs and learning styles, fostering a more personalized learning experience.					

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the challenges or barriers in constructing essay test items that promote collaborative learning among students?

**KEY**

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3= Not Sure 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

Item	5	4	3	2	1
Increased engagement and motivation in learning					
Improved collaboration and communication skills					
Enhanced self-awareness and understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses					
Greater ability to provide and receive constructive feedback					
Increased capacity for critical thinking and problem-solving					

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

11. Do you believe students experience each of the following benefits when your essay assessment practices actively encourage collaborative learning and self-reflection?

Item	Yes	No
Increased engagement and motivation in learning		

Improved collaboration and communication skills		
Enhanced self-awareness and understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses		
Greater ability to provide and receive constructive feedback		
Increased capacity for critical thinking and problem-solving		
Other (please specify) _____		

12. Which of the following benefits do students experience when your essay assessment practices are aligned with Education 5.0 principles?

Item	Yes	No
Increased engagement and motivation in learning		
Improved critical thinking and problem-solving skills		
Enhanced creativity and innovation in their work		
Greater collaboration and communication with peers and instructors		
Better preparedness for future careers and entrepreneurial endeavors		

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

13. Which challenge (s) or barrier(s) do you find most significant in aligning your essay assessment practices with the entrepreneurial goals of Education 5.0 principles?

Item	Yes	No
Lack of clear understanding of Education 5.0 principles and their application to essay assessments		
Inadequate resources and support for integrating entrepreneurial elements into essay assessments		
Insufficient training and skills in developing and implementing entrepreneurial-focused essay assessments		
Resistance from students, faculty, or administration in adopting Education 5.0 principles in essay assessments		
Difficulty in measuring the effectiveness and impact of entrepreneurial-focused essay assessments		

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

14. Which of the following professional development or support resources would be most helpful to you in aligning your essay assessment practices with the entrepreneurial goals of Education 5.0:

Workshops or training sessions on designing essay items that promote entrepreneurial skills.	
Resources or examples of essay assessments that align with Education 5.0 principles	
Opportunities to collaborate with colleagues on developing and implementing essay assessments.	
Mentoring or coaching from experienced colleagues on essay assessment practices.	
Access to technology tools or platforms that can support essay assessment (e.g., plagiarism detection software, automated grading tools).	

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION D: SCORING AND GRADING OF ESSAYS

On a scale of 1 to 5, Please tick [✓] where appropriate.

**KEY**

Strongly agree = 5  
Disagree = 2

Agree = 4  
Strongly Disagree = 1

Not Sure = 3

15. Which of the following statements best describes your practice regarding the preparation of a marking scheme or guide?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
I prepare a marking scheme or guide before writing the essay test items.					
I prepare a marking scheme or guide after writing the essay test items, but I do not modify the test items based on the marking scheme.					
I prepare a marking scheme or guide after writing the essay test items and may modify the test items based on the marking scheme.					
I do not prepare a marking scheme or guide for my essay test items.					

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

16. Which of the following statements best describes your practice regarding collaborative learning and peer-to-peer feedback during the essay writing process?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
I do not facilitate collaborative learning or peer-to-peer feedback during the essay writing process.					
I facilitate collaborative learning, but I do not provide opportunities for peer-to-peer feedback during the essay writing process.					
I facilitate peer-to-peer feedback, but I do not provide opportunities for collaborative learning during the essay writing process.					
I facilitate both collaborative learning and peer-to-peer feedback during the essay writing process.					

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

17. Which of the following best describes your approach to providing formative, constructive feedback to support student learning and improvement on their essays?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
I provide detailed, individualised feedback that highlights both strengths and areas for improvement, and I encourage students to use the feedback to revise and enhance their work.					
I provide general feedback focused on the overall quality of the essay, but I do not necessarily give specific guidance on how students can improve.					
I primarily focus my feedback on correcting grammatical and formatting errors, with limited commentary on the content and analysis.					

I do not provide formative feedback during the essay writing process; I only give summative feedback on the final essay submission.					
---	--	--	--	--	--

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

18. Which of the following best describes how your essay assignments require students to demonstrate critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
My essay assignments incorporate open-ended prompts that encourage students to analyse complex issues, propose innovative solutions, and make well-reasoned arguments.					
My essay assignments focus more on recalling and summarising course content, with limited opportunities for higher-order thinking skills.					
My essay assignments require students to apply concepts to hypothetical scenarios, but do not necessarily challenge them to think critically or creatively.					
My essay assignments emphasise technical writing skills, such as organisation and mechanics, over the demonstration of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.					

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

19. To what extent do you encourage students to consider the following in their essays?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
Diverse perspectives and viewpoints on the topic					
Real-world applications and relevance of the content					
Both diverse perspectives and real-world applications					
Neither diverse perspectives nor real-world applications					

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

### SECTION E: ADMINISTRATION OF ESSAYS

On a scale of 1 to 5, Please tick [✓] where appropriate.

#### KEY

Strongly agree = 5

Agree = 4

Not Sure = 3

Disagree = 2

Strongly Disagree = 1

20. Which of the following best describes how you make students aware of the rules and regulations governing the essay assessments?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
I provide detailed written guidelines and instructions on the essay assessment rules and regulations, and I review them with students prior to the assessment.					
I briefly mention the essay assessment rules and regulations in class, but I do not provide comprehensive written information or review the details with students.					
I assume students are already aware of the standard essay assessment rules and regulations, so I do not explicitly					

communicate them.					
I do not have any specific rules or regulations for the essay assessments, and I allow students to approach them with flexibility					

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

21. To what extent do you communicate the purpose of the essay assessments to your students?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
I clearly and thoroughly explain the purpose and learning objectives of the essay assessments to students.					
I briefly mention the purpose of the essay assessments, but I do not provide a detailed explanation.					
I assume students understand the purpose of the essay assessments without needing explicit communication.					
I do not explicitly communicate the purpose of the essay assessments to students.					

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

22. Which of the following best describes how you communicate the content areas that will be covered in the essay assessments?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
I provide a detailed outline or list of the specific content areas that will be covered in the essay assessments.					
I give a general overview of the broad topic areas or themes that will be the focus of the essay assessments.					
I rely on the course syllabus to inform students about the content areas that will be covered in the essay assessments.					
I do not explicitly communicate the content areas that will be covered in the essay assessments.					

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

23. Which of the following best describes how you communicate the date and time of the essay assessments to your students?

Item	5	4	3	2	1
I provide the specific date and time of the essay assessments well in advance and remind students regularly.					
I announce the date and time of the essay assessments in class, but I do not provide written communication or reminders.					
I include the date and time of the essay assessments in the course syllabus, but I do not provide additional reminders.					
I do not explicitly communicate the date and time of the essay assessments to students.					

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your co-operation**

## **APPENDIX D**



**BINDURA UNIVERSITY  
OF  
SCIENCE EDUCATION**

**FACULTY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION**

**DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND EDUCATIONAL**

**MANAGEMENT STUDIES**

**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. This study focuses on alignment of essay assessment practices among lecturers in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences with the student centred principles of constructivism and the entrepreneurial goals

of Education 5.0. I am going to ask you some few questions and I believe you can make a significant contribution with regards to gaining insights into the matter under investigation. In case you do not feel like answering the questions or any question, you are allowed to say so. I would like you to know that your personal and school details will not be included in the final report.

## **ESSAY TEST CONSTRUCTION AND ADMINISTRATION**

1. Can you please describe the process you use when constructing your essay test items?
  - a. What considerations and steps do you take to develop effective essay prompts or questions? I'm interested in learning more about your approach to designing essay assessments, including any frameworks, guidelines, or best practices you follow.
  - b. What do you consider important when constructing essay test items?
2. Could you elaborate on the specific challenges you encounter when constructing essay test items that align with constructivist principles and Education 5.0 goals? For example, do you face difficulties in designing question items that encourage higher-order thinking skills or incorporating real-world scenarios?
3. Could you elaborate on whether you typically administer essay tests in a controlled environment, and what specific considerations or challenges this presents for you?
  - a. What strategies or approaches do you use to address these considerations when administering essay assessments.
4. What specific strategies or approaches do you use to help prevent cheating on your essay tests?
  - a. Can you describe the measures you have in place to maintain the integrity of the essay assessment process and ensure academic honesty? I'm interested in learning more about the anti-cheating protocols, monitoring techniques, or other safeguards you utilize.
  - b. Describe the various methods you employ, and the rationale and effectiveness of the different approaches you've tried.
5. Can you describe the measures you take to ensure the fairness and integrity of your essay test administration process?
  - a. What specific steps do you follow to uphold principles of fairness, consistency, and academic integrity throughout the assessment?

## **ALIGNMENT WITH CONSTRUCTIVISM AND EDUCATION 5.0 PRINCIPLES**

1. Could you please describe your current essay assessment practices in detail?
  - a. What approaches, strategies, and methods do you utilize when evaluating student essays? I'm interested in learning more about the specific techniques and considerations that guide your essay assessment process
2. To what extent do you feel your current essay assessment prompts promote a learner-centered approach and encourage active student engagement and critical thinking?
  - a. Can you elaborate on how the design and framing of your essay prompts aim to foster these learning-focused outcomes
3. Can you describe how your current essay assessment practices reflect the key elements of Education 5.0?
  - a. In what specific ways do your assessment approaches aim to develop skills like digital literacy, entrepreneurship, problem-solving, self-reflection, and critical thinking?
  - b. Can you provide examples and elaborate on your efforts to align essay assessments with these 21st-century learning goals.
4. Could you provide some examples of how you have incorporated constructivist principles, such as active learning or knowledge construction, into your essay assessments?
  - a. Please elaborate on the specific strategies, activities, or design elements you use to encourage students to actively engage with the content and construct their own understanding through the essay writing process.
5. How have you integrated Education 5.0 principles, such as digital literacy or entrepreneurship, into your essay prompts or evaluation criteria?
  - a. Please describe any specific ways you have designed your essay assessments to align with and promote the development of these 21st-century skills and competencies. I'm interested in learning more about your approach and any successes or challenges you've encountered.
6. What training or capacity-building resources have you accessed to support the development and refinement of your essay assessment practices?
  - a. Please elaborate on any professional development opportunities, workshops, pedagogical resources, or other support mechanisms you have utilized to enhance your skills and knowledge in this area.

7. What type of support, whether it be workshops, mentoring, online resources, or other mechanisms, would be most helpful for you and your colleagues in strengthening your essay assessment practices?
  - a. Can you share your thoughts on the specific types of support, training, or resources that could benefit you and your team in this area.
8. Can you describe how your essay assignments encourage students to engage in collaborative learning and peer-to-peer feedback processes?
  - a. What specific strategies or activities do you incorporate to foster collaboration, peer review, and the exchange of ideas throughout the essay writing and assessment cycle?
  - b. Elaborate on your approach and the rationale behind it.
9. In what ways do your essay assessment prompts encourage students to make connections between new information and their prior knowledge or experiences?
  - a. Please describe any specific techniques or strategies you use to design essay questions that prompt students to draw on their existing understanding and apply it to new contexts or concepts.
  - b. How do you aim to foster this type of meaningful learning through your essay assessments?

## **SCORING AND INTERPRETATION METHODS**

1. Can you briefly describe the scoring and interpretation methods you use for your essay assessments?
  - a. What specific approaches do you employ to evaluate student essays, and how do you ensure consistency and fairness in your grading processes?
  - b. Can you elaborate on the criteria, rubrics, or other tools you use to assess and interpret student performance on essay assignments?
2. Can you describe how you ensure reliability and validity in your essay assessment process?
  - a. What specific measures or procedures do you have in place to maintain consistency, objectivity, and alignment with intended learning outcomes when evaluating student essays?
  - b. Can you elaborate on the strategies you use to uphold the integrity and defensibility of your essay assessment practices?

3. In what ways do you think technology could be utilised to enhance the scoring and interpretation of essay assessments? For instance, have you considered using plagiarism detection software, automated grading tools, or online platforms for peer feedback? If so, what are your experiences with these tools, and how have they impacted your assessment practices?
4. What additional training or resources do you feel you need to effectively implement more student-centred scoring and interpretation practices for your essay assessments?
  - a. Can you describe any gaps or areas where you would benefit from further professional development, tools, or support in order to enhance the learner-focused aspects of your essay evaluation process?
  - b. Please share your thoughts on the specific types of training or resources that could help strengthen this area of your assessment practices.