

## **Transformative Learning Experiences of the Vocationally Interested and Vocationally Disinterested Pre-Service Teachers in Teacher Training Colleges in Zimbabwe**

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*Abstract: This article reports on some of the findings from a doctoral research project that explored how the vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers in selected teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe experienced transformative learning. Through multiple-site case study and qualitative approach within an interpretive paradigm, guided by Mezirow's ten-phase Transformative Learning Theory, the study sought to understand the pre-service teacher transformative learning experiences. The study employed a multi-modal approach which involved focus group discussions, individual face to face interviews and continuum drawing and discussions to generate data from a purposive sample of 40 participants. Findings suggest that, both vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers experienced transformative learning through two avenues: disorienting dilemmas and learning experiences. The findings also suggested that while the majority of pre-service teachers experienced transformative learning, a few did not experience transformation. We argue that if vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers are to transform during teacher training, vocational supports should be built into processes and activities to purposefully cushion their transformative paths, given the lack of interest in teaching at the start of the course.*

**Keywords:** Transformative learning; vocationally interested; vocationally disinterested; pre-service teachers; teacher training colleges; Zimbabwe.

### **Introduction**

Student teachers who enter teacher education the world over are a combination of passionate (vocationally interested) and dispassionate (vocationally disinterested) individuals (Fried, 2001). Zimbabwe is not an exception to this practice. Given the economic meltdown that saw almost all industries folding up (Mushawatu, 2017), school-leavers saw teaching as the only avenue for employment and survival. The vocationally interested in this study are those pre-service teachers who were intrinsically motivated to become teachers, while vocationally disinterested represented those who had extrinsic motives for going into teaching. However, transformative learning experiences in teacher training in this study encompassed both vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested student teachers.

The doctoral study from where this article draws, explored transformative learning experiences of vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers in four selected primary teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe. Notwithstanding the motivation for entering teaching, all graduates (vocationally interested and disinterested) are expected to exit with dispositions, attitudes, mind-sets, commitments and motivations to effectively teach and relate to the school community, while interpreting and delivering policies and procedures laid down by policy makers (Kapur, 2020). The expectation is that transformation of all trainees particularly the vocationally disinterested trainees would take place during teacher education to prepare them to carry out teacher roles effectively. Failure to realise transformation may negatively impact classroom practice and consequently learner achievements when they enter the profession. Research (Serin, 2016) indicates that teacher attitude, mind-set, passion and enthusiasm shape student learning outcomes. However, whether or how vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers experience transformative learning in teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe is not clearly known. International and regional contexts are abound with literature on transformative learning experiences focussing mainly on university students. Questions regarding transformative learning experiences of vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers in teacher education in Zimbabwe needed to be answered. This study therefore sought to address one question: *What is the nature of transformative learning experiences of the vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers in teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe?*

### **The Context of Zimbabwe Teacher Education**

Teacher education in Zimbabwe is offered in teacher training colleges and universities. The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) Action Plan (2010) indicates that academic qualifications (knowledge levels) vary greatly among serving teachers. According to Mukeredzi (2013) the required minimum qualification for primary and lower secondary school teachers (Grades 8-11) is an Ordinary-Level Certificate plus a three- or four-year teacher's diploma obtained in a teacher training college. For senior secondary school teachers (Grades 12-13) an Advanced-Level Certificate plus a two- or three-year diploma also obtained in a teacher training college or Advanced-Level Certificate plus a three- or four-year university degree capped by a teacher's diploma/certificate is required. Thus, the majority of pre-service teachers who possess O-Level Certificates, undertake a three- or four-year teacher training programme. Upon graduation they teach in primary or lower secondary schools, depending on whether their training college was primary- or secondary-school oriented. However, a significant number of pre-service teachers will have gone through A-Level but failed to attain the required points for university entry. Such students are usually offered a two-year teacher training programme and will teach senior secondary school classes, supplemented by holders of undergraduate degree qualifications (Mukeredzi, 2013).

From 2008 the Zimbabwean economy took a nose dive. Consequently, industries collapsed, many big companies relocated to neighbouring countries, and unemployment rates shot up across all age groups (Mushawatu, 2017). Teacher Education was not spared of the effects as the jobless saw teaching as the only window of hope for employment after graduation (Mukeredzi, 2013) notwithstanding the lack of teaching passion. This forced teacher training colleges into enrolling both vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested student teachers. Thus, many trainees joined teacher education, not because they had a calling into teaching, but because that was the only avenue with promise for a job following training. However, little is known about how this mixed bag of teacher trainees

experience transformative learning. In such situations, Teacher Education is expected to transform all pre-service teachers, both vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested, so that by graduation they all have the appropriate knowledge, skills, dispositions and attitudes required of teachers to ensure effective teaching and learning of all children. Lack of teacher teaching passion, commitment and dedication impacts students' transformative learning and consequently their achievements. The World Bank (2012) notes that teacher effectiveness is one of the most important school-based predictors of children's learning, as effective and passionate teachers can offset the learning deficits of disadvantaged learners. Further, teacher passion and commitment are at the core of quality education as passionate teachers inculcate and nurture values that guide subsequent learning in the wider world beyond the classroom (Darling –Hammond et al. 2020). Concomitantly, transformative learning is significant to student teachers as it promotes development of requisite and appropriate dispositions, commitments and motivations vital for quality education.

### **Zimbabwe Teacher Training Programme**

Teacher education in Zimbabwe resides in the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education Science and Technology Development (MHTESTD). Zimbabwe teacher training colleges offer diploma certificates, while universities have diverse programmes inter alia: Graduate Certificate in Education; Bachelor of Education Degree and others. However, this study focused on Teacher Education in teacher training colleges. Training occurred in 17 teacher training colleges: 13 primary, three generic secondary and one secondary technical teacher training college.

Pre-service teachers in primary school teacher training colleges generally studied all primary school curriculum subjects. In addition, the pre-service teachers had to choose one specialisation either, Early Childhood Development (ECD) (also known as Infants or Foundation Phase) or, Junior Course (Ye, 2020). ECD covers initial stages of organised instruction, designed to introduce young children to school-type environment and develop their cognitive, physical, social and emotional skills. Thus, ECD prepared teachers for teaching Grade R to Grade 3, and Junior Course prepared Grade 4 to Grade 7 teachers. Secondary school teacher training colleges were divided into two categories: generic academic teacher training colleges, and technical teacher training colleges. Students in academic colleges majored in at least two curriculum subjects, while technical colleges required student teachers to specialise in one technical and one academic subject (Ye, 2020). It was from the pool of 13 primary teacher training colleges and four secondary teacher training colleges that the four colleges investigated in this study were drawn.

### **Literature Review**

Transformative learning in the context of this paper implies personality changes, or changes in the organisation of the self, characterised by simultaneous restructuring of a whole cluster of schemes and patterns. In other words, this was about a break from existing orientations, understandings and beliefs which typically occurred as a result of a crisis-like situation. Such a situation is often caused by challenges experienced as urgent and unavoidable, that make it necessary to change one's world view in order to move forward. Transformative learning emanates from a number of triggers which are discussed below.

## **Transformative Learning from Disorienting Dilemmas**

Swartz and Tisdell (2012) reported that student emotional experiences emanating from disorienting dilemmas, prompt transformative learning. Disorienting dilemmas may also emanate from being in new college environments away from home which leads to shock in trying to adjust to the new academic environment. Consequently, individuals become lonely, home-sick, frustrated, anxious and confused because of dilemmas from different environments, creating cultural shock. However, in this study, the new college environments, that often have different cultures which create dilemmas leading to cultural shock, disorientation from homesickness, and emotional factors like loneliness, fear, anger, frustration, isolation, and anxiety. Consequently, this leads to transformative learning experiences in striving to cope. Tarrant (2010) says transformative learning experiences following such dilemmas are enhanced by inclusivity and non-discriminating practices, openness, reflection, and emotional ability to change.

Swartz and Tisdell (2012) noted that emotional intelligence embraced empathy (care for others), optimism (seeing the world with a positive eye) and self-control (maintaining a stable mind), all critical elements of self-awareness are crucial for transformative learning experiences. Empathy is vital not only in life situations but also in students' relationships with others which trigger transformative learning experiences (Giotopolous & Pavlakis, 2018). Swartz and Tisdell (2012, p.325) assert that, "emotion must be recognised as essential, always present, [and] worthy of reflection". In other words, without emotional experiences, transformative learning may not occur as disorienting dilemmas strongly influence transformative learning either facilitating or impeding the transformative learning. Students who experience positive changes in their mental models see dilemmas as challenges, which increase their determination and persistence to acquire new knowledge, practice new skills and change their attitudes (Mezirow, 1997). However, for some pre-service teachers, dilemmas and disorientations may have a negative effect leading to loss of focus, feelings of guilt, frustration and humiliation. In this regard, Tamashiro (2018) emphasises that expressing painful emotions/disorientations is often self-censored and unbearable, thereby hindering critical questioning of assumptions for fear of challenging habitual traits which hampers transformative learning experiences.

## **Transformative Learning Through Catalysts and Passion**

Catalysts and passion also prompt transformative learning experiences. Forté and Blouin (2016) outlined catalysts of transformative learning experiences as: reading, assignment writing, classroom activities, critical reflection, class experiences, videos, interaction with families, peer or collegial professional dialogues, discussion forums and PowerPoint presentations. However, Forte and Blouin warn that the presence of catalysts does not guarantee transformational change, but rather indicate shifts in perspective having taken or would take place with on-going critical reflection on and re-examination of assumptions (Mezirow's 1991). In addition, the Com-B Model of Behaviour (Marks, 2020) is critical for transformative learning experiences. From the COM-B three factors: capability, opportunity and motivation must be present for behaviour change to occur. These factors interact over time to generate behaviour so that behaviour can be seen as part of a dynamic system with positive and negative feedback loops (Michie, Stralen & West, 2011). At any given moment, a particular behaviour may occur provided the individual concerned has the opportunity, is capable of engaging in that behaviour, and is more motivated to enact that particular behaviour than any other behaviours (West & Michie, 2020). Thus, both vocationally

interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers may change behaviour when an opportunity presents itself to engage in behaviour change, when they are capable and more motivated to enact such a behaviour than any of the other behaviours. In other words, capability and opportunity influence links between motivation and behaviour, and not behaviour itself, as they act like gates. Both 'gates' (capability and opportunity) must open for motivation to produce the behaviour. Thus, student teacher transformative learning can only occur if the two gates (capability and opportunity) open so that motivation can produce behaviour. These two gates, capability and opportunity affect individual motivation to enact a behaviour. This is given that the more capable a person is, or believe they are in portraying a behaviour and also the more conducive the environment is to enacting that behaviour, the more the person tends to want to do it (West & Mitchie, 2020).

Passion and enthusiasm for work are additional catalysts for transformative learning. Passion lays an appropriate foundation for transformative learning giving rise to improved learner performance. Passionate teachers (student teachers) display enthusiasm about and commitment to their job (training) and for this reason are always making efforts to broaden their knowledge and increase their student achievement (Serin, 2016). On the other hand, non-passionate teachers lack interest, put less effort in their job (learning). Serin (2016) indicates that teachers show a strong tendency and willingness to teach through learning, acquiring new ideas. Such enthusiasm, excitement, commitment and creativity are all ingredients for transformative learning. The Prime Theory of Motivation relates to transformative learning as it foregrounds motivation to avoid or escape unpleasant thoughts and experiences (West & Mitchie, 2020). In this case, passionate teachers are motivated to continue with their career while non-passionate teachers have to change their behaviour to make themselves like teaching as a career. Self-evaluation or self-assessment (Mezirow 1997) are intricately interwoven with the Prime Theory of Motivation where pre-service teachers experience transformative learning when they think about themselves, and how much they like or dislike themselves. This has widespread ramifications that affect all self-conscious behaviour. Marks (2020) points out, passion is a significant factor which inspires and motivates learners. It contributes to creativity; thus, passionate/intrinsically motivated teachers have more thinking skills and can produce more new ideas. Thus, the vocationally interested pre-service teachers with a calling to teaching would more likely achieve their set goals. Such trainees would be creative, given their intrinsic motivation, and such motivation may be carried to the classroom.

### **Transformative Learning Through Social Media**

Cruz and Cruz (2013) found that online social network offered students better transformative learning experiences and engagements, and appreciated the social learning support therefrom. Through critical academic engagements, exchanges and networking, transformative learning experiences are enhanced. Social media enhances student growth, change and development through critical realisation of pressing need to apply technology in transformative learning experiences. South (2016) notes that when students are engaged in critical reflection and evaluation not only do they become critical thinkers but also problem-solvers which is vital for transformative learning. The PRIME Theory of motivation includes focus on reflective choice processes, focus on emotions and drives, including models that encompass habits and instincts (West & Mitchie, 2020). It connects these realms to address diverse factors that influence motivation and behaviour. In this study, social media fostered student transformative learning experiences. While other avenues that depict transformative learning are related teaching strategies, ICTs could be integrated with the teaching strategies

to offer avenues through which the vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers experience transformative learning.

### **Transformative Learning Through Critical Reflection and Self-Awareness**

Jones and Miles (2018) argue that without critical orientation, and emancipatory concern, university students learning becomes a voyeuristic or tourist gaze with minimal transformative changes. However, the authors found that study programmes yield significant student transformative learning experiences around self-awareness, personal growth and appreciation of cultural diversity. Concomitantly, Tran (2012) found that students constructed reality through critical reflection on their existing assumptions leading to life-changing development in their personal and professional perspectives. Hence, professional identity is central to self - awareness and professional development as it interweaves with pre-service teachers' sense of identity making them take pride in their career (Skinner et al. 2021). Teacher Professional Identity is also closely linked to student teachers' learning success, their long-term empowerment as teachers in their professional work, and support for effective policy development (Suarez & McGrath, 2022). Consequently, professional self-awareness (professional identity) becomes key to transformative learning.

Transformative learning experiences were through critical reflection and self-awareness of their academic and social settings during the study programmes. Moving between different environmental worlds was the catalyst for self-discovery and self-reconstruction (Brown, 2009) which led to critical reflection and self - awareness which were critical to transformative learning experiences.

### **Transformative Learning Experiences Through Spirituality**

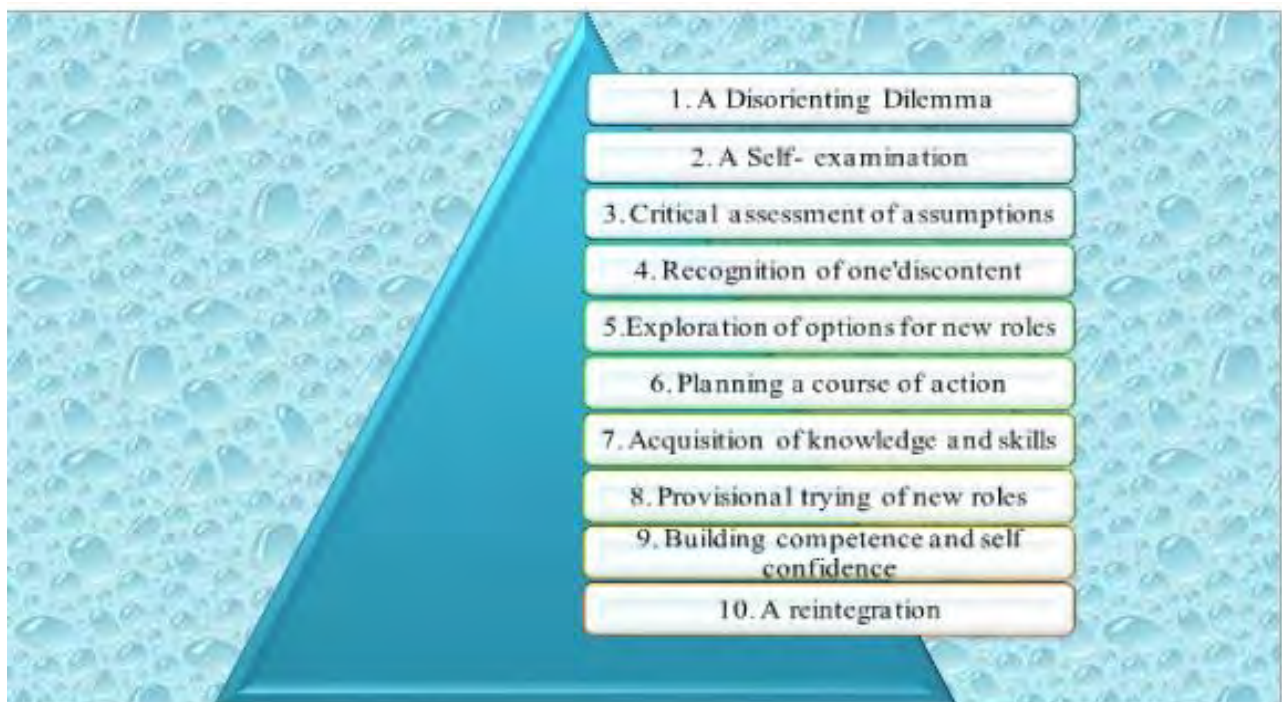
Spirituality are the beliefs, practices, and experiences that shape and create ways of knowing and living that may be informed by religious rituals, tradition, and doctrine (Zakrzewski, 2013). In other words, this is a process of growing intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, where the self is embedded in something greater than itself, which may be sacred, and viewed as a developmental "engine" that propels a search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and contribution, shaped both within and outside religious traditions, beliefs, and practices (Daniel, Moulin-Stozek, 2020). Consequently, spirituality becomes topical in transformative learning. found that transformative learning experiences embrace spiritual and physical aspects. Lee (1960, p.39) says "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." Thus, you have to observe them, speak to them, listen to them, understand their point of view to understand their spirituality. Empathy is core to transformative learning experiences as students attach meaning to cultural transformative learning making meaning of their cultural histories and reshaping these histories in light of existing lived moments. In such cases they weave new threads of meaning about their own and others' cultural lives. Consequently, transformative learning is experienced when students encounter new environment which call into question what they believe in, persuading them to revise their perspectives (Cranton, 2015). Hence, the interactive nature of spirituality apparently fosters transformative learning experiences.

While literature search did not yield any academic work on transformation generally, or students' transformative learning in Zimbabwe, literature on transformative learning discussed above, reveals abundant research globally and regionally (see for example

Bunduki, 2017; Cruz & Cruz, 2013; Forté & Blouin, 2016; Jones & Miles, 2018; Tamashiro (2018); Tran, 2012). However, none of the studies investigated trainees in teacher training colleges.

## Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Mezirow's (1991) ten-stage TLT as reflected in Figure One. Transformative learning from this perspective is prompted by reflection, active learning, and uncomfortable situations. Through reflection, students develop self-understanding and understanding of their new world, which creates change of perspectives and frames of reference, followed by change in action.



Source: Researchers 2022.

Figure 1: Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) Phases.

- 1. Disorienting Dilemmas:** Disorienting dilemmas are major disruptive events which initiate some metamorphosis and consequently transformation (Mezirow, 2009) without which change can occur. A new environment creates dilemma leading to disorientation triggering fear, confusion, shock and overwhelm. Disorienting dilemmas emanate from life crises or major transitions (Mezirow, 1991) for example being in a new college environment. The experiences illuminate and challenge invisible and unquestioned assumptions which determine self-knowledge. Such dilemmas prompted pre-service teachers to challenge their previous beliefs about teaching after encountering teaching processes in college.
- 2. Self-examination:** Transformative learning is a consequence of self-reflection, self-questioning, feeling guilty, anger etc. Lack of teaching passion, would demand lots of critical reflection and self-examination to enable transformative learning. Such psychological restructuring is not only painful but also changes understanding of the 'self' and world views. This is probably what some vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers in this study experienced. Mezirow (2012) says critical self-reflection and self-questioning create transformation of frames of reference including habits of mind and subsequently new view

points. Self-reflection and examination prompt looking ‘inside oneself’ while standing ‘outside oneself’. It allows exploration and evaluation of long-held constructions, perceptions, (Mezirow, 1991) feelings and actions when facing new and challenging encounters. Hence, self-examination with fear, anger, guilt or shame are pre-cursors of transformative learning.

**3. Critical assessment of assumptions:** Significant learning experiences in adulthood involve critical self-reflection and reassessing consequences and origins of one’s meaning structures (Brookfield, 2012). Critical assessment and re-evaluation of personal and world assumptions, occur when student teachers are in situations that challenge and alter their attitudes, values and behaviours, leading to transformative learning. This therefore allows for movement beyond self-evident assumptions, controlling unquestioned thinking, feelings and actions, internalised through socialisation. In this study, while pre-service teachers experienced guilty, fear, shame and frustration, they needed to move on after assessing their previous assumptions.

**4. Recognition that discontent and process of transformation is shared:** Mezirow (1997) suggests that self-dialogue and peer dialogue are essential for encouraging and experiencing transformation. Learning activities promote sharing debate, role plays and others. Such activities trigger transformative learning as through sharing student teachers might realize that their prejudices, stereotypes and unexamined beliefs limit/hinder transformative learning. To foster transformative learning, environment that builds trust and facilitates development among all group members should be established. In this study, college environments were such that all students trusted them and this encouraged active engagement in different learning activities which fostered collaboration of the transformative process.

**5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions:** Subsequent to critical examination of assumptions, pre-service teachers can explore new roles, relationships and actions as their world changes. Learning activities and engagements lead to deeper critical reflection and class discussions promote perspective transformation in adult learners through sharing drawing on experiences. From the new roles, relationships and actions, student teachers experience transformative learning.

**6. Planning a course of action:** Having had some experiences individuals critically reflect on those experiences and make meaning. Subsequently, they open up to alternative view-points, make judgements based on new information, then plan way forward. Mezirow (1997) indicates that transformative learning ignites profound changes in thoughts, feelings and actions. Planning course of action is riddled with hermeneutic movements as individuals decide on the action to take. The cyclic processes are also probably experienced by pre-service teachers in planning.

**7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills:** The ‘what’ and ‘how’ students learn is built upon assumptions that they bring to the classroom (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Consequently, instructors must create environments to promote collegiality and respect, where students not only feel secure and free to share experiences, but also ask questions and seek clarification on issues of concern to them. In conducive environments, pre-service teachers freely and reflectively challenge their dilemmas and through knowledge and skill acquisition, thereby enhancing transformative learning. Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017) attest that artefacts, interactive activities and other strategies provide deeply embedded and highly contextualised learning that promotes acquisition of knowledge and skills; which enhance transformative learning. In this study, pre-service teachers probably experienced transformative learning through engagement in different learning activities where they acquired knowledge and skills.



**8. Provisional trying of new roles:** Students' emotional balance is kept in check by providing safe and secure learning environments. Disorienting emotions like fear, frustration, guilt, shame and embarrassment (Mezirow, 1991) are addressed in trying new roles which enhances transformative learning. Interactive, student-centred learning activities in and outside the classroom also promote transformative learning, addressing dilemmas while trying new roles.

**9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships:** Gaining confidence is not an easy 'walk in the park.' Students revisit their assumptions over and over, re-examining and acting in the new roles. Often revisiting is hermeneutic as new opportunities for exploring assumptions arise. Learning environments should offer integrative, support services: health, sports, adequate learning space including other extended forms of support (Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017). This promotes competence and confidence development in new roles, and relationships. By questioning assumptions, pre-service teachers assess their acquired skills and confidence.

**10. A reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's perspective:** Mezirow (1991, p.209) believes that acting "is an integral and indispensable component of transformative learning". Action requires emotional strength, willpower and freedom, which may be immediate, delayed, progressive or an existing pattern reaffirmed after critical reflection (Mezirow 2009). The vocationally interested and disinterested pre-service teachers should show passion in teaching through action.

## Methodology

A qualitative approach within an interpretative paradigm was adopted for exploring the transformative learning experiences of vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers in four selected teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe. These orientations were appropriate to understand experiences from student teacher perspectives. This was a multiple-site case study (Yin, 2017) where a multi-modal approach involving two focus group discussions, two face-to-face interview series, and continuum drawing and discussion to generate data from 40 purposively selected first year student teachers. Ethical clearance was awarded by Durban University of Technology Institutional Research and Ethics Committee for the big project and participants consented to participation by completing consent forms.

All 40 participants (10 from each college) engaged in two focus group discussions (FGDs) one group meeting per college per time, all were recorded, and took approximately two and half hours. The first focus group discussions were conducted in the first month of the students' first year in college. This was intended to capture joys, dilemmas or other emotions that these first-year students were experiencing or had experienced, while still fresh in their minds. The second focus group meetings were held between November and December of the same year to capture transformative learning experiences and establish any shifts in perspectives, attitudes and views about teaching from the time they joined college.

24 of the 40 participants were interviewed. Two individual face to face interviews were held with each of the 24 participants. The first individual face-to-face interviews were also held at the start of the course subsequent to focus group discussions. The second individual interviews were conducted at the end of the first year to understand any changes in perspectives that may have occurred as the year progressed. These took approximately 60 minutes and all were audio-recorded. The individual face-to-face interviews created room for sharing 'hidden information' that might have been left out during focus group discussions.

All the 24 student teachers who were interviewed participated in continuum drawing and discussions which shed deeper insights into participants' transformative learning experiences. Continuum drawing and discussions emerged as a novel way of generating data as it allowed participants to make reflections and reflexions on their experiences and internalise their progress in a meaningful and creative manner (Phillips, 2019). We asked the pre-service to draw their transformative learning journeys, showing ascends and descends, and landmarks throughout the year from the time they joined college. In a group discussion, interpreted and shared those landmarks in their transformative learning journeys. They reflected on how they had felt at the start of teacher training, joys, sorrows, fears and dilemmas that they had faced at the time, and the feelings they experienced later, how they dealt with those feelings and settled into the programme as well as how they were feeling at that point, about 12 months into the course, which helped them understand themselves better.

The research question "*What is the nature of transformative learning experiences of the vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers in teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe*" provided the broad theme for data analysis. Data analysis was manually accomplished through five interrelated steps of open coding. First stage involved reading and re-reading transcriptions and listening to audio tapes repeatedly to familiarize with the data and determine themes, while comparing and contrasting them, and repeated the process with each transcript, scrutinizing data. The second stage involved developing codes, segmenting chunks of data and labeling with an 'in vivo' term. The third stage involved clustering the codes (in vivo terms) into related ones of general meaning and reducing them to categories of relevant meaning (relevant to research questions). The fourth stage required scrutinizing categories and determining naturally clustering one into themes. Drawing on Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) who emphasize involvement of independent judges to minimise bias, and verify themes, the co-author examined the data set to identify any errors/omissions and confirm themes. This also helped to enhance trustworthiness. In the fifth stage, data were re-examined selecting quotes representative of each theme, ensuring appropriate representation across participants and research sites to understand the transformative learning experiences of the pre-service teachers in the different teacher training colleges. The quotes substantiated participants' stories about their reports on the nature of transformative learning experiences. Mukeredzi and Manwa (2019, p. 6) cite Singleton and Straits who emphasize, "... capturing in their language and letting them speak for themselves". The methodical, immersive and investigative strategy that we adopted to comprehend the students' transformative learning experiences, further strengthened analysis and enhanced rigour.

## **Findings and discussion**

Addressing the nature of transformative learning experiences, the vocationally interested and disinterested pre-service teachers in the four teacher training colleges revealed that transformative learning was experienced through five realms: emotional experiences and disorienting dilemmas; catalysts and passion; social media; critical reflection and self-awareness; and through spirituality. In presenting findings, student teachers are identified by codes S1 to S10 and colleges as College1 to College 4 to subvert anonymity and confidentiality. Individual interviews are represented by Ind. Int., and Focus Group Discussion identified as FGD while Continuum Drawing Discussions are written in full.

*Transformative learning experiences related to disorienting dilemmas*

First, vocationally disinterested participants displayed downbeat, pessimistic feelings like fear, shame, confusion, frustration shock and being overwhelmed when the programme commenced, in the new college environments. S8 at College4 in a FGD said:

*When I started teacher training I was afraid. This fear was caused by lecturers who came during orientation saying, 'if you fail, you will go', so you have to pass exams and assignments. For my first assignment, I was blank, didn't know what to write or where to get information.*

The response by S8 shows disorientations, fear and anxiety. Mukeredzi (2013) says anxiety is not bad, as it is often a normal reaction to certain situations informing us that something needs our attention. In this case, anxiety enhanced action as it propelled the drive to learn - in other words, transformative learning. Mezirow (1991) notes that disorienting dilemmas are caused by life crises or major transitions. In this case, pre-service teachers were in a crisis-like situation, new environment, new career that they did not really like which challenged their unquestioned assumptions about teaching, thus prompting transformative learning.

The vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers had joined teaching as a last resort. Feelings of shame, culture shock, confusion and frustration were also reported. Vocationally disinterested Participant S7 at College1 during a FGD explained:

*I am frustrated. I am new here. I feel homesick. I left a three-month old baby. The lecturers want us to work, during weekends. It's shocking I can't be with my baby and family. I am not enjoying teaching, I am just confused.*

The participant expresses context and culture shock, which was inimical to her transformative learning. Often new environments where students are responsible for their own learning poses the biggest challenge for them. The vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers' transformative learning experiences were enhanced by these disorienting dilemmas which created fear, anxiety, confusion, being overwhelmed, shame, frustration, and shock from a culture of being expected to work over weekends. Significant transformative learning experiences among young adults are catalysed by disorienting dilemmas as emotions are the chief drivers of transformative learning. The dilemmas emanated from new environment and its academic and social demands consequently leading to transformative learning. Transition to college life, notwithstanding the dilemmas experienced, is itself transformative as pre-service teachers acquire knowledge and skills, which is confirmed by Mezirow's Principle Seven of the TLT (Mezirow, 1991) about acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Another source of disorienting dilemma emanated from dress code. In this study, change in behaviour was based on transformative learning, which shaped how an individual behaved or acted. The vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested participants explored in this study concurred that they understood transformative learning as change, which included change in dress behaviour. Students after settling in their colleges accepted and were now happy to change from casual to formal dressing, something that they were upset about at the commencement of training. Some vocationally disinterested student teachers had felt like they were in prison, wearing a tie the whole day. Lavin, Davies and Carr (2010) indicates that teachers' professional dress has a positive impact on their credibility, level of preparation and knowledge, which in turn impacts the pupils' enthusiasm to learn and influences their behaviour. Consequently, vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested participants understood their transformative learning as change involving dress code. This was exemplified by one vocationally disinterested participant, S8 at College2 during a Continuum Drawing Discussion when she said:

3a) Environment changed as well as the way I dress. Before college life I rarely wear formal wear, mostly I used to wear casual so there are some of the changes that are physically manifesting

Change for this participant related to style of dress; from casual to formal dressing. In another Ind. Int. another vocationally disinterested pre-service teacher, S6 at College3, echoed similar sentiments about behaviour change related to dress when she said: *“I also learnt how to dress. Before I joined training, I used to dress anyhow but now I know how to dress professionally”*. The vocationally interested participants thus concurred with the vocationally disinterested participants in terms of dress code. This was confirmed by a vocationally interested pre-service teacher, S3 at College4, during an FGD saying: *“Dressing formally is now a habit, which wasn’t my thing when I started training. I have to be formal every time”*. During Ind. Int. another vocationally interested participant, S4 at College1, concurred that: *“My experiences in the course are that I have learnt professional dressing having formal attire always”*. Another vocationally disinterested participant, S10 at College4, during Continuum Drawing Discussions added:

1. I have changed dressing code, I now wear formal clothes and I now like church most because we go to church (mass) everyday.

Change related to formal dress may not only be a result of transformative learning, but could be influenced by requirements of the profession, as stipulated by Public Service Dress Code for civil servants. From Mezirow’s TLT, the vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers above understood their transformative learning as challenging their existing knowledge and practices, and they had no choice in that crisis-like situation within the college environment but to make a paradigm shift (Mezirow, 1991).

Second, catalysts and passion were significant in transformative learning experiences. Transformative learning catalysts emerged as reading, learning activities, critical reflection, videos, interaction and dialogue, PowerPoint, research, demonstration, question and answer, and ICT. One vocationally interested participant, S3 at College3, during Ind. Int. said: *“We use internet and research using our phones, we interact and share ideas”*. Another vocationally disinterested participant, S6 at College2, during Continuum Drawing Discussions commented: *“We learn a lot using group work; sharing our views. Telling others that this is wrong, or right”*.

Students’ peer engagement during learning activities promoted self-reflection, critical thinking, and innovation, acquisition of knowledge and skills, competence and confidence development in their work, propelling transformative learning. Promoting student teachers’ opportunities for sharing challenged their prejudices, prior experiences and assumptions giving rise to critical evaluation. From PRIME Theory of Motivation evaluation is about beliefs that involve judgement about 'goodness' or 'badness' (West & Mitchie, 2020). Thus, for these students, they included beliefs about right and wrong, good or bad, beneficial or harmful. Unless a belief is active at a given moment, it will not directly influence motives and therefore not directly influence behaviour. However, for these student teachers, evaluations gave rise to learning about themselves, evaluating and comparing their prejudices, prior

experiences and assumptions with those of others. Transformation is, by its nature, a personal and individual reality, which occurs as prompted, facilitated and acted out in social contexts, in our existence. Thus, through peer collaboration, pre-service teachers engage in productive dialogues, generating new knowledge. Mezirow (1991) highlights the significance of dialogues, multilogues and self-disclosure, which propel transformative learning. In addition, critical reflection, negotiation and re-negotiation, and discussion prompt transformative learning. In this instance, pre-service teachers engaged in a community of learners where they were challenged to question their own beliefs and attitudes, and pushed into critical self-reflection, assimilating new knowledge thereby experiencing some transformative learning.

The vocationally interested pre-service teachers however, confirmed their passion for teaching. S5 in College3 during Ind. Int. intimated: *“As for me, I was happy because I always wanted to be a teacher”*. Another vocationally interested participant, S3 at College2 during FGD also said: *“I cried, b tears of joy because this had been my passion”*. To confirm S4 at College2 also expressed happiness during a Continuum Drawing Discussion saying: *“I was happy, I always wanted to be a teacher and I have passion for teaching”*.

The responses suggest ‘a calling’ to the teaching profession. Serin (2016) points out that passion is a significant factor as it inspires and motivates students. Passion contributes to creativity; thus, passionate teachers often have higher thinking skills and can produce ideas as alluded to above. Generally, a career - interest relationship exists when there is congruence between the career/vocational interest and the environment where the individual works, which results in an individual persistently working hard to achieve their set goals. The COM-B Theory of Change Model (Mayne 2018) consolidates the idea that transformative behaviour occurs from the interaction of the three conditions; capabilities, opportunities and motivation. The vocationally interested student teachers in this study probably worked enthusiastically and learned excitedly. Passion for teaching creates better teachers as such those teachers ‘go above and beyond’ in their work, model for their students, and hold high expectations for them (Serin, 2016). In classroom practice, a passionate teacher bring enthusiasm, stimulates student motivation, engagement, and passion for learning given the efficient and dynamic teaching. During teacher training, such pre-service teachers likely experienced transformative learning faster.

Third, critical self-reflection and self-questioning which lead to transformative learning also emerged. A vocationally disinterested pre-service teacher, S7 at College2, during a Continuum Drawing Discussion, pointed out that:

*I can now see that teaching is a noble profession because in Professional Studies during peer teaching, colleagues refer to me as ‘Sir’. I am excited by this title and envisage myself in the classroom with learners; teaching and people in the college community respecting me.*

Another vocationally disinterested participant, S8 from College3 during Ind. Int. commented: *“Sometimes it’s annoying and I feel like quitting. But because I want the title I will sacrifice because I am a student at their college”*. Drawing on Mezirow (1991), most pre-service teachers ‘moved on’ after critical self-reflection and critically challenging their previously held beliefs and using the new knowledge gained during training. Consequently, students probably challenged and altered previously held attitudes, values and behaviours about teaching leading to transformative learning. The pre-service teachers viewed teaching as a profession which could earn them respect, appreciation and acknowledgement in the school and community. Often when pre-service teachers experience change, it has to do with their self-awareness and the teaching profession. These changes influence their personal development and growth, resulting in transformative learning.

Questioning also emerged as a catalyst for transformative learning. Vocationally interested participant S1 at Colleg1, reported during the Ind. Int. saying: *“I value question*

*and answer method during lectures because I learn from my friends*". Similar sentiments were echoed by vocationally interested pre-service teacher S5 at College4 in a FGD who said: *"I understand better when the lecturer uses question and answer technique"*. Questioning enabled clarifying and correcting misunderstandings, and filling-in knowledge gaps giving rise to understanding. Concomitant to this finding, students' questions play an important role in the learning process as they are a potential resource for both teaching and learning. Effective questions in a psychologically safe environment generally support student's transformative learning by probing for understanding, encouraging creativity, stimulating critical thinking, enhancing confidence and rectifying misconceptions. Self-examination and critical thinking, are crucial in Mezirow's TLT as they challenge previously held assumptions and understandings about teaching hence reconstructing new world-view. The shift in perspective enhances personal and professional development (Mezirow, 2000) and self-knowledge is central to knowledge construction leading to transformative learning.

Fourth, social media also promoted transformative learning as an interactive learning activity. A vocationally disinterested participant, S6 at College2 during a Continuum Drawing Discussion remarked: *"Our co-ordinator created a WhatsApp group where she informs us about the lectures or where we assemble for group discussions"*. The use of social media was vital for communication, sharing knowledge and ideas amongst students and the college community about lecture information. Tess (2013) defines social media as tools, services, and communication facilitating connection, among peers with common interests. Hence, effective incorporation of social media and other information communication technologies in and out of classroom settings benefits student learning outcomes and participation in classroom activities. When this happens, transformative learning may be realised given that TLT emphasises that the social aspect of knowledge acquisition prompts transformation.

Fifth, both vocationally interested and disinterested pre-service teachers attested that spirituality enhanced their transformative learning experiences through spiritual growth. A vocationally interested participant, S3 at College2 during Continuum Drawing Discussions said: *"...I got to learn and grow spiritually, following liturgical activities with peers at college"*. Confirming, another vocationally disinterested participant, S6 at College3, during Ind. Int highlighted: *"...I like the religious part you grow in faith, and I have faith that I am going to finish teacher training"*. Spirituality, seemingly enhanced pre-service teachers' transformative learning. Religious service attendance often has positive effects on emotional health. Dirkx (2012) adds that spirituality and emotions including empathy provide crucial support and play a role in enhancing students' transformative learning. Spiritual teachers are empathetic and supportive of their students' learning as they allow them to see the world with a different eye and strengthen their abilities to focus and persevere in their transformative learning. Mezirow's (1991) TLT, Principle Two emphasizes self-examination. Consequently, when an individual knows himself/herself and feel purposeful, transformative learning is enhanced. In this regard, a healthy religious learning environment on campus promoted participants' transformative learning experiences.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

This study sought to explore the transformative learning experiences of the vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers in teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe. From the findings, we draw five key points.

To begin with, both the vocationally interested and disinterested pre-service teachers experienced emotional dilemmas which seemingly propelled their transformative learning.

While vocationally interested pre-service teachers' transformative learning experiences were prompted by assenting emotions of excitement, happiness, joy and pride; vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers' emotions were promoted by disorienting dilemmas such as fear, anxiety, confusion, being overwhelmed, shame frustration, and shock. Echoing Mezirow's (1991) TLT, emotions are the chief drivers of transformative learning. These vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers shifted their perspectives about teaching. This implies that student support structures for example counselling and social service supports need to be infused in the training of pre-service teachers so that they can manage their emotions and be able to discover and develop their vocational interest in a warm environment.

Second, by engaging in interactive activities the pre-service teachers were challenged to question their own beliefs and attitudes, and pushed into critical self-reflection, assimilating new knowledge thereby experiencing some transformative learning. Thus, more opportunities for interaction and interactive activities should be built into the teaching and learning programmes of these trainees to promote reflection and knowledge assimilation and consequently transformative learning.

Third, self-reflection and self-questioning enhanced the vocationally interested and disinterested pre-service teachers' transformative learning. The students' questions facilitated creativity, stimulated critical thinking, enhanced confidence and rectified misconceptions leading to transformative learning. Student teacher learning activities should be designed in such ways that they are trained and guided through reflective processes using reflection questions to promote critical thinking and problem - solving skills to enhance transformative learning.

Fourth, the pre-service teachers' transformative learning was enhanced by incorporation of social media and other information communication technologies in and out of classroom settings which benefitted student transformative learning outcomes and participation in classroom activities (Tess, 2013). Thus, to enhance transformative learning provision of information and communication technologies need to expand and be a central aspect of student teacher teaching and learning activities. Mezirow (1991) emphasises the social aspect of knowledge acquisition leading to transformative learning.

Fifth, student teachers in the two private church run institutions highlighted the significance of spirituality in their transformative learning. Empathetic and spiritual teachers provide a supportive learning environment leading to transformative learning. A healthy religious learning environment on campus promoted participants' transformative learning experiences. This may imply that a supportive spiritual environment is significant for the pre-service teachers' transformative learning. Dirkx (2012) indicates that spirituality embraces the whole person: the mind, body and spirit. Religious and spiritual growth is necessary for transformative learning because it prompts critical reflection shaping and moulding pre-service teachers into holistic, well behaved and respectful professionals. It is also generally impactful in people's lives as it promotes tolerance, respect, gratitude, compassion, empathy, mindfulness, and altruism which help students develop positive relationships, and overall wellbeing, all crucial for transformative learning. Mezirow's (2009) TLT, says when students experience religious and spiritual growth, self-questioning, reflexivity and self-assessment, transformative learning occurs. However, it was only 18 pre-service teachers at Colleges 2 and 3 that indicated that spiritual support had enhanced their transformative learning. Two of the pre-service teachers did not see the essence of religion in their transformative learning, notwithstanding that these colleges were reported to have provided an opportune environment and time for all participants to question their spiritual beliefs and learn and grow spiritually. Again, the two government colleges (Colleges 1 and 4) did not have structured religious activities, albeit that student teachers had

the option to attend their denominational services outside campus. This could imply that the college environment did not directly support students' transformative learning from a spiritual perspective. However, given its value in student transformative learning, encouraging preservice teachers to engage in spiritual activities in their own way would enhance transformative learning particularly for the vocationally disinterested student teachers.

These findings on the nature of transformative learning experiences of vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers in selected teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe align with Mezirow (1991) TLT where disorienting dilemmas, self-examination, critical assessment of assumptions and acquisition of knowledge and skills promoted transformative learning. While the study produced significant insights, this was a small study on transformative learning experiences of 40 vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers in four selected teacher training colleges out of 17 colleges in Zimbabwe. More comprehensive studies on the transformative learning of vocationally interested and vocationally disinterested pre-service teachers would yield more generalizable results considering that many students particularly in Zimbabwe enter teacher education not because of a calling but as a last resort.

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