

Digital Transformation, Artificial Intelligence, and Learner-Centred Education: Implications for Primary School Performance in Zambia

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Abstract — The convergence of artificial intelligence (AI), digital transformation, and learner-centred pedagogy has redefined educational practice globally. In Zambia, despite national policy mandating learner-centred instruction, rural primary schools continue to face significant implementation gaps. This article synthesises findings from a descriptive survey conducted in three primary schools in Sioma District, Western Province, with global scholarship on AI-powered personalised learning, blockchain-enabled credentialing, and adaptive curriculum design. Findings confirm that learner-centred methods enhance critical thinking, motivation, and academic mastery among primary pupils, while resource deficits, time constraints, and limited teacher professional development remain primary barriers. The study argues that strategically deploying AI and digital technologies in contextually appropriate ways can substantially advance learner-centred reform in developing nations. Policy and practice recommendations are offered.

Keywords — *Learner-Centred Education; Artificial Intelligence; Digital Transformation; Primary Education; Zambia; Personalised Learning; Cognitive IoT.*

1. Introduction

Global education systems are undergoing fundamental transformation driven by artificial intelligence, machine learning, and digital innovation (Venice et al., 2025a; Arockia et al., 2025). AI-powered learning analytics, recommendation systems, and blockchain-enabled credentialing are reshaping the boundaries between instructional paradigms, compelling educators and policymakers to reconsider how knowledge is constructed, assessed, and transferred (Venice et al., 2025b; Vasantha et al., 2025). These advances carry particular significance for developing nations, where pedagogical reform intersects with persistent challenges of resource scarcity, teacher capacity, and educational inequity. In Zambia, the 2013 revised national curriculum and the Educating Our Future policy formally institutionalised learner-centred instruction across all levels of schooling. Yet empirical evidence continues to document a persistent gap between policy intent and classroom reality in rural primary settings (Namangolwa, 2013; Banda et al., 2014).

Teachers in districts such as Sioma, Western Province, frequently revert to transmission-based methods owing to inadequate resources, large class sizes, and insufficient professional development challenges that digital transformation initiatives have the potential to meaningfully address (Vettriselvan & Rajan FSA, 2019; Swadhi et al., 2025a). This article bridges the Zambian primary school context with the global digital education discourse by integrating empirical findings from Sioma District with scholarship on AI, blockchain, adaptive learning, and inclusive education. The objective is to

identify how strategic technology adoption can advance learner-centred reform in resource-constrained developing country settings, while acknowledging the structural barriers that limit such adoption. The article offers evidence-based policy recommendations and directions for future inquiry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Constructivism and Learner-Centred Pedagogy

Learner-centred education is theoretically grounded in constructivism, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction between new information and existing cognitive schemas (Slavin, 2018; Cakir, 2018).

Piaget's concepts of assimilation and accommodation describe how learners integrate or restructure knowledge when cognitive disequilibrium occurs processes directly analogous to the adaptive mechanisms embedded in contemporary AI learning systems (Basha et al., 2025; Venice et al., 2025c). Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development further introduced scaffolded instruction, wherein learners progress through calibrated challenges with diminishing teacher support, a principle now instantiated in AI-driven adaptive learning platforms (Vasantha et al., 2025; Akila et al., 2025). Learner-centred pedagogy encompasses cooperative group work, project-based learning, peer interaction, inquiry-based science, and field-based study approaches that position learners as active co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients (McCombs & Whistler, 2017). The growing evidence base confirms that these strategies produce measurable gains in critical thinking, academic motivation, and content

retention across diverse educational contexts (Vettriselvan et al., 2025a; Gayathri et al., 2025b).

2.2 AI, Personalised Learning and Recommendation Systems

Artificial intelligence has introduced a new paradigm of personalised, adaptive, and data-driven instruction in education (Venice et al., 2025a; Vettriselvan, 2025). AI-powered learning analytics platforms collect and interpret learner interaction data to generate individualised instructional pathways, identify at-risk students, and support teacher decision-making (Arockia et al., 2025; Swadhi et al., 2025b). Recommendation systems derived from collaborative filtering and machine learning continuously analyse learner behaviour to generate content suggestions calibrated to demonstrated competencies and knowledge gaps (Venice et al., 2025b; Catherine et al., 2025).

The pedagogical logic of AI-driven recommendation systems is consonant with learner-centred principles: effective instruction must be responsive to individual differences rather than calibrated to an assumed average learner (Vasanth et al., 2025; Vinodh et al., 2026a). In resource-constrained settings such as Zambia's rural primary schools, AI-mediated tutoring platforms and offline-capable digital content repositories could substantially compensate for shortages of qualified teachers and specialised instructional materials that currently impede learner-centred implementation (Arockia et al., 2025; Vettriselvan et al., 2025b).

2.3 Blockchain, Cognitive IoT, and Educational Data Analytics

Blockchain technology has emerged as a significant force in educational credentialing, record security, and performance analytics (Venice et al., 2025c; Rajeswari et al., 2026). Blockchain-enabled systems offer tamper-proof, decentralised academic records that address systemic challenges of credential fraud and administrative inefficiency prevalent in developing nation educational systems. The application of blockchain to cognitive Internet of Things (CIoT) in educational networks enables real-time monitoring of learning outcomes and institutional performance at granular levels previously unattainable through conventional systems (Venice et al., 2025d; Akila et al., 2025). For Zambia, blockchain-enabled performance tracking across schools and districts could provide the Ministry of Education with longitudinal pupil outcome data of unprecedented precision, enabling evidence-based identification of schools requiring targeted pedagogical support and resource allocation (Venice et al., 2025e; Devi et al., 2025). These systems represent a structural technological infrastructure within which learner-centred

reform initiatives could be monitored, evaluated, and iteratively refined at scale.

2.4 Digital Transformation, Inclusion, and Teacher Professional Development

Digital transformation in education encompasses systemic integration of technology into curriculum design, instructional delivery, and institutional management (Vettriselvan et al., 2026a; Swadhi et al., 2025c). Scholars emphasise that effective digital transformation requires not merely technology adoption but a fundamental reconceptualisation of organisational culture, pedagogical philosophy, and leadership practice (Gayathri et al., 2025a; Vettriselvan, 2025). The strategic role of human resource management in facilitating sustainable pedagogical reform is well-established: teacher professional development quality is the primary determinant of instructional innovation success or failure (Gayathri et al., 2025b; Vettriselvan & Anto, 2018).

Digital transformation also carries significant implications for educational inclusion. When appropriately designed, digital technologies can democratise access to quality resources, reduce geographic barriers to qualified instruction, and provide learners with disabilities adaptive learning supports previously unavailable in resource-constrained settings (Meena et al., 2025; Ashifa, 2019). For Zambia, where historical educational inequity along lines of gender, geography, and socioeconomic status persists, technology-mediated learner-centred approaches offer a promising equity pathway (Ashifa, 2021a; Vettriselvan et al., 2025c).

2.5 Well-Being, Health, and the Learning Environment

An established body of scholarship connects learner health, nutritional status, and emotional well-being to academic participation and performance outcomes (Ashifa, 2020a; Ashifa, 2022; Ranganathan et al., 2024). Emotional intelligence and self-leadership are significant moderators of stress and academic resilience, particularly in high-pressure or resource-scarce educational contexts (Zahoor et al., 2025; Elkin et al., 2025). Learner-centred pedagogical approaches that cultivate collaborative skills, peer interaction, and inquiry-based problem-solving have documented benefits for psychosocial development alongside academic achievement (Vettriselvan et al., 2025a; Kariveliparambil et al., 2026a). In Zambia's rural primary school context, the intersection of poverty, food insecurity, and limited healthcare access creates compounded vulnerability among learner populations that directly constrains the effectiveness of pedagogical interventions (Ashifa, 2021b; Ashifa et al., 2019; Rasi & Ashifa, 2019). Effective learner-centred reform must therefore be embedded within a broader social equity and health support

framework that attends to the holistic needs of the primary school child (Vettriselvan et al., 2025d; Kariveliparambil et al., 2026b).

2.6 Global and Regional Perspectives

Internationally, learner-centred education is endorsed through UNESCO's Education for All framework, the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4, and the International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) standards. These frameworks advocate participatory, inquiry-based approaches that prioritise learner agency over rote memorisation (Vettriselvan et al., 2026b; Venice et al., 2025f). Across sub-Saharan Africa, implementation of learner-centred curricula has been constrained by overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teacher training, and insufficient instructional materials (Shanthi et al., 2025; Mohanbabu & Vettriselvan, 2025a). Zambia's national experience reflects this regional pattern, with documented implementation gaps attributable to teacher attitude, resource availability, and institutional support (Nyimbili et al., 2018; Vettriselvan & Rajan FSA, 2019).

3. Methodology

The empirical component draws from a descriptive survey conducted in three selected primary schools in Sioma District, Western Province, Zambia. A mixed-methods design was employed, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to achieve a comprehensive account of learner-centred pedagogy in context (Kombo & Tromp, 2014; Orodho & Kombo, 2012). The target population comprised approximately 750 teachers and pupils. Stratified random sampling yielded a sample of 75 participants: 21 teachers (7 per school, selected purposively) and 54 pupils (18 per school, selected by simple random sampling), representing 10% of the total population. Data were collected through semi-structured teacher interviews and structured pupil questionnaires. Teacher interviews elicited qualitative data on attitudes toward learner-centred methods, perceived implementation challenges, and enhancement recommendations. Pupil questionnaires generated quantitative attitudinal and perceptual data. Ethical clearance was obtained from the District Education Board Secretary prior to fieldwork, with written school consent and pupil verbal assent secured. Quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics; qualitative data underwent thematic analysis cross-referenced against the scholarly literature (Slavin, 2018; Gredler, 2017).

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1 Effects on Pupil Academic Performance

Findings reveal a consistently positive association between learner-centred instruction and pupil academic

outcomes. Among 21 teacher respondents, 38% identified improved critical thinking and problem-solving as the primary effect; 29% cited increased engagement and motivation; 19% highlighted personalised learning benefits; and 14% noted greater learner independence. These outcomes align with global evidence that AI-powered adaptive systems enhance academic engagement through the same mechanisms calibrated challenge, personalised pathways, and inquiry-based activities (Arockia et al., 2025; Venice et al., 2025a; Swadhi et al., 2025b). Pupil respondents corroborated teacher perceptions: the majority reported improved learning experiences, enhanced interest, better academic performance, and stronger concept mastery through learner-centred activities. Fewer than 17% found these methods burdensome, contrasting with earlier African studies reporting significantly higher learner resistance (Olana & Amante, 2017). This finding suggests that contextually sensitive implementation can achieve high learner acceptance even in low-resource primary settings.

4.2 Teacher Attitudes

Teacher attitudes toward learner-centred methods were predominantly positive. All 21 teachers strongly agreed that learner-centred approaches enhance pupil recall and lesson enjoyment findings consistent with research demonstrating that pedagogically confident teachers develop positive orientations toward constructivist instruction and implement it with greater fidelity (Gayathri et al., 2025b; Vettriselvan et al., 2025a). A minority expressed concern that learner-centred methods insufficiently prepare pupils for examination-oriented assessment systems, reflecting the documented tension between constructivist pedagogy and behaviourist assessment paradigms a tension that competency-based digital assessment platforms have the potential to resolve (Venice et al., 2025c; Venice et al., 2025d).

4.3 Implementation Challenges

Six primary implementation challenges were identified: lack of instructional resources (28%), time constraints (24%), noisy classroom environments (14%), risk of learners missing content (14%), learner discomfort in collaborative settings (10%), and teacher unfamiliarity with field trip venues (10%). Resource deficits represent the most critical structural barrier, directly impeding the diversity and quality of learner-centred activities available to teachers in rural Sioma District schools (Nyimbili et al., 2018; Gijbels, 2019). Digital technologies including offline-capable tablet devices, solar-powered learning centres, and AI-driven content platforms offer a practical pathway to addressing these resource deficits without the infrastructure investments characteristic of high-income contexts (Venice et al., 2025b; Vinodh et al., 2026b; Vettriselvan et al., 2025b). Time constraints reflect a

structural curriculum design challenge requiring systemic policy intervention, as individual teacher adaptation is insufficient to resolve timetabling pressures generated by comprehensive syllabus coverage requirements (Selvi et al., 2026; Vettriselvan et al., 2026a).

4.4 Methods Used and Recommended Enhancements

Group work was the dominant learner-centred method, employed by 16 of 21 teachers. Project-based learning was used by 4 teachers; field trips by only 1. The limited use of high-impact methods — particularly project-based learning and field trips reflects financial and logistical constraints that restrict pedagogical diversity (Blumenfeld et al., 2011; Zakaria, 2018). Recommended enhancements included provision of teaching and learning materials (66%), financial support for project activities (19%), financial support for field trips (10%), and learner guidance and counselling (5%). These recommendations align with international evidence that resource availability is the primary organisational determinant of learner-centred implementation quality (Simui et al., 2017; Mkandawire, 2015).

5. Discussion

The findings from Sioma District primary schools, situated within the global digital education discourse, reveal important convergences and tensions. The consistently positive learner and teacher attitudes documented here provide robust empirical support for continued constructivist pedagogical reform in Zambian primary schools, reinforced by the extensive international evidence base on AI-mediated personalised learning (Venice et al., 2025a; Arockia et al., 2025; Vasantha et al., 2025). The resource and capacity constraints identified as primary implementation barriers underscore the largely untapped transformative potential of digital technologies in Zambian primary education. Blockchain-enabled performance monitoring, AI-driven adaptive platforms, and offline digital content repositories represent concrete technological pathways toward democratising access to high-quality learner-centred instruction in rural settings (Venice et al., 2025e; Akila et al., 2025; Rajeswari et al., 2026). However, bridging this digital divide requires coordinated policy commitment, sustained public investment, and equitable infrastructure development that explicitly targets underserved rural districts (Vettriselvan et al., 2026b; Vijayalakshmi et al., 2025b). Teacher professional development emerges as the most critical organisational lever for advancing learner-centred reform. Research consistently demonstrates that teachers with adequate pedagogical knowledge and digital literacy are significantly more likely to implement constructivist strategies with fidelity and consistency (Gayathri et al., 2025b; Mohanbabu & Vettriselvan, 2025b). In Zambia, this

translates into a clear imperative for sustained, contextually relevant in-service training that integrates learner-centred pedagogical skills with digital tool literacy (Vettriselvan & Rajan FSA, 2019; Jenifer et al., 2025).

The health and well-being dimensions of effective learner-centred practice deserve explicit policy attention. Evidence linking nutritional status, chronic stress, and emotional well-being to academic outcomes in primary school populations (Ashifa, 2020a; Ashifa, 2022; Zahoor et al., 2025; Elkin et al., 2025) suggests that narrowly cognitive pedagogical interventions yield limited returns in contexts of compounded social vulnerability. Holistic learner-centred reform must address the physical, emotional, and social dimensions of learner development alongside cognitive outcomes (Vettriselvan et al., 2025d; Kariveliparambil et al., 2026a). Finally, the social deviance and digital risk research conducted in comparable Zambian school contexts (Venice et al., 2025f) highlights that technology integration in primary education must be accompanied by comprehensive digital citizenship education. Introducing internet-enabled devices without appropriate safeguarding frameworks and digital literacy programmes risks exposing young learners to harmful online content — an outcome antithetical to the equity and development goals of learner-centred reform (Vijayalakshmi et al., 2025a; Vettriselvan et al., 2025c).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This article has examined the effects of learner-centred teaching methods on primary school pupil performance in Sioma District, Zambia, contextualising empirical findings within global scholarship on AI, digital transformation, blockchain, and personalised learning. The study confirms significant positive effects of learner-centred instruction on critical thinking, academic motivation, and content mastery, while identifying resource deficits, time constraints, and teacher capacity limitations as persistent structural barriers to effective implementation. The theoretical coherence between constructivist pedagogical principles and the adaptive, personalised logic of AI-driven educational systems provides a compelling intellectual foundation for technology-mediated learner-centred reform in developing nations. For Zambia, realising this potential requires strategic, equity-oriented policy leadership that prioritises digital infrastructure investment in rural schools, sustained teacher professional development, and the integration of holistic well-being supports within the learner-centred reform agenda. The following recommendations are offered: (1) The Ministry of Education should prioritise digital instructional resource provision in rural primary schools, including offline-capable devices and AI-adaptive learning platforms (Vettriselvan et al., 2025b; Venice et al., 2025a); (2) sustained, nationally coordinated in-service teacher

professional development programmes integrating learner-centred pedagogy and digital literacy should be established (Gayathri et al., 2025b; Vettriselvan & Rajan FSA, 2019); (3) the Ministry of Finance should increase education budget allocations to support project-based learning and field trip activities (Blumenfeld et al., 2011; Venice et al., 2025c); (4) comprehensive digital citizenship education programmes should accompany all technology integration initiatives (Vijayalakshmi et al., 2025a; Vettriselvan et al., 2025c); and (5) future research should investigate the feasibility and outcomes of AI-powered adaptive learning interventions in Zambian primary school contexts, with explicit attention to equity, cultural relevance, and teacher preparedness (Arockia et al., 2025; Swadhi et al., 2025b; Vasantha et al., 2025).

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