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Transformative Pedagogies: Cultivating Educators for 21st Century Graduates

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Abstract
In the era marked by rapid technological advancements, globalization, and evolving societal needs, the demands for transformative pedagogies to prepare students for the complexities of the 21st Century has become increasingly urgent. This research examined the role of educators in fostering transformative pedagogies to cultivate the skills and competencies necessary for 21st Century graduates. Through a comprehensive review of literature, the study examined the theoretical foundations and practical implications of transformative pedagogies, highlighting their role in fostering critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication skills, digital and information literacy among students. Furthermore, the study explored the role of professional development initiatives in supporting educators' adoptions of transformative pedagogies and enhancing their instructional practices. Through qualitative analysis, the study assessed the influence of these initiatives on student learning outcomes, academic achievement, and readiness for higher education and workforce. Curriculum interconnection from secondary to tertiary and the workforce, resource constraints and change of attitude were the major challenges showed in the implementation of transformative pedagogies. By identifying barriers to adoption and strategies for overcoming challenges, this research provides insights into maximizing the potential of transformative pedagogies to prepare students as agile and adaptable graduates capable of thriving in an ever changing world. Ultimately this paper contributes to ongoing discourse on educational reform and provides actionable recommendations for stakeholders invested in cultivating educators for the demands of 21st Century.

Keywords: Transformative Pedagogies, Instructional practices, Skills and competencies

Introduction/ Context and Imperatives

The digital transition is altering global economies and cultures. New technical and 'soft' skills are becoming increasingly important in the labor market and as a means of full participation in society. As a result, established roles, content, and educational techniques are being questioned. Today's education must prepare students for shifting duties and roles in the labor market and as successful citizens of their country (Scott, 2022) [20].

"Transformative pedagogy" fosters environments that help teachers and students develop their identities as entire individuals. It investigates settings that can assist people in building the ability as "beings-in-relation" (collaborative-social skills and knowledge of coexistence with others in society) and "beings-in-becoming" (personal development leading to social-economic development) (Farren, 2019) [7]. Transformative pedagogy is based on moral-ethical concepts that urge all stakeholders to collaborate in understanding their roles and creating meaning from any educational program (Farren, 2019) [7]. It emphasizes personal and social transformation through deliberate acts and critical awareness.

Teachers' contribution to effective teaching and learning is vital. Learner achievement depends on teachers, whose performance in turn, hinges on their capacity (Todaro and Smith, 2012). According to the research, a more dynamic and beneficial alliance between learners living in the environment of the school and the larger society to which they belong has the potential to provide transformative benefits to learners (Farren, 2019) [7]. It is vital for educators to develop pedagogical skills that transform students into critical thinkers, problem solvers, and innovators capable of applying learned information in the workplace and society as a whole. Graduates of the 21st century require skills that make them relevant to regional and global

needs, emphasizing the importance of well-trained teachers in communicating these skills to their learners (Hutson *et al*., 2023 [11]; Musonda, Trinity, Mulenga and Daka, 2023).

Statement Problem in Context

Teacher education programs have long struggled with preparing highly competent instructors who can effectively serve diverse student populations. According to research, many teachers complete their training without learning the transformative attitude and skills required for successful teaching and creating graduates who can navigate the 21st - century terrain (Garvey *et al*., 2019; Daka, Minjale, Kakupa, Kaani, Tembo Mulenga and Musonda, 2023) [8, 2]. Many teachers in the school system graduated 10, 15, or even 25 years ago and did not receive training in 21st-century skills (Hussain *et al*., 2019) [12]. Transformative learning is critical for both educators and aspiring educators if the education provided is to transform societies and become productive. With digital programs supplanting traditional instructional methods, teachers must evolve and gain 21st-century skills to produce graduates prepared to face new difficulties (Istance & Paniagua, 2019). This urgency stems from creating transformative learning that prepares teachers to meet the needs of historically oppressed and underserved students (Garvey *et al*., 2019) [8]. This research adds to the current discussion of how educators from teacher training institutions, in-service training departments, and policymakers might instill transformative pedagogies in teachers and student teachers.

Study Objectives

1. To examine the role of educators in fostering transformative pedagogies to cultivate the skills and competencies necessary for 21st Century graduates.
2. To explore the role of professional development initiatives in supporting educators' adoptions of transformative pedagogies and enhancing their instructional practices.
3. To assess the influence of these initiatives on student learning outcomes, academic achievement, and readiness for higher education and workforce.

Literature Review

a. Transformative pedagogy

Transformational pedagogy is based on constructivism and critical pedagogy, with the goal of acquiring transformational knowledge, facilitating personal identity development, and developing self-reflection skills and societal critique that foster democratic sensibilities (Dimmock & Goh, 2019). To achieve transformative learning in higher education, both student instructors and educators must be willing to change personally and as a system (Halupa, 2020). However, in-service teachers and student teachers may be unprepared for self-directed, reflective learning, and educators may be unwilling to adapt their pedagogical techniques to accommodate this transition (Dündar & Merç, 2017) [6].

b. Curriculum Development and Review

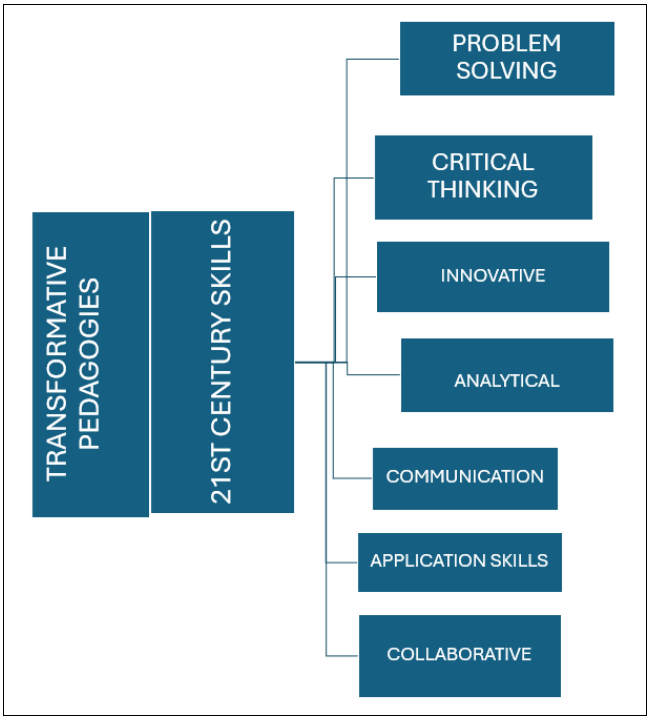
Curriculum development and review are critical components in fostering transformational pedagogy. A well-developed curriculum is vital for ensuring that educational practices meet the needs of the twenty-first century. Kanji *et al*. (2016) [14] emphasize the significance of rigorous curriculum creation and evaluation in ensuring educational relevance. Similarly, Hussain *et al*. (2019) [12] and Changwe, Mwanza, Daka and Ng'onomo (2023) [1] underline the importance of critically reviewing the curriculum development process to verify that it fulfills current educational standards. Dimmock and Goh (2019) contend that good curriculum development promotes transformative pedagogy by combining leadership and school organization with pedagogical innovation.

c. Prioritizing 21st-Century Skills in Curriculum Design.

Darling-Hammond and McCloskey (2008) and Mwamba, Musonda, Daka and Mulenga (2021) proposed that while designing curricular guidelines, authorities, government officials, and schools should prioritize what they called "21st-century skills." These abilities include finding and organizing information to solve problems, framing and conducting investigations, analyzing and synthesizing data, applying learning to new situations, self-monitoring and improving one's own learning and performance, communicating effectively in a variety of formats, working in groups, and learning independently. These abilities have evolved into critical thinking and problem-solving, which include assessing information, evaluating evidence, and thinking critically in a systematic manner in order to arrive at answers to problems (Darling-Hammond & McCloskey, 2008).

Additionally, communication skills, which involve successfully expressing information, and collaborative skills, which require working together, sharing ideas, and learning from one another, are important talents for educators to acquire and pass on to student teachers (Farren, 2019) [7]. Furthermore, creative talents encourage students to examine and think critically beyond the current situation in order to generate novel ideas that can be applied to existing information or created entirely new to tackle 21stcentury difficulties. The investigation of new approaches or views, as well as the production of new ideas, are critical for driving innovation and thriving on the application of learnt abilities (Hirsh-Pasek *et al*., 2020) [9].

In essence, educators have the duty to rethink and upscale their skills to meet the demands of the 21st century. These skills, coupled with digital literacy and information literacy, enable teachers to easily navigate platforms for information and understand digital ethics. Communicative skills, which encompass awareness of global issues, cultural diversity, and empathy, allow for assistive measures that teachers require as they interact with learners. These skills go beyond traditional academic knowledge. They empower students to thrive in an ever-changing world, adapt to new challenges, and contribute meaningfully to their communities and beyond (Scott, 2022) [20].



Source: Field data, 2024

Fig 1: Transformative Pedagogy

d. Essential Focus Areas for 21st-Century Educators

Unquestionably, in the 21st century, educators play a crucial role in shaping learners who are well-prepared for the challenges of our rapidly evolving world. Here are essential skills that teachers should focus on to cultivate 21st-century learners:

1. Aligning curriculum at secondary with tertiary and the workforce.
2. Addressing infrastructure and resource constraints to facilitate hands-on practice in order to bridge the theory with practice.
3. Changing the mindset of educators in tertiary and secondary schools in order to impact and influence the thought values and attitudes of students who are would-be teachers.

The need for teachers' reskilling and upskilling cannot be overemphasized. Teachers and educators must take advantage of available opportunities to gain relevant skills necessary to tackle the challenges of tomorrow (Garvey *et al*., 2019) [8].

Re-thinking education in the digital age should become a central matter for today's policymakers for two reasons. First, only education can form a skilled workforce prepared for future jobs and a changing labor market. Re-thinking education in the digital age, therefore, constitutes a prerequisite for Zambia's future global competitiveness. Secondly, only education can provide the preconditions for social inclusion and the equal participation of citizens in a digitalized democracy. Re-thinking education in the digital age, therefore, matters for safeguarding values such as equality, democracy, and the rule of law (Hussain *et al*., 2019) [12].

This study presents policy options based on a thorough analysis of current strengths and weaknesses, as well as future opportunities and threats, for education in the digital age.

a. The Fundamental Components of Transformative Pedagogies

The key components of transformative pedagogies are as outlined by Patrick Farren, (2015);

1. Identity
2. Beliefs and Attitudes
3. Knowledge
4. Moral-ethical values
5. Socio-affective factors
6. Social interaction/collaboration
7. Meta (Cognition)
8. School and wider society.

Methodology

To collect data from academics and school administrators, this study used a descriptive survey methodology combined with qualitative methods. This method enabled a thorough analysis of their experiences, perspectives, and insights into the use of transformational pedagogies. The qualitative methods employed were semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and open-ended surveys, which provided rich, detailed data that showed the complexity and nuances of participants' ideas. The researchers also reviewed Policy documents and frame works.

The capacity to gather substantial and context-specific information distinguishes this technique as useful. By directly engaging with educators, the study was able to identify practical difficulties, best practices, and potential solutions for implementing transformative pedagogies. This study also helped to better understand educators' subjective experiences, which is essential for developing focused professional development programs and policy recommendations. Overall, including qualitative approaches into a descriptive survey design proved to be an effective and fruitful strategy for this study, giving useful insights that contribute to the ongoing discussion regarding educatial reform.

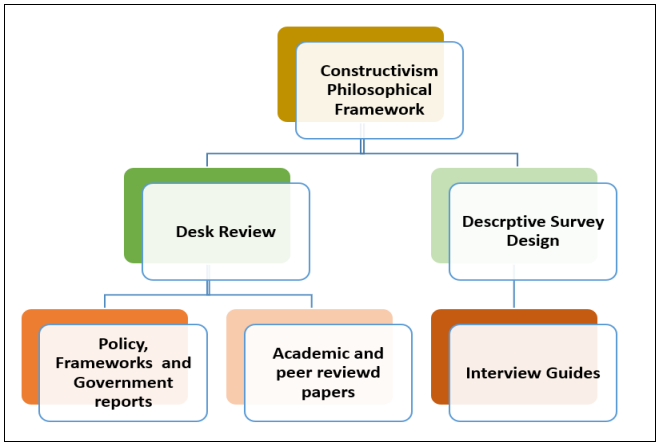


Fig 2: Data collection Flow sheet

Interview data was collected from six administrators from three different higher learning institutions, focus group discussion was done with the nine academics from three tertiary institutions while surveys were done from thirty students (ten from each institution). All data collected was analysed and integrated into the desk reviews done. Ethical considerations were implemented and all participants were protected.

Findings and discussions

a. Implementation of transformative pedagogies by educators

In recent years, innovative teaching approaches and initiatives have played an important role in advancing transformative pedagogy. Gamification, for example, is incorporating game design aspects into educational contexts to increase student engagement and motivation. This strategy makes use of leaderboards, achievement badges, and peer competitions. Minecraft: Education Edition, MergeCube, and educational robots like Ozobots and Beebots make studying more dynamic and enjoyable, assisting students in developing problem-solving skills and maintaining interest in the subject (Istance & Paniagua, 2019; Hauerwas *et al*., 2023).

Place-based learning extends education beyond traditional classrooms, linking students to their local settings and communities. This method is particularly useful for areas such as geography, Agriculture science, Design and Technology, and other practical subjects. Real-world inquiry and learning experiences help students get a better knowledge and appreciation for the subject matter. This approach not only makes learning more relevant and concrete, but it also encourages community participation and environmental care (Leite *et al*., 2022).

Virtual field trips are becoming more popular, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. They allow pupils to explore settings and scenarios that they would not otherwise be able to see. Students can use virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies to immerse themselves in historical sites, ecosystems, and scientific phenomena. This strategy improves comprehension and retention by creating a vibrant, participatory environment (LakshmiPriya & Priyadarshini, 2017; Dimmock & Goh, 2019).

The flipped classroom paradigm flips the usual learning environment by presenting educational information online, outside of the classroom. This allows students to use classroom time for activities, discussions, and hands-on learning. Students learn from lecture videos or reading materials at home before applying their knowledge in class through collaborative projects and problem-solving activities. This technique promotes active learning and critical thinking skills (Istance & Paniagua, 2019).

Collaborative online learning uses digital platforms to enable group projects and peer-to-peer learning. Students can collaborate, exchange ideas, and provide comments in real time using tools like discussion forums, wikis, and collaborative documents (for example, Google Docs). This strategy encourages communication, collaboration, and the ability to operate efficiently in a digital world (Hauerwas *et al*., 2023).

Project-based learning (PBL) entails students working on complicated, real-world projects over time. This technique promotes deep learning by challenging students to conduct research, plan, execute, and present their projects. It promotes critical thinking, creativity, and the practical application of knowledge. Students frequently work in groups, which improves their collaboration and interpersonal abilities (Leite *et al*., 2022).

These innovative teaching techniques not only improve student engagement and learning outcomes, but also prepare students for the challenges of the twenty-first century by cultivating critical, creative, and collaborative abilities, (Istance & Paniagua, 2019; Dimmock & Goh, 2019; LakshmiPriya & Priyadarshini, 2017).

b. Impact of transformative pedagogies by profrssionals on 21st Century graduates

The use of transformative pedagogies has had a profound impact on the capacities of 21st century graduate teachers. These graduates will enter the teaching profession with a strong understanding of innovative teaching strategies such as gamification, place-based learning, virtual field excursions, and the flipped classroom model. As a result, they are better able to engage students in dynamic, interactive, and student-centered learning settings.

For example, 21st -century graduates are skilled at using digital tools and platforms, preparing them to teach in a future where technology is central to education. They may easily incorporate virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) into their teachings, making abstract topics more apparent and understandable to students. This technological proficiency also allows them to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills in their students, as these pedagogies push students to investigate, question, and create within a digital framework (Istance & Paniagua, 2019).

c. Impact on Older Graduate Teachers

Older graduate teachers, who were trained in more traditional educational approaches, may have difficulty adapting to these new methodologies. The transition from teacher-centered to student-centered learning, along with an increased reliance on technology, necessitates a major paradigm shift. Older instructors may struggle with the technical aspects of incorporating digital tools in the classroom and require substantial professional development to become comfortable with new advancements.

However, the adoption of new pedagogies does not always result in a division. With the right assistance, such as ongoing professional development programs and peer mentoring, older teachers can successfully adjust to the demands of modern teaching. Furthermore, their experience and extensive material knowledge can supplement the innovative techniques of younger teachers, resulting in a rich and diversified learning environment for pupils (Hauerwas *et al*., 2023).

d. Reaching a Common Consensus for 21st -Century Education

The successful integration of transformational pedagogies necessitates agreement on the critical skills and competences that 21st-century education should provide. Both new and seasoned teachers must appreciate the necessity of instilling critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy in students. Achieving this consensus requires bridging the gap between conventional and current pedagogies, ensuring that all teachers, regardless of graduation date, are prepared to meet the demands of today's students.

To promote this integration, educational systems must provide continual training that is available to all instructors, fostering collaboration across different generations of educators. Such approaches can help to build a unified teaching force that is sensitive to the changing educational landscape, ultimately helping students who need both foundational knowledge and 21st-century skills (Leite *et al*., 2022).

e. Comparison with Other Perspectives

When comparing this impact to different perspectives, Dimmock and Goh (2019) found that in some locations, opposition to embracing new pedagogies is rooted in firmly ingrained traditional values. In these circumstances, the move to transformative pedagogies may be slower, necessitating a more cautious and culturally sensitive approach. In contrast, countries that prioritize technological advancements in education, such as Finland and Singapore, have seen faster and more successful integration of these pedagogies, resulting in graduates who are better prepared for the demands of the modern world.

To guarantee that all instructors can effectively fulfill the demands of 21st -century learners, it is critical to prioritize ongoing professional development. This development should concentrate on integrating digital tools and creative pedagogies, allowing teachers to keep up with the latest educational trends and technologies. Additionally, encouraging cross-generational collaboration among teachers is critical. Such collaboration enables educators to share best practices and learn from one other's abilities, thereby bridging the gap between traditional and new teaching methods. Furthermore, educational policy must encourage the progressive and inclusive adoption of transformative pedagogies. Policymakers should consider teachers' various degrees of experience and familiarity with technology, ensuring that all educators are well-prepared to adapt to these developments.

f. Challenges and Perils

While the use of transformative pedagogies has shown great promise for improving education, a number of issues and hazards must be addressed to ensure its effectiveness. One of the most pressing concerns is the digital divide, which refers to the gap between those who have access to modern information and communication technology (ICT) and those who do not. Many settings, particularly poor ones, lack the necessary infrastructure, such as reliable internet access and up-to-date hardware, to fully implement digital tools and platforms in the classroom. This digital divide can exacerbate educational inequities by depriving students in under-resourced schools of the same opportunities to engage with innovative pedagogies as their peers in better-equipped institutions (Leite *et al*., 2022).

Another challenge is instructors' reluctance to shift, especially older graduate professors trained in more traditional teaching methods. As previously said, the transition from teacher-centered to student-centered learning, combined with the use of digital resources, needs a fundamental adjustment in mindset. This resistance can be attributed to a lack of confidence in using new methods, a fear of the unknown, or a reluctance to quit previously effective approaches. According to Dimmock and Goh (2019), in some educational environments, this opposition arises from cultural views that favor traditional teaching methods, making it difficult to introduce and sustain revolutionary pedagogies.

Furthermore, the rapid rate of technological advancement presents a difficulty in itself. Teachers are expected to stay current with ever-changing digital tools and platforms, which can be overwhelming, particularly for those who are not naturally inclined to technology. Continuous professional development is critical, but it requires a significant investment of time and resources. Without sufficient support, teachers may struggle to effectively integrate new technologies into their teaching, perhaps leading to a superficial acceptance of innovative pedagogies without a thorough understanding of their pedagogical foundations (Hauerwas *et al*., 2023).

Another concern associated with the implementation of transformational pedagogies is the potential to increase student anxiety and stress. Gamification, for example, may increase engagement and motivation, but it can also generate a competitive environment that is unsuitable for many learners. Leaderboards and success badges may encourage a focus on extrinsic rewards rather than intrinsic motivation, stifling the development of a genuine love of learning. Furthermore, students' constant exposure to digital displays through virtual field trips, collaborative online learning, and other technology-driven efforts can cause screen fatigue and decreased attention spans (LakshmiPriya & Priyadarshini, 2017).

Another key problem is to ensure that all teachers, regardless of experience level, can effectively deliver 21st-century education. While younger graduate instructors may be more comfortable with technology and novel pedagogies, older teachers may need more time and support to adjust. This discrepancy can lead to variations in educational quality, with some pupils obtaining a more current, dynamic education than their peers. Leite *et al*. (2022) underline the necessity of providing instructors with personalized support based on their specific requirements, ensuring that all educators are prepared to meet the demands of modern education.

Finally, the adoption of transformational pedagogies necessitates a systemic approach that involves support from legislators, school administrators, and the general public. In many circumstances, there is a mismatch between policy and classroom practice, leaving teachers to implement new ideas without adequate direction or resources. This can lead to stress and burnout among instructors, especially when they are expected to reach high standards with little support. Hauerwas *et al*. (2023) argue that a more coordinated approach is required, in which education policy are matched with classroom practices and teachers are given the resources and support they need to succeed.

While transformative pedagogies present great prospects for improving education, their implementation is fraught with problems and risks. Addressing the digital divide, overcoming resistance to change, staying current with technology changes, controlling student fear, assuring consistency in educational quality, and providing systemic support are all crucial to the success of these pedagogies. By recognizing and solving these issues, educators and policymakers may collaborate to build an educational environment that really fulfills the requirements of 21st-century learners.

Implications

The study on transformative pedagogies in 21st century education reveals several key implications:

1. **Educational Reform:** The findings underline the importance of fundamental educational reforms that include transformative pedagogies. These reforms should promote the development of critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, communication skills, and digital literacy in students.

2. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Effective implementation of transformational pedagogies requires ongoing professional development for educators. This includes retraining and improving existing educators to meet the demands of modern education.
3. **Curriculum Integration:** The successful application of transformative pedagogies requires seamless curricular integration from secondary to university education and the workforce. This congruence ensures that students are adequately equipped for the needs of higher education and the labor market.
4. **Resource Allocation:** Managing infrastructure and resource constraints is crucial. Adequate resources must be allocated to facilitate hands-on practice and bridge the gap between theory and practice in educational settings.
5. **Mindset Shift:** Educators need to shift their mindset. This entails integrating new teaching methods, embracing digital change, and building an environment of continuous learning and adaptability.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Enhance Teacher Training Programs:** Revise teacher education curricula to integrate transformative pedagogies, ensuring that both pre-service and in-service teachers acquire the skills necessary to cultivate 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy in their students.
2. **Invest in Continuous Professional Development:** Develop and fund comprehensive professional development programs focused on transformative pedagogies. These should include workshops, seminars, and online courses that equip educators with the latest strategies and tools to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.
3. **Regular Curriculum Review and Alignment:** Establish a systematic process for regularly reviewing and updating the curriculum to reflect the evolving demands of the 21st-century workforce. Ensure that curricula at all educational levels emphasize the development of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy.
4. **Address Resource Gaps:** Allocate sufficient funding and resources to overcome infrastructure and technology deficiencies in educational institutions. Ensure that schools and universities are equipped with the necessary tools and technologies to facilitate transformative learning experiences for all students.
5. **Cultivate a Culture of Innovation:** Promote a culture of continuous innovation and collaboration among educators by recognizing and rewarding those who successfully implement transformative pedagogies. Encourage experimentation and the sharing of best practices to foster a dynamic learning environment.
6. **Strengthen Stakeholder Collaboration:** Engage all stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, students, parents, and the community, in the process of educational reform. Ensure that all voices are heard and that there is a shared commitment to the implementation of transformative pedagogies across the educational landscape.

Conclusions

The study highlights the critical importance of transformational pedagogies in educating students to face the difficult problems of the twenty-first century. These pedagogies, which emphasize critical thinking, creativity, cooperation, communication, and digital literacy, provide students with the fundamental skills required for academic success and eventual professional preparedness.

However, the successful application of transformational pedagogies necessitates considerable changes in several critical areas, including teacher education, curriculum creation, resource allocation, and educational mindsets. Educational stakeholders can maximize the potential of transformational pedagogies by resolving these difficulties and accepting the provided recommendations. This will result in graduates who are not only academically strong, but also nimble, innovative, and capable of making significant contributions to society and the global economy.

Finally, this study adds vital insights to the continuing discussion about educational reform, providing actionable ideas for stakeholders committed to aligning education with the needs of the twenty-first century. By encouraging a collaborative and forward-thinking approach to education, we can ensure that all students are prepared to flourish in an increasingly complicated and interconnected world.

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