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Book Review: *The Contextualisation of 21st Century Skills Assessment in East Africa*, edited by Esther Care, Mauro Giacomazzi, and John Kabutha Mugo. Switzerland: Springer, 2024. xviii + 211 pp. Ebook. ISBN: 978-3-031-51490-6.

Almontassar Bellah Taieb^{1*}

¹Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary

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***Corresponding author:** Almontassar Bellah Taieb

Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary

Abstract

The world is replete with changes facing youngsters, from readiness to workplace challenges to society's capacity to address the socio-economic demands of the 21st century. This book review highlights how East African education systems have sought to integrate life skills and values into their policies and curricula. A key limitation, however, is the lack of exploration into teaching strategies that promote these skills, particularly the adaptation of Western frameworks to measure competencies in non-Western contexts. To address this, the Assessment of Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) project investigates how collaboration, problem-solving, self-awareness, and respect are understood in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Findings reveal that East African views on personal identity are more community-oriented, thus contrasting with the individualistic approaches typical of Western contexts. Designing assessment tools for East Africa requires careful consideration of conceptual, ethnographic, and epistemological factors, from framework development to data collection and analysis.

Keywords: Education, assessment, 21st century skills, curriculum, East Africa

Book Review: *The Contextualisation of 21st Century Skills Assessment in East Africa*

The Contextualisation of 21st Century Skills Assessment in East Africa is a comprehensive examination of how 21st-century skills are assessed within the educational frameworks of the sub-Saharan African countries, namely: Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. This

edited volume is part of the *Enabling Power of Assessment* series that focuses on re-imagining current assessment practices to ensure education provision. The book is a by-product of extensive research and collaboration under the *Assessment of Life Skills and*

Values in East Africa (ALiVE) initiative, which aims to integrate essential life skills and values into the educational curricula of adolescents in East Africa.

The book is structured into twelve chapters. Its organization serves to build on the theoretical foundations of 21st-century skills, explores a number of practical approaches for assessment and reflects on ALiVE's initiative broader implications for education policy across the three East African countries. Overall, the way these chapters are compiled allows the reader to follow the developmental goals of such initiatives, from initial conceptualization to implementation and policy recommendations.

The book opens with a foreword by Ruth Kagia, thus setting the stage for linking the assessment of 21st century skills to the broader educational goals, such as those outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 4. Reflecting on the East Africa context, Kagia pinpoints the need to create a tailored set of tools for measuring life skills and values by incorporating household-based assessment.

Chapter 1 discusses the global movement towards 21st century skills and how these skills are being contextualized in East Africa. It provides a comprehensive understanding of the 21st century skills deemed crucial in modern education, including but not limited to critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving. Subsequent chapters delve into the various methodological approaches employed to assess these skills. The book discusses a range of techniques, such as scenario-based assessments, questionnaires, and direct observations. Each of these methods has been evaluated for their robustness and cultural relevance in the East African milieu. Towards the end, the book emphasizes the importance of combining methods to achieve a more comprehensive assessment, compliant with 21st century skills. The authors advocate for ongoing refinement and contextualization of assessment tools for the purpose of ensuring alignment with the cultural and educational landscapes of East African countries.

The core of the book, however, is dedicated to the ALiVE initiative whereby it seeks to measure life skills and values through household-based assessments. The initiative's goals, processes, and outcomes are therefore detailed with the purpose of highlighting the collaborative efforts of educators, policymakers, and community members across Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Insightful reflections on the policy implications of their findings are described. The book advocates for educational reforms that incorporate 21st century skills into national curricula and calls for a more principled investment in educational infrastructure and teacher training. Additionally, it reports on several case studies that illustrate the practical application of the assessment tools developed by the ALiVE initiative and demonstrates how these tools have been used to generate actionable data, inform policy decisions and foster a community of practice around life skills assessment.

In its entirety, the book offers a systematic examination of assessment practices, supported by extensive research and empirical data. By focusing on the contextualisation of skills, the book ensures that the educational strategies are pertinent and applicable to the East African context. The involvement of multiple stakeholders, including educational experts and policymakers from the region, adds depth and credibility to the findings.

Needless to say, the *Contextualisation of 21st Century Skills Assessment in East Africa* represents a significant contribution to

the field of educational assessment particularly for the development of region-specific evaluation frameworks. It not only provides a detailed account of the methodologies and findings of the ALiVE initiative but also offers a set of practical recommendations for policymakers and educators.

The book constitutes an excellent reading for those interested in the intersection of education, culture and policy in sub-Saharan Africa. The editors have effectively highlighted the importance of culturally relevant assessments and the need for continuous dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders to improve educational outcomes in the region. While the book provides in-depth insights into East African contexts, it occasionally overlooks the broader regional dynamics that might affect educational practices. It should be also noted that the technicality of this book might be challenging for readers with a limited background in educational assessment.