The Proof is in the Prototype

Dr James Keevy

Zaahedah Vally

Tarryn de Kock

The final webinar of the 2025 NASCEE-TICZA series presented the Prototyping methodology to be applied in the next stage of the Teacher Internship Collaboration South Africa (TICZA) project. The JET team shared the main elements of the five-year TICZA journey and explored the Prototyping model for the proof-of-concept testing soon to be launched (TICZA Prototyping Proposal 2025 presentation).

TICZA is a collective impact partnership, convened by JET Education Services and involving government, NGO implementers, higher education institutions (HEIs), funders, SACE and teacher unions. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students studying through distance learning while based in schools are supported by various NGO Implementing Partners, in what TICZA calls **extended student teacher internships (ESTIs)** as an enrichment of the Work Integrated Learning (WIL) element of teacher education. TICZA aims to show how and under what conditions ESTIs can provide high quality student teacher training, and how the model can be institutionalised within the broader ITE system. Visit TICZA on the JET Education Services website.

TICZA partners and stakeholders progressively formulated a common agenda through a number of activities, including participation in core research areas. These covered reviews of the different ESTI models used by NGO Implementing Partners, the nature of the wrap-around support offered, cost benefit analyses and the common competencies expected of student teachers.
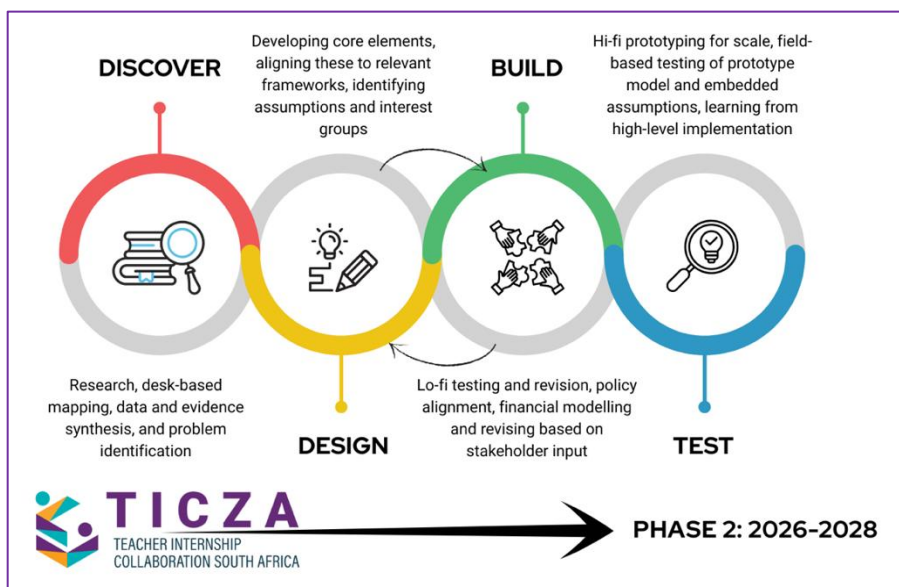See TICZA Collective Impact Webinar 1 and TICZA Common Competency Framework Webinar.

Prototyping – Designing for Proof of Concept

Prototyping is a method of demonstrating design intent leading to a prototype model which is empirically tested in its use-context, with its proposed end users and stakeholders.

Three of the four core steps – **discover, design, build** – have been shaped by all the mutually reinforcing activities undertaken by TICZA partners over the past five years.

In 2026 TICZA will embark on the **test** phase., checking against key indicators for effectiveness: **relevance, consistency and practicality.**

DISCOVER — Developing core elements, aligning these to relevant frameworks, identifying assumptions and interest groups

BUILD — Hi-fi prototyping for scale, field-based testing of prototype model and embedded assumptions, learning from high-level implementation

DISCOVER — Research, desk-based mapping, data and evidence synthesis, and problem identification

DESIGN — Lo-fi testing and revision, policy alignment, financial modelling and revising based on stakeholder input

TEST

PHASE 2: 2026–2028

Prototyping – 'Testing in the Wild'

The Prototyping test will involve 50 distance education students studying through the Standardised ESTI model over two years, and 50 students in a control group with standard HEI offerings (i.e. not exposed to the Standardised ESTI model). Aims and boundaries for the prototype have been closely defined in order to control for variables and to work within the funding budget. Aspirational or anecdotal ESTI outcomes (e.g. quicker completion times or development of leadership qualities) cannot be tested for at this stage.

Eleven components of the Standardised ESTI Model will be controlled for:
1. **Essential Wraparound Support (EWAS):** at R30,000 per student teacher per year
2. **Supervision and mentoring***: of student teachers by project mentors on a 1:25 ratio for 21 days per year on-site for the mentor
3. **Professional development***: of student teachers for 28 full days per year
4. **Lesson observation assessment:** of student teachers x 7 per year
5. **Competency assessment:** against common competencies as defined in the TICZA CCF
6. **Qualification:** Bachelors in Education (BEd)
7. **Cohort:** years 3-4
8. **Institution:** public universities in South Africa
9. **Mode:** distance education
10. **Foundation Phase**: with preference for South African indigenous languages
11. **Placement:** at quintile 1-3 public primary schools

Testing addresses **two key questions:**
1. Does the Standardised ESTI model identified through the TICZA process produce **more competent teachers** than teachers trained through other distance education programmes?
2. Can the standardised ESTI model be delivered at a cost **affordable to government funding schemes** such as NSFAS, Funza Lushaka and SETA learnerships?

Next Steps: Securing funding is in process, and the aim is to get the application process started before year-end. HEIs and NGOs need to apply in partnership, opting in to the ESTI Standardised Model.

Discussion highlights

- TICZA illustrates that systems change in **complex systems such as teacher education is a long game**. As implementation models and evidence collection methods differed, reaching agreement on a standardised model took longer than anticipated. In-depth research takes time, and the perspectives of researchers and on-the-ground implementers needed to be brought closer together. There were different degrees of engagement, and the benefits of participating in TICZA (given the commitment required) needed to be communicated.
- TICZA is mindful of the **teacher education policy context** in which it works and must keep pace with any current or proposed review processes, including to the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework* for *Teacher Education and Development* (ISPFTED), the *Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications*(MR TEQ) and the *SACE Act*. The evaluation of TICZA by Southern Hemisphere is also a tool for policy influence.
- The **adoption of new nomenclature** such as 'ESTIs' and 'EWAS' in teacher professional development debates illustrates TICZA's influence.

- Inclusion of **provincial and district levels** is critical. For the prototyping process TICZA is working with DBE for student selection linked to Funza Lushaka bursaries, and for school placements in geographic proximity to reduce travel costs for NGO IPs; these discussions crucially involve districts.
- **Future government support** for the model may depend on its **cost-effectiveness**. For UNISA as the largest provider of teachers in the country, wasted expenditure on non-completion of degrees could be reduced. Partnerships at district level can integrate cross-cutting support and available resources (for example, in the development of training schools and the use of teacher centres) to reduce costs.
- There are differences between **urban and rural** schools, such as cost factors (e.g. distance and travel costs for mentors) which make it easier to implement EWAS in urban schools. Implementation of ESTIs and EWAS may look different in rural and urban contexts but the overall dosage in the prototyping process will be the same.
- Working with other stakeholders resulted in benefits such as new insights into policy, research, and implementation perspectives. NGO Implementing partners also learned for each other's programmes and have enriched their own models.
- It is not sustainable to continue with niche programmes. Funders want implementers to learn from each other, and are now more willing to fund collaborative interventions and to attach a cost to collaborative practices. The onus is on organisations to take up this challenge.
- Collaboration takes effort, time and trust ; but it is generative, leading to better solutions as a sector.