



The TESCEA approach to student engagement

CASE STUDY

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Harriet Mutonyi and Josephine Dryden

With expert contributions from: Dr David Monk (Lecturer at Gulu University), Dr Felichesmi Lykurwa (Senior Lecturer at Mzumbe University), Perpetua Kalimasi (Department of Education Foundations and Teaching Management Coordinator), Patrick Kihoza (Assistant lecturer, Mzumbe University), Jacinta Bwegyeme (Senior Lecturer from Uganda Martyrs University).



To ensure that transformed higher education has a positive impact on employability and social change, it is vital that the process and vision are embraced by students.

1 Introduction

“We are disrupting a cycle of education that has been in place here for more than half a century... and they [students] – like all of the stakeholders – need to be engaged in the process as much as possible.”

Dr David Monk, Gulu University

Student engagement has been prioritised throughout the TESCEA project and has two specific aims. Firstly, to introduce students to the new pedagogies they will experience in the classroom and, secondly, to promote critical thinking, problem solving and gender responsiveness. As the ultimate beneficiaries of changes to their institution, it is important that students actively contribute to the refinement of this approach which, as the quote above describes, can be a significant departure from what they are used to.

2 Enacting the approach

The following engagement activities aimed to ensure that students felt like active contributors to their learning, as well as changemakers in their institutions.

Awareness raising

All universities emphasise the importance of devoting time to introducing students to this approach, especially at the beginning of implementation and also the start of each academic year. This has been done through presentations during university orientation or through dedicated launch events.

“We presented the TESCEA idea to the students and asked them what skills they think they need to work, how they can get them, and what they feel they are missing - what do they need more of? We also asked them what barriers they face from a gendered perspective in getting jobs. This was a really important component of engaging with these students about learning differently and seeking their perceptions rather than just telling them.”

Dr David Monk, Gulu University

Input into curriculum redesign

While the transformative learning, programme alignment and course redesign workshops are directed at faculty, the perspectives of students are integral. Students have been invited to discuss candidly their experiences in each programme; what they found meaningful and where improvements need to be made.

TRANSFORMING EMPLOYABILITY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN EAST AFRICA

Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA) is helping young people in Tanzania and Uganda to use their skills and ideas to tackle social and economic problems. With partners in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, TESCEA supports universities, industries, communities and government to work together to create an improved learning experience for students – both women and men. This improved learning experience fosters the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and allows for practical learning beyond the classroom that improves a graduate’s employability.

The TESCEA partnership is led by INASP (UK), working with Mzumbe University (Tanzania), University of Dodoma (Tanzania), Gulu University (Uganda), Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda), Association for Faculty Enrichment in Learning and Teaching (Kenya) and Ashoka East Africa (Kenya).

Some universities also invite students to join the final session of the course redesign workshop, where faculty present their redesigned courses.

Student-led clubs

Clubs have evolved differently at each institution, the core idea is for students to practice what they were learning, with a particular focus on social change, gender, and innovation.

For example, at Mzumbe University, students use the clubs to meet and discuss emerging issues and employment prospects related to their discipline.

“Recently, many clubs have changed into learning clubs whereby academic papers are presented, and professional guest speakers are invited.”

In addition to the gender clubs at UMU, which are described in the gender case study, the university's students also formed five multidisciplinary clubs. Two of these clubs, The Developers Club and the Innovators Club, have collaborated to deliver entrepreneurial online training to other students in JAVAscript and Android App development.

Student changemaker journey portfolios

Developed by Ashoka East Africa, the portfolios are designed to build student's profiles, showcasing their abilities. This approach has been particularly effective for framing student internships and placements.

“We have hosted a series of portfolio workshops with students – two before COVID and two after COVID. Personally, I have had 2000 students implement portfolios as a component of my teaching.”

Dr David Monk, Gulu University

As described in the external stakeholder case study, Gulu University conducts transdisciplinary internships, which engage with challenges faced by the community. Portfolios are used to structure and assess these learning experiences. For example, malnutrition is being explored collaboratively by the Agriculture, Public Health and Education faculties. The team observes that this approach leads to a more holistic and integrated learning experience, in touch with the needs of the community.

Mentoring

A variety of opportunities have been developed to meet the needs of students. For example, multipliers have mentored students as they developed clubs, and Joint Advisory Group members have offered career and entrepreneurial mentoring to students.

These engagements are in addition to the changes that students experienced in their classrooms. As a student from UMU reflects:

“This engagement allows students to explore their knowledge just like the constructivists say, that learners are able to construct their knowledge. Being students does not mean that we are dust bins to be filled. But we also have ideas which the lecture does not have or has never thought of through the research we make. At least for the three years we have spent at UMU, this kind of learning builds one's confidence because each individual is given a chance to present their views. Even those who were shy have now gained confidence and I am sure, they are ready to go to the field and start teaching. It also brings joy to the lecturers because when you assign a topic and it is well presented, then it means that teaching is becoming effective and it also helps them complete the syllabus in time.”

3 Challenges

When delivering these engagement activities, the universities had to address the following challenges:

- **Level of engagement**
“[We should] have engaged students more deeply in the whole TESCEA process – asking them to participate in workshops together with lecturers...and asking at least a few of them to become multipliers, trainers, evaluators and champions. We saw them take this up very effectively as an outcome of the portfolio training”.
 Dr David Monk, Gulu University
- **Time**
 Several universities emphasise the need to devote adequate time to these engagement activities.

- **Compensation**
In some cases, it may be appropriate to compensate students for their time and reimburse expenses, for example, if it is necessary to travel to a JAG meeting. Finding an appropriate budget for this can be challenging. However, there are other forms of engagement, such as student clubs, which can be nurtured and grow with minimal/no cost at all.
- **Online engagement**
In response to COVID-19 restrictions, universities needed to adapt the delivery of engagement activities with students. As such, some found it beneficial to provide connectivity support to both students and others involved such as multipliers.

4 Beyond TESCEA

As new students join the institution each year, the universities intend to continue these engagement activities, although their exact form may change in response to the evolving needs of the institution.

For example, Gulu University intends to deliver student engagement through an institutional community of practice *“of which students will form an integral component. They have taken up leadership in the digital portfolios and changemaker practice, and this is an important opportunity to open the door to the full TESCEA approach and get them to own and lead it.”*

At UMU, conversations about sustainability are ongoing with the university administration, and there is a proposal to integrate clubs into the university purpose.

For more case studies of TESCEA approaches see
www.transformhe.org

Contact: TransformHE@inasp.info

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