



Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform

IMPROVING HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH INNOVATIVE STUDENT-CENTRED PEDAGOGY – PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA

Many academics in African universities face challenges shared by higher education institutions around the world: large class sizes, poor infrastructure, heavy teaching and administrative workloads and weak reward systems for teaching excellence. Teaching staff are highly qualified in their disciplines but there is often limited investment in pedagogical skills. This has a negative impact on the learning environment and on graduates' abilities to use their knowledge to address local needs and find innovative solutions to developmental challenges.

Part of the Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform (SPHEIR) programme, the Pedagogical Leadership in Africa (PedaL) partnership, established a network of academics in African universities to help transform graduate education and its outcomes, by embedding innovative pedagogy within graduate social science programmes.

PedaL embraced a unique and holistic approach to teaching and learning:



Capacity development in student-centred pedagogical skills for university teaching staff. This includes “flipped classroom”, contextual case studies, simulations, role plays, and threshold concept tools aimed at maximising learning outcomes among students.



Cascade trainings at university level, made possible through cost-sharing with host universities who invite PedaL to train their staff.



Course delivery through blended learning. PedaL's training was delivered using blended learning approaches and participating academics were also equipped with the digital toolsets to excel in delivering the courses they teach.



Integration of PedaL at institutional level through its adoption as the preferred approach to teaching and learning in social sciences programmes at participating universities.

SPHEIR programme management



Main achievements

Transformed teaching and learning practices.

By training over 2,700 academics in 1,056 university departments (336 departments in partner universities and 720 in non-partner universities) across more than 10 countries in innovative pedagogies, PedaL was a driving force leading the shift from traditional lecture methods to participatory teaching and learning approaches. Through the training, academics built pedagogical skills to facilitate deeper learning and produce employable graduates. All PedaL trainings enable teaching staff to redesign courses for enhanced quality, relevance and equity, particularly integrating gender as well as pressing issues in various African contexts.

Successful adaptation of pedagogical training to online platforms.

PedaL was adapted to create the 'PedaL Online: Technology for Transformative Pedagogy' course. The self-paced course was designed so faculty staff from different universities could apply it to design and deliver courses on the different learning management systems used within their institutions. The PedaL Online training was a driving force in moving teaching and learning from a purely face-to-face endeavour to online and blended modes in all participating universities.

Establishment of a community of practice leading pedagogical innovations.

A strong community of practice has emerged around pedagogical innovation. Annual convenings of the PedaL community have proved useful for sharing novel ideas, resources, experiences and lessons learned.

Development of students' 21st century skills critical for employability.

Critical thinking skills, collaboration and teamwork, reflecting and connecting to real life situations, change and adaptability, innovation and creativity, and digital literacy were among the skills that students reported they

acquired from the teaching and learning experiences delivered by lecturers who undertook PedaL training. 76.1% of the students surveyed from partner universities expressed satisfaction with their experience with PedaL-supported innovations.

Adoption at institutional level of pedagogical innovations introduced by PedaL.

Both partner and non-partner institutions recognised the relevance of PedaL and its contribution to addressing demands in the labour market, adopting the model and accrediting PedaL training for teaching staff. Partner universities have shared the costs of PedaL training, embedded it on university learning management systems, established relevant centres for continuous pedagogical training for their staff, and endorsed relevant institutional policies.

Cost-sharing model to support equity within the higher education system

To ensure alignment with its principles of equity and inclusivity, the partnership adapted its approach to ensure that it did not discriminate against small and under-resourced universities. For the most part, the well-resourced universities were committed to a cost-sharing model while extending invitations to teaching staff from smaller universities as part of affirmative action. This model is already bearing fruit with at least six universities outside the original partnership having launched and institutionalised PedaL training based on the cost-sharing model.

A transferable training programme.

At the core of PedaL training is its transferability. The courses that are redesigned by PedaL-trained academics incorporate elements learnt from PedaL such as constructive alignment, mainstreaming gender in the curriculum, technology-enhanced learning, and application of innovative teaching and learning tools.

PedaL in numbers

More than

2,700 teaching staff
trained on innovative
pedagogies

PedaL influenced the redesign of

1,752
university courses
delivered to students

Transformed teaching
and learning across

1,056 university
departments,

97
universities,

11
African
countries

Demand-driven multiplier effects

PedaL generated demand outside its formal partner universities and in subjects beyond its social science focus: 720 departments from non-partner universities are implementing the PedaL model. Although PedaL was initially designed to transform teaching and learning in social science programmes, increased demand across disciplines led to its adaptation for STEM programmes – a process that was initiated and coordinated by a team of PedaL-trained STEM teaching staff. Similarly, PedaL was designed for graduate programmes with typically smaller class sizes but

was successfully adapted for use in undergraduate programmes that are characterised by large class sizes.

These adaptations were motivated by popular demand from university lecturers and leaders and intensified by the need for systemic change rather than programme-specific changes that benefitted only selected units in the university system. This achievement was supported by university-led trainings but very much driven by the PedaL Online variant of PedaL training, which minimised costs, making trainings more affordable and accessible even for smaller universities.

Main lessons

Technology-enhanced learning enabled change

The adaptation of PedaL to the online environment was made possible by the flexibility of the SPHEIR partnership and the all-encompassing nature of the PedaL design. At its inception, PedaL developed a Technology-Enhanced Learning Strategy, which was the blueprint that facilitated adaptation of the programme to be offered online in the context of Covid-19.

The importance of senior leadership at institutional level

Stable and committed university senior leadership proved to be an asset in PedaL partner universities and this unlocked university resources for PedaL training. Participation of university leadership in the design, implementation and evaluation of capacity building programmes such as PedaL is critical for improved uptake and sustainability. Uptake was further enhanced by PedaL participants' intrinsic motivation as well as demand from industry for graduates with 21st century skills.

Engagement with regulatory agencies

PedaL recognised the role played by regulatory bodies in the institutionalisation of pedagogical innovation through relevant policies. Leveraging relationships with higher education regulatory agencies at the earliest opportunity in developing a partnership is critical in facilitating the integration of pedagogical standards and policy reforms in higher education institutions.

The power of context-driven ownership and leadership

Universities and teaching staff invested enthusiasm as well as resources through a cost-sharing model to catalyse the growth of PedaL beyond its initial expectations, reinforcing the importance of grounding pedagogical innovation in the local context through relevant case studies and voices from the continent.

Addressing the digital divide

Most universities are unable to procure the necessary ICT infrastructure, equipment and software to support reliable connectivity. Facilitating access to training materials and audio recordings within the PedaL Learning Management System (LMS) was noted as strategic in tackling the challenge of disruptions caused by unstable connectivity within the online training environment. This ensured that even those teaching staff who might have dropped out of the training due to competing responsibilities were given the opportunity to continue to engage with the training resources.

Continual improvement in approaches to change

The use of reflective logs, peer observations of teaching, and shared reflections on experiences formed a critical aspect for managing feedback throughout the life of PedaL. This should not be left to chance but should be made intentional, with adequate resources allocated for synthesis of feedback findings in order to facilitate continuous improvement.

Eight attributes of female leadership transforming social science pedagogy in higher education.

PedaL's structure, expert contributors, and inclusive leadership were core to its success. The SPHEIR mid-term evaluation included a case study highlighting the female leadership attributes that were pivotal to the success of the project. It also identified the role that team members (women and men) who were themselves leaders, champions and mentors in their own institutions played in expanding PedaL's outreach and maintaining its community of practice.

The attributes identified were: leaders pursue a vision selflessly and inspire the same from team members; eliciting team buy-in; carrying people along in an evolving process; prompting subtlety of thought; problem-solving through inclusive discussion; a nurturing approach to building leadership skills; availability; and diffuse leadership that negotiates and influences. [Read the full case study.](#)

Sustainability and scalability potential

The PedaL model is already bearing fruit with at least six universities outside the original partnership having launched PedaL training based on a cost-sharing model. This approach has led to the mainstreaming and scaling of the PedaL model in partner and non-partner universities.

The partnership has trained a significant network of educators across Africa who will continue to build the capacity of their peers and to motivate one another through the project's active community of practice.

Some of the systemic changes attributed to PedaL which will outlive the project lifespan include:

- Policies for pedagogical training of teaching staff and recognition of pedagogical competencies for promotion of teaching staff
- Integration and revitalisation of online teaching and learning in universities, new frameworks for curriculum design
- Establishment of new variants of PedaL – a Masters in Higher Education (Innovative Pedagogy and Leadership) at Uganda Martyrs University and a postgraduate Diploma in PedaL at Egerton University

To assure sustainability of the initiative, the partnership has anchored its capacity building interventions within existing university structures such as centres of teaching and learning innovation as well as centres for continuous professional development. For example, Uganda Martyrs University and Egerton University approved formal programmes at masters and postgraduate levels while the University of Ghana and the University of Nairobi integrated PedaL in two centres for in-service training of teaching staff

Partners

The PedaL partnership was led by the Partnership for African Social & Governance Research (Kenya), working with the University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Egerton University (Kenya), University of Ibadan (Nigeria), University of Ghana (Ghana), Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda), Alliance for Research Universities in Africa (ARUA), and Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex (UK). An extensive network of additional universities across Africa also joined the PedaL network and took part in project activities.



Find out more

[View the PedaL summative evaluation report.](#)

[Visit the PedaL profile on the SPHEIR website.](#)

[Visit the PedaL website.](#)

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INNOVATION AND REFORM (SPHEIR)

Transforming the quality, relevance, scale, access and affordability of higher education in low-income countries

8 partnerships

58 organisations

16 countries

About SPHEIR

Strong higher education systems are key for accelerating development, building inclusive societies and promoting sustainable economic growth. SPHEIR was a UK Aid programme (2016-2022) supporting change in higher education to better meet the needs of students, employers and society in focus countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

The programme was managed by a consortium of organisations, led by the British Council in association with PricewaterhouseCoopers and Universities UK International.

SPHEIR's transformational impact

Quality – In Sierra Leone, a National Qualification Framework for Tertiary Education set new quality standards for higher education institutions. Across East Africa, a new quality review tool was applied in **21 universities** to improve institutional blended learning capacity.

Relevance – In Somaliland and Sierra Leone, **13 degree programmes** were redesigned with contextualised content and practice-based learning. In Tanzania and Uganda, four universities are engaging public and private sector representatives through new Joint Advisory Groups.

Scale – **4,470** academic and support staff were trained in curriculum design, student-centred and gender-responsive pedagogy, assessment, blended learning and distance

The SPHEIR approach

Mutually beneficial partnerships brought together different types of organisations – including higher education institutions, authorities and associations, civil society and private sector organisations – to design and deliver innovative solutions to higher education challenges by focusing on transformative change at individual, institutional and sector-wide levels.

education. Over **77,600** students benefitted directly from SPHEIR, including 12,400 from Myanmar who accessed online courses.

Access – More than **12,500** students in Lebanon and Jordan accessed study tracks and bespoke short courses with a further **1.1 million learners worldwide** enrolled online.

Affordability – **913** students in Kenya received an affordable loan to start or continue university, of whom **82%** were from the bottom three wealth quintiles and nearly half were the first in their family to progress to tertiary education.

SPHEIR partnerships

AQHEd-SL: Assuring Quality Higher Education in Sierra Leone

PADILEIA: Partnership for Digital Learning and Increased Access in Lebanon and Jordan

PEBL: Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda

PedaL: Pedagogical Leadership in Africa in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda

PfP: Prepared for Practice in Somaliland

LEAP: The Lending for Education in Africa Partnership in Kenya

TESCEA: Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa in Tanzania and Uganda

TIDE: Transformation by Innovation in Distance Education in Myanmar