



Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform

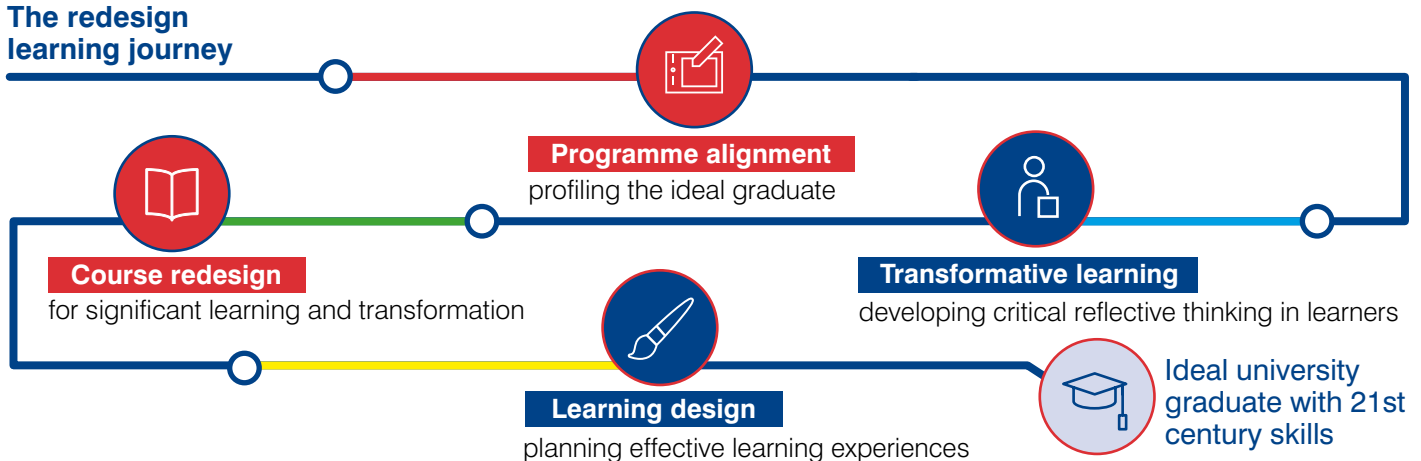
HELPING STUDENTS LEARN ‘HOW TO THINK’ INSTEAD OF ‘WHAT TO THINK’ – TRANSFORMING EMPLOYABILITY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN EAST AFRICA

Many graduates in East Africa are ill-prepared to address the challenges they encounter in the modern workplace or to leverage their knowledge and competencies to contribute to society. One of the key contributory factors is a limited focus on critical thinking and problem solving within university teaching and learning. While universities recognise the need to improve the quality and relevance of curricula, to rethink pedagogies and to build stronger connections with communities and industries, the solution is to move beyond islands of good teaching and to bring about change at scale.

Part of the Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform (SPHEIR) programme, the Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA) partnership brought together universities in Tanzania and Uganda with organisations in Kenya and the UK to develop a scalable pedagogical model to help students develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that will increase graduate employability.

The TESCEA model was developed by testing approaches in partner universities and consolidating their experience into a set of practical tools and online courses that offer a complete pathway from programme alignment to learning design in order to transform the employability of graduates.

The redesign learning journey



SPHEIR programme management



Woven into the journey to transform teaching and learning practice were:

Joint Advisory Groups (JAGs): forums where representatives from local communities, the private and public sector worked together with the university to help shape and deliver learning in and beyond the classroom.

Training of ‘multipliers’: to achieve sustainability, the project trained teaching staff to become facilitators – or ‘multipliers’ – who went on to train their colleagues.

Key achievements

Scalable pedagogical model

- **Development of a contextualised model for transformation in teaching and learning rooted in the experience of East African universities.** Working closely with classroom practitioners, TESCEA adapted existing materials and concepts for use within a resource-constrained environment and developed a gender-responsive approach to teaching for critical thinking and problem-solving skills that leverages greater engagement with employers and communities. The model was published as a scalable methodology of pedagogy and curriculum redesign that can support lecturers and universities working in similar contexts to transform teaching and learning practices.

Transformation in teaching

- **Strengthened teaching practices of lecturers.** Teachers trained in transformative learning used the tools and expertise shared by the partnership to develop their own teaching practices that responded to the specific contexts of their institutions and of East African higher education more widely.

98% of the academic teaching staff surveyed rated their experience with TESCEA as positive. *“Lecturers are now able to define their own visions for teaching and learning and create their own practice.”*

Edwin Ngowi, University of Dodoma

- **Improved ability and confidence in digital learning.** The programme delivered specific support to academic staff on how to facilitate online learning and, in doing so, it delivered greater proficiency and confidence in teaching through digital platforms. This was precipitated by Covid-19 but enabled by the ability of the project team to adapt quickly and boldly to the situation in order to meet new needs.

Positive changes in students’ learning

- **TESCEA’s pedagogical approach puts students at the centre of their own learning and created new channels for their voices to be heard.** As an example, the University of Dodoma incorporated student experience measures into its quality assurance procedures for the first time. The collaborative evaluation conducted by the TESCEA partnership evidenced *“significant changes in the attitudes, learning styles and learning activities of students”*. As one TESCEA student highlighted, *“This kind of learning is very, very, very important for the future of this world. It should continue.”*

Gender-responsive pedagogy

Gender was a central consideration in TESCEA. The partnership developed and piloted a framework for gender-responsive pedagogy in higher education with the aim of improving the classroom experience for female students by challenging pedagogical practices that reinforce gender inequalities. A learning brief produced by the project concluded that gender-responsive teaching improved learning outcomes for both women and men through increased participation and interaction, with particularly noticeable benefits for female students. The mainstreamed approach to gender within the project also led to policy changes at an institutional level – notably, the establishment of a dedicated Gender Unit at Gulu University. As Christine Oryema, the university’s gender lead, explains, *“The establishment of the gender unit has been a great step for Gulu University to have an autonomous office for handling gender related issues. Before, gender mainstreaming was considered a small unit under the academic registrar and was mainly concerned with admission issues. However, with the TESCEA project, the university has realised that gender encompasses more than admission and requires special attention.”*

Innovation in stakeholder engagement

- **Establishment of new mechanisms to connect universities with external stakeholders – business, public sector and surrounding communities.** The Joint Advisory Groups established at each of TESCEA’s partner universities were embraced by the institutions as offering opportunities to improve the relevance of teaching and learning, to help universities understand their key stakeholders better, and to strengthen outside understanding of the value of universities. *“As a platform, it has allowed for a lot of dialogue. Students, lecturers, university leadership and industry stakeholders can all make their voices heard.”*

Albogast Musabila, Mzumbe University



- **Enhanced external engagement in university life.** Joint Advisory Group members have contributed to TESCEA universities beyond formal meetings by offering student placements, providing advice on curriculum revision and university policies, giving guest lectures, and mentoring students. Uganda Martyrs University created interdisciplinary clubs for students to engage with issues of employability and entrepreneurship outside of the classroom, with lecturing staff as coaches and industry members as regularly engaged mentors.

job promotion. TESCEA's other partner universities now include gender-responsive pedagogy and teaching for critical thinking and problem solving in their staff appraisal criteria. Additionally, Mzumbe and Uganda Martyrs Universities have both proposed the development of centres for excellence in teaching and learning.

Impact at institutional level

- **Establishment of a cadre of expert trainers and mentors in partner universities.** These experts – or 'multipliers' – constitute an institutional mechanism to support continued staff development, including by facilitating transformative learning and course redesign workshops and running sessions on gender-responsive pedagogy. *"I have shifted my mental model about learning... I cannot begin to express how enrolling in this program has positively and powerfully impacted my life on all levels. It is the best thing I have ever done and I am so grateful for the experience. I am definitely changed and I am in alignment with my life's path more than I have ever been. It's very exciting!"*
Gloriana Monko, TESCEA multiplier at University of Dodoma
- **Adoption of institutional policies, processes and structures supporting the pedagogical development of teachers.** By engaging with senior leadership and explicitly planning for institutional change, TESCEA succeeded in promoting the adoption of policies, plans, tools and guidelines to support innovation in teaching and learning. Gulu University developed and launched a postgraduate certificate in transformative teaching and learning which will be completed by all lecturers and will count towards



TESCEA in numbers

565 lecturers across four universities trained by TESCEA in course re-design and transformative learning

29 multipliers who can now train and mentor their colleagues in course redesign, transformative learning and gender-responsive pedagogy

91% of surveyed academics use gender-responsive pedagogy and 80% use critical thinking techniques in their teaching

87% of students surveyed had a positive experience of TESCEA's transformative teaching and learning approaches

39 institutional policies, plans, tools and guidelines introduced to support teaching and learning innovation – including the establishment of Gulu University's Gender Unit and Uganda Martyrs University's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Main lessons

Academics as agents of change

Efforts to transform teaching and learning must be led by teaching staff themselves in order to create sustainable change. Whilst support from senior leadership and external partners is key, academic staff need to feel motivated, empowered and confident to change their practice in the classroom and other learning spaces.

Ownership and intentionality in approaches to change

Processes of institutional change are complex and require careful attention. TESCEA considered change at multiple levels – individual academics and students, institutional policies and processes and external engagement. The partnership engaged university leadership from the outset to ensure that change was shaped, owned and led by the institutions involved and the policy changes needed to support the change being made by TESCEA champions in the classroom were explicitly discussed.

Contextualisation strengthens relevance

TESCEA grounded the development of its materials and tools in the context and practical experience of East African higher education practitioners to ensure its relevance both within and beyond the project. By ensuring that its approach was suitable for use in resource-constrained settings, TESCEA created a model of transformation in teaching and learning with particular value for academics and institutions working with similar constraints around large classes and limited funding and facilities.

Holistic stakeholder engagement

The forums for dialogue between universities and external stakeholders that were established through TESCEA's Joint Advisory Groups generated trust and understanding through their holistic approach. Rather than focusing on narrow and instrumental engagement to extract advice from stakeholders, the groups enabled a wide-ranging engagement that was shaped by all participants and led to unanticipated collaboration opportunities.

Power and challenge of equitable partnership

Collaboration can be powerful but the investment of time and effort required to build a genuine and equitable partnership should not be underestimated. Attention has to be paid to building trust and relationships both before, during and after the implementation of a project and it is important to openly acknowledge the power dynamics implied when working through grant mechanisms and across partners from the Global North and South.

Effectiveness of mainstreaming gender

TESCEA's conceptual framework included gender-responsiveness from the outset and this was integrated into the project's pedagogical model. However, the attention to gender issues went beyond pedagogy. By consistently addressing gender throughout its activities, the project was able to raise gender awareness more broadly and to catalyse changes in university policy and related resourcing.

Value of learning and adaptation

Integrating learning into project implementation through dedicated roles in the team and regular reflection opportunities enabled TESCEA to nurture collaborative decision-making and to adapt interventions based on data.

Sustainability and scalability potential

- TESCEA set out to create a scalable and replicable model for pedagogical transformation that was grounded in the East African experience. The collection of practical, contextualised resources within the publicly available 'Transforming Higher Education for Social Change' model facilitates replication by other academics and institutions interested in a model of course redesign that emphasises critical thinking, problem-solving skills and gender-responsiveness in both content and pedagogy.
- The 'multipliers' – champions and facilitators of the TESCEA approach – trained across the project's four partner universities provide institutional capacity to sustain, extend and deepen improvements in teaching and learning. The multipliers continue to cascade training in gender-responsive pedagogy, course redesign, and transformative learning.
- The Joint Advisory Groups have been built into university workplans to support continued engagement with external stakeholders. In Tanzania, the University of Dodoma's Joint Advisory Group is drafting a formal framework for industry-university collaboration to enhance curriculum design following positive feedback around the model's potential for replication from the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology and the Tanzanian Commission for Universities.
- At the institutional level, TESCEA influenced policies across its partner universities, including around recognition of and reward for good teaching, which will continue to support high quality learning experiences for students.

Partners

The TESCEA partnership was 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).

Find out more

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

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

[Access the Transforming Higher Education for Social Change model with toolkits, videos, and case studies.](#)

[Explore TESCEA's gender-responsive pedagogy framework and read the related learning brief.](#)

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