

Incubating an entrepreneurial mind through student skills empowerment programme at Kwame Nkrumah University in Zambia

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is highlight Kwame Nkrumah University's student Empowerment programme (SEP) whose core business is to empower students to improve their lives and the lives of others while on campus and after they have left the university. The program was initiated by three lecturers after a realisation that there has been a shrinking space for employment in the teaching fraternity in the country. Kwame Nkrumah university predominantly trains teachers who are taken on by the government which has not been able to employ all the graduates of late. As such, graduate teachers have been left to wander the streets without anything meaningful to do. This is because their training does not expose them to survival skills in an event that jobs are not available after graduation. Due to a huge backlog of unemployed teacher graduates, there is no hope that our students would be employed soon. The nature of training directs them to

job-seeking as opposed to self-employment. The empowerment aspect seems to be the missing link that the SEP

has come to address especially at Kwame Nkrumah University through a number of activities. To address the gap identified, three clubs outside the normal academic calendar were introduced namely, Art Club, Student Research Club, and French Club. In these clubs, students are exposed to hands-on activities such as music and dance, interpretation, Research mentorship activities, and many other skills development activities. The clubs, through various activities, are critical in shaping the students to be change agents by gaining the skills to impact their own lives and lives of other individuals, organisations, and communities once they are out of the university instead of waiting to be employed by the government. Various career programmes are conducted through in-house workshops and the programme has proved to be a success story.

Keywords: Employability, career activities, youth empowerment, students,

Background

Zambia has been facing the challenge of high unemployment since the early 1990s and this problem is more prevalent in urban areas and amongst the youth, women, and people with disabilities. (Shamenda, 2012:2). Some of the notable causes of high unemployment levels especially among the youth include among others: weak entrepreneurial culture, lack of investments in areas of high potential for employment generation, and a weak education system that doesn't support practical work-related skills. Drawing from the above perspective, promoting youth empowerment with a focus on self-employment opportunities and job creation through skills training becomes paramount in the quest to address the high unemployment in Zambia. The government of the Republic of Zambia and non-governmental organisations has taken youth empowerment a priority because of the realisation that the youth are the leaders of tomorrow. The understanding that investing in the youth and ensuring that the youth have access to the opportunities that many others often take for granted secures a better tomorrow.

clubs, skill.

Youth empowerment, therefore, becomes a conduit through which a better country is secured as empowerment through skills development has the potential to reduce crime and increase a skilled labour force which ultimately impacts positively on communities and the world as a whole. Kwame Nkrumah University Student Empowerment Programme (SEP) addresses/supplements government effort in Youth empowerment activities. SEP promotes artistic talents among the students at the French club, Art Society club, and research clubs. Talents Activities such as Music, Comedy, Drama, Poetry, dancing, and writing are done to ensure that when students graduate, they do not end up in the streets as they wait to be deployed by the government. The two-year-old programme which started in 2017 and non-funded has seen positive progress in empowering the students with survival skills.

Implementation and Methodologies

Through clubs formed within the university, a number of entrepreneurial and skills training activities are conducted in the Student Empowerment Programme (SEP). Once in a while, the clubs invite

local entrepreneurs and motivational speakers to conduct workshops to equip SEP members with skills that would make them survive the shocks of delayed deployment after graduation. There are a number of clubs that exist in the university whose student population is around 4,000. However, their agenda are not as those of SEP since their activities revolve around normal club 'hobby'. SEP, however, does not exist to take away the normal club 'hobby' as there is room created for that in the operations SEP. Student Empowerment Programme (SEP) activities are organised by SEP members in collaboration with their patrons. Each of the three clubs involved in SEP activities organises its own activities although there are times when the three clubs meet for a common goal such as fundraising activities. Resources raised from joint fundraising activities are shared equally among the three clubs.

In as far as funding is concerned to these clubs, membership subscription and fundraising ventures such as car wash within the university, targeting members of staff are the major sources of funding to these clubs. Membership subscription of K1000 Zambian currency is done on termly basis while carwash fundraising activities are done fortnightly. The university, on

request, once in a while comes in to provide transport for SEP members when they carry out activities outside campus. Adequate funding to SEP would make it expand its operations and activities to enable the students develop the skills that would make them self-reliant after graduating.

The following clubs demonstrate the activities embedded therein:

French Club

This club has a total number of 30 active student members and out of this number, five (5) students representing 16.6% of the total number have been successful in earning income as a result of this programme.



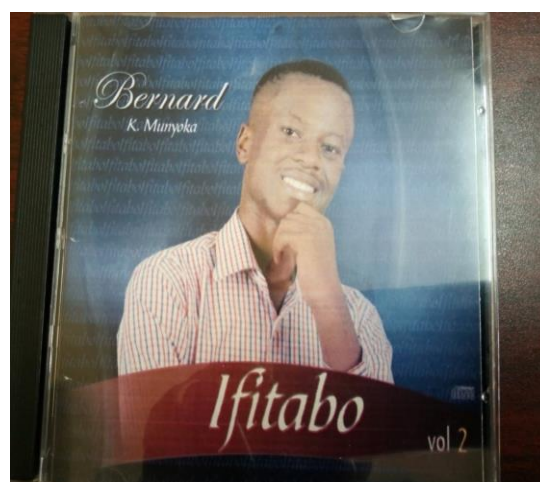
SEP members at Alliance France in Lusaka, after a music performance (2017)

In this club, there are a number of student empowerment activities that are conducted

on Thursdays during the week. These include talent promotion from the perspective of interpretation and translation. SEP members are taught translation and Interpretation skills to enable them earn a living out of the skills learned. They are trained in translating English into French and vice-versa. One Fourth Year student by the name of AgnessMubanga is a living example of the results of the empowerment products of SEP. In 2017, she was called to interpret in Lusaka at a Tourism International Conference. She was paid good money for that interpretation. She was able to do a good job because the club has nurtured her well in the field of interpretation and translation. This is an indication that SEP seeks to create employment opportunities for the students who will have taken translation/interpretation seriously.

Not only that, but the French club also promotes the students in singing not only in English but also in local languages. A number of students have been grounded in song composition, writing, and production and performance. SEP also develops partnerships between industry (music) and training institutions will help keep up with changing market needs. Through SEP members' attachments/collaborative activities to established musicians, the

project aims to provide more and better quality performances/production for the youth (students). For instance, a Second-year student by the name of Kalenga Bernard had his music album launched on 2nd June 2019 at Kwame Nkrumah University. His album has so far sold a number of copies and he has made money and earning a living out of it. The thriving music industry in Zambia offers job opportunities and lucrative career options.



Second Music Album by Bernard K. Munyoka, current Student president of French Club

Further, SEP members are also taught how to write poems through creative writing activities the programme has designed for them. This has encouraged many of the SEP students to embrace poetry as not only a means of purging of emotions but also as

a channel of minting money for their survival. SEP members are now able to compose quality poems which they perform before audiences who pay them. This approach has groomed writers who set to go out and impact on society and their own lives.

The club has also concentrated on sectors that have the largest potential for employment creation, such as the film industry, Drama and comedy. The thriving film industry in Zambia that promotes local content through soap Operas and comedy shows offer job opportunities and lucrative career options. For instance, William, a drama club member of SEP is already featuring in one of the popular Zambian soap Opera while the other two club members are making headlines in comedy. SEP is doing enough to empower them to be able to earn a living even when job recruitment delays. Already, they are making money within the university through a programme dubbed 'Kwame Nkrumah Comedy Show Frenzy' that is done every Friday evening. Fellow students and members of staff pay to attend the comedy shows.

Art Society Club

SEP also considers Art as a potential money spinner and as such, the club

embarked on empowering the students with artistic skills that would make students survive the shock waves of delayed deployment. The club has specifically concentrated on empowering students with fine art skills. Fine art students are connected to art galleries Lechwe Art Gallery in Lusaka for possible market penetration by participating in art gallery activities. Hands-on practical and local competitions in the university encourage them to perfect their works. So far, some fine art students have started making money out of it. For instance, William, a fourth-year student whose drawing is shown below is making a living out of fine art even before he graduates.



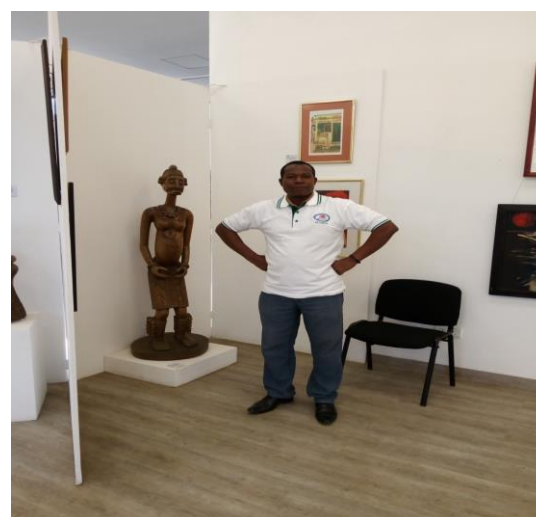
money for its operations. For instance, when the university turned 50 years of its existence, one member of the club in collaboration with the patron designed a Golden Jubilee Logo while earlier another art club member was hired to design the current University Logo and they earned good amount for the job well done as can be seen below:



Kwame Nkrumah University Golden Jubilee Logo designed by MamadouKhalis (SEP member) and Current Logo for Kwame Nkrumah University, designed by a SEP member.

Artistic Portraits by William, a member of SEP

In this club, there 15 club members who are actively involved in fine art and 5 (33%) of these have been successful in earning some income as a result of SEP. They have been making money by getting tenders from members of staff and from within the community of Kabwe town. The university also hires them to print banners for various activities undertaken by the institution. In the end, the club earns



*Jive Lubbungu At the Lechwe Art Gallery
in Lusaka during the exposure of the SEP
members (May 2019)*

Research Club

This club has 10 members who are actively involved in research activities. The focus of this club is to supplement research activities that are course-oriented so that students acquire research skills and have excellent understanding of research. The club goes an extra mile to impart research skills to SEP members through various activities such as in-house research workshops conducted by their patrons as well as by people invited from outside the university. The research club members are exposed to field research activities through members of staff undertaking individual researches. SEP members are used as research assistants during the field work and are given the money for the work done. The money earned from such activities is channeled into the club coffers for the operations of the club. The success story in this club is almost 100% because all research club members are involved in generating money for the club and as individuals since they usually engaged as research assistants. As such, they have acquired research skills that help them carry out research with various

Organisations and individuals outside and within the university.



Members of the Research Club after a live programme broadcast on KNC TV station in Kabwe. March 2019.

The Research Club has been involved in a number of activities bordering of Research and dissemination of research findings through platforms like the Television, Radio, and Road shows. In March 2019, the SEP members of the research club did research on reproductive health whose findings were shared with young people on KNC TV live broadcast. Club members are also carrying out research on environmental issues and other issues that affect the youth.

Monitoring Mechanisms

SEP has put in place a monitoring mechanism which ensures that the students are closely monitored on their progress on

their various empowerment activities. The clubs meet once per week to review the progress of each student's projects. Three Lecturers involved are assigned Five to eight students to monitor their progress form from time to time. And progress reports are given to the lead patron of the clubs before the meeting, where reviews are done on each project and possible suggestions on improvements where necessary are given. Club members' projects are also subjected to experts who assess them and offer guidance. As for SEP members who have graduated, the clubs have put in place mechanisms that ensure that they remain active members of the clubs as ex-officials who, from time to time attend the club meetings in the university. For those that are doing very well and have established a firm ground in their project/talent, they are coopted into the mentorship programme to assist the lecturers monitor and mentor the upcoming SEP members. This approach has helped make those who have graduated remain on the hook of the Student Empowerment Programme as they feel part of the family.

Conclusion

The paper has highlighted the Student Empowerment Programme activities the clubs are undertaking. The clubs, through various activities, are critical in shaping the [ZAPUC International Conference, 7-9 June 2023, Livingstone](#)

students to be change agents by gaining the skills to impact their own lives and lives of other individuals, Organisations, and communities once they are out of the university. Various career programmes are conducted through in-house workshops and the programme so far seems to gain ground. The paper has also shown how SEP provides a range of optional entrepreneurial and skills training activities to students through four on-campus clubs in Art, Students Research, Drama and French Club. The aim of these activities is to develop self-employment, or alternative employment options for students by developing their existing talents and skills.

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