



Soft Skills and Career Development (SCAD)

Empowering Rwanda Polytechnic graduates with with employability skills

Promising Practice

Implemented by: Rwanda Polytechnic

Where: Rwanda

Status: Ongoing, started in September 2021

Summary: The Soft Skills and Career Development (SCAD) training programme is designed to support graduates of Rwanda Polytechnic with soft skills for employability. The initiative comprises training for trainers and for students, as well as the organization of annual career fairs. It operates across the eight colleges of Rwanda Polytechnic.

Overview

Rwanda Polytechnic's Soft Skills and Career Development (SCAD) programme is designed to improve graduate readiness for employment: ensuring graduates are as workplace proficient as they are technically skilled. It has progressively grown through a phased implementation across Rwanda Polytechnic's eight colleges. The SCAD programme provides all students with workplace skills training and supports trainers in updating their pedagogical approach with the aim to integrate soft skills into their teaching.

Description

The SCAD initiative comprises training programmes for trainers and students.

- **Training for Trainers:** Trainers are helped to integrate updated teaching skills into their courses through training sessions on questioning strategies, group facilitation and grading methods. They are coached in active learning techniques enabling them to integrate soft-skills training into their courses.
- **Students receive employability training** in four main areas. These are:
 - i. **Professionalism:** training in time and task management, integrity, teamwork, taking initiative, problem-solving, giving and receiving feedback and developing a mindset of continuous improvement.
 - ii. **Communication skills:** preparing effective verbal and written communication with various counterparts. Topics covered are how to write professional emails, cover letters and curriculum vitae together with public speaking and interview skills.
 - iii. **Digital literacy** utilising computer and general IT skills to complete tasks efficiently and to manage workplace projects.
 - iv. **Career services** providing support for job search, job applications, personal presentation, understanding the realities of the job market and workplace behaviours.

These skills and support services are delivered through training, mentorship, alumni networks and connections with industry professionals. Trainees receive information from guest speakers and company visits, as well as through career fairs. Students gain access and exposure to real world employers and workplaces. As the programme has expanded beyond graduating students, new students participate in the SCAD Foundation Programme as part of early career readiness preparation.

The SCAD programme was initiated at Rwanda Polytechnic in 2021 in collaboration with Kepler-Kigali College. It was piloted at the Polytechnic's Gishari

College and progressively extended to the other seven colleges in 2023 and 2024 through a partnership with the Education Collaborative (a consortium of higher education institutions in Africa initiated by Ashesi University in Ghana). Kepler provided training together with financial and technical support for the initiative and its implementation while the Education Collaborative financially supported the expansion of the programme including providing a platform for learning and exchange through the System Change for Employability programme.

The 2021 SCAD programme pilot at Rwanda Polytechnic's Gishari College provided training for nineteen lecturers in the Training of Trainers (ToT) course and 146 students received employability training. In 2023, the programme was expanded to two other colleges of Rwanda Polytechnic (Kigali and Tumba) with a larger number of training modules, more employer involvement and the holding of career fairs. In 2024, the remaining five colleges (Karongi, Ngoma, Kitabi, Huye and Musanze) were included. Throughout the pilot, continuous feedback was collected from trainers and students, which was used to refine and adjust the training methods, learning materials and delivery approaches.

Following the pilot, the training was expanded to include a broader range of employability skills that included teamwork, communication, problem solving, and time management. The programme is implemented before students begin a mandatory seven weeks industrial attachment aimed at supporting their transition into the world of work and enhancing their chances of being retained by the host companies.

2,684 companies and industries are collaborating with Rwanda Polytechnic supporting academic programme development, workplace learning, and technology transfer. Among them are 103 signed MoUs and many active participants in the SCAD programme via showcasing at career fair; offering guest lectures; and providing mentorships and industrial placements. Employers consistently express strong appreciation



Fig 1.2. Photo: Job matching during the career fair at RP Musanze college, 2025

for SCAD graduates, noting their professionalism, adaptability, and readiness to perform tasks both during industrial attachment and in the workplace. The importance of introducing these 'soft' skills to trainees has been recognised during the evaluations of the SCAD programme by employers.

Objectives

At Rwanda Polytechnic, curricula frequently place a higher priority on 'hard' skills and interdisciplinary topics like gender, entrepreneurship, morals, and civic education than on 'soft' skills. In a tracer survey conducted by Rwanda Polytechnic on graduates' employability and employer satisfaction, graduate skills useful in the workplace were present yet weaknesses related to soft skills emerged, specifically communication skills, ability to work under pressure, negotiation skills and leadership skills. The SCAD initiative therefore addresses the critical skills gap and the mismatch between graduates' technical qualifications and their practical employability skills.

The SCAD training is designed to ensure graduates have:

- Employability skills such as communication, teamwork, time management and problem-solving skills.
- Understanding of behaviours required in a professional workplace.
- An opportunity to engage with employers during their training.

To deliver these objectives, trainers also receive training to improve their pedagogical skills and to integrate the development of these skills, attitudes and behaviours into their courses. Partnerships have been built with employers to include them in the SCAD programme and to engage them with students. The goal is to ensure that every Rwanda Polytechnic graduate is fully prepared for the job market.

Outcomes and impact

The outcomes of the SCAD initiative include:

1. Enhancing **students** with employability skills improving their career readiness, self-confidence and overall personal and professional growth.
2. Improved **faculty** collaboration ensuring employability skills have been integrated into all courses. Trained lecturers have incorporated communication skills into writing assignments, teamwork exercises and problem-solving activities.
3. Upgraded **career services** including career fairs, an alumni association, business incubation initiatives and increased employer engagement activities. Students can schedule individual appointments to receive personalised job recommendations and access career-relevant resources.

4. Development of **industry partnerships** with colleges building connections with local employers who support career fairs and offer internships and employment opportunities to students improving graduate employment rates.
5. Creation of an **alumni mentorship programme** with graduates mentoring students and sharing their experiences of entering and progressing in the labour market.
6. Establishment of a **guest speaker series** with industry experts who provide information and guidance on current job market trends, industry-specific skills needs and emerging career opportunities.

Taken together, the impact has been to ensure all graduate students have transferable employability skills to complement their technical expertise ensuring they are job ready.

294 trainers from across the Rwanda Polytechnic's eight colleges have completed the SCAD training of trainers' course. 4,340 graduates and 5,999 new Year 1 students have received SCAD training. 84.4% of SCAD graduating participants secured employment within nine months of graduating in 2024. Feedback from employers and students showed that communication, time management and professional ethics are the most highly applied soft skills by graduates in the workplace. Feedback from employers was positive, they consistently rate SCAD graduates highly in terms of communication and time management skills. Other positive behaviours such as honesty, integrity, proactiveness and capacity to receive and apply feedback were also more highly rated amongst SCAD graduates.

"I think the SCAD was really helpful for the students...they need to learn about the soft skills like how to conduct themselves, how to be professional."¹ - Teacher testimonial

"This training defines my ability to present myself and convince potential employers within a 60 second time frame."² - Student testimonial

"One of the skills I have learned from the SCAD programme is how to write the job application documents like resumes and cover letters."³ - Student testimonial

For the longer term, a stronger partnership between Rwanda Polytechnic's colleges and employers will be achieved through structured agreements.

1 Testimonial in the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nATPyfRkwm8>

2 Testimonial in the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hO4DG0NbVU>

3 Testimonial in the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nATPyfRkwm8>

Insights and challenges faced

Implementing the SCAD programme has not been without its challenges. Some trainers found it difficult to prioritize their participation due to multiple demands on their time. It was also not possible to train all trainers across all colleges. There is a variation in how capable trainers are to adjusting and changing their pedagogical approach. Not all students were motivated to engage in additional training.

To overcome these challenges, trained staff were encouraged to mentor their peers using practical demonstrations of what they had learned. A co-teaching, rotational model was introduced where two or more trainers were assigned a group of students to train. This was a particularly welcomed approach as it often meant that trainers were not alone when they were integrating new skills training for their students.

By working with trainers on their pedagogical skills, learning outcomes improved. Equipping trainers to utilize interactive teaching strategies ensured all students were participating in discussions and that regular formative assessment check-ins were made before moving on to new concepts. Trainers introduced small group

activities assigning roles to students to achieve a timebound task and provided constructive and actionable feedback to help students to reflect, improve and gain confidence. Each of these teaching tools increased student engagement, accountability, teamwork and communication skills – all of which are important to function effectively in a workplace.

To encourage student motivation, a pre-test is conducted to stream them into groups which match their existing proficiency and competency level.

Conclusions and next steps

The SCAD programme will continue and be further expanded. This will be achieved through:

- Institutionalizing it into the official Rwanda Polytechnic workload policy as well as both teaching and learning schedules.
- Organizing more SCAD training of trainer courses to increase the number of qualified trainers across the eight colleges.
- Introducing digital and blended delivery options to support remote access and cross-college cooperation.

Learn more

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To learn more about SCAD training approach, see:

<https://educationcollab.ashesi.edu.gh/career-employability/>

To learn more about Rwanda polytechnic, see:

<https://www.rp.ac.rw>

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