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New online tool helps users learn an African language

Student start-up, Vambo Academy, makes African indigenous language learning fun and interactive – at the click of a button users will be well on their way to achieving their language development goals.

The brains behind this innovative idea, Chido Dzinotywei, is a Master of Commerce student at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB). Dzinotywei established her business with one goal in mind: to make learning African languages and cultures accessible online.

"Africa is the fastest growing and second largest continent in the world. Sadly, African knowledge resources are difficult to source. At Vambo Academy we aim to bridge that gap and make learning fun," she said.

Vambo Academy is an educational technology (EdTech) platform that provides digital resources to support language learning and translation. In addition to teaching indigenous languages, the platform also offers a dictionary service, as well as blog posts and podcasts on relevant cultural topics. Students have the opportunity to learn a new language in one of two ways: using the self-learning tool and learning at their own pace, or they have the option of booking a virtual session with an experienced tutor for a one-on-one, personalised learning experience.

The objective of the business is to "democratise access to indigenous language learning and champion the preservation of indigenous languages and cultures for future generations. We want to create a space where the diversity and richness of indigenous cultures is recognised and celebrated. We believe that language is key to achieving inclusion in our societies," said Dzinotywei.

When creating the Vamba Academy, Dzinotywei shared that her inspiration was two-part. "Firstly, we acknowledge that education is the backbone of society. Yet, there remains large gaps when it comes to access to education on the continent, and language is one of the main barriers preventing students from pursuing their dreams. The platform was developed to provide students with the necessary resources to learn an indigenous language, and to improve their skill set.

“Secondly, we really want to preserve our heritage; so many African languages and their heritage aspects are fizzling out. None of us should ever stop learning about our culture and heritage because knowing where we come from is important. This why we chose to call ourselves Vambo, which means “origin” in ChiShona.”

According to Dzinotywei “the one skill set Africans have mastered is their mother tongue. With this venture we hope to create opportunities for talented individuals like writers, poets, teachers and translators, and to be that stepping stone as they venture out into the world. We hope to demonstrate that African solutions backed by technology can make a difference in societies.”

Story by Niémah Davids

[Contact Vambo Academy for more information.](#)



Chido Dzinotywei.

Photo: Supplied

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