

ABSTRACT

VarsityBridge: An Intelligent Opportunity Matching and Skills Development Platform for Work-Integrated Learning in Zimbabwe

University students in Zimbabwe face persistent challenges in accessing structured pathways to internships, volunteer work, and entry-level employment, leading to a gap between academic learning and workplace readiness. At the same time, companies struggle to efficiently identify and engage early-stage talent with relevant skills, motivation, and exposure to real-world work environments. This paper presents VarsityBridge, an intelligent opportunity matching and skills development platform designed to bridge the gap between education and employment by enabling work-integrated learning. The system extends an existing experience-sharing platform, VarsityBlog (<https://varsityblog.org>), which allows students and professionals to publish academic and career-related stories. VarsityBridge builds upon this foundation by introducing a structured ecosystem that connects students and employers through data-driven opportunity matching and skills alignment. The platform consists of three core components: (1) an opportunity discovery and matching engine that connects students to internships, volunteer roles, and entry-level jobs based on skills, interests, and profile data; (2) a skills development module that provides guided learning pathways aligned to industry needs; and (3) an employer access layer that enables companies to discover, evaluate, and engage potential talent earlier through volunteer and internship pipelines. By facilitating two-way value exchange between students and employers, VarsityBridge promotes a structured talent pipeline, improves employability outcomes, and supports workforce development in Zimbabwe's evolving digital economy.