

Young African Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni turn English, leadership skills into global opportunities

By Tiffany Gonzalez, ASU News
August 13, 2026

Representing a new generation of African leaders, 50 Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni from [Université d'Abomey-Calavi](#), a French-speaking university in Benin, have completed 10 months of online intensive English language instruction through [ASU Global Launch](#).

Forty-two participants from the cohort then traveled to [Ashesi University](#) in Ghana for a three-week language and entrepreneurship immersion experience, held from July 13 through Aug. 1, where they applied their new language skills in academic, professional and cultural settings.

The experience was part of [Phase III](#) of the [Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at ASU](#), which is designed to strengthen the cohort's ability to communicate and collaborate across cultures while expanding access to graduate education, research, entrepreneurship and international professional opportunities.

Students in the cohort come from a range of fields — including education, entrepreneurship, technology, public service and community development.

One of the program's highlights included a 10-minute business pitch where participants worked in groups to identify unmet needs in their communities and develop innovative, resourceful solutions to address them. Four teams were selected to present their ideas to a panel of outside judges.

"Effective leadership depends on communication. To inspire others, build trust, negotiate and advocate for your ideas, you need to be able to communicate clearly and confidently," said [Alissa](#)

[Nostas](#), senior global educator with ASU Global Launch and one of two facilitators of the English Language Pathway in Ghana.

Accompanying Nostas was [Joshua McIver](#), assistant instructional professional with ASU Global Launch, who helped design and deliver the program.

“Language learning in a classroom has its limits,” Nostas said, “but when you are living in the language, working in the language, pitching ideas to professionals in the language, and building friendships across cultures in the language, real growth happens.”

For Sedami Belynda Amida Sohoun, a participant with a bachelor’s degree in natural resources management from Université d’Abomey-Calavi, presenting her pitch was a defining moment of the program.

“My favorite moment was presenting my pitch during the immersion program,” Amida said. “It was an intense moment for me, standing in front of everyone and speaking in English about my ideas, but it pushed me to believe more in myself and in what I can achieve.”

For Amida, that confidence reflected one of the program’s most significant outcomes: becoming more comfortable communicating in English in academic and professional settings.

“At the beginning, I was nervous to speak English and I depended a lot on French to understand things,” Amida said. “By the end of the program, I felt much more confident. The teachers and staff were patient and encouraging, and that support helped me grow, not just in English, but also in how I see myself as a leader.”

The immersion program also gave participants a firsthand look at how organizations in Ghana are using business and community-based approaches to address local challenges and create economic opportunities.

During a visit to [fairafric](#), a Ghanaian chocolate company, participants learned about a business model that sources cocoa directly from local farmers, employs people from surrounding communities and operates a school where young people can learn to make chocolate.

“What made it so impactful was the business model,” Nostas said. “For our participants, who were themselves developing business ideas aimed at improving their own communities in Benin, seeing this model in action was deeply inspiring.”

The English Learning Pathway reflects the shared focus of ASU and the [Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program](#) on preparing young leaders to create change in their communities.

“Partnerships like this demonstrate what is possible when higher education institutions build upon one another’s strengths, resources and expertise around a shared commitment to students,” said [Mina Ahmad](#), senior director of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at ASU.

“By connecting ASU, Université d’Abomey-Calavi and Ashesi University, we are creating opportunities that extend far beyond a single classroom or campus,” she said. “Students gain the skills needed to contribute to their communities, the institutions involved strengthen their ability to serve students in new ways, and the global connections create lasting value for Arizona by bringing new perspectives, talent and partnerships into our state.”

This cohort of Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni from Université d'Abomey-Calavi is the first to complete the full English Learning Pathway.

Building on the program's success, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at ASU plans to expand the English Learning Pathway this fall through partnerships with [University of Gaston-Berger in Senegal](#) and the University of Oxford's [Refugee-Led Research Hub](#), an organization that works with refugee students across Africa.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni from Université d'Abomey-Calavi in Benin gather at Ashesi University in Berekuso, Ghana, during a three-week English immersion and professional development program hosted through ASU Global Launch. Participants hold ASU certificates and the university flag in celebration of their program completion. Photo courtesy of ASU Global Launch

Gallery



Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni pose with the “Forks Up” symbol outside an event at Ashesi University in Berekuso, Ghana.



Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni gather outside Ashesi University in Berekuso, Ghana, during the program.



Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni gather in a courtyard at Ashesi University in Berekuso, Ghana, during the program.



Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni visit with fairafric, a Ghanaian chocolate company and gather among cocoa plants in Ghana.



Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni gather with fairafric representatives in a courtyard in Ghana during a program visit.



Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni participate in a classroom session at Ashesi University in Berekuso, Ghana.

Gallery



Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni participate in a classroom session with Alissa Nostas, senior global educator with ASU Global Launch, and Joshua McIver, assistant instructional professional with ASU Global Launch, at Ashesi University in Berekuso, Ghana.



Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni participate in a classroom session with Alissa Nostas, senior global educator with ASU Global Launch, and Joshua McIver, assistant instructional professional with ASU Global Launch, at Ashesi University in Berekuso, Ghana.



ASU Global Launch facilitators Alissa Nostas, senior global educator, and Joshua McIver, assistant instructional professional, pose with a Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumnus holding a certificate of completion at Ashesi University in Berekuso, Ghana.



A Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumnus holds a certificate of completion at Ashesi University in Berekuso, Ghana.



A Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumnus holds a certificate of completion at Ashesi University in Berekuso, Ghana.