

# Zomila is tackling the South African education system

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Zomila, a mobile platform, is made up of a team of young engineers who are tackling the massive issue of guiding students in their after school careers.



Zomila co-founders: Carla Wilby, CTO and Jasanth Moodley, COO

We chat to Jasanth Moodley, founder of [Zomila](#), the mobile platform that aims to unlock a student's full potential with access to bursaries, articles and tips, universities, as well as a guide for students in their after school careers

## ■ Can you tell us a bit about Zomila?

In a nutshell, Zomila is a platform that provides free online career guidance to high school students and then links them to university and funding opportunities that suit their strengths. We use machine learning and personality assessments to help students make better decisions.

Zomila also helps corporates simplify and magnify their bursary processes through our online portal where they can easily create and manage applications for their bursary programme. We enable them to make data-driven decisions to find students that are right for them.

The majority of youth don't have the resources to make informed career decisions that suit their interests and abilities, resulting in dropouts and wasted potential.

In a failing education system, it is a reality that school marks aren't a good measure of aptitude and don't encourage or stimulate development. Youth graduate from high school face overwhelming and expensive career decisions - and many are unaware of all the available university and funding opportunities out there.

Thirty percent of students who enter university in South Africa graduate on time. In fact, only half of university students graduate at all. The situation is far worse for vocational training and technical colleges.

These factors contribute to what is today a cycle of high university dropout rates and high employee turnover rates, not to mention the massive youth unemployment levels.

Zomila attempts to solve all three issues.

On the other side of the coin, bursary providers struggle to access diverse candidates from hard to reach places, as well as with inefficient bursary pipelines, poor bursary assessment.

### ■ ***When, how and why did you get started?***

We started Zomila because we have had firsthand experience of the challenges that students face when trying to pursue their careers and dreams (or even just understanding what those dreams are) - we wish that there had been more support for us when we started our career journeys.

We were all studying engineering, we had numerous interests and were struggling to find our true passion - to discover our paths in life. It was a problem we'd all faced throughout our lives, so we decided to try and solve it ourselves, noticing that the jump from high school to university or college or employment was where we could potentially make the biggest difference.



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Most South African students don't have the resources to make informed career decisions that suit their interests and abilities. Since the educational system is failing students, and many go without functioning schools, textbooks and teachers, it is the reality that school marks aren't a good measure of aptitude and don't encourage or stimulate development.

We believe that we live in a country and a continent where talent is equally distributed, but the opportunity is not. It is, therefore, our responsibility to create access to opportunity and empower talented youth everywhere.

### ■ ***What is the core function of Zomila***

The platform supports students in three ways:

- It helps them understand which opportunities exist for them to further their education after high school,
- Helps them understand which opportunities they might be best suited to exploring. It helps them find funding for those

opportunities, through scholarships or bursaries,

- It simplifies and provides guidance during the application process for those opportunities.

Using personality assessments gives us a solid, research-based grounding from which to make career recommendations and machine learning allow us to continuously improve the efficacy of those assessments over time. A unique personality profile is created for each student on the platform and fields of study are suggested based on this profile.

Students are then able to search through our database of funding opportunities and filter them based on a number of requirements. Funding opportunities are also recommended based on the students' personality profiles.

For funding and opportunities from partner organisations, students are able to apply directly through the Zomila Learning platform, with our Central Bursary Application form. This saves students time from filling out the same information for multiple applications and multiple companies. Ancillary resources are provided for students to prepare for university, including practice quizzes for the National Benchmark Tests, and tips on interviews and CV writing.

### ▣ ***What are some of the obstacles you've had to overcome since starting out?***

Entrepreneurship is a never-ending list of challenges, which is both terrifying and exciting.

One of the biggest, probably being not knowing what to do. There's no one to tell you what to do so you have to figure it out. You can ask for advice but no one can tell you what to do.

During difficult times your employees are looking to you to figure it out. Starting a company straight out of university is going straight into the deep end. University hasn't really prepared you for this, so you have to learn fast otherwise your company will die. The progress of the company is reliant on you which is a lot of pressure and takes its toll.

### ▣ ***What advice would you give to other aspiring entrepreneurs?***

Be clear about the problem you are solving to make sure you are providing value. Don't spend too much time and money developing, launch early to get user feedback. Get as much feedback from your users as early as possible. This is the only way you will be able to iterate and get closer to product-market fit. Be confident in yourself and your abilities. Back yourself but also be aware of your weaknesses and humble enough to ask for help.

### ▣ ***What has been your proudest achievements thus far?***

Launched the MVP of the student platform in May 2018. Graduated from Injini Incubator. Developed machine learning personality assessment. Selected for Mandela Day 67 Startups award 2018. Established partnerships to reach over 150,000 South African youth. In August 2018, we also successfully raised angel funding.



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We successfully piloted a client bursary management portal with a social impact initiative programme, GRRRRRLCamp. We placed second in the Global EdTech Startup Awards semi-final (representing SA in London in March 2019). Selected for the 3rd cohort of the Google Launchpad Africa Accelerator (in April 2019). Having students message us telling us how much we've helped them.

### ▣ ***What does the future of entrepreneurship look like to you?***

As technology becomes more commonplace, the resources will become available for people to come together to build

solutions for problems in their communities and society. Startups will go from the 'fad' they are now, to the process of how solutions are developed in the changing the industrialised world.

■ ***You recently took part Google's first regionally-based startup accelerator program, Launchpad Accelerator Africa. How has this benefitted Zomila and what was the biggest highlight?***

The Launchpad has been a phenomenal experience, we travelled to Nigeria and Kenya, meeting other startups doing groundbreaking work in healthcare tech, fintech etc. It's an inspiring journey and has opened the door to the rest of Africa for us. The company has benefitted tremendously from the help of the mentor network within the program. They were able to give us invaluable insight specific to the African context.

■ ***What is the importance of startup accelerator/incubator programmes?***

They help startups get off the ground - which is one of the hardest things, especially for young entrepreneurs who are unfamiliar with what it takes to run a company. They help companies create a solid foundation in sales, marketing, product development etc. from which to grow.

■ ***What would you like to see changed in the South African startup landscape?***

Collaboration with the corporate sector. Big companies are slower to innovate, and in this economy, it is essential for companies to keep up - investing in new solutions.

There is a large gap in the funding market for seed funding. Companies struggle to move from angel/pre-seed to series. There needs to be more seed funding, risk capital, available to promising early-stage companies to iterate and establish themselves.

■ ***What do you believe are the traits an entrepreneur needs in order to succeed?***

Resilience, curiosity, determination, resourcefulness

■ ***Tell us about your biggest struggles as entrepreneurs, as well as some major highlights.***

The highlights include being able to travel, expenses paid for, to pitch your company. Being able to network and meet incredible people doing meaningful work from all over the world who I would otherwise have never met. Working with students and having them tell us how much we've helped them.

In terms of lowlights, it's a lonely journey, struggling with mental health and burnout. Going through periods of difficult cash flow and having to sacrifice a salary in order to pay your team.

■ ***Why would you encourage someone to become an entrepreneur?***

It is a learning experience like no other. If you like to challenge yourself and learn in a fast-paced environment, then this is the best way to do so. It is also incredibly fulfilling.

■ ***Where would you like to see Zomila in the next five years?***

Established as a resource within schools across the country, partnering with established organisations so that the resources can help those who need them most. Moving towards helping African students study overseas.

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