



4TH NATIONAL ECONOMICS DEBATE

Meet Michael Awimbo, the 3rd and 4th KESA National Economics Debate Champion.

Profile statement

Michael Awimbo is an Economics and Statistics student at the University of Nairobi and the former Training Head of the University of Nairobi Debate Association. He is a versatile debater with extensive experience across topics including Economics, Politics, Philosophy, Ethics, Social Issues, and Global Affairs.

Michael has represented his university in numerous national and regional tournaments across Africa, including Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, India, and South Africa, gaining exposure to diverse adjudication styles and debate cultures, and consistently achieving top speaker positions, finalist placements, and championship titles. Beyond competing, he has also adjudicated and mentored younger debaters on strategic case framing, focusing on fact-based analysis and clarity on what the debate seeks to resolve.

Through debate, Michael has developed exceptional communication skills, analytical reasoning, and the ability to present well-researched facts, craft persuasive responses, and secure panel buy-in, making him a respected figure in the East African debating community. He has participated extensively in competitive debating across multiple circuits, with a strong record of both team and individual honours.

His achievements include winning the Zetech University Business, Economics, and Statistics Students Association debate, where he was also named Best Speaker, and emerging Champion at the 3rd and 4th KESA National Economics Debates. He placed 2nd Runner-up and Best Speaker in Policy Debates, and secured championship titles at the Athena Opens, Mbokodo 5 Opens, and the Seed Open Championship. He has also finished 1st Runner-up at major tournaments such as the KUDC Nairobi Regionals, Indaba 4 Opens, and the Kikapu Pro-Am.

Becoming a great debater

By Michael Awimbo

When you dive into unfamiliar waters, your first instinct is to retreat, to get out, dry yourself, and return to safety. My first encounter with competitive debate felt exactly like that. I had just completed high school, carrying the excitement and confidence of someone who believed life would continue rewarding effort as easily as it always had before.

I walked into Strathmore University for my first tournament bubbling with optimism, but the moment the first round began, I was humbled. The level of eloquence, structure, and coherence displayed by the speakers I met left me in awe. For the first time in my life, I was losing, and losing alarmingly. I felt ashamed and uncertain, as if the flair I once carried had suddenly deserted me, yet even in the discomfort, something in me refused to walk away.

While many people I started with quit almost immediately, I chose persistence. I turned myself into a project I called “Mission: Top the Tab,” devoting hours every night to understanding a wide range of subjects, economics, philosophy, religion, art, global affairs, anything that could help me grow. I consumed debates, lectures, and podcasts relentlessly, trying to catch up to the debaters I admired.

The journey felt like Sisyphus pushing his boulder uphill; except unlike Sisyphus, I was getting tired. I expected instant growth, but debate doesn’t reward impatience. It took a full year of nightly drills, often with debaters from West Africa, before I made my first-ever break. That breakthrough taught me something profound: **knowing debate content is only a drop in the ocean. Debate is also about strategy, audience adaptation, and judge preferences**, and to excel, I had to understand the circuits and tailor my delivery to what each adjudication culture valued. This required even more study, more practice, and more refinement.

My first finals came a year later, and my first championship took even longer, but once the wins began, they came in waves. My second attempt at the Zetech Economics Debates 2024, convened Zetech University Business, Economics, and Statistics Students Association in partnership with KESA, saw me crowned both Champion and Best Speaker, a feat I repeated in the third and fourth editions of KESA’s National Economics Debate Championships, marking the beginning of a new chapter in my debate identity.

When I meet my fellow young economists and debaters on the circuit today, I often recognise a familiar spark, the same raw energy and unrefined talent I once carried

into my first tournament. It reminds me that excellence is not born; it is built.

People often ask whether debate is “worth it,” especially since tournaments rarely offer monetary rewards. I always tell them that I may not have earned money, but I have gained something far greater. Debate has expanded my world beyond anything I imagined as a first-year student. I have made friends in Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, India, South Africa, and many other places. I have travelled across the continent representing my institution. My communication has evolved into deliberate eloquence, my thinking has sharpened, and my worldview has stretched in ways I never anticipated.

The KESA Debates have been the icing on the cake in the intersection between my debating career and my journey in economics. *Since my first attempt during the inaugural edition at Kabarak University, where, as a first-year student, I was knocked out at the semi-finals- to my second appearance in the 3rd edition, where I emerged Champion, and my recent run in the 4th edition, where I defended the title again, each experience has been transformative.*

These competitions have not only offered me the opportunity to demonstrate my debating ability but have also taught me how to communicate economic analysis and statistical reasoning in a way that is simple yet fully captures the nuances of economic thought. These are important lessons that will significantly shape my future career as a policy advisor.

I remain deeply grateful to the KESA team for consistently bringing together high-level economists who guide our discussions and provide industry-grounded insights. As I now enter my final academic year, I am confident that I am well-equipped to transition seamlessly into my career because of the experiences and exposure KESA has provided.

As a parting shot, I would strongly encourage my fellow young economists to take full advantage of the opportunities KESA provides through its forums, especially the National Economics Debates. These platforms will shape you, refine your thinking, and prepare you for the economic world far more than you may realise alone.

Looking back, I am grateful I stayed. I am grateful I stepped forward and showed up when opportunity was within my reach. My journey into the unknown did not just make me a better debater; it made me a better thinker, a better leader, a better economist, and a better human being. To anyone considering debate, I have only one message: do it, not because it is easy, but because it will transform you.