



AFRICA HUMAN CAPITAL HEADS OF STATE SUMMIT

Africa Human Capital Technical Briefs Series

Digital Skills to Accelerate Human Capital for Youth in Africa

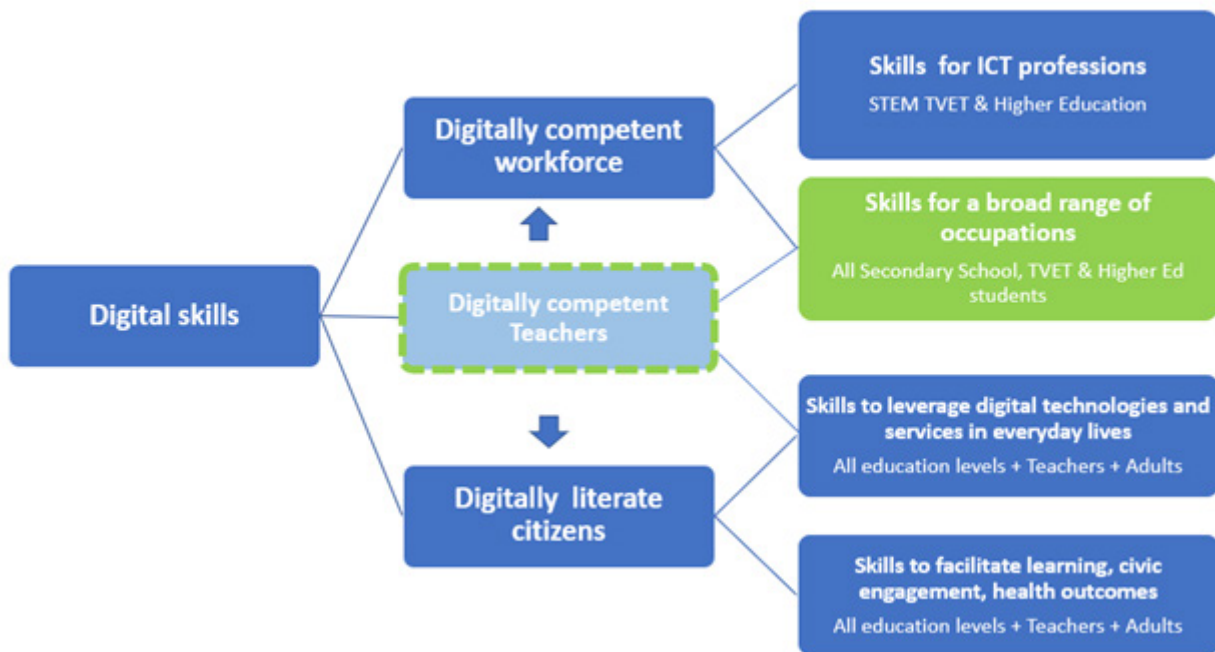
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KEY MESSAGES

Digital skills represent a continuum from basic to intermediate, advanced and highly specialized skills. Digital skills can also be distinguished according to functional needs: for citizens, for a wide range of occupations using digital technologies including teachers, and for the ICT professions. While Africa faces a

shortage at all levels, shortages of general digital skills at the **intermediate and advanced level** are expected to become more critical as economies grow which can impede the uptake and application of digital technologies ([WB, 2021](#)).

Framing and Characterizing Digital Skills



Source: World Bank EdTech Team

WHY IT MATTERS SPECIFICALLY SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Africa's digital and technology sectors are poised for growth. Sub-Saharan Africa's (SSA) internet penetration has increased tenfold since 2010, three times the rate of global expansion. According to projections, Africa's digital economy will reach US\$180 billion by 2025, and US\$712 billion by 2050. The continent has developed a vibrant innovation ecosystem in fields like mobile financial services, telemedicine, and e-commerce. COVID-19 accelerated

the move to digital activity, especially when governments and businesses championed mobile-based services as an alternative to face-to-face contact. Many of these changes are continuing. For example, the telemedicine market in the Middle East and Africa is estimated at more than US\$3.8 billion in 2022 and is expected to reach US\$6.4 billion by 2027 ([BCG, 2022](#)).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following four strategies are recommended for policymakers to keep in mind when implementing digital skills program in their countries:

- 1. Ensure an enabling condition including digital infrastructure and relevant policies:** Digital skills development requires devices and connectivity to be taught. Improve IT preparedness at the school level. An enabling condition goes beyond basic infrastructure. Review policies and regulatory frameworks relevant to the digital economy in areas specific to digital skills and develop strategies and action plans to guide and monitor the implementation.
- 2. Adopt a digital skills framework and conduct labor market analysis to gauge skills in demand:** Avoid reinventing the wheel by adapting and making references to the existing frameworks such as UNESCO's Digital Literacy Global Framework ([DLGF](#)) or the European Union's [DigComp](#). Based on the skills framework, conduct labor market analysis to capture specific skills in demand.
- 3. Update curriculum and assessment and integrate digital technology across subjects:** Review existing or planned programs against the framework. Identify gaps or areas for improvement and update curricula and assessment. Digital skills are practical skills and therefore require hands-on/task-based approaches. Also enhance and sustain digital skills by embedding them in rest of curriculum and across subjects.
- 4. Enhance use of technologies in teaching and learning and train teachers:** Expand and improve the use of technology for teaching and learning in classrooms. Invest in making sure teachers have the skills, knowledge, and competencies to deliver digital skills programs to students. Empower teachers to use digital skills to identify challenges and potential innovations in the classroom.

Relevant Data That Policymakers Must Have Handy

- **Current status of digital skills in Africa:** About 87% of African business leaders identify digital skills development as a priority area in need of further investment. In 2022, African countries scored between 1.8 and 5 on the Digital Skills Gap Index, which is below the global average of 6. Of the world's 20 countries with the weakest digital skills, 12 are in Africa, and only 11% of Africa's tertiary education graduates have formal digital training ([BCG, 2022](#)).
- **Digital skills and labor market demand:** Nearly 65% of individuals recruited for jobs at the African companies surveyed in 2019 require at least a basic level of digital skills. **By 2030, Africa will encompass about 625 million people who require digital skills.** More than 50% of all jobs in Kenya and 35-45% of jobs in Rwanda, Nigeria, and Côte d'Ivoire, for example, are expected to require digital skills supported by strong ICT infrastructure and supportive policy towards digital literacy ([IFC & WB, 2019](#)).
- **Digital skills and earnings:** Digital skills are positively linked with improved employment rates and increased earnings. For example, a study shows that in India, individuals who have digital skills earn 10.9% higher wages than those without digital skills (Liu & Mithas, 2016). Workers with advanced digital skills in fact [earn almost double](#) than those with a similar education who do not use digital skills at work. In developed countries, studies estimate a 3-10% increase in earnings linked with acquisition of basic digital skills.
- **Digital gender divide:** Only about 40% of the population in Africa has internet access, compared to the global average of 66% ([BCG, 2022](#)). In SSA, there is a gender digital divide of 43% regarding access to the internet. The cost of keeping women and girls offline is estimated to be around [US\\$1 trillion](#). It is imperative to provide digital skills to girls and women.

Definition

According to [UNESCO](#), digital skills is the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.



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