

CLOUD



> Connecting Leaders Online for
University Digital Transformation

Issue
17
2026.09

Women Leading Change in the Age of AI

- Her Leadership, Our Future
- **Women Leading Change in Africa:**
Stories from Eight Countries
- New Knowledge on
Higher Education's Digital
Transformation



unesco

CLOUD - Connecting Leaders Online for University Digital Transformation

 www.ichei.org
 [UNESCO-ICHEI](#)
 [unescoichei](#)
 [UNESCO-ICHEI](#)



CLOUD is an original quarterly magazine guided by UNESCO-ICHEI's mission to advance the digital transformation of higher education in developing countries. It presents a multi-perspective view of global developments and innovative practices, from digital transformation strategies to exemplary institutional cases, offering a visually engaging and accessible resource for higher-education innovation. "CLOUD" symbolises "connecting leaders online for university digital transformation". Published both in print and online, it provides an open, inclusive platform for information exchange among higher-education practitioners worldwide. As a two-way window linking Shenzhen with the world, the magazine is available in all six official languages of the United Nations.

Chief of Editorial Board: SHEN Xiaoli

Editorial Board: BI Xiaohan, PAN Feng, SIT Fung, SU Rui, CAO Zian, XU Mingshun

Editor-in-Chief: WANG Yuting, SU Rui

Content Assistants/ Interns: DU Jiaqi, Joseph Lee

Translation: DU Jiaqi

Design and Layout Coordination: SHI Ziai

Cover Design: Abdul Malik Amirullah

UNESCO-ICHEI works with global partners in the knowledge production and communication of **CLOUD** without any commercial purpose. **CLOUD** is committed to building a global knowledge community and providing original knowledge production and possibilities for the digital transformation of global higher education. During the process of knowledge production, communication, and sharing, UNESCO-ICHEI hereby makes the following declarations regarding the contents of **CLOUD**:

1. The intellectual property rights of this publication belong to UNESCO-ICHEI, and the source must be acknowledged if the content of this publication is cited.
2. The designations employed in this publication and the presentation of relevant materials (including maps) do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO-ICHEI concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or areas of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The term 'country' as used in this publication also refers to, as appropriate, territories or areas.
3. Articles in this publication express the opinions and research outcomes of the authors and the editing team and do not represent the opinions of UNESCO-ICHEI. The editing team has made its best effort to ensure the accuracy of the data and assumes no liability or responsibility for any consequences of their use.

Languages: **CLOUD** is available in six official languages of UNESCO (Chinese, English, French, Arabic, Russian and Spanish).

Competent Authority: International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO (Shenzhen, China)

Organizer: Knowledge Production and Communications Centre, International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO (Shenzhen, China)

Information and copyrights: © UNESCO-ICHEI

The International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO (Shenzhen, China) is a UNESCO Category 2 Centre jointly established by UNESCO and the Shenzhen Municipal People's Government. The establishment of UNESCO-ICHEI was approved by the 38th session of the UNESCO General Conference on 13 November 2015, and it was officially inaugurated on 8 June 2016. On 18 May 2023, during the 216th session of the UNESCO Executive Board, the Executive Board formally announced the renewal of UNESCO-ICHEI's designation as a UNESCO Category 2 Centre, marking the beginning of a new eight-year phase of development.

Tel.: 0755-88010925

E-mail: office@ichei.org

Address: No. 1088, Xueyuan Rd., Xili, Nanshan District, Shenzhen, Guangdong, China, 518055



| Participants at the 2024 High-Level Policy Dialogue in Africa on
Operationalising Strategies for Quality Higher Education in the AI Era,
held in Dakar, Senegal



CONTENT



05



27



31



14



38



FOCUS

- 02** **Her Leadership, Our Future:**
Gender Perspectives in
Higher Education's Digital
Transformation

- 12** **From Access to Agency:**
Ain Shams University
Advances Women's Digital
Leadership

- 16** **Featuring Ethiopia's
Experience in Advancing
Women's Leadership
in Higher Education
Institutions**

- 18** **Ahmadu Bello University:**
Building Women's Confidence
in AI Through Practical
Learning and Community

- 22** **Mulungushi University:**
Zambia's Journey Towards
Inclusive AI Leadership in
Higher Education

- 25** **Building Women's
Leadership through
Learning, Networks
and Partnerships:**
The UCA Experience

- 27** **Bridging the Divide:**
Empowering Ghanaian
Female Educational
Leaders in the
Intelligence Era

- 31** **Makerere's Leadership
Experience:** Initiatives,
Barriers and AI Hopes
for the Future

- 33** **From Readiness to
Momentum:** Women
Leading AI Change at
INP-HB



WIDE ANGLE

- 38** **The Future of Higher
Education in the Global
South**

- 43** **IIOE Development Report:
A Notebook of Action**

- 47** **Consensus of the
International Institute of
Online Education (IIOE)
Ecosystem Partners**



FRONTIER

- 52** **Programme Updates**

- 56** **Knowledge Sharing**



Shafika Isaacs

Director a.i., UNESCO IITE;
Chief of Section, Technology
and AI in Education, Future
of Learning and Innovation
Division, UNESCO

Gender-Responsive AI Transformation in Higher Education

The rise of artificial intelligence is reshaping higher education at unprecedented speed, yet this transformation is far from gender-neutral. We recognise a practical predicament: the AI divide is primarily a gender divide. Women remain four times less likely to code than men, and thirteen times less likely to file a technology patent. In the worlds portrayed by AI, including emerging agentic systems, women are more often cast as assistants and caregivers than as leaders or drivers of change. Awareness raising and actions needs to be taken from leadership development to competency development.

UNESCO remains committed to working with all partners towards a gender-equitable transformation of AI in education. It is encouraging that many national AI strategies now make explicit reference to gender equality, and that higher education transformation features prominently in their approaches. Yet policy language alone is not enough. Genuine change should be translated into concrete practice. Gender-disaggregated public reporting should become standard in AI-related education and research programmes. Ethics modules addressing algorithmic bias and gender discrimination should be embedded in AI curricula, so that teaching itself becomes gender-transformative. Targeted funding and leadership pathways for women in AI should be established, including cross-institutional, cross-border mentorship and exchange networks.

This issue of *CLOUD* shows this substance taking shape. Across Africa's universities, women are turning access into practice: expanding AI literacy, sustaining peer learning, applying new knowledge in teaching and research, and carrying their voices into institutional and policy conversations. Training opens the door. What follows from access to practice and from participation to leadership, is harder, necessary work. We need more than powerful models. We need powerful commitment, and the patience to build what commitment requires. Technology takes its direction from those it is built to serve.

Women Leading Change is more than the name of a project. It reflects our aspiration for AI and education shaped by the participation of all. This is a journey towards more inclusive and gender-responsive digital transformation that we will continue to pursue.

Her Leadership, Our Future: Gender Perspectives in Higher Education's Digital Transformation



A gender perspective is an indispensable element of digital transformation in higher education. Over many years, UNESCO-ICHEI has integrated gender equality into project design and evaluation, platform development, curriculum creation, policy dialogue, and partnership collaboration. The *Women Leading Change in Africa* (WLCA) project represents a concentrated expression of this long-term commitment in the AI era. Co-initiated by UNESCO-ICHEI and UNESCO IITE, and relying on African HEIs, the project drives professional practice, leadership development, institutional support, and knowledge production by enhancing the digital and AI capabilities of professionals.

Gender Equality: At the Heart of Transformation

The world's first published computer algorithm was written by a woman. In 1843, while translating a paper on Charles Babbage's "Analytical Engine", British mathematician Ada Lovelace set out a complete method for

calculating Bernoulli numbers. It is often called the first computer program. She also dared to imagine that the machine might one day do more than crunch numbers: that it might compose music, or create. That vision arrived more than a century before the term "artificial intelligence" was even coined.

Two hundred years on, AI is indeed doing



This imbalance extends to lecture theatres, laboratories, and administrative offices in universities worldwide. While AI is reshaping teaching, knowledge production, university resource allocation, and decision-making, in many regions, women still face barriers to entering certain disciplines, securing opportunities for academic development, and advancing to senior leadership positions. Social norms and gender stereotypes also hinder their participation in decision-making, access to professional support, and ability to exercise leadership. In the AI era, these existing obstacles are further compounded by a new digital divide. Engaging with the AI transition requires fresh knowledge, skills, and professional capabilities; however, if women are under-represented in data generation, technology R&D, curriculum design, and policy formulation, systems will fail to

far more than arithmetic, yet women remain strikingly scarce at the frontier of this change. According to 2024 UNESCO data, women make up only around 12% of AI researchers worldwide, and roughly 20% of technical roles at major machine-learning companies.[1]

reflect their experiences and will be far more likely to perpetuate existing biases.

Higher education cannot afford to look away. Universities do more than use technology. They train the next generation of educators, researchers, engineers, administrators and public decision-makers. A responsible digital and AI transformation in higher education needs women as practitioners of educational innovation, participants in technology governance, and drivers of institutional change.

Gender inclusion, then, is not an afterthought in building an equitable, inclusive and sustainable digital future, but central to it. And everyone stands to gain, not only women: fuller, more balanced participation tends to bring higher productivity, and stronger innovation, inclusion and social cohesion.

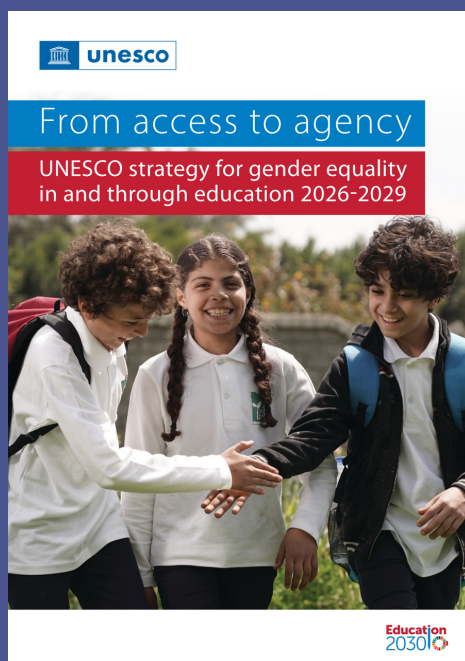
“

The digital transformation we are experiencing is not gender-neutral.

”

Gender equality is one of UNESCO's two global priorities.[2] *UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2026-2029* speaks of moving "from access to agency"[3] — education, in this view, should give every learner not just equal rights and opportunities, but the power to shape their own lives and futures.

That same thinking runs through its recent work on AI governance and digital skills. *Women for Ethical AI (W4EAI)*, launched in 2024, brings together experts from across disciplines to help design AI systems that are gender-equal and in line with the *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*, while pushing gender onto the agenda of AI governance more broadly. Across the regions, UNESCO also runs partnership projects that bring relevant, inclusive and transformative digital skills to women and girls worldwide.



| *From access to agency: UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2026-2029*

UNESCO-ICHEI's Long-Term Commitment and Practice

As a UNESCO Category 2 Centre, weaving gender equality into the digital transformation of higher education is a long-standing institutional commitment for UNESCO-ICHEI — one written into its very mission. Quality, equity and access have always sat at the heart of what it considers digital transformation to be about. Among the six missions of its flagship initiative, the International Institute of Online Education (IIOE), is one that speaks directly to this: to empower women and marginalised communities with greater access to quality higher education.

Project Design and Implementation

A principle only shapes practice once it enters project design, resource allocation and evaluation criteria. In 2016, UNESCO launched the UNESCO-Shenzhen Funds-in-Trust (UNESCO-SFIT) project to strengthen quality assurance in African higher education, with ICHEI commissioned by the Shenzhen Municipal Government to help design, coordinate and oversee it. Guided by a commitment to gender equality and a people-centred approach, the project kept women's participation and empowerment in view throughout — gender was factored into both participant selection and activity design for its quality-assurance capacity-building work.

As digital initiatives expanded, gender-disaggregated indicators were incorporated into project monitoring and evaluation. In the 2022–2023 IIOE Pilot Projects, both the number and



Faculty capacity-building training at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, under the UNESCO-SFIT Project in Asia

proportion of women taking part in professional development were key performance measures. This encouraged partner institutions to consider women's participation more deliberately in course design, staff mobilisation and project delivery. One such initiative, jointly launched by UNESCO-ICHEI and the IIOE Egypt National Centre at Ain Shams University, trained teaching staff from 20 Egyptian HEIs in digital pedagogy. More than 60% of participants were women.

Platforms, Courses and Partnerships

Since launching in 2020, IIOE has provided online courses, training resources, and digital teaching support to partner HEIs worldwide, helping higher education staff enhance their digital literacy and AI capabilities. In 2024, it launched the English-language course *AI, Gender and Public Policies*, bringing the relationship between AI and gender equality into the curriculum. To date, the IIOE platform features over 700 courses, reaches

135 countries and regions, and has benefited nearly 400,000 higher education professionals, with female participants accounting for more than 40%.

Within the IIOE global ecosystem, a growing number of female educators and professionals are not only taking part in capacity-building initiatives, but are also emerging as a significant force in driving digital transformation.

Across several partner HEIs and IIOE National Centres, female-led operations teams are actively shaping course design, project coordination, and localised implementation. By bringing their unique experiences and perspectives to project execution, they actively contribute to course promotion, learning support, and local adaptation, ensuring that capacity-building initiatives are more attentive to the needs and engagement of diverse groups.

IIOE online course *AI, Gender and Public Policies*






AI, Gender and Public Policies

Fatima Roumate (PhD)
dent of the International Institute of Scientific Research, IISR



The Mongolian University of Science and Technology (MUST) partnered with UNESCO-ICHEI to implement the *IIOE Pilot Project in Mongolia: Blended Learning Capacity Building for STEM Teachers*. The project developed five training modules and trained 322 faculty members from 6 national universities, including 65 core faculty members, 80% of whom were women.

Dialogue, Recognition, and Shared Knowledge

Lasting change also depends on letting experience travel into wider conversations, and eventually into the wider ecosystem. The IIOE Higher Education Digitalisation Pioneer Case Award has made equity and inclusion one of its judging criteria, with particular attention to empowering women and other under-represented groups, turning inclusion into one of the yardsticks by which educational innovation itself is judged. The workshops and regional policy dialogues UNESCO-ICHEI has hosted or co-hosted, on women's leadership in STEM, women's participation, AI ethics and digital inclusion, have given educators, administrators and policymakers a space to exchange ideas and be heard. *CLOUD* magazine has done its own part too, documenting the experiences of women educators across countries, and using stories and data to trace the relationship between women's empowerment and the development of higher education.

Over the years, gender has found its way into how we design projects, deliver them, monitor them, generate knowledge and build partnerships — no longer an isolated concern, but a thread running through the whole of our work on transformation.

Women Leading Change in Africa

The *Women Leading Change in Africa: Future Higher Education Professionals and Leadership in the Intelligence Era* (WLCA) project builds on UNESCO-ICHEI's longstanding work in digital and AI capacity-building, women's empowerment and partnerships across Africa. It brings these strands together within a clearer programme framework, moving beyond access to foster leadership and institutional influence.

The project serves professionals across Africa's higher education systems, with emphasis on women educators, researchers, administrators, learning-support staff and university leaders.

It is grounded in a simple principle: women should not be seen only as users of technology or classroom practitioners. They work at every level of higher education and should be able to shape digital transformation from each of those positions. By building capacity across the wider higher education workforce, the project treats gender equality not as a stand-alone issue, but as part of a more inclusive and resilient digital transformation.

In support of UNESCO's global priorities, the project contributes to the *Operational Strategy for Priority Africa (OSPA) 2022–2029*, particularly Flagship Programme 1, *Campus Africa: Reinforcing Higher Education in Africa*, and Flagship Programme 4, *Harnessing new and emerging technologies for sustainable development in Africa, including through the implementation of the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*.

The project seeks to chart a path from women's

professional and leadership development to stronger institutional capacity and lasting systemic influence.

How does change happen?

Through the ILOE platform, multilingual courses, micro-certifications, in-person training, workshops, policy dialogues, case studies and policy recommendations, the project turns principles into practical change.

Start with local needs. Countries, institutions and language contexts across Africa vary widely. Course packages are therefore tailored to local priorities, languages and standards, while targeted outreach and support encourage women to participate.

“

Needs assessments, data analytics, and partner communications form an integral part of the project's methodology.

”

A Pathway for Transformation	
Level	Target
Access	Ensure access for women to AI learning and development opportunities
Capability	Build actionable capabilities for teaching, research, and administration
Agency	Translate capabilities into concrete practice and action
Leadership	Support peers, organise collaboration and participate in decision-making
System Change	Integrate into professional development, certification, and policy

Adapt global resources to local contexts.

UNESCO-ICHEI and partners provide courses, learning platforms, tools and institutional networks. Participating universities adapt these resources through translation, content selection and training design, while aligning them with staff development systems and institutional policies. As the cases that follow show, the goals and framework remain consistent; the routes to achieving them differ.

Combine complementary forms of learning.

The IIOE platform provides open, continuous and cross-border access to learning. Multilingual courses build foundational digital and AI knowledge, while micro-certifications recognise achievement through structured study and assessment. Face-to-face training connects this learning with local cases, direct exchange and practical needs, laying the groundwork for wider local delivery.

Prioritise practical application. Participants are encouraged to apply their skills in teaching, research and university administration. This may involve redesigning courses, using AI to support research and academic writing, improving administrative processes, exploring disciplinary and industry applications, addressing ethical and data concerns, or developing teaching innovations, case studies and small-scale action plans.

Extend impact through communities and dialogue. Workshops, peer exchange and policy dialogues create lasting connections among women professionals, university staff in different roles and partners across the higher education sector. These networks allow participants to share

experience, collaborate and be heard, helping them move from learners to practitioners, contributors and change-makers.

Turn practice into lasting knowledge and systems.

The project is not simply seeking to increase training numbers. Through joint case studies, practice reports and policy recommendations, it strengthens the evidence base on women's digital and AI capacity-building. This supports longer-term change and provides guidance for other universities wishing to develop similar initiatives.

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

Building a higher education transformation that is both AI-ready and gender-equal calls for a network able to connect different pools of knowledge and the actors willing to act on them. WLCA is built around exactly that: a multi-stakeholder model drawing on the resources of international organisations, higher education institutions, governments, businesses and professional networks.

As the project's initiator and coordinator, UNESCO-ICHEI draws on the IIOE platform, its courses and its wider partner network to support participating universities — offering project design support, resource coordination, help with local delivery, and channels for research and knowledge-sharing, so that each university can chart a path suited to its own needs.

The UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (UNESCO IITE) brings its expertise in digital education, ICT and AI to



unesco

INTERNATIONAL

Women's Day

Her Voice. Our Innovation.
A Shared Future.

| UNESCO-ICHEI celebrated 2026
International Women's Day



| The 2019 Training Workshop on ICT Applications in Higher Education for Asian and European Countries

the table, contributing international experience, connections and technical support, and helping knowledge flow more freely across the UNESCO system.

Participating universities are where the project actually happens. As local implementers, they recruit participants, run training, build communities, and gather data and feedback; they work courses into their own faculty development systems, open up policy conversations on campus and beyond, and turn what they learn into case studies and recommendations.

Governments, enterprises, and UNESCO's headquarters and field offices extend the project's reach further still. In Egypt, Ain Shams University has drawn on corporate support to advance women's leadership in digital education;

in Nigeria, policy dialogue has placed women's participation in AI transformation within a broader governance conversation; in Zambia, a national higher education network has driven collaboration across institutions. No single university, these examples suggest, can carry this transformation alone. It takes an ecosystem, sustained by many hands at once.

Diverse Case Studies

WLCA is currently under way in eight African countries — Egypt, Ethiopia, Morocco, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Zambia and Uganda — with more partner universities expected to join.

The cases that follow are snapshots of these different journeys. Read them side by side,

and a few lessons start to emerge. Open enrolment doesn't guarantee participation on its own, as targeted outreach, sustained support and learning communities are what draw more women in, and keep them there. Capability-building rarely stays confined to the individual: given time, it works its way into faculty development, institutional governance and policy, leaving something more lasting behind. And collaboration across institutions and borders is less about repeating a formula than about trading experience, adjusting course, and learning together as you go.

If there's one thing WLCA's work makes clear, it's that access to technology and learning opportunities is only where things begin. For learning to leave a lasting mark, it needs institutional backing, real structural support, a sense of community, and space to put what's learned into teaching, research and the running of an institution. The project started in Africa, but it isn't stopping there. The question it's answering is one the whole of higher education is grappling with; the approach it's testing, we hope, will keep growing well beyond where it began.

Country	Higher Education Institutions	Keywords
Egypt	Ain Shams University	Awards, Incentives, and Women's Innovation
Ethiopia	Addis Ababa University	Institutionalisation of Micro-certifications
Morocco	Cadi Ayyad University	Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships
Zambia	Mulungushi University	Inter-Institutional Local Networks
Nigeria	Ahmadu Bello University	Women-Led Operations and Learning Communities
Cote d'Ivoire	INP-HB	Francophone Localisation
Ghana	IEPA, University of Cape Coast	Local Learning Support and Policy Advocacy
Uganda	Makerere University	Gender Mainstreaming and Future Collaboration

“

Technology has arrived at the future Ada Lovelace once imagined. And more women like her are stepping into it — this time, by choice.

”

References:

- [1] UNESCO, "Women's Access to and Participation in Technological Developments," UNESCO.org, n.d.
 [2] UNESCO, "Gender Equality and Education," UNESCO.org, n.d.
 [3] UNESCO, "From Access to Agency: UNESCO Strategy for Gender Equality in and through Education 2026–2029," UNESCO, July 2026.

From Access to Agency:

Ain Shams University Advances Women's Digital Leadership

At Ain Shams University, an initiative is connecting AI learning with practice, women-led innovation, public recognition and academic promotion.



| "She Leads" award ceremony was held on 19 April 2026

On 19 April 2026, at the IIOE Egypt session of the Ain Shams University (ASU) International Conference, three women academics took the stage.

Prof. Enjy Abouzeid Mohammed of Suez Canal University and Prof. Fatima Elzahraa Abd-Elraheem of Alexandria University won the Teaching Innovation category of the "She Leads: Digital Education Excellence Award." Prof. Eman



Hands-on practical training, *The AI Educator's Toolkit: Transforming Your Teaching Practice*, in April 2026

Mohamed Mohamed of Ain Shams University won in Research Empowerment. Before an audience of educators, university leaders, policymakers and technology partners, their work offered clear examples of how women academics in Egypt are using AI to improve teaching and research. For the *Women Leading Change in Africa* (WLCA) project, their recognition marked a meaningful milestone.

Behind that moment was a wider effort led by the IIOE Egypt National Centre — a connected pathway bringing together training, practical application, professional recognition, public visibility and institutional support.

Opening a Broad Door

The first link in that chain is a learning mechanism capable of operating at scale. By early 2026, more than 4,000 participants in Egypt had enrolled through the IIOE platform's micro-certification programmes; over 2,300 had completed one. Women accounted for 66% of

certified participants, which is well above the project's original target.

The network now reaches 25 Egyptian public universities, giving the initiative a foundation beyond any single campus.

Moving to Practice

To deepen the transition from knowledge to application, the National Centre organised an intensive, hands-on programme titled *The AI Educator's Toolkit: Transforming Your Teaching Practice*. 336 academics applied for thirty places, selected for a balance of gender, institution and discipline. Participants learnt to use AI “across the full teaching cycle.”

Participants practised prompt engineering, generated lesson plans and instructional content, explored tools for differentiating materials according to students' learning needs, and compared platforms such as DeepSeek, ChatGPT, Copilot and Magic School AI. They developed

course-specific tutoring chatbots that could answer questions and guide students using designated course materials. They also designed multiple-choice questions, essays, case studies and assessment rubrics aligned with Bloom's Taxonomy.

“

Access can be counted. Agency is seen in what women are able to create, influence and change.

”

Making the Invisible Visible

The "She Leads: Digital Education Excellence Award 2026" was open to women academic and professional staff across Egypt, built to surface work already underway: women using AI and digital tools to innovate in teaching and research. It drew 28 submissions, 15 in Teaching Innovation and 13 in Research Empowerment.

The inclusion of a gender perspective signalled that inclusive design was part of innovation, not an optional extra.

The winners received a cash prize of EGP 15,000, an official certificate, gifts from the project partners and a Microsoft certification examination voucher. These forms of recognition created an incentive mechanism with both material and professional value. The cash award could support further development, while certification and industry-linked opportunities

Participants at the *Third Annual Conference of the Measurement and Evaluation Scientific Association*, on 14 May 2025



strengthened the visibility and professional standing of the winners.

Awards alone cannot create women leaders, but help address a persistent problem: valuable work often remains invisible when it takes place within an individual classroom, research group or department. By creating a national platform specifically for women educators, the award gave such work a route into wider professional recognition.

Beyond the Campus

The ASU initiative has also involved actors beyond universities. Praxilabs and Qorrect backed "She Leads"; Microsoft supplied certification vouchers; technology-sector experts joined the wider policy dialogue. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Supreme Council of Universities lent formal backing, with a senior Council representative sitting on the judging panel itself.

Together, these partners gave promising ideas more than one route. Universities provide the institutional environments in which new practices can be tested. Technology companies contribute tools, specialist knowledge and links to professional certification. International organisations connect local activity with global experience. Government and sector-level bodies help align individual initiatives with broader priorities for higher education.

Entering the Promotion System

The clearest sign of institutionalisation sits at

Ain Shams University itself. In August 2025, the university introduced seven training programmes on the application of AI in education and learning through the IIOE platform. Academic staff seeking promotion are required to complete at least one of these courses. A guidance page has been created for academic staff, supported by experts who evaluate course assignments and by administrative and technical teams responsible for reviewing, accrediting and issuing certificates. When professional learning depends only on project funding or individual enthusiasm, participation may decline once an initiative ends. When the same learning is connected to the formal professional development and promotion system, it acquires a different status. It becomes part of what the institution expects, supports and recognises.

For women academics, such recognition is particularly important. It places newly acquired digital capability within a structure that can influence professional progression. This is the point at which capacity building begins to move beyond individual change. It starts to alter the environment in which academic careers develop.

Learning provides broad access, online courses and micro-certification, with women certified. Practice lets academics move past introductory knowledge and apply AI across the full teaching cycle. Incentive, embodied in "She Leads," turns knowledge into original work, backed by prizes, certification, opportunity. Display carries that work into public and international view, where ideas get discussed and partnered. And institutional recognition (AI training folded into promotion) gives it all a chance to outlast the project itself.

Featuring Ethiopia's Experience in Advancing Women's Leadership in Higher Education Institutions

Addis Ababa University's experience shows how online micro-certification, hands-on AI practice and institutional recognition can work together to support women academics professional growth.

Strengthening Women's Participation

In Ethiopia, women's representation in higher education leadership remains limited. At Addis Ababa University (AAU), women account for only 20% of academic staff, reflecting persistent cultural, economic, and digital literacy barriers. These challenges mirror broader patterns across Africa, where women's advancement into senior academic and leadership roles is constrained by systemic inequalities.

To confront these barriers, Addis Ababa University joined the *Women Leading Change in Africa* project. Implemented alongside Hawassa, Arba Minch, and Wollo Universities, the project empowers female academics by enhancing their digital and AI competencies through blended training programs.

This growth reflects Ethiopia's increasing commitment to equipping women with the skills needed to thrive in the digital era.



AAU, in collaboration with UNESCO-ICHEI, hosted a workshop under the *Women Leading Change in Africa* project in August 2026

Enrolment Progress

Date	Total	Female	Male
February 28, 2026	457	50	407
June 30, 2026	1039	222	817

Participant Feedback and Impact

Since the initiation on Feb 28, 2026, the project has already certified more than 1,000 instructors through micro-certificate courses on AI applications in education. Although initial enrolment was modest, enthusiasm grew rapidly once participants completed their first course. Many went beyond the two-course requirement, completing three or four courses and actively encouraging colleagues to join.

Recognising this success, AAU has formally integrated these micro-certificates into its continuous professional development framework. Complementing the online learning, face-to-face workshops provided practical AI training tailored to teaching, research, and management needs. Evaluation results from these sessions confirm their strong relevance: 92% of participants rated the training as "very or extremely relevant" to their professional work.

Future Priorities

To sustain progress and expand impact, Addis Ababa University is advancing a transformative agenda — revising its curriculum, launching multidisciplinary programmes, and embedding digital tools and AI competencies across teaching, research, and management. Building robust digital capacity is therefore critical to ensure that women academics not only participate but lead in shaping Ethiopia's higher education future.

Finding Her Digital Voice

One female course developer reflected that producing her own video lectures in the multimedia studio initially felt intimidating. Yet the process built her confidence and technical skills, enabling her to create future digital content independently. She emphasised that her own video lectures inspire other female academic staff more than generic online materials, underscoring how Ethiopian women educators can lead by example in embracing digital tools.

Accordingly, Addis Ababa University identifies the following priorities requiring continued support from UNESCO-ICHEI and partners:

Curriculum & Course Access. Sustained provision of relevant, high-quality online micro-certificates to meet the growing demand for digital and AI literacy training.

Infrastructure & Dedicated Spaces. Establishment of a state-of-the-art smart classroom within the e-learning department, serving as a shared hub for innovative teaching and professional development across all academic units.

Technical Assistance & Tools. Access to expert guidance and licensing for advanced digital creation and AI platforms, enabling staff to design and deliver engaging, technology-enhanced courses.

Supplemental Funding. Continued external financial support to bridge resource gaps, as internal university budgets remain insufficient to meet the scale of investment required for sustainable e-learning initiatives.

Authors

Basira Yahaya, Habiba
Atta, Binta Zakari,
Aminatu Makarfi, Aisha
Abdulkadir, Rahila
Yakubu, Nafisa Shehu
Usman, Fidelia Whong
and Ramatu Umahaba
(Ahmadu Bello University)

Ahmadu Bello University: Building Women's Confidence in AI Through Practical Learning and Community

At Ahmadu Bello University, a women-led team of the IIOE Nigeria National Centre is turning apprehension about AI into confidence, competence, and community; showing how leadership, learning communities, and hands-on training can widen women's participation in digital higher education.

The *Women Leading Change in Africa* project in Nigeria, implemented by the IIOE Nigeria National Centre at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) with the support of UNESCO-ICHEI, was established to strengthen digital and AI competencies among women in higher education while promoting gender-inclusive leadership. Between March and July 2026 alone, it supported 251 successful IIOE micro-certification course completions (149 by women and 102 by men) through awareness campaigns, hands-on training, online micro-certification, mentoring, and peer learning. Although the initiative centres on women, participation has remained open to all, creating an inclusive space where knowledge is shared across disciplines.

A Women-Led Team Shaping the Programme

The WLCA project is coordinated by a team of women academics and professionals who bring both technical expertise and a clear understanding of the reality women face in higher education. That perspective shaped every design decision, the timing of activities, publicity strategies, and the balance of support, while coordinating a national project alongside teaching, research, administration, and family commitments demanded careful planning and flexibility.

Leading as women also changed how



In July 2026, the *Women Leading Change in Africa* project and the IIOE Nigeria National Centre hosted a reception celebrating four female students who won the Grand Prize at the Huawei ICT Competition Global Final in China

participants engaged. Many who had viewed AI as intimidating or male-dominated grew more confident after learning from women who were themselves facilitating the training and demonstrating AI in practice. The team became visible role models, and the programme became living proof that women can contribute meaningfully to AI, digital innovation, and leadership.

A Learning Community that Sustains Engagement

Engagement continued well beyond each training session through a dedicated WhatsApp learning community. Rather than a noticeboard, it functions as an active community of practice; sharing course information and registration guidance, announcing webinars, answering questions, sending reminders, celebrating completed certificates, and encouraging members throughout their learning journey.

Read More

The WLCA project formed part of the IIOE Nigeria National Centre's continuing efforts to advance a consensus-driven approach to digital transformation. Issue 14 of *CLOUD* features an article led by the National Centre's Director, Professor Muhammed Bashir Mu'azu, and co-authored with colleagues from the National Centre. It offers a fuller account of how dialogue, capacity-building, micro-certification and localised practice have been brought together to shape an AI-ready academic future in Nigeria.



Scan to read

Early exposure to the IIOE platform, through introductory webinars and hands-on orientation, helped participants master registration, navigation, and certificate acquisition before starting their courses: lowering barriers and building confidence. Regular online sessions on AI for research and data analysis, AI policy, and academic integrity kept interest alive between courses, while peer support turned individual study into shared momentum.

“

A workshop can open a door. A community helps people keep walking.

”

What Participants Tell Us

Participants consistently describe the training as practical, relevant, and easy to follow. They value tools they can apply immediately such as ChatGPT, Google Workspace, NotebookLM, Litmaps, Calendly, and Notion AI; with the NotebookLM session, on generating lecture content and explainer videos, among the most popular. Many returned for one-on-one guidance on using these tools in their own classrooms, in assessment design, and in research supervision.

Motivation was the greatest early challenge: many were unfamiliar with micro-certification, so the team added orientation sessions, platform demonstrations, and follow-up webinars. Constructive feedback, such as occasional difficulty downloading certificates, was resolved through mentor support and fed back into delivery.



Asmau Nna Sulaiman Ph.D • 3rd+
Antimicrobial resistance, Ethnobotanical survey, ...
1d • Edited •

+ Follow ...

UNESCO-ICHEI

I am delighted to share that I have received my certificate for completing the course: "AI for Science" through the International Institute of Online Education. This course was more than just learning about artificial intelligence; it was an opportunity to explore how AI is transforming scientific research, discovery, and innovation. It deepened my understanding of how AI can help scientists analyse complex data, uncover patterns, accelerate discovery, and develop new approaches to solving scientific problems.

The experience has broadened my perspective on the growing role of AI in science and the exciting possibilities it offers for research and innovation.

Habiba Atta, Ph.D. Thank you for your mentorship. You did a good job during the training process of the micro certification courses. You guided and followed up every step all the way. Kudos....



This is to certify that
Asmau Nna Sulaiman
has successfully completed the IIOE Micro-certification Programme:
AI for Science
on the IIOE platform
and has successfully completed all required courses and examinations.



华大BGI

| One participant shares her feedback on IIOE courses on LinkedIn



© Ahmadu Bello University

The IIOE Nigeria National Centre conducted digital capacity-building training for the Department of Political Science in March 2026

Participation in Motion

The participation figures also tell a more complicated story.

In 2025, women represented 45.2% of those reached through the project. In the consolidated figures for 2026 activities, their share rose to 61.5%. Across the project to date, 2,338 participants have been recorded, including 1,108 women, or 47.4%.

The project's response has been gradual rather than fixed from the outset. More focused activities, such as platform onboarding and women-centred mobilisation, have begun to produce a different balance. ABU's experience therefore offers a dynamic version of participation by design: not a model that was perfect at the beginning, but one that is learning from its own data and adjusting as it proceeds.

Reporting Period	Total Participant	Male	Female	Female Proportion
2025	2,026	1,110	916	45.2%
2026	312	120	192	61.5%
Cumulative (Project-to-Date)	2,338	1,230	1,108	47.4%

Mulungushi University: Zambia's Journey Towards Inclusive AI Leadership in Higher Education

Meaningful digital transformation begins with people. The IIOE Zambia National Centre shows when universities collaborate, invest in women's leadership and create opportunities for continuous learning, AI becomes more than a technological innovation.

In Zambia, the journey of the *Women Leading Change in Africa* project was launched on 6 March 2026 when educators, university leaders, policymakers and development partners gathered in Livingstone, Zambia. Officiated by

Zambia's Minister of Education, Honourable Douglas Syakalima, MP, the event brought together 50 participants for leadership dialogues, practical Generative AI sessions and discussions on the future of women in higher education.

| The *Women Leading Change in Africa* project was launched on 6 March 2026 in Livingstone, Zambia



© Mulungushi University

Targeted Mobilisation, Broader Access, Practical Relevance



The network of WLCA project builds on the work of the IIOE Zambia National Centre, hosted by Mulungushi University. Before extending its activities across institutions, the Centre had already begun strengthening digital capacity among educators, administrators and university leaders. In May 2025, Mulungushi University and UNESCO-ICHEI convened representatives from eight Zambian HEIs for AI training and formal cooperation through the National Centre. Mulungushi University later became the

2026 IIOE Rotating Presidency Unit, identifying women's professional development and institutional collaboration among its priorities.

Behind women's strong participation across the network sat a set of deliberate choices. The University of Zambia created a dedicated women-focused stream, while regional outreach encouraged partner institutions to nominate senior women in academic, management and leadership positions. Others widened who counted as an AI learner in the first place, as training was never reserved for computer scientists or technical staff, but reached lecturers, administrators, senior managers, support staff and technical educators alike, opening a door for women whose roles had never been labelled "technical," even as AI increasingly shapes their work. And where training worked best, it stayed close to the ground: the implementation report found stronger uptake wherever AI was tied directly to institutional work (teaching, curriculum design, administration, governance, service delivery), rather than presented as an abstract subject.



**MULUNGUSHI
UNIVERSITY**

289 of the **475**
participants were
women



**COPPERBELT
UNIVERSITY**

454 of the **950**
participants were
women



**UNIVERSITY
OF ZAMBIA**

Women accounted for
100% of the participants
(228 in total)



**EVELYN HONE
COLLEGE**

Majority being
women (230 in total)

The launch signalled a shared commitment to ensuring that women are not only participants in digital transformation but also leaders who influence how AI is developed, governed and applied within higher education.

The project has since grown into a collaborative national network connecting 18 universities and colleges in Zambia and the region. Through this partnership, universities have shared experiences, exchanged good practices and worked together to strengthen digital and AI competencies among higher education professionals. Today, the project has reached more than 1,653 verified participants, including at least 971 verified women, demonstrating the value of collaboration in building institutional capacity and expanding opportunities for women across Zambia's higher education sector.

Creating an environment where women can lead has been central to every stage of the programme. Rather than focusing only on technology, learning activities combined practical AI skills with leadership development, ethical decision-making, collaboration and innovation. Participants explored how Generative AI can strengthen teaching, research, curriculum design and institutional management while recognising that transformative leadership depends equally on vision, empathy, inclusion and responsible governance. This reflects the programme's belief that AI should empower people rather than replace them.

Women also played visible roles as speakers, facilitators and mentors throughout the project, demonstrating that diverse leadership strengthens innovation and helps create more inclusive approaches to AI. Their experiences

encouraged participants to see leadership not simply as holding positions of authority, but as the ability to inspire change, build partnerships and support others to succeed.

The momentum generated during the launch continued through the *Women Leading Change in Africa Webinar Series*. The inaugural webinar attracted 143 registered participants, bringing together academics, researchers, university leaders, students and development partners to exchange experiences on AI, ethical leadership and digital transformation. Participants valued the opportunity to learn from international and local experts while discussing practical approaches to strengthening women's leadership in higher education. The webinar reinforced the importance of continued capacity building through mentorship, micro-certification, institutional collaboration and responsible AI policies.



The IIOE Zambia National Centre facilitates AI training for academic and administrative staff at the Copperbelt University

Building Women's Leadership through Learning, Networks and Partnerships: The UCA Experience

Cadi Ayyad University's distinctive contribution to the WLCA project lies in connecting areas that are often addressed separately: digital capacity-building, women's leadership and cross-sector collaboration.

Through an online learning platform, targeted professional development and the *Women For Impact* (W4I) workshop, Cadi Ayyad University (UCA) is exploring how women in higher education can strengthen their practical skills while also expanding their professional networks and influence.

At the centre of its capacity-building efforts is an online learning platform developed by ENCG Marrakech, in partnership with UNESCO-ICHEI. As part of the IIOE initiative, the platform is designed to make training accessible to higher education teachers, managers and learning support staff.

The platform draws on IIOE courses and locally relevant content. One French-language course focuses on designing and producing educational audiovisual materials. Over five weeks, participants learn how to design and script instructional videos, use screen-capture tools and apply basic editing techniques. The course was offered in a blended format to 45 participants, 40% of whom were women. A second course, currently in development, addresses how to

build and manage effective research teams, including inclusive leadership, collaboration, mentorship and psychological safety.

These online resources are complemented by practical training in digital pedagogy, automated assessment, academic management systems and the use of artificial intelligence in management, research and teaching. This combination allows UCA to approach digital transformation not simply as the adoption of new tools, but as an opportunity to strengthen the wider professional capabilities of university staff.



| Design and Production of Educational Capsules, a course on ENCG-UCA online learning platform



| The *Women for Impact* workshop was held at ENCG Marrakech to mark International Women's Day 2026

W4I adds an important leadership and community dimension to this work. Organised on International Women's Day, the workshop brought together 102 participants, including women leaders, experts and entrepreneurs; women accounted for 60% of those attending.

Discussions addressed women's leadership, entrepreneurship and empowerment, as well as the challenges and opportunities involved in strengthening women's role in Moroccan society. The workshop therefore contributes to the WLCA project by creating a space in which professional learning can evolve into peer exchange, networking and collective action.

UCA is also building a cross-sector partnership ecosystem around its work. The prospective partners identified by the university span women entrepreneurs' associations, technology and AI companies, business and engineering schools, a mining group, a banking foundation and

digital learning platforms. This range reflects an understanding that the advancement of women in higher education cannot be achieved by universities alone.

By connecting higher education with businesses, social organisations and technology providers, this emerging ecosystem has the potential to broaden women's access to expertise, learning opportunities and professional networks. It may also help to ensure that capacity-building responds to developments beyond the campus and remains connected to wider social and economic needs.

Together, the platform, W4I and the developing partnership network form a mutually reinforcing approach. UCA's experience suggests that digital skills can provide a foundation, while leadership opportunities and cross-sector relationships enable women to turn those skills into wider professional and social impact.

Bridging the Divide: Empowering Ghanaian Female Educational Leaders in the Intelligence Era

Author

Ama Serwah Nerquaye-
Tetteh (IEPA)

In joining WLCA, IEPA hopes to help Ghana's women educators move from adapting to digital transformation toward shaping it, and build the AI skills and institutional support to ease the barriers that have long held them back.

A well-known Ghanaian Adinkra symbol is Aya (the fern). The fern grows in the harshest, most unwelcoming corners of the forest floor, yet it endures, spreads, and thrives. Across Ghana, it has long stood as a symbol of resourcefulness and of independence. It is a fitting image for the work now about to unfold at the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA).

As artificial intelligence reshapes classrooms, campuses, and education ministries around the world, the question of who gets to lead that transformation has never mattered more. IEPA, a UNESCO Category II Centre of Excellence hosted at the University of Cape Coast, has answered that question with a clear commitment: equity cannot be an afterthought in digital transformation. That commitment is what brought us into the *Women Leading Change in Africa* project, supported by UNESCO-ICHEI and IIOE.

The numbers tell a story Ghana already knows



| Aya (the fern)

Present

Official Press Launch for "WOMEN LEADING CHANGE IN AFRICA"

Empowering women higher education faculty and leaders across Africa to navigate and lead within the rapidly evolving digital and AI landscape

Tuesday, 25th August, 2026



Launch workshop of the *Women Leading Change in Africa* project at University of Cape Coast in August 2026





Participants at the project launch workshop

well. Enrolment at the basic level has moved encouragingly close to gender parity, but somewhere along the way, a leaky pipeline quietly drains women out of the leadership track.

Ambition isn't the problem; the barriers are structural. Women hold only 24% of tertiary academic positions across the region, and just 8% of full professorships in Ghana. Further down the pipeline, only 11% of rural headteachers are women. The talent is there. The system simply hasn't made room for it. Nationally, most administrators sense that AI is about to upend how they work, but only one in five feels equipped to actually lead that shift. Left unaddressed, these gaps risk pushing women further to the margins just as digital fluency becomes the price of admission to leadership.

IEPA is setting out to change that through the delivery of IIOE micro-certifications, hands-on workshops, and sustained policy engagement. The goal is to train 1,000 women digitally and deliver in-person leadership development to more than 100 female leaders every year. We're

not asking Ghanaian women educators to simply keep pace with the intelligence era ; we want them steering it.

The model IEPA has built to deliver this joint initiative with UNESCO-ICHEI is rigorous online learning paired with support systems rooted in local reality; a technical hotline, WhatsApp and Telegram groups for real-time troubleshooting, and a network of regional peer local champions who understand the terrain because they live in it. Crucially, none of these stops at the individual level. It feeds directly into systemic reform, building toward a June 2027 Policy Dialogue aimed at securing formal recognition of digital micro-credentials within promotion criteria so that what women learn actually counts toward where they can go.

Like the fern that roots itself where the ground is hardest, this generation of Ghanaian women educators isn't waiting for easier conditions. They are growing through them and IEPA intends to make sure the system finally makes room for what they've already shown they can do.

Author

Lozirah Caroline
Abilat (Makerere
University)

Makerere's Leadership Experience: Initiatives, Barriers and AI Hopes for the Future

Long-term gender mainstreaming at Makerere University now extend into a new arena, as partnership and micro-certifications work to move women from the margins of the intelligence era toward its centre.

Makerere University is a pioneer in promoting Gender Equality embedded in its mission and vision. Women's participation in leadership is enhanced through affirmative action policies, establishment of the Gender Mainstreaming Directorate, enactment of the *Makerere Gender Equality Policy* and the *Policy and Regulations against Sexual Harassment* and targeted women in leadership training opportunities.

Key among these is the investment in capacity building of women in leadership skills, introduction of the Vice Chancellor excellence awards to motivate university staff to conduct

impactful cutting-edge research. There are opportunities for experience sharing and learning from each other.

Other initiatives include the Male Engagement Strategy and formulating the Makerere University Men's forum. A space for male staff and students to promote gender equality by supporting female colleagues advance in leadership. Toxic narratives are spoken about and challenged.

The university has created a conducive environment through policy implementation. A case in point is the *Policy and Regulations*



© Makerere University

Participants at a leadership training programme for early-career female staff at Makerere University

against Sexual Harassment, which is at the core of ensuring zero tolerance to sexual harassment.

Despite the above initiatives, women in Uganda higher education face distinct barriers.

There is persistent male domination for higher leadership positions like vice chancellor and college principals who are picked from a pool of professors and senior lecturers. In the case of Makerere of the 75 professors, only ten are female professors with the 65 being male professors. There are forty-three female associate professors compared to ninety-four male associate professors. Early career females have few role models for inspiration.

Low numbers of women undertaking PHD studies. In 2025 alone, only 9 females and 11 males completed PHDs in the college of Humanities and Social sciences. Yet a PHD is a requirement for entry in to academia and ensures advancement in the career ladder. In the same year there were 444 female and 908 male academic staff, of these only 10 are female professors while 65 are male professors, representing 87% for males and only 13% for females. These low female numbers affect the pool of academic staff to be considered for leadership.

Conditions required for promotion trap women. For one to be promoted to senior lecturer, they need eight recognised publications in their area of specialisation, with at least four new publications in the last three years at the time of application. For directors the requirements include ten years of proven research experience, twelve publications, eight of which must be published in referred journals.

Limited opportunities for individual networking among university women. These personal

networks are sources of information on leadership development programs, study opportunities and mentorship. The networks provide a pathway for collaboration. Women are less inclined to join activities with colleagues outside of the family and work. Without access to these networks, women find themselves isolated.

Only 8% of the 24.3 million women are digitally literate, over 90% remain digitally illiterate. In addition, economic inequality affects women's access to digital devices and data on top of these there are entrenched social norms which act to restrict women's access to AI education and use.

The current positioning of women as secondary actors and downstream consumers of AI renders them invisible in the AI sector. This creates the impression that AI is a male domain and translates into few women actively participating in development of AI knowledge and championing its use.

Women's limited access to digital devices like laptops, desk top computers and internet connection devices affects their advances in AI literacy. The cost of these devices is too high for an average Ugandan woman, with laptop costs ranging 650-1,300 dollars.

Makerere hopes for long-standing partnerships in gender, leadership and AI literacy. The mobilisation of women to position themselves as the main actors in AI knowledge creation and use. The use of micro certification programmes as vehicles to build women's capacity to use AI.

Opening up spaces for diverse groups of staff and students. The planned symposium will be a means to collaborate and reflect. The university especially hopes for continued capacity building and knowledge transfer on mindful AI use, transparency and accountability.

From Readiness to Momentum: Women Leading AI Change at INP-HB

What distinguishes the WLCA case in Cote d'Ivoire is not the scale of activity but its shape: a later start, followed by faster-than-expected expansion, carried primarily through French-language micro-certifications and digital platform delivery.



Poster for the *Women Leading Change in Africa* project at INP-HB

In June 2026, *Women Leading Change in Africa* project moved quickly from plan to practice at the National Polytechnic Institute Félix Houphouët-Boigny (INP-HB) in Côte d'Ivoire. Built around generative AI, digital educational resources, course design, digital presentations, and AI-assisted teaching, the French-language micro-certifications training extended beyond INP-HB itself to reach Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny (UFHB), the country's top-ranked university. The speed with which demand

formed said as much about the readiness of Ivorian higher education for AI capacity-building as it did about the programme itself.

Anchoring Women's Leadership in a Digitalising Institution

How does a women's leadership initiative take root inside an institution that is already transforming itself digitally?

INP-HB at a Glance



Female faculty account for **38% of the faculty**

Female graduates account for **34.74%** of all graduates



A global alumni network of **over 35,000** across **more than 20** countries

Ranked 2nd best university in French-speaking Africa



At INP-HB, the answer lies less in a standalone training programme than in timing. Côte d'Ivoire's *National AI Strategy 2030*, a 10,000 m² national data centre, five active FabLabs, and master's programmes in data science and AI developed with partners including École Polytechnique and ENSEA all point to an institution already mid-transformation — one where digital and AI certification is becoming a formal requirement for CAMES 2027 academic promotion applications.

WLCA enters this landscape not as an isolated intervention, but as one further step in that transformation: a door opened specifically for women within a digital ecosystem INP-HB was already building. Prof. Georges Loum, Deputy Director-General of INP-HB shared that ranked second among French-speaking African universities, with 7,317 students (34.74% women) and 403 faculty members (28% women) across strong programmes in AI, data science, and cybersecurity, INP-HB had already partnered with industry, international universities, and UNESCO-ICHEI before the project began, and had set a target of reaching 1,500 participants through the WLCA project, a figure the training has since surpassed. This builds on UNESCO-ICHEI's earlier Francophone Africa AI capacity-building work, which had already brought together 172 higher education professionals from 20 universities across 10 French-speaking countries, which is an evidence of a sustained regional demand for AI education resources in French.

For INP-HB, the project marks a new phase in that ongoing collaboration: a shift from general faculty digital development towards capacity-building that is explicitly gender-responsive.

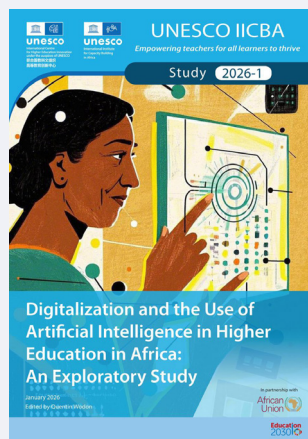
Why Weeks, Not Months?

Rapid uptake rarely happens by accident. Three conditions converged at INP-HB.

The first was demand that already existed. Findings drawn from *Digitalization and the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education in Africa: An Exploratory Study*, point to funding and infrastructure as the most significant constraints on digitalisation, alongside limited student programming and coding skills and a broader shortage of AI specialists across the continent, while more than 90% of French-speaking respondents expressed a wish for guidance in

Read More

UNESCO-ICHEI in partnership with the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA), conducted a joint survey and research study examining the state of digital transformation across higher education institutions in five sub-Saharan African regions (West, Central, East, Southern, and North Africa) alongside the key challenges shaping AI's integration into higher education systems.



Scan to read

using AI tools. Broad participation, in this sense, was less a surprise than a response to conditions already in place.

The second was a digital foundation already under construction. INP-HB's existing programme offerings, its AI and data science research base, its FabLab and digital infrastructure, its industry partnerships, its deployment of the IIOE platform, and the gradual incorporation of digital and AI certification into faculty development together meant that the WLCA project did not need to build capacity from zero. It only needed to open a door that was already within reach.

The third was a learning path designed to be modular, French-language, and sustainable. Structured around five IIOE micro-certification modules, including *Fundamentals of Generative AI in Higher Education*, *Obtain and Evaluate Digital Education Resources*, *Co-Design Engaging Courses with Generative AI*, *Design and Produce Presentation*, and *Teaching with AI: Practical Tips and Prompts*. The programme met educators where their daily work already was, rather than opening with an abstract case for women's leadership. Capacity, networks, and leadership space were left to form gradually, from there. The original design paired online learning with in-person feedback sessions, assessment, micro-certification, and experience-sharing, with a legal and ethical framework for AI use in Ivorian higher

education planned for discussion as the project draws to a close, allowing the programme to move naturally from technical skills, to classroom practice, to questions of ethics and governance.



In June 2026, 5 training sessions reached 2,339 learners

By the Numbers

Across five training sessions in June 2026, spanning INP-HB and UFHB, the programme reached 2,339 learners (by June 2026). Over the same May–June window, IIOE platform registrations across all participating institutions rose by 1,352 accounts, of which 393, or roughly 30%, came from INP-HB alone (the highest share of any institution on the platform). Micro-certification courses enrolment grew by 3,779 learners platform-wide, with 1,944 of them, again the largest share of any single institution coming from INP-HB.

An Approach in Its Own Right

The WLCA project at INP-HB designed around women's digital capacity and leadership found its momentum by first entering through the wider gateway of institutional capacity-building. Looking ahead, an October workshop on legal and ethical frameworks is planned, alongside the formation of working groups bringing together teachers from INP-HB and other Ivorian universities — the next stage in translating rapid uptake into lasting practice.



From May to June, INP-HB recorded 1,944 new IIOE micro-certification learners, representing 51.4% of the total number of new learners



|| IOE global partners visited Huawei's Ox
Horn Campus on the southern shore of
Dongguan's Songshan Lake, on 7 June 2026



”

Over the past few years, IIOE has worked hand in hand with partner HEIs across the globe, listening all the while to voices from the field. The section that follows brings these observations, reflections and actions to life, and shows how they have been distilled into a toolkit.

From Digitalisation to AI Empowerment: The Future of Higher Education in the Global South helps people first see where we stand. Before acting, one may understand the problem: how is digital transformation actually unfolding? What sets the experience of one region, one institution, apart from another? Drawing on a wealth of case studies and data, this report captures a snapshot of where things stand today.

The *IIOE Development Report 2019–2026* is, by contrast, IIOE's own hands-on practice. What has IIOE done to strengthen the digital and AI capabilities of higher education professionals? Which of these experiences might offer something to other institutions? This clear-eyed record of progress reads, quite naturally, as a notebook of action drawn from the field.

Consensus of IIOE Ecosystem Partners takes a further step, building on this research and practice to make a statement of its own. It brings together the values and vision shared by IIOE's global partners, and lays the groundwork for dialogue and collaboration still to come — a shared commitment to the principles partners will carry forward together, come what may in an ever-changing landscape of technology and education.

The Future of Higher Education in the Global South



Scan to read



Every university meets the future on its own terms. Digital technology and AI arrive not as a single wave but as many quiet tides, each shaped by the infrastructure, teaching traditions and social needs already rooted in that place. technology and education.

Much of the current conversation around the digital and AI transformation of higher education centres on national AI strategies, policy and governance frameworks, and principles for the responsible use of AI. These global conversations

matter greatly, offering direction and rules for change. Yet how far different regions of the Global South have come, how digital transformation actually unfolds within institutions, and how promising practices are sustained and scaled – these questions have received far less attention.

This report brings together a series of joint studies conducted across the Global South since 2023, which were carried out with UNESCO's regional offices and Category 1 institutes, alongside a wide range of international and regional organisations, research bodies, and higher education institutions and experts, spanning Africa, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, East Asia, the Arab region, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

This report holds national policy and institutional practice within the same frame. Drawing on institutional surveys, feedback from practitioners, and concrete cases, it identifies challenges shared across regions, while paying close attention to the many different paths that have emerged under different resource conditions and social settings. By tracing how digital transformation takes hold, where it stalls, and how it spreads, the report's findings offer a fuller understanding of transformation approaches across the Global South, and will feed into future capacity-building and cooperation efforts.

Trends Across the Global South

The Global South is moving from expanding "digital access" towards "integrated application" and "AI empowerment", but the pace differs sharply between regions, countries and even institutions. The pandemic pushed more courses online and brought digital tools into classrooms faster than expected, yet for many institutions this amounted to "digital change" rather than the deeper "digital transformation" that reshapes pedagogy, governance, quality assurance and organisational structure.

In the post-pandemic era, higher education systems are shifting from emergency response towards a more deliberate, systematic and strategic approach to digital transformation.

Multiple Gaps, Old and New

The traditional digital divide persists. Across rural Africa, remote parts of South Asia and much of Southeast Asia, unreliable connectivity and power, limited access to devices and high data costs still shape daily life.

While new inequalities are emerging: between basic digital literacy and the pedagogical skills needed for AI; between leading urban leading universities and rural institutions; between English-language resources and localised, multilingual content; between women and men in technology, STEM and digital leadership; and between teachers with access to ongoing training and those left to learn alone.

AI will not bridge these divides by itself. If access to tools expands without matching investment in people and institutions, old inequalities will take new forms, and may deepen.

Systemic Transformation

The report identifies a widespread gap: policy, capacity, incentives, resources and classroom practice do not yet form a coherent system. The same problems recur across regions. Teachers have little say in policy or curriculum design. Ambitious digital and AI targets are rarely matched by adequate time, equipment or teaching support. Digital innovation often goes unrecognised in appraisal and career progression. One-off tool training is common; sustained pedagogical support is not. Many institutions still see AI as an IT issue rather than a matter of teaching, scholarship and governance. The problem is not a lack of policy, but a failure to translate it into conditions teachers can act on, institutions can sustain and systems can carry forward.

Frontline innovation tells two stories: it shows teachers' resourcefulness, but also the system's fragility. When innovation relies on individual effort, it often remains local, without the recognition or support needed to spread. Good practice becomes difficult to replicate, while the burden falls on teachers. They can spark transformation, but cannot be left to carry it alone.

Systemic transformation also depends on a coherent digital education ecosystem. Yet in many regions, investment still favours hardware over platforms, content and support. Connectivity and devices create educational value only when combined with learning platforms, localised and multilingual content, teacher training, pedagogical support, data governance, quality assurance, maintenance, stable funding and affordable access.

Collaboration as Infrastructure

Across the report's case studies, one message is clear: shared platforms, coordinating bodies and communities of practice help institutions lower costs, pool resources and turn scattered experience into collective capacity. Platforms reduce duplication; coordinating bodies link policy to practice; and communities allow knowledge to travel and adapt. For resource-constrained institutions, these networks are not an addition to transformation, but part of its infrastructure.

What Determines Whether Transformation Takes Hold?

Why do some digital practices grow into a lasting institutional capability, while others fade after the pilot phase?

The report examines this through two interdependent lenses: the **digital competency of the higher education workforce**, and **institutional digital support capacity**. The

higher education workforce includes teachers, administrators, technical staff and institutional leaders. Digital competence means more than knowing how to use a tool. It means making sound choices about technology, integrating digital tools and AI into teaching, assessment and management, adapting curricula and pedagogy, and addressing questions of ethics, privacy and data. As technologies evolve, what matters is not simply mastering them, but using them responsibly and with purpose.

Beyond networks and devices, institutional digital support capacity includes digital platforms and content, governance and roadmaps, leadership and delivery, incentives, quality assurance, technical support, stable funding and partnerships. Together, these conditions determine whether technology can be used safely, effectively and over time. A platform may be in place, but without training, content, maintenance and governance, it will create little educational value.

The alignment between these two dimensions shapes the depth, scale and sustainability of transformation.

	Strong Institutional Support	Weak Institutional Support
High Workforce Competency	Systemic scale-up: policy, platforms, workforce capability and teaching practice reinforce one another, forming a fairly stable path to transformation	Innovation without support: frontline practice is lively, but tends to stay a local bright spot, hard to replicate or sustain
Low or Uneven Workforce Competency	Institutions ahead, practice behind: policy and platforms advance top-down, while integration and application at the teaching level remain uneven	Building the basics: the priority remains expanding digital access, improving infrastructure, and establishing foundational capability

This is neither a country ranking nor a fixed classification of institutions. Universities in the same country may occupy very different positions. An institution may also move over time as its policies, leadership and resources change.

Four Mechanisms

The framework above sketches where transformation might stand. The cases show what that actually looks like on the ground. Seven regional and subregional studies draw on extensive surveys and case analysis, covering 67 countries, more than 500 higher education institutions, over 40 organisations and companies, and 28 case studies. Across this variety, four mechanisms stand out.

Scaling through shared coordination. Korea's KERIS, India's SWAYAM, its National Knowledge Network and National Digital Library, all point to the same lesson: national coordinating bodies and shared platforms pool resources, cut duplication, and give institutions steadier infrastructure, content and standards to build on. When good resources can be shared, the cost of transformation falls for each institution, and the gap between them has room to narrow.

Extending capacity through partnerships. For institutions short on resources or expertise, partnerships widen what's possible. IIOE National Centres connect international resources to local need through regional coordination, joint training and shared resources. The Inter-University Council for East Africa uses a training-of-trainers model, bringing together educators from several countries and adapting courses to local teaching contexts.

Frontline innovation under constraint. In Nepal, Sri Lanka, Ghana and Nigeria, teachers are using messaging apps and generative AI for everyday teaching. Innovation, it turns out, can start at the margins. But without institutional recognition, professional support or a peer network, individual effort rarely lasts. Build the incentives, the support, the communities of practice, and institutions can turn scattered initiative into something shared and improved upon.

Transforming institutions through leadership. Training run by the Association of African Universities for ICT directors, chief information officers and senior managers points to a precondition: digital governance, cybersecurity, resource planning and strategic leadership have to be in place before a pilot can become an institution.

What Comes Next

Grounded in practice, and built to serve it, the report closes with a set of priority actions for the Global South.

One strand looks to the workforce: putting higher education staff at the centre of AI-enabled transformation, through competency-based career pathways, stronger incentives and recognition, and capacity-building that respects teacher autonomy, inclusion and local context. The other looks to the institution: strengthening governance, leadership and delivery; investing in digital infrastructure that is inclusive, sustainable and reliable; and building an ecosystem that is collaborative, platform-based, and linked to industry.

IIOE Development Report: A Notebook of Action

Can Higher Education Answer the Call of Technology?

Faced with this digital and AI-enabled transformation, IIOE has set about translating its forward-looking vision into tangible tools and products that empower higher education worldwide. In 2020, UNESCO-ICHEI, together with Jiker Academy, launched the IIOE online learning platform (iioe.org), which is committed to bringing high-quality online courses and digital capacity-building resources to partner institutions. Through its online learning system, digital resource management system, and intelligent learning support tools, the platform offers higher education institutions an effective digital learning environment.

The content on the IIOE platform is in constant development, now offering over

7000+

massive open online courses (MOOCs) spanning online and blended teaching, ICT fundamentals, cloud computing, big data, and AI — together forming a rich, multidisciplinary repository of learning resources.

By May 2026, the platform had drawn over

27000+

registered users and 283 registered institutions across **Asia, Africa, Latin America and beyond**, testament to its reach and influence across the global higher education landscape.

Can Teaching and Learning Keep Up with Industry?

To keep learners and workers competitive and adaptable in a fast-changing economy, the AI era demands nothing less than a structural transformation of education and training systems, building a lifelong learning ecosystem fit for the needs of tomorrow's society.

As an important form of lifelong learning, micro-credentials have demonstrated significant potential in bridging the gap between knowledge renewal in HEIs and the rapid pace of technological advancement.

Relying on a "partner needs
+ frontier trends" dual-
driven system, IIOE has

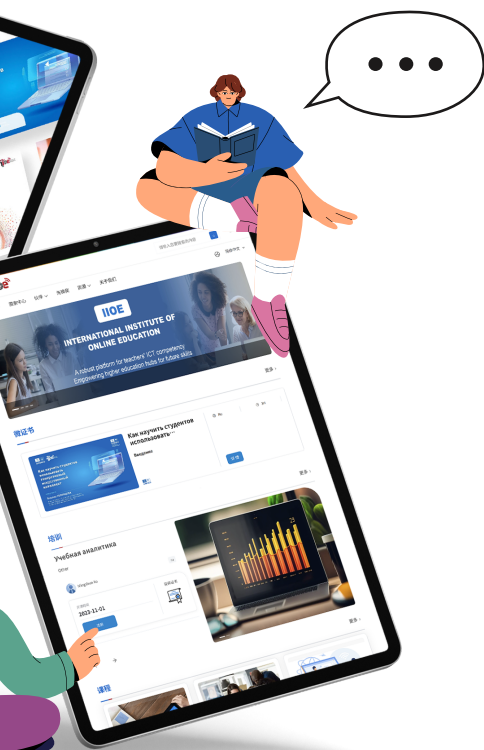


4

micro-certification course categories

progressively established micro-certification course categories: "Higher Education Teaching Personnel Digital Competency", "GenAI for Higher Education Professionals", "AI+Discipline", and "AI+Industry". The IIOE micro-certification courses effectively fill the gap in quality digital education resources in many developing countries. They have been embedded into the teacher professional development systems of some IIOE partner institutions, achieving the institutionalisation of capacity-building programmes. IIOE courses are available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish, and other languages.

Amid the continuously expanding global talent gap, IIOE engages with industrial frontiers, partnering with leading enterprises and industry associations



WIDE ANGLE



to develop "AI+Industry" micro-certification programmes.

For example, UNESCO-ICHEI and BGI Group jointly developed the IIOE "AI+ Life Sciences" course series based on real enterprise business scenarios, effectively bridging the gap between academic theory and workplace requirements. The two parties plan to develop "Life and Health Sciences Literacy" micro-certification courses for university faculty, administrators, and continuing education learners. This aims to empower higher education professionals to become early adopters and communicators of cutting-edge health technologies, thereby enriching the "AI+Industry" curriculum matrix across the dual dimensions of talent cultivation and health literacy enhancement. Building on existing achievements, IIOE is actively planning for courses in frontier fields such as "AI+Low-Altitude Economy", "AI+Clean Energy", and "AI +Embodied Intelligence".



Can Digital and AI Transformation Last?

Local adaptation is what gives development its depth and staying power. Only when rooted in the local educational ecosystem can digital and AI-enabled transformation shift from something externally driven to something that grows from within. Through its multi-tiered system of National Centres, Training Centres and Regional Centres, IIOE brings high-quality global resources into dialogue with each country's own policy frameworks, teaching contexts, and industry needs.

17

National Centres

Several IIOE National Centres have integrated IIOE training into teacher professional development systems, ensuring the institutionalised implementation and sustainability of capacity-building programmes.



2

Regional Centres

By integrating high-quality local resources, IIOE Regional Centres scales up training in educators' digital and AI competencies.

400000+

With Orleu's contribution, the total number of learners empowered through IIOE has now surpassed 400,000.



principles: extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefit

IIOE is committed to drawing out the complementary strengths of multiple stakeholders and turning them into real synergy.



Training Centres

IIOE is also establishing Training Centres in high-income economies, leveraging local high-quality educational resources and industrial advantages to develop cutting-edge, practical, and industry-recognised training programmes. IIOE has collaborated with Hong Kong Wedon Demos Group, International Leading Education Alliance, and Brest Business School to successively establish IIOE Training Centres in Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, and France.

4

parties

The Smart Classroom Project, with academic support from the SUSTech, hardware and software facilities provided by enterprises, and technical standards set by UNESCO-ICHEI, has been implemented at IIOE partner institutions.

53

countries

200+

partner HEIs

40+

enterprises

In the year of

2023

UNESCO-ICHEI launched the IIOE Higher Education Digitalisation Pioneer Case Award.

They focus on fintech, healthy lifestyles, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), and "AI+Tourism".

4 +

areas

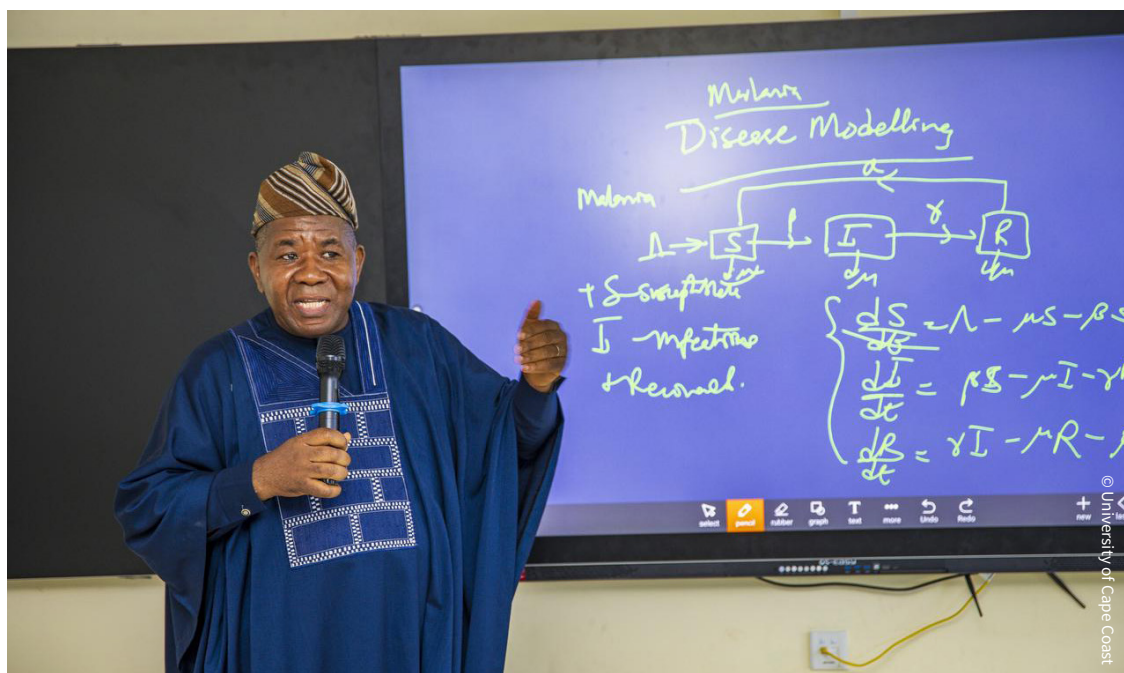


Can Innovation Create Value for All?



The 2023 IIOE Higher Education Digitalisation Pioneer Case Award Ceremony

IIOE has held fast to a guiding principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefit, committed to drawing out the complementary strengths of multiple stakeholders and turning them into real synergy. From co-building infrastructure and high-quality training resources through industry-academia collaboration, to forging regional policy consensus and practical guidance through multilateral dialogue, to recognising outstanding practices and championing global exchange inspired by pioneering cases — IIOE has built a system of collaborative empowerment.



The Smart Classroom at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, was officially inaugurated on 31 July 2025

Looking ahead, IIOE will grow along four directions: technology empowerment, multilateral collaboration, localised operation, and mutual benefit.

At its core will sit "AI+Discipline" and "AI+Industry" micro-certification training, extending capacity-building beyond higher education professionals to reach students and practitioners across related fields. Working alongside enterprises and industry associations, IIOE will help build localised talent pipelines that bring education and industry into step, carrying learners through learning, practical training, and on to employment or entrepreneurship.

At the same time, IIOE will widen its network further still. Already spanning 53 countries, and bringing together over 200 partner HEIs and more than 40 enterprises, it will deepen its roots across Asia and Africa, extend strategically into other parts of the Global South, and open dialogue with higher education institutions in high-income economies too.

It will also strengthen the pivotal roles played by National Centres, Training Centres, and Regional Centres within the ecosystem. Through this multi-tiered, interlinked network, IIOE will keep bringing frontier resources into alignment with the real needs of digital transformation in higher education — nurturing models that are local, distinctive, and built to last.

Building on this foundation, IIOE looks ahead: towards training programmes recognised by governments and industry bodies, towards institutions built to last beyond any single project, and towards knowledge that moves from the page into practice.



Scan to read

Consensus of the International Institute of Online Education (IIOE) Ecosystem Partners

On 6 June 2026, the UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia (UNESCO Beijing), the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (UNESCO IITE), Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech) and the International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO (UNESCO-ICHEI) jointly convened the *Global Future Higher Education Summit: A New Ecosystem for AI-Driven Industry-Academia Collaborative Talent Development*. The summit brought together representatives from higher education institutions (HEIs), international organisations, and enterprises across multiple countries and regions. Cities such as Shenzhen, characterised by its vibrant technology and digital industries, a hub of innovation, offer valuable practical experience for the integrating frontier technologies and higher education, while also providing important references for international cooperation at this summit. In this context, representatives of partner HEIs, enterprises, and relevant institutions of the International Institute of Online Education (IIOE) Ecosystem, building upon long-term cooperation and a shared vision, have reached the following consensus:

1. This Consensus is grounded in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and the Education 2030 Framework for Action, and is committed to advancing the digitalisation of education and the responsible application of artificial intelligence (AI), so that technological progress and capacity-building serve the goals of inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning for all. The Consensus also acknowledges the positioning articulated in the UNESCO report *Transforming higher education: Global collaboration on visioning and action*, which frames digital technologies and AI as transformative principles centred on people and the public mission of higher education, and affirms support for the construction of a new social contract for higher education.
2. The transformation and development of higher education in the Global South require in-depth, contextually grounded research and targeted strategies that are responsive to regional differences and local needs. Drawing on research by UNESCO, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and other international organisations, a series of joint studies conducted between 2023 and 2025 across seven sub-regions — South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Central Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the

Arab States — provided a comprehensive mapping of the current landscape, challenges, and directions for action in higher education digitalisation across these regions. Building on these findings, the report *From Digitalisation to AI Empowerment — The Future of Higher Education in the Global South* identifies key opportunities and challenges in the digital transformation and AI-enabled development of higher education, and puts forward priority actions oriented towards greater inclusivity and sustainability.

3. The transformation of higher education requires robust multilateral cooperation. Establishing phased and attainable targets in alignment with national policy frameworks and development stages is essential to ensuring effective implementation. UNESCO Headquarters, field offices, and regional intergovernmental organisations play an indispensable bridging role between global education goals and local needs. Embedded within partner HEIs, IIOE National Centres serve as national hubs for strengthening multilateral cooperation and supporting institutional transformation through network development, localised capacity-building, and policy dialogue. The engagement of enterprises and industry bodies provides important support for bridging talent development and labour market needs. As the initiator of IIOE, UNESCO-ICHEI continues to coordinate stakeholders and advance multilateral cooperation across diverse regional and institutional contexts.
4. Teachers remain the central driving force and key enablers of transformation in higher education. Strengthening teachers' professional capacity to apply technology responsibly and effectively is a necessary foundation for advancing this transformation. IIOE continues to support faculty capacity development at partner HEIs through digital and AI application micro-certification training, with an emphasis on localised implementation.
5. The seven years of practice documented in the *International Institute of Online Education (IIOE) Development Report (2019–2026)* demonstrate that, guided by the principle of "extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits", IIOE has developed an ecosystem of partners spanning 48 countries, more than 190 HEIs, and over 40 enterprises, with a sustained commitment to strengthening the digital literacy and AI competencies of higher education faculty across the Global South. The ecosystem model, centred on technological empowerment, grounded in local adaptation, and supported by multilateral cooperation, constitutes a practical pathway toward bridging both the digital divide and the education divide.
6. The accelerating integration of AI with key industries is placing ever-greater demands on workforce competencies, calling for more flexible, industry-oriented approaches to talent development. Micro-certifications, as a significant form of lifelong learning, have emerged as a promising means of bridging the gap between the pace of knowledge renewal in HEIs and the rapid iteration of technologies. In collaboration with industry partners, IIOE has launched "AI + Industry" and "AI + Discipline" micro-certification courses, including "AI + Cross-Border E-Commerce," "AI + Life Sciences," and "AI + Clean Energy", dedicated to enhancing the AI application competencies

of higher education professionals and students, while advancing industry-academia collaborative talent development.

7. The *Beijing Consensus on Artificial Intelligence and Education* and the *Global Education Monitoring Report 2026* highlight that persistent challenges remain in the digitalisation of higher education and the application of AI, including underrepresentation and gender disparities in participation. IIOE supports the development of the open digital learning platform and smart classrooms, providing partner HEIs with digital and AI capacity-building resources. In collaboration with UNESCO IITE, IIOE implements the Women Leading Change in Africa initiative, delivering targeted capacity-building support for women higher education professionals across multiple African countries. Drawing on the IIOE Higher Education Digitalisation Pioneer Award, exemplary practices are identified and disseminated, enabling institutions and industry partners across the Global South to share experiences and learn from one another more widely.
8. Building on the foregoing considerations and practices, we commit to the following priority actions:
 - a. Advancing technological empowerment: expanding the "AI + Industry" and "AI + Discipline" Micro-certification programme portfolio to support the development of talent equipped to meet the demands of industrial transformation across the Global South.
 - b. Deepening multilateral cooperation: strengthening cross-national, cross-regional, and multi-sectoral cooperation, and supporting the participation of industry bodies in competency standard-setting, curriculum development, and the recognition of competency-based learning outcomes.
 - c. Strengthening local operations: leveraging IIOE National Centres and regional cooperation mechanisms to support institutions in developing contextually grounded and sustainable training implementation plans.
 - d. Promoting shared benefit: supporting the identification and dissemination of good practices, and facilitating the exchange of experience and the building of shared consensus.
9. The IIOE ecosystem partners call upon all stakeholders to treat this Consensus as a new point of departure and to commit to translating it into sustained action — deepening multilateral collaboration, contributing to the narrowing of gaps in digital literacy and AI application competencies among higher education professionals and students, and advancing the realisation of the Education 2030 Agenda and the vision set out in Futures of Education.



Scan to read in other languages (Chinese, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic)



Qinqiang, one China's old opera tradition and national intangible cultural heritage





As we imagine the future of higher education together, this evening on 6 June, 2026 reminds us: technology may transform how we learn, but culture remains what connects us in learning.

Like a Qinqiang aria echoing across centuries, its courage and wisdom find new voices in every generation.

Programme Updates

2026 Leadership Policy Dialogue in South Asia Held

Jointly hosted by the UNESCO Kathmandu Office, Tribhuvan University (TU), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and UNESCO-ICHEI, the "2026 Leadership Policy Dialogue in South Asia: Charting Responsible and Innovative AI Integration in Higher Education" was held on 20 May 2026 at the Everest Hotel in Kathmandu, Nepal. The meeting centred on the digital transformation of South Asian higher education and pathways for the responsible integration of AI into higher education ecosystems. The event also featured the official launch of the IIOE Nepal National Centre and the release of the *Report on Digital Transformation in Higher Education in South Asia*.



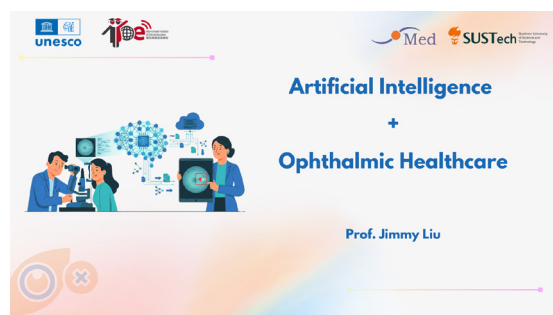
Smart Classroom Unveiled at Tribhuvan University

On May 21, 2026, the unveiling ceremony of the Smart Classroom was held at Tribhuvan University in Nepal. This unveiling ceremony marks a pivotal milestone in the UNESCO-ICHEI Smart Classroom project's journey in Nepal. Ms. Bi Xiaohan, Deputy Director of UNESCO-ICHEI, noted that the Smart Classroom is "not merely a classroom, but an action platform." The launch of the Smart Classroom would provide a powerful implementation engine for the IIOE Nepal National Centre, accelerating the digital transformation of higher education in Nepal.



Co-Launched "AI + Ophthalmic Healthcare" Micro-Certification Programme

UNESCO-ICHEI and Professor Jimmy Liu's iMED team from Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech) jointly launched a new "AI + Discipline" micro-certification course titled *Artificial Intelligence + Ophthalmic Healthcare: Frontier Applications and Precision Diagnosis and Treatment*. The course has been officially released on the IIOE platform and is open to global learners



free of charge. The course is an important part of IIOE's continued efforts to expand its "AI + Discipline" micro-certification course system. It aims to help university teachers, students, and relevant professional learners around the world understand how AI can be applied in specialised fields, while promoting deeper integration between higher education course content and frontier technological development.

Global Future Higher Education Summit Convened

On 6 June 2026, the "Global Future Higher Education Summit: A New Ecosystem for AI-Driven Industry-Academia Collaborative Talent Development" was held at SUSTech Convention Center in Shenzhen, China. Leaders, experts, and representatives from government authorities, international organisations, HEIs, and frontier technology enterprises gathered to explore how to restructure the connection between higher education and industry.



Co-Launched "AI + Life Sciences" Micro-Certification Programme

On 6 June 2026, UNESCO-ICHEI and BGI Group jointly launched the "AI + Life Sciences" Micro-Certification Programme. As an important practice of UNESCO-ICHEI's efforts to advance "AI + Industry" course development, the Programme focuses on the convergence of AI and the life sciences industry.

Covering life science frontiers, core technologies in genomics, biological foundation models and intelligent computing, precision medicine, molecular diagnostics, and agriculture and genomics, it provides systematic, modular and internationalised online learning resources through the IIOE platform. All nine courses under the Programme have now been launched in the "AI + Life Sciences" section on the IIOE platform, and are open to learners worldwide.



Co-Launched "AI + AgriTech" Micro-Certification Programme

UNESCO-ICHEI and Universiti Putra Malaysia jointly developed the "AI+Agritechnology" Micro-certification Programme, which was officially launched on 6 June 2026. As an important practice of UNESCO-ICHEI's efforts to advance "AI+Industry" course development, the Programme follows a learning pathway from foundations to application. It covers HyFlex learning design, the principles and systems of agritechnology, smart farming and precision agriculture technologies, agricultural data analysis, agritechnology management and entrepreneurship, and agricultural programme development and evaluation. The Programme helps learners understand how digital technologies can



be applied to agricultural production, management and decision-making, while developing their ability to design, implement and evaluate agritechnology programmes and apply agritechnology in educational contexts.

Co-Launched "AI+Cross-Border E-Commerce" Micro-Certification Programme

The "AI+Cross-Border E-Commerce" Micro-Certification Programme is jointly advanced by UNESCO-ICHEI and the China Association of Trade in Services (CATIS) through the IIOE platform. The Programme was officially launched on 6 June 2026. The two parties brought together industry experts, university teachers, and business practitioners to conduct course research, framework design,

content development, and quality review in response to cross-border e-commerce talent development needs, transforming industry knowledge, educational experience, and real-world cases into resources suitable for online learning.



Attended IUCEA Annual Meeting and Conference in Kenya

From July 28 to August 1, 2026, UNESCO-ICHEI was invited to attend the 17th Annual Meeting and Conference of the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) in Nairobi, Kenya. During the meeting, delegates from UNESCO-ICHEI shared practical experience in regional AI training of trainers. Taking this opportunity, they held a series of bilateral meetings with universities from across East Africa and with Kenya's higher education authorities, deepening regional partnerships and contributing to the building of a new ecosystem for higher education in East Africa.



Knowledge Sharing

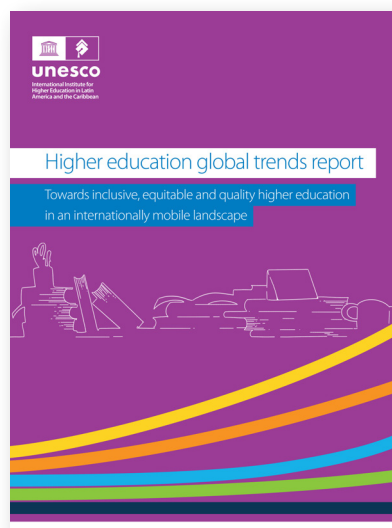
Introduction to Artificial Intelligence in Education



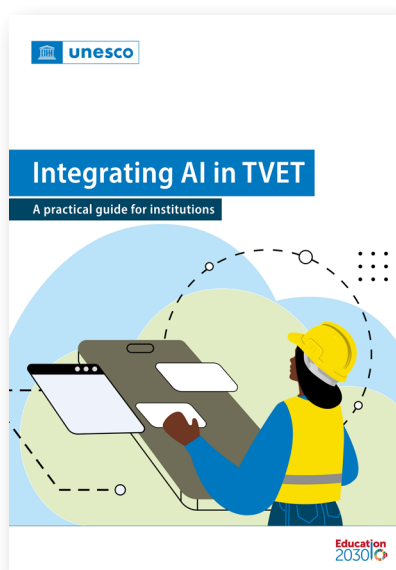
Guided by the UNESCO AI Competency Framework for Teachers and China's AI + Education Action Plan, the *Introduction to Artificial Intelligence in Education* systematically synthesises the frontline experience accumulated over years of integrating AI with pedagogical theory and practice at SUSTech. It elaborates detailedly the educational theory of "Education Intelligence" (EI). The book aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth discussion centred on AI applications and developments in education, serving as a theoretical reference and practical guidance for educators, researchers, pre-service teachers, and all readers interested in AI in education.

Higher Education Global Trends Report

By integrating data from 146 countries through UNESCO-IESALC's Higher Education Policy Observatory, with in-depth policy analysis across 10 thematic areas, the *Higher Education Global Trends Report* has created an evidence base that moves beyond simple statistics to reveal the deeper patterns shaping this sector. It examines the changing face of higher education, mapping policies and trends related to participation and completion, equity and inclusion, governance and legislative frameworks, external quality assurance, financing, digital transformation and AI, and higher education teaching personnel.



Integrating AI in TVET: A Practical Guide for Institutions

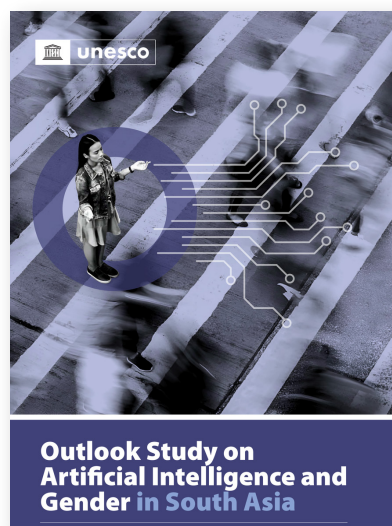


This practical guide supports technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions in developing a coherent approach to AI integration that keeps educational purpose, human agency, equity and safety at the centre. It helps institutions harness the potential of AI with a clear understanding of its impacts, limitations and risks by presenting principles for ethical and responsible AI use and examining the ecosystem conditions that enable AI-ready TVET. This guide proposes an institutionwide approach covering AI governance, programme and curriculum development, pedagogy and training delivery, assessment, competency development, AI use in safety-critical occupations, innovation and entrepreneurship, as well as monitoring and evaluation.

AI and Gender in South Asia

How are women positioned across the rapidly expanding AI ecosystem in South Asia? Who participates, leads and benefits from the technologies increasingly governing everyday life? This report seeks to answer these questions by establishing a regional baseline on AI and gender in South Asia.

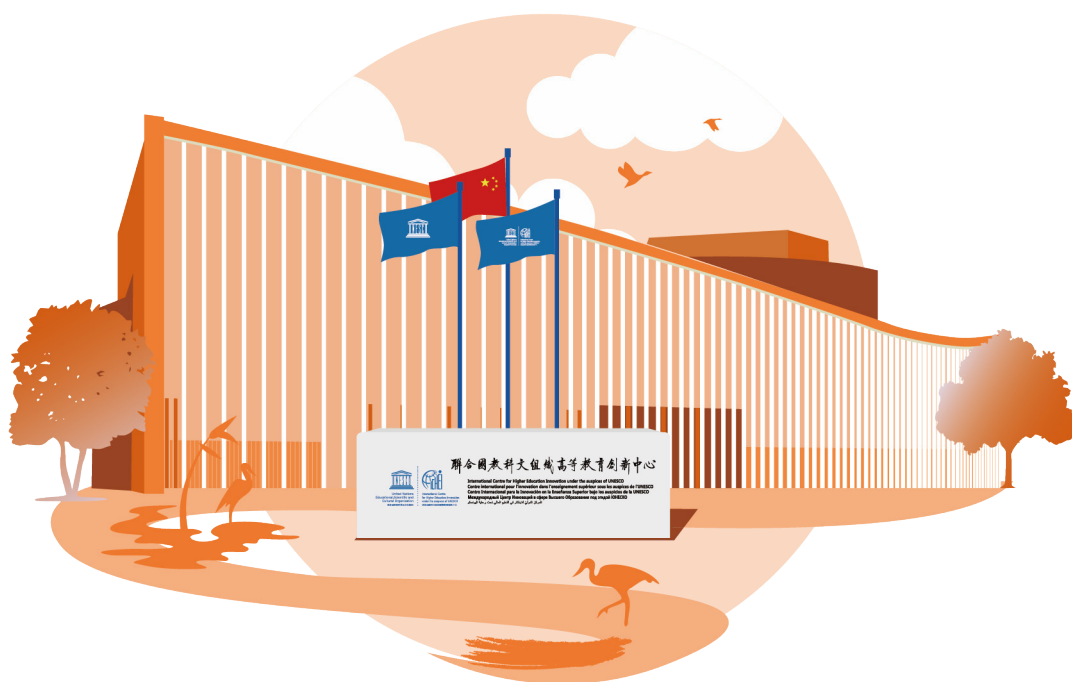
The findings of this report reveal how gender inequality is reproduced across the AI ecosystem, and where targeted interventions can shift outcomes. Readers will find regional evidence, comparative insights, and policy recommendations to support more inclusive AI futures in South Asia.



| The operational team of the IIOE
Indonesia National Centre (Indonesia
Cyber Education Institute) at the
2023 IIOE Global Partners Summit







Published by the International Centre for Higher Education Innovation
under the auspices of UNESCO