

Digital-ESE Pilot Profile

The Evolving Landscape of Work & the Digital Skills Gap

The global workforce is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by rapid technological advancements and shifting economic demands. As the nature of work evolves, digital skills are becoming increasingly essential across all sectors. The World Economic Forum estimates 1.1 billion jobs worldwide will be fundamentally altered within the next decade due to accelerated technological integration in business practices.¹

In too many economies, educational institutions and employers are not meeting the moment – traditional learning curricula leaves out the most in-demand skills and organizational learning and development resources are inequitably distributed. Youth, women, and others from marginalized communities are particularly at risk to being left behind. Rapid technological change can exacerbate existing critical skills gaps, and lack of access to, or understanding of, online learning opportunities can stifle self-skilling.² These systemic barriers and a lack of institutional responsibility for upskilling means that youth prioritize their own learning journeys – often in non-traditional and self-directed ways via digital mediums, such as online courses or social media.³ The ability to effectively learn new and relevant digital skills is an increasingly critical skill, as are the knowledge and practices to learn online while balancing work and life commitments and protecting oneself from digital harm.

IREX Youth-Led Research on Digital Upskilling

To better understand this pressing issue and contribute to innovative solutions, in 2024 IREX launched a research initiative in Kenya. Youth researchers interviewed 44 youths from urban and peri-urban areas to gain insights into their experiences with digital skill building. Youth answered a range of questions covering their motivations, fears, learning strategies, successes, and challenges. We also sought to gauge their knowledge of and experiences with online safety, privacy and security breaches, mis- and dis-information, and cyber-bullying.

The findings highlight the complex landscape of digital upskilling for Kenyan youth, marked by significant challenges such as financial constraints, time management issues, and non-conducive learning environments.

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The Development of the Digital-ESE Curriculum

Despite the obstacles identified in the research, the interviewed youth were motivated by their commitment to learning and growing professionally. Addressing cybersecurity concerns, providing affordable and accessible resources, and fostering supportive learning communities were suggested as integral components that empowered young learners to navigate the digital world efficiently, safely, and effectively (ESE) - and so, Digital-ESE was born!

IREX developed the Digital-ESE curriculum, designed to equip youth to become “power learners” in digital upskilling and to maintain a confident and secure digital presence while doing so. Through character-based scenarios, instructional content, and interactive activities, youth learn how to identify opportunities to improve digital skills, cultivate effective learning environments, evaluate their learning progress, navigate online spaces safely and responsibly, engage in a digital learning community, and ultimately parlay digital skill-building efforts to professional growth. Learners end the program with a two-page “Learner Persona” that documents their learning goals, a cyber-hygiene toolkit, effective online learning strategies, a learning schedule, a map of their support network, a list of digital issues they care about, and a list of people they can keep informed about their learning progress.



Digital
Upskiller

Throughout the modules, participants follow the journey of Wanjiku, a fictitious character whose stories are inspired by the lived experiences of the 44 Kenyan youth interviewed.

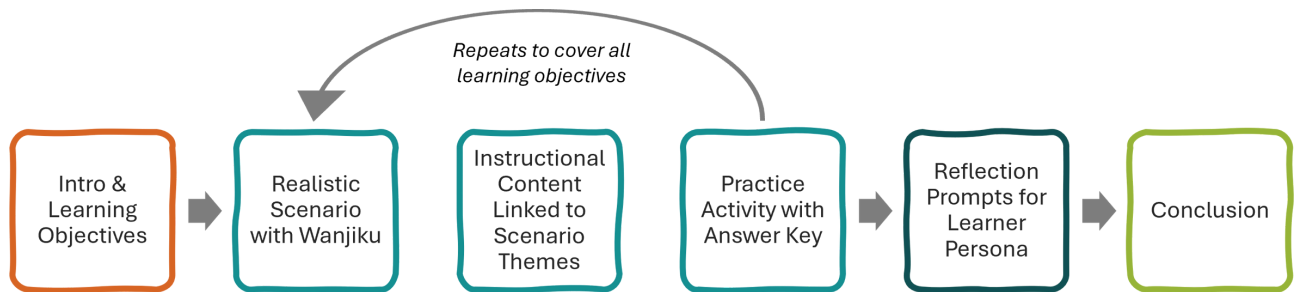
IREX created a custom generative AI tool to create the Wanjiku persona and produce stories that drew from the authentic circumstances and challenges to learning online that the interviewees described.

Other components of the curriculum were enriched and tailored through insights gained from various IREX programs focusing on mis- and dis-information, technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), and digital safety and security.⁴

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The Digital-ESE Curriculum Experience

Each of the modules follows the standard learning experience shown below:



Excerpt from Wanjiku's Journey

One evening, while scrolling through her social media feeds, Wanjiku stumbled upon a job advertisement that seemed almost too good to be true. The post boasted of lucrative job opportunities requiring minimal experience but promising high returns. The company appeared to be based overseas and promised extensive training and fantastic growth opportunities.

The post resonated with Wanjiku, however, her recent education on digital literacy – where Wanjiku learned about online safety and the risks of unreliable information – made her pause. Wanjiku decided to probe deeper. She noticed that the job posts lacked specific details about the company and the roles offered. The high pay for minimal experience was a red flag. She remembered her friends' encounters with job scams that promised a lot but resulted in financial losses or identity theft.

Wanjiku went to a local online forum to ask about the company. Members quickly pointed out discrepancies in the company's online presence – reminding Wanjiku to check the credibility of the company's digital footprint, seek out employer reviews, and verify job offers through official company contact details. Some noted that similar postings had been flagged as scams in other forums. Based on this, Wanjiku reported the post to the social media platform.

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Partnership & Pilot

SafeOnline Women Kenya (SOW-Kenya) is a youth-led organization dedicated to empowering and protecting women and girls in Kenya online. Through education, advocacy, and support, they provide the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to navigate the digital landscape securely. Driven by this shared vision, IREX partnered with SOW-Kenya to pilot the Digital-ESE curriculum in Nairobi, Kenya. On June 22, 2024 in Kenya, 14 women aged 18-35 participated in a full-day workshop to experience the curriculum firsthand and provide feedback. The group included lawyers, entrepreneurs, managers, biologists, and teachers, among others. They comprise a mix of employed, self-employed, and job-seeking professionals, all of whom hold bachelor's, master's, or community college degrees.



Digital-ESE facilitators from SOW and IREX pictured from left to right: Emmanuel Ng'osei, Julie Radol, Lucy Mwaura, Lilian Olivia Orero, Maxie Gluckman, Petronila Adhiambo

In alignment with the Digital-ESE course objectives, participants left the workshop equipped with new knowledge, skills, and resources to aid in their digital upskilling journey. Participants described the workshop as an eye-opening experience, highlighting the development of practical skills they had not previously considered, particularly regarding their digital safety and security. As one woman shared, she was “inspired by Wanjiku's journey. I now understand that I should not fully rely on online resources and that I should fact check to ensure I use information that is from legitimate sources.” Another participant reflected that she “should be keen on whatever I share online since there is footprint, we leave behind it that is usually beyond our control... Also, there are places to report cyberbullying and cookies put us at risk, tracking the stored information.”

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Participants shared they would use the following strategies going forward:

Online Learning

- Verify learning sources
- Use lateral reading approaches
- Practice growth mindset
- Set a learning schedule
- Maintain work-life balance
- Report cyberbullying

Digital Safety

- Use strong, secure passwords
- Accept only necessary cookies
- Clear cache regularly
- Report cyberbullying
- Avoid sharing private information online
- Be cautious of phishing scams
- Stay informed about misinformation
- Enable two-factor authentication

Our inaugural Digital-ESE Upskiller cohort includes leaders and changemakers, who envision a better future for themselves and Kenyan youth. They care about and have committed to taking action on wide range of digital issues including:

- Enhancing access to information and learning for marginalized communities
- Advocating for the awareness of TFGBV
- Promoting social media activism
- Spreading awareness of the risks of cyber-bullying, doxing, and phishing
- Addressing the mental health impact of social media
- Reducing the spread of harmful and false information online



We are inspired by them and look forward to seeing their collective impact!

What's Next? The Digital-ESE team is incorporating feedback from this first pilot experience and look forward to making this resource open-source and available to other youth-led and youth-serving organizations in Kenya and globally. We are preparing a monitoring and evaluation toolkit and adaptation guide to inform contextualization for other implementation contexts. Stay tuned for more on Wanjiku's story and our Digital-ESE community!

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LinkedIn Posts from Pilot Participants



Follow

I'm excited to share that I took part in the First ever Digital-ESE Workshop #DigitalESE Implemented by #IREX and SafeOnline Women Kenya (SOW-Kenya) that took place on the 22nd June 2024.

I learnt how i'll Efficiently, Safely & Effectively upskill my digital Literacy in my Digital Creation and Marketing Sector #upskillingjourney through ways such as;

- ◆ Understanding the type of content I put across various Social Media Platforms.
- ◆ The kind of digital footprints I leave behind as I use & browse through Social Media.
- ◆ How to respond to #cyberbullying and the measures to take if it happens.
- ◆ The necessary bodies I can freely run to. Such as SafeOnline Women Kenya (SOW-Kenya) #onlinesafety
- ◆ Plus so much more! 🍷

I got the chance to widely understand about the various forms of the Technology Facilitated Gender-Based violence that currently happen within us such as doxing, trolling among others.

I grabbed the opportunity of Networking and also shared great ideas with such like minded Individuals.



Follow

I'm excited to share that I recently attended a digital ESE workshop organized by IREX Kenya and SOW Kenya, which took place on June 22, 2024. During the workshop, I learned how to effectively use my digital skills to create compelling graphic designs and impactful PowerPoint presentations.

I also gained insight into different types of cookies, the associated risks, and best practices for creating strong, secure passwords to protect my projects from cyber threats.

Additionally, the workshop provided valuable information on identifying and reporting instances of cyberbullying, as well as understanding various forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence such as trolling and doxing. I am incredibly grateful to IREX, Lilian Olivia, Maxie, and SOW-Kenya for organizing this informative and empowering workshop.

#digital ESE
#upskilling journey
#online safety
#wanjiku and I
SafeOnline Women Kenya (SOW-Kenya)
IREX



Follow

I'm thrilled to share that I participated in the inaugural Digital-ESE Workshop, implemented by IREX and SafeOnline Women Kenya (SOW-Kenya), on June 22, 2024.

1. I learnt how to efficiently, safely, and effectively navigate through social media and using the internet to upskill and minding my online safety.
2. Learning effective methods for up-skilling and time management was a key takeaway. I also explored various avenues for #upskilling, such as formal education and self-training through platforms like YouTube.
3. Understanding the digital footprint I create while using social media was emphasised, along with the importance of mindfulness in online activities. Addressing #cyberbullying and understanding the necessary actions to take if faced with it was another crucial topic. Being mindful of social media posts and knowing where to seek help, such as SafeOnline Women Kenya (SOW-Kenya), #onlinesafety, NIC, ODPC, and others, was highlighted.
4. I gained insights into misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation during the workshop.
5. Valuable insights were also gained into various forms of Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV).

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References

1. World Economic Forum. The Future of Jobs Report 2023. www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2023/digest.
2. PwC. *Upskilling for Shared Prosperity*. 2021, www.pwc.com/gx/en/news-room/press-releases/2021/upskilling-for-shared-prosperity.html.
3. Eynon, Rebecca, and Anne Geniets. "The Digital Skills Paradox: How Do Digitally Excluded Youth Develop Skills to Use the Internet?" *Learning, Media and Technology*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2016, pp. 463-479, doi:10.1080/17439884.2014.1002845
4. IREX has a rich history of work in the areas of mis- and dis-information, technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), and digital safety and security. We thank the Learn2Discern, TRANSFORM, SAFE, She's Great, Community Solutions, Mandela Washington Fellowship, FANS, Data4Leaders, and the Data Learning Playbook programs for their thoughtful collaboration and shared resources throughout the design process.