# Africa’s urgent need to catch up with AI education advances in China and India



The global technological landscape is witnessing a profound transformation powered by artificial intelligence (AI), a development that has prompted countries like China and India to intensify their integration of AI within educational frameworks. Meanwhile, the African continent faces significant challenges in keeping pace with these advancements, risking economic and technological marginalisation if urgent reforms are not enacted.

In China, the government has introduced an ambitious policy to embed AI education starting from the age of six by September 2025. This comprehensive curriculum aims to cover coding, machine learning, and practical AI applications, supported by AI-driven adaptive learning platforms designed to personalise education for each student. China’s approach reflects a broader strategic intention to secure economic and military supremacy through AI expertise cultivated from a young age.

India has adopted a somewhat different but equally comprehensive method, weaving AI education into diverse academic disciplines beyond engineering. The All India Council for Technical Education has incorporated AI, the Internet of Things (IoT), and data science into all streams of higher education. Since 2019, AI has been offered as an optional subject to Class 9 students under India’s Central Board of Secondary Education, with plans for expansion. Furthermore, the Smart India Hackathon, the world’s largest innovation competition, encourages AI-driven solution development across student cohorts nationwide. This inclusive strategy ensures graduates across various fields such as medicine, law, and agriculture acquire AI literacy relevant to their professions.

In contrast, Africa’s progress remains uneven and tentative. Kenya has introduced coding initiatives within primary education, and Rwanda has collaborated with AI companies like Zindi to provide data science training. However, most African nations lack cohesive AI curricula, do not adequately prepare teachers in emerging technologies, and generally emphasize rote memorisation over critical thinking and digital competencies.

This disparity poses substantial economic risks. According to a World Economic Forum report, by 2025, AI is projected to displace 85 million jobs globally while creating 97 million new positions. However, these new roles will predominantly benefit those equipped with AI-related skills. For Africa, failure to develop an AI-ready workforce could translate into widespread unemployment, economic stagnation, and increased dependency on foreign technology firms.

Without homegrown AI expertise, control over Africa’s digital infrastructure risks falling into the hands of major technology players from Silicon Valley and China, compromising data sovereignty and limiting local innovation. Moreover, Africa’s youthful median age of 19.7 years further compounds the urgency; the failure to equip this demographic with relevant AI skills could generate a “lost generation” facing high unemployment, potential social instability, and intensified brain drain.

To address these challenges, a strategic roadmap for African nations has been proposed:

**Policy Overhaul**: AI education should become a national priority, mandating the inclusion of AI and coding in primary schools, akin to China’s approach. Collaborative efforts with leading global AI organisations are essential for developing curricula tailored to local contexts. Establishing national AI task forces can help coordinate these efforts effectively.

**Teacher Training**: Empowering educators is crucial. Partnerships with entities such as UNESCO’s ICT in Education programme can facilitate upskilling, while competitive remuneration and research grants can attract and retain STEM educators.

**Public-Private Partnerships**: Collaboration between technology hubs and universities can enhance AI certification programmes. Corporate apprenticeship initiatives, like Microsoft’s AI for Good, offer practical experience to bridge skill gaps.

**Fostering Innovation**: Hosting continent-wide AI hackathons, inspired by India’s Smart India Hackathon, could stimulate innovation. Additionally, funding student-led AI startups via grants and incubation centres will nurture entrepreneurial activity.

**Ethical AI Considerations**: Integrating AI ethics into educational content is necessary to guide responsible development and use. Promoting African-led AI research ensures technology solutions address continent-specific issues in sectors such as healthcare and agriculture.

Despite the momentum shown by China and India, Africa’s concrete plans following recent forums such as the Africa AI Global Summit in Kigali have yet to be fully articulated. Oyewole O. Sarumi, Professor of Strategic Leadership and Digital Transformation and Executive Director of ICLED Business School in Lekki, highlights the critical juncture at which the continent stands. Speaking in Businessday NG, Sarumi notes, “The AI revolution is not coming—it is already here. While China and India prepare their youth for AI dominance, Africa risks becoming a passive consumer rather than an active creator of this transformative technology.”

The situation presents a clear set of imperatives for stakeholders: governments must formulate and implement AI education policies promptly; educators require targeted training in emerging technologies; students may pursue self-directed AI learning through platforms such as Coursera and Udacity; and technology leaders should invest in nurturing African AI talent.

The strategic choices made in the near term will significantly influence Africa’s role in the evolving digital economy. As Professor Sarumi concludes, “The future belongs to those who prepare for it today.”

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-beijing-ai-education-mandatory-classrooms-elementary-schoolers-2025-3> - This article corroborates the claim that China is making AI education mandatory from elementary school through high school, starting this fall, aiming to introduce students to AI fundamentals and applications.
* <https://www.asiaeducationreview.com/technology/news/china-to-introduce-mandatory-ai-education-in-schools-by-2025-nwid-3573.html> - It supports the assertion that China is introducing mandatory AI education by 2025, which aligns with its goal to become an AI superpower by cultivating a technologically skilled generation.
* <https://www.lawyer-monthly.com/2025/03/beijing-makes-ai-education-mandatory-for-students/> - This article highlights Beijing's initiative to make AI education compulsory for all students, providing at least eight hours of AI instruction annually, tailored to different age groups.
* <https://www.eweek.com/news/china-ai-education-united-states/> - It discusses China's AI education plan and its implications, noting that it starts from age six and covers ethical considerations, advanced programs, and innovation.
* <https://www.indiatimes.com/technology/news/smart-india-hackathon-intel-ml-tech-345860.html> - While specific details about India are not included in this response due to limited search results, the Smart India Hackathon represents India's efforts to integrate AI and technology into various fields, aligning with the broader strategy mentioned.