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# Integrating Artificial Intelligence in Personalized Learning in East Africa

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# ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a holistic model for integrating Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), to foster personalized learning in East Africa. Despite the adoption of individual educational technologies, the region still faces challenges in achieving personalized learning due to limitations in pedagogy, clear learning objectives, high student engagement, and ongoing feedback mechanisms. By leveraging AI, educators can tailor learning experiences to individual student needs, thereby enhancing educational outcomes. This review evaluated AI-based models for assessing and adapting to learner readiness, creating adaptive learning pathways, and influencing educational policy in East Africa.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Personalized Learning, 4IR Technologies, East Africa, Adaptive Learning, Educational Technology, Student Engagement and Learning Analytics

#### INTRODUCTION

But many parts of the world, specifically in East Africa, still struggle to achieve some essential prerequisites of personalized learning, specifically increased use of pedagogy, clear learning objectives, high student engagement, and ongoing feedback that can contribute to personalize learning [1]. Such challenges lead to teachers' "one size fits all" approach to teaching and learning  $\lceil 2 \rceil$ . Despite the quick adoption of individual technologies like interactive boards, technology acceptance literature is replete with studies that have sought to identify the determinants and the use of technology individually  $\lceil 3 \rceil$ . However, the adoption of 4IR-related technologies to foster personalized learning in East Africa has received little scholarly attention, and no model seeks to explain its use collectively as compared to their single use [4-8]. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to propose a holistic model for the adoption of 4IR technologies in East Africa to promote personalized learning in the future [9-12]. With the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), there is an onset of technological advancements that can redefine education in novel ways, introducing us to an interesting phenomenon called Personalized Learning [13-18]. Personalized learning, as illustrated, employs technology and data to meet each student where they are, keeping them on a level appropriate for their academic progress, with educators often using data and analytics to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each student and guide them to learn at an optimal pace [11]. Consequently, educators can determine when it is right to employ a teacher, small group, larger group, a software solution, or a combination of these in the learning process [7]. Thus, technology can be used to enhance the segregation and personal guidance of learning for each student  $\lceil 19 \rceil$ .

#### **Background and Rationale**

Models of educational systems that support the student's particular needs have shown to be sometimes more efficient than educational systems that are not implemented with these technologies [20-24]. However, the incorporation of educational models into the classroom is a continuous challenge, not only due to the students' diversity criteria (prior knowledge, learning capacity, cognitive styles, personality traits, learning preferences) but also because of the cost-benefit relationship of them and because educators are comfortable with the use of new educational models that integrate educational technologies with artificial intelligence (learning object classifiers, question and answer converters, and intelligent tutors, etc.) which are absolutely necessary for the assessment, content flash, and follow-up of the pupils both inside the classroom and at home via the Internet [25-27]. The demand for personalizing education in schools and homes has made it necessary to develop new free software systems related to open-source tools and assessment systems, and to develop completely new software systems using artificial

intelligence to provide a personalized support platform that will facilitate the work of teachers and students  $\lceil 22 \rceil$ . In this way, access to the students' personalized education systems will be possible for families who do not have economic resources. The model proposed to assess the pupils is shown to be more efficient than present models  $\lceil 17 \rceil$ . The teaching materials are always adapted to the pupils' real knowledge, generating questions related to the materials provided. The improvement in the teaching materials is evaluated and the results are improved. With this, the pupils have been more motivated to do what they are asked to do  $\lceil 9 \rceil$ . A final study about the experiences being carried out with the platform. African nations, especially Kenya, are in the process of implementing a personalized education model. This is based on economic and technological advantages  $\lceil 28 \rceil$ . The model is increasingly being used in both developed and developing countries  $\lceil 29 \rceil$ . The main objective of this education and pedagogy model is to use information and communication technologies (ICT) to provide personalized assessment and education support for students' specific individual needs  $\lceil 23 \rceil$ . The main technological contribution of this model is to use artificial intelligence in education, which has shown to have improved the quality of assessment models and the development of interactive systems that are able to provide personalized support in schools and via the Internet  $\lceil 30 \rceil$ .

#### **Artificial Intelligence in Education**

AI not only motivates education to shift from labor-intensive to technology-driven, but also reshapes educational philosophy, educational objectives, education concept, education model, and education system, making education smarter, more flexible, and more personalized [31]. Introducing AI into practical teaching, stimulating interest in AI learning is an important guarantee for promoting educational reform. Impressing students with profound practical significance, active, and participatory AI knowledge, helping them understand the profound changes of educational practice, acquainted with new theories and methods, and determine their learning goals is the key to AI education [32]. The integration of practical activities and the development of innovative thinking through AI learning is also the most advantageous way for talents to bring the greatest value to society and to cultivate future employment competitiveness  $\lceil 33 \rceil$ . The use of AI technology has been significantly involved in educational practice to help students learn in particular settings [26]. Some researchers have also incorporated AI into instruction design, making AI participate in curriculum tracking participant learning and adjusting participant learning paths, and assisting the teacher to conduct intelligent diagnostics for students' comprehensive development issues. Like the development of intelligent educational technology represents that educational theory and means have changed and the new step and social demand, many countries have issued "Artificial Intelligence + Education Plans" to promote the integration of technology in primary and secondary education [34].

# **Overview of AI in Education**

Accessibility and quality of education at the primary and secondary school levels still remain major problems in East Africa [21]. There is a great need to implement strategies that can influence/enhance learning, literacy, and socio-relational skills of pupils wherever they are, and that can support learning professionals in carrying out teaching and organization activities [24,13,29]. This paper focuses on the application of AI in classroom education to enable personalized and inclusive methodologies that permit support to each pupil in learning, according to individual necessities, characteristics, learning processes (pace), and current achievements (results) [35]. The aim is to develop a methodical approach to support peer education in the classroom at primary and secondary level and providing tutoring, effecting metacognitive reflection, improving strategic abilities related to study, communication, and social exchange  $\lceil 36 \rceil$ . The concept of artificial intelligence (AI) in the field of education is not new. Research in the area has been ongoing for decades and has shown that AI can potentially play a very important role in the innovation of education. For instance, various AI methods such as expert systems and intelligent training systems have been developed to assist in delivering education at the basic and university levels. Despite the growing rates in emerging technology, there has been little progress on the routine use of AI methods in primary and secondary schools [37]. The primary aspect of education where AI has been widely applied is that of personalized e-learning, and this was primarily done to assist learners around the age of 15 and above to learn complex subjects, normally from a distance  $\lceil 38 \rceil$ . Although the application of AI in personalized learning from a distance solves some of the constraints in curriculum delivery, most of East African school learners at these levels have access to learning facilities, often in the form of a one teacher-school ratio, although quality of education and teacher experience are issues of concern  $\lceil 39 \rceil$ .

# **Benefits and Challenges**

The social connections are the other major challenges posed by the use of AI in personalized learning [34]. As AI advances to more advanced capabilities, we need to model the type of curiosity we want students to have. Students need to know that questioning the software's decision is acceptable. Small

challenges need to be created to expose a wider variety of students' backgrounds to greater complexities [40]. One of the biggest challenges of integrating AI in personalized learning is ensuring that every student has access to the right technology [32]. Many students do not have access to devices or Wi-Fi. Another challenge is around recruiting and developing teachers. All teachers need help responding to the variety of student needs in their classroom, from students who want to move ahead quickly to those who need more support to catch up [41]. Furthermore, AI raises issues around data, privacy, and security. These concerns are real and important aspects that need to be resolved. Some of the benefits that come with integrating AI in personalized learning include maximizing the value of learning time and meeting the needs of all students. With AI, every student gets the personalized attention that they need to have a successful learning is being embraced by numerous teachers, and some of them are integrating AI. The advanced countries are experiencing so much from AI, and they know the risks and benefits [42]. This increases the need for developing countries like East Africa to know to what extent the use of AI in personalized learning is beneficial and challenging. This will enable them to take advantage of the benefits while at the same time finding solutions to the challenges [43-45].

# Personalized Learning in East Africa

Personalized learning is a teaching model based on having smaller groupings, or one-to-one, of students in which they receive more individually tailored instruction than in traditional models, and the use of promotion of the use of digital technology in instruction  $\lceil 12 \rceil$ . There is substantial hope that, despite the challenges in implementation, personalized learning model has the potential to provide solutions to the East African education crisis resulting from excessively large class sizes and varying performance levels [32]. Rapid and efficacious methods of determining subject understanding are now available thanks to development in personalized learning tools that are driven by artificial intelligence [24]. The well-built technical abilities of these personalized learning tools combined with the novel research in the field of educational data mining - translating these massive trails of fine-grained data into tools and information realizable by teachers and school administrators interactively, have led to numerous study schools in Kenya and Uganda to connect PL tools with the traditional schooling model [22]. Preliminary studies indicate that students who are in schools using these PL tools performed better than their counterparts in conventional schools [46]. These preliminary studies have not only led to the acknowledgment of the previously understood PL theoretical underpinnings but have also recognized innovative implementations including teachers' responsibility, school administrators and type of curriculum material. Despite the multidimensional nature of education, these findings inform us that teachers can significantly influence the gain in performance leveraging students from these types of technology-a definitive finding from starkly disparate US educational technology revolutions experiences [41]. These broadscale PL tool innovations that use artificial intelligence techniques square with the modern endeavors to introduce minor advances in universal foundational capital theory or technology-based capital economic models that help to explain economic development and growth. Understanding the interactions and complementarities between these technology tools and IT and instructor capital can help formulate the school-based digital strategies that are required for enhanced student performance [47-51].

# **Current Landscape**

While it is true that automation specifically will happen in the future, AI is already influencing education. Online learning platforms have integrated AI and machine learning to adapt content, user interface, and experience [14]. Virtual teaching assistants perform tasks such as sending reminders, reading questions aloud, and giving feedback to students. Technologies that use natural language processing present learners with data, essays, and open-ended responses in a way that allows them to collect data and foster reflection on language use trend over time [18]. Massachusetts Institute of Technology is using AI to teach introductory physics courses. In the Kenyan context, traditional education systems have frequently been criticized for the poor teaching methods that lead to poor learning outcomes [19]. Despite a long history of educational policy change and reforms, there has been very minimal implementation of policy options that are able to show concrete signs of addressing issues to do with poor learning outcomes by pupils or even average performance in schools. Such slow progress is unfortunate given the key role of education in development and changes in society, especially at a time of globalization, dramatic technological advances, demographic expansions, and international goals of achieving growth with equality and the elimination of poverty  $\lceil 21 \rceil$ . While technology is no silver bullet, technology-driven initiatives are promising some revolutionary changes within schools, leading to the anticipated improvement in the learning process  $\lceil 52 \rceil$ .

#### **Opportunities and Challenges**

Assistant technologies such as Alexa by Amazon and Google Assistant are AI-powered and enable people to interact with devices, assisting them to answer their questions, opening applications, and playing the desired music channel [38]. They can also sing them an already learned song setting to a comfortable tune, and provide up-to-date news and weather [42]. While there has been little research work conducted on sustainable society aspects, experiments have been conducted on how these tools can be used for GPSR, explosive ordnance recognition, and other minor problems, healthcare, and taxi operators [53]. We know only of four research studies that have been conducted on individualized educational functionality in teaching and learning skills with Alexa by Amazon and two research studies with Google Assistant. Of these few reports, only one is about individualized education skills in a classroom setting, while the rest were conducted with different groups and were limited to basic subject content [54]. Tasks such as 'help me with my Mathematics homework', content identification in the syllabus, and pronunciation issues from multilingual backgrounds were addressed and used for research inquiries  $\lceil 55 \rceil$ . In addition, there is a need for standard baseline developmental data models, instance-level quantitative data, and algorithms from continuous research to develop more applications that meet the needs of children in various regions, of different age groups, gender, race, and learning challenges, more accurately and with affordable voice-enabled technology  $\lceil 56 \rceil$ . The use of low-cost devices, tablets, and smartphones enables the individual pace of instruction and the ability to generate assessment information quickly with minimal to no back-and-forth teacher technology [43]. This enables one-on-one instruction while using a personalized learning approach, making it easier to measure learning outcomes of personalized learning. Machine learning methods provide a breakthrough in producing completely automated teachers that display a customizable dialogue by using applications that incrementally get to know and understand the student. In addition, personalized learning attracts politicians, whether decisively or cautiously, across the ideological spectrum. However, debates continue among teacher unions and teachers [41]. Yet, to date, only a tiny fraction of what makes classroom teaching has been digitized. Personalized learning integrates several technology-assisted instructions and individualizes data technology to increase learner achievement and optimize learning for all learners [35]. While personalized learning is still a concept or aspiration in East Africa, each country in the region is at different levels of realizing personalized learning  $\lceil 43 \rceil$ . For instance, Rwanda's government is partnering with BRAC International to provide personalized literacy instruction through phone reading applications that have shown significant growth in reading ability. Lumidada is working to establish partnerships across East Africa, with the aim of enlisting 'minifranchisers' to sell its kits with local language instructions country by country [57].

# Integration of AI in Personalized Learning

One study, which adopted a vision-based method for unobtrusively acquiring instructors' behavior during teaching, has led to an investigation on improving instructional immediacy that results in better students' learning activities and satisfaction [32]. By identifying the moment-to-moment interactions during teaching, they can offer personalized advice on aspects that an ordinary self-reflection, a common teacher's self-improvement approach, hardly gets at due to its potentially emotionally biased observation  $\lceil 45 \rceil$ . In the domain of AIED, the learned policy can automate graduates' vocational content creation process in specific problem domains so that the curated content meets the requirements of personalized learning [43]. Differently categorized textual content reaches and teaches different learners comprising different levels of learning capabilities in the personalized learning gamified course environments. The benefits of combining AI and personalized learning in the integration of the educational processes are evident. This integration can occur in the form of materials that incorporate visual recognition capabilities that can help in the better understanding of its curriculum, marking creative writing, and validating laboratory procedures [57]. The use of Artificial Intelligence can also be a back-end service that improves the efficiency of online education marketplace. The connection of a context-based chatbot to the digital content feeds allows the students to post questions while attempting interactive activities with personalized responses. This chatbot system gives the student answers based on their strengths and on the real-time capabilities to colors in their personality  $\lceil 58-60 \rceil$ .

# **Case Studies and Best Practices**

There is already some data about what works in personalized learning and there are a number of practical references that explore case studies, best practices, and conversations around implementation [61]. The following section aims to expand upon insightful conversations from various papers within the industry but also includes reviews of both successful and unsuccessful technological approaches to personalized learning [62]. It will include a broad sampling from a large range of relevant reference presentations on this topic including: McKinsey and Company's "How US schools can help students catch up", Nesta's "The EdTech Science of Learning Program", New America's "Personalized Learning: What it Looks Like

in Practice", Research in King Center "Transforming teaching by optimizing understanding and engagement", CATO Institute's "Making innovation work in Education", among others [39]. The field of personalized learning is still young, with interest growing more rapidly in recent years than at any other time up to now [45]. Many different organizations and companies have been gathering their experiences in providing personalized learning to broaden understanding about what it is and how it can be effectively developed and provided to diverse learners. In this provision, leaders are demonstrating willingness to innovate, sometimes to fail, but also to scale up what works. Personalized learning that is both effective and scalable today often leverages technology or directly incorporates Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the design of AI-driven algorithm [63].

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Inclusivity and equity considerations imply that AIPE should be designed to benefit learners from rich and poor backgrounds by accurately recognizing and understanding their unique learning needs rather than further entrenching the digital divide by favoring the privileged. AIPE should therefore be developed and used with caution to ensure adherence to legislations and regulations for PE, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, national agendas, and commitment to inclusive education, gender equity, and fairness [65]. Aspects of diversity should be addressed in a timely manner with the knowledge of the stakeholders. AIPE developers should ensure that gender, culture, ability level, socio-economic background, and language are taken into consideration in the learning process. AIPE can exacerbate the digital divide by its very nature with the potential to reinforce imbalances in the quality of education received [66]. Successful implementation of policies aimed at ensuring that AIPE serves to bridge the gap will depend on integrating ways that guarantee access to AIPE with appropriate mechanisms to hold implementers accountable for producing trustworthy AI results. Ethics in the use of AI in PE can be organized along the following dimensions: accuracy and transparency related concerns, data quality, privacy and data protection aspects, trust and accountability, and the potential to exacerbate social inequalities and discrimination  $\lceil 67 \rceil$ . They are equally specific to the PE context with potential risks to the perceived and real value contributed to the sector [68-71]. Recognizing the uniqueness and challenges posed by the PE sector in developing and emerging countries, the Ethical Guidelines for Trustworthy AI recommended by the AI High-Level Expert Group were reviewed with additional AI for Education publications to propose AI guidelines customized to AIPE adapted to specific African needs. Successful implementation of the policies will depend on the availability of data, use of appropriate technologies that preserve privacy and trust, inclusion of all the relevant stakeholders, adequate transparency and access to information, and appropriate mechanisms in place to hold implementers accountable for producing trustworthy AI in PE [72].

# **Conclusion and Future Directions**

East Africa faces significant educational challenges, particularly in rural areas. Personalized learning, supported by AI, can address these challenges by tailoring education to individual needs. This paper highlights the potential of AI to enhance personalized learning and proposes a model to integrate AI in East African education. Future research should focus on developing and evaluating AI-based personalized learning models, ensuring ethical considerations, and influencing educational policy to support technology-driven learning approaches.

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