

# IBM to provide free digital skills training to 25m Africans

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IBM has announced a US\$70 million initiative to provide free digital skills training for 25 million African youth over five years, in a bid to create a tech-savvy workforce and nurture innovation on the continent.



Image by 123RF

The 'IBM Digital – Nation Africa' initiative will see free skills training provided over a cloud-based platform; offering a range of programmes, from basic IT literacy to highly sought-after advanced IT skills, including social engagement, digital privacy, and cyber protection.

Advanced users will be able to explore career-oriented IT topics including programming, cybersecurity, data science and agile methodologies; as well as business skills like critical thinking, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

IBM said the initiative aims to raise overall digital literacy, increase the number of skilled developers able to tap into cognitive engines, and enable entrepreneurs to grow businesses around new solutions.

"IBM sees effective, high quality IT education as a key driver of economic vitality in Africa. Through access to open standards, best practices, IBM tools, and course materials, the broad scope of this initiative will enable vital skills development," says Hamilton Ratshefola, country general manager for IBM South Africa.

“In order to find solutions to Africa’s challenges, industries across the spectrum need to enable the existing and future workforce to perform at the forefront of technologies such as cognitive and cloud computing. This will be the key to spurring economic growth.”

Users will be able to access thousands of resources – in English – including mobile apps, web guides, demonstrations, interactive simulations, videos, online assessments, volunteer mentors, and there will also be an app marketplace.

The platform will be based on IBM’s artificially intelligent system Watson, and as such will adapt and learn. It will review the multiple interactions the education initiative will have with students, to help direct them to the right courses and help IBM refine the courses to better adapt the material for the needs of the users.

It will also collect anonymous data from users to further improve the service, and create information to help students better locate relevant courses for them.

IBM says it aims to equip 25 million Africans with digital skills over five years through the programme. The initiative will be launched from IBM’s regional offices in South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Morocco, and Egypt – with a view to enabling expansion across the continent.

The initiative is also supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which will work with governments across Africa to extend the programme throughout the continent, while it will also collaborate on opportunities for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) skills delivery, certification, and accreditation.

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