



Skills Builder | Global
PARTNERSHIP

INSIGHT PAPER | JULY 2026 | TOM RAVENSCROFT

The Essential Skills Advantage



Case studies

Human Skills
in an Age of AI

Japan



Reframing AI to support young people's economic futures

In the global narrative of Artificial Intelligence, the script often follows a familiar, dystopian arc: automation arrives, jobs vanish, and human workers are left behind. But in Japan, a different story is being written. Faced with a demographic crisis where the country is projected to be 11 million workers short by 2040, Japan has reframed AI not as a competitor to human labour, but as an essential enabler.⁶²

The challenge, however, is not merely technical. As Japan moves toward its ‘Society 5.0’ vision - a human-centred society where the physical and virtual worlds are seamlessly integrated - the focus is shifting from what technology can do to what humans must do better.⁶³ To thrive in this AI-empowered world, the Japanese education system and business community are doubling-down on ‘human skills’, a concept that mirrors the Skills Builder Universal Framework’s emphasis on essential transferable competencies.

The paradox of AI: from classroom threat to national necessity

The Japanese attitude toward AI is a study in contrasts. Within the hallowed halls of traditional education, the initial reaction was one of defensive caution. Kazuo Yamamoto of Asknet notes that the education sector first viewed AI as a threat, fueled primarily by the “fear of students using AI to complete assignments”. Teachers in elementary and high schools often struggled to understand how to bridge the gap between their traditional teaching methods and a tool that could instantly generate a passing essay.

Yet, outside the classroom, the economic imperative has forced a rapid evolution. Large Japanese corporations have actively embraced AI as a tool for business efficiency and operations. National debate has moved beyond the fear of job loss - a concern that feels less acute in a country suffering from a chronic labor shortage. As Kazuo put it:

“Japan still has a big challenge around labour shortages... so people find it less threatening... Now what’s more wanted is actually that people are equipped to use AI in their work.”

Guidance from the Japanese Government in 2026 reinforces this. Official views state that the labour shortage is no longer a future problem but a structural reality that hiring alone cannot fix. Consequently, AI is being positioned as the “DX” (Digital Transformation) engine required for the economy.⁶⁵ In early 2026, the Japanese government introduced the AI Act, aiming to create an agile governance framework that encourages AI adoption while ensuring safety and ethics.⁶⁶

This shift from “AI as a threat” to “AI as economic opportunity” has fundamentally changed the skills demanded of the workforce. It is no longer enough to be a technician; one must be an “AI-literate human” capable of ethical judgment and critical oversight.



Human Skills: The evolution of essential skills in the Japanese Curriculum

Japan's approach to building essential skills - often termed 'human skills' - has long been a pillar of its educational philosophy, though its implementation has historically been relegated. The Japanese curriculum, while directed by the central government, is not legally binding, allowing schools significant flexibility in how they interpret these guidelines.⁶⁷

Currently, Japan is in the midst of a critical 10-year curriculum review cycle that will shape education until 2037. This review marks a departure from purely academic attainment toward the measurement of human skills through 'self-initiative' and 'dialogue-based learning'.

The demand from employers

Employers are leading this demand for a more holistic skill set.

The Keidanren (Japan Business Federation), emphasizes that as automation handles repetitive tasks, a premium is being placed on human-centric skills like creativity, empathy, and adaptive leadership. Modern HR departments in Japan are moving away from traditional resumes toward "skills intelligence" - mapping what an individual can *do* rather than where they have *been*.

Critical thinking also features heavily: In the "Society 5.0" era, students are required to master Higher Order Thinking Skills, including complex problem-solving and social creativity.

The challenge of assessment remains. In the past, teachers measured initiative by counting how many times a student raised their hand or whether they submitted work on time. However, there is an ongoing debate about whether these



metrics truly capture the human skills needed for the future. This is where the granular steps of the Skills Builder Framework provide much-needed structure, moving from arbitrary counts to observable progress in skills like Listening, Speaking, and Teamwork.

Befriending the machine: the intersection of AI and essential skills

A unique theme emerging from the Japanese context is the goal of 'befriending' AI. Rather than viewing the machine as an 'other', the government and educational leaders are discussing how human skill sets can complement technology to create a more resilient society.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) updated its guidelines for generative AI in 2025,

advocating for a human-centered approach.⁶⁸ The guidelines are clear: AI is a tool to expand human possibilities, but human judgment and responsibility must remain at the end of the process.

"Asknet's role... is to foster the right ethical thinking around AI use and help young people develop the necessary literacy to build their human skills,"
says Yamamoto.

This reflects a growing realization: the more powerful AI becomes, the more important essential skills become. Without Problem Solving skills, an AI's output cannot be verified. Without Creativity, AI cannot be prompted effectively.

A 2025 survey from Google & Ipsos found that overall respondents from Japan were among the least likely in the world to feel that AI is for them.⁶⁹ This gap creates a critical

need for educators who can guide students not just in *how* to use the technology, but in *when* it is appropriate to do so. The dialogue has shifted from “prohibition” to “literacy” and “coexistence”.⁷⁰



Scaling the future: initiatives for human-centric innovation

To address the challenge of building these skills at scale, several high-profile initiatives are underway across Japan, blending government policy with grassroots social innovation.

ASKNET and Skills Builder Partnership

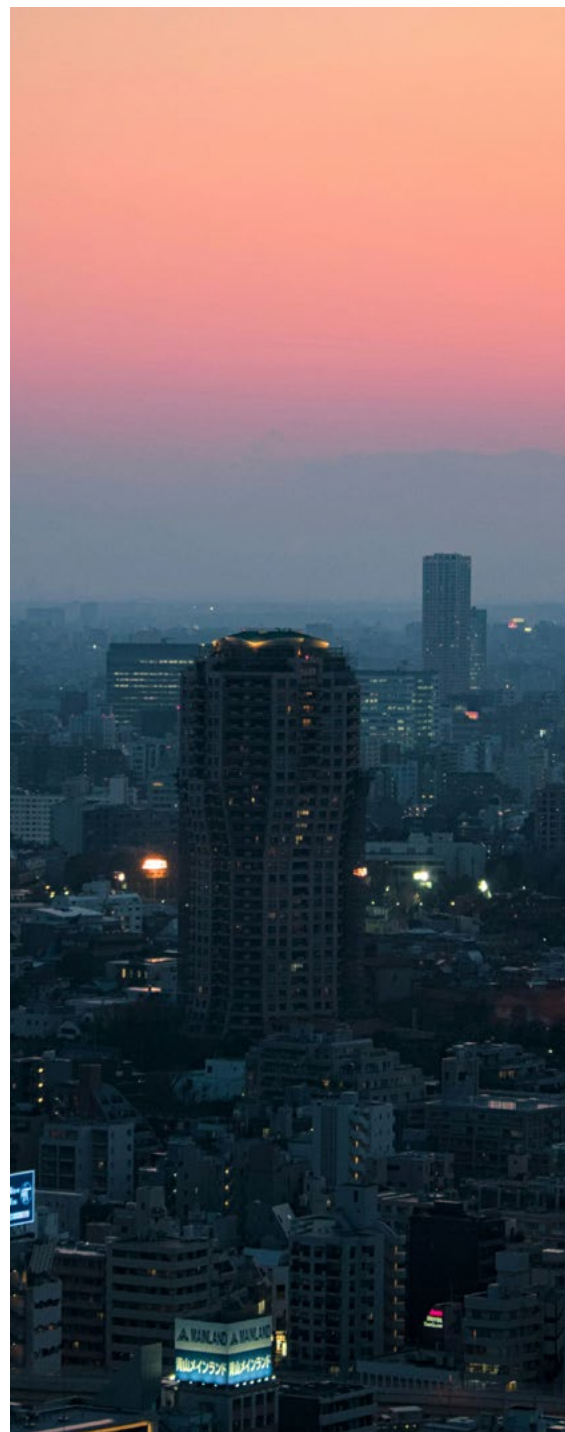
Asknet, in partnership with Skills Builder, is at the forefront of localizing these global standards. They are currently finalising the translation of the Skills Builder Handbook into Japanese. This is more than a linguistic task; it is a cultural translation that aligns the 16 steps of the Universal Framework with the ‘human skills’ terminology used by the Japanese Ministry of Education. By providing a rigorous, measurable structure, they are helping teachers move beyond hand-counting toward true developmental assessment.

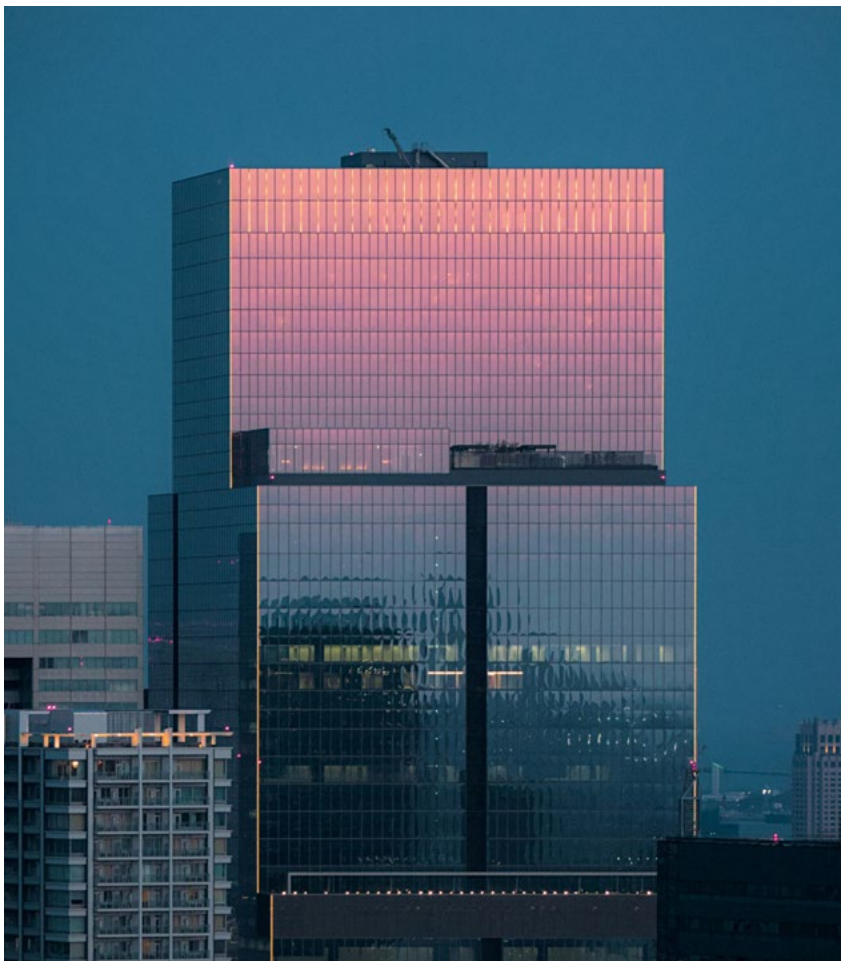
Government pilot schools

MEXT has designated Generative AI Pilot Schools to test how AI can be used to enhance - rather than replace - creativity and motivation. Early results from these pilots suggest that students who experiment with AI to “obtain the intended output” actually enhance their problem-solving and creative thinking.

GIGA School Project & Society 5.0

The national GIGA School Project (Global and Innovation Gateway for All) has already provided one device for every student in Japan. The integration of Higher Order Thinking Skills into digital platforms ensures that students aren’t just consumers of technology, but creators and critics.





Conclusion: the Japanese lesson

Japan's journey suggests that the 'AI revolution' is, at its heart, a human one. By treating AI as a tool for national survival and focusing on the essential skills required to direct it, Japan is providing a blueprint for other aging societies. The lesson is clear: when the workforce shrinks, the value of each individual worker - and their uniquely human skills - only grows.

Investing in these skills is not an afterthought; it is the prerequisite for thriving in a world of technological change. For Japan, the goal is not just to build better AI, but to build better humans to lead it.

References

- **Asknet (2026)** *Interview with Kazuo Yamamoto, Naho Kawashima and colleagues (Asknet Japan): AI Readiness and Essential Skills*. [Interview] Interviewed by Tom Ravenscroft, 28 April 2026.
- **Cabinet Office of Japan (2025)** *Outline of the Act on Promotion of Research and Development, and Utilization of AI-related Technology (AI Act)*. Available at: https://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/ai/ai_hou_gaiyou_en.pdf
- **Council for Science, Technology and Innovation Cabinet Office, Government of Japan** (December 18, 2015) Report on The 5th Science and Technology Basic Plan. At https://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/kihonkeikaku/5basicplan_en.pdf
- **Fukuda, N. (2026)** *Generative AI and Employment in Japan - How to ensure young people develop skills*. JRI Research Journal. (Vol.9 No. 11 June 15, 2026) At <https://www.jri.co.jp/en/MediaLibrary/file/english/periodical/jiri/2026/11/fukuda.pdf>
- **Google & Ipsos (2025)** *Our Life with AI*. Available at: https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2025-10/IpsosGoogle_our-life-with-ai_2025.pdf
- **Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)** (2025) *Updated Guidelines on the Use of Generative AI in Primary and Secondary Education*. Tokyo: MEXT. Available at: https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20250422-mxt_shuukyo01-000030823_001.pdf [Accessed 22 May 2026]
- **Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)** (2025) *Guideline for the Use of Generative AI in Primary and Secondary Education (Ver2.0)*. Tokyo: MEXT. Available at: https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20250422-mxt_shuukyo01-000030823_001.pdf [Accessed 22 May 2026]
- **Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry** (31 March 2026) *AI Guidelines for Business Ver1.2*. At https://www.meti.go.jp/shingikai/mono_info_service/ai_shakai_jisso/pdf/20260331_12.pdf
- **Recruit Works Institute (2023)** *Future Forecast 2040: The 11 Million Worker Shortage*. Tokyo: Recruit Holdings. Available at https://recruit-holdings.com/en/blog/post_20230926_0001/ [Accessed 22 May 2026]

Hong Kong SAR (China)

**Encouraging local
innovation for young people**

While many educational systems have spent the mid-2020s focused on risk mitigation, data privacy disputes, and defensive classroom bans on generative models, East Asia has adopted a starkly different playbook. In Hong Kong (China), Singapore, Taiwan, and Mainland China, the narrative around Artificial Intelligence is not one of containment, but of rapid, high-appetite orchestration.⁷¹

Hong Kong (China), in particular, is executing an aggressive digital transition, shifting its highly competitive educational landscape away from pure technical performance toward a hybrid model where code logic must connect with human values.

As the territory navigates this transition under its unique school governance model, the structural question is no longer about technology access, but about human capability. To prevent the automation of intellect, Hong Kong educational leaders are turning to their

established generic skills framework⁷² and reimagining these as the essential skills to keep human agency at the centre of the machine age.

The high-appetite horizon: fast-paced AI adoption in Hong Kong

The societal appetite for AI in Hong Kong is distinctively positive, viewed across government, business, and community sectors as a generational economic opportunity. Marco Shek, an educational innovator leading Ednovators, contrasts this regional momentum with the caution observed further west:

“I think East Asia is having more of a positive leaning towards the positive side of AI. Whereas when I talk to European educators, they’re like, ‘Wait a minute. We don’t want that.’ In Hong Kong, you see AI embedding in day-to-day teaching already - from planning to teaching to learning.”

This societal push is heavily backed by the state. Following strategic directives in the Chief Executive’s Policy Address to accelerate digital education, the Education Bureau (EDB) launched a major capital injection via the AI for Empowering Learning and Teaching Funding Programme. This initiative allocated substantial one-off grants to every publicly-funded and Direct Subsidy Scheme school to



immediately deploy AI-powered tools and enhance student digital literacy.⁷³

The administration’s tactical approach has been deliberately experimental: “Their policy tactics is: We’ll give you money first. You figure out what to do,” Shek explains. By funding deployment ahead of a centralised territory-wide framework, the government has incentivised decentralized school-based micro-innovations, with the intent to harvest and formalise what works best.

Consequently, the tech wave is no longer confined to specialized Information and Communication Technology (ICT) classrooms. Language, history, and arts teachers are actively experimenting with generative tools to differentiate instruction. Yet, underneath this enthusiasm lies an underlying professional anxiety. Educators find themselves hopping onto a high-speed train while still trying to decode what long-term AI literacy means for child development and deep conceptual learning.

“Generic Skills” and the school ecosystem

To understand how Hong Kong intends to scale human capability alongside machine deployment, one must parse its unique institutional infrastructure. The local system encompasses more than 1,000 primary, secondary, and special needs schools. Crucially, less than 10% of these are managed directly by the state. Over 70% operate as aided schools, fully state-funded but independently managed by School Sponsoring Bodies - predominantly non-profit organisations, religious temples, churches, and medical charities with centuries of local history.⁷⁴

Backed by the government's School-Based Management policy, these institutions possess considerable structural autonomy to interpret the central curriculum and design localized learning models. Furthermore, over the past two decades, Hong Kong has embedded business operational logic into its schools. They operate as performance-driven, board-accountable institutions, making them uniquely agile and entrepreneurial when responding to systemic disruptions like AI.⁷⁵

The Learning to Learn 2+ Framework

When it comes to human competencies, Hong Kong does not use the phrase “essential skills”; instead, the central curriculum - codified under the EDB's Learning to Learn 2+ blueprint - relies on ‘Generic Skills’. These are organized into three core clusters:

- » *Basic Skills*: Encompassing foundational communication, mathematical logic, and baseline IT literacy.
- » *Thinking Skills*: Centering explicitly on critical thinking, open-ended creativity, and structured problem-solving.
- » *Personal and Social Skills*: Prioritizing collaboration, self-management, and lifelong self-learning capabilities.

This framework is layered with 12 formalized priority values, including perseverance, empathy, law-abidingness, and national identity.

However, the structural paradox of the Hong Kong system rests in the execution blueprint. While the government mandates *what* these generic skills are, it provides no standardized pedagogical architecture for *how* to measure or systematically develop them step-by-step. Teachers are left to interpret these human attributes on their own, a challenge that community organisations such as Ednovators are looking to support.

Humanities values meet technical logic

As AI handles routine coding, calculation, and drafting, Hong Kong's educational leadership has realized that a narrow focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) is an incomplete strategy for national competitiveness. The territory's discourse is shifting toward cultivating a cross-disciplinary talent pool capable of contextualising and directing machine outputs.

Yet, Marco Shek notes that there are still questions that need to be answered:

“How can we tap into the potential but at the same time, when do we stop? Or when do we go back to the traditional or conventional way of teaching and learning?”

Without anchoring AI usage to robust human assessment - specifically the thinking skills of Critical Thinking and Problem Solving - the immediate efficiency gains of automated homework completion risk degrading long-term analytical capacity.

Innovation at scale: grassroots playbooks for a regional blueprint

To bridge the gap between top-down funding and practical classroom application, social enterprise agility is proving essential. While the Education Bureau finalises its official territory-wide AI policy framework, organisations on the ground are constructing the practical tools teachers need.⁷⁶

Ednovators and Skills Builder Partnership

Ednovators, working in collaboration with the Skills Builder Partnership, is addressing this by providing a common, highly structured language for Hong Kong's 'generic skills'. By taking abstract competencies like communication, creativity, and collaboration and mapping them to the explicit, observable 16 steps of the Universal Framework, they give schools an actionable classroom playbook.

This progressive framework allows teachers to design project-based curricula where human verification and machine interaction coexist. For instance, when a student uses a generative tool to plan a science project, their performance is evaluated not on the speed of the output, but on their ability to structure problems, evaluate algorithmic bias, and collaborate within human teams to iterate on the solution.

Preparing for the territory-wide framework

This grassroots model is setting the stage for systemic scaling. As the territory prepares for the official rollout of the national AI education framework, the insights gathered by Ednovators and other grassroots innovators are helping to demonstrate how human skills can support digital transitions.





Conclusion

Hong Kong's digital strategy proves that technical fluency is only one half of the equation. By backing their AI funding programme with a clear focus on the 'generic skills', they are building an educational ecosystem that views technology as an accelerator of human capability, rather than its replacement. In the machine age, true competitive advantage belongs to the societies that invest with equal rigour in the human.

References

- **Education Bureau (EDB)** (2024) *Chapter 3: Addressing Specific Learning Elements of the Curriculum — Curriculum Guide for Special Schools*. Hong Kong SAR Government. Available at: [https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/special-educational-needs/curriculum_guide_for_special_schools/Chapter%203_CGSS%20\(2024\)_e.pdf](https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/special-educational-needs/curriculum_guide_for_special_schools/Chapter%203_CGSS%20(2024)_e.pdf) [Accessed 19 May 2026].
- **Education Bureau (EDB)** (2026) *LCQ10: Utilising artificial intelligence to enhance learning and teaching effectiveness*. Hong Kong SAR Government Press Release, 4 February 2026. Available at: <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202602/04/P2026020400182.htm> [Accessed 19 May 2026].
- **Hong Kong Government (2025)** *Hong Kong - The Facts: Education*. <https://www.gov.hk/en/about/abouthk/factsheets/docs/education.pdf>
- **Hong Kong SAR Government** (2025) *Govt launches \$500m AI scheme*. news.gov.hk, 16 December 2025. Available at: https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2025/12/20251216/20251216_112101_776.html [Accessed 19 May 2026].
- **Hong Kong SAR Government** (2025) *Promote the Integrated Development of Education, Technology and Talents*. Policy Address 2025 Supplement. Available at: https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2025/public/pdf/supplement/supplement-07_en.pdf [Accessed 19 May 2026].
- **Our Hong Kong Foundation** (2026) *Establishing an AI Education Framework to Nurture a New Generation of Critical Thinkers*. Commentary, 10 March 2026. Available at: https://www.ourhkfoundation.org.hk/en/media/commentaries/%E5%88%B6%E5%AE%9A%E6%95%99%E8%82%B2%E6%A1%86%E6%9E%B6-%E5%9F%B9%E8%82%B2%E6%80%9D%E8%BE%A8%E6%96%B0%E4%B8%80%E4%BB%A3?_cf_chl_f_tk=bPwxwFdIIQnWQz2j2kz9LbpObZeWU7Furb78DOET8mg-1783083883-1.0.1.1-eO1InGR.C6ayCp6Q2W_26ip0lFq1ZhandQ0YgtTPg [Accessed 19 May 2026].
- **Shek, M.** (2026) *Interview with Marco Shek (Ednovators Hong Kong): AI and Generic Skills Integration*. [Interview] Interviewed by Tom Ravenscroft, 19 May 2026.

Czechia



**Helping young people move
beyond rote learning**

For decades, Czechia has been defined by its industrial prowess, serving as the ‘workshop of Europe’ with a long manufacturing tradition. However, as 2026 unfolds, the nation is undergoing a significant pivot – a pragmatic, rapid transition from a heavy focus on technical and rote-learning attainment to a new paradigm centred on human-AI synergy.

In the corridors of the Ministry of Education to the workspaces of Prague’s tech scene, a consensus is emerging: in the age of generative technology, the nation’s competitive edge no longer lies solely in its citizens’ technical skills, but in how they collaborate, solve problems, and adapt.

The pragmatic shift: AI from taboo to tool

The Czech attitude toward Artificial Intelligence has performed a remarkable “about-face” in a span of just a couple of years. Egle Havrdová, of Schola Empirica, notes that as recently as 2024, AI was largely “prohibited” in educational spheres, viewed through a lens of academic integrity and risk.⁷⁷

By 2026, this prohibition has dissolved into a pervasive sense of

inevitability. “No one is actually now... talking outloud that they are using AI,” Egle observes, “it has switched very fast”. This shift is fueled by Czech pragmatism: if a tool can make the work better and faster, it would be foolish to ignore it.

However, this optimism is not universal. Research from the Randstad Workmonitor 2026 indicates that while Czech employers

are highly optimistic, nearly 41% of employees remain skeptical, often due to a lack of confidence in their own digital and human skills to manage the change.⁷⁸ This gap defines the current national challenge: moving beyond the “efficiency shock” to ensure that the workforce has the critical thinking and independent judgment to validate and lead the machines they now use.

The human foundation: beyond rote learning

The Czech education system is currently at a historic crossroads. The government’s Strategy for Education Policy 2030+ explicitly seeks to move away from the traditional rote learning model - heavy on memorisation - to a more dynamic, competency-based approach.⁷⁹

The 2027 Curriculum Reset

Central to this is a major curriculum revision. While originally slated for 2026, the implementation has been postponed to 2027 to ensure teachers are adequately prepared for the magnitude of the change. This new framework incorporates essential transferable

skills (often termed “key competencies” in the local context) as a central pillar.

The skills highlighted in the Skills Builder Universal Framework - such as Listening, Speaking, and Teamwork - are now being acknowledged as vital for social cohesion. This recognition has been accelerated by the “social debt” of the COVID-19 pandemic, which left educators grappling with a noticeable decline in children’s ability to engage in face-to-face dialogue and focus on complex tasks.

Employer Demand

Employers are reinforcing this educational shift. The CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Technical Training) 2025 Skills Forecast for Czechia suggests that while technical qualifications remain the baseline, the ability to adapt to changing roles and solve problems in interdisciplinary teams is what now distinguishes ‘medium-qualified’ workers from the ‘high-qualified’ leaders.⁸⁰ As technical ‘know-how’ is increasingly outsourced to AI, the premium on ‘know-why’ and ‘know-who’ (social and management skills) has skyrocketed.

The synergy: AI entwined with essential skills

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of the Czech context is the realization that AI and essential skills are not parallel tracks, but mutually reinforcing ones.

Discussion is shifting from “how to teach AI” to “how to use AI to teach human skills.” Egle Havrdová describes an interesting development where teachers are using AI tools to bridge the gap between skill definitions and practical classroom activities.

“Teachers need to have ready-made activities... and now they will take these skills and with the help of AI tools will generate the activities,” she explains.

This creates a high-speed feedback loop:

- » The Universal Framework (now available in Czech through Schola Empirica) provides the granular, 16-step definition of what progress looks like in Problem Solving or Creativity.⁸¹
- » AI tools can generate a dozen creative project outcomes or “learning puzzles” tailored to that specific skill step in seconds.
- » The educator applies the ethical oversight and empathy required to guide the learners through the exercise, observe their performance and provide individualised feedback.

This fascinating way of putting the puzzle together is seen as a key way to help teachers engage with the technology without feeling overwhelmed.

Scaling the transformation: systems and social enterprises



Scaling these innovations across a decentralized system depends on a mix of government-led infrastructure and social-enterprise agility.

Schola Empirica has been instrumental in translating the Skills Builder Universal Framework for the Czech context. By providing a structured, measurable language for essential human skills, they are helping schools move from vague aspirations to rigorous development. Their Prague Summer Schools have become a hub for practitioners, focusing on student wellbeing and the teaching of essential skills.

In parallel, the National Pedagogical Institute (NPI) is leading the AIDIG project (2024–2026), which aims to develop the digital and AI competences of teachers across all school levels.⁸² In an ambitious move, the Minister of Education has claimed that within two years, every teacher will have access to a paid, professional version of an AI tool to support their work.

The Czech National Recovery Plan has unlocked significant funding to ensure that AI literacy is not just a luxury for elite private schools, but a standard part of the public curriculum.

Conclusion

Czechia's pivot is more than a pragmatic technological shift; it is a profound national recalibration of value. By swiftly moving from AI prohibition to widespread adoption, the nation has exposed the critical vulnerability of a rote-learning-focused system, simultaneously highlighting the urgent need for essential human skills like critical thinking, collaboration, and independent judgment to overcome workforce skepticism.

The true innovation lies in the synchronized policy response: an ambitious move to integrate competency-based learning via the postponed 2027 curriculum reset and scale teacher AI literacy through projects like AIDIG. By leveraging social enterprises like Schola Empirica and AI agents to generate teaching activities tied to the Skills Builder Universal Framework, Czechia is pioneering a path where technology does not replace but rather supports the development of human potential.

This comprehensive model, driven by a deep-seated pragmatism, offers a vital lesson to the global community: sustainable technological leadership is achieved not by optimizing machine efficiency alone, but by ensuring that policy, pedagogy, and private enterprise are aligned. Czechia's goal is thus no longer just to build an industrial heart, but to nurture a resilient human hub that masters the tools of the future to become distinctly human.



References

- **Cedefop** (2025) *2025 skills forecast: Czechia*. Available at: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/skills_forecast_-_czechia_2025.pdf [Accessed 6 May 2026].
- **Havrdová, E.** (2026) *Interview with Egle Havrdová (Schola Empirica): AI and Essential Skills in Czechia*. [Interview] Interviewed by Tom Ravenscroft, 5 May 2026.
- **Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT)** (2020) *Strategy for the Education Policy of the Czech Republic up to 2030+*. Prague: MŠMT. Available at: <https://dig.watch/resource/the-strategy-for-the-education-policy-of-the-czech-republic-up-to-2030> [Accessed 16 May 2026].
- **National Pedagogical Institute (NPI)** (2026) *AIDIG project: Support for AI in education and development of teachers' digital skills*. Available at: <https://en.npi.cz/blog/aidig-project-support-for-ai-in-education-and-development-of-teachers-digital-sk> [Accessed 16 May 2026].
- **OECD** (2026) *Building an AI-ready public workforce*. OECD Public Governance Reviews. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/building-an-ai-ready-public-workforce_b89244c7-en/full-report.html [Accessed 16 May 2026].
- **Prague Summer Schools** (2026) *Education: The Future of School - Programme Overview*. Available at: <https://praguesummerschools.org/education/> [Accessed 16 May 2026].
- **Randstad** (2026) *Randstad Workmonitor 2026: Czech Employees More Skeptical of AI Than Most of the World*. Available at: <https://nlchamber.cz/blog-posts/randstad-workmonitor-2026-czech-employees-more-skeptical-of-ai-than-most-of-the-world> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
- **Schola Empirica** (2026) *Our Methodologies: Skills Builder* <https://www.scholaempirica.org/en/programs/skills-builder/>

Colombia



**Connecting AI policy to
young people's wellbeing
and readiness**

In the high-altitude tech hubs of Bogotá and Medellín, the narrative of Colombia's future is often written in code. With the second-highest demand for digital talent in Latin America and an AI market projected to scale quickly, the nation appears to be on the cusp of a technological leapfrog.

Yet, descend into the rural communities or the informal markets that sustain the majority of the population, and the story changes. Here, the digital revolution is not measured in processing power, but in the widening chasm of access, where many schools still operate with only pen and paper⁸³

As 2026 unfolds, Colombia is attempting a bold social experiment: tethering its ambitious AI roadmap to a radical overhaul of the national curriculum that prioritises essential skills - the human competencies that machines cannot yet replicate.



The AI landscape: opportunity and inequality

The Colombian attitude towards AI is best described as 'diplomatic' - a calculated balance between economic optimism and anxiety. Within the corporate sector, AI is embraced as a productivity engine. This sentiment is formalised in CONPES 4144, the National AI Policy launched in 2025, which allocates more than \$100 million to transform the economy through ethical adoption and human talent development.⁸⁴

However, for the average citizen, the 'threat' is multi-dimensional. Beyond the fear of job displacement, there is a profound access gap.

Edward Sara-Kennedy of Coschool notes that connectivity remains a "massive challenge," even in some parts of Bogotá, the country's capital, let alone in rural areas. In this context, without deliberate investment in skills, AI adoption risks widening existing inequalities in access to opportunity and economic mobility.

"When we're talking about the benefits of AI, who are we talking about? Because we're not talking about the majority of Colombians at this moment",
Sara-Kennedy warns.

The government's response has been to integrate social appropriation of AI into its national strategy, attempting to ensure that SMEs and rural communities aren't left in the digital wake.



A shift: from rote learning to emotional mandates

Colombia's education system is decentralised, with authority delegated to more than 90 local Secretaries of Education who manage regional budgets and implementation. This structure has historically led to fragmented results, but a national trend is now unifying these districts: the shift from academic rote learning to Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and essential skills.

In recent years, several laws have been passed mandating emotional education as a core component, not

an elective. Most notably Law 2383 (2024), which embedded socioemotional competencies across all school levels, and Law 2503 (2025), which made it a mandatory curriculum requirement from preschool through grade 11. That same law triggered a landmark change for 2026: the ICFES Saber 11 state exam - the gatekeeper to higher education - now includes a mandatory section measuring emotional competencies such as self-regulation, empathy, and social skills.⁸⁵

The demand for these skills is also being shouted from the marketplace. As technical tasks are automated, Colombian employers are increasingly prioritising the human element. Recruitment is shifting to value Adaptability, Critical Thinking, and Teamwork over technical expertise alone. This creates a paradox: while the digital talent gap is a concern, the solution is seen as being more human.⁸⁶

The human filter: AI and critical thinking

The intersection of AI and essential skills in Colombia has sparked a debate on 'skill deterioration' versus 'competency augmentation'. Educators worry that over-reliance on AI will erode independent thought, yet they also recognise that AI *requires* high-level human skills to function effectively.

In the Colombian context, Critical Thinking is viewed as the primary

defense against AI-generated bias and misinformation. As Edward Sara-Kennedy suggests, the existence of AI "inadvertently develops critical thinking" because users must constantly evaluate and validate the data they receive.

"I don't see it as AI versus essential skills. I think they're very much interconnected,"
says Sara-Kennedy.

Within the Skills Builder Universal Framework, problem solving and receiving information critically are emerging as vital for a society that must now act as a deliberate consumer of digital tools.

Innovation at scale: tying policy to pedagogy

To address the policy-practice gap - where laws are passed but overworked teachers struggle to implement them - several high-profile initiatives are leveraging technology to build human skills.

Coschool and Flori

Coschool is bridging the digital-human divide through Flori, an AI-powered tool designed to integrate essential skills development and wider social and emotional learning into the classroom and beyond.⁸⁷ While elite private schools use these tools to make learning interactive and monitor student wellbeing, Coschool's focus remains on making these innovations low resource so they can eventually scale to the public sector.

The CRESE Education Model

The government's Program for Education CRESE (Citizenship, Reconciliation, Socio-Emotional, Anti-Racist, and Climate Change) aims to refocus the school day. By integrating these transversal themes into the standard curriculum, Colombia is moving away from one-time workshops and toward an environment where flourishing is the primary metric of success.

Conclusion

Colombia's 2026 strategy is a high-stakes bet that a nation can overcome structural inequality by focusing on its greatest renewable resource: human potential. By making emotional education mandatory and aligning it with the technological roadmap of CONPES 4144, Colombia is attempting to build a digital frontier where the machines work for the people, and the people are uniquely equipped to direct them.

The goal is not to educate just for a job, but for life in an unpredictable, AI-empowered world.

References

- **Banco de la República** (2026) *Monetary Policy Report - January 2026*. Available at: <https://www.banrep.gov.co/en/publications-research/monetary-policy-report/january-2026> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
- **AS Colombia** (4 January 2026), *Nada será como antes: los importantes cambios en la prueba Icfes que notarán todos los estudiantes*, AS Colombia, viewed 1 June 2026, <https://colombia.as.com/actualidad/nada-sera-como-antes-los-importantes-cambios-en-la-prueba-icfes-que-notaran-todos-los-estudiantes-f202601-n/>.
- **ColombiaOne.com** (2025) *Colombia to Introduce Emotional Education Classes in Schools*. Available at: <https://colombiaone.com/2025/07/14/colombia-emotional-education-schools/> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
- **ColombiaOne.com** (2026) *Colombia's Most In-Demand Digital Jobs in 2026: AI Leads the Shift*. Available at: <https://colombiaone.com/2026/03/24/colombia-demand-digital-jobs-talent-gap-ai/> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
- **Coschool** (2026) *Interview with Edward Sara-Kennedy: AI Readiness and Essential Skills in Colombia*. [Interview] Interviewed by Tom Ravenscroft, 30 April 2026.
- **Fundación Microfinanzas BBVA** (2025) *Artificial Intelligence - National Policy CONPES 4144*. Available at: <https://www.fundacionmicrofinanzasbbva.org/revistaprogreso/en/inteligencia-artificial/> [Accessed 6 May 2026].

Nigeria



**Turning young people's
appetite for AI into opportunity**

In the global race for Artificial Intelligence dominance, Nigeria represents a striking paradox. It is home to Africa's largest population - over 200 million people - and a median age of just 18.

While the nation's formal education system has long been criticised for operating on an 'old curriculum' that prioritises theoretical knowledge over practical application, the street-level reality is vastly different. According to Google's 2026 *Our Life with AI* report, more Nigerians now use AI to master complex topics than the global average.⁸⁸

Yet, this digital fluency exists alongside a profound structural

divide. Despite the eager tech-appetite within academic and research circles, many citizens are not comfortable with basic internet or computer environments - and connectivity remains a real challenge.⁸⁹

Nigeria is aspiring to use AI to bypass structural educational gaps, supported by millions of dollars from the African Development Bank to accelerate training in emerging technologies.

To formalise and scale these structural reforms, the Federal Ministry of Education officially unveiled the National Policy on Skills Development in February 2025. This comprehensive policy provides the legal framework required to systematically embed transferable skills acquisition across the country's entire education system, ensuring that the leap from individual curiosity to national economic resilience is anchored by an official, skills-first framework.⁹⁰

The generational tug-of-war

The attitude towards AI in Nigeria is deeply fractured along generational and socio-economic lines. Vivienne Bamgboye, a Lead Partner at Concinnity, describes the prevailing sentiment as a "mixed feeling".⁹¹

For Gen Zs and Millennials - who make up the bulk of the nation's digital workforce - AI is viewed as the "best thing ever": a tool that democratises expertise in a country where high-quality formal training is often priced out of reach. This enthusiasm is reflected in the data: more than 80% of Nigerians report being excited about the possibilities of AI.⁹²

In contrast, older generations view the technology through a lens of existential risk. With unemployment statistics remaining stubbornly high, there is a significant fear that AI will automate the very entry-level roles that the economy desperately needs to create. As Vivienne notes:

"There's a pushback because... if AI is going to wipe away certain people's jobs, then it probably is not what we need as a country."

Beyond job security, a more subtle but profound anxiety exists regarding AI ethics, misinformation,

and the potential for AI to "control the minds of people". This fear has prompted the Federal Ministry of Education to establish a high-level committee to evaluate AI as a formal tool and develop a position paper to guide national policy.

However, Professor Jegede stresses that these disparate anxieties must be channelled into a unified framework. "There's a need to coordinate all these things that are happening," he argues. "The disparate things happening all over would not help if they are not coordinated and linked to a national objective or a national policy."



From theory to toolkit: reforming the Nigerian curriculum

For decades, the Nigerian education system has been a cognitive learning model, heavy on theories but “weak when it comes to skills development”. Vivienne illustrates this with a poignant example:

“You would have somebody who studies a BSc in Computer Science and they may never practice on a computer.”

This ‘theory-trap’ has created a massive demand for supplementary education. Parents, desperate to ensure their children remain globally competitive, routinely pay for private programmes outside the national curriculum to build communication, digital literacy, and leadership skills.

The private sector is feeling this talent deficit acutely. In 2026, tech and commercial employers reported that essential transferable skills - such as Problem Solving, Adaptability, and Collaboration - are now just as important as technical degrees. Professor Jegede points to a recent disclosure by the CEO of a digital financial house, who stated that his business was short of nearly 5,000 proficient hands equipped in new technologies to drive core operations. “Everybody was saying wow, you mean we still have thousands that are needed and we can’t find them,” Jegede reflects, highlighting that the modern economic bottleneck is explicitly human, not technological.

Structural shifts

The National Policy on Skills Development (2025) directly addresses this mismatch by legally shifting the paradigm away from traditional, certificate-based learning toward a skills-first framework.⁹³ The core mandate of the policy is to resolve graduate output imbalances by making structured skills acquisition entirely mandatory across basic, secondary, tertiary, and non-formal educational tracks.

Crucially, the policy institutionalises a strict mandate for essential transferable skills alongside technical training. It dictates that curriculum adjustments must embed transferable skills, including:

- » Decision-making
- » Self-Awareness
- » Creativity
- » Communication

Why AI Requires Essential Skills

In the Nigerian context, the interaction between AI and essential skills is increasingly seen as a ‘literacy’ challenge. While the government is accelerating the training of AI engineers, there is a growing consensus that the users of AI require a robust foundation of human skills to deploy these tools safely and effectively.

Discussion at the university level has been particularly sharp. Lecturers are grappling with the “cheating” dilemma - students using AI to bypass assignments - but forward-thinking academics argue that AI “can no longer be ignored”. The challenge is to shift from prohibition to partnership.

Currently, institutional readiness remains highly uneven across the

territory. Professor Jegede estimates that “probably just about 30% of the training institutions and universities are working on the use of AI”, while “60% are still at the baseline level of asking: *what is AI and what can it do for education?*”.

Essential skills like Problem Solving act as the vital human filter for AI outputs. In an environment where network data is expensive and connectivity is a constant, resource-draining barrier for government schools, the ability to use AI *efficiently* - to prompt correctly, avoid generic answers, and verify insights critically - becomes an indispensable economic skill. Without these underlying competencies, rapid AI adoption risks widening the existing disparities between the digital elite and the underserved.

Scaling success: collaborative initiatives for the future

To move from individual AI curiosity to systemic readiness, several key initiatives are scaling up across Nigeria in 2026.

Concinnity and the Skills Builder Partnership

Concinnity, working as part of the Skills Builder Partnership, is at the forefront of this transformation. Their work focuses on bespoke consultancy for the private sector and research into how to successfully embed the explicit, measurable steps of the Universal Framework into the national curriculum. By bridging the gap between national policy and private sector needs, they are helping to move essential skills into core components of the institutional educational experience.

Regulatory engagement

This work is reinforced by multiple regulatory bodies. The National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), and the National Senior Secondary Education Commission (NSSEC) are all working simultaneously to weave transferable and emerging technical skills directly into their respective institutional frameworks. Furthermore, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) has established its own dedicated national committee on digital literacy, productivity, and emerging skills to fund this transition.

Private sector vanguards

Because the ‘concurrent list’ in Nigeria divides educational authority between federal, state, and local governments, uniform implementation can be slow. To fill this quality gap, prestigious international institutions have opened campuses in Nigeria, serving as localized innovation hubs. These schools integrate global standards for AI and essential skills, serving as innovation hubs that local government schools can potentially learn from.

Building the infrastructure

The Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy (FMCIDE) has moved the needle from policy articulation to delivery. Under the leadership of Minister Dr ‘Bosun Tijani, the Digital Nigeria 2026 initiative aims to link public institutions - including schools - to the national fibre backbone. This infrastructure is the prerequisite for AI-enabled education, but the government is also clear that hardware without “human skillsets” is a hollow investment.⁹⁵

University leadership

Simultaneously, the university ecosystem is staging a massive collective initiative. In August 2026, the Association of Vice Chancellors - representing all 306 universities in the country - is hosting a major national conference dedicated entirely to incorporating essential skills, emerging technologies, and AI frameworks seamlessly into university curricula. To ensure these efforts carry international currency, the country is focusing on globally recognized certification tracks, such as the IC3 certification, which provides young Nigerians with verifiable evidence of proficiency required to secure roles in competitive international markets like the UK and US.

Conclusion

Nigeria's 2026 landscape is one of intense digital energy fighting against an outdated educational framework. The country's path forward lies in formalising the informal: taking the globally high AI-adoption rate of its youth and backing it with the structured, measurable steps of the Skills Builder Universal Framework. If Nigeria can successfully integrate these human skills into its new curriculum under a coordinated national policy, it will not just be a consumer of the AI revolution - it will be a lead architect in the Global South.

References

- **Businessday NG** (2026) *Nigeria's curriculum reformed in 2025 - Inclusion must follow in 2026*. Available at: <https://businessday.ng/opinion/article/nigerias-curriculum-reformed-in-2025-inclusion-must-follow-in-2026/> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
- **Concinnity** (2026) *Interview with Vivienne Bamgboye: AI Readiness and Essential Skills in Nigeria*. [Interview] Interviewed by Tom Ravenscroft, 30 April 2026.
- **Digital Nigeria** (2026) *Digital Nigeria 2026: Secure, Intelligent & Inclusive Systems*. Available at: <https://digitalnigeria.gov.ng/> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
- **Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy (FMCIDE)** (2026) *WeekInReview: Unveiling NAIS at 2 - Dr 'Bosun Tijani*. Vol. 124/125. Available at: <https://fmcide.gov.ng/weekinreview-full-week-recap-of-activities-of-the-honourable-minister-dr-bosun-tijani-vol-124-125/> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
- **Federal Ministry of Education (Nigeria)** (October 2024) *National Policy on Skills Development in Formal and Non-Formal Education in Nigeria*. Available at https://education.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/National-Policy-on-Skills-Development-23-October-2_241116_170725-2.pdf
- **Google & Ipsos (2025)** *Our Life with AI*. Available at: https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2025-10/ipsosGoogle_our-life-with-ai_2025.pdf
- **Jegede, O.** (2026) *Interview with Professor Olugbemiro Jegede: National Coordination and Skill Certification in Nigeria*. [Interview] Interviewed by Tom Ravenscroft, 9 June 2026.
- **PolicyVault Africa** (2024) *National Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2024 - Nigeria*. Available at: <https://www.policyvault.africa/policy/national-artificial-intelligence-strategy-2024/> [Accessed 6 May 2026].



© Enabling Enterprise CIC, trading as Skills Builder Partnership

A Community Interest Company, registered in England and Wales, 244-254 Cambridge Heath Road, London, E2 9DA

www.skillsbuilder.org