Innovators of Tomorrow: Digital Literacy and Mentorship for Peace
Enyan Maim, Ghana
International House, University of California, Berkeley
Eric Assan

The rapid advancement of technology around the world has brought about many benefits, but it has also highlighted the importance of digital literacy and mentorship in ensuring that individuals, particularly children, are equipped with the skills they need to succeed in a digital world. In Ghana, many children, especially those in rural and low-income areas, lack access to digital literacy education and mentorship opportunities, which hinders their ability to succeed in a technology-driven world. This concept paper outlines a proposed project to address this issue by providing digital literacy education and mentorship opportunities for students at Enyan Maim D/A Primary School, a rural elementary school in Ghana.

Background:
In Ghana, access to technology is limited, particularly in rural and low-income areas. According to the World Bank, only 34% of the population has access to the internet. Additionally, many children in Ghana do not have access to formal education and are at risk of being left behind in the digital age. This is particularly concerning as technology is becoming increasingly important for accessing information and opportunities, as well as for participating in the global economy. The disparity between schools in urban and rural areas is observed in terms of the unavailability of educational materials and resources and the lack of computers for teaching literacy skills.

Even though the educational system in Ghana continues to make progress, it is faced with many challenges. Over the recent years student enrollment in secondary schools have increased owing to the implementation of the government's flagship policy, Free Senior High School, but has failed to address problems such as quality of education, access, and sustainability. Additionally, the inadequate provision of teaching and learning resources and materials and the deficit in school infrastructure present a huge challenge. These factors have resulted in the poor performance of students, especially those in rural and low-income areas.

Also, as a student from a rural area, I had to deal with similar problems that slowed me down a lot. However, with hard work, dedication, perseverance, and the mentorship of very dedicated teachers who took an interest in me and gave me the guidance I needed, I was able to get through elementary school, high school, and college, and I'm now in the United States getting my master's degree in education.

Ghana has a big problem with the growing national security risks caused by youth unemployment. The increase in flash points for civil unrest and conflicts in the Northern regions and election-related violence continues to be a worry for civil society, religious groups, and the government. Quality education is a key part of making the world a peaceful place because it creates an environment where tensions and conflicts between people can be reduced. This makes it easier for people from the same or different communities to live together in peace. i.e., "PEACE: People, Educated, Adequately, create a Cordial coExistence."

To help solve these problems, I came up with the project for peace: Innovators of Tomorrow: Digital Literacy and Mentorship for Peace. The goal of this project is to teach students in rural and low-income areas of Ghana digital literacy and provide general mentorship avenues for them. The goal is to use education as a tool for peaceful coexistence, achieve educational equity, improve access to education in rural areas, and train the future generation to be innovators rather than getting involved in conflicts and violent activities. This presents a proactive approach to building peace rather than being reactive.

Digital literacy in early childhood is important because it helps children learn and develop the skills they need to navigate and succeed in a technology-driven world. This includes skills such as basic computer operation, internet navigation, and digital citizenship. Children can learn 21st-century skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and creativity if they learn digital literacy skills at a young age. Also, it can provide children with access to educational resources and opportunities and help them build the skills they will need for future academic and professional success.

In the same way, having a mentor when a child is young can be very good for his or her development. Mentorship that works well gives advice, support, and a good example, which can help a child build self-esteem, confidence, resilience, and a sense of purpose. Mentors expose children to new experiences and opportunities that may not be available to them otherwise. They also help them by helping them explore careers, set goals, develop contacts, and identify resources.

"Unlocking Digital Opportunities, Unleashing Endless Possibilities"
Project Objectives;
The goal of the project is to address the digital divide and inspire "Innovators of Tomorrow." It will be done by providing digital literacy education and mentorship opportunities for pupils in Grades 1-6 at Enyan Maim D/A Primary School.
The specific objectives of the project are to:
1. Increase access to digital literacy education for pupils by training them in basic computer skills, digital skills and internet.
2. Provide access to information technology devices such as computers, projectors, television to help develop basic digital skills.
3. Ensure the availability of teaching/learning resources to enable pupils to become digitally literate citizens by 2026.
4. Initiate mentorship opportunities for pupils by connecting them with mentors who can offer guidance, support, and access to new experiences and opportunities.
5. Foster children's overall development and well-being by providing them with a safe and supportive space to talk about their feelings and experiences, and to develop coping strategies and resilience.
6. Partner with groups to advocate for the provision of facilities and infrastructure to promote a conducive learning environment, academic enhancement, and improve access and overall quality of education.

Project Site
Enyan Maim D/A Primary School is the only public elementary school in the village of Enyan Maim, which is in the Central Region of Ghana. It is in the Ajumako Enyan Essiam Constituency. The school has over 700 students, with a higher girl-to-boy population. At the moment, the school does not have enough classrooms for all of the students, so some of them have to sit and have lessons outside. Seating in the classroom is a major issue, with some students having to bring their own chairs to school, whereas in other cases, students sit on the floor, making it difficult to fully concentrate in the classroom. There is also the problem of too many people in a class. Often, there are 40–50 people in a class rather than the required 30 students. This creates an unfavorable teaching and learning environment, impedes teacher and student engagement, and negatively impacts student performance and the overall quality of education received in school. Also, the school is not well equipped with other basic infrastructure, such as a functional library, computers, and a playground.
It is encouraging, though, that, through the government's rural electrification project, schools in many rural areas have been connected to the national power grid. This puts Enyan Maim D/A Primary School in a good position to improve its way of teaching and learning by incorporating information and communication technology (ICT) devices like computers, laptops, iPads, and other electronic learning devices like projectors, televisions, and screens.

Project Implementation:
This Project for Peace, "Innovator of Tomorrow," is the brainchild of a yet-to-be-incorporated non-profit organization, Literacy Africa, which seeks to educate and expose students in marginalized communities in Africa to 21st Century Skills, i.e., learning skills, literacy skills, and life skills, with the aim of training and mentoring them to be functional global citizens.
The project will be implemented in partnership with my colleagues and other local organizations in Ghana, such as schools, community centers, volunteers, and other non-profit organizations. The proposed date of project execution is Friday, July 28, 2023, at Enyan Maim D/A Primary School. We will work together with the school administration, opinion leaders, resource persons, and a group of volunteers made up of university students, colleagues, and friends who wholeheartedly support the initiative.
The project will include the following components:

- **Technology access**: The project will provide Enyan Maim D/A Primary School access to technology to train in digital literacy skills. To successfully implement and ensure project sustainability, 5 computers, 2 Laptops, 2 Projectors, 2 Projector screens, and Television sets will be procured. The computers and projectors will be donated to the school after the project to ensure that pupils receive sustained training in digital skills. The other devices will be used to continuously train them and I envision that this will serve as the foundation for the establishing a Digital Skills Hub in the school.

- **Digital literacy education**: The project will provide children with formal digital literacy education, including lessons on computer skills, internet safety, and digital citizenship. In order to implement this project 5 resource persons will be called upon to provide the digital skills training. The volunteers will assist the resource persons in the lesson delivery and provide sustained guidance beyond the project implementation.

- **Mentorship**: The project will also pair pupils with volunteers who will serve as mentors. Mentors will be trained on how to provide guidance and support to the pupils and work closely with them to set goals, develop important skills, and expose them to new experiences and opportunities. In all 15-20 volunteers will be selected after an application process to provide mentorship for the pupils during and after the project implementation.

- **Monitoring and evaluation**: The project will be closely monitored and evaluated to ensure that it achieves its objectives and make adjustments when necessary. The volunteers will be in constant contact with the pupils who will take part in the project. Volunteers will be required to provide feedback and write reports on the progress of each mentee after the project.

**Expected Outcomes:**

- Improvement in children's digital literacy skills
- Increase in children's access to technology and the internet
- Mentor pupils by connecting them to volunteers to provide sustained guidance and help them reach their potential.

**Future/Other Works:**

We hope that this project will not be a one-time initiative but rather create a spillover effect for the incorporation of digital literacy education and mentorship schemes in all basic schools in Ghana. I hope to replicate this project in other schools in rural areas and culminate in the establishment of a Digital Skills Hub to provide Digital Literacy Training to all students in Ghana. We also hope to build a hybrid library in the village with the help of grants and generous donors to get kids interested in STEM education, programming, engineering, and community development. Additionally, through this project, we hope to scale and make data science very accessible to students in secondary schools and universities. As an education policy student, my interest is in leveraging technology to make education accessible to low-income and marginalized communities and promote educational equity. In the next 10 years, I hope to make a big difference in changing education in Ghana by bringing digital literacy and data science into elementary and high schools while promoting STEM education.

**Conclusion:**

In its purest form, education must be impact-driven; it must empower students to think about their current livelihoods, imagine possibilities, and offer the platform through the knowledge and skills they acquire to solve the problems in their society, such as ensuring peaceful coexistence. Education is simply the tool for empowerment, improvement, and development. Additionally, we hope to use education as a preventive measure against conflict by giving children a sense of purpose while promoting a drive for curiosity and providing digital literacy education and mentorship to them. The project will help children access information and opportunities and take part in the global economy by giving them the skills they need to do well in a digital world.