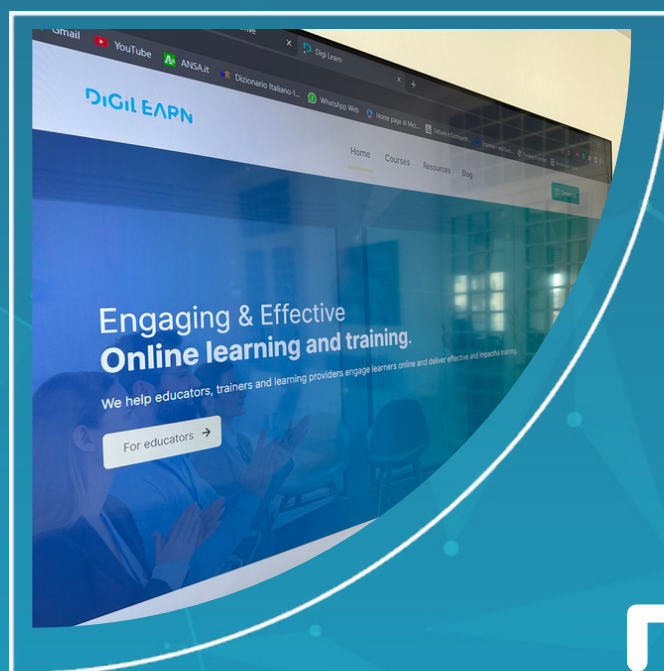


DiGiLEARN

EDUCATORS

RESEARCH AND GUIDE FOR EFFECTIVE
DIGITAL LEARNING FOR ADULTS



INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

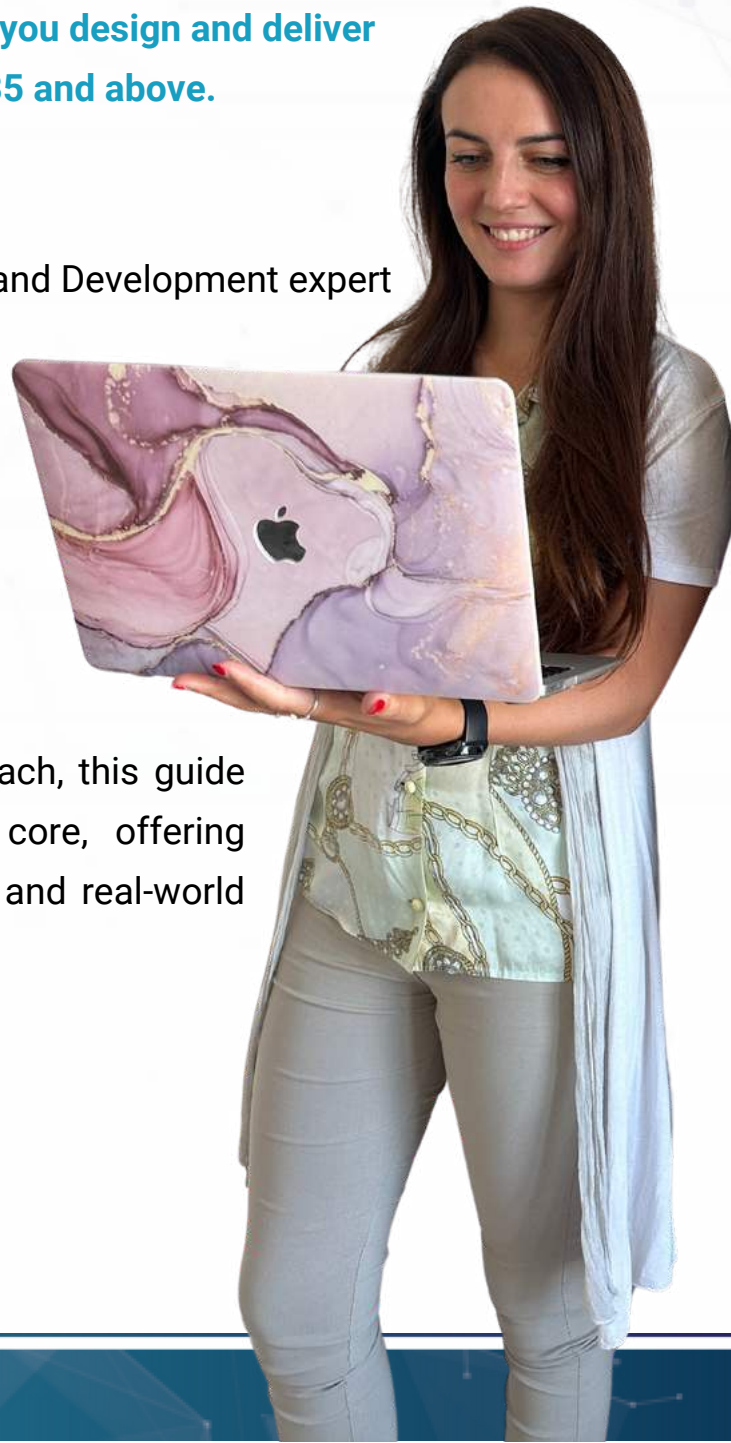
In today's dynamic educational landscape, digital learning stands as a transformative force, transcending traditional boundaries and offering boundless opportunities for personal and professional growth.

This comprehensive guide, a collaborative endeavor by CRS Laghi, Human innovation Hub, and EduAge, aims to **help you design and deliver effective digital learning for adults aged 35 and above.**

This is for you, if you are:

- Human resources specialist or Learning and Development expert
- Trainer of adults
- Language teachers who teaches online
- University teacher or professor
- Coach, consultant or expert who teaches online

Through a human-centered design approach, this guide places learners and educators at its core, offering practical insights, step-by-step guidance, and real-world examples.



DIGITAL LEARNING

Dr. Kelchev, a seasoned economics professor at a prestigious university, suddenly faced the challenge of shifting her traditionally interactive and discussion-rich classes to an online format due to unforeseen circumstances.

At first, she was skeptical – could the depth of economic theories and the lively debates her classes were known for be replicated online? But as she delved into the world of digital learning, she discovered a realm of possibilities.

Through a blend of video lectures, interactive forums, and digital simulations, she not only maintained but enhanced the engagement and learning outcomes of her students. This transition wasn't just a temporary shift; it became an integral part of her teaching methodology, offering flexibility and accessibility previously unimagined.

A man in a white polo shirt and glasses is shown in profile, pointing his right hand towards the text. The background is a light blue and white geometric pattern.

● Definition and Aspects of Digital Learning

Digital learning is an educational practice that uses technology to strengthen a learner's experience. It transcends traditional classroom boundaries, utilizing digital tools and resources to facilitate learning. This approach to education is increasingly vital in today's rapidly changing world.

KEY ASPECTS OF DIGITAL LEARNING:

Accessibility: It breaks geographical barriers, allowing learners from any location to access high-quality education.

Flexibility: Learners can often set their own pace and schedule, making education more adaptable to their lifestyles.

Interactivity: Digital platforms offer various interactive elements like quizzes, discussion forums, and virtual simulations, enhancing engagement.

Diverse Content Delivery: Information can be presented through videos, podcasts, e-books, and more, catering to different learning styles.

Collaboration and Communication: Tools like chat rooms and video conferencing foster collaboration and communication among learners and instructors.

Tracking and Feedback: Digital learning platforms often have built-in analytics to track progress and provide immediate feedback.

Continuous Improvement: The digital format allows for easy updating and improvement of educational materials based on learner feedback and changing information.

” Digital learning isn't just about technology; it's a holistic approach that reshapes how we think about education, making it more inclusive, flexible, and learner-centered. For educators and trainers like Dr. Emily, it opens a world of innovation in teaching and learning methodologies, ensuring that education remains relevant and impactful in a digital age.

DIGITAL LITERACY

Digital literacy is the set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to effectively use digital technologies for communication, information retrieval, content creation, and problem-solving. Key components include technical skills, information skills, communication skills, and safety and security skills.

Meet Mark, an experienced HR professional who has always relied on traditional methods of training and development. With the shift towards digital platforms, Mark felt overwhelmed. He was not alone; many of his peers, despite their expertise in their respective fields, found themselves struggling with basic digital tools.

This digital literacy gap became evident when they had to attend online workshops or use new software for performance assessments. Initially hesitant and frustrated, they often avoided engaging with digital resources, which hindered their professional growth and adaptation to the evolving workplace.



● Digital Literacy and Tackling its Lack

Digital literacy refers to the ability to find, evaluate, utilize, share, and create content using information technologies and the internet. It encompasses a range of skills, including basic familiarity with hardware and software, understanding and utilizing digital platforms, and critically assessing digital information.

Key Components of Digital Literacy:

- ✓ **Technical Skills:** Understanding how to operate digital devices and use software.
- ✓ **Information Management:** The ability to search, gather, and manage information online.
- ✓ **Communication:** Effectively communicating and collaborating through digital means.
- ✓ **Safety and Privacy:** Knowledge of digital security practices and understanding the importance of data privacy.
- ✓ **Critical Thinking:** The ability to critically evaluate digital content and distinguish between credible and unreliable sources.

Addressing Lack of Digital Literacy in Adult Learners in 10 steps:

1. **Assessment of Current Skills:** Begin by assessing learners' current digital skills to tailor the learning approach.
2. **Customized Training Programs:** Develop training programs that address specific skill gaps and are tailored to adult learning styles.
3. **Step-by-Step Learning:** Start with the basics and gradually progress to more complex tasks, avoiding overwhelming learners.
4. **Practical and Relevant Examples:** Use examples and scenarios that are relevant to the learners' professional or personal lives.
5. **Encouraging a Growth Mindset:** Foster an environment where learners feel safe to make mistakes and learn from them.
6. **Peer Learning and Support:** Encourage collaboration and learning among peers, which can be less intimidating and more relatable.
7. **Continuous Learning Opportunities:** Provide resources for ongoing learning and skill development.
8. **Leveraging Familiar Tools:** Start with digital tools that learners are already familiar with and gradually introduce new technologies.
9. **Positive Reinforcement:** Celebrate milestones and progress to motivate continued learning.

In Mark's case, a structured digital literacy program, tailored to his professional context and paced to his learning style, transformed his approach to digital tools.

He and his peers not only became competent in using digital platforms but also started to appreciate the efficiency and opportunities they presented.

By addressing the digital literacy gap, adult learners can more confidently and effectively engage in the digital world, enhancing both their personal and professional lives.

OBSTACLES TO ADULT DIGITAL LEARNING

There are several barriers to learning engagement in digital learning, which can hinder the effectiveness of online education. The following are examples of obstacle and some practical examples on how to avoid them.

1. Technical difficulties: Technical difficulties can disrupt the learning experience for adults, leading to frustration.

What can you do? To address this, educators and institutions can offer technical support services, optimize course content, communicate recommended system requirements, and ensure regular updates. These steps can include providing helpdesks, online troubleshooting guides, and dedicated IT support staff. Educators can also create content that is optimized for various devices and internet speeds, such as providing low-bandwidth options for videos or using responsive design for course materials. Regular updates can help learners assess and upgrade their equipment, making online education more accessible and engaging for adult learners.

2. Lack of interaction: Online education can often feel isolating due to the lack of interpersonal connections and collaboration opportunities.

What can you do? To overcome this, educators can implement steps such as facilitating virtual discussions, designing collaborative projects using tools like video conferencing, organizing live webinars and Q&A sessions, and incorporating peer feedback. These steps can help create a more dynamic and interactive learning experience for adult learners. By incorporating these practical examples, educators can enhance interaction and interpersonal connections in digital learning for adult learners.



3.Distractions: Distractions in the digital environment can hinder students' focus and engagement.

What can you do? To overcome this, educators can implement steps such as facilitating virtual discussions, designing collaborative projects using tools like video conferencing, organizing live webinars and Q&A sessions, and incorporating peer feedback. These steps can help create a more dynamic and interactive learning experience for adult learners. By incorporating these practical examples, educators can enhance interaction and interpersonal connections in digital learning for adult learners.

4.Lack of motivation: Online learners often struggle with self-motivation due to lack of structure and accountability.

What can you do? To boost motivation, educators can encourage goal setting, provide regular feedback, create structured schedules with milestones and deadlines, and promote peer support. These steps can help adult learners stay motivated throughout their online education, providing a sense of purpose, shared experiences, and a sense of community. By incorporating these steps, educators can help adult learners stay motivated in their digital learning journey.

5.Poor course design: Poorly designed courses can negatively impact online engagement by making it confusing, lacking coherence, and by being difficult to navigate.

What can you do? Educators should ensure a clear course structure with organized modules, use an intuitive Learning Management System (LMS) with easy navigation, present information in various formats, and continuously improve course design based on feedback from learners. By implementing these practical examples, educators can enhance the course design and engage adult learners more effectively.

6.Limited access to resources: Online learners often face limited access to resources compared to their peers in traditional classrooms.

What can you do? You can create digital resource libraries, virtual labs, remote assistance, and networking opportunities. These resources can include articles, videos, simulations, and hands-on experience. Virtual labs allow learners to conduct experiments in a digital environment, while remote assistance offers assistance when needed. Networking opportunities allow learners to share knowledge and resources, ensuring they have access to resources equivalent to traditional classroom resources.

7.Resistance to change: Some learners may be resistant to the idea of digital learning and prefer traditional, in-person instruction.

What can you do? To overcome resistance to digital learning, educators can implement clear communication, training, success stories, and flexible blended learning. Clear communication about the benefits of online learning, such as flexibility and convenience, is crucial. Training sessions or tutorials can familiarize learners with digital tools and platforms. Success stories from learners who have thrived in online environments can also be shared. Introducing blended learning options that combine traditional classroom experiences with online components can ease the transition for resistant learners



REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE DIGITAL LEARNING

Requirement: User-Friendly and Accessible Digital Learning Platform

What can be done: To meet the requirement of a user-friendly and accessible digital learning platform, take the following steps:

1. **Intuitive Interface:** Design the platform with an intuitive user interface that is easy to navigate. Use clear labels, menus, and a logical structure to enhance usability.
2. **Accessibility Features:** Ensure the platform adheres to accessibility standards, making it usable for all learners, including those with disabilities. Provide alt-text for images, closed captioning for videos, and keyboard navigation.
3. **Responsive Design:** Opt for a responsive design that adapts to various devices and screen sizes, ensuring a seamless experience on desktops, tablets, and smartphones.
4. **User Training:** Offer tutorials or guides to help learners familiarize themselves with the platform's features, tools, and functionalities.

Requirement: High-Quality, Relevant, and Engaging Digital Content

What can be done: To fulfill the requirement for high-quality, relevant, and engaging digital content, follow these steps:

1. Needs Assessment: Conduct a needs assessment to understand the specific goals and preferences of adult learners. Tailor content to their needs and prior experiences.
2. Multimodal Content: Provide content in various formats, including text, videos, interactive activities, and quizzes, to accommodate different learning styles.
3. Real-Life Applications: Ensure the content relates to real-life applications and scenarios that resonate with adult learners, making it more engaging and relevant.
4. Regular Updates: Keep the content current by regularly updating it to reflect the latest information and trends.

Requirement: A Supportive Online Community and Social Learning Environment

What can be done: To create a supportive online community and social learning environment, consider the following steps:

1. Discussion Forums: Establish discussion forums where learners can interact, ask questions, and share insights. Encourage active participation by both learners and instructors.
2. Collaborative Projects: Integrate collaborative projects that require learners to work together, fostering a sense of community and cooperation.
3. Peer Feedback: Promote peer-to-peer feedback and discussion to enhance learning through diverse perspectives and insights.
4. Virtual Office Hours: Offer virtual office hours where learners can connect with instructors for additional support and guidance.

Requirement: Clear and Transparent Communication Channels

What can be done: To maintain clear and transparent communication channels, follow these steps:

1. **Regular Updates:** Provide regular updates on course progress, changes, and important announcements through email, announcements on the platform, or discussion posts.
2. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Create channels for learners to provide feedback on the course content, materials, and learning experience. Act on this feedback to enhance the course.
3. **Progress Tracking:** Implement tracking tools that allow learners to monitor their progress and achievements, providing transparency about their performance.
4. **Q&A Sessions:** Host regular Q&A sessions or webinars to address learner questions and concerns directly.

Requirement: Flexibility and Adaptability

What can be done: To accommodate the diverse needs and schedules of adult learners, consider the following steps:

1. **Self-Paced Learning:** Provide the option for self-paced learning, allowing learners to progress through the material at their own speed.
2. **Asynchronous Communication:** Offer asynchronous communication channels for discussions and assignments, enabling learners to participate at convenient times.
3. **Personalized Learning Paths:** Implement personalized learning paths that allow learners to choose their preferred order of study or focus on specific areas.
4. **Extensions and Make-Up Assignments:** Allow learners to request extensions for assignments when needed and offer opportunities to make up missed work.

Requirement: Access to Personalized Support and Resources

What can be done: To provide access to personalized support and resources, follow these steps:

1. **Tutoring and Coaching Services:** Offer tutoring and coaching services where learners can receive one-on-one assistance to address specific learning challenges.
2. **Career Guidance:** Provide career guidance and counseling resources to help learners align their learning goals with their career aspirations.
3. **Resource Centers:** Create resource centers that house a wealth of supplementary materials, study guides, and references to support learners' needs.
4. **Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship programs where experienced learners or alumni can guide and mentor newer learners.

Requirement: Commitment to Inclusivity, Accessibility, and Diversity

What can be done: To demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity, accessibility, and diversity, consider these steps:

1. **Accessibility Standards:** Ensure that all course materials meet accessibility standards to accommodate learners with disabilities, such as providing closed captioning, alt-text, and accessible document formats.
2. **Diverse Content:** Include diverse perspectives and examples in course materials to create an inclusive and equitable learning environment.
3. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Promote cultural sensitivity and respect for diversity in interactions and discussions within the online community.
4. **Equitable Assessment:** Design assessments that are equitable and unbiased, ensuring that all learners have an equal opportunity to succeed.

CURRICULUM DESIGN

Learning contract



A learning contract is an agreement between the trainer and the student that outlines the expectations, goals, and responsibilities of both parties in a learning experience. It serves as a tool for communication and collaboration throughout the learning process. Here are some key elements of a learning contract:

- Objectives and goals: Clearly define the learning objectives and goals of the course or program.
- Roles and responsibilities: Define the roles and responsibilities of both the trainer and the student.
- Learning outcomes: Identify the expected learning outcomes and how they will be assessed.
- Learning activities: Describe the learning activities and assignments that will be used to achieve the learning outcomes.
- Timeframe: Establish a timeframe for completing the course or program.
- Evaluation and feedback: Discuss how progress will be evaluated and how feedback will be provided.
- Resources: Identify the resources that will be available to the student, such as textbooks, online materials, or support services.

A Learning contract is a collaborative tool that helps both the trainer and the student to stay focused and motivated throughout the learning experience.

Understanding by design approach

"Understanding by design" (UbD) is a framework for designing and delivering effective education called "backwards design."

Backward design involves starting with the end goal in mind (i.e. what students should be able to understand and do) and then working backwards to plan learning experiences that will help them achieve that goal.

The authors of UbD emphasize the importance of focusing on "big ideas" and essential questions in order to promote deeper understanding and transfer of learning.

The goal of Understanding by Design is to help educators create meaningful and engaging learning experiences that promote enduring understanding and transfer of learning.

UbD is a framework for designing educational curricula that focuses on teaching for understanding. The key concept is starting with the end in mind – what students should understand and be able to do by the end of the course – and then designing the curriculum backward from those ends.

Step-by-Step Guide to design your Digital Program with UbD

STEP 1: Identify Desired Results - What is the transformational goal of learning?

What will learned be able to do, understand and be after learning has occurred?

Questions to Consider:

- What are the key learning outcomes for this course?
- What enduring understandings are desired?
- What essential questions will guide the course and focus learning?

Checklist:

- Define clear, measurable learning objectives.
- Develop enduring understandings – the big ideas that have lasting value.
- Formulate thought-provoking essential questions.

STEP 2: Determine Acceptable Evidence of Learning - How do we know learning has occurred?

What evidence will demonstrate that the learner has accomplished the goal, to what extent is the goal accomplished and what else needs to be considered for the goal to be fully accomplished?

Questions to Consider:

1. How will you know if students have achieved the learning outcomes?
2. What performance tasks will demonstrate understanding?
3. What other evidence (e.g., quizzes, reflections) will be collected?

Checklist:

- Design performance tasks that align with learning outcomes.
- Develop criteria for evaluating performance tasks.
- Plan for additional forms of assessment (quizzes, discussions, etc.).

STEP 3: Plan Learning Experiences and Instruction - What learning needs to experience - do, hear, read, see, practice, consider, reflect on.

Bear in mind that simply listening to a lecture, reading or doing a task with no thought is not learning. Learning occurs when learners overcome challenges and go from the comfort zone of known and easy to what is challenging and difficult.

Questions to Consider:

1. What learning activities will equip students to achieve the desired outcomes?
2. How will you sequence the learning activities?
3. What resources and materials are needed?

Checklist:

- Create a sequence of learning activities that logically progresses toward the learning outcomes.
- Ensure activities address different learning styles and preferences.
- Prepare necessary resources and materials (videos, readings, interactive elements).

STEP 4: Implement and Reflect - By having your goals, evidence and learning and learning experience, you have the map.

The map is not the territory. Start implementing and testing what works and what needs adjustment or improvement.

Questions to Consider:

1. How effective was the learning experience in achieving the learning outcomes?
2. What feedback did you receive from students?
3. What adjustments might be needed for future iterations?

Checklist:

- Gather student feedback through surveys or discussions.
- Reflect on the effectiveness of the learning experiences.
- Make necessary adjustments to the course design.

Implementation Exercise

Activity: Design a small segment of your course using the UbD framework. Start by identifying a single learning outcome, then work backward to create a relevant performance task, and finally, plan a learning activity that aligns with the outcome and task.

Reflection: After completing your design, reflect on the following:

How does starting with the end in mind change your approach to course design?

Were there any challenges in aligning learning activities with outcomes and assessments?



The Human Centered Approach

The human-centered approach to teaching is a philosophy that places the learner at the center of the educational experience. This approach focuses on understanding the needs, goals, and motivations of individual learners, and designing teaching methods, materials, and assessments that meet those needs.

To apply the human-centered approach to online teaching, adult teachers can follow these steps:

1. Understand your learners: Take the time to get to know your students, their interests, and their learning styles. This can be done through surveys, personal interactions, or online discussions.
2. Design learning experiences that meet learners' needs: Create lessons that address the interests, goals, and motivations of your learners. Use a variety of teaching methods, such as video lectures, online discussions, and group projects to cater to different learning styles.
3. Provide frequent feedback: Give your students regular feedback on their work and progress. This can help them stay motivated and improve their performance.
4. Foster a sense of community: Create a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable asking questions and sharing their thoughts. Encourage collaboration and peer-to-peer learning.
5. Continuously evaluate and adjust: Monitor the effectiveness of your teaching methods and adjust them as needed based on student feedback and performance.

Overall, the human-centered approach to teaching is about understanding and meeting the needs of individual learners. By applying this approach in online teaching, you can create a more engaging, personalized, and effective learning experience for adult students.

EFFECTIVE DIGITAL LEARNING FOR ADULTS

In the digital era, mastering online study skills has become crucial for academic achievement. These skills encompass a range of strategies and abilities tailored to the unique demands of digital learning. As online education gains prominence, students must adapt by honing these skills, ensuring they thrive in virtual classrooms.

Key Characteristics of Effective Online Study Skills:

Self-Direction and Motivation: Unlike traditional classroom environments, online learning places greater emphasis on students' self-discipline. Success in this realm requires a strong sense of direction and motivation.

Organizational Skills: Navigating online resources and platforms calls for exemplary organizational abilities. Students must adeptly manage digital tools and resources to optimize their learning experience.

Developing Core Online Study Skills:

✓ **Understanding Online Learning Dynamics:** Grasping the nuances of digital education is the first step. Recognize that online learning shifts the responsibility of learning to the student, requiring proactive engagement.

✓ **Mastering Time Management:** Balancing academic, work, and personal life is a critical skill in online studies. Effective time management ensures that students can meet their diverse responsibilities without compromising their academic goals.

✓ **Technological Proficiency:** Familiarity with digital tools, from learning management systems to online communication platforms, is vital. Being comfortable with technology enhances the overall learning experience.

✓ **Critical Thinking and Evaluation:** Online learning often involves sifting through an abundance of information. Developing the ability to critically evaluate online content is essential for meaningful learning and engagement.

✓ **Participation and Collaboration:** Engaging in online discussions and collaborations with peers is crucial. These interactions enrich the learning process and mirror real-world digital communication.

The Impact of Robust Online Study Skills:

” Academic and Professional Preparedness: By cultivating these skills, students not only excel academically but also prepare for the digital-centric workforce. Communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, honed through online study, are highly valued in today's job market.

Fostering Independence and Lifelong Learning: Online study skills encourage students to become independent learners. This independence paves the way for lifelong learning, an invaluable trait in an ever-evolving educational and professional landscape.

Competitive Edge in the Job Market: As online learning becomes increasingly mainstream, students equipped with strong online study skills will find themselves at an advantage in the competitive job market.

DIGITAL LEARNING AND THE EU

The European Commission is aiming to modernize education and training by funding research, innovation, and promoting digital technologies.

The [Digital Education Action Plan \(2021-2027\)](#) is a policy initiative to support the sustainable adaptation of EU Member States' education and training systems to the digital age.

The plan focuses on two priority areas: fostering a high-performing digital education ecosystem and enhancing digital skills and competences for digital transformation. An expert group is being tasked with developing ethical guidelines on artificial intelligence and data usage in education and training, and developing common guidelines for teachers and educators to foster digital literacy and tackle disinformation.

The Commission will also establish a [European Digital Education Hub](#) to strengthen cooperation and exchange in digital education at the EU level.

The Digi Learn project aims to support adults in life-long digital learning and foster digitalization in Europe. The project aims to foster digitization among institutions and training organizations, aiming to create a more competitive, adaptive, and job-ready workforce. This will lead to more adults having access to quality digital education, leading to competency development and increased value-creation capacity.

EU policies and documents on digital literacy include the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp), the European Digital Strategy, the EU Digital Education Action Plan, and the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu).

These documents aim to promote digital transformation across all sectors of the economy and society, ensure access to digital technologies and skills, support the development of digital competences in education and training, and define the digital competences needed for educators to effectively integrate digital technologies into their teaching practices.

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