

This summer, I had the opportunity to complete my LiA project at Jakim School, a community school that serves students from low-income families in Eldoret, Kenya. We were —and I say 'we' because this was done with my teammate Nagyung Kim— responsible for designing, building, and teaching an introductory course on digital literacy to children who had very little, if any, exposure to technology, let alone computers. Our work would lay the foundations for future computer science classes that would be integrated into the curriculum, and we had a clean slate to design the program from scratch.



I've attempted to reflect on my experience somewhat chronologically using a narrative approach by exploring both our struggles and victories —however small they might have been— and the lessons that emerged from this transformative journey and the ways it contributed to my personal growth.

Before visiting the school, our discussions with the teaching staff revealed two main challenges we needed to prepare for. The first was purely practical —the few computers they owned had been gathering dust for a considerable time, leaving us uncertain whether the machines would even function. The second challenge was pedagogical: creating meaningful and accessible lessons without any real understanding of where the students stood academically or technologically. Upon reaching the school and examining the computers firsthand, most of them were completely unresponsive, which didn't come as much of a surprise. After some fiddling and troubleshooting with the power and ethernet cables and downloading some web browsers, we successfully brought 4 out of the 6 computers back to life —which honestly felt like a small victory. This challenge aside now, the classes began. We taught three distinct age groups —PPE 2, grades 1-2, and grades 3-4— and from day one, while the students were shy at first, their enthusiasm was evident. Surprisingly, the teachers were just as excited and curious as the students, if not more so. We had prepared an expansive set of topics - from Scratch, a beginner-friendly visual programming language, to teach programming concepts such as loops and conditional statements for the older students, to typing exercises, web navigation, and mouse accuracy exercises for the younger ones. As we delivered lesson after lesson, I learned my greatest lesson from experience itself - it taught me real adaptability. Whether it was discovering that our initial Scratch approach was too ambitious —watching students mechanically copy blocks of code without truly grasping the concepts because we were moving too quickly and overestimating their strengths— or dealing with a week-long neighborhood power outage on week 3 making computers completely useless, we constantly had to go back to the drawing board and get creative. I also realised how hard teaching really is - it was often less about explaining the material and more about making sure every student was engaged and on the same page, which was especially tricky as there were often more than two students per computer and we were sometimes dealing with very young learners. The learning environment was even more challenging due to its diverse student population. Many of our students were South Sudanese refugees who had unfortunately experienced

interrupted schooling, leaving some academically behind their peers. Navigating this heterogeneous classroom—with varying academic levels and degrees of English fluency—made me realize that my teaching style, heavily influenced by my Western educational background and experience as a university teaching assistant, wasn't the right fit here: it was too abstract, rushed, and based on assumptions about students' prior knowledge. Constant self-reflection and introspection were also of invaluable help during my stay. By questioning my assumptions, continuously asking for feedback, observing before acting, and listening more than speaking, I was able to constantly adjust my methods for the best interest of their learning. Beyond the technical skills and teaching strategies I learned and developed, this experience also changed my perspective on adversity and opportunity. Although a bit cliché, what left the deepest impression on me was witnessing their resilience and zest for life despite the hardships they encounter daily both inside and outside the classroom - a humbling reminder to always face challenges with optimism.



By the end of our time here, I was genuinely impressed: students who had once struggled to hold a mouse or find letters on the keyboard were now able to express their creativity through digital drawings in Paint and conduct their own web searches to answer the questions that popped in their head. The most advanced group concluded their learning journey by creating a polished presentation in groups using what they'd learned about web searches, Powerpoint, and putting together a good-looking slideshow. From the very beginning, we made a deliberate effort to document each student's starting point and track their progress, so that teachers would know where to begin next time and students could see their own growth and feel proud of their achievements. While most digital skills are impossible to measure directly, we focused on measurable metrics such as mouse accuracy and keyboard proficiency through online tests, and the progress was beyond our expectations. To ensure continuity beyond our stay, we worked closely with the school director—our designated successor—throughout the summer, regularly updating her on our progress and methods. Before our departure, we took the time to produce a comprehensive roadmap for each class, including all the digital resources and materials, so the program could continue to build on the foundation we had laid.

As this adventure comes to an end, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to Jakim School for their warm welcome and support throughout our stay, and to the Laidlaw Foundation for providing me with this incredible opportunity to learn, grow, and make a meaningful impact.