

DIGI-FACE REVIEW



As we welcome the New Year, the DIGI-FACE team sends our very best wishes to all DIGI-FACE members. We are delighted to share the good news that the DIGI-FACE proposal to the DAAD was successful, securing funding for the programme through to the end of 2029.

In this edition of the DIGI-FACE Review, we invite you to explore highlights from across the network, from new platform developments and partnerships to training achievements and emerging ideas shaping digital learning. We hope you enjoy reading this issue and celebrating these shared successes with us.



The DIGI-FACE team with Dr Dorothee Weyler at the DAAD offices in Nairobi.

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DIGI-FACE continues to strive for excellence

Since its launch in 2019, the Digital Initiative for African Centres of Excellence (DIGI-FACE) has evolved into a robust platform for digital capacity development, academic collaboration, and research support. The network now connects 52 universities across more than 25 countries. In 2024 alone, the platform recorded 105,794 visitors from 204 countries, including 82,004 visits from Africa. DIGI-FACE is actively used by over 2,000 registered members and 1,500 guest users who engage with its learning, networking, and publishing tools.

Following the prototype (2019–2022) and consolidation (2023) phases, the current stage emphasises institutionalisation, professionalisation, and long-term sustainability. The Moodle- and WordPress-based platform achieved 99.97% uptime, supported more than 3,500 users, and introduced new event and publication modules. Members from over ten Centres contributed more than 100 publications, while comprehensive technical and user documentation was released on GitHub, reinforcing DIGI-FACE's open-source commitment.

To enhance scalability and data protection, DIGI-FACE initiated migration from locally hosted servers at Nelson Mandela University to a GDPR-compliant OCRE research cloud. Additional improvements included multilingual functionality, expanded open educational resources (OER), and enhanced accessibility features.

In 2025, more than 351 participants took part in training programmes covering digital skills, academic writing, research coherence, and artificial intelligence in education. Over 40% earned certificates, and women represented more than 35% of participants. DIGI-FACE also certified a new cohort of trainers and delivered structured capacity-building for Centre Administrators and Moodle Managers in Cape Town and Dakar, strengthening decentralised delivery.

Strategic partnerships were further strengthened with organisations such as King's College London, Atingi, Université Numérique de France, Research4Life, and ITOCA. DIGI-FACE also contributed to major international events, including eLearning Africa and OEB in Berlin. User feedback reflects high satisfaction levels and strong progress toward programme targets.

The next phase will focus on decentralisation, sustainability, and micro-credentialing. Priorities include completing the cloud migration, expanding the multiplier network, and transforming longer courses into 10–15-hour micro-credentials that can be stacked into Short Learning Programmes (SLPs). The first SLP, Academic Writing, Presentation and Communication, will launch in March 2026, featuring modular content, automated assessment, digital badges, and certification.

Hannes Königer



Beyond Assessment: Recognising Learning in an AI-Driven World

Learning without a script.
Capability without limits.

Artificial intelligence is the defining topic of the moment. It is reshaping the learning landscape in profound ways: disrupting assessment practices, redefining workplace expectations, and challenging how we think about thinking and learning itself. Yet beyond the technology, AI forces us to confront a deeper question: in a world where learning is increasingly improvised, fluid, and unpredictable, whose learning is it, really?

In this context, it is no longer sufficient to know only what someone was assessed on. We need richer ways of demonstrating what people can actually do; their adaptability, judgement, and capacity to apply knowledge in real-world settings.

This is why DIGI-FACE began to experiment. What started with traditional certificates is now evolving into a digital credential pilot, designed to explore more flexible and

meaningful ways of recognising learning. The aim is to make participation, skills development, and learning moments visible as they occur. This initiative is not about replacing formal qualifications; rather, it seeks to broaden how learning is recognised and valued, while creating space for future developments such as competencies, micro-credentials, and stackable learning pathways.

Like improvised comedy shows without a script, that inspired the subtitle above, today's learning environment is becoming increasingly unscripted demanding flexibility, creativity, and new approaches to recognising growth. As education moves toward this "no script" reality, we are encouraged to experiment, stay curious, and keep adapting.

DIGI-FACE is not merely testing a process. It is rehearsing the future.

DIGI-FACE MOVES TO THE CLOUD:

A New Home for a Growing Global Science Community

Eldridge van der Westhuizen

DIGI-FACE has reached a major milestone: it has fully migrated its platform from on-premises servers at Nelson Mandela University (NMU) in South Africa to a modern cloud environment in Germany, hosted under the GÉANT/OCRE (Open Clouds for Research Environments) framework.

This move is more than a technical relocation. It strengthens reliability, data protection, scalability, and long-term sustainability for a community working across Africa and Europe. While NMU's infrastructure provided a solid foundation, on-site systems have limits: expanding capacity requires new hardware, maintenance and backups rely on local resources, and dependence on a single data centre increases risk. For a multi-time-zone platform with constant activity, greater flexibility became essential.

Rather than expanding physical infrastructure, the consortium adopted an Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) model, renting secure computing resources from a trusted European cloud provider. The GÉANT and OCRE 2024 Frameworks streamline access to approved providers across 39 countries and support compliance with public-sector procurement requirements.

This move is more than a technical relocation. It strengthens reliability, data protection, scalability, and long-term sustainability for a community working across Africa and Europe

For DIGI-FACE, the benefits are significant: GDPR-compliant hosting within the EU, data primarily located in Germany, stronger information sovereignty, and resources that can scale with demand. Procurement conditions are already tailored for universities and research institutions, reducing administrative overhead.

A tender issued under the OCRE framework specified EU-based hosting, GDPR and ISO 27001 compliance, 24/7 availability, and full support for core services such as Moodle, WordPress, and media streaming.

Now operating in professional European data centres, DIGI-FACE gains higher uptime, stronger security, and more efficient computing, contributing to a reduced environmental footprint. The move aligns with wider trends toward cloud-based research and education services and positions DIGI-FACE as a strong example of Africa-Europe digital collaboration.

Ultimately, the shift to the OCRE cloud is an investment in DIGI-FACE's resilience, openness, and impact, ensuring that researchers, teachers, and students can collaborate securely and effectively in a modern digital environment.

AI in the DIGI-FACE Environment

Why understanding AI matters more than ever

For those who remember the Terminator films, artificial intelligence once appeared as a distant, dramatic threat. Today, the reality is embedded in our daily lives, especially in education. AI is a tool used for automated feedback, personalised learning pathways and tutoring. As educators, understanding this technology is essential for using it ethically and preparing the next generation for an AI-shaped world.

DIGI-FACE participants recently joined an excellent professional development course hosted by King's College London titled "AI in Education". The course explored how AI is reshaping teaching and learning, the opportunities it creates, and the risks that require critical, responsible engagement. Participants were encouraged to reflect on where AI can genuinely strengthen teaching practice and where human judgment must remain central.

Learning to work with AI today resembles the early introduction of calculators in schools. Initially met with hesitation, calculators eventually became indispensable tools, provided educators guided their use appropriately.

Similarly, AI should never replace pedagogy, but understanding its capabilities helps us use it responsibly and effectively.

Major AI actors have also begun opening access to learners worldwide. Google's AI Student Plan now offers eligible students in several African countries, including South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Rwanda and Zimbabwe, free access to Gemini for one year, helping them develop increasingly essential digital skills. OpenAI's new OpenAI Academy provides courses such as ChatGPT for Higher Education and prompt packs for students, offering structured support for those wishing to use AI in academically sound ways.



Global investment in generative AI rose from USD 889 million in 2019 to USD 29.3 billion in 2024, a leap comparable to moving from a classroom to a football stadium. While much of this investment targets broader industries, AI already shapes everyday tools such as search engines, smartphones and translation apps. The more we understand AI and its implications, the better prepared we are to guide learners, safeguard academic integrity and navigate an increasingly AI-driven world.

DIGI-FACE collaboration goes beyond cyberspace

XN Iraki

What should DIGI-FACE users do when not online? Two members of the DIGI-FACE family, Eldridge van der Westhuizen from South Africa and XN Iraki from Kenya, found golf therapeutic, an antidote to the high pressures of being constantly online. At Vetlab sports club on the outskirts of Nairobi, they duelled for 18 holes. A tight match won by only a single point! It was relaxing and fun. I hope others will take the cue in the future. Collaboration can go beyond cyberspace ...



Eldridge and Iraki on the golf course in Nairobi

AUGA becomes first nationwide Alumni Association to join the DIGI-FACE platform

Mercy Chemutai

We are thrilled to announce that the Association of Ugandan-German Alumni (AUGA) has officially joined the DIGI-FACE platform, and we're making history as the first wider than a Centre of Excellence alumni association to do so!

Since our incorporation in 2013, AUGA has united over 150 Ugandan scholars across diverse disciplines who've

Every Ugandan-German alumnus should seize this opportunity.

benefited from German scholarships. With chapters at Mbarara University (Western), Muni University (Northern), and Busitema University (Eastern), we're dedicated to strengthening academic, professional, and cultural cooperation between Ugandan and German alumni.

This partnership is a game-changer. For AUGA members, DIGI-FACE opens extraordinary new doors: enhanced online visibility, access to cutting-edge learning resources and courses, and connections with German alumni across

Africa, South America, and Asia. You'll have a global stage to share your research, accomplishments, and innovations, exponentially expanding your reach and impact.

For DIGI-FACE, this partnership extends their reach beyond Centres of Excellence to a vital community: German alumni throughout Uganda and Africa. By bringing AUGA's network into the fold, DIGI-FACE creates a more centralised hub for the DAAD to support and engage scholarship beneficiaries continent-wide.

Together, we're building something bigger; a dynamic, interconnected community where Ugandan-German alumni can thrive, collaborate, and drive progress for our country, region, and continent.

Every Ugandan-German alumnus should seize this opportunity. Join the DIGI-FACE AUGA platform, engage with our activities and events, and be part of this exciting new chapter. Let's [connect](#), grow, and make an impact: together!



Members of AUGA celebrating DAAD'S 100 years of change.

Microfinance meet mining: pioneering a new path for Africa's sustainable future

Michael Kongo

A new master's programme aims to help reshape Africa's artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector by connecting microfinance, sustainable development, and digital higher education. Developed by the Université Protestante au Congo (UPC) with Taita Taveta University (TTU) in Kenya and the Congolese German Centre for Microfinance (CCAM), the proposed Specialized Master's in Microfinance for Sustainable Development and Artisanal Mining Formalization (MSD FEMA) will be delivered fully online via the DIGI-FACE platform.

Although CCAM has completed its DAAD funding phase and TTU's CEMEREM is nearing completion, the

partners are showing how collaboration can continue beyond funding cycles. By combining expertise and infrastructure, they are building a pathway for long-term, African-led impact.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has vast mineral wealth, yet ASM remains largely informal. This creates persistent challenges in worker safety, environmental management, and financial inclusion. At the same time, the DRC's Ministry of Higher Education is advancing digital learning through its Directorate for Open and Distance Learning.



MSD FEMA responds to two connected needs:

- Specialised training that links microfinance, sustainable development, and mining formalisation.
- Accessible, high-quality online education aligned with national digital learning priorities.

MSD FEMA is designed as an online-first programme, combining asynchronous learning with virtual seminars and personalised mentorship from faculty at UPC, TTU, and CCAM. Assessment will be continuous and will culminate in either a master's thesis or an applied innovation project with community impact. If approved, the degree will be jointly awarded by UPC and TTU.

Overall, the initiative shows what becomes possible when African universities use digital platforms and shared expertise to create programmes rooted in local realities. By merging microfinance and mining, MSD FEMA aims to support more inclusive and sustainable resource development and strengthen Africa's capacity for self-driven transformation.

Improved Learn page launched for DIGI-FACE courses



Check out our
NEW LEARN PAGE

- Find out more about courses
- Filter by category
- Apply for courses
- Request courses

The newly redesigned Learn page on the DIGI-FACE platform officially launched at the end of 2025. This update marks an important step in improving access to training and capacity-building opportunities, with a strong focus on usability, clarity, and responsiveness to the diverse needs of the community.

The updated Learn page features a cleaner interface, improved navigation, and enhanced filtering functionality. Users can now easily locate courses by selecting target audience, mode of delivery (self-paced or facilitated), and language of instruction. These improvements make it simpler to find relevant courses efficiently, ensuring the right learning opportunities are accessible at the right time.

In addition to browsing current and upcoming courses, users can now also request a course that is not presently available. By completing the simple request form on the Learn page, you can let us know what training you need, helping us prioritise future offerings and ensure that DIGI-FACE continues to support the community in meaningful and relevant ways.

The updated Learn page features a cleaner interface, improved navigation, and enhanced filtering functionality.

Explore the New LEARN Page

We invite all partners, colleagues, and community members to explore the redesigned LEARN page and discover the enhanced features:
<https://www.digiface.org/courses/>

This launch reflects our commitment to strengthening digital capacity-building across the African higher education landscape. We look forward to your feedback and to continuing the journey of learning, innovation, and collaboration together.



Boosting the visibility and credibility of your research

Our publications site offers members a dedicated space to showcase their academic work, ranging from peer-reviewed articles and book chapters to dissertations, working papers and other forms of scholarly output. All submissions undergo a light-quality review to ensure that the metadata meets international standards, enhancing discoverability and credibility.

The site hosts a curated list of 83 Open Access databases, including catalogues, repositories, directories, portals, textbooks and archives that are regularly reviewed and updated to help researchers find trustworthy, openly available literature.

So why should you publish here? One compelling reason is visibility. Google Scholar harvests content from the Publications page, ensuring that your work, and any citations it receives, appears in the public domain and can feed directly into your personal Google Scholar profile. This establishes a clear, trackable scholarly footprint.

This leads to a final and crucial point: citations are the currency of academia. They are more than numbers; citations demonstrate that your research is being read, used, and built upon. They signal relevance, scholarly contribution, and impact. Citations strengthen CVs, support funding proposals, build academic reputation, and enhance institutional visibility. For early-career researchers they form an essential part of developing a credible academic profile. For established researchers, they help maintain influence and signal ongoing engagement in their fields.

By making your work easily discoverable, properly indexed and openly accessible, the DIGI-FACE Publications site increases your chances of being cited, amplifying both individual and network-wide visibility.

In short, publishing on the DIGI-FACE platform supports your research journey, enhances your academic profile, and contributes to the collective knowledge ecosystem of our academic community.

DIGI-FACE'S 2025 TRAINING HIGHLIGHTS:

Karlien Potgieter

A year of growth, reach, and innovation

2025

Throughout 2025, DIGI-FACE delivered a total of 16 cross disciplinary modules designed to strengthen digital, pedagogical, and research competencies across the African higher education landscape. These offerings covered a wide array of academic needs, both in English and French, and various levels of professional experience. With programme durations ranging from intensive two-week workshops to in-depth eight-week courses, participants were able to select learning pathways that suited their schedules and development goals.

Several well-established modules, including Technology Enhanced Teaching and Learning, Course Craft, Admin Essentials, and Achieving Research Coherence, remained popular choices, drawing consistent participation across institutions. Research-focused modules such as Quantitative Research Methodologies 1 and 2, and Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision continued to play a key role in enhancing research and supervisory excellence among academic staff.

This year also saw strong engagement in French offerings. Modules such as Quantitative Research

Methodologies 1, Academic Written and Graphic Presentations, and Exploring the Online Learning Environment in French enabled accessibility for 144 francophone participants. The AWGP French module offering drew an exceptional 77 participants.

The AI in Higher Education module attracted 40 highly engaged participants, highlighting the growing need for digital transformation skills in academic environments. Across all modules, DIGI-FACE a total of 354 male and 188 female participants completed all the requirements of the modules in which they were enrolled.

Looking ahead, DIGI-FACE is excited about what 2026 will bring. All cross-disciplinary modules will continue to be offered and you are invited to explore our growing selection of modules on the newly updated Learn page on the DIGI-FACE website <https://www.digiface.org/courses/>. In addition, DIGI-FACE will introduce micro-credentials, offering even more flexible learning opportunities for busy academics and university staff.

Project team convenes annual project management meeting in Nairobi

Elisa Adams

The DIGI-FACE team held its annual on-site project management meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, from 24 to 26 September 2025. The meeting reviewed achievements from the current funding phase, identified outstanding priorities and established the strategic direction for the forthcoming 2026–2029 cycle. Over three days, the team assessed progress in capacity development, technical infrastructure and learning design, while also discussing DIGI-FACE's long-term sustainability and its role as a continuing service provider for the Centres of African Excellence.

Workshop sessions focused on innovative teaching formats, enhanced Moodle tools, collaboration platforms, open-access publishing, and improvements to user-friendly platform design. Participants also explored upcoming innovations such as the integration of gamification elements into cross-disciplinary modules.

The strong link between DIGI-FACE and the Centres of African Excellence was reinforced through the contributions of Dr Susan Kurgat, CERM-ESA Coordinator at Moi University, and Michael Kongo, CCAM Coordinator at the Université Protestante du Congo, who shared insights into current developments, institutional needs

and areas where DIGI-FACE can offer further support. The team also met Dr Dorothee Weyler, Director of the DAAD Regional Office for Eastern Africa, at the DAAD headquarters in Nairobi to discuss recent progress and future priorities.

The meeting brought together members of the DIGI-FACE Project Consortium, including Prof Dr Paul Webb, Co-Project Lead at Nelson Mandela University, alongside NMU colleagues Eldridge van der Westhuizen (IT Architect & Engineer), Elmien Waring (Senior Learning Designer), Karlien Potgieter (Digital Learning Project Manager), Koshala Terblanche (Digital Learning Experience Design and Innovation, Moodle) and Andrew Thuo (Learning Technologist). The University of Oldenburg was represented by Prof Dr Karsten Speck and Dr Malve von Möllendorff, Project Coordinator, while the University of Applied Sciences Kehl was represented by Prof Dr Ewald Eisenberg, Project Lead, and Hannes Köninger and Elisa Adams, Project Coordinators.

The meeting reaffirmed the Consortium's collective commitment to strengthening digital capacity and supporting excellence across the Centres of African Excellence network.



DIGI-FACE project management team - work and recreation in Nairobi.

Strengthening digital futures: deepening partnerships with Kenyan universities

Paul Webb



CEMEREM meeting at Taita-Taveta University, Voi, Kenya.



CERM-ESA meeting at MOI University, Eldoret, Kenya.



Meeting at Nairobi University, Kenya.

In September 2025, DIGI-FACE continued its mission to advance digital adoption and strengthen partnerships across Africa through a series of strategic visits to three Kenyan universities: the University of Nairobi, Moi University and Taita-Taveta University. Each visit highlighted unique strengths, shared challenges, and promising avenues for collaboration in digital teaching and learning.

At the University of Nairobi, DIGI-FACE teams visited two centres: the Centre for Sustainable Operations for Resource Management and Food Supply (SCO) and the African Climate and Environment Centre - Future African Savannas (AFAS). At SCO, discussions centred on expanding secure, accessible digital learning through Moodle and integrating AI solutions, mobile learning packs and tailored training resources. The Centre's thriving postgraduate programmes, including its first cohort graduating in November, demonstrate strong momentum.

At AFAS, the team explored ways to deepen digital capacity building. With 21 master's students from across Africa, AFAS highlighted the need for enhanced instructional design and plans for an electronic repository to strengthen collaboration across the DAAD network.

The visit to Moi University's CERM-ESA marked an

important moment for reinforcing long-standing partnerships. Students and academic staff shared powerful testimonials about the impact of DIGI-FACE's user-friendly platform. The team also proposed a student-and-alumni ambassador network to strengthen peer learning and engagement, alongside plans to increase mobile accessibility through the Moodle Mobile App.

At Taita-Taveta University, a DIGI-FACE representative engaged with the TTU team to discuss how digital tools can enrich teaching, especially in technical fields like engineering. Conversations underscored the importance of pedagogical content knowledge and the need for digital strategies that personalise learning across Africa's varied educational landscapes.

Across all three universities, the message was clear: DIGI-FACE is catalysing the shift toward resilient, inclusive and future-ready African higher education. Through shared platforms, shared purpose and shared innovation, these partnerships continue to contribute to building a stronger

DIGI-FACE is catalysing the shift toward resilient, inclusive and future-ready African higher education.

Open Education on the Global Stage: DIGI-FACE at OEB Berlin

On 4 December 2025, DIGI-FACE was represented at the OEB Global Conference in Berlin, one of the world's leading events on digital learning. Elmien Waring and Elisa Adams participated in an international panel discussion titled "Leveraging international cooperation in open education to sustain economic growth and human development".

The panel brought together experts from across the open education ecosystem, including Zeynep Varoglu (Senior Programme Specialist at UNESCO), Jacques Dang (Secretary of the Board at the Digital University), and Antoine Dubost (CEO of Chaucot Dubost). Discussions focused on how international collaboration and open education can support sustainable development, reduce global inequalities, and align skills development with economic and societal needs.

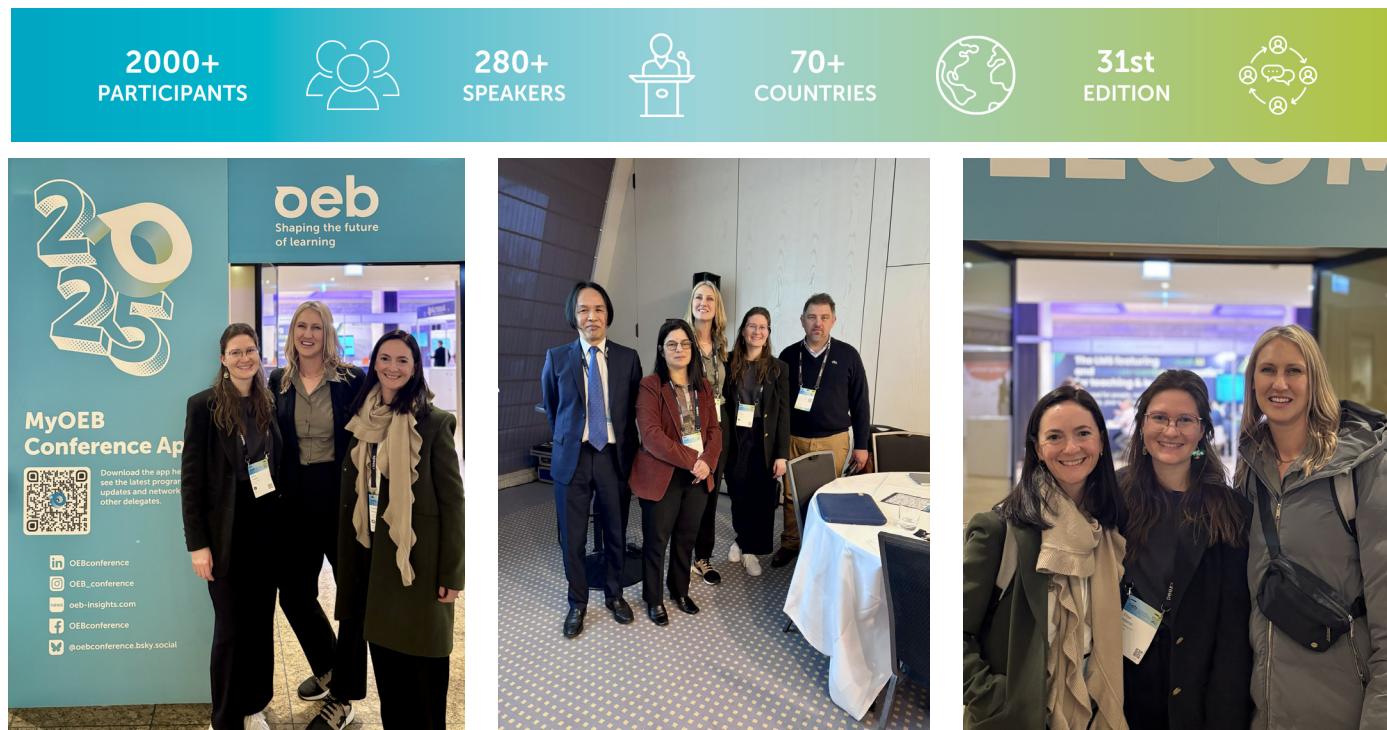
A key focus of the session was the online course Open Education, Copyright and Open Licensing, developed by the OER Foundation with funding from UNESCO. The course provides essential legal and practical guidance for working with Open Educational Resources (OER). DIGI-FACE has further developed and delivered the course multiple times in both English and French via its platform.

The self-paced course is available on the [DIGI-FACE platform](#) in:

- English: Open education, copyright and open licensing
- French: Éducation ouverte, droit d'auteur, copyright et licences ouvertes dans un monde numérique

Open education is supported by a wider ecosystem of initiatives, including Open Access databases listed in the DIGI-FACE Publication Area and Research4Life, which provides institutions in lower-income countries with free or low-cost access to peer-reviewed research.

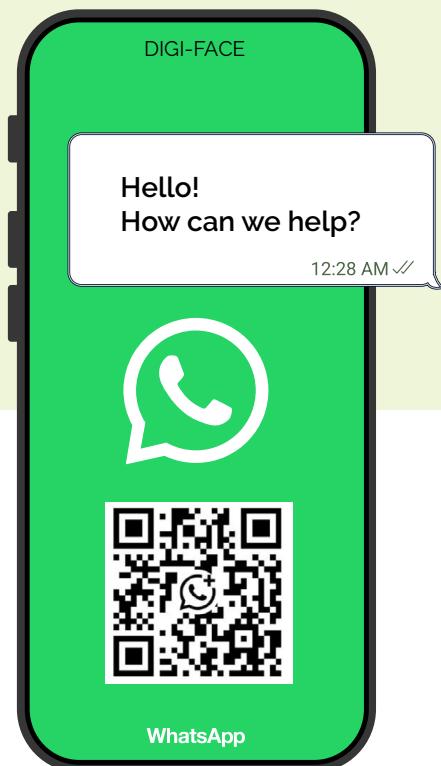
In early 2025, Professor Dr Luc Dossa from the Centre Pro-RUWA shared insights on using Research4Life to advance research and education in Africa during a DIGI-FACE webinar, highlighting the continued importance of open education for inclusive growth and human development.



Elisa, Elmien and Karlien representing DIGI-FACE at the OEB conference in Berlin, Germany.

STAY CONNECTED WITH DIGI-FACE: New WhatsApp Business account

Karlien
Potgieter



Last month, DIGI-FACE launched a brand-new WhatsApp Business account, and we are delighted to open this additional channel of communication with our community. As our network continues to grow, we recognise the importance of connecting with participants in ways that are quick, accessible, and user-friendly. WhatsApp offers exactly that.

With this new platform, we can take advantage of several unique features, including dedicated WhatsApp Communities for different module offerings, training sessions, and presentations. These spaces will allow participants to engage more easily, receive updates in real time, and access important resources in one convenient place.

The WhatsApp Business account also enables us to share announcements, reminders, and the latest DIGI-FACE news efficiently, ensuring you stay informed without needing to rely solely on email or website updates. More importantly, it serves as an additional layer of support, allowing members to reach out quickly whenever assistance is needed.

If you are not yet part of our WhatsApp community, we'd love to have you join us! Simply save our number on your phone and send us a short message. We will add you to our contact list and make sure you're included in the relevant community groups.



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The Digital Initiative for African Centres of Excellence (DIGI-FACE) and its network is a DAAD funded project and includes all DAAD funded African-German Centres of Excellence

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