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Secure Digital Credentials and Learning Records in the Educational Metaverse: Leveraging Blockchain for Trust and Transparency in Africa.

Abulfathi Ibrahim Saleh Al-hussaini
Research departmnet
Africa Centre of Excellence in Blockchain Research, Windhoek, Namibia

Kayode Babarind
Research departmnet
Africa Blockchain Institute, Kigali, Rwand

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Abstract— This study investigates the application of blockchain technology for digital credentialing and academic record management, with a focus on African education systems. Using a qualitative multiple case study approach, the research examines selected African countries—Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa—alongside international cases from Malta, Vietnam, Korea, and Brazil. These countries were chosen for their diverse implementation contexts, levels of maturity, and policy commitments. A thematic analysis was conducted using a comparative framework across four dimensions: credential security, interoperability, scalability, and adoption challenges. Findings indicate that blockchain enhances trust, transparency, and efficiency in credentialing, but success depends on infrastructure readiness, regulatory frameworks, and institutional capacity. African case studies highlight increasing policy interest, pilot initiatives, and early-stage implementations, while global cases provide scalable models that can guide future developments. The study offers strategic insights and transferable lessons for policymakers, educators, and technology stakeholders seeking to modernize education systems through secure, verifiable, and interoperable digital credentials.

Keywords— *Secure Digital Credentials, Learning Records, Educational Metaverse, Blockchain*

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of emerging technologies has led to significant transformations in education, with blockchain and metaverse technologies standing out for their potential to reshape credentialing, data management, and learning environments. The metaverse, as an immersive 3D virtual environment, enables real-time interaction and engagement, making it an increasingly relevant space for educational institutions. At the same time, blockchain technology offers a decentralized, secure, and tamper-proof infrastructure for managing digital records and verifying credentials. In many parts of the world—particularly across Africa—traditional credentialing systems face challenges such as fraud, inefficiency, lack of standardization, and difficulty in cross-border recognition. These issues hinder student mobility, slow down recruitment processes, and create barriers to accessing global educational and professional opportunities. Furthermore, the lack of digital infrastructure and regulatory frameworks exacerbates these issues in developing contexts. This study explores how blockchain-enabled digital credentials and learning records can be integrated into the educational metaverse to enhance trust, transparency, and accessibility in African education systems. Using case studies from Ethiopia, Malta, Vietnam, Korea, and Brazil, the paper investigates the practical implementation of blockchain in credentialing and student record management, with a focus on addressing the unique challenges faced in Africa. This study aims to examine how blockchain technology is being implemented for educational credentialing and student record management across selected countries, and to analyze how these implementations can inform similar efforts in African contexts. It seeks to identify key benefits and challenges related to credential security, interoperability, scalability, and adoption. The central research questions guiding this work are: (1) How is blockchain being applied in national education systems? (2) What challenges and enabling factors influence its adoption? (3) How do blockchain-based systems address issues of trust, efficiency, and standardization? (4) What lessons can African countries draw from these international experiences? The following section reviews related literature on blockchain applications in education and the

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emerging role of metaverse platforms in transforming learning environments.

II. RELATED WORK

The integration of blockchain and metaverse technologies in education has garnered increasing scholarly attention in recent years. Several studies have explored how these technologies can enhance educational systems through secure credentialing, immersive learning environments, and improved data transparency. Ma and Fang (2020) provided a comprehensive review of blockchain applications in education, identifying key benefits such as enhanced data security, improved credential verification, and reduced administrative costs. Similarly, Chen et al. (2018) investigated the potential of blockchain to support decentralized learning ecosystems and smart contracts in educational settings.

The role of digital credentials has been central to several studies. Chakroun and Keevy (2018), in a UNESCO technical paper, emphasized the challenges in cross-border recognition of learning and proposed digital credentialing systems that can facilitate mobility and trust. Davis et al. (2017) also discussed the need for boundary-less learning and how digital credentials can help recognize informal and non-formal education. More recent works have focused on self-sovereign identity (SSI) and verifiable credentials. Grech, Sood, and Ariño (2021) analyzed how blockchain-based SSI models can empower learners with control over their educational records while ensuring data privacy and authenticity. With the emergence of immersive learning platforms, metaverse technologies have begun reshaping education.

Radianti et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review on immersive virtual reality in education, noting its potential to improve engagement and retention through experiential learning. They emphasized the need for integrating secure data management tools like blockchain for learner records in such environments. Tang and Hussain (2021) explored the convergence of the metaverse and blockchain in education and proposed architectural models where smart contracts govern student interactions and credential issuance. Their work highlighted use cases such as decentralized campuses and NFT-based certification. Further practical implementations were documented in case studies from Ethiopia (IOHK, 2021), where the government deployed a Cardano blockchain-based identity and credentialing system for over five million students, showcasing the scalability and real-world applicability of these solutions.

In Korea, the government initiated blockchain-focused education programs to build capacity and integrate blockchain into formal education systems (SotaTek, 2021). Likewise, Vietnam and Malta demonstrated how blockchain could improve the transparency and verifiability of national certification systems. Collectively, these studies highlight existing efforts and ongoing challenges in leveraging blockchain and metaverse technologies to enhance the educational landscape. While many implementations focus on credentialing and identity verification, there remains a significant gap in unified platforms that combine immersive learning with secure data systems. This paper contributes to this evolving field by proposing a framework for integrating blockchain-secured digital credentials within the educational metaverse, particularly in the African context.

III.BACKGROUND AND IMPORTANCE OF CREDENTIALING, DATA SECURITY, AND STUDENT RECORDS

Credentialing recognizes and validates academic achievements and learning outcomes. Secure, standardized, and verifiable credentials foster trust across education and employment ecosystems. Data security is essential for protecting student records, which contain sensitive information.

Academic records ensure transparency, support credit transfer, and enhance operational efficiency in institutions. Mismanagement of credentials leads to fraud, inefficiencies, and international recognition challenges.Keep your text and graphic files separate until after the text has been formatted and styled. Do not use hard tabs, and limit use of hard returns to only one return at the end of a paragraph. Do not add any kind of pagination anywhere in the paper. Do not number text heads-the template will do that for you.

IV.TRADITIONAL CREDENTIALING CHALLENGES

Traditional systems face issues including: centralized database vulnerabilities, cumbersome manual verification, lack of standardization and interoperability, and susceptibility to fraud. These hinder student mobility, delay recruitment and education progression, and restrict global opportunities.

V. THE BLOCKCHAIN SOLUTION

Blockchain's decentralized and immutable nature can secure records, improve efficiency, and enable self-sovereign identities. It supports interoperability, enhances mobility, and builds trust in academic records. Initiatives like the U.S. Department of Education’s 2020 blockchain post and Ethiopia’s IOHK project showcase its rising relevance.

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VI. METAVERSE USE CASES IN EDUCATION

The metaverse, representing a significant evolution in digital interaction, is increasingly being explored for its transformative potential in the education sector. One of the primary applications is the creation of virtual classrooms and collaborative learning spaces, which utilize Virtual Reality (VR) headsets and immersive software platforms. These environments often feature avatars representing students and educators, allowing real-time interaction in shared 3D virtual spaces. From realistic simulations of traditional classrooms to imaginative learning environments, these spaces enable synchronous learning through live lectures, group discussions, and project-based collaboration. Studies suggest that such immersive learning can lead to increased student engagement, improved focus, and better knowledge retention through experiential and social learning methods (Radianti et al., 2020).

Another significant use case is interactive simulations and experiential learning. By employing both VR and Augmented Reality (AR), educators can design highly interactive, risk-free simulations that replicate complex systems or real-world scenarios. These might include virtual science labs, engineering assembly tasks, or medical training procedures. Learners gain hands-on experience by manipulating virtual objects and observing consequences in real-time, a method shown to enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Makransky & Mayer, 2022). For instance, medical students can repeatedly practice surgeries in a virtual operating room, enabling mastery before engaging with real patients.

The metaverse also facilitates virtual field trips and cultural immersion, expanding access to geographically or economically inaccessible locations. VR headsets and 360-degree video content enable students to explore historical landmarks, natural wonders, and cultural heritage sites with an immersive sense of presence. These experiences allow students to navigate environments at their own pace and gain enriched understanding of historical and cultural contexts. Research demonstrates that such immersive experiences foster empathy, deeper learning, and a sense of global connectedness (Southgate et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the metaverse enhances skill development and vocational training through virtual environments that mimic real-world scenarios. Whether in automotive repair, surgery, or equipment operation, VR and AR technologies provide a safe space for repetitive practice, error-based learning, and immediate feedback. These training systems improve learner confidence, speed, and proficiency in technical domains (Pottle, 2019). For example, AR can overlay step-by-step instructions on physical machinery, guiding trainees through repair tasks without the need for constant supervision.

Lastly, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics within metaverse platforms enables personalized and adaptive learning experiences. AI-driven systems can track individual progress, diagnose areas of difficulty, and adjust content delivery accordingly. Personalized virtual tutors or AI assistants provide real-time support, making the learning experience responsive and tailored to individual needs. This adaptive approach is shown to enhance learner motivation, promote mastery, and cater to diverse learning styles (Holmes et al., 2019).

VII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative multiple case study method. Countries were selected for diversity in adoption stages, policy support, and geographic representation. Data sources included academic papers, government reports, and industry whitepapers. Thematic analysis was based on four dimensions: credential security, interoperability, scalability, and adoption challenges.

VIII. CASE STUDIES

A. Ethiopia

Ethiopia is undertaking a significant initiative to modernize its education sector by integrating blockchain technology to enhance efficiency and combat fraud in academic credentials. This ambitious project is a core component of a broader national strategy to revolutionize the education system.

At the heart of this transformation is a strategic partnership with Input Output Global (IOHK), developers of the Cardano blockchain. This collaboration aims to establish a decentralized and secure digital identity solution for students and teachers nationwide. Leveraging the Cardano blockchain, Ethiopia's education system can securely store and verify academic records, track student performance, and monitor attendance. This approach ensures academic achievements are authentic, verifiable, and highly resistant to fraud, addressing a persistent challenge in traditional systems.

The initiative's scale is vast, designed to serve over five million students and 750,000 teachers across approximately 3,600 schools. This tamper-proof digital identity system guarantees that academic records remain immutable, secure, and easily verifiable by authorized parties. This significantly reduces credential fraud, enhances system integrity, and improves access to quality education and employment opportunities. Employers and higher education institutions can now verify

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academic achievements in real-time, streamlining processes and eliminating inefficiencies associated with paper-based systems.

The project's technological foundation, the Cardano blockchain, was chosen for its scalability, security, and energy efficiency. Unlike centralized databases, blockchain ensures educational records are secure, decentralized, and highly tamper-resistant, fostering trust. Beyond technology, the Ethiopian government is actively providing tablets and reliable internet connectivity to schools to bridge the digital divide and ensure equitable access, empowering students and teachers to interact with the blockchain-based system.

Beyond credential management, blockchain technology is also enabling personalized and adaptive learning experiences. Through seamless integration with Learning Management Systems (LMS), the new system facilitates data-driven educational policies. Teachers and administrators can track student progress in real-time, enabling targeted interventions, individualized support, and tailored learning strategies, ultimately enhancing engagement and improving learning outcomes.

A key overarching goal is to promote digital inclusion, especially for students in rural and underserved areas. By ensuring equal access to digital educational resources and verifiable credentials, the initiative aims to break down historical barriers to higher education and meaningful employment. The long-term vision is an inclusive and equitable education system where every student's academic achievements are recognized and valued globally.

Ethiopia has ambitious plans to expand this initiative beyond primary and secondary education. Future phases aim to extend blockchain-based credentialing to higher education institutions, potentially encompassing up to nine million students. This expansion would create a fully integrated, cohesive, and transparent academic system, allowing students to seamlessly transition from school to university and into the workforce with secure and accessible educational credentials.

B. Nigeria

Nigeria is increasingly embracing blockchain technology within its education sector, signaling a strong commitment to modernizing academic processes and enhancing data integrity. This interest is underpinned by strategic policy development and active private sector involvement.

The National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) spearheaded this drive with the release of the National Blockchain Policy in 2023. This policy provides a comprehensive framework for blockchain integration across various sectors, including education, demonstrating a clear national vision for leveraging this transformative technology.

Several private educational institutions in Nigeria are actively piloting blockchain-based digital credentialing systems. These initiatives aim to significantly improve the verification and authenticity of academic records, addressing long-standing challenges related to credential fraud and manual verification processes.

Furthermore, the Blockchain Nigeria Organization's Education Project (BONEP) plays a crucial role in fostering awareness and building capacity for blockchain in education. BONEP's efforts are geared towards supporting the development of scalable and secure systems for credential issuance and recognition nationwide, laying the groundwork for broader adoption and a more trustworthy academic ecosystem.

This growing engagement highlights Nigeria's proactive approach to harnessing blockchain's potential for a more secure, transparent, and efficient educational landscape.

C. Kenya

Kenya’s blockchain and AI Taskforce, established by the ICT Authority, has identified education as a key sector for blockchain innovation (ICT Authority Kenya, 2022). Pilot projects in vocational training and digital credentialing have been initiated, especially in TVET institutions. The Ministry of Education’s Digital Education Strategy emphasizes interoperability and learner mobility as priorities (Kenya Ministry of Education, 2022).

D. South Africa

South Africa has actively explored blockchain for education through government initiatives and university pilots. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is working on blockchain policies to modernize credential verification (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2023). The University of Cape Town piloted blockchain diploma issuance (University of Cape Town Blockchain Initiative, 2023). South Africa’s National Development Plan highlights emerging technologies as key to improving education quality (South African Government, 2020).

E. Malta

Malta has positioned itself as a pioneer in embracing blockchain technology across various sectors, including education. The country is known as "the island of Blockchain". Malta became the first nation-state to use Blockchain technology in

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education in 2017. To explore the opportunity for using a digital credentialing platform developed over Blockcerts, Malta's Ministry of Education and Employment signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a multi- national company named Learning Machine for four separate pilot programs within public institutions on 18 January 2017. Since 2016, the Ministry of Education and Employment (MEDE) has explored the possibilities of education technology blockchain. The possibility for notarial study certificates in the blockchain utilizing an open standard in Malta has become a persuasive proposal. Successive Malta administrations were interested in the speedy deployment of "ready-to-use," short and medium-term technology that might benefit citizens, as well as promote Malta's developing reputation as an Island Laboratory to test and implement innovative technologies. The blockchain in education pilots was identified as potentially contributing to Malta securing a competitive advantage over other jurisdictions looking at the blockchain for the internationalization of core products and services.

F. Vietnam

Vietnam is one of the countries applying blockchain in education to deal with social problems in general and certificate management. Vietnam attempts to be one of the countries applying blockchain in education to deal with social problems in general and certificate management. The news comes courtesy of Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), which announced that blockchain technology would start to be used to issue diplomas in 2021. Vietnam's MOET has entered into an exclusive agreement with SotaTek & TomoChain to archive student records on a blockchain. The Blockchain system developed by SotaTek and the MOET would handle all data and records regarding educational diplomas and certificates in Vietnam, with optimal capacity and minimal fraud, following a November 2020 statement.

SotaTek is honored and proud to be the exclusive partner of MOET in this pioneering project to apply Blockchain Technology to Vietnam's governance systems. The National Qualifications Archive (NQA) program will be the very first project of any ministry in Vietnam applying blockchain technology. The NQA system is set to be implemented nationwide for the 2020–2021 school year to store and access all educational records under the purview of MOET, beginning with Vietnam's High Schools, Universities, and Foreign Language Institutes. According to the announcement, the National Qualifications Archive program will upload all certifications to the public blockchain to create a transparent and immutable record.

"With the strong spirit of innovation of the whole society and Government's Parties, the application of 4.0 technology is expected to drive future developments. The Ministry of Education and Training is also not out of this trend, and many 4.0 technology applications adopted by schools, Departments and Ministries have proven that the application of new technology helps solve long-standing problems faster, more effectively, and more cost-savingly. Diploma and certificate management is one of the issues that need to be renovated by technology, which is significant for the whole society and cost-efficient for the diploma management system in particular and the education sector in general." said Nguyen Van Phuc, Department Minister at the MOET.

G. Korea

Korea is not only one of the pioneering countries applying blockchain in education, but this country has also gained a lot of achievements through broad blockchain adoption in sectors such as banking, logistics, IP rights, trading, and medicine. Although Korea has a big share of blockchain implementation as the latest technologies are quickly adopted, Korea's blockchain ecosystem remains a progressive phase.

As of 2018, the South Korean government had agreed to invest about $9 million to assist the development of blockchain technology in the nation, with intentions to carry out six blockchain project pilots. The country's Ministry of Science and ICT said that it will collaborate with government entities to conduct blockchain pilots in the public sector. The government's program focuses on cattle supply chain management, online voting, cross-border e-document distribution, customs clearing, shipping logistics, and real estate transactions. The program's major goal is to increase openness and efficiency in information exchange across public services via a distributed network.

In terms of education, South Korea's Ministry of Science and Technology has taken the initiative to teach the future generation of blockchain professionals. The government was influenced by the inaugural blockchain-focused lecture given by the ministry's Information and Communication Division in September 2018. The speech led to the South Korean government investing $90 million to create a "blockchain technology development strategy" course. A total of 42 individuals were picked for the

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training courses following a process of interviews and applications. Students enrolled in this course will receive eight hours of instruction each day as well as blockchain training over the following six months. The program's goal is to place graduates right into jobs when they graduate.

H. Brazil

Brazil's Ministry of Education (MEC) has proactively explored blockchain technology to address the persistent issue of university degree fraud, particularly among non-state colleges. This initiative, championed by former MEC minister Abraham Weintraub, aims to establish a blockchain-based platform for issuing digital certificates, fostering greater coherence and enabling self-regulation within the credentialing ecosystem.

The proposed platform's development would be funded by the private educational institutions themselves, as they hold the responsibility for granting certificates. Implementation would require these institutions to establish autonomous departments dedicated to maintaining the blockchain system. Reports indicate that at least 14 private institutions have shown interest in this governmental proposal.

According to Gilberto Garcia, former president of the National Education Council, this plan also promotes transparency by enabling the publication of historical data from educational institutions through the open nature of blockchain. The ministry's core objective is to combat the long-standing problem of forged university diplomas, which has been a recurring concern in Brazilian media. In a related move, the MEC made it mandatory in 2019 for both public and private educational institutions to issue diplomas in digital form, paving the way for more robust digital credentialing solutions.

This strategic direction underscores Brazil's commitment to leveraging blockchain to enhance the integrity, verifiability, and efficiency of its higher education credentialing system

IX. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

To ensure consistency and depth in analysis, a comparative analytical framework was developed and applied across all five case studies. The framework was organized around four critical dimensions. The first, credential security, examines how blockchain is used to enhance the authenticity and immutability of academic records and mitigate fraud. The second, interoperability, evaluates the extent to which blockchain platforms enable the seamless recognition and portability of credentials across institutions and borders. Third, scalability considers each country's capacity to implement blockchain credentialing solutions at the national level or within large-scale education systems. Finally, adoption challenges identify socio-technical, regulatory, and infrastructural barriers that impact the deployment and sustainability of blockchain technologies. This structured framework guided the thematic analysis and enabled a nuanced comparison of the benefits, limitations, and implementation strategies observed in each country. This framework categorizes credentialing systems into four types based on observed patterns in security, interoperability, and implementation complexity (see Figure 1).

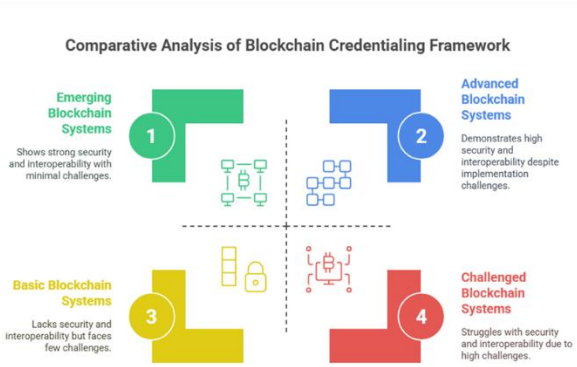

Figure 1. Comparative analysis of blockchain credentialing systems (adapted by author).

X. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that blockchain offers significant potential for securing academic records and streamlining credential verification. In Ethiopia, blockchain is used at scale through a national initiative powered by Cardano, providing tamper-proof digital identities to students and teachers. Nigeria has demonstrated strong policy interest through the National Blockchain Policy, with pilot initiatives underway in both public and private institutions. Kenya's blockchain taskforce highlights education among its use cases, and South Africa has shown interest in leveraging blockchain for higher education and TVET systems. Among the international cases, Malta and Korea demonstrate successful pilot implementations with government support and policy alignment. Vietnam is advancing blockchain through its EdTech ecosystem, while Brazil represents a decentralized, institution-driven model. Common benefits across cases include improved data integrity, reduced credential fraud, and faster verification processes. However, challenges persist: African countries face infrastructure limitations, inconsistent policy support, and limited technical capacity. Meanwhile, global implementations reveal lessons in interoperability

protocols, stakeholder collaboration, and phased deployment strategies. These insights suggest that while blockchain can enhance trust and efficiency in credentialing, its successful implementation in Africa depends on regulatory clarity, inclusive access strategies, institutional readiness, and international alignment.

XI. CONCLUTION

This study presents a comparative analysis of blockchain applications for educational credentialing, focusing on African education systems within a broader international context. By examining eight countries—including four from Africa—the study identifies key benefits and challenges related to blockchain adoption. While Ethiopia leads with a national-scale system, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa show growing interest and early-stage experimentation. International case studies offer tested models that inform and enrich African implementation strategies. Blockchain has the potential to transform educational credentialing by ensuring secure, interoperable, and scalable systems. However, implementation success requires strong governance, cross-sector collaboration, infrastructure investment, and regulatory frameworks that support innovation while protecting users. This paper contributes to ongoing discourse by bridging global experiences with Africa's unique needs and offering a framework to guide future deployments. Future research should involve empirical studies with stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and students, across African countries to validate frameworks and assess impact in real-world settings.

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