

Digital the key to educational success in South Africa

South Africa's ongoing education crisis, specifically access to schooling and learning material has been well publicised. Government has responded with subsidy offers, but simply providing financial aid does not solve the crisis that South Africa faces. Compounding the issue is the fact that universities are at capacity, with no new plans to build more facilities. According to Pierre Aurel, strategic project manager at e4, this is not a scalable solution and South Africa is limiting itself to brick and mortar as the rest of the world enters the fourth industrial revolution.



Pierre Aurel

“In an era driven and dominated by technology, we are not leveraging the potential of technology to address these issues. Digital content solves not only an access issue but will also power new content that can future-proof our people, while enabling them to succeed,” says Aurel.

“Digital education is vital to the country’s future, we cannot succeed by clinging to an outdated and broken educational system. It’s time to adapt and rethink how we share knowledge, learn and teach in the digital era,” says Aurel. “Technology is almost inseparable from our daily lives, it has changed the world and will continue to evolve. However, the critical skills needed now and well into the future are not being developed and taught, leaving the youth with a challenging and questionable future.”

The World Economic Forum reports that by 2020 there will be more than 1,5 million new digital jobs globally. In a world characterised by technologies that blur the lines between digital, physical and biological, education needs to evolve rapidly to meet the demands for a new type of knowledge worker. “We need a stronger plan to prepare the youth for the digital economy and to play productive roles within the digital revolution,” says Aurel.

He says that there is already a great choice of digital learning platforms and better use of these could effectively prepare the future generation. The World Bank says that supporting access to education is one of the most certain ways to end poverty: “Platforms such as Udemy, Khan Academy and LinkedIn Learning already provide excellent opportunities to further your education. Closer to home, South African EdTech companies like GetSmarter, Obami and Suits & Sneakers University are working to provide modern course content. South Africa needs to look at more collaborative content initiatives and broader access to technology and free internet access.”

Aurel says that given the scale of South Africa’s education challenge, embracing a digital mindset and collaborating with strategic partners to address access and content, education could dramatically improve: “The possibilities are endless as technology has made learning even more possible. In a country that cannot build new universities to scale with population growth, alternative education formats need to become the default option, with short courses, certifications and online training becoming more common place. Industry recognition of these alternative education options is also important as not every student will want, or be able to, complete a traditional four-year degree.”

What the fourth industrial revolution has to offer is infinite. Students are no longer restricted to desks, textbooks and school programmes. The future student has access to countless videos, podcasts, learning models, apps and digital communities: “All this is possible with access to the Internet and more so if the content is affordable,” says Aurel.

The future of education is technology-driven. Digital teaching and learning platforms will play a critical role in making education not only a success, but more widespread and effective. Government should start collaborating with EdTech companies from the private sector to equip our nation with critical skills.

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