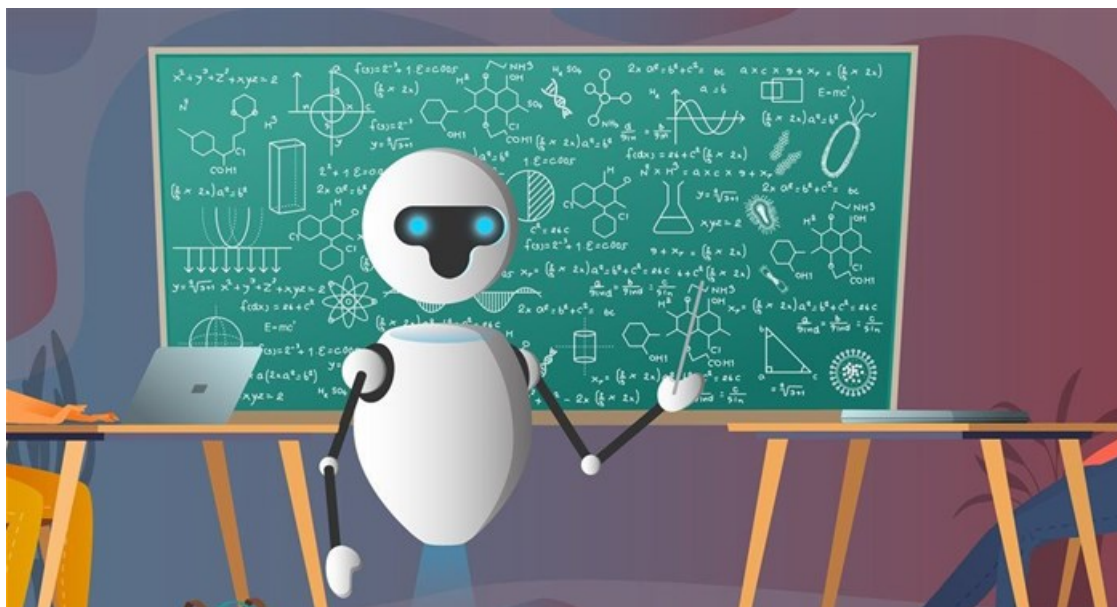


Connectivity is key to leveraging digital technologies in education

By [Vino Govender](#)

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Having adequate levels of education and digital skills capacity and capability is pivotal in ensuring that South Africa maximises the benefits of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).



However, this is a major challenge that South Africa faces while trying to meet the educational needs of its growing population. The challenge is made worse by the living conditions of the majority of the population in rural areas who live in poverty, which often determines their access to quality education. Technology, and more specifically always-on, reliable connectivity, presents a compelling solution.

The latest School Monitoring Survey from the Department of Basic Education highlights issues such as a high number of vacant teacher posts and the availability of adequate teacher skills for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Implementing alternative models to address this capacity deficit is, however, not an option.

Current and emerging digital technologies will have to take a more prominent role on the strategic roadmap of primary and secondary education.

Flexibility is an advantage

Perhaps the most compelling advantage of using these digital technologies is its flexibility. Educational content can be adapted to suit the language, devices, and network capabilities of end-users. This helps to deliver and assess the learning more effectively and efficiently. Existing content that is available globally can be repurposed to suit the requirements of local curriculum standards.

This can fast-track the implementation of policy decisions such as introducing coding and robotics into South Africa's national school curriculum. Introducing technology to schools not only aids teaching and learning but also equips learners to function in a technology-driven work world.

Reliable connectivity as a foundation

Always-available, reliable connectivity is a foundational component in leveraging digital technologies for education. The aim is to level the education playing field by making sure that every child is well taught, and laying the groundwork for this connectivity will need significant investment. It will take great effort to make it available to every school.

Fibre, or fibre-supported technologies such as high-quality Wi-Fi, is widely accepted to be the best mediums for this kind of connectivity.

In March 2018, according to information provided by the National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS), more than 9,000 primary schools and over 5,000 high schools in South Africa were still without internet connectivity. This will need to be addressed readily to ensure that our young people don't fall further behind.

Getting connectivity to schools is a priority, and Dark Fibre Africa (DFA), through its wholesale, open-access fibre model, is playing a key role in making its fibre network available for the roll-out of the SA Connect initiatives that are aimed at connecting a range of government institutions, including schools.

We and many others in the industry are rolling out or planning to roll out some form of programme to ensure that underprivileged schools have access to high-quality connectivity. A number of schools are already on our network, and through our CIVH group as well as other wholesale clients, we aim to increase this number in future.

Governments around the world, including South Africa, have put 4IR at the top of their agenda and are making significant investments into technology-enabled solutions to societal issues, including education.

We believe that the joint and collaborative efforts of all telecoms providers and ecosystem participants will go a long way towards providing these solutions and creating tomorrow's technology- and 4IR-enabled workforce.

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