

# Technology and Wi-Fi access help overcome educational challenges

Industry experts point out the importance of using technology and Wi-Fi as an enabler and tool to help overcome educational challenges in developing countries.

Bruce Pitso, regional manager for South Africa at Ruckus Wireless, says Africa is well positioned to take advantage of improved connectivity in a continuously evolving digital landscape. "Internationally technology and Wi-Fi access has become a prerequisite for a 21st century education system and over the past 12 months, we have seen many schools and education departments locally embracing tablets, eBooks, and internet access to provide students with a richer learning experience. The growth in tablet adoption is not only restricted to private schools but happening in public schools in cities and rural areas alike."

## College example

MSC Business College is moving away from a traditional classroom model and utilising a blended approach that gives students the best of both worlds. From the beginning of this year, every student registering for full-time courses received a new tablet.

"These tablets have been loaded with an electronic learning platform that supplements what is being done in the classroom. With 19 campuses across South Africa, this forms part of an ongoing drive to equip our students with the best education delivery method possible," says Anthony Gewer, Divisional Head of MSC Enterprise Solutions.

However, he is quick to point out that tablets will not substitute face-to-face learning but are there to encourage self-study. Students will have access to the curriculum on their tablets to go through it before they come to class. This enables the lecturer and students to spend more time on concepts that may be confusing or that they may need further elaboration on - offering an integrated learning system.

"Using technology should always be complementary to what is happening at a college or school. There still needs to be real-world engagement with tablets and internet connectivity enhancing that."

Ruckus agrees that it should never be just about the technology, but instead what it enables the school to do with it. "In our experience, embracing tools such as tablets and Internet access at schools mean learners not only benefit from increased access to quality information, but helps teachers utilise multimedia to illustrate difficult concepts that might not otherwise be understood," says Pitso.

Technology also encourages further teacher/parent engagement, where parents can email teachers and get responses within a much quicker timeframe instead of waiting for a parent's evening, which occurs, on a quarterly basis on average.

## **ICT improves competitiveness**

Recent World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness results show that South Africa has moved up from its initial position due to our ICT capabilities. Moreover, as ICT permeates further into sectors we are likely to see competitiveness from an infrastructure perspective increase further. This is proof that technology in the schooling system is certainly beneficial, but requires further collective industry efforts and cannot be left to schools and parents to drive.

Internationally, Wi-Fi is predicted to reach 99% of all campuses by 2016, where IT resources and access is very high on the list of differentiations between schools and campuses. According to a college student poll - 75% of students said that Wi-Fi access helps them to get better grades and 44% use Wi-Fi to get a head start on assignments before a class ends.

Using a Wi-Fi network at a school provides the additional benefit of the teachers being able to control what sites the learners have access to and what can be downloaded on their tablets. This mitigates any concerns by parents that illicit content could be viewed or that learners will have to be responsible for their own 3G connectivity to be part of the new learning experience.

"Many schools actually recommend that parents do not get tablets with 3G capabilities or request those SIMs to be removed before the learner comes to school. They are better able to manage the educational experience from their own Wi-Fi network and avoid any potential data bill shocks that some parents are concerned about," adds Pitso.

The classroom of the future is arriving sooner than many are expecting in South Africa and the rest of the continent. However, Pitso believes, if technology and connectivity are adopted in responsible ways the benefits outweigh any concerns that there might be.

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