

5 ways mobile technology will transform education

By [Ernst Wittmann](#)

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Mobile technology has transformed the way we live and work, and it can be expected to rapidly change the ways in which children learn as smartphones and tablets become more widely accepted at primary and high schools. By putting a powerful computer in every learner's schoolbag or pocket, smartphones could play an important role in improving educational outcomes in a country where so many schools are under-resourced.



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Here are some ways that mobile technology will reshape education in the years to come:

Organisation and productivity

For many adults, the real benefit of a smartphone comes from simple applications like messaging, calendaring and email. The same goes for schoolchildren, many of whom will get the most value from basic apps like sending a WhatsApp message to friends to check on the homework for the day, keeping track of their extramural calendar, or photographing the teacher's notes from the blackboard or whiteboard. One study of young people's mobile phone use in Ghana, Malawi and South Africa confirmed that many of them got the most value from using their phones to complete mundane tasks.



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Interactivity

One of the major benefits smartphones can bring to the classroom is boosting learners' engagement with educational materials through rich media and interactivity. For example, apps like Mathletics use gamification to get children excited

about doing mathematics — they turn learning into a game, with rewards for practicing and hitting milestones. Or teachers can set up a simple poll using an app like Poll Everywhere to ask the children in a class what they think about a character's motivation in their English setwork book.

Personalisation

Mobile technology opens the doors to more personalised and flexible ways to teach and learn, making more space for children to work in their own style and at their own pace. Not every child learns in the same way or excels at the same tasks and subjects – the benefit of mobile phones is that they can plug the gaps for children seeking extra enrichment or those that need some additional help with classroom work.

For example, teachers can provide recommended educational materials for children who are racing in ahead of their peers in some of their subjects. Or they can suggest relevant games for children who learn better through practical application of ideas than by listening to a teacher and taking notes.



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In future, we can expect to see teachers, perhaps aided by algorithms and artificial intelligence, make use of analytics to track how students engage with educational content on their mobile devices and use these insights to create more powerful learning experiences.

Access

South Africa has a shortage of teachers in key subjects such as mathematics and science, which disproportionately affects learners in poor and rural areas. According to a statement in 2017 from the Department of Basic Education, it has more than 5,000 underqualified or unqualified teachers working around the country. Though technology cannot substitute for a qualified teacher, it can supplement human teaching in remote or poor areas where teachers are not available or not qualified to teach certain subjects. Video learning and videoconferencing sessions offer the next best thing where a math or physical science teacher is not physically present in the classroom.

Information

Knowledge is power and the internet is the world's biggest repository of knowledge. Schoolchildren can access information and expertise about every subject under the sun from their smartphones – whether they are reading the news on a portal, watching documentaries on YouTube, downloading electronic books, using apps to improve their language skills, or simply Googling facts and figures for a school project.



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Take a mobile-first approach

Technology has a powerful role to play in the South African school of the future, but there are some key success factors schools must bear in mind as they bring mobile devices into the classroom:

- Use appropriate technology — in South Africa, that means taking a mobile-first approach and using the smartphones many children already know and use.
- Thinking about challenges such as security – put in place the cyber and physical security needed to keep phones and data safe and secure.
- Ensuring teachers and children alike are trained to make the most of the tech – teachers need to take an active role in curating content and guiding schoolchildren's use of their devices. To get that right, they will need training and access to reliable tech support.

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