

EdTech to increase access to education

A focus on education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines is becoming increasingly relevant in South Africa, given the current state of its maths and science education...



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Omidyar Network today announced its investment in Siyavula Education, an education technology company that enables learners to improve their performance in high school maths and science through e-learning.

Amy Klement, Omidyar Network partner, said, "Siyavula is creating opportunity and improving the prospects of young South Africans by using technology to increase access to education.

"Omidyar Network's funding will help the company expand across the country as it seeks to scale its highly effective, innovative and affordable education technology solutions."

Innovative software that enables learners to practice maths and science

Siyavula has developed innovative software that enables learners to practice maths and science. The software adapts to every learner's individual needs, providing targeted feedback so that they can master the necessary concepts and skills. The practice service currently covers Grade 8-12 mathematics and Grade 10-12 physical sciences. Accessed over the web or mobile, subscriptions to the service are either individually to parents and learners or to schools as a classroom tool for teachers.

The technology provides teachers with the ability to monitor their classes by summarising learners' efforts and identifying problem areas, making it a powerful diagnostic teaching tool. Siyavula also works with publishers and educational institutions to license the content and algorithms for intelligent, personalised adaptivity when practicing.

"Our programme gives the learner immediate, detailed feedback and allows long-term progress tracking," said Mark Horne, CEO Siyavula Education. "This way, learners who are struggling can be identified easily and assisted."

Currently, over 50,000 learners and teachers in public and private schools across the country have access to Siyavula's online programmes, which have delivered and automatically marked more than four million exercises developed from a complex set of adaptive algorithms.

Siyavula has also developed openly-licensed, curriculum-aligned textbooks for maths and science. This content is freely-accessible to read and download online, over mobile, as ePUBs and on Mxit. The Department of Basic Education has printed and distributed about 10 million copies of these textbooks to public schools in South Africa across Grade 4-12. For many schools, where access to the Internet or other necessary technology is limited or non-existent, the printed textbook fulfills a crucial role in access to educational resources.

"Omidyar Network's mission to empower individuals to improve their own lives and the lives of those around them is closely aligned with ours," added Horner. "Through this partnership, we will be able to increase access to quality education materials among more youth across the country."

Through its education initiative, Omidyar Network supports entrepreneurial models that bring high-quality, affordable schooling, pre-primary education and vocational training to areas where opportunities are scarce. Omidyar Network also invests in the latest teaching and learning technology that have the potential to scale across the world. With the investment Siyavula Education, Omidyar Network's education initiative now supports 23 organisations focused on early childhood development, education technology, K-12 and work readiness across Africa, Latin America, India, North America and the Philippines.

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