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The Business of Education for School Decision Makers



AI education applications



Subject choices



**Planning for the costs of
a tertiary education**



Changing schools



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Editor's Column

The Artificial Intelligence rabbit hole

The questions around the use of AI in the classroom and its impact on teachers and learners is not new. The pros and cons have been discussed for some years now. And not just in the education arena but in most other societal sectors such as economics, employment, medicine, law, and even personal relationships and human interaction.

But let's focus on education. It's important to point out that various types of artificial intelligence have been used at different levels in the classroom – and by teachers and students – for a couple of decades now.

The breakthrough began at the turn of the century when Google and YouTube revolutionised our access to information. Seemingly overnight, learners and teachers had an instant encyclopaedia at their fingertips. Gone were the days of a teacher saying: "Good question Johnny, why don't we all go home and look it up, then we can discuss it tomorrow – okay class, that's your homework."

The web-based search engines (which were always AI driven at its core) provided a limitless library of information, explanation, synthesis, analysis and examples of virtually any subject or topic. Johnny and his classmates no longer had to spend hours or days sifting through volumes of Britannica to answer one small, detailed question. And neither did the teacher.

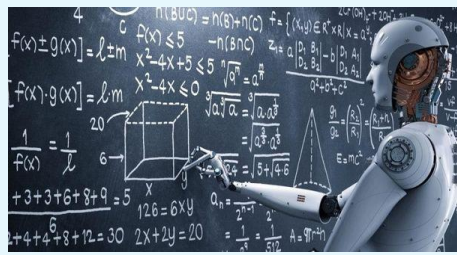
This technology was the true turning point in education. And very quickly the global education industry began to harness the rapid advancements of technological applications. Developments like video-based teaching, electronic whiteboards, digital publishing of learning materials, online learner activities and study groups, and even web-based assessments were being adopted and implemented by schools and universities around the world. This was further enhanced by radical improvements of hardware devices such as smartphones, tablets, and virtual reality gadgets.

Very soon we were reaching for the stars – well, the clouds to be more accurate. Cloud-based servers put internet usage and information storage onto a new level.

The recent advancements in AI have just boosted all of the above (and now fairly established) educational tools. Artificial intelligence offers a more effective and efficient way of working with information. This will create new innovations for classroom management systems, learner management systems, collaboration and interaction, training, the teaching of coding and robotics, and even the generation of ideas and solutions.

But no, your teacher will not be replaced by a robot. And learning will not take place through microchip implants and surgically attached goggles and headsets. I believe that with these advancements in technology, we might just see a "human" improvement in education. By this I mean smaller and more personalised learning groups and classrooms, community and family-based learning, and even a yearning for some good old retro reading and writing. ■ **Janos Bozsik - Editor**

Artificial Intelligence – educational applications



The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the classroom has the potential to revolutionise the way students learn, and teachers teach. AI algorithms can provide students with personalised feedback and recommendations, allowing for a more engaging and effective learning experience. Despite these potential benefits, there are also several challenges associated with incorporating AI into the classroom.

One of the key benefits of incorporating AI into the classroom is the ability to provide students with a more personalised learning experience. AI algorithms can analyse student data and adapt to their learning styles, providing feedback and recommendations that are tailored to their individual needs and abilities. This can help to keep students engaged and motivated and can lead to improved academic performance. Another benefit of incorporating AI into the classroom is the opportunity to deepen students' understanding of this rapidly evolving technology. By incorporating AI into the curriculum, teachers can help students develop a critical perspective on this technology and prepare them for the challenges and opportunities of the digital age. Finally, incorporating AI into the classroom can also help students develop important 21st-century skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration. These skills are essential for success in the digital age, and they can be developed through hands-on experience with AI tools and applications.

While there are many benefits to incorporating AI into the classroom, there are also several challenges that teachers must overcome. One of the biggest challenges is the need for technical expertise. Teachers who are not familiar with AI may find it difficult to integrate this technology into their teaching practices, and they may need support and training to get started. Another challenge is the cost of AI tools and applications. Many schools and universities do not have the resources to purchase and maintain the technology, and they may need to seek external funding or partnerships. Finally, there are also ethical concerns associated with incorporating AI into the classroom. As AI becomes more sophisticated, there are concerns about its impact on privacy, security, and the job market.

Best practices for incorporating AI into the classroom

Best practices for incorporating AI into the classroom can help teachers effectively integrate this technology into their teaching practices and provide students with a more personalised and engaging learning experience. The following are some key best practices to consider:

1. Partner with a reliable AI provider

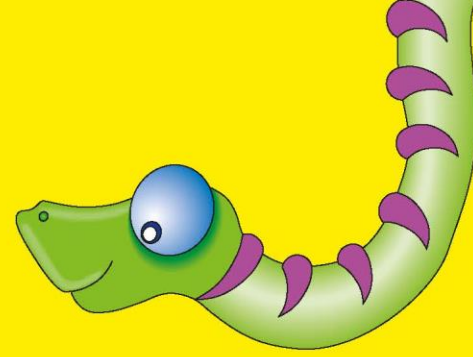
Finding a reliable and trustworthy AI partner is crucial for the successful integration of AI into the classroom. This can be a technology company, a local university, or a non-profit organisation that specialises in AI education. The right partner can provide support, training, and guidance to help teachers effectively incorporate AI into their teaching practices.

2. Start small

Rather than trying to implement AI across the entire curriculum, it is recommended that teachers start small and work their way up. This allows teachers to gain experience with the technology, build confidence, and refine their teaching practices over time. For example, teachers could start by incorporating AI-powered learning games into their lessons or using AI algorithms to provide students with personalised feedback on their assignments.

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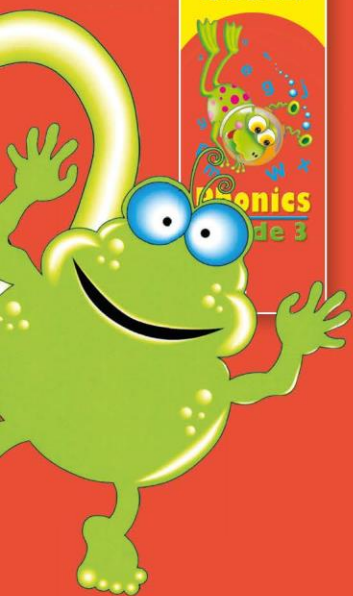
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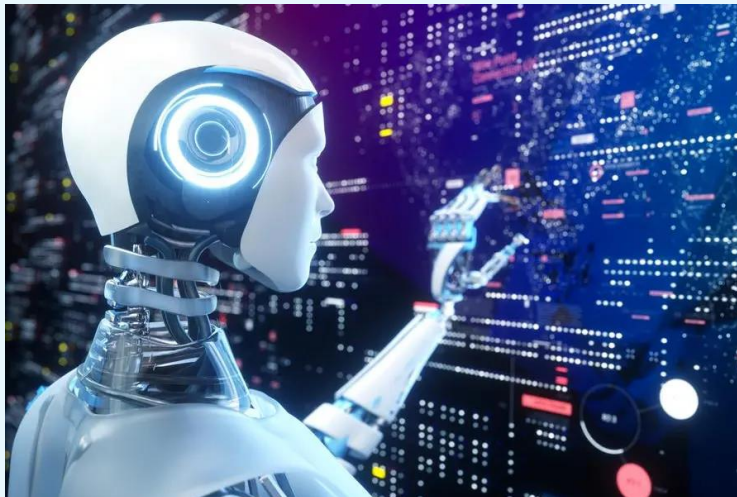
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➤ from page 2



3. Foster ethical and critical thinking

Incorporating AI into the classroom provides an opportunity for students to develop a critical perspective on this technology and its impact on society. Teachers should encourage students to think critically about the ethical implications of AI and to consider the potential consequences of its widespread use. This can help students become responsible and informed digital citizens who are equipped to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the digital age.

The ethical considerations of using AI in learning

The use of AI in learning raises ethical concerns that must be addressed. Bias in algorithms used by AI is a significant concern, as incorrect programming can result in biased outcomes or the promotion of certain ideologies without transparency. Another concern is the potential for AI to replace human teachers, as human interaction, guidance, and support are crucial for students' development. Data privacy and security are also concerns, as the collection and use of student data must be ethical and transparent.

Educators and policymakers must carefully consider these ethical considerations when implementing AI in learning. Transparency and accountability are essential in ensuring that AI is used in a manner that benefits students and does not harm them. The goal should be to enhance the learning experience and improve learning outcomes, rather than replacing human teachers or compromising student privacy and security. Students must be informed about the data being collected, how it is used, and who has access to it. It is imperative to prioritise the ethical use of AI in learning to ensure that it serves the best interests of students and upholds their rights and privacy.

The future of AI in learning: opportunities and challenges

AI has the potential to revolutionise learning, with opportunities in personalised learning and grading. However, challenges include the fear of job loss for teachers and the potential for bias in AI algorithms. It's important to strike a balance between the benefits and challenges of AI in learning, recognising that AI is a tool to enhance learning, not a replacement for human teachers. ChatGPT, for example, can be a helpful tool in supplementing learning, but it's crucial to remember its limitations and the need for human interaction in education.

Educators need to be mindful of the limitations of AI and use it appropriately, while learners need to develop skills to navigate AI-based learning tools effectively.

AI has the potential to transform education, but it must be used ethically, transparently, and with consideration for learners and educators alike. ChatGPT is just one example of the many AI tools available, and its role should be carefully considered in the context of each learning environment.

5 Pieces of Advice for Teachers, Tech Coaches, and Principals to Increase Student Engagement

Honor student and teacher voices

allow students and teachers to share what's working and what's not working

Bring hope into your school and classroom

emphasize importance of empathy, the importance of optimism as a leader

Remain positive

the motto during this time is "this too shall pass."

Reestablish norms

educational instruction will move back to the classroom and students will have to readjust to the new environment.

Self-care

teachers are unable to fully educate students without taking care of themselves first

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AI in education – a priority for SA schools



Artificial intelligence (AI) has been comprehensively embraced in the private sector in South Africa in less than a year, but more must be done to ensure that the public sector (and especially students in public schools and universities) are also empowered and prepared for the future world of work, an education expert says.

“In a rapidly changing job market, adaptability is paramount. By integrating AI into education, South Africa will ensure that our young people are not only consumers of technology but also creators. We must ensure, as a matter of urgency, greater AI literacy throughout our education system, and that students are equipped with skills that transcend textbooks,” says Dr Alex Asakitikpi, Senior Researcher at IIE Varsity College.

Asakitikpi says resource constraints and well-known challenges throughout the education system cannot be dismissed; however, it is essential to work towards integrating AI into the education system despite these hurdles.

“There is much that can be done, and done urgently if SA’s policymakers, educators, and industry leaders collaborate,” says Dr Asakitikpi.

“Curricula should incorporate AI literacy, demystifying complex topics and emphasizing hands-on learning. Teacher training programmes should equip educators with the skills to navigate this new terrain. And partnerships with tech companies, research institutions, and NGOs can provide resources, mentorship, and exposure,” he says.

In recognition of the importance of incorporating AI into the education system, The Independent Institute of Education’s IIE MSA hosted an international conference at its campus in Ruimsig, Johannesburg, called “*Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Education and Work*”, where leading researchers and academics in the field of AI were united in urging the government to speed up the development of policies that facilitate incorporation of AI across all levels of the education system.

“AI is rapidly changing the future of work and it is estimated that 50% of jobs that exist today will disappear as companies adopt and integrate new AI-driven technologies and machines into their production and business processes to perform tasks that were previously done by many people,” says Dr Asakitikpi.

“We all know by now that AI will make humans more efficient and faster when performing tasks, and that tasks that were previously done by many people can now, and will in the future, be done by one person. However, at the same time, AI will create new opportunities for job seekers and entrepreneurs. Preparing our youth in this regard is non-negotiable, and nobody should be left behind.”

AI-driven technologies and tools enable people to learn new skills quickly and to develop new ideas, thereby reducing barriers to market entry and lowering the cost of doing business.

“For instance, there are new AI-related jobs in the fields of data science and robotics, which did not exist before, but pay significantly higher than traditional occupations. We therefore call on the government to establish a Task Force that takes a pro-active approach to developing policies for AI, while the industry collaborates with higher education institutions to fund research into AI-related skills,” advises Dr Asakitikpi.



A new school – what is right for your child?

School choice is not a straightforward ticking-of-the-boxes exercise. As all parents know, there are many factors that influence the decision-making process. Even when exhaustive investigations have been done, questions may still remain whether the right choice was made.

Parents may be considering moving schools due to various factors – academic, social and emotional. The decision to move schools is a significant one that can come with major upsides but also unforeseen downsides, and therefore warrants careful consideration.

Education experts say that while moving schools is a hard call to make, there are ways to determine whether a child's current school is the best fit for them, or whether they will be best served in a new or different environment.

Renie Sutherland, Principal at The Bridge Assisted Learning School, says there are a few factors to take into consideration when assessing if a school is a good match.

They include the questions of:

- **Progress or regresses:** If your child is no longer making progress or is regressing despite the support in place, it may indicate that the current environment is not meeting their needs.
- **Emotional distress:** If your child exhibits consistent emotional distress, anxiety, or behavioural issues that seem exacerbated by the school setting, this might be a sign that the environment is not conducive to their well-being.
- **Lack of adequate resources:** If the school is unable to provide the necessary resources, therapies, or accommodations that your child needs to thrive, it might be time to explore other options.
- **Mismatch in educational philosophy:** If the school's approach to education and support structures does not align with your child's learning style or needs, it could be beneficial to seek a school with a more tailored approach.

The ideal environment varies based on the child's specific challenges; for example, a child with learning difficulties might need a more specialised setting, which offers individualised learning plans, smaller class sizes, and dedicated support staff.

"How your child responds to school (happy or anxious) is a good determiner of how your child copes at school. Academic success is very much connected to emotional well-being, especially for children who require additional support," says Sutherland.



Marion Kohler, Principal at Abbots, says there are several reasons as to why a school does not work out for a student:

"It could be for emotional reasons, where the child is not making friends, or there has been social isolation. Academic progress could also be a factor, where the child feels they are not getting the necessary support from the teachers or school, or that their subject offering is not aligned with future goals."

However, it is important to differentiate between typical challenges that can be overcome with time and support, and those that are perhaps just an incompatibility with the school environment. If the issues persist despite efforts to address them, it may be time to consider a change. A school cannot be everything to everybody.

"Most good schools will offer support for children with barriers to learning, in the form of concessions for exams and tests. There are also more niche schools that are very accommodating of children with mild autism, ADHD, learning barriers such as slow processing speeds, dyslexia, dyscalculia and those with mental health challenges," says Kohler.

It comes down to weighing up the concerns against potential opportunities.

Primary school exams – foundation for success

As parents, we eagerly watch our children attempt and reach their milestones from birth. One significant milestone that often fills us with both excitement and apprehension is their first big formal assessments in primary school.

In public schools, these are usually the mid-year exams in Grade 5, and in private schools, formal assessments may only start later, with Grade 6 students starting out by writing core subjects at year-end, and full formal assessments starting in Grade 7.

Regardless of when these formal assessments first start, students and parents will face new expectations in terms of planning, studying, commitment and scope of work that needs to be mastered – amounting to moving up to the next level in students' academic journey.

While a good performance in formal assessments should be planned and worked towards, parents also need to realise that the *experience* of the journey of studying and preparing at this time will make a substantial impact on the child's approach to exams in the future, when adult assistance and guidance won't be available or even desirable

Developing a successful study foundation

- **Cultivating a positive mindset and atmosphere**

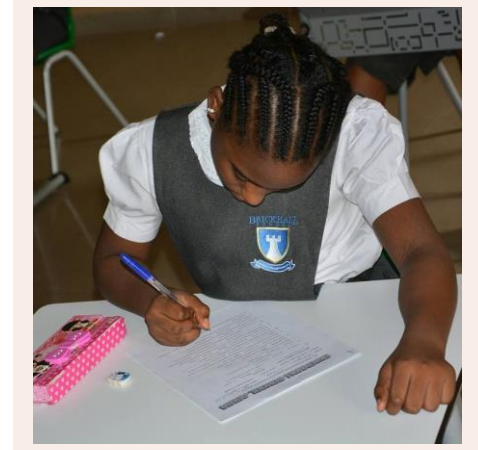
Parents' influence and attitude matter. Our children absorb our emotions like sponges, and if we ourselves approach exams with anxiety or negativity, or a push for peak performance at all costs, they'll pick up on it. Instead, parents must aspire to model a positive attitude. Share stories of your own exam experiences, with an emphasis on growth and learning. Encourage your child to view exams as opportunities to showcase their knowledge and skills.

- **Organisation and preparation**

Make the effort to create a clutter-free, dedicated study zone over which the student can feel some 'ownership', to set the stage for focused learning. Ensure it's free from distractions like mobile phones. Before study sessions, check that stationery, textbooks, and an exam pad are readily available. This simple step minimises disruptions and keeps the momentum going.

Help your child break down the work, as large tasks can overwhelm anyone, but especially young students. Help them section the exam requirements into manageable pieces and guide them in terms of creating summaries and flash cards (without doing the job for them).

Celebrate small victories every day. Each section completed is progress toward success and reduces the need for anxiety-ridden cramming the day or weekend before the exam. Encourage your



child to develop a habit of writing and drawing keywords while studying, as this reinforces memory retention. Whether it's jotting down key points, solving math problems, or practising spelling, the act of writing solidifies understanding. This is the age where just reading the textbook for revision is no longer a strategy for success.

- **Goalsetting & effort**

Formal assessments in primary school are important in terms of performance, but in the earlier years, laying the foundation for future years is even more important. This is the time to show your child how to determine and set achievable goals, to provide direction and motivation.

Teach your child that effort matters, and that hard work pays off. Anxiety may still creep in, but consistently putting in the work, a little bit every day at this stage, helps students feel more empowered.

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(Names are changed to protect members' anonymity)

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"Proud Mother".

It's amazing how much honesty there can be in Alateen when alcohol is full of lies. *"Maria" age 11.*



Alateen has relieved me of the stress in my life. I have more focus on my schoolwork and I have stopped overthinking everything. I have serenity in my life for the first time as I have stopped worrying about my Dad's drinking and am more confident.

"Jabulani", age 11.

I have been told by my friends & family I am much more relaxed, calmer and more mature. I have been going to Alateen for nearly three years and I don't worry so much about my Mom and am not so negative. *"Lucy" now age 13.*



Alateen has helped me stop worrying about what might happen at home if my parents are drinking and fighting. *"Ray" age 12.*

Alateen has helped me deal with the stress at home and my school marks have improved. I didn't want to go to meetings at first, but now I look forward to the weekend meeting and seeing my friends there.

"Rebecca", age 15.

Before Alateen I found it very difficult to talk to other people at school. Now I feel freer, am much more confident, and understand it's not only my family that has this problem. *"Mark" age 14.*

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Subject choice – parents must guide & support

Many parents today have children who require additional assistance academically, emotionally, or both. For these parents, concerns are never far away that their child will battle in the world of the future, and that they might not ultimately achieve personal and career success.

But an educational psychologist says parents need to change the paradigm through which they view success, as many are still focused on ideas about what constituted becoming a successful adult in the past, rather than embracing a world of new opportunities that are constantly emerging.

“In the past, and unfortunately among some people to this day, there was this perception that if your child is not studying to be a medical doctor or a lawyer, then they haven’t made it,” says Dr Greg Pienaar, renowned Educational Psychologist and Principal of The Bridge Assisted Learning School.

“Everyone has a future in terms of a passion or career, so if your child is not specifically focused on academic matters and isn’t necessarily wanting to study anything related to Core Mathematics or Physical Science or Life Sciences (Biology), then there are literally thousands of other career paths to follow. And these career paths are not inferior, they are just different,” he says.

Dr Pienaar notes that there is also still a perception that students can only advance to tertiary studies if they attend a traditional high school and follow the traditional academic journey in terms of subject selection. That is simply not the case, he says, because schools that provide additional support on the neurodiversity front, emotionally or academically, also write Matric exams. In the case of The Bridge, for instance, students sit for IEB exams. Additionally, future success isn’t reliant on choosing only those subjects that provide access to traditional ‘high-end’ careers.

“So, what if your child is interested in something to do with food or cooking or hospitality? What if your child loves everything to do with computers or technology? What if your child is interested in travelling the world and discovering its wonders? What if your child has strong verbal ability and can charm and convince people easily? What if your child has the skill or ability to run a business or be an entrepreneur?”

“It makes no sense to force them to follow a career path which is not natural for them, while there are avenues available which will support their future career success in a field that interests them or which they are passionate about.”

Dr Pienaar says it is legitimate for parents to be concerned if their child battles to focus and concentrate, struggles with words and



reading, blanks out when numbers are involved, or is bright but not interested in academics.

However, realising a child needs additional support is the start of the road - not the end of it.

“Often children battle to focus on a career early in life, but they do know what they like and don’t like, sometimes as early as primary school. Our role as parents is to help nurture these interests and provide the space for a child to develop without pressure, and harness additional support if needed to assist them on their academic pathway, even if that is not the standard pathway.

The old cliché still holds, that you can’t force a square peg into a round hole. This is never truer than with our children, because we spend many hours of our lives in our work environment or in something related to work.

“Academic and career success is not merely a case of doing well but being happy and fulfilled while doing so. It is important that our focus falls equally on the other half of the equation, not simply the surface considerations of success.”

Dr Pienaar says parents can help their children make a start on this road by allowing them – with the help of education experts at their school – to choose subjects appropriate to their desired careers wisely.

Walk the education journey – with your child

Parents and guardians play a vital role in the overall development and academic growth of their children during their educational journey.

However, in today's world, despite an increased need for parental support and involvement, many parents find it challenging to fulfil this role due to various reasons including, but not limited to, time constraints, lack of knowledge about modern school curricula, and personal or work-related circumstances.

But parental involvement isn't an all-or-nothing proposition – either one is part of a child's journey or not – because there are various small ways in which a parent can become a valuable pillar of support and encouragement for their child, which can make a huge difference even with limited but consistent investments of time and effort, an education expert says.

“Parental involvement is essential for a child on all levels, including academic achievement, and it is undeniable that children whose parents or guardians support them in their educational journey have a stronger foundation for academic performance, positive learning experiences, and personal growth,” says Desiree Hugo, Academic Head: Schools Division at ADvTECH.

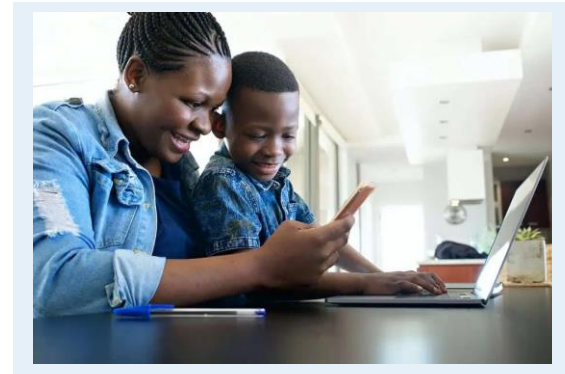
“Nonetheless, and very understandably so, many parents struggle to strike a healthy balance between their daily obligations and work responsibilities while also providing the necessary support and encouragement their children need on their academic journey.

“Fortunately, being involved doesn't require parents to drop the other balls. Even small but consistent connections to School, can make a significant difference in their child's educational success and emotional wellbeing,” she says.

Maintaining open lines of communication is crucial, Hugo says. “Parents should ensure that they receive and stay informed about all school communications. If any issues arise, prompt communication with the school can address these matters before they escalate into more significant challenges.

“Additionally, parents should engage in daily conversations with their child, to understand their experiences, both positive and negative. This simple practice requires minimal time but provides valuable insight into potential challenges, enabling parents to stay proactive regarding their child's performance and well-being while also staying connected to what is happening in their lives.”

Whenever possible, parents should participate in school activities



and events. Where schools organise events such as parent-teacher conferences, school fairs and sports matches, making the time to attend these activities periodically, demonstrates interest in and appreciation for the importance of a child's educational journey and holistic development as part of a larger learning community.

Maintaining a positive attitude towards the educational journey is also essential.

Students benefit from having supportive structures in place as part of their daily routine that are conducive to learning. Parents can help create a positive atmosphere and should where possible provide a dedicated space for studying that is quiet and comfortable. “Children often feel anxious and overwhelmed by their studies, making it crucial for parents to remain positive and encouraging, even during challenging times.”

In addition to providing logistical support, parents should also help their children develop a growth mindset and a love for learning. Encouraging curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking, and setting realistic and achievable goals, can foster their academic and personal growth.



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For the hundreds of thousands of South Africans who want to fast track their career and get a qualification that is in demand by employers, but who do not have matric or do not meet the entry requirements for other types of qualifications, an occupational certificate presents the best opportunity for realising their career dreams.

“An occupational certificate is a qualification that is awarded to individuals who have demonstrated competence in a specific occupation or trade. It is a nationally recognised qualification that is based on industry standards and is designed to equip learners with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a particular occupation,” explains Siyavuya Makubalo, Marketing Manager at Oxbridge Academy.

In South Africa, occupational certificates are developed and managed by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), which is a public entity responsible for quality assurance and the oversight of the design, accreditation, implementation, assessment and certification of occupational qualifications, part-qualifications and skills programmes.

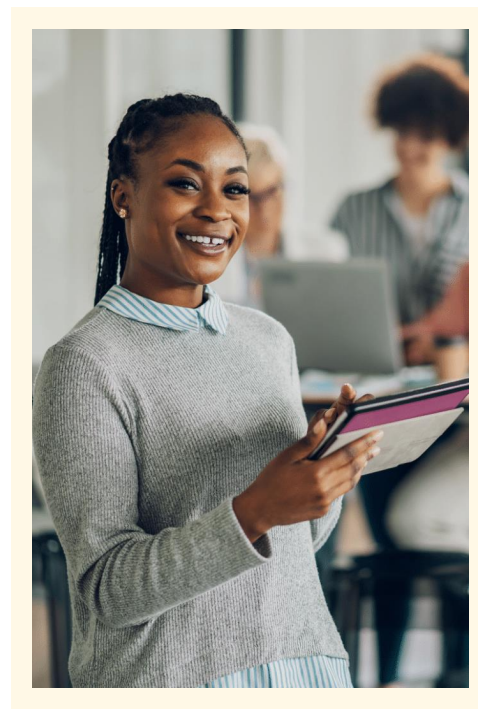
“One of the advantages of occupational certificates is that they provide an alternative pathway to education and training for students who have not completed their matric or who do not meet the entry requirements for other types of qualifications. Occupational certificates are divided into three components: theory, practical and work-based, which allow the learner to gain relevant knowledge, practical skills and work experience,” Makubalo says.

“Provided students have the necessary foundational learning competence (FLC) or recognition of prior learning (RPL) for the specific occupation or trade, they are able to enrol for an occupational certificate programme without having to complete their matric first, and still get a nationally recognised qualification that is relevant to a specific occupation or trade.”

Some examples of occupational certificates that do not require matric

- Early Childhood Development
- Health Promotion Officer
- Cash Office Clerk
- Home-based personal care assistant
- Home-based personal care worker

Makubalo says in South Africa, occupational certificates cover most sectors including agriculture, business, construction, education, health, hospitality, manufacturing, mining & transport.



Interested students can find more information about the different occupational certificates on the QCTO website or on the SAQA website.

“By getting an occupational certificate without matric, you can fast track your career and gain access to the labour market by gaining a qualification that is in demand by employers and which prepares you to fill a specific role,” says Makubalo.

“You can also improve your chances of finding employment or starting your own business in a specific occupation or trade. Additionally, you can progress to higher levels of learning within the same or related occupational fields, as some occupational certificates are articulated with other qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).”

So, if you are a student who wants to fast track your career without matric, an occupational certificate could be the answer to making your dream career a reality.



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Planning for the costs – of tertiary education



Getting a tertiary qualification is a big commitment, both financially - and the time and effort you'll need to invest to get your degree or diploma.

According to a *Careers Portal* story on the high drop-out rates at South African universities, over half of the students who apply for university do not complete the first year. This high drop-out rate is not only due to poor academic performance but also because many students run out of money.

Education is one of the top reasons people give when applying for loans with specialist loan providers and banks.

Monita Zeterberg, communications manager at DirectAxis, says there are some important questions to consider before you decide to enrol for any post-matric qualification.

Unfortunately, many of these questions are financial-based and even with government funding for some students, affordability will remain a problem for most.

Starting a course if you can't afford to complete it, makes it much less likely you'll ever go back and get the qualification.

Can you afford the university or college you want to attend?

You may have your sights set on a particular institution, but it's worth doing some research. According to the *BusinessTech* website, first year university fees are on average R62 000, but this can vary considerably depending on the university and the course.

It's sensible to research all the options that are available before deciding which is the most suitable.



Remember that in addition to the course fees, you'll have to pay application and registration fees. Some bursaries and funders do not pay these costs.

You will also have to pay for books, other course materials, stationery and possibly a laptop or other IT device.

If the institution is far from home you'll have to budget for food, accommodation or transport, and possibly even data or WiFi connectivity.

Are you getting value for money?

There's more to tertiary institutions than just academic life, particularly if you're planning to spend three or more years of your life earning a qualification. If you can, visit the campus beforehand to get a feel for it and to check out the facilities.

Ask about student support such as tutoring, guidance or career counselling.

You won't spend all your time studying, so also consider what non-academic activities and facilities are provided. Find out what sports are offered and if there are other clubs and societies that interest you.



Magazine EDUCATION

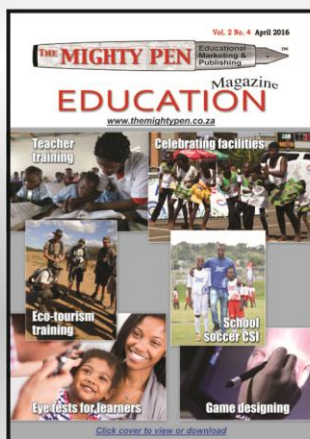
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