

Your platform

Mobile learning is Africa's hope for the future



Dr Allen Mutono

Mobile learning is not electronic learning. Mobile learning is learning that takes place anywhere, any time, over a wireless device, usually a mobile phone.

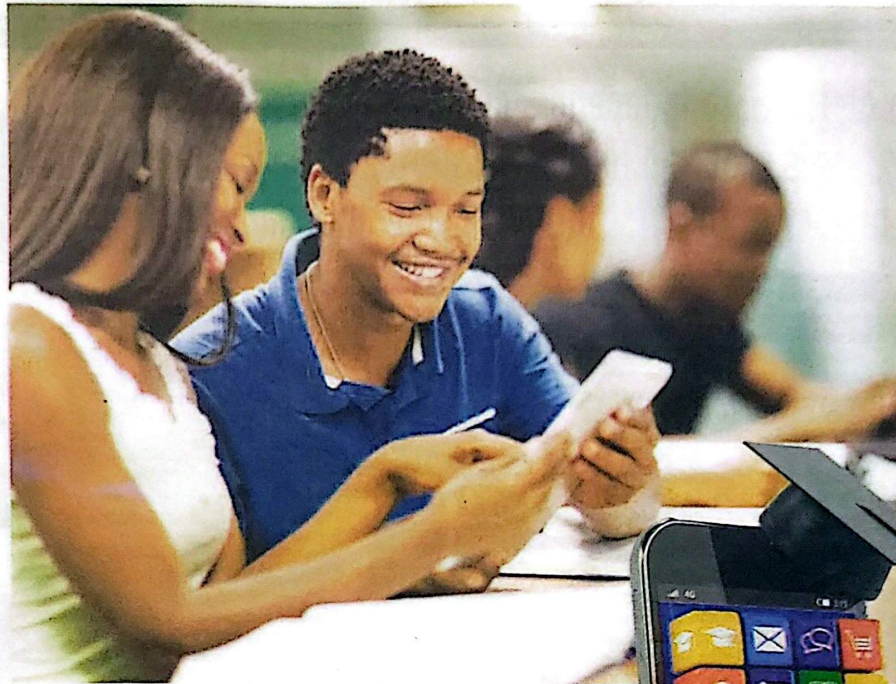
Electronic learning on the other hand is learning that takes place on tethered communication devices usually called desktop computers. The cost of using computers and their bulkiness led to the evolution of mobile learning as mobile phones achieved ubiquity.

Ink and paper are being replaced with screen time, several of the tasks we used to complete with the physical medium are now being completed online. One cannot deny the transformative and disruptive influence of mobile communication devices on societies, especially in Africa.

It is being reported that our continent has some 700 million mobile phone connections at least half of which have access to the Internet. We have seen this impact a variety of sectors, such as financial services, health, transport services, media etc. However, a similar intensity has not occurred in the area of education.

While many educational institutions have introduced online learning projects to support, complement or spread their activities, the expected gains are still eluding practitioners, as well as the intended beneficiaries.

For a continent that still experiences the highest levels of illiteracy and the lowest skill ratios in the world, this, definitely, is a problem. In an attempt to resolve this



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anomaly a frame work for the implementation of mobile learning systems for educational institutions in Africa has been developed.

While the framework rectifies the design flaws currently existing in the current online learning initiatives, its main purpose, though, is to establish mobile learning as an alternative system of education.

The constraints due to inadequate electricity and affordability are

TOP TIP ✓

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economic constructs whose consequences can be obviated with mobile learning as a viable alternative to conventional learning methods.

Firstly, a mobile device uses less power and can be charged with the smallest of solar panels. Secondly, the cost of ownership is also lower as one might not need a building or a piece of furniture to utilise it.

One cannot compare the potential of this with the cost of building and operating a school. The cost of delivering learning through a mobile device is far lower than conventional educational methods. This makes the medium suitable for African communities.

Mobile learning is the best possible option we have in efforts to improve educational outcomes.



show a disregard for the purpose of educational attainment – literacy, numeracy, memory, recall and critical thinking.

Our school system is fixed onto a dated framework going back hundreds of years. In this system, young people are recruited and classed into batches of a particular age. Throughout their educational career, they are promoted through a system of class marks, to come out at the other end with a certificate. For the rest of their lives, they are expected to hawk their old knowledge to prospecting employers and once settled they learn that there is little relationship between what is taught at school and work.

Education is an everlasting human activity made possible by life-long learning. Systems that allow for continuous learning represent higher order education. There is no better way of doing this than providing people with access to learning opportunities any time, anywhere.

When a new technology that transforms people's lives emerges, no amount of push back can block its path. Once people feel the benefits of a new technology, its acceptance and usage will spread exponentially. Any government or investor looking on and observing such happenings would be ill advised to fold their arms.

But, through mobile learning, people can constantly reskill themselves and adjust their knowledge to the changing circumstances within their communities.

We have observed in our communities where, through individualised learning experiences, hunters have become plumbers. This happens in informal settings, but picture what it would be, if more carpenters could be trained through a mobile system.

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Definitely, there exists fundamental flaws with the quality of our educational institutions. This can be traced to several issues, but the one thing we have done is to consistently