

Touch: Even rural learners understand it

 By [Brett Lindsay](#)

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In the race to educate South Africa's emerging youth population, touch based platforms may be the most effective solution.

South Africa's education sector has recently come under harsh scrutiny from citizens, the media and public watchdogs alike.

The well-documented failure of both local and national government to deliver textbooks to Limpopo schoolchildren in 2012 has sparked a national debate over our ability as a nation to equip the youth with the tools required to succeed in adult life.

This has encouraged further investigation into the availability of teaching professionals and facilities in rural areas, resulting in a growing disquiet amongst South African voters.

Adjustments to the system?

In response, many state owned and corporate agencies have begun to call for a revision of the national education system - an adjustment that would more wholly embrace technology as a facilitator of learning in impoverished locales.

Touch based technology, in this setting, would arguably be the most fitting solution. Interactive and intuitive in nature, such offerings have the capacity to communicate intricate concepts in a manner that is easy to comprehend.

One need only watch an infant use an Apple iPad to appreciate the universal power of touch platforms. Even in the absence of literacy, these solutions have the power to transmit concepts or ideas with startling efficiency.

But what of youngsters who have had no access to modern technology? Increasingly, these are the individuals that the government has failed to provide for. Situated in outlying areas with limited facilities, these rural children have scarcely seen a desktop computer - let alone a state of the art tablet device.

Quick learners

Statistics suggest that even those individuals with no prior experience of touch or gesture based devices can still effectively use these platforms to learn.

During a recently conducted COSAS Careers Day, thousands of underprivileged youngsters were afforded the opportunity to access career, education, cultural and health education via touched based portals.

Sponsored by the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA), the devices were equipped with an interactive content delivery system that allowed learners to find out more about career fields and social issues such as drugs and teenage pregnancy.

During the course of the morning, the 'Careers' section was selected 1180 times in total. The most popular vocations proved to be Property Leasing (303 selections), Social Sciences (201 selections) and Administrative (187 selections).

One of the twelve devices available processed 2211 clicks in just a few hours - disproving the theory that learners with no knowledge of touch interactivity require training to use this technology.

Significantly, the Teenage Pregnancy portal received 595 selections during the course of the event. This signals a capacity for teachers and policy makers to better understand youth issues or concerns when making use of touch devices.

Massive potential

By implementing an analytics platform beneath the available content, the individuals responsible for shaping curriculum or course material could gain a close and immediate insight into what is most effective.

The technology exists. It is affordable and ubiquitous. Learners understand it, even without prior instruction. Now, it is simply up to government to begin investigating the massive potential associated with touch interactivity more closely.

ABOUT BRETT LINDSAY

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