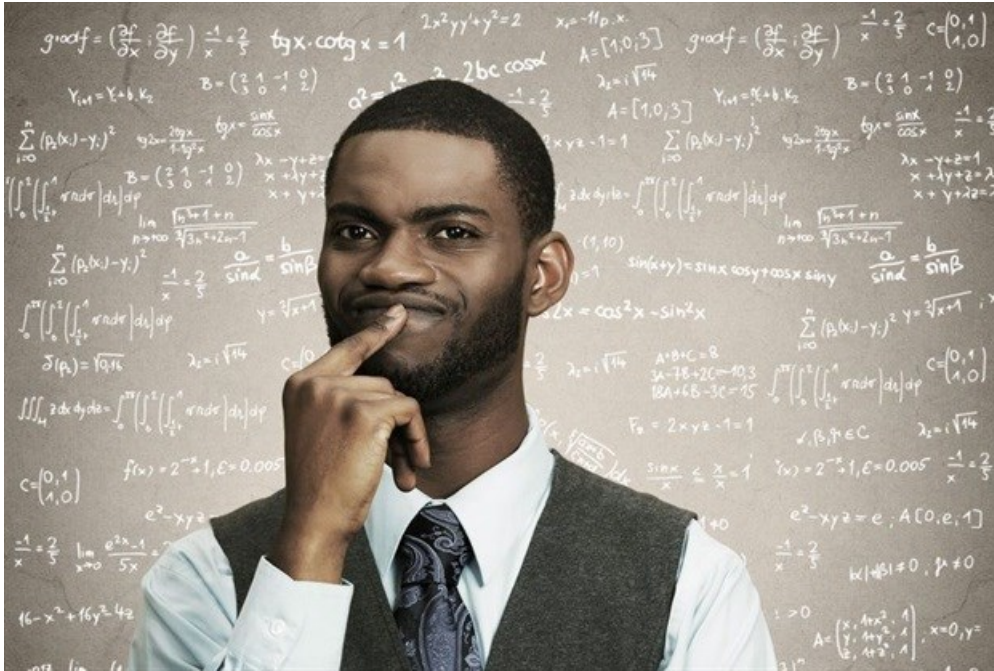


How local businesses are closing SA's education gap

By Jackie Carroll

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While South Africa's government faces challenges with providing quality education to all, local businesses have increasingly stepped into the learning gap to upskill their staff.



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As a provider of adult education solutions for over 22 years, we as Media Works have witnessed this first-hand, particularly through our Accelerate Pro offering which helps South African adults improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

But this has also been evidenced by the latest [Global Talent Competitiveness Index](#), which is released annually in January at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland.

The Global Talent Competitiveness Index measures 125 nations' abilities to grow, attract and retain talent, and it calculates an overall score by considering various pillars ranging from formal education to lifelong learning and access to growth opportunities.

Looking at South Africa's 2019 ranking and its scores in the various pillars, it's clear that the country has mixed successes

and failures when it comes to talent management.

Weaknesses include South Africa's ability to retain talent, where it ranks 102 on this particular pillar. Meanwhile, the latest index has also described South Africa's formal education system as not being "exemplary", with the country ranking 77 in this regard.

But the 2019 index does note some bright spots including that South Africa's private sector is good at facilitating lifelong learning (where it ranks 42nd) and providing access to growth opportunities (where it ranks 33rd).

We believe that one key factor behind this is the existence of our country's Skills Development Levies Act, which was introduced in 1999. The Act regulates a compulsory levy scheme to fund education and training in local businesses. Its primary aim is to expand the knowledge and competencies of the country's labour force.

As part of this regulation, employers are obliged to contribute a percentage of their annual payroll towards skills training. This skills development levy is paid to the South African Revenue Service (Sars), and the funding is then distributed to Sector Training and Education Authorities (Setas).

In turn, companies can apply for grants to receive their spend back, providing the incentive to boost skills training among a wide variety of working South Africans.

It is important to note that in recent years government has tried to push through regulations to reduce the mandatory grant for businesses from 50% to just 20%. For some time, government has also sought to redirect unspent Seta funds to initiatives such as the National Skills Authority.

As a result, there have been several court battles over this with opponents arguing that Setas may not fully support workplace training anymore if government gets what it wants.



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Whichever way this turns out, government will have to look more closely at its stance on Setas to ensure that incentives remain in place for companies to continue contributing towards upskilling workers in South Africa.

Accelerating workforce development

Despite possible changes hanging over Setas in South Africa, we've seen a consistent, and growing, demand for our basic numeracy and literacy programme Accelerate Pro (previously known as Accelerate), which has been used in workplaces across South Africa for over 15 years.

While government has done a commendable job in rolling out education to more citizens than ever before, the quality of education still has a long way to go. In addition, there are also many adults who have been left behind owing to the high drop out rate in our schooling system.

To bridge this gap, programmes like Accelerate Pro continue to be vital. The programme is a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 1 programme that uses a combination of computer-assisted and face-to-face training methodologies designed to meet the literacy needs of adult learners in our country.

To ensure learning success, the programme harnesses best-practice solutions in blended learning through implementing new Quick Response (QR) code technology, called 'Bubbles', within textbook pages. With Bubbles, learners have access to

short, multimedia lessons via their mobile phones. Users of Accelerate Pro include workers at large mining companies and even adult learners at community colleges.

For many adult learners in our country, improving their literacy and numeracy skills is the critical key to furthering their education, going on to complete their matric and even getting a tertiary qualification.

By obtaining these basic building blocks through workplace training, companies have played a part in boosting lifelong learning for South African adults, allowing better access to growth opportunities, as outlined in the Global Talent Competitiveness Index.

While there are many improvements that need to be made within our education system, we trust that South African workplaces will continue to foster a culture of lifelong learning and development, as the country embarks on a better life for all.

ABOUT JACKIE CARROLL

Jackie Carroll is the CEO and co-founder of Media Works, South Africa's leading provider of adult education and training for over 21 years.

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