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African e-learning 'needs human capacity building'

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A survey on learning via technology (e-learning) in Africa suggests that expertise and management skills of the practitioners, not just advancing infrastructure and hardware, are key to the success of e-learning on the continent. The survey of people involved in e-learning in 42 African countries was released at the eLearning Africa conference in Accra, Ghana, last week (28–30 May).

Students in Africa are using mobile phones as part of e-learning (Flickr/doommeer)

Many respondents to the survey were unaware of how to manage e-learning programmes and, furthermore, did not feel that they were involved in the development of e-learning content. Others' only use of e-learning was in accessing information from the Internet.

Making the most of e-learning is a matter of developing 'softer' elements, such as training and human capacity building, as well as developing infrastructure, the report concludes.

Diverse e-learning practices are currently being used across the continent.

Mobile technology — regarded as a component of e-learning — has become crucial in the continent's "remarkable bridging of the digital divide", said Dominic Fobih, the Ghanaian minister of education.

But some problems remain. For example, as part of the M4G (Maths for Girls) project — which aims to teach maths using technologies that are not usually permitted in the classroom — South African female secondary school pupils have made extensive use of videos on cellphones.

But power dynamics with teachers who wanted to control levels of phone usage were problematic, said Kirston Greenop from Mindset Network South Africa.

And researcher Onaolapo Oladipo said that while cellphone tutorials helped part-time students at Nigeria's Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Internet connection costs were a constraint.

Despite "useful and sometimes quite successful mobile learning pilot projects, the move into sustainable large-scale, long-term implementation is still quite new", warns Tony Carr of South Africa's Centre for Educational Technology.

A Ghana-wide e-learning project for mathematics and science was announced at the conference by Intel's World Ahead programme, which is testing similar efforts in Nigeria and South Africa.

And Intel's "skool.com.gh" project — based on Ghana's maths and science curriculum for both primary and secondary school students — was launched on the first day of the conference, at the Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence, Ghana's first advanced information technology institute and home to West Africa's first supercomputer.

[Link to e-learning survey report](#)  [461kB]