

SPECIAL EDITION

MTN Online School:

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New MTN Online School will Bolster the Country's Education System

By Amy Musgrave



MTN SA Executive: Corporate Affairs, Jacqui O'Sullivan, MTN SA CEO, Godfrey Motsa and Gugulethu Mfuphi, moderating a panel at the official launch of the MTN Online School.

MTN South Africa has partnered with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to launch the MTN Online School.

MTN aims to bolster the country's education system by making online learning accessible to learners across the country, but especially for those from disadvantaged communities, townships and rural areas.

MTN Online School is specifically focused on using the power of the digital world to supplement and support the physical classroom.

The MTN Online School portal provides a comprehensive digital curriculum for grades R to 12.

In time it will provide a comprehensive digital curriculum for all grades and

children with learning disabilities.

Access at no data cost

The education portal, which is zero-rated for MTN's millions of customers, means that teachers and learners who subscribe to the mobile operator can access it without any data costs. Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education, said that this affirms the adage that it takes a village to raise a child. "This is massive if you look at the reach and the strategy," she said during the launch of the web portal.

Teachers and learners benefit

The MTN Online School platform, which is already up and running, has been

welcomed by teachers and learners.

Rutasetjhaba Secondary School in Evaton North in Gauteng, where MTN has built a multi-purpose computer centre, is one of the first schools to use the platform.

Pupils and teachers are ecstatic about the interactive portal.

"I feel very excited because it's going to help me improve my work for school and it's going to help me with many subjects," said learner Lesego Monete.

Dimakatso Tseki (Grade 10) plans to recommend the MTN Online School to her friends. "The best thing is that I don't have to view (learning material) from my books anymore. I can just watch videos."

Computer Applications Technology teacher, Clifford Motsitsi, said: "Not only can learners experience information, communication technology tools firsthand, but MTN has evolved in their

project by ensuring that they create an e-learning platform that will aid teachers and learners with content such as videos, questions, live streaming and tutor support."

To access the portal, which can be done from any mobile device, users can go to <http://www.mtnonlineschool.co.za>.

The portal is live and can be accessed on laptops, computers and tablets that have either an Android or iPhone operating system.

An account needs to be registered, and those who are younger than 18, must add a parent or guardian's mobile number and permission to sign up. Once signed up, they can view active courses, completed courses, recent assessments, and a calendar of upcoming online sessions and assessments that they can join.

Adding a full content library

MTN plans on adding a full content library over the next three years which



The initial rollout has additional features for FET phase learners (Grades 10 to 12) include:

- Support for learners after school, on weekends, during holidays and dedicated lessons leading up to exams
- A timetable to drive transparency and structure
- Learners can work at their own pace as lessons are available on-demand and can be accessed on a mobile device, tablet or computer whether at home or school
- Tutoring sessions
- An online tutoring service provides support to pupils via the help function interface
- Live interactive sessions presented by a teacher
- Pre-recorded lessons to watch
- Feedback questions to work through
- It offers pre-assessments to test existing knowledge
- Post assessments that help identify problem areas
- Analysis reports for users
- Learners can request help at any time or submit questions via the platform or WhatsApp chat line

will focus on key subjects and content approved provided by the DBE.

"In our strategy, we will continue pushing digital aggressively because (we believe) we reach people much faster this way," said MTN CEO Godfrey Motsa.

For MTN, this is the start of a long-term project that will be introduced to the rest of the continent.

Get ahead and get access to world-class learning material at the click of a button. Register today on:

www.mtnonlineschool.co.za/register
www.mtnonlineschool.co.za/login

... learners can request help at any time or submit questions via the online platform or WhatsApp chat line ...

Minister Motshekga Gives MTN's New E-education Portal The Thumbs Up

By Phindile Xaba



MTN SA Foundation General Manager, Kusile Mtunzi-Hairwadzi and Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga.

It takes a village to raise a child, said Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga at the recent launch of the MTN Online School, a public-private partnership between the telecoms giant and her Department. Motshekga said this partnership would see South African children get access to online education and that it was an example of how corporate citizenship could be taken beyond mere compliance.

The investment made by MTN to public schooling will have a ripple effect in that it will benefit the next generation of learners.

"As a country, we must learn not to

spend our children's inheritance; instead, we must be investing to benefit the next generation. The MTN Online School is a fit-for-purpose digital tool to take our basic education to the next level. The online portal is agile, innovative and modern," she said.

Partnership aligned with the NDP

Motshekga went on to spell out how this collaboration was aligned with the department's vision of education as anchored in the National Development Plan (NDP), which states "that if we are to overcome the legacy of Apartheid, it is essential that everyone has access to basic education at a high standard, regardless of who they are, or where

they live. The NDP envisions that by 2030, schools will provide all learners with quality education, especially in Literacy, Mathematics and Science - with the ultimate aim of ensuring that 90% of learners pass these subjects with at least 50% by 2030."

While she emphasised the improvement of foundational skills such as literacy and numeracy, she put a spotlight on "reading for meaning", explaining that students learn to understand what they read.

Motshekga said that this partnership would remedy the digital divide, which is at the heart of basic education reform, and that all schools and education offices needed to have access to the internet and data within the next six years.

Digitising textbooks and prioritising reading

"All learners must access digital workbooks and textbooks on a digital device such as a tablet during the same period. To this end, by 2019, we completed the digitisation of Computer Applications Technology (CAT) and Information Technology (IT) of Grade 10-12 state-owned textbooks (high enrolment subjects)," said Motshekga.

She said 100 schools have already been provided with e-library solutions and that the department two years ago launched the Integrated National Reading Sector Plan to address the conundrum of "reading for meaning". This is an overarching evidence-based strategy that will alter the country's reading and literacy landscape.





MTN SA Foundation General Manager, Kusile Mtunzi-Hairwadzi; Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga; Executive Corporate Affairs MTN SA, Jacqui O'Sullivan; MTN SA CEO, Godfrey Motsa and moderator at the official launch of the MTN Online School, Gugulethu Mfuphi.

"I am proud to announce the Basic Education Department has designed and launched its first-of-its-kind online programme dubbed: The Comprehension Across the Curriculum to turbocharge reading for meaning."

The MTN Online School

"This innovation allows us to have all learning resources in one portal designed for learners and teachers. As you might know, education, skills development, and jobs are vital national imperatives. We are proud that MTN has responded positively to the NDP's clarion call for partnerships to improve education for all," Motshekga said about the partnership.

She explained that more could be achieved by nurturing and supporting "society's next layer of leadership" and that the launch of the MTN Online School signalled a leap forward and positive change for communities across South Africa.

Motshekga expressed her gratitude to MTN for putting its money where its mouth is and said that it was through productive public-private partnerships like this, that better communities would be built.

"Having MTN as a partner is a boom for the basic education sector and millions of our learners," Motshekga concluded.

Making a case for STEM subjects

By Amy Musgrave



Dr Mosibudi Mangena, former Minister of Science and Technology now serving as Chairman of MTN SA Foundation.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects are critical and need a greater focus at schools if South Africa wants to build its economy and successfully compete in the global space, according to Dr Mosibudi Mangena, MTN SA Foundation Chairman.

However, he says these subjects are even more essential if the country wants to harness the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

He says that if South Africa wants to benefit from this revolution, it is key

that the country embraces STEM. "If we are to fit in and benefit from the Fourth Industrial Revolution, our STEM performance, embracing it and so on must be very strong. "If we don't do so, we are once more going to fall behind and we will remain a consumer of the products and the intellect of other countries, rather than our own," he warned.

He said these subjects would also allow South Africa to leapfrog other countries, citing an example where mobile telecommunication companies and start-ups were assisting citizens in



several ways, including how business is done. Mangena said the COVID-19 pandemic had also revealed South Africa's "deficit in STEM" because it did not have the capacity or know-how on the manufacturing front and had relied on other countries.

Making a concerted effort

"It is therefore crucial that the MTN Online School, together with its partners, is making a concerted effort to ensure that the best STEM tutors from public and private schools, would be on hand to help learners understand how to apply these complex subjects", he explained.

South Africa's education system ranks poorly compared to the rest of the world, especially on STEM subjects.

Mangena, who is a mathematician

and a former Science and Technology Minister, believes that the country needs to drastically pick up its education pace and move in the right direction.

"Our training in those subjects presently is very poor. And as a result, going up to technical subjects, to universities, for people to enter medical schools, engineering schools, and other technically-orientated schools – that pipeline is very narrow."

The country was not producing enough professionals as far as engineering, medicine and technology were concerned, he said.

"We need to up our game and that is why I believe the MTN Online School will make a valuable contribution," he said.

One of many initiatives

This online school is only one of many initiatives that are needed, he said. Mangena said countries like South Korea produced more PhDs when compared to numbers in South Africa, and there was a direct correlation between a successful STEM education system and a strong manufacturing and industrialisation base.

"If you are not producing enough scientists, engineers, researchers and innovators, you will not be able to build an economy that is competitive and will not be able to trade with others on an equal basis," he said.

He said South Africa extracts valuable minerals and sells them off to other countries to process, saying we should have the capacity and professionals to

do that in our own country.

Mangena believes it is time that the government, private companies such as MTN, and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research collaborate on designing and manufacturing mobile devices such as cellphones and tablets that are "education-specific".

"We are talking about the Fourth Industrial Revolution. We can't expect our children not to be familiar with laptops and phones," he said.

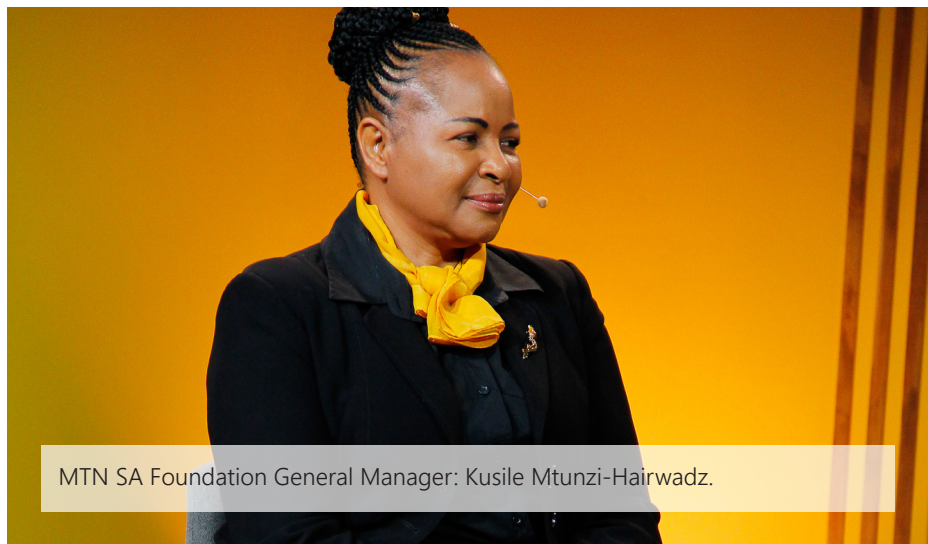
"Familiarity comes with usage, and usage to achieve a particular aim. That aim is to ensure that our country and young people are good in STEM. You cannot do so asking them to use pencils, pens and paper."



MTN brings education to learners' fingertips

By Lucas Ledwaba

The MTN Foundation's Kusile Mtunzi-Hairwadzi speaks about the new portal that will benefit millions of learners across South Africa.



MTN SA Foundation General Manager: Kusile Mtunzi-Hairwadzi.

Kusile Mtunzi-Hairwadzi, MTN SA Foundation's General Manager, worked for 18 months with a small, dedicated team to build an application that will ensure millions of learners have access to thousands of textbooks, videos and other learning material.

The project aims to "contribute towards quality teaching and learning in South Africa by implementing and embracing Information and Communications Technology (ICT) solutions and is targeted towards learners in public schools, those with special educational needs (LSEN), community centres and tertiary institutions"

The team behind the project

Mtunzi-Hairwadzi, a seasoned communicator and branding specialist, speaks passionately about the innovation and credits her team of four, for working hard to ensure that the project comes to fruition.

"The power behind this project is the team I work with. I have a dedicated and passionate team that has been pushing the limits for the last 18 months to ensure we are where we are," she told Inside Education.

The team comprises of a programmes manager, operations manager,



technician, and an ICT manager in the Foundation's education department. "I just happen to be the person who said, 'guys where are we? or what's happening here?', until we delivered on the programme - The MTN Online School. It is a great project, even though it took a bit longer to complete than anticipated. One of the many things that we needed to do well, was social mobilisation. In a project of this stature, you need a lot of buy-in from internal and external stakeholders. You need to educate and enlighten people about what the project is about, what it is going to do, and what changes and benefits it would bring about," she said.

The inspiration to solve problems

The inspiration behind Mtunzi-Hairwadzi's work on the project was the idea of ensuring that the current generation do not face challenges encountered by those who came before

them. "It's true for people of my age because we went to school before the age of technology. The advancement in education right now is such that you marvel at how much knowledge and information there is available at the click of a button. In my time, access to information was so limited and I often wonder how much different our lives could have been. But - it is never too late, and you are never too old to learn," she said.

The portal is a timely intervention as South Africa aims to fulfil some of its obligations of the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 goals, particularly goal two, in which the continent aspires to have well-educated citizens and a skills revolution underpinned by science, technology, and innovation. The AU considers education a basic human right that should be recognised by every member state.

Interest in the portal across Africa

The project is not yet available in the other African countries where MTN has a presence, but there is great interest in the portal.

MTN operates in Botswana, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Republic, Liberia, Nigeria, Republic of Congo (Congo Brazzaville), Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, eSwatini, Uganda, and Zambia.

"The MTN Group is looking at finding solutions that can be rolled out across the continent to alleviate the scarcity of devices. This is what often blocks access to educational content. We believe that access to devices and content, are a game changer," she said.

Mtunzi-Hairwadzi has advised her colleagues across the continent about the importance of partnering with their governments.

"I tell my colleagues in other countries that it [the MTN portal] has to be driven

by their departments of education in their countries. In that way their governments would be supplementing what they already have and will not be starting from scratch. It is so important to partner with your custodians of education because whatever they are trying to teach in the mainstream, can be taught via a platform like this one," she said.

Access even in most remote areas

The United Nations Education and Scientific Council have identified factors that lead to learners sharing textbooks, missing crucial lessons and being unable to revise work. These are all crucial factors that negatively impact children's education.

However, through the MTN Online School Portal, even children in the most remote areas will be able to access thousands of textbooks and other learning material.

"If they have a smartphone and data connectivity, they will be able to access



the MTN Online school. MTN has zero-rated the portal for their subscribers to ensure that they all have free access to these resources,” Mtunzi-Hairwadzi said.

The Independent Communications Authority of SA (ICASA) reported last year that the country’s smartphone penetration reached 91.2% in 2019, meaning most of the population will have access to the application. This number was up from 81.7% in 2018. Partnership with the department of education.

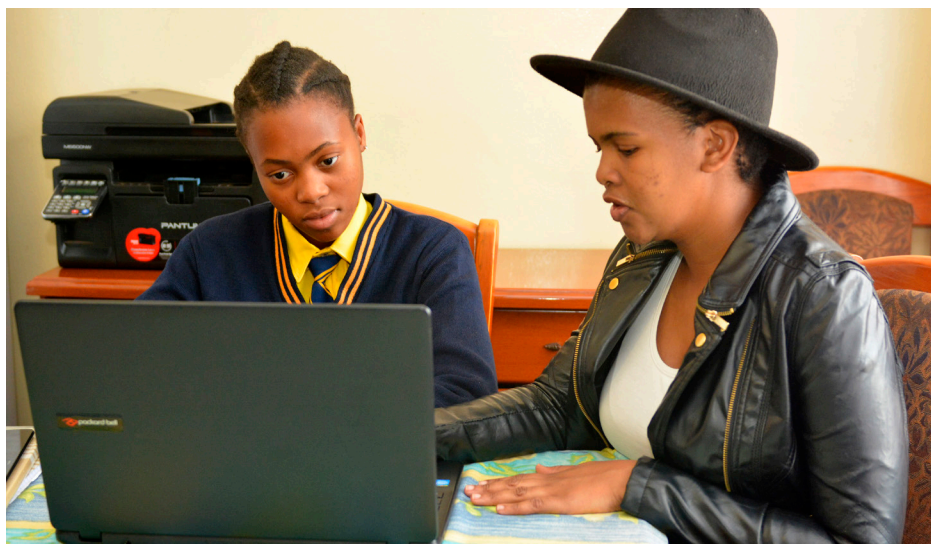
“We have been a partner of the Department of Education for years since I started the Foundation. You cannot execute a social mandate without looking at the social partner. The government’s role is to ensure that good education is provided to our youth. Our social mandate is to support the government to achieve

their mandate,” Mtunzi-Hairwadzi said.

According to the African Union Development Agency (AUDA), Africa has a 58% efficiency for basic education, which is significantly lower than the European Union, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, and emerging and developing Europe.

Curriculum-aligned content

The solution is aimed at increasing access to curriculum-aligned educational content, as endorsed and provided by the DBE in SA for Grades R to 12 and LSEN, using a digital platform. The full content library will be added to the platform and made available over three years, focusing on key subjects. “What I want to emphasise more than anything, is that it (MTN Online School) will not take over traditional schooling. It is an online program that is meant to supplement and enhance education in South Africa, said Mtunzi-Hairwadzi.



Online learning is here to stay

By Amy Musgrave

The emergence of COVID-19 has changed the world forever, and more importantly it changed how we live our lives and how we educate our children. MTN in partnership with the Department of Basic Education has initiated an innovative solution - an e-learning platform that gives learners and teachers access to educational material.



Lockdowns brought everything to a standstill, sometimes for months on end. This in turn caused economic disruption and damage to key sectors, bringing large parts of the global economy to the brink.

The most important and lasting changes are the way we live. Perhaps the most obvious of these has been in the way the world of work has transformed, as millions of office-bound workers globally shifted to work from home. The long-term effects of this on how companies conduct

business, not to mention the wider effects on our economies, are still to be fully understood.

Learning has shifted

There is another area of our lives in which the aftershock of COVID-19 is perhaps less obvious, but more profound. This is in the way we learn.

At the height of the pandemic-induced lockdowns in 2020, some 1.2 billion children of school-going age were at home as their schools shut down.

Here in South Africa, one of the year's biggest concerns was whether the 2020 academic year could be rescued, as months of contact learning was lost.

As a result, education has changed dramatically, with the distinctive rise of e-learning, whereby teaching is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms. There has been an explosion in the development of online learning platforms and strategies, accelerating a trend that predates COVID-19 but will have the pandemic to thank for its growth and permanence.

Research suggests that online learning increases the retention of information and that it takes less time to achieve the outcome than traditional contact learning. This suggests the changes that COVID-19 caused, might be here to stay.

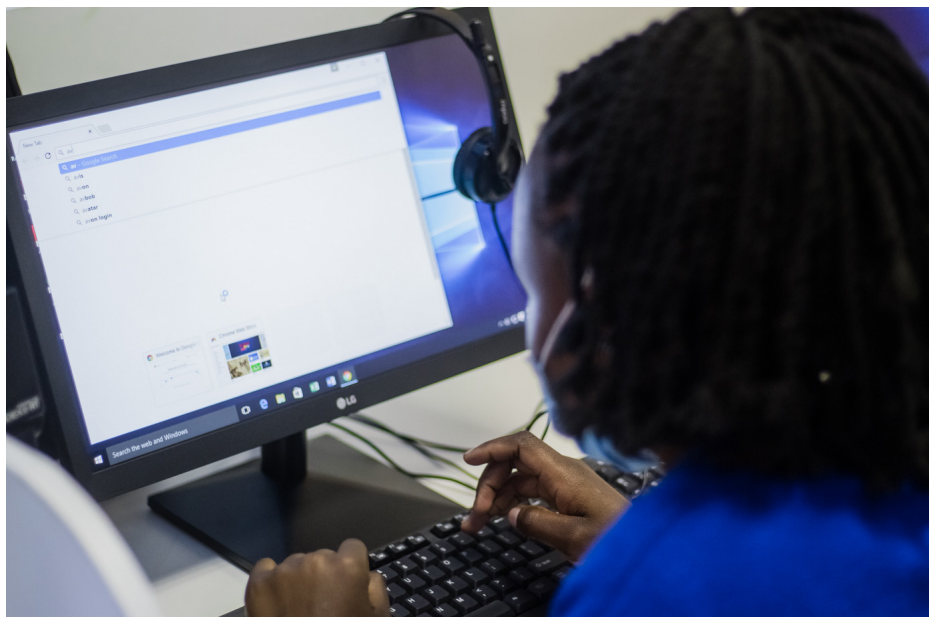
Responding to the challenge

South Africa, like the rest of the world, had to move fast to respond to the challenge and did not do badly.

South Africa was able to save the 2020 school year, thanks in no small measure to the rapid adoption of digital solutions that were rolled out quickly, as well as moving to adopt the policies and investments to enable solutions in areas that were still lacking.

In recognition of the fact that this new reality is here to stay, South Africa is still rightly investing in and building new platforms to take education fully towards the digital future.

In October, MTN with the support of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) launched the MTN Online School, a free online portal that props up the





department's curriculum for Grades R-12 and has additional features like video lessons, assessments and extra lessons for Grade 10-12 learners.

MTN's innovative solution

The solution, which was developed in partnership with DBE and the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), addresses the 21st-century learning needs of children and closes the concerning access to quality education gap among the youth.

The integrated online educational portal is supported and housed on the MTN network and is zero-rated for MTN customers, which means it can be used without any data.

South Africa is determined to never again be caught off guard and lag the rest of the world when it comes to e-learning. But there are caveats. The most important to keep in mind are these:

There is no replacing peer interaction, particularly in early childhood development. Encourage early take-up of digital learning in children, but do so in a way that still encourages the development of social skills through learning with others.

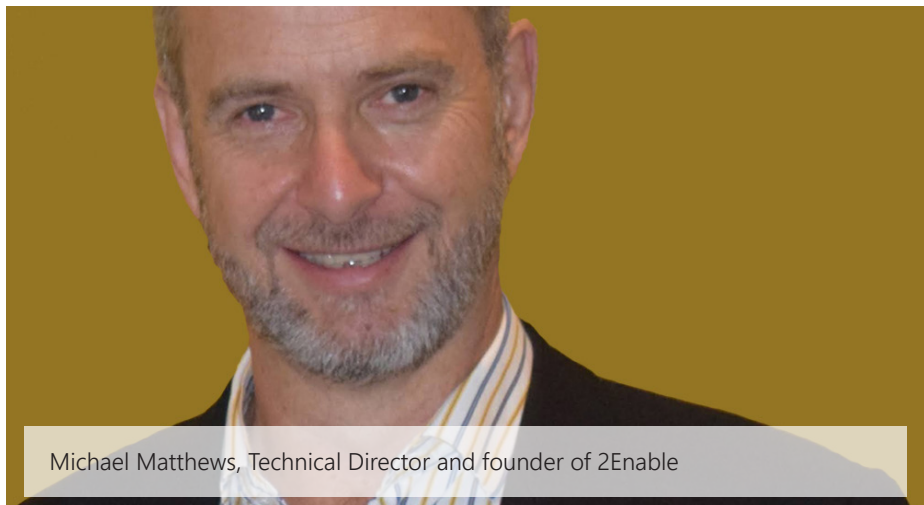
Unequal access to technology will limit how much can be achieved through e-learning. This is especially pronounced in South Africa, with its well-documented inequalities. South Africa needs to bridge the digital divide if the online classroom is to become a reality for all.

However, if the challenges of 2020 can be overcome, so can these limitations. If these limitations are overcome, there is no reason to not look forward to a future of enriching, innovative, tech-savvy education for all.

Crucial partnership between MTN, 2Enable and Department of Education

By Amy Musgrave

2Enable, which is one of the key collaborators in the MTN Online School platform, believes that the initiative will have far-reaching benefits for learners as it is countrywide and can be easily accessed.



Michael Matthews, Technical Director and founder of 2Enable

2Enable has a comprehensive e-learning platform with a vast amount of material and has helped the government on online learning projects, and this is the partner that will now develop the MTN portal over the next three years.

According to Roith Rajpal, CEO, 2Enable's partnership with MTN and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) is "crucial" for South Africa's education system.

"We firmly believe that anything you do in education must be done in conjunction with the department. For us, it is very important in that there is a

partnership that involves the department, a major information and communications technology telecoms player like MTN who can reach millions of people easily and quickly, and us being the education specialists. We are bringing all that expertise together in a way that we can change the face of education going forward."

Michael Matthews, the company's technical director who founded 2Enable, agrees.

"The partnership is really important, and I think one of the things we need to recognise is that with COVID-19 and the lockdown, there has been a

sudden interest in digital learning. It has the attention that it has never had before,” he said.

“We had this tool before and it is important to recognise that it was something that was developed locally to work in rural South Africa and that is where it was born.”

Matthews explains that it did not take off at the time, but that COVID-19 was the push that brought e-learning to the fore.

Matthews said that while they were using the 2Enable platform as the basis for the MTN portal, the telecommunication company’s platform was more modern, responsive and interactive in terms of user experience.

Providing support services

2Enable is aggregating content for the MTN platform and providing crucial support services. Most of the content

was provided by the DBE, and some of it has been produced by 2Enable, and some content was sourced from other partners.

Matthews said that developing the platform was an ongoing process.

“The platform is like a living organism because we are continually updating content and trying to align it with the department’s curriculum to make it relevant,” he explained.

“One of the benefits of an online platform is that it’s not like a textbook that you send out and then have to wait for a new edition in two years. It has been rebranded with MTN and the important relationship in that space is obviously that MTN has agreed to zero-rate the site, which means a lot more people have access to it and it has energised the whole programme dramatically in terms of what we are doing,” Matthews said.



Roith Rajpal, CEO of 2Enable



Appeals for help

As with any new digital platform, appeals for help have been streaming in, including from learners.

"We have had requests ranging from 'can you do my homework?', to 'can you give me a certificate?'. So, it's an interesting journey from a support perspective," he said.

He believes that going forward, the

possibilities for the platform and its impact on the education system are limitless.

"The narrative is that this is an academic support platform. So, although it's called the MTN Online School, we don't have teachers per se. I think the next natural step would be to have teachers who provide live lessons and support, from that space, there is a huge potential upside."

