

Four lessons for personalised learning

How countries across Asia and Africa are harnessing automation, AI and analytics in the classroom.

EdTech is gaining prominence as schools make space for digital tools in the classroom. Massive open online courses, coding workshops and social skills robots are changing how students of all ages are learning and interacting with educators.

However, it has so far been challenging to personalise learning in a traditional classroom, particularly in emerging countries. Teachers may recognise that different students learn differently, but there is little they can do as there is only one of them to a classroom full of students.

Today's new technologies could help make personalised learning for every student a reality. GovInsider explores four initiatives in Asia and Africa to see how technology can be used as a tool to tailor education to individual needs, allowing students to learn at their own unique pace.

1. Automated exam marking in Cambodia

With the student-teacher ratio as high as 62 to one in some provinces in Cambodia, teachers struggle to keep track of students' progress. It is time-consuming for teachers to mark dozens of assignments, and they may not be able to provide all the support that students need in crucial areas such as reading.

World Education, a nonprofit organisation, developed a mobile application that can automatically mark assessments. Students can now just complete benchmark exams on tablets, and their results will immediately be available to their teachers afterwards. This frees up teachers' time, allowing them to focus their energies on supporting and monitoring progress.

If a student fails an assessment, the app will prescribe them additional exercises targeted at their weak areas, helping them develop reading skills at their own pace.

2. Intelligent tutoring in India

Many students struggle with maths at school. Educational Initiatives (EI), a private education company, believes that this is due to students' misunderstanding of basic concepts, which are not getting corrected in class.

EI developed Mindspark, an intelligent tutoring system, which identifies the student's weaknesses and provides them with tailored questions. Teachers receive real-time feedback on student performance and a common wrong answer report to help them identify weak points so that they could better design their lessons.

According to J-Pal, a global research centre, students who used Mindspark for 4.5 months saw a two times higher increase in scores than those who did not.

3. SMS classrooms in Kenya



What about children who do not have access to the internet? Most Kenyan homes have access to mobile phones, but less have internet connectivity.

Education company Eneza Education came up with a tool that uses SMS. Eneza partnered with mobile network operator Safaricom to launch Shupavu291, a studying tool that allows students across Kenya to access lessons and exercises aligned with the national curriculum via SMS.

Students receive questions over texts, and get personalised feedback based on their answers. “We want to ensure that the same way mobile devices are being used for banking, Kenyan children have access to educational material through mobile devices. Not only will it make learning convenient, but also interesting,” Safaricom CEO Bob Collymore was quoted as saying.

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This tool has made tailored tutoring accessible to children in remote regions and refugee camps, and just this year, won the 2018 GLOMO “Best Mobile Innovation for Education” award.

4. China

In China, online education company Yixue Education is using an artificial intelligence tutor to help students prepare for the Gaokao, China’s national university entrance exam.

Yixue Education co-founder Li Haoyang explained that “traditional teaching in the classroom is very low in efficiency as the weaknesses of each student varies,” reported South China Morning Post.

Li believes that AI can solve this problem by optimising content and pace for individual students. The algorithm evaluates the student’s mastery of the skills tested on the exam, and provides a tailored set of lessons and exercises to help students practice the skills as needed. After a few days of training, the solution managed to raise students’

average maths scores by 9.95 points (or 38%).

We are still far from being able to provide a personalised education for every student. But these initiatives demonstrate that in encouraging ways, we are making strides towards that ideal.

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