

# Why online learning should be prioritised as a primary method of education

Online learning should be prioritised as the primary method of learning in the country following the postponement of the reopening of schools, says distance educator Brainline. With schools now scheduled to open on 15 February, two weeks later than the initially expected, Brainline CEO, Coleen Cronje says thousands of learners may suffer an academic set back due to a loss of precious educational time.



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"Hundreds of thousands of learners were affected by the long school closures last year. The fact that the reopening of schools has been pushed back another two weeks again translates into valuable academic time being lost. It is important that the Department of Basic Education and relevant stakeholders urgently look at ways to minimize the impact of the current status quo, starting with setting up reliable e-learning platforms," she says.

Cronje has welcomed suggestions that the Department is looking at opening online schools to reduce pressure on school admissions. Earlier this week, Gauteng's Director-General of Education, Mathanzima Mveli, said the department was working with provinces and private education providers to come up with regulations and policies that they can follow to open online public schools. Cronje says now is the opportune time for basic education authorities to look at restructuring the current traditional school system by phasing in e-learning elements.

"South Africans are familiar with a more traditional classroom set-up but now is the time to evolve. E-learning and also mobile learning should be viewed as an additional learning resource that can assist in accessing learning tools. President Cyril Ramaphosa in a recent State of the Nation Address said that government wanted to provide learners with a tablet to access e-learning platforms. He also indicated that government was working with network operators to reduce the cost of data. This drive should be on government's radar more than ever before."

However, Cronje admits that the quality of e-learning will be dependent on the learner's access. She says it is expected that online learning and even home education will see another growth spike in the year to come.

"Home education in South Africa has experienced significant growth over the last few years. At the end of 2018, there were an estimated 100,000 home education learners in the country. Several factors have driven the growth of home education as an alternative option, ranging from increasingly sophisticated distance e-learning technology to an ever-growing network of tutors. Because it's based on individual needs, home education can provide a safe space for children who may have found the traditional schooling environment challenging. Nowadays it is also a safe and secure environment for parents amid fears of Covid-19," says Cronje.

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