

Public private partnerships urgently needed to tackle reading crisis

Angie Motshekga, South Africa's Minister of Basic Education, responded to the most recent Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which found that 81% of Grade 4 students struggle to read for meaning, by stating that the Department was nearing completion of a revised national plan.



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To expedite this solution, Dr Corrin Varady, CEO of edtech platform IDEA, emphasises the need for public-private partnerships to complement the Government's plan and rapidly improve these outcomes.

"The children most affected are those who speak African languages and attend no-fee schools, where the curriculum was disrupted due to the pandemic," he highlights. "Consequently, learners in the country's poorest schools are falling further behind their counterparts in more privileged institutions, exacerbating existing inequalities."

While commending the Department for ensuring culturally appropriate reading materials will be developed in all African languages, Dr Varady believes that partnering with private companies capable of digitally deploying materials and training programs will accelerate the distribution process. "This approach can contribute to establishing an equitable future for all pupils by closing the gap faster while improving their digital literacy and computer skills."



Low literacy levels pose a threat on SA's economic growth prospects

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"There is a misconception that children from low-income areas are unable to benefit from digital learning opportunities due to a lack of infrastructure and internet access," he says. "However, tailored and low-cost solutions designed specifically for these schools do exist. By encouraging private companies to provide additional infrastructure support, present challenges

can be addressed.”

“Considering South Africa's persistent youth unemployment rate, which shows no signs of improvement, now is the opportune moment for everyone to contribute to empowering the country's children with essential skills, ensuring they have the same opportunities as their more advantaged peers,” Dr Varady concludes.

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