BIZCOMMUNITY

Evaluating Artificial Education

Artificial intelligence (AI) continues to cause ripples across industry, sector, and organisation. It is changing the way people engage and consume products and solutions, shifting the benchmarks of development and data analysis within the organisation, and transforming the relationship between government and citizens.

Phathizwe Malinga, managing director of SqwidNet

It is a powerful technology that has applications across all sectors and industries and individuals, and it has the potential to truly transform not just education, but how that education is used to change the challenges affecting Africa.

“The relevance of AI in education sits at the intersection of how education and AI will evolve in the future,” says Phathizwe Malinga, managing director of SqwidNet.

“At its core, AI is based on the STEM skills – Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths – and as the technology matures, the greater the demand becomes for these STEM-based skills and degrees from the future workforce. The future is a workforce that understands the technology and has evolving digital skills that can be applied across both new and legacy applications and innovations. Those who can’t adapt, who are not given the opportunity to adapt, will struggle.”

Free 5G training for ICT postgrads

4 Jun 2019

If the skills of STEM are the foundation of AI, then creativity is the art of understanding the why of AI and it is another skill that is both critical to develop in children today and to embed across education platform and ethos.

Education institutions and curriculums must place both STEM and creativity at their core, alongside critical thinking and design thinking that is both fundamental to the successful development and application of AI. Design, creativity, STEM – all these ways of thinking change how people approach problems and how they design solutions that understand people.

“The better question that should be asked of education isn’t how AI impacts on it but rather how to ensure that the next generation doesn’t lose the ability to create and think outside the box when they are sent to school,” adds Malinga.

> *“Imagine providing the type of education that adapts year on year to accurately match the skills demanded in the future. This is what should be happening right nowto ensure that education provides children with the skills they need to be relevant in the workplace and community.”*

The strength of AI lies in its ability to take large sets of data and find patterns, then using these patterns to influence results or change direction – improving the process, business and quality of life. It has the ability to take the data from three specific sets – what society needs to increase quality of life; the ability or inability of employees to service those needs; and finally the school system – and to use this data to adapt system, education and individual to better develop skills today that are relevant tomorrow.

The potential of AI in education

“There is something incredibly compelling about how AI can potentially help the education system evolve from its legacy rigidity into a more fluid and dynamic space that allows for deeper and richer skills development,” says Malinga.

“It can increase the relevance of what is taught to children and can be fine-tuned to become context specific. Right now, a child being educated in any rural setting in South Africa is being educated to leave that setting. This is because we have only one curriculum and it will always be more suited to roles in the city.”

AI has the ability to create multiple curriculums that are not only child-specific, but relevant in, and of, themselves within the global and local context. It allows for the removal of the stuck and the staid and the introduction of learning that can evolve and adapt.

Something that has already been tried in countries such as Finland which has rolled out a national AI education platform designed to provide the population with free access to education in emergent technologies and relevant skillsets. It has been an inordinate success across age group and sector, introducing everyone from children to adults to AI and its foundational concepts.

Education has to change and adapt to tomorrow's world

Ariellah Rosenberg 27 May 2019

“A contextually relevant and ever-improving curriculum allows for the nation to produce the most valuable product it can, and it has the potential to be exported into other markets that find it equally valuable,” says Malinga.

“This would not only benefit our economy but make education far more inclusive. More children learn what they need to

learn for their communities and become the best version of themselves.”

AI can extend a new level of continuous learning to professionals across all sectors and age groups. If anyone is given the opportunity to brush up on their skills or given the chance to use learning to adapt to changing life circumstances, then the potential for job creation and personal growth is extraordinary.

“In the end, we need the help of machines to help us keep up and machines need us to ensure they evolve, deliver and remain relevant, it is very Jerry Macguire-esque,” concludes Malinga.

“Besides, the curriculum, AI dares us to shape our own future in Africa. AI drives innovation, it will improve people and quality of life as fundamentally as it will change the face of the African continent in the future.”