

Making Education a Universal Right for All

Inclusive Access to E-learning: Delivering Inclusion through Connectivity

The Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisations (CTOs) Forum heard a presentation by Ruth Kulamu from the Fijian Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MoEHA) and Hilary Guckian from Commonwealth Education Solutions (CES, part of the Commonwealth Education Trust), delivered in association with the Commonwealth Secretariat, outlining a pilot project in schools in Fiji.

As a result of the technology needs to improve equity and access identified by the 19th Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers in June 2015 the 3-month pilot project is addressing the priorities of connectivity, capacity and content and illustrating the importance of having inclusive access to e-learning. The CTOs' support of initiatives that contribute to improving children's education and lives across the Commonwealth is key.

Another key issue is sustainability. The Commonwealth Curriculum Framework, piloted by the Secretariat, outlined the intention to incorporate the United Nations' Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) into the curriculum. Addressing climate change and its impact is particularly important for small island states such as Fiji, which is leading the way with this initiative, increasing the knowledge and skills of both teachers and pupils to benefit the wider community.

About 120 children are taking part in the project and will be using the cloud-based system developed by CES called LearnSmart Studio, a teaching and learning platform with inbuilt assessment measures, allowing continual assessment with every task linked to a learning outcome. E-learning is a new concept for most of the children, as well as the teachers. Tablet computers have been provided by CES for the duration of the project.

The goal is to see the learners acquiring the intended knowledge in the curriculum via the technology provided. Having a tablet means they can access the content in the entire learning cycle outside as well as inside school (subject to connectivity), submit tasks and get feedback on their work. Teachers will have the tools to be creative in their lesson delivery with a wide range of materials and tasks available to them. They can tailor content to suit differing learning abilities and make students aware of objectives and outcomes.

The overarching goal for the MoEHA is to achieve an e-learning platform as a pathway to inclusion, with digital teaching and learning rolled out nationwide. The pilot will highlight the effort and resources needed to meet the larger aims as well as the challenges likely to be encountered.

Known challenges include the lack of electricity and connectivity in some of the more isolated regions of Fiji; limited opportunities for training staff; the need for hardware maintenance and repair from trained support staff and the cost of installing networks with sufficient capacity to allow equal access to all students.

The benefits are expected to be worthwhile however, with increased motivation and participation amongst students who will have learning opportunities outside as well as within the classroom, while teachers will increase in confidence via opportunities for collaboration and the option to use live data to monitor progress and outcomes.

This project is a big step towards rolling out e-learning for inclusion by offering access to education anywhere anytime and making a difference to the lives of children across the Commonwealth.