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Site:
vernondickason.com

Email:
connect@vernondickason.com

Address:
Cape Town, South Africa

AI and Inclusive Education

Tools for Equity or Echoes of Exclusion?

Author: Vernon Dickason

Opening Reflection

Inclusion is not a favour; it is a right. South African classrooms are diverse, with learners facing barriers of disability, language, trauma and access. Artificial Intelligence offers new possibilities: text-to-speech, adaptive learning and personalised support. But can it truly serve every learner? And how do we ensure that AI does not deepen digital divides?

What's Happening Now

- Western Cape schools are trialling AI reading tools for learners with dyslexia and visual impairments.
- AI platforms with adaptive learning are being used in remedial maths programmes.
- Concerns are rising about unequal access to devices, connectivity and training.
- NGOs are calling for inclusive AI design that reflects South African learner realities.

What's Changed: From One-Size-Fits-All to Personalised Pathways

Before AI:

Support for diverse learners relied on human aides, specialist teachers and printed resources.

Now:

AI can offer tailored content, voice support and flexible pacing, if infrastructure allows.

Key Shift:

From standardised delivery to differentiated access. From exclusion to empowerment, if equity is prioritised.

Why It Matters

Inclusion is foundational to justice. AI can help bridge gaps, but only if it is designed and deployed with empathy. South African schools must ensure that AI serves the margins, not just the mainstream.

Reflective Responses

How can AI support inclusive education?

By offering tools that adapt to learner needs, support accessibility and honour diverse contexts.

What barriers must be addressed?

Connectivity, device access, training and culturally relevant content.

What does inclusion mean in a digitally evolving classroom?

It means designing for dignity, not just access. It means ensuring every learner feels seen, supported and empowered, regardless of ability, background or bandwidth.

What support do schools and policymakers need?

- Investment in inclusive infrastructure
- Partnerships with disability advocacy groups
- Training in universal design for learning
- Monitoring of AI bias and exclusion risks

Sidebar: Facts and Philosophy

Insights from Western Cape inclusion pilots (2025):

- Text-to-speech tools improved learner confidence
- Teachers called for more localised content and training
- Equity remains a challenge in rural and under-resourced schools

“Inclusion is not about making room. It is about changing the room.”
– Naledi Jacobs, *Inclusive Education Specialist*