

Making *sense* of AI in South African education

WEBINAR SERIES RECAP

Making sense of AI in South African education

AI in South African Basic Education: Rapid Response Series

Lefa AI is a national process helping South Africa make sense of AI in basic education, supported by UNICEF and learning partners across the sector. Here is a short recap of each of the three webinars, with the resources shared along the way and a few ways to add your voice.

WEBINAR 1

Thursday 10 September 2026

Navigating AI, Learning and Safety

WEBINAR 2

Wednesday 16 September 2026

The Changing Classroom: AI, Teachers and School Governance

WEBINAR 3

Wednesday 23 September 2026

AI Policy and the Broader Education Ecosystem

WEBINAR 1

Navigating AI, Learning and Safety

Thursday 10 September 2026

Catch up on the recording [Watch here](#)

Passcode: Yy.vFU1W

What we covered

Webinar One brought together researchers, practitioners and international voices to explore how AI is shaping learning in South African classrooms. We opened with the question of whether AI helps or hinders learning, then moved into the hard realities of access, with connectivity still a concern for many South African schools, before turning to what children themselves are experiencing and how they navigate these tools, often more self-aware and self-regulating than adults assume. From there, we explored the role teachers want to play alongside AI, where we heard that teachers favour tools that support pedagogy and their choice in how to use these tools, and closed on what responsible design and safeguarding should look like, particularly for the youngest and most vulnerable learners.

Audience questions and comments throughout the session raised many important points, from concerns about outsourced thinking to calls for clearer ethical guidelines and faster regulation, to whether AI should even be part of education.

On next steps, the panel and chat both emphasised:

- Test tools against our own curriculum and home languages
- Bring parents and caregivers into the process
- Prioritise under-resourced schools
- Stay disciplined about only using AI where it solves a real problem, and do not use it if it does not make sense to

“The challenge is not simply to equip children with another form of proficiency, but to ensure that education itself remains consciously concerned with human formation and human flourishing.”

One participant, in the webinar chat

Resources shared during the session

- APEX Schools examples: [Google Drive folder](#)
- UNICEF EdTech for Good Framework 2.0: [Read here](#)
- UNICEF Reimagine Education: [Read here](#)
- Giga Maps (South Africa): [View here](#)
- UNICEF AI policy guidance: [Read here](#)
- Cambridge University Press and Assessment case study: [Read here](#)

The Changing Classroom: AI, Teachers and School Governance

Wednesday 16 September 2026

Catch up on the recording [Watch here](#)

Passcode: #2kP+4T0

What we covered

Webinar Two brought together Tamsin Carelse, primary school teacher at Pinelands North; Riaan van der Bergh, Deputy CEO of FEDSAS; Hagan Horne, acting principal at Aquila High School; and Gabi Immelman, co-founder and CEO of Mindjoy, to look at how AI is playing out for those closest to the classroom. A huge thank you to our wonderful speakers who shared valuable insights and experience.

Very briefly (we will share a more detailed insight brief soon):

- **Tamsin** shared insights and examples on how she has used AI in her classroom.
- **Riaan** spoke to a governance perspective, drawing on a recent FEDSAS survey of educators and learners in the Eastern Cape.
- **Hagan** spoke candidly as a Quintile 1 school leader about connectivity, capacity and the realities of under-resourced schools.
- **Gabi** spoke to adopting AI responsibly and challenged us to think about “why do I need to use AI” rather than “should we use AI”.

A strong thread throughout was the shift from policy building to shared values and sensibility around AI use at school level, as well as the role of assessment in an age of AI.

Across the panel and the participant chat, the conversation kept returning to protecting teacher agency and professional judgement, redesigning assessment around process rather than output, focusing on AI application rather than policing its use, and finally, being honest about the fear, burnout and uneven access many teachers are navigating.

On next steps, the conversation surfaced:

- Building an AI ethos with staff, learners and parents rather than a static policy
- Redesigning assessments around process, application and understanding rather than detection
- Training teachers through peer support rather than waiting on departmental guidance
- Keeping human relationships and teacher professionalism at the centre of any AI use

“We cannot blame students for ‘cheating’ when the focus and reward sits in the outcome vs the process.”

Resources shared during the session

- FEDSAS: [TechTalk](#) and [website](#)
- Mindjoy free AI readiness assessment: [Access here](#)
- Mindjoy blog, a history of cheating: [Read here](#)

AI Policy and the Broader Education Ecosystem

Wednesday 23 September 2026

Catch up on the recording

[Watch here](#)

Passcode: 7tn!Ej!i

What we covered

Webinar Three brought together Mr Seliki Tlhabane (Department of Basic Education), Prof Shafika Isaacs (UNESCO), Dr James Keavy (JET Education Services) and Prof Leketi Makalela (University of the Witwatersrand) for a conversation on AI policy and the wider education ecosystem. The conversation was extremely rich and in-depth, and this is a brief snapshot of what was covered.

Prof Shafika Isaacs opened with UNESCO's global lens on how AI shows up in education systems, highlighting four distinct layers ranging from schools with no access at all through to a small number of well-resourced systems already setting clear guardrails, layers that likely all coexist within South Africa rather than forming a simple ladder from under-resourced to advanced. From there, Mr Tlhabane spoke to where South African policy currently stands, including progress on the Department's digital education transformation strategy, and what it will take to build guardrails without falling behind. Prof Isaacs addressed UNESCO's position on normative standards, the case for pooling resources in service of the public good, and where South Africa could be in five years' time, which is a long time in an AI landscape!

The conversation then moved into African languages, where Prof Makalela spoke to a real opportunity: AI's potential to help scale mother-tongue-based bilingual education, easing the human resource strain that has long held it back and letting African languages walk alongside English in the classroom. Alongside this, he raised a real risk, that of AI simply reproducing existing inequalities through direct translation rather than genuinely reflecting how meaning is made in these languages.

Audience questions and comments throughout the session raised many important points, from concerns about data control and commercialisation, to calls for closer coordination across government departments and AI for inclusion, to name a few.

Closing thoughts for policymakers

Asked what they would say to the Minister directly, the panel offered three clear asks:

- Run a national rapid assessment of the AI affordances already available in South Africa, checked for accuracy, curriculum relevance and effectiveness across different levels of connectivity
- Build real capacity within government to engage on these issues
- Take the time to understand what is already working on the ground here, alongside a broader call for all of us to better understand how these technologies actually work

What comes next

Full insight briefs drawing together the sessions will be shared on the Lefa AI website:

lefaai.humanstudios.org

We need your voice

Lefa AI has put together four short, anonymous surveys to capture different perspectives on AI in education. Responses will help inform the DBE's guidelines on AI in basic education, so please take a few minutes to share your view, and pass this on to others who should be heard.

- Teachers: tinyurl.com/4x667uvk
- Parents and caregivers: tinyurl.com/26njw6sp
- Civil society organisations: tinyurl.com/43e4efbj
- EdTech organisations: tinyurl.com/2p9sr8y6

Thank you to our panellists and to everyone who joined and contributed across the series. It has been a privilege to hold this conversation with such a thoughtful community, and we look forward to sharing what we have learned together.

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