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edX, Facebook to partner to create free social education mobile app for students in Rwanda

Posted by Matt Rocheleau February 24, 2014 02:39 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Boston.com Staff

Cambridge-based online education nonprofit edX is partnering with Facebook, other companies and the government of Rwanda to launch SocialEDU, a pilot initiative that will give students in the African country free access to a social learning platform via Internet-enabled mobile devices.

Facebook and edX will work together to create a SocialEDU mobile app optimized for a low-bandwidth environment, and the government of Rwanda will work to adapt course materials for local students.

"With SocialEDU, students in Rwanda will receive free data plans for accessing free edX MOOCs from some of the world's leading universities, including Harvard, MIT, U.C. Berkeley, TU Delft, Australian National University and ETH Zurich," Facebook said in an [announcement](#) Monday.

"Our platform will allow students to ask questions, engage with other students, interact with teachers, and participate in group discussions," the social media company said. "We are bringing the classroom to them and providing locally-relevant content, while transforming the educational experience to provide collaborative, social and sustainable learning."

Telecom company Ericsson will help test that the app can work in a 2G environment, while another telecom company, Airtel, will provide free data to everyone in Rwanda who participates in the program for one year

Device manufacturer Nokia will provide affordable smartphones, and the government Rwandan will reduce costs further through various financing mechanisms.


The government will also expand an existing program that provides free Wi-Fi access on campuses throughout the country.

The initiative is a part of the [Internet.org project](#), an effort led by Facebook and six mobile technology companies that are working together to bring the Internet to the two thirds of the world's population that doesn't have access.

"We know we have a long way to go to provide access to the two-thirds of the world that doesn't have it today," Facebook said. "Rwanda is our first test of this approach, and our hope is that this will serve as a blueprint for other partnerships to follow. Through

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committed partnerships like SocialEDU, we move one step closer to bringing everyone in the global community online."

Founded in the spring of 2012 by Harvard University and MIT, edX is comprised of 32 institutions worldwide, or the xConsortium. EdX.org, which features nearly 150 courses, boasts about 2 million unique users from nearly 200 countries.

"Improving global access to high-quality education has been a key edX goal from day one," said a statement from edX president Anant Agarwal. "Nearly half of our 2 million students come from developing countries, with 10 percent from Africa. In partnering with Facebook on this innovative pilot, we hope to learn how we can take this concept to the world."

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Looking for more coverage of area colleges and universities? Go to our [Your Campus pages](#).

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