

9 trends shaping SA education in 2019

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Local and international factors continue to influence the local education sector, with the economy, technology and employer needs playing ever-increasing roles in the way South Africa's education landscape is being shaped.



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As the 2019 academic year gets into full swing, these are the major trends likely to dominate education in South Africa this year.

The value and utility of education

A current trend that remains firmly entrenched in the public discourse is the value and utility of education in South Africa. The debate centres on degrees versus skills, as degrees are perceived to be no longer relevant to industry needs. The discussion also touches on whether the local curriculum has been decolonialised and, as such, whether it remains useful and relevant in the current fast-changing economic climate.

Curriculum reform

There is rising crescendo about whether the education curriculum has been reformed enough to make graduates employable. A purely academic qualification is no longer particularly relevant to someone who, for instance, wants to become an entrepreneur. The local curriculum is likely to see a flood of new skills being included, such as data analytics and robotics. The curriculum needs to be reformed to meet the needs of a technology-rich environment.

New players in education

In the next three to five years, many new private education providers are likely to spring up in the local education space, including many unknown and untested brands. This will be in response to the gap between the education that is currently provided and that which is needed to fulfil industry needs. As the state alone is unable to meet this demand, private sector players will step into the void. This will affect all tiers of the education system – from early childhood to tertiary.

Life-long learning

An ever-changing economic landscape dictates the need for people to continually improve their skills. The current environment increasingly calls for employees to be skilled in data analytics and literate in statistics. Automation is an evolving trend that has made many jobs obsolete but has also created many new career opportunities. Life-long learning is a trend that will be driven by institutions such as universities, as well as through learning-at-work programmes.

Redefining contact learning

With the advance of ICT, there is an increased blurring of lines between traditional contact learning and distance learning. There will be fundamental changes in how we view contact learning, with virtual learning becoming a trend that can address many of Africa's educational challenges.

Demand for full access to higher education

Apart from access to free higher education, there is a growing demand for full access to higher education, including subsidies for food and accommodation for students. This will place more pressure on the public fiscus but is a trend that is likely to remain in the public discourse.

Demand for competence

An increasing number of employers are demanding graduates with demonstrable competence, resulting in more pressure to include competence as a measure in education. Vocational skills are increasingly being valued over and above theoretical qualifications.

Sub-Saharan migration

While South African tertiary education institutions can only absorb about a quarter of matriculants each year, the demand for tertiary education in Sub-Saharan Africa has never been higher. The flow of students from neighbouring countries will increase, placing increased pressure on local public education institutions to become more exclusively South African-focused.

Non-racialisation of education

This is a very complex issue and debate will continue about how to achieve quality education and build a unified nation under the current education system.

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