

Shivad Singh, founder and CEO of Head Start Education

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

25 Jun 2021

As part of our [#YouthMatters](#) series, we chat to Shivad Singh, founder and CEO of [Head Start Education](#).



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■ Can you tell us more about Head Start Education and what your role entails?

Head Start Education serves as the gateway to Africa for the leading education technology companies in the world, in order to lead the advancement of education across the continent. Head Start is a full-blown edtech provider, having exclusive licenses of over 20 of the leading educational apps worldwide and in South Africa.

We have been described as the 'Netflix for Education' with a catalogue that has over 50,000 activities, games, videos and PDF content. Our current offerings cater for early childhood development to high school. Our offerings are award-winning, internationally recognised and research-tested and provided at prices more economical than the market rate.

I am a 26-year-old founder and CEO. I drive the vision, strategy, help build a world-class team and oversee strategic partnerships.

■ When, how and why did you get started?

My best friend and I noticed a lot of our friends were struggling to make the jump from high school to university. I was fortunate to receive a scholarship from Investec for my entire university studies at UCT and this showed me the power of how education can positively change someone's life. The struggles of my friends, combined with the positive support from Investec is what inspired me to start my first company called Presto, which is now part of my main company, Head Start Education.

When we started Presto, the aim was to create study guides to make learning simpler and easier. I wrote the accounting study guide and my best friend wrote a guide on Economics. Those sold out at the UCT bookstore and we then knew we were onto something. We researched and contacted the leading students who received a high 90% or 100% in that subject for Matric. We sent them the "A-Team" and we created Grade 12 guides for Maths, Physics, Chemistry and Accounting, as those were the subjects with the lowest pass rates. Presto, my first company then paved the way for the holding company that is now Head Start Education.

■ What is the core function of Head Start Technologies?

Head Start aims to equip learners and teachers with the 21st century and digital skills that can make them a success in this globalised world and lead to an improvement in learner's marks, mental well-being and development. We provide a ready-

made, E-school solution for organisations such as schools, corporate and consumers.

■ ***What sparked your interest in getting into this arena?***

From a young age, I loved reading. As I moved into the beginning years of high school, I started reading many business and personal growth books. I learned so much from these books that have helped me in my journey now. My love of learning ignited my passion for educating others. I would say that I was heavily influenced by my family members. My paternal grandfather, Hirdaw Singh, was a school teacher and principal while my maternal grandfather, Benny Singh, was an entrepreneur who has an amazing rags-to-riches story of his own. I see myself as a combination of them, which has led me to become a social entrepreneur with a focus on education.

I was also captivated by some of the greatest entrepreneurs of our generation and would watch countless interviews, read their biographies and watch documentaries on them. I learned about all of them from a young age such as Elon Musk, Steve Jobs, Warren Buffet, Sir Richard Branson and Oprah Winfrey to name a few.

■ ***Can you tell us about your journey so far?***

It has been an incredible journey with many highs and lows. Now that we are in the growth phase, there are much more highs and I now have the experience in creating the right mental tools, I don't really get affected by the lows.

In terms of the lows, I have faced rejection more than 1000 times, faced a chemical imbalance and experienced low moods and anxiety, felt like quitting, had to get a job that I disliked to help earn an income to support the business.

However, the highs have made this difficult journey worth it, and I am so grateful. We have received various forms of grant funding from the likes of the SAB Foundation, won pitching competitions, built amazing friendships and relationships with business partners and customers.

For my work in education, I was recognised as a News24 Young Mandela of the Future, a Queen's Young Leader and received the Leading South Africa award by the prestigious, One Young World. I was chosen as a delegate speaker for Education at their event in Colombia in 2017 where I shared the stage with Professor Thuli Madonsela. At that event I made amazing connections with some of the world's greatest leaders like Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Muhammed Yunus and met people who I now see as best friends.

I have met amazing mentors and advisors who have guided me on my life journey.

We have been able to provide our education content to impact over 100,000 learners, selling thousands of books to learners, providing our content for free to learners in need, partnering with multiple corporations to offer services to benefit their stakeholders. I am now in the position to do what I love every single day, and I feel immensely blessed.

■ ***Since being in this industry. What has your biggest achievement been?***

To celebrate Youth Month, my company, Head Start Education has partnered with SplashLearn, the leading game based learning program in the world, to provide free access to SplashLearn's maths program to all teachers in South Africa. This digital educational offering is valued at over R5,000 per teacher.

We are already working with the Western Cape Education Department to sign up as many schools as possible, with an initial target of 160 schools imminently, then the rest of the province and then hopefully nationally!

▣ ***What advice would you give to other aspiring entrepreneurs?***

It is great to be excited by your idea, but know that this can be a difficult and challenging journey. To solve this, create a powerful vision and mission for your life and business that will energize you and enable you to not give up and keep on going when you may be in a low space.

Test your idea as quickly as possible and get feedback from prospective customers. You should continually iterate and get version one up and running as soon as possible. Think how you can save as much money as possible when you are starting out.

Move fast and get things quickly! This allows you to do in one day what some large companies may only be able to do in a week, month or even year!

Find a mentor - If you don't have a mentor now, you can find mentors in the authors of your favourite books or videos on Youtube. You need to show value first and let the relationship develop naturally.

Always do your best in any project, and whatever happens thereafter is beyond your control - be unattached to the outcome.

If you are disappointed in your current situation, never blame yourself. However, it is up to you to make opportunities for yourself. You can contact and reach out to people, send your CV to 100 employers for example.

Never stop learning, Google, Youtube, books and courses are your best friends when it comes to learning new skills to do with your field of interest.

▣ ***If you could travel back in time, what advice would you give yourself?***

I would tell myself that I should keep pushing and never give up, because it's all going to work out in the end. I would say that even if it seems like I have failed, those failures are actually pointing me into the right direction for success.

▣ ***Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?***

I believe that the best way to predict the future is to create it!

I hope to be running one of the leading and biggest education companies in Africa and globally, that impacts tens of millions of learners. I see myself as a serial entrepreneur, so I am sure that I will start and build many other businesses that may not be education related. I see myself travelling between our offices in Cape Town, Netherlands, London, LA, Mumbai, Sydney and in more countries.

I'm confident that my team and I would have launched many shows that aim to inspire and fuel young people to take action on their dreams and give off their best self to the world. I hope to have invested in some leading startups in Africa and globally.

I hope to have published a few books that were on the New York Times Bestseller lists.

The Head Start Foundation that I started would help millions with its focus on education, healthcare and climate change.

I hope to be happier, healthier and get to live life more in the present moment.

■ ***As we celebrate Youth Month, do you have any words of encouragement for the youth?***

I have so many words of encouragement - You, the youth, have the capacity to be a genius and to give off your best self to the world. You are smarter than you think!

Be curious and explore as many hobbies and interests as possible. This will help you find what you are passionate about.

You may have limiting beliefs that were created due to your experiences and environment that can be removed. Your mind created them and you can remove them as well. It can help if you can find examples of how you actually did the opposite of what you think you are. For example, if you think you are not confident, think of times when you showed confidence.

Use your God-given talents to discover and follow your dreams. It can be a difficult journey, but it's all about enjoying the journey and not the destination.

Be kind and always think how you can help others directly or indirectly, without expecting anything in return.

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