

Fundi's top 5 educational trends for the year

The past decade has seen a radical shift in education and, often, disruptive evolution of the collective industry. From free tertiary education all the way through to the rise of EdTech, the next 10 years promises to be equally exciting to watch - starting in 2020.



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Fundi's CEO Tshepo Ditshego presents the top five educational trends he believes will shape and influence the space in 2020:

1. Increased demand: More emphasis on education for South Africans

Education looks set to become a hygiene need in every home; a basic requirement influencing “success” and the perception thereof across all life spheres.

South Africa's flatlining growth rate, increasing unemployment (or the possibility thereof); the rise in retrenchments across key industries; and increasing levels of poverty, as well as global, macro and micro economic risks are all shaping and influencing personal narratives about actively owning and mapping one's own future: being one's own agent of change wherever possible.

To this end, South Africans are very clear that education is critical for us to eliminate and reduce poverty and social crisis – supporting the growth of private (mainstream) school and tertiary institutions, alternative funding models for these, and the increase in untried and untested new education brands.

This trend can also be seen in the way more South Africans are embracing life-long learning: a global trend for eons. Our Fundi datapoints support this. Over the past 25 years, we've seen more and more senior teachers and public sector servants applying for educational loans, as well as mentoring and coaching services, among others. The concept of "adult education" is widely accepted and supported locally. It has very positive associations.

Learning is also beginning at a far younger age thanks to digitisation and 4IR penetration in our homes, schools and within broader society.

The question that will be tabled by all will remain: "How will supply meet the growing demands of South Africa's educational needs?"

2. Convergence: More blended learning options (Phygital)

While Gartner, Forbes and EDS all site a pervasive adoption of digital tools and methods from early childhood into pre-primary and then through higher education, the rise of the digital nation is something we as Fundi have first-hand experience of.

Over the past six years in particular, we've seen a significant uptake of technology tools and devices increase across all markets. Convergence of technologies and hyper-convergence has further enabled blended learning, with "phygital" starting to be naturally included in the learning and teaching environment. This also speaks to our growing understanding of "experience" in the learning process.

As children get more access to digital tools at school, we're additionally seeing access to these tools demanded beyond the classroom. The fact that data and the cost of smart devices are now cheaper, means that these tools are becoming more widely used.

This trend reflects our collective – and growing – understanding of different learning styles and needs. Because digital tools can often be personalised, they are better able to support learners in the unique way needed. This improves the learner's potential for success.

As per 2019, the trend of more courses being adapted for online consumption is set to continue. While many of these might end up being "one hit wonders", standards, approaches and best practice are being continuously defined and refined – with traction among audiences a good benchmark as to relevance and content accessibility.

Greater diversity in subject matter coupled with widespread availability will undoubtedly continue to impact more traditional learning content and methodology. As such, teachers and lecturers can anticipate more robust debate around content relevance and practical applicability in the "real world" going forward. We anticipate that in the very near future, the power of choice will be shifted as a result of this, and students will be able to select their fields of study far earlier and in a far more personal way. In addition, students will use both physical teachers and digital methods for a converged learning experience – or alternately their peers and digital learning; a technique already yielding success in local tech development and coding schools.

3. More changes in consumer behavior and student-led education

As online shopping becomes more prolific, consumers will start imposing/expecting/demanding the same ease and convenience when “shopping” for education online – given their view and experience of “best practice” in this space. This speaks to the rise of more aggregators and aggregating behaviours among suppliers, including discounts; “package deals”; and – critically – delivery. To succeed against heavily invested international players such as Amazon and Takealot will require deliberate and concerted evolution from traditional service providers such as textbook stores and uniform outfitters. Both their “tech” and customer service will now need to compete to maintain customer loyalty and keep bringing them back after product/solution trial.

The rise of the digital student will also force education and related suppliers to provide always-on/anywhere/anytime sales and service options. It is no longer possible for government or business to ignore students – as Greta Thunberg has shown us.

Fundi’s adhoc consumer research points to the fact that students want more choice, more convenience, and more affordable quality education that breaks with traditional consumption norms. Classrooms will continue to empty as learning starts to happen in non-traditional spaces and places. The reality is that the student will decide how and where to learn – watch the growing trends on the rising of the digital learner!

4. More demand for accessible, affordable, quality education

Forbes cites accessibility as the #2 trend in its education trends forecast for the next few years.

Technology creates new social impact and new social demands. While demand can be seen across all LSM groups in respect of accessible, affordable quality education, technology is addressing this demand.

With pervasive access to global education “standards”, South Africans continue to benchmark local education against global standards – with any innovators and entrepreneurs now responding to it and creating brands like Curro and Spark Schools. As such, strong social movements are stepping up to bridge the gaps between “private” and “public” education as we’ve traditionally known it, ensuring better access regardless of race, gender and background, among others.

Downward pressure on the price of education is set to remain strong with data pricing and new digital teaching and learning platforms levelling the playing field in many instances.

5. More balanced education – a holistic learning environment

We are experiencing a growing need for the learning environment to migrate from pure intellectual development towards addressing the whole learner: the mind; body and soul approach. Student wellness is growing as an inclusive offering as part of the learning process. This is to manage anxiety, stress and other disorders.

In addition, the growing introduction of pre-assessments and assessments at both basic education and higher education institutions is exceptionally good news. This helps to ensure that children are more informed and prepared to make better decisions about their futures.

Students are additionally interrogating their roles of the future – and not really interested in learning topics/ subject matter that has little to no relevance to their passion, purpose and future. They want to learn in spaces that support them holistically. As such, we’re seeing an associated increase in coaching and mentorship requests; again linking back to finding the right people who support you as a student.

The active listening supported through the coaching process is also a “power skill” many younger students are wanting to cultivate. Coaching additionally speaks to self-learning and individual learning: being one’s own agent of change.

“We believe these trends to be positive,” says Ditshego. “The more we can actively empower students to own, shape and manage their individual futures, the more empowered a society we will create. This is something critically needed as we step boldly and bravely into 2020.”

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