

6 trends that will shape SA education in 2024

 By [Mark Anderson](#)

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For the longest time, education systems have changed at the proverbial glacial pace. However, the rapidity of change in every other human-made system over the past few decades has put education under excruciating pressures to transform, keep up and prove that it is fit for purpose in the modern world.



Mark Anderson, the principal of Koa Academy | image supplied

Education in South Africa is undergoing significant transformation which is driven by several key trends. This is ushering in an era where South African children are increasingly being educated in different ways, in different kinds of school environments with their teachers serving in different roles. In short, the education of today's children is becoming increasingly different from the education that their parents experienced.

Here are six prominent trends that are currently shaping the South African educational landscape and that, I believe are going to become more evident in 2024:

1. Learning is becoming personalised

Personalised learning customises education to the individual learner's needs, interests, and abilities. This is a radical shift from the traditional school classroom model where standardised content is delivered to a group of learners.

We are seeing big shifts in the ways that schools are thinking about how content is delivered and how assessments are done to be much more personalised and individualised, while at the same time operating within constraints, which may be economic, geographic, and meeting legislative requirements.

Personalised learning not only changes the education experience for learners. Teachers are no longer mere presenters of content, but expert guides and facilitators who dynamically support and coach each learner as they progress on their unique learning pathway.

In this way, personalised learning unleashes the real expertise of teachers who are trained to have deep knowledge and experience of how people learn and about different learning styles. It also addresses the major concerns that parents have when their child is either left behind because they are struggling with certain concepts, or they get bored in class because they grasped some other content more quickly than their peers.

2. Mastery and competencies are in the spotlight

The mastery-based approach shifts the focus from advancing because of your age or grade level to advancing because you've mastered the concepts. This emphasises not only a deeper understanding of subjects and the ability to apply learning but also ensures that no student is left behind.

In practical terms, the real strength of the mastery-based approach is that we don't plaster over gaps in learning. Historically, this has been a significant problem for kids in South Africa where they are promoted into the next grade, even when they have big learning gaps.

3. Gamification has entered the education landscape

With its propensity to deliver dopamine boosts, gamification is making learning more engaging and interactive. Through game elements such as targets, leaderboards, points, and rewards, schools are creating more enjoyable and motivating learning environments. For learners, this trend can encourage problem-solving, collaboration, and creativity as they navigate through challenges and adventures in the pursuit of knowledge.

It's important to note that gamification in education is not just about having fun. It's about being rewarded for progress and inspiring you to be accountable for your own learning. The idea is that I know what my academic goal is, I know what I must do to reach my goal, and when I reach it, I am rewarded.

This is a tangible recognition that I have levelled up and it gives me an indication of my progress. As you are working, the gamified platform is telling you the things you are getting right, and it is showing you where you are tripping up or dropping the ball.

4. AI in education is already a game-changer

We're only seeing the tip of the iceberg at this moment. In the early 1980's, educational psychologist, Benjamin Bloom conducted research into teaching and learning techniques that showed that average-performing students who were exposed to one-on-one tutoring could perform better than 98% of their classmates who experienced classroom learning only. He coined the term 'the 2 sigma problem' in reference to the fact that our education systems are not built to deliver one-on-one tutoring to every student, and this solution to attain optimal educational efficiency is simply not scalable.

One of the great promises of AI is that it has the potential to fill the gap in one-on-one tutoring. We are already seeing the emergence of classroom testing of AI tutor models such as Khan Academy's Khanmigo. An AI tutor model embedded in an

education platform means that the platform can see exactly where each learner is and what they are struggling with.

It can then immediately provide the precise guidance or help the learner needs so that they can master the concept and progress. This use of AI supports both personalised learning and the mastery-based approach. This is just one way, a very important way, that AI can be deployed to enhance education in the future.

We are also likely to see AI making an impact in freeing up teachers from routine administrative tasks so that they can spend more time focusing on meaningful engagement with their learners. We'll no doubt see AI coming to the fore when it comes to analysing learner performance data, identifying learning gaps and creating individualised learning plans.

Schools, online or offline, have to address developing a generation that knows how to responsibly and ethically engage with AI models.

5. Soft skills are foundational instead of 'nice to have'

If modern education is to meet the workplace demand for young generations with the skills to succeed in their jobs, then gaining soft skills needs to be prioritised in school and tertiary education. In a 2019 LinkedIn Talent Trends survey, 91% of employers ranked soft skills as their top requirement in the recruitment process.

Research conducted by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research and published by the National Soft Skills Association concluded that soft skills make an 85% contribution to career success. We know that understanding myself and understanding others; being able to interact, communicate, create, and collaborate are so important. These attributes are key drivers in our learning process itself, and in achieving outcomes. Schools are realising that socio-emotional learning can't be icing on the cake, it must be foundational.

6. Demand for high engagement in online schools

The Covid-19 pandemic greatly accelerated the uptake of online education in South Africa. However, a curriculum dumped online and accessed by large groups of learners doesn't make a school or a college. As online education evolves in South Africa, and the world, we're seeing different models emerge based on the needs and wants of learners and their families. We know from our intentions and experiences that fostering a strong sense of community, and of belonging in the online space is doable.

These trends transforming education are reshaping the roles of teachers and the experiences of learners. As personalised learning and the mastery-based approach develop further, more South African learners will be set on their own pathways to develop as lifelong learners. We can expect that gamification in education and AI will be revolutionising forces in the years ahead. It's taken a long time for our education system to evolve, in many ways it is still woefully out of step with the world of work, but change is happening; and the pace of change in education is certainly accelerating.

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