



The educator of the future

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According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, approximately 1.5bn learners in 188 countries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic were impacted by school closures. Earnest calls for a speedy response for an alternative means to ensure the continuity of learning and teaching resulted in the rapid transitioning from classroom-based teaching to virtual learning content delivery using various platforms and technology.

These have presented both advantages and disadvantages. Educators were faced with the challenges of moving their classrooms to their homes which saw their role shift from being the educator to becoming the facilitator, innovator, and IT specialist. Together with school leaders, teachers have been rapidly mobilising and innovating to facilitate quality distance learning for students, with or without the use of digital technologies.



The impact on learners has been significant as COVID-19 has pulled the plug on structure and comfort and has put a spotlight on the lack of resources in the South African education system. With very little opportunity and limited support, teachers have had to shift roles, and this brought to the fore their questionable preparedness to adequately manage the transition and the availability of skills and competence to respond to the changing demands brought on by the transition.

Despite all the criticisms and questions, their commitment and dedication to ensuring that learners were supported during the lockdown has been acknowledged the world over. While we have all been impacted socially, culturally, psychologically, emotionally and financially, teachers have had to continue to support learners while juggling multiple roles with limited access to resources. In many instances, at personal costs and risks.

In recognition of the vital role played by teachers, through the UNESCO-led initiative themed **‘Teachers: Leading in crisis, reimagining the future’**, PwC joins in celebrating teachers as leaders during the crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The leadership and contributions by teachers during this time have been critical in the provision of virtual learning, supporting vulnerable populations, reopening of schools and the adjustment of the curriculum to mitigate learning gaps.

PwC acknowledges the major strides made in realising the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) relating to Goal 4: Quality Education, such as achieving the target of universal primary education, where the worldwide number of learners out of school dropped by almost half with literacy rates increasing exponentially (SDG Fund, 2020).

However, the pandemic has exposed the grave inequalities relating to the availability and access to basic services, resources and opportunities — perpetuating a wider socio-economic divide amongst communities. Inclusive and quality education is one of the most powerful means to achieve sustainable development.

While we celebrate how far we have come, it is inevitable to consider the impact of COVID-19 and how it has dramatically changed the role of the educator around the world, with many effects on the teacher and the learner. While COVID-19 may have exposed several challenges that exist within our education system, it has also provided significant opportunities. Translating these opportunities into operational plans can be accelerated using the pandemic as a catalyst. These opportunities include:

- Using data to inform current and future ways of working
- An assessment of the current workforce with a focus on the available skills, competence and expertise to provide for blended learning opportunities
- A standardised national digital platform for educational institutions to bridge the socio-economic divide, ensuring access for the majority of learners

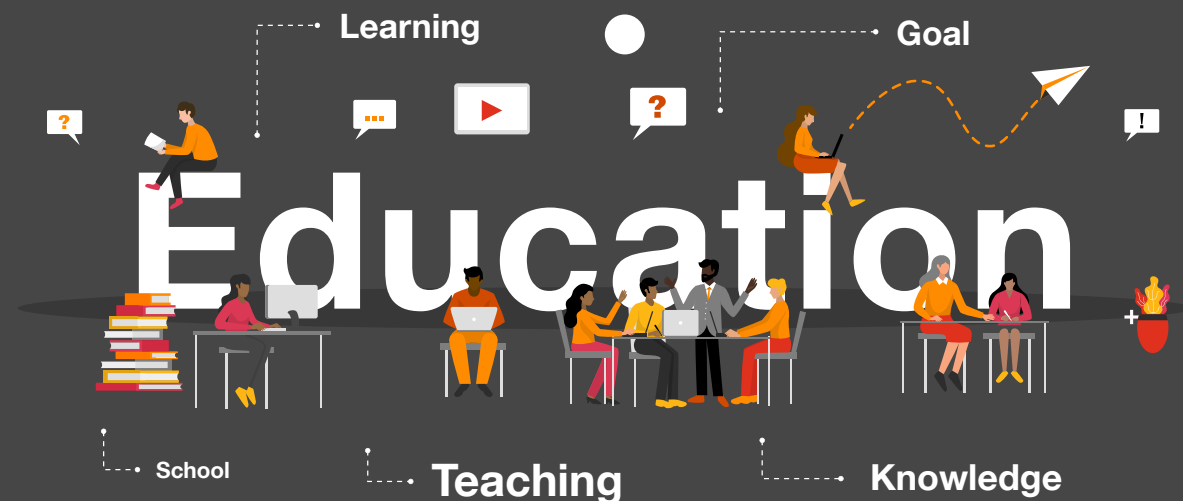
To ensure a seamless transition and embracing the ‘new normal’, we must consider the perceptions of automation and digitisation as a threat to job security. While it is believed that automation will result in many jobs becoming obsolete within the next couple of years, we need to understand that many more jobs will be created to support the age of digitisation and transformation.

There is currently a dearth of a suitably qualified workforce to respond to the new digital economy. As a commitment towards upskilling society and preparing individuals for the future, PwC has launched [*New world. New skills*](#) — our first truly global, purpose-led initiative that encourages a collective effort to help solve one of the world's most important problems.

PwC will be investing USD3 billion over the next four years, primarily in training its people, and also in developing and sharing technologies to support clients and communities. We have also recently partnered with UNICEF to support Generation Unlimited, a multi sector partnership aimed at helping 1.8bn young people to transition from school to work by 2030. This collaboration also builds on PwC's existing community ambition to help maximise the potential of 15m people, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social and micro enterprises by 2022.

COVID-19 has given us a glimpse of the world to come and has forced us to rethink what we are teaching and preparing people for. Moving forward, educators will need to rethink how they educate future generations. We need to redefine what education should look like for Generation Z, Alpha, and beyond.

In order for educators to be adequately prepared to teach in this constantly changing environment, they need to upskill themselves and others for the digital world. The shift to virtual classrooms, virtual collaboration and online assessments require digital skills and the use of tools to ensure that the knowledge imparted is not lost. Educators across the world are experiencing new possibilities to do things differently.



Educating people in a world that's becoming smaller

The pandemic has highlighted the role technology has played in promoting and accelerating global interconnectedness. COVID-19 has catapulted us into virtual learning scenarios and curriculum facilitation by using computer generated classrooms to teach using online tools. However, as a result of the historical challenges in the South African context – namely, a lack of educational tools of trade such as laptops/computers, internet connectivity and affordable data, South Africa is lagging behind in becoming active participants in a world where digital learning has become the 'new normal'. This makes it important to adequately equip the country's education system and enable it to respond to the changing needs of teaching and learning.

Transforming the role of the educator

According to a 2020 report by the (OECD) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020), educators have to adapt to new pedagogical concepts and ways of delivering teaching for which they might not have been trained. To be able to respond to the societal needs and educational imperatives, teaching offerings will need to be revisited.

Merely focusing on the teaching of technical skills would fall short of preparing learners for the changing demands of the world of work. Key skills to respond to a transformed digital world will include continuous learning, resilience, emotional intelligence, critical thinking and adaptability to prepare learners for an ever-changing future. Educators will also need to teach life skills which include entrepreneurship, creativity and empathy.

In addition, many teachers and learners may have not been exposed to technology before. The technological culture shock needs time to deal with, as well as proper attention provided in these situations. Distance learning cannot replace teachers but COVID-19 has highlighted that the role of the educators needs significant change that allows for a more learner-centered approach aided by the use of digital tools and technology as well as curriculum differentiation and individualised learning.

Ongoing professional development of 21st century skills

As much as learners need a holistic education, educators also need to constantly upskill to stay relevant and keep up with the changing times. Technology can enable educators and students to access a plethora of educational information and materials beyond textbooks and can elevate the role of teachers from just imparting knowledge to rather working as co-creators of knowledge, coaches and mentors as well as evaluators (OECD, 2020).

According to a June 2020 article by training and certification institution, Henry Harvin, entitled 'The changing role of a teacher post covid-19', the role of an educator after COVID-19 will be one of an effective delegator, subtle facilitator, role model, good listener and nurturer of inspiration and creator of a joyful and conducive atmosphere.

Upskilling and reskilling – a MUST!

According to OECD (2020) the COVID-19 pandemic struck when educational systems were not ready for digital learning opportunities. About 36% of teachers reported that they themselves participate in online courses and seminars - which shows that educators are not relying heavily on distance learning for their own development. Before teachers can lead learners through this process of change, they must understand where they are individually in the emotional process of change.

In support of this, PwC has launched the [*Digital Fitness App*](#) to empower everyone to stay relevant, boost their digital acumen and access resources to navigate the new reality. It offers an extensive content library to deepen your understanding of digital trends and help you adapt to new ways of working and learning. The app is freely available globally until 30 June 2021. You can download it on your mobile phone via the Apple App Store or Google Play and use the invite code: LRNALL.

Future skills needed by educators and learners

According to the OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 report (OECD, 2018), three different types of skills are needed for 2030: 1) Cognitive and metacognitive skills; 2) Social and emotional skills and 3) Physical and practical skills. In as much as these are the skills needed by students and learners to be relevant for the future — teachers/educators also need to develop and grow these skills as they will be fostering and helping learners develop these skills to be relevant for the digital age.

Cognitive and metacognitive skills

Cognitive skills are a set of thinking strategies that enable the use of language, numbers, reasoning and acquired knowledge (OECD, 2018). These skills include verbal, nonverbal and higher-order thinking skills which are critical for all. In addition, Metacognitive skills play an important role in all learning and life experiences as they include learning to learn and reflective thinking about how you can learn and grow.

Educators will need to grow in these skills to enhance the teaching process and improve the way learners learn. A growth mindset will become an empowering tool for educators and learners in the near future.

Social and emotional skills

Demographic and societal changes demand more social and emotional skills. These skills — which include empathy, self-awareness, respect for others and the ability to communicate — are becoming essential as classrooms and workplaces become more ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse.

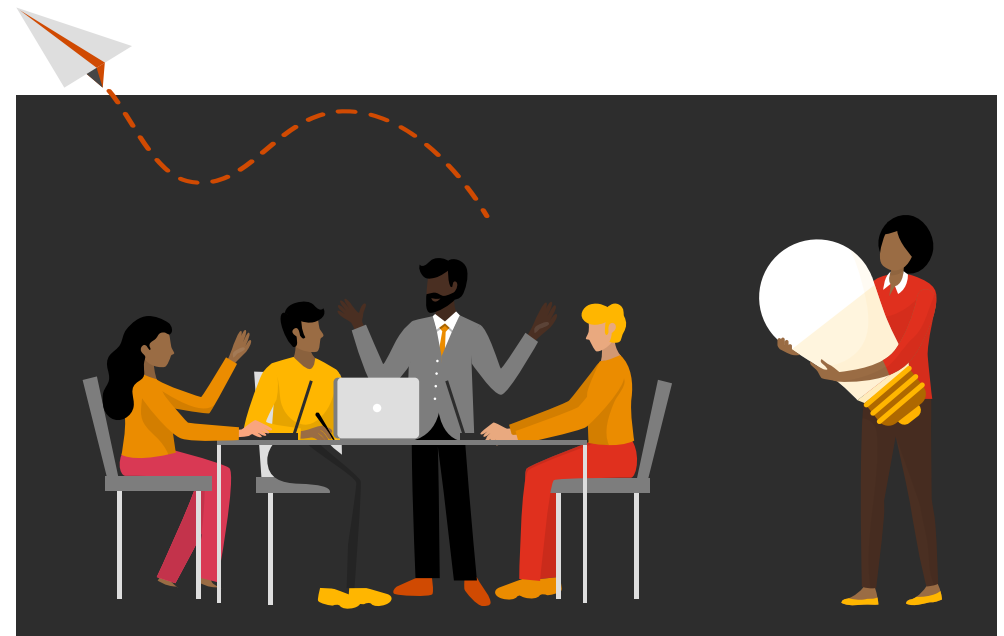
In addition, the way educators would teach in the past is quickly shifting with the generations. Learners now face different challenges compared to those faced in the past which may have a different effect on how they learn, their behaviour and their attitude. Educators will need to develop emotional intelligence by cultivating self-awareness.

Physical and practical skills

Digital literacy is becoming a much-needed skill for the digital age as it refers to the ability to find, evaluate, and compose clear information through writing and other media on various digital platforms. These skills should begin in the classroom as data is a much-needed asset for the future world of work.

Physical skills also include manual skills, such as the ability to use information technology devices, play musical instruments, craft artworks, play sports; life skills and the ability to mobilise one's capacities, including strength, muscular flexibility and stamina (OECD, 2018).

This should be filtered down to the classroom environment where learners should become skilled, capable and knowledgeable in different areas. Which strengthens the fact that educators need to develop more broadly in order to teach in the constantly changing landscape.



Conclusion

Educational institutions and educational leadership and, more specifically, educators need to be commended for their resilience and stewardship during the uncertain time of COVID-19. The pandemic has forced teachers to quickly adapt, especially in countries where pedagogical and technical skills need improving in order to promote the use of digital technology and tools in classrooms and learning environments.

Technology will continue to impact our lives and COVID-19 might not be the only crisis we will face in our lifetime, therefore educators will need to upskill and develop their digital skills in order to play a facilitation role to learners and stay abreast with new technologies and teach learners life skills needed to be active members of society.

PwC celebrates the exceptional role played by educators in society and the impact they have on the lives of many. We advocate for the protection, support and development of educators and for the recognition of their efforts in response to the current pandemic and beyond.



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