

# **Time For Transformation: How Education Must Change**

The global economy is undergoing major technology-driven disruptions, creating opportunities and challenges for all. The youth are the most vulnerable as the education system seems to lag behind, unable to prepare them in time for changes that have already happened or are yet to come. This not only impacts lives, but also the economy and society as a whole.

Without a doubt, education is the most important policy domain and shapes the future of generations, defining their chances to be successful in an ever-changing work environment. Each year of education has been shown to increase an individual's earnings by up to 10%. UNESCO estimates that each additional year of schooling raises average annual GDP growth by 0.37%.

Formal education provides countries with a direct lever for driving national strategy and influencing strategic outcomes. However, failure to deliver in the education system erodes national competitiveness and social fabric in an ever more technology-disrupted socio-economic environment.

Education is going through a transformation characterized by a greater understanding of human development and the proliferation of tools that allow education systems to target best learning practices for individuals.

Most economies today are experiencing a severe mismatch between the skills developed by the education system and the skills needed in the labor market. At the current speed of change, this gap is only going to increase if it remains unaddressed. Many students will enter the workforce and realize that their skills are already obsolete.

To meet future skills requirements, curriculums need to be designed and updated, leveraging cross-sector data and foresight into the occupations of the future. This is an important shift towards a data-driven curriculum that meets the future needs of the individual, labor market and society. Such future needs are constantly evolving, and this evolution should be captured in the curriculum revisions.

Data analytics techniques and the strategic view of experts should be leveraged to forecast the future required skills on a continuous basis and support curriculum development. The curriculum lies at the core of any education reform and requires action on all key functions of the education system, from teacher education to professional development, from content production and publishing to student assessment.

Traditional education systems have been mainly focused on the average student, leaving struggling students behind and failing to challenge high-performing students. However, recent research findings show that there is no such thing as an average student and

students learn in different ways.

To fully realize the potential of every student, the education model needs to be adapted to the individual student. For example, students may predominantly have an auditory, visual or tactile learning style. With today's knowledge, data and technology tools, skilled teachers can work with students in crafting learning plans that are tailored to their most productive learning times, preferred learning styles and high-engaging topics.

Expanding reach in education has long meant building more schools and training more teachers. While these aspects remain critically important, particularly in developing countries, today informal learning (that outside of a classroom setting) is increasingly recognized as a primary component of education.

Two factors play an important role in facilitating this type of learning: parent involvement and ed-tech learning tools. Parents need to participate in their children's education journey and use their experience and knowledge to augment their learning. For example, in South Africa, a simple text message service reminding parents to read with their children on a daily basis showed positive development in the students' ability to read for meaning.

Ed-Tech learning tools are allowing learning to extend beyond the classroom and empowering students to pursue those topics and learning styles that stimulate them most. One recent study in the U.S found that students who used an online homework intervention program scored higher than a traditional homework control-group, with the greatest gains for students who had been at the bottom end of the achievement scale. 24-hour access to learning tools allows students to work at their own pace, often in their own homes, and at the hours that suit them best. Ed-Tech learning tools need to have demonstrated impact on learning, be easy to use and come at a low cost.

Several countries have experimented with Ed-Tech and many have focused on providing hardware to students and schools, for example the notorious one-tablet per child programs. Such initiatives are bound to fail if they are not embedded within a broader approach to deploying Ed-Tech learning tools. This includes working together with the private sector to create content and platforms for learning, upgrading the digital literacy skills of teachers and parents, integrating the use of tech into the curriculum, and providing the required infrastructure, connectivity and data.

Despite the rising importance of Ed-Tech, the teacher remains key in the delivery of education and preparation of students for their future. Investment must be made to upgrade and refresh the teacher capabilities to master the changing curriculum and to integrate Ed-Tech into education delivery.

In addition, as the education system becomes better-aligned with the labor market, teachers will be required to either bring the practical experience directly or integrate their instruction with industry experts that can help make the education experience more relevant to the labor market. A number of initiatives are already underway. For example, New Teach, a UK non-profit organization, plans to recruit people in their 40s and 50s with various career backgrounds to teach at secondary schools.

Across the education system, stakeholders make important decisions on a regular basis. For example, teachers decide on interventions to help a struggling student, school principals allocate staff according to their needs, and parents select the school for their children. Often, decisions are based on anecdotes rather than being backed by evidence and data.

With advanced systems and tools, data is collected across the education system. However, this data is not used effectively to drive decision-making. Efforts need to be made to collect the right data and then use it.

At a system level, a country's education strategy needs to translate into a data strategy that establishes a strong link across goals, metrics and data requirements. The data collected must be relevant for the specific metric linked to a particular goal and enable decision-making at all levels of the education system. Note that each country needs to investigate this at granular level to capture geographic, demographic and socio-economic differences. The overall national education strategy should be cascaded down into regional or provincial strategies to address the local education challenges and enable targeted data-driven decision-making.

Education systems today are not fully capable of facilitating the transition of students into the labor market. Many students upon graduation find themselves without employment or need to seek work in industries unrelated to their fields of study. This issue poses serious questions on the value of education in general. Why would students invest time, effort and money into education?

Education systems need to more proactively guide students toward labor-market relevant paths, while allowing pathway flexibility for students to adapt to changes in the internal and external environment. Institutions need to build deeper collaborations with the labor market and make these a focal point of the student development journey.

The labor market still relies on signals such as university degrees to determine a student's potential—many jobs are not accessible without a formal degree. However, employers still have to develop the skills of fresh graduates entering the labor force. In future, students will craft their own journey and may not attain a degree in a traditional sense, but rather a customized collection of credits based on interests and relevance to the labor market. At the same time, the labor market will need to shift from relying on traditional signals to recognizing work-relevant skills.

Transformation is inevitable and will be holistic, but it will require strategic direction, investment, time and collaboration of all ecosystem stakeholders. The education system is one of the last bastions resisting change and disruption. Innovations are emerging, albeit not far-reaching. However, the speed of change demands swift and decisive action—it is time for bold moves in education.

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<https://www.forbesmiddleeast.com/time-for-transformation-how-education-must-change>