

Building a nation of global citizens is the key to education success in SA

By [Jonathan McGill](#)

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In the [World Economic Forum's 2013 Global IT report](#), South Africa was ranked second last, out of 144 countries, in Maths and Science. For economists, this paints a less than desirable picture of the future and for educators, sheds an even further light on our country's widening education and skills gap.

Today's economy means that as workers we can no longer expect to do the same job, in the same way and in the same place until retirement. Spurred by the speed of change, employers not only require, but also expect employees to be more skilled and mobile than ever. Our education system, still recovering from decades of apartheid, means that many South African learners and graduates continue to enter the workforce with deficiencies in basic education areas, such as numeracy and literacy.

As a result, many graduates leaving school are faced with poor career prospects, while those lucky enough to secure employment are often left ill-equipped to evolve, lead and respond to industry demands.

As a nation, we can no longer afford to leave any learners behind. Beyond building the basic education foundation and instilling the value of skills in young learners at an early stage, teachers need to increase their focus on nurturing learners to succeed in a global workplace.

As educators we need to play a role in building a nation of globally aware and skilled citizens that can represent our country on the international stage. This rings particularly true amongst international employers who have become more aware of the growing skills imbalance between first world and emerging economy graduates, leaving them questioning the investment involved in up-skilling talent from the third world.

How do we bridge the education and skills gap?

1. **Skills versus talent deficit:** while industry experts regularly speak about the local talent gap, I firmly believe that as a country, we have a multitude of talented learners at our disposal.

Whilst a big portion of these may not have access to the necessary resources, a larger proportion seek the opportunity to achieve success at school and in building a career path. Young learners entering apprenticeship schemes and university leavers entering graduate programmes do so without key attributes such as self-management, problem solving and with a poor attitude towards work.

As an industry, we need to take responsibility to change this, by devoting more support for educators to strengthen their ability to direct and mould talent and to build transnational skills. Beyond this, educators need to learn how to consistently collaborate and develop a shared understanding of what young learners need to know in the classroom and the workplace, to be successful not just locally, but globally as well.

2. **Marrying 'knowledge' and 'know-how' education:** steps to building a nation of global citizens starts with encouraging a culture that values skills as much as the academic path to education.

Employers with tight training budgets, expect students entering the workforce to be equipped with a real life view and understanding of what to expect. While the traditional academic route provides a host of theoretical benefits to learners, the byproduct of this route, is that graduates are not fully prepared for the practical realities of employment.

Basic Education Minister, Angie Motshekga spoke earlier this year of the need for students to take advantage of the further education facilities that provide skills led qualifications such as BTEC and VET, to empower both learner and the skills economy.

Marrying knowledge and know-how approaches will provide a more balanced view of the working world, equipping learners with a sense of confidence in their skill set when entering into the workforce. The private sector must grab the opportunity to play a larger role in shaping the future workforce, by being part of their education roots.

It's time for employers to get involved in designing courses to add real-life experience and set expectations for learners to help drive skills development and industry understanding more quickly.

3. **Establish a skills standard:** Earlier this year, The International Skills Standards Organisation (INSSO) launched its Transnational Skills Standards project with the aim of working with Pearson and INSSO Canada, UK and India, to determine the feasibility of a global skills standard.

Talent from emerging economies often suffer at the hands of their mis-matched skills, impacting the ability to develop whilst remaining competitive and productive. The movement for transnational skills aims to establish a globally fair playing ground where global graduates have a fair and equal opportunity to innovate and develop in an international capacity.

I believe that the benefits of a global skills standard can only help to improve prospects for South African learners and graduates and in the long run our economy as well.

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