**Youth Skills for Tomorrow: Bridging Global Needs with Local Realities**

 *Dr Sean Kruger, Lead researcher and 4IR specialist at the University of Pretoria’s* [*Centre for the Future of Work.*](https://www.up.ac.za/centre-for-the-future-of-work)

The future of work is undergoing a rapid transformation, driven by technological advancements, shifting economic dynamics, and evolving societal needs. As the backbone of the future workforce, today's youth must be equipped with essential skills to navigate this complex environment effectively. Equipping young people with the right skills and aptitudes not only propels economic development and social stability but also enables them to realise their potential in a competitive global market.

Globally, the demand for skills is being shaped significantly by the integration of technologies associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). According to the World Economic Forum (2023), a substantial portion of job functions will transition to machines by 2027. Furthermore, 23% of job roles are expected to change by 2030, necessitating immediate and strategic action to prepare youth adequately.

Critical skills for the future include creativity, cognitive abilities, communication, critical thinking and metacognition, which involves an awareness and understanding of one’s own thought processes and is vital for self-directed learning and adaptability.

In South Africa’s context, youth skills development faces unique challenges. The country ranks low in workplace readiness, with significant deficits in cognitive skills. Employers report a skills shortage in areas such as engineering, information and communications technology, foreign languages, media, marketing and digital literacy. Addressing these gaps requires aligning education with industry needs, focusing on nurturing creativity, enhancing customer relationship management (CRM) and strengthening cognitive capabilities.

Additionally, leadership attributes, accountability and ethics are essential. To support this, it's crucial to ensure the necessary infrastructure and skills of the trainers are in place.

The 4IR has led to increased automation and digitisation of services, reducing demand for traditional job roles while creating new opportunities in areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data, and other tech-driven fields. This shift necessitates a workforce skilled in digital literacy. Digital skills are crucial for enhancing productivity, fostering innovation, and engaging effectively in the global economy.

For South Africa to maintain its competitiveness and stimulate sustainable economic growth, prioritising the development of these essential competencies within its workforce is crucial. Bridging the skills gap in creativity, CRM and digital literacy involves integrating digital literacy into education by updating educational frameworks and training.

Universities play a pivotal role in this regard. However, mechanisms such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and micro-credentials can supplement university education. MOOCs provide a wide range of courses from leading institutions and allow learners to acquire new skills at their own pace. Micro-credentials are shorter, more focused qualifications that certify specific skills or knowledge areas.

These tools offer flexible, accessible learning opportunities that align with industry needs and are particularly beneficial for graduates and younger learners, including those in basic education. By incorporating these tools, educational systems can enhance traditional university curricula. This combined approach can enable South Africa’s youth to thrive in a rapidly changing global landscape.

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