

Ten educational trends for 2026: Where learning is headed



Educational trends for 2026 point to a more flexible, humane, sustainable education focused on continuous learning.

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Education is undergoing a profound transformation. In 2026, **education systems** will move toward **learning models** that are even more driven by **technology**, **human skills development**, and **mental health care**.

That's how **Esteban Venegas**, Director of [Tec de Monterrey's Observatory](#) of the **Institute for the Future of Education**, puts it.

Venegas shares ten trends that will shape learning this year with **CONECTA**.

Education is looking at a profound transformation driven by technological, social, and pedagogical changes in 2026, says an education expert at Tec de Monterrey. (Photo: Shutterstock)



Furthermore, Tec de Monterrey and the World Economic Forum have analyzed the educational conditions in a variety of countries to **understand the behavior of this and other trends in emerging economies**. [Find out more about this report.](#)

These trends will also be discussed in **various international forums addressing education**, such as the [IFE Conference 2026](#), which is to be held on January 27-29 at Tec de Monterrey.

1. Lifelong learning: A key transformation in education

According to Venegas, **lifelong learning is not synonymous with continuing education** but is a much broader concept that has been promoted by organizations such as [UNESCO](#) since the 1990s.

Learning does not begin or end with university: **“we are born learning and we die learning,”** says the education expert.

He goes on to say that for the [Observatory](#), this **trend is structural and multi-year**, not a recent fad.

For universities, this trend means **rethinking academic models** in terms of **more flexible programs, modular training pathways**, and **options** that allow people to **update or acquire new skills** over time.

Lifelong learning is becoming established as a key trend in response to rapid changes in the workplace and society. (Illustration: Shutterstock)



2. Micro-credentials and alternative credentials: Training with professional and international validity

Micro-credentials or alternative credentials are short, modular certifications that validate specific skills and are recognized by industries and universities, thereby

facilitating **professional mobility**.

“Micro-credentials did not come along this year but have been in the works for more than a decade,” Venegas explained.

[Reports from the Observatory itself](#) and from international organizations show that universities, companies, and global platforms are investing in this type of **modular and cumulative certification**.

These credentials meet two key requirements: **professional validity and international portability** in addition to forming part of the lifelong learning ecosystem.

3. Artificial intelligence in education: Personalization, analytics, and ethics

For the director of the Observatory, **great things are expected** from **AI**, as is the case of other technological cycles described [by the Gartner Hype Cycle](#) (technology maturity).

Venegas sees AI in the following processes:

- **Augmented/personalized learning**, with **AI** academic **agents** for each student.
- **AI-driven learning** and **learning analytics**.
- **Ethics, governance, and AI literacy** as **cross-cutting subjects**.

“It’s interesting technology with real applications, but also with ethical, pedagogical, and human consequences that are still being understood.”

Venegas warned that the challenge is not just technical but also educational and cultural. Since the [Observatory’s report](#) came out, **AI** is no longer analyzed as a trend, but rather as a profound transformation.

Artificial intelligence is starting to be integrated into educational processes from personalized learning to academic analytics. (Photo: Shutterstock)



4. Power skills: Key human skills for education in the AI era

These are human and transferable skills that are now central to any teaching process, no matter the discipline in question. Venegas cites the following examples:

- **Written communication**
- **Critical thinking**
- **Quantitative reasoning**
- **Oral communication**
- **Intercultural skills**
- **Critical information management**
- **Ethical reasoning**
- **Teamwork**

According to Venegas, the above should be considered *power skills* because as artificial intelligence advances, **they become more important than ever** by

helping prevent the uncritical use of tools and sustain what he calls the **“human aspect” of learning**.

He also emphasized that areas like **the humanities** are key to strengthening and balancing the impact of AI.

The expert points out that this view coincides with an analysis done by [Harvard Business School](#) which warns that, in the AI era, skills like **critical thinking, communication, and ethical judgment don’t lose any value** but rather become a **key differentiator** in education and the workplace.

5. Mental health and wellbeing: A structural challenge for higher education

Mental health has become one of the major **systemic challenges in higher education**, and addressing it will be key to sustaining any **educational transformation in the coming years**, Venegas emphasizes.

The [Observatory of the Institute for the Future of Education](#) no longer interprets this phenomenon as an individual problem but rather as a **structural** one.

To gauge its significance, according to [Inside Higher Ed’s Student Voice Survey](#), which polled more than five thousand students from various institutions, **only twenty-seven percent consider their mental health to be good or excellent**.

This issue also has repercussions for academia. *“Teachers, in addition to being teachers, are dealing with issues related to artificial intelligence, internal problems, and student problems,”* Venegas says.

But the wear and tear doesn’t end there. [University World News](#) has documented that burnout also affects top **university officers**.

They take on financial pressures, rapid technological change, mental health crises in their communities, and constant expectations of leadership in **uncertain contexts**.

Students' and teachers' wellbeing and mental health have become a central issue in sustaining educational transformation. (Illustration: Shutterstock)



6. Green education and sustainability as a curriculum requirement

According to Venegas, **sustainability** is no longer a secondary issue but has become an **educational requirement**.

He explained that this approach can no longer be treated as optional or isolated **curricula content**.

*"It is extremely important that it be included in the **curriculum** and that students should clearly see which classes they are taking and why."*

The [**Higher Education Policy Institute**](#) has documented that new generations of students **expect universities to integrate sustainability in a cross-cutting manner** and not just as parallel initiatives or institutional rhetoric.

Environmental, climate, and social education has become a criterion of academic relevance and social responsibility.

7. Learning by doing: Skills, challenges, and learning assessment

This trend reflects a fundamental shift in higher education: the focus is drifting away from memorizing content to **what students are able to do with what they learn**, especially in real-world contexts.

According to the [Observatory of the Institute for the Future of Education](#), these models prioritize active learning, real-world problem solving, interdisciplinary work, and continuous assessment. He referred to the **Tec Educational Model** as an example.

This approach's goal is to give a better response to a professional environment that demands adaptability, **critical thinking**, and the ability to tackle **complex challenges**.

8. Aprendizaje global: internacionalización del conocimiento en un mundo conectado

*"The **internationalization of knowledge** no longer depends exclusively on physical mobility,"* explains Venegas.

Digital platforms, open courses, and collaborative programs now provide access (without leaving the classroom or the country) **to knowledge generated in different parts of the world**.

According to the **Observatory of the Institute for the Future of Education**, this trend accelerated during the pandemic and is now entering a stage of consolidation.

Venegas describes it as a "**global landscape of knowledge**," where universities from different countries share content online in multiple languages and formats.

The Observatory highlights that this model **reduces costs**, broadens access to international experiences, and strengthens intercultural skills, especially in contexts where travel is not always feasible.

9. CCyber-Physical Learning: Hybrid environments that integrate the physical and digital worlds

The concept of [Cyber-Physical Learning](#) was developed by the **Institute for the Future of Education** and refers to environments that intentionally integrate physical and digital resources into **hybrid learning** experiences.

According to the Institute's own definition, these ecosystems may include telepresence robots, mixed reality, artificial intelligence, and [immersive learning experiences \(such as those found at the Tec\)](#).

The foregoing is in addition to **remote laboratories**, which make it possible to conduct digital experiments 24/7.

10. Revalorización de la profesión docente

The **shortage of teachers** is emerging as one of the **most worrying challenges** for the **future of education**.

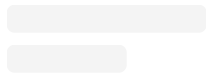
According to [analyses done by the Observatory of the Institute for the Future of Education](#), this phenomenon is related to:

- **Burnout**
- **Unattractive working conditions**
- **The teaching profession's ongoing loss of social prestige**

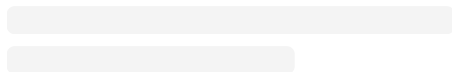
Venegas warns that this problem **cannot be solved with artificial intelligence**. Although **technology can support educational processes**, it does not replace **the teacher's educational, social, and ethical role**.

The Observatory argues that the challenge is not only to fill vacancies, but also to **transform and revalue the teaching profession** to create better conditions, institutional support, and recognition to attract and retain new generations of educators.





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Educational trends in emerging economies

At the end of last year, [Tec de Monterrey](#) and the **World Economic Forum** (WEF) published an analysis identifying the main forces that will transform higher education in Latin America and other emerging economies.

The study, entitled [***Higher Education in Emerging Economies***](#), highlights **eight critical megatrends** and **provides an interactive tool** for educational institutions, governments, and academics to make informed decisions about the future of the sector.

The study identifies the following critical areas, including:

1. **Digital transformation** of education
2. **Climate change** and its impact on universities
3. Restructuring of **institutional financing**
4. **Student inclusion and wellbeing**
5. **Innovation** ecosystems
6. **Flexible lifelong learning**
7. **Social stability** and education
8. The future of **specialized work**

Each trend gives Latin America specific challenges. [Click here](#) if you would like to read more.

IFE Conference 2026: A meeting point to analyze the future of education

These transformations are not only analyzed in reports and specialized studies. They are also discussed in forums where academics, administrators, teachers, and education specialists exchange experiences and perspectives on the future of learning.

One of these forums will take place at **IFE Conference 2026**, which will unite voices from different regions to reflect on the changes that are redefining education worldwide and in emerging economies.

[**Learn more about over five hundred activities that will be part of the 2026 edition.**](#)

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