

Chapter 17

Challenges and Opportunities for Active and Hybrid Learning related to UNESCO Post 2015

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ABSTRACT

The UNESCO Post-2015 Development Agenda proposes equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all as its overarching goals for education. A holistic quality approach is espoused to encourage lifelong learning and thereby build inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous societies. Their quality goals are particularly ambitious given that the practical recommendations for inclusive education necessitate ubiquity and are disruptive of existing processes. Higher education is facing widespread and serious challenges in terms of helping individuals develop and acquire the ability to advance and sustain their own learning. Proactive and innovative strategies are required to fully embrace the open learning culture in a manner that aligns with the global driving forces for the development of the individual, society, and the world in general. This chapter examines shaping the future of education related to UNESCO Post-2015, especially its interrelatedness with adhering to quality standards in education for all.

INTRODUCTION

The education sector, particularly higher education institutions, is expected to face both demanding challenges and exciting opportunities in the years to come after 2015 through to 2030. As the target year (i.e., 2015) for the Education for All goals and the Millennium Development Goals nears its end, UNESCO and member states have launched several interlinked processes that are aimed at shaping the education development agenda for

the years succeeding 2015 (UNESCO, 2015 a b). Reflections and debates are ongoing as to the vision, shape, and scope of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, as well as the manner by which future education plans should be articulated in such agenda. The Global Thematic Consultation on Education proposes *equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all* as the overarching goals. In consonance with this proposal, UNESCO argues for a holistic lifelong learning perspective and emphasizes the need to increase attention to

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9680-8.ch017

equity and quality. As indicated by the organization, providing quality education and fostering lifelong learning require working toward the overarching goals and core pillars for building inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous societies. UNESCO's position paper states the following:

Education is a right that transforms lives when it is accessible to all, relevant and underpinned by core shared values. Because quality education is the most influential force for alleviating poverty, improving health and livelihoods, increasing prosperity and shaping more inclusive, sustainable and peaceful societies, it is in everyone's interest to ensure that it is at the centre of the post-2015 development agenda. (Bokova, in UNESCO 2015a, p. 1)

The UNESCO post-2015 approach to education is crucial to developing and implementing active learning approaches that enable meaningful student learning and enhance teaching environments. UNESCO's (2015a b) vision is to:

... [reaffirm] a humanistic and holistic vision of education as a fundamental human right and essential to personal and socio-economic development. The objective of such education must be envisaged in a broad lifelong learning perspective that aims at enabling and empowering people to realize their rights to education, fulfil their personal expectations for a decent life and work, and contribute to the achievement of their societies' socio-economic development objectives. In addition to the acquisition of basic knowledge and cognitive skills, the content of learning must promote problem solving and creative thinking; understanding and respect for human rights; inclusion and equity; cultural diversity; it must also foster a desire and capacity for lifelong learning and learning to live together, all of which are essential to the betterment of the world and the realization of peace, responsible citizenship and sustainable development (p. 3).

As indicated above, an essential component that all involved stakeholders should understand is the inextricability between sound pedagogy and quality. In terms of quality, The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), in cooperation with the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), conducted a study on quality models for online and open education around the globe (Ossiannilsson, Williams, Camilleri, & Brown, 2015). This research focuses on the quality indicators for global online learning and on the preparedness of stakeholders for web-driven online educational environments. The introductory perspectives put forward in the study are discussed throughout this chapter. Please note that the concept online and open education / learning most often is used and provided throughout this chapter, note also that not all online learning avenues are necessarily also open.

The learning landscape has substantially changed in the past few years. The ever-improving performance of mobile devices and the development of networking infrastructures continue to increase the appeal of new powerful instruments as avenues from which to expand the reach and quality of education. The rapid spread of technologies, as reflected by their untamable demand and use, and significant developments in research and practice inevitably transform the information society, mostly in ways that extend beyond institutional settings and often along unexpected pathways.

Worldwide, the public has expressed growing interest in and high demand for knowledge and education while intensive social media movements occur in both the provider and user community levels. Amid these developments, resolving the issue of skills deficit has become a critical factor in the formulation of educational strategies that will satisfy the public. Against this backdrop, realizing educational objectives is expected to entail complex changes and accelerated transformations. This chapter discusses related issues and the challenges that lie ahead for individual learners and stakeholders, such as higher education institutions:

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