

# QUALITY EDUCATION

UNESCO Position Paper

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**“Our first wish is that all human beings should be educated fully, to full humanity; not any one individual, nor a few nor even many, but all men and women together and singly, young and old, rich and poor, of high and low birth, men and women – in a new world whose fate it is to be born human beings... Our second wish is that every human being should be wholly educated, rightly formed in all things which perfect the human nature”.**

**Jan Amos Comenius**

## **Introduction**

1. UNESCO is committed to quality in all forms, levels and types of education and learning. Its mandate in education, science, culture, communication and the social sciences makes it uniquely suited to assist Members States and the international cooperation community in developing a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to define specific context-bound priorities and strategies to improve quality. UNESCO’s commitment to quality is therefore closely linked to its longstanding commitment to equity. Equity is increasingly elusive in today’s world characterized by economic globalization, structural poverty, rapid population growth, continued denial of democracy and human rights, persistent conflict and violence. While education may be part of the answer, it can also be part of the problem. Hence, the very concern for quality education.
2. The UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy- 2002-2007 (Draft 31C/4) calls for an improvement in the quality of education through the diversification of contents and methods, and the promotion of universally shared values. Its biennial Programme for 2002-2003 (Draft 31C/5) proposes a new approach to quality education, which is both dynamic and holistic but flexible enough to incorporate new components with fresh challenges. This position paper takes up the challenge set by UNESCO’s Executive Board in its 161st Session to re-define and focus its mandate to promote quality education. It acknowledges the renewed international commitment through conferences and commissions over the past ten years, especially the Dakar Framework for Action. It is a first step in re-focusing a larger dialogue within the Organization and among Member States so that limited resources may be effectively used to provide greater access to an education of quality for all. UNESCO will make a concerted attempt to promote a better quality of learning environments, teacher-learning processes, and learning outcomes in order to bring about a new generation of autonomous and critical learners better able to define and take up their own continuing education needs at each stage of their lives.
3. The position paper firstly analyses the context in which quality education is located. It reviews a large body of contributions provided from all parts of the Organization to the intersectoral Task Force on Quality Education set up by the Education Sector. It concludes with a framework of action to offer guidance on UNESCO’s existing programmes and how they may be better tailored to contribute to improved educational quality worldwide.

## **A Shared Collective Vision**

4. A large international body of literature addresses the concept of quality education. It is a relative term. Definitions and expectations differ according to purposes, contexts, stakeholders, and time. Clearly though, a system that serves a small minority with a “high standard” and the large minority poorly cannot be said to have achieved high quality for all. That is precisely UNESCO’s challenge. A quality education that refers solely to one level of formal schooling, to cognitive achievement, or to one global culture and context is unacceptable for the learning society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The mediocre quality of education in numerous countries is often due to the dominance of ill-trained or untrained teachers and facilitators working in poorly equipped conditions, the lack of relevant and appropriate textbooks, guides and manuals and educational supplies, the absence of built-in mechanisms for continuous assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes, and the lack of effective educational administration and management capacities. These conditions lead inevitably to high proportions of dropout, failure, underachievement and grade repetition.

5. Quality education cannot be limited to increasing the material inputs for school systems or enhancing school effectiveness, important though they are. Quality education must be geared to enhancing each individual’s potential and the full development of a learner’s personality. Above all, quality educational provision contributes to autonomous and critical learning so that all individuals regardless of age can select and take advantage of the continuing education opportunity needed to make transitions from one stage of life to another. Lifelong learning can only be meaningful in a context of individual ability and opportunity to make informed choices rather than simply submit to economic and political forces. Social cohesion and respect for human dignity, solidarity, justice and peace are painstakingly built with critically informed independent citizens. Again, UNESCO’s approach to quality must go beyond the rhetoric to this difficult reality.

6. Any successful quality education requires genuine broad-based partnership of major education, and education-related stakeholders, namely the state, regional and local authorities, civil society organizations, associations and groupings, the private sector and above all, parents, teachers and the individual learners themselves.

7. Education for sustainable development must be seen as an umbrella concept for quality education. This is possible only, if it can bring substantial components of education to the standards of pertinence and relevance of the real world. Quality education addressing human rights, democracy, tolerance and other values, prevention, population, environment, health, the use of traditional languages and other aspects of cultural diversity and systems for measuring and monitoring learning outcomes are all necessary and can play a fundamental role in inducing humankind to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There are important educational quality tensions to be overcome: those between the global and the regional, between and within nations, between the universal and the individual, between the tradition and the modern, between the need for competition and the need for equality of opportunity, between knowledge expansion and its capacity to be assimilated, and between the spiritual and the material.

## **Quality Education for Social Development: A Public Responsibility**

8. The dimensions of 'quality' in education need to be redefined in such a broad context of national development goals and in the search for the most effective strategies to make that development sustainable. Quality education should not be only for a few but for all. The urgency to address the needs of learners who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion through responsive educational opportunities was pointed out in the Dakar World Education Forum in April 2000. There are a growing number of persons who are excluded from meaningful participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life of their communities. When masses of individuals or groups become marginalized, society itself becomes polarized. Such a society is neither efficient nor safe. All learners should be given the right to receive the kind of quality education that does not discriminate on grounds of race, class, disability, ethnicity, religion, language, gender or capability.

9. Quality education is particularly important in situations of emergency and crisis, enabling children find protection to regain hope, dignity, peace, and the will to live and thus the ability to have some effect on the situations of conflict and disaster in which they are the too frequent first victims. Education in emergencies requires a high level of relevance and effectiveness. Crises can paradoxically provide the opportunity to upgrade education programmes providing positive changes for long-term benefits such as upgrading local capacity building, programmes management, teacher training, setting new guidelines, principles, standards, and creating new educational materials. In post-conflict and reconstruction phases, there are great opportunities for educational transformation in the areas of curriculum, infrastructure, social-educational values (education for peace, citizenship, democracy, tolerance, disarmament, environment awareness, health education, etc.) social participation and educational governance.

## **Quality Education – An Interdisciplinary Imperative at All Levels**

10. Quality education begins in infancy and extends throughout life. It should start at early ages as first steps towards a lifetime of peaceful, non-violent activities, of respect for oneself and others, and of appreciation of diversity. During early childhood, children begin to mature and put their cognitive and affective framework into place. Early and basic primary education should therefore embrace human living values, positive attitudes and basic life skills at an age where children learn most easily. Considerable research evidence indicates that key values, basic attitudes and problem-solving skills begin to develop before school age.

11. Experiences from quality basic education need to be immediately integrated at secondary education level. The links between academic and vocational subjects and their interdependence in the overall education of adolescent learners should be further maintained. Gender-sensitive, socially and culturally appropriate, hands-on approaches to science and technology education are more attractive to youth, especially in situations that contribute to sustainable personal and social development. UNESCO sees quality in education that develops the whole individual through the social sciences, physical sciences and technical disciplines, art education as well as physical education and sports. The wider community of artistic and cultural institutions such as theatres, opera houses and concert halls, cinemas, literary and poetry centers, traditional arts, museums, cultural centers and libraries should be open to all categories of learners in their neighborhood, district or city.

12. According to Article 11 of the World Declaration on Higher Education, quality is a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions, and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, faculties, equipment, services the community and the academic environment.

13. Quality lifelong learning involves responsiveness to diverse and changing needs by national and international public oversight. Quality literacy programmes in both formal and non-formal settings must either start in perceived needs of learners. There will always be a healthy ongoing tension between the responsiveness of the educational setting to learner aspirations and possible broader social goals. An ongoing quality issue remains society's definition of equity with respect to language. Some countries consider that competency in the national language by all children and adults are the major public responsibility in terms of equality of opportunity. Others consider that equity is best served through education in more than one language. It is found that young people and adults alike learn most readily in their first languages or mother tongues.

### **Towards Quality Education -Meeting the Goals of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

14. Quality education as presented in the earlier sections of this position paper treats quality from the standpoints of the learners, the teachers, their learning environments, the learning structures, methods and contents, the teaching-learning processes and the learning outcomes. It can be argued that quality can be defined by the learning environment, the family environment (parental education, nutrition, health care, reasonably high expectations, and caring, stimulating), the school environment (health intervention, school climate for values to be 'caught'), a safe, healthy social environment (including mass media) and quality standards set in reflection of cultural diversity and individual differences. Altogether, good quality teaching and learning processes require an instruction which is appropriate to each child's learning needs, abilities, and learning styles (active, co-operative, democratic, gender-sensitive learning). Structured content and good quality materials and resources are to be provided. Teacher capacity, morale, commitment, status, and income - and their recognition of child rights is to be enhanced. For example, materials developed within the framework of the Associated Schools Project (ASP) may be useful in a large number of schools. Quality education also implies the promotion of quality education outcomes, i.e. defines and helps what needs to be (e.g., literacy, numeracy, life skills, child rights) and teaches the learners how to learn.

15. Education programmes that are child-friendly, child-centered and promotes active learning show positive results. A child-friendly school recognizes the important role of teachers, is sensitive to the diverse abilities of children and the importance of a healthy, hygienic, safe and gender sensitive learning environment. The curriculum should be meaningful to the learners so that it fits their social, cultural and environmental context. This requires that primary school teachers, in particular, are an active part of curriculum development and that the curriculum is sufficiently flexible to permit adaptation at the local level.

16. It is important to note that healthy children with positive early learning experiences and supportive, involved parents are most likely to succeed in school. The Focusing Resources for Effective School Health (FRESH) initiative is a case in point. Further, although many constraints exist, schools can play a role in helping parents to enhance the 'home curriculum' and improve the quality of parental involvement in their children's education.

## **Quality and Relevance – Inseparable but Flexible Entities**

17. It seems obvious to say that the content of education is as important as its availability. Yet the notion of “quality as well as quantity” is just making its way into policy level circles, thanks in part to the major efforts of the last decade. Much has been done to define the broad parameters of this new direction. For example it has been suggested that education be oriented to focus on these kinds of outcomes:

- Ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing.
- Ability to think about systems (both natural and social systems).
- Ability to think in time –to forecast, to think ahead, and to plan.
- Ability to think critically about value issues.
- Ability to comprehend quantity, quality and value.
- Capacity to move from awareness to knowledge and to action.
- Ability to work cooperatively with other people.
- Capacity to use various process – knowing, inquiring, acting, judging, imagining, connecting, valuing, questioning, and choosing.
- Capacity to develop an aesthetic response to the environment.

18. According to the principle of curriculum differentiation, both teachers and students should have a sense of comfort and belonging within any learning milieu. This includes respect for others and diversity (including cultural, gender, linguistic, sexual orientation and ability differences); helping and working cooperatively with others; having high expectations for students; and maintaining a positive climate (e.g., sharing of positive feedback). The classroom environment and its arrangement (physical and participant make-up) can contribute to having a sense of community. Classroom arrangements should provide for inclusiveness (i.e., including all students within the classroom arrangement – not isolating individuals or a group of students), for comfort (e.g., seating, noise level, physical space), and for a sense of order (e.g., material storage, student work folders).

19. Curriculum structure, methods and contents should be gender-sensitive and inclusive of children with diverse abilities and backgrounds, and responsive to emerging issues such as HIV/AIDS and conflict resolution. Likewise, individual learning opportunities depend directly on the environment and programmes that schools, other learning institutions and communities can provide. Content is what the learner is expected to know, understand or be able to do. It includes facts, concepts, and skills that students will acquire within their learning environment. When we look at learning we must look at it in the context of being meaning-centered, social, language-based, and human. A similar view is expressed for child-friendly environments in which learning institutions have to recognize, plan and manage holistic learning opportunities for all learners and help to enhance positive character development in them.

## **Quality Teaching-Learning Processes: Learner-Centered Pedagogy**

20. Making learning the focus of curricular recommendations sets up new challenges for teaching-learning methods and approaches in both formal and nonformal education. Other changes as well may refer to the way in which each content area should be approached. The progress achieved in several subject areas for formalized instruction and formalized settings can be improved to adapt to teaching-learning processes in nonformal education programmes. Many countries have seen progress in the implementation of interactive approaches for language teaching, and in bilingual or multilingual teaching. The content of subjects such as civics education, history, geography, biology, etc. must include pertinent issues and sometimes taboos to help learners challenging the new requests of the society. In mathematics, formalist proposals are giving way to contents linked to probability, statistics and to applications of mathematics for forming interpretative models. In social sciences, proposals aimed at the teaching of processes have gained ground at the expense of simple transmission of ideas. In physical education, methods used in the army are being increasingly abandoned in favor of more wide-ranging training (sport for all, health, etc.). In artistic education greater stress is being placed on personal production and creativity given the realization that artistic and creative skills will in the future play a growing role in the individual, social and personal life.

21. Strategies for improving the quality of instruction should provide learners with choices on how they receive information (input modes); on how they practice what they learn (the activities, the process), and on how they demonstrate what they have learned (output modes). In curriculum differentiation there are many instructional strategies that help teachers vary their input and output modes and methods of practice based on individual learner needs. For example, in field of vocational education and training, it is proposed that such a pedagogy should be equally oriented towards school directors and support personnel to focus on learning methodologies and activities that encourage discovery, critical and independent reflection, and auto-learning process.

22. Better use of the new information communication technologies (ICTs) can boost the quality of teaching and learning when conceived and geared towards policies and practices of an education of quality for all. Thoughtful programmes may, however, be more effective in specific in-service teacher training such as simulated practice-teaching opportunities, and professional upgrading opportunities. Use of communications technologies inevitably shifts interpersonal relations among learners, teachers, parents and stakeholders. These shifts will improve quality only if they can expand and promote mutual understanding based on the respect of diversity.

## **Effective Educational Management, Leadership and Partnership**

23. While public responsibility remains for equity and quality, the participation of major stakeholders is critical. Promoting policy dialogue between all actors and stakeholders in education (governmental, non-governmental – in particular teachers' associations, civil society, private sector and intergovernmental organizations) is a major prerequisite for quality education. Active and participative parent-teacher associations (PTAs) at local community level are also potential sources for quality improvement in education. Effective educational management, improved supervision, guidance and counseling, built-in system of monitoring and evaluation of the process of policy implementation and strengthened capacities for local governance are common determinants of good quality education. The interchangeability among these

components of quality education bring also some fundamental changes, for example, the inspectorate role must be changed from “policing” to “supporting” and educational management should be made effective and participatory.

24. Effective educational management and leadership are often determined by the milieu and climate for partnership and participatory decision-making. The perspectives and prospects of local educational governance are more apparent in nonformal educational programmes, which are often run by NGO’s and, which are community-based. Likewise, many issues are raised concerning the extent to which effective educational management may ensure standards, equity and transparency. It is evident that communities are not homogenous and differ in financial resources and capacity. The extent of the responsibility devolved to the communities depends largely on the capacity of the communities to undertake such responsibilities effectively. In several countries, reforms for implementing development programmes were geared towards decentralization procedures and the empowerment of local communities. One common criterion for successful decentralization in these countries was namely the existence of organizational and managerial capacities of quality at regional, provincial and local community levels to implement policies, plans, programs and projects at these various levels. For the most part, however, equity in the form of the real redistribution of a society’s wealth is only effective at national level. Hence, the need for thought centralization and decentralization processes to ensure sustainable quality education as well.

## **Measurement and Monitoring of Learning Outcomes**

**(I)mprove all aspects of the quality of education, and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.**

### ***EFA Goal No. 6–Dakar Framework of Action***

25. There has been a number of learning achievement surveys during the past decade. Some continue to provide comparability of performance often critically viewed as “*international league tables*” such as those of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (I.E.A). Others, the most recent ones are mostly carried out in the developing countries to strengthen national and regional systems for measuring and monitoring learning outcomes. They are, for example, the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of Educational Quality (Laboratorio), the Programme for the Analysis of Educational Systems of the CONFEMEN Countries (PASEC), and the Southern Africa Consortium for Measuring Education Quality (SACMEQ).

26. The development and strengthening national capacities to measure and monitor learning achievements have been the cornerstone of the UNESCO-UNICEF Inter-Agency Monitoring Learning Achievement Project (MLA) in some 60-member states. It helps develop a sustainable **culture of monitoring and evaluation of education** in using “critical mass approach” to capacity-building. The project focuses on learning achievement and factors influencing the quality of outcomes that are due to personal, home, community, school and classroom learning

environments and processes. A number of lessons have been learned for quality improvement in education.

- Quality of education for all and minimum mastery learning level are attainable goals provided that the problems of educational access are first and foremost adequately addressed.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on sustaining a minimum level of mastery in all learning areas, at all grades and for all forms and types of education, as a preliminary step towards attaining the desired level of mastery learning.
- More attention should be given to curriculum planning and the provision of adequate and relevant materials for improving the teaching and learning processes.
- Teacher education, teacher training and teacher's working conditions require special considerations to attain an education of quality for all, the same applies for educators and facilitators of nonformal programmes.
- Systematic and continuous learning assessment schemes are needed in all educational systems in order to understand the dynamics of the teaching and learning contexts. This may empower major stakeholders to develop relevant strategies so as to guarantee that a learner's potential and attributes can be valued and optimized.
- Redressing gender, urban-rural, private-public and other within-country disparities in learning achievement so as to boost education growth in both quantitative and qualitative terms should be the cornerstone of national, regional and international educational policy-making, planning and implementation.
- Institutional (formal and nonformal) effectiveness can be improved through developing 'soft resources' such as discipline, self-esteem, working in a reinforcing collective milieu, partnerships and a commitment to excellence and democratic managerial leadership.
- The importance of the home environment on pupils learning achievement must not be neglected as parental education and home learning support are vital to learners. Moral values, code of conduct and other skills of young learners are often conditioned by their parental situation, behaviors and attitudes.
- Parents play an active role in promoting quality education, the more the family is associated with the demands and functions of educational institutions, the more profitable it will be for the direct clientele, namely, teachers and learners.
- Curriculum and its relevance as well as the teaching-learning processes need to be learner-centered. Here again, more efforts are needed in order to integrate and facilitate the teaching and learning of basic skills, values and behaviors, self-learning and to strengthen learners' capacities to visualize, problem-solve, communicate and think critically and creatively.

## Framework for Action

Quality is at the heart of education for UNESCO and its partners. A quality education is one that satisfies basic as well as lifelong learning needs. It enriches the lives of learners. The Dakar Framework for Action sets the basis towards UNESCO's approach to quality education. Regardless of gender, wealth, location, language or ethnic origin, quality education for all requires: (1) healthy, well-nourished and motivated students; (2) well-trained teachers and active learning techniques; (3) adequate facilities and learning materials; (4) a relevant curriculum that can be taught and learned in a local language and builds upon the knowledge and experience of the teachers and learners; (5) an environment that not only encourages learning but is welcoming, gender-sensitive, healthy and safe; (6) a clear definition and accurate assessment of learning outcomes, including knowledge, skills, attitudes and values; (7) participatory governance and management; and (8) respect for and engagement with local communities and cultures.

- Policies and strategies for quality improvement necessitate integrated and well-balanced perspectives for all levels, types and forms of education. There is also an urgent need to adopt effective policies and strategies to identify and include the socially, culturally and economically excluded. This requires participatory analysis of exclusion at household, community and school levels, and the development of diverse, flexible, and innovative approaches to learning and an environment that fosters mutual respect and trust.
- Measurable and monitoring indicators of quality education should not only focus on learning inputs but also on learning environments at home, and in the community, on learning processes, and learning outcomes (short-term and long-term). For example, in the area of life skills, multiple quality indicators are needed to account for health, prevention, nutrition, civics and environmental awareness as well as social and communicative skills of learners. Such quality indicators are very important for both formal and nonformal education programmes.
- Strengthening of democratic structures and institutions, participatory governance and the empowerment of civil society organizations, local educational managers, planners and administrators are indispensable for broad-base commitment towards quality education. Quality education requires good leadership and appropriate human resource development policies and implementation strategies.
- Think-tank mechanisms and networks for quality education are to be set-up to assist Member States in promoting a trans-disciplinary approach within the curricula and educational processes through guidelines, methodologies and other special instruments.
- A global dialogue on quality education needs to be cultivated through synergies and strategic alliances. Sharing experiences, outcomes and knowledge of innovative and successful programmes and research and development initiatives on quality education should be strengthened.

A policy and strategy paper on quality education will be necessary to ensure the follow-up of the works of the Task Force on Quality Education. All UNESCO partners of education - nationally, regionally and internationally – will be called upon to further strengthen this collective perspective.