

Directions for Education Sector Reform



The education system is the main enabler providing knowledgeable human capital for all the sectors. A modern, effective and efficient educational system is vital to the society which fosters economic competitiveness, social development, and citizens' well-being while also enhancing the country's growth and employment prospects.

Therefore, the development of the human capital, skills and qualified labor force – through education and long life training – are the foundation of well positioned knowledge-based economy.

The workforce has to be highly skilled to fit the labor market requirements and be efficient and innovative in work. Graduates should be able to successfully compete in a globalized knowledge economy.

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Developed countries' ambitions necessitated the transformation of school culture through improving quality, teaching critical thinking, problem solving, and linking skills to labor market requirements (bridging any gap in that regard) characterized by technical and scientific development.

Education will determine the competitiveness of a country and its integration into the global knowledge economy. The education reform philosophy aims to ensure that every person to be educated should be able to develop the following characteristics:

- Co-operation: develop harmonious relationships with social environment and capacity to work with others.
- Creativity: create new ideas and translate them into practical applications and be knowledgeable about information and communications technology.
- Open-mindedness: develop capability that underpin flexible and analytical thinking, and be receptive and sensitive to different cultures.
- Industriousness and diligence: produce efforts and reliable results, and be able to move across subject disciplines to develop new expertise.

Many developed countries are facing challenges and initiating policies to tackle the barriers and achieve high quality improvement in their educational systems, considered as the fuel for innovation, scientific and engineering advancement. The most ambitious policies aim to transform the educational system (k-12) and equip future graduates with necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies to successfully compete in a globalized economy.

For example, the Australian education system compares well in an international context on certain indicators, such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores. The government's commitment, as part of its comprehensive agenda "Education Revolution", to provide a universal access to early childhood education for all four year-olds by 2013 and to increase the supply of qualified early school educators goes in the right direction.

For Jordan, human resources — well-educated and highly skilled population — are the primary asset needed to achieve economic growth and wealth. Indeed, the different education reforms' ambition is to prepare Jordanians to successfully compete in a globalized knowledge economy. The different programs aimed to transform the school culture through improving quality, teaching critical thinking and problem solving, and linking skills to labor market requirements characterized by technical and scientific development.

In Korea, The education reform philosophy, since 1992, aims to ensure access to education to all without constraints of time and space. Since then, Korea is improving the quality of its education system from the childhood to the lifelong learning through the tertiary education. The education's quality improvement enabled Korea to position itself as the 11th largest economy in the world.

Education is a key domain of the strategy for an information society in Switzerland and it is in a continuation reform set in motion. According to Academies of Arts and Sciences' white paper (published on 31st August 2009), the future requirements of the Swiss educational system are gaining higher degrees and developing more competencies.

Education has been a top priority for the UK Government over the last decadeⁱ. Investment per pupil has been doubledⁱⁱ in real terms and coupled this with far-reaching reform. The Children's Planⁱⁱⁱ, published in December 2007, is a vision for change for the next decade in all aspects of life to ensure that all children enjoy a happy, healthy, safe childhood and develop into skilled, qualified and experienced adults to be able to achieve their full potential. The educational reform, part of the plan, set out the agenda for achieving: excellence and equity (rising standards for all, while continuing to narrow the gaps for individual pupils), and leadership and collaboration (foster greater collaboration and create high quality environments for teaching and learning).

The key reform policy must foster the coordination between all educational sectors policies (Early Childhood, Education, Technical Vocational Education and Training, Higher Education). Any lack of cooperation may lead to the creation of four separate entities instead of a coherent national strategy and system, and thus negatively impact their efforts to address the mismatch between the labor market needs and the educational system outputs.

Change management is another critical issue for the stakeholder's adherence and reform success. It should be sufficiently addressed to overcome resistance to new methodologies and processes. In addition, any reform should not be only conducted in a top-down manner but must take into account teachers and professional staff requirements and opinions offering them the opportunity to formulate their own assessment of the situation and suggest policies and initiatives to improve the system's outcomes. Otherwise, the reform will increase educational staff's frustration and their resistance to change.

A successful reform for the education sector should give higher focus and priority to the following areas:

Capacity Building

Ensure access to education to all without constraints of time and space. Therefore, improving the quality of educational system from the childhood to the lifelong learning passing by the tertiary education should be a national requirement which will enable to position the country among the most developed knowledge economies in the world.

- Establish a supra-ministry responsible for the national human resource development (NHRD) policy coordinating all areas of education (early childhood, elementary and secondary, vocational and technical, higher education and lifelong learning).
- Enhance the quality of teacher education and the support of professional training (the quality of education cannot exceed the quality of teachers): A well trained, motivated and motivating teaching staff constitutes an essential component of the educational system. Teacher candidates should be hired through an exam which covers the topics of pedagogy, content area and essay writing. Teacher should be graduated with effective pedagogy skills and an understanding of the learning complexity and techniques. Ensure minimum time training for new graduate teachers, and attract more people with science, technology and engineering backgrounds into teaching. An appropriate training of teachers at all levels must be considered as a strategic element of the educational policy.

- Introduce greater personalized teaching and quality improvement for children with special educational needs. Consider raising the compulsory school age for those pupils who left schools without having achieved a certain minimum standard of core skills by the end of their compulsory school attendance.
- Encourage collaboration between parents (are treated as partners) and teachers for children informal education; and take into consideration educational, family, social and economic policies interconnection.
- Promote transparency, monitoring and evaluation activities including qualitative assessment of policies and strategies, as well as facilitate educational research and policies analysis.

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

A real challenge is to tackle the problem of the under-representation of children from disadvantaged groups, ensuring that all children have equal opportunity in order to sustain social cohesion.

- Provide universal access to early childhood education for four/five year-olds and focus initially on disadvantaged families and rural areas.
- Encourage private sector to launch pre-school facilities and streamline accreditation system, ensuring its rigorous and transparent implementation.

Curricula, Educational Content and Pedagogy

Enhance the educational system's effectiveness and efficiency by addressing the curricula structure (balance between different subjects according to the real needs) and content (more math & science), and integration of ICT (for students, parents and teachers).

Develop the teaching approach and assessment, abilities, high-standard skills, attitudes, and values associated with a knowledge-based economy. Ensure high participation in entrepreneurship activities during compulsory education years.

- Adopt student-centered learning approaches (Shift from traditional teaching model 'chalk and talk', rote learning and memorization) strengthening the critical thinking and problem-solving methods, and enhancing learning assessment tools.
- Give priority to areas of literacy, numeracy, science, mathematics, ICT, analytical thinking skills and capacity of ideas creation and communication.
- Introduce standardized learning assessment tools: Assess student progress in a rigorous and comprehensive manner, reflecting the curriculum, and draw on a combination of the professional judgment of teachers and testing.
- Increase the use of ICT in the classroom and encourage teachers to use digital educational content (especially interactive) in classrooms.

School Management and Governance

Make educational governing bodies more effective to prevent schools from failing and challenge those who are not achieving predefined goals and performance objectives, through strengthened accountability and governance for a better leadership.

- Move towards a less centralized management governance structure: School principals should be given autonomy (against accountability) in recruiting and rewarding in order to attract and retain the best experienced teachers. Enhance the schools' efficiency by reducing the administration system's bureaucracy.
- Strengthen accountability and transparency: publish reporting on pupils' progress and schools' performance, and provide reliable and rich data on the performance of the educational system, is important for all stakeholders (schools, students, parents, researchers...) and especially for policymakers.
- Teacher's performance and efficiency is quantified for the purpose of their promotion and wage increases. Teacher career progression and remuneration systems should create appropriate incentives so that teachers move to schools, where high-quality teaching is most needed.

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Enhance the VET capacity and quality to address skilled workforce shortages is of great importance for the sustainability of economic growth. Reform initiatives should increase the skills of the workforce and eliminate the existing skill gaps.

- Enhance upper secondary educational attainment by improving the quality and standing of Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs. Deliver generic skills, in addition to solid specialist skills. Update training packages regularly to meet changing skill needs in the labor market.
- Establish more coherent links between schools, VET and higher education. Develop a more systematic approach to disseminating information on VET and ensure the provision of effective career advice and counseling.
- Reduce the skilled workforce shortage: offer incentive payments for apprenticeships in short supply and extending the income contingent loan scheme available in the higher education sector to Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses offered through VET.
- Organize an annual employment forum for VET graduates and open days for new students.

Higher Education and Lifelong Education

Move towards a less rigid policy framework for higher education would enhance flexibility and diversity, making the educational system more responsive to changing labor market needs and globalization challenges.

- Give the university more autonomy and make it more accountable, improve the quality of teaching, set up a social and economic-centered curriculum, and enhance faculty performance through incentives based on evaluation rather than seniority.
- Create strong and close university-industry linkage (promoting knowledge sharing and transfer) in order to better meet industrial needs and enhance employment rate of graduates.
- Support Universities of applied sciences (promoting research and product development projects), and thus create a strongly practice-oriented subject basis, whose graduates will form the backbone of the economy.
- Make the higher education system more demand-oriented, financing students following disciplines that experience skill shortages. Fund specific measures to promote young scientists.
- Create, through lifelong learning, a flexible link between education and employment by increasing and enhancing the human capital and thus strengthening the country's capabilities towards the knowledge-based economy.

Conclusion

The high spending on education does not automatically lead to better outcomes. Of course, spending is important but high-quality teachers and curriculum are critical for increasing student performance, combined with better response to labor market needs, will enhance employment rate, and thus will elevate the country's overall competitiveness and help facing international competition.

ⁱ The international Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study 2007 (TIMSS) found that English pupils ranked in the top five amongst participating countries at age 14 for science; performance in mathematics at age 14 had significantly improved since 2003, to seventh place; and that England was the most consistently high-achieving European country overall at ages 10 and 14 and in both subjects.

ⁱⁱ Total funding has increased by £2,880 per pupil (97%) in real terms between 1997/98 and 2008/09.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures (<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan/>).