

Introduction

Providing access to education for all – in its various forms and through multiple channels – had been a global agenda for the past 15 years. Most countries in the Asia and Pacific region made remarkable gains in expanding access to education at all levels.¹ However, progress on improving the *quality* of the education, particularly in terms of student learning and related teaching and learning conditions, was less impressive.²

The issue of quality education is deeply rooted in history as folk lore, skills, knowledge and values passed on from one generation to another, albeit in different manifestations and emphases. More contemporary international debates about the quality of education can be traced back to the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand,³ but the 2000 Dakar Framework of Action had reignited attention on the quality dimension, with Goal 6 calling for action to *improve every aspect of the quality of education, and ensure their excellence so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills*.⁴

Emphasizing that quality stands at the heart of education, the 2005 Education for All Global Monitoring Report noted growing consensus and impetus building around the imperative to improve the quality of education since it determines how much and how well students learn.⁵ The report identified two principles to define quality in education: (i) learner's cognitive development and (ii) education's role in promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development. Other frameworks for understanding education quality in more recent literature provide further food for thought.⁶

The Global Education First Initiative (GEFI), launched by the United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Ban-Ki-moon in September 2012, further pushed the quality agenda to the forefront.⁷ Advocating the need to improve the quality of learning as one of its three priorities, GEFI identified eight barriers to quality education that have to be addressed: shortage of qualified teachers, lack of learning materials, weak foundation for early learning, challenging family environments, mismatch of skills and livelihoods, language barriers, hunger and poor nutrition, and ineffective systems to evaluate students' performance. These factors are in line with many of the findings from international organizations and researchers.⁸

The efforts to bring the quality imperative to the centre stage have clearly paid off, as demonstrated by the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – Education 2030 agenda: *ensure inclusive and equitable quality*

¹ UNESCO. 2015. *Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges*. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015. UNESCO, Paris; UNESCAP. 2015. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015*, UNESCAP, Bangkok.

² UNESCO and UNICEF, 2012. *The Asia-Pacific End of Decade Note on Education for All – Goal 6: Quality of Education*, p. 1.

³ UNESCO. 1994. *World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs*. 3rd ed.; Inter-Agency Commission for the World Conference on Education for All. 1990. *Meeting Basic Learning Needs: A Vision for the 1990s*. Background document. World Conference on Education for All. Jomtien, Thailand, 5-9 March 1990.

⁴ Tawil, S., Akkari, A. and Macedo, B. 2012. Beyond the conceptual maze. *UNESCO Research and Foresight Occasional Papers*. UNESCO, Paris; UNESCO. 2000. *The Dakar Framework for Action*. UNESCO, Paris.

⁵ UNESCO. 2004. *Education for All – The Quality Imperative*. UNESCO, Paris.

⁶ Tawil et al. 2012. Beyond the conceptual maze. *UNESCO Research and Foresight Occasional Papers*. UNESCO, Paris; UNESCO and UNICEF, 2012. *The Asia-Pacific End of Decade Note on Education for All – Goal 6: Quality of Education*.

⁷ Ban, K.M. 2012. Global Education First Initiative. United Nations, New York.

⁸ UNICEF. 2000. Defining quality in education. A paper presented by UNICEF at the meeting of the International Working Group on Education Florence, Italy; Ross, K.N. and Genevois, I.J. (eds.). 2006. *Cross-national Studies of the Quality of Education: Planning their Design and Managing their Impact*. International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris; UNICEF. 2007. *Quality of Education*. UNICEF, New York; Dumont, H., Istance, D. and Benavides, F. (eds). 2010. *The Nature of Learning: Using Research to Inspire Practice*. Centre for educational research and innovation, OECD, Paris; Mourshed M., Chijioke C. and Barber M. 2010. *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*. McKinsey & Co.; Rosefsky, A. and Darleen Opfer, V. 2012. *Teaching and Learning 21st Century Skills: Lessons from the Learning Sciences*. Asia Society and Rand Corporation.

*education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*⁹ This stand-alone goal for education is comprehensive, aspirational and ambitious, where education is not merely about literacy and numeracy, but is designed to help all learners reach their full potential so that they can contribute to a peaceful, just and sustainable world.

In Pursuit of Quality Education: The Past, Present and Future

Much of the confusion about quality can be attributed to a lack of clarity and common understanding about its meaning. The interpretation of quality is dependent on many factors, including expectations from different stakeholders grounded in their respective values, cultures and traditions. The perception of quality may also be specific to a given state, province, community, school, parent or individual student.¹⁰ The multiple, and sometimes conflicting, interests of states, communities and families exacerbate the difficulties in deriving a single definition or approach to understand and assess the quality factor.

The interest in measuring learning outcomes has been piqued by international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), as well as the exponential growth in the number of countries which are organizing their own national assessment programmes.¹¹ However, criticisms about these standardized tests highlight the narrow focus on academic or cognitive learning, thereby overlooking other equally critical parameters such as values, attitudes and emotional development.

An exception is the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) which tests knowledge and conceptual understanding as well as student dispositions and attitudes related to civics and citizenship. Another example is the Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF), an initiative by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution to build consensus on learning indicators and actions to improve the measurement of learning globally. The LMTF in its final phase includes work on early childhood learning outcomes and on measurement of Global Citizenship Education (GCED), with follow-up activity around the concept of 'Breadth of Learning'.¹² Closer to home, the Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP) is aiming to enhance student learning assessment systems in countries in the region through an agenda that includes research on assessment of transversal competencies, school-based assessment and the impact of assessment on policy and practice.¹³

While definitions and measurements are integral to any discussion about quality, the essence and elements of learning must also be understood to enable the development of comprehensive and effective interventions for quality learning in the 21st century and beyond. In fact, all considerations about the quality of learning should be viewed through the lens of the entire education system, including the curriculum, teaching and learning materials; teachers and their teaching practices; school environment and infrastructure; allocation and use of resources; school leadership and management; students, their families and communities; and the diverse socio-cultural contexts and conditions.

Several efforts undertaken by UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok) reflect this holistic perspective of education for the 21st century, e.g., studies on (i) the integration of transversal competencies in education policies and practices, (ii) Learning to Live Together, (iii) Happy

⁹ UN, 2015. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. United Nations, New York; Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.

¹⁰ Adams, D. 1993. Defining educational quality. Improving Educational Quality Project, Biennial Report. Institute for International Research.

¹¹ Benavot, A. and Köseleci, N. 2015. Seeking quality in education: The growth of national learning assessments, 1990-2013. Background paper for the 2015 Education for All Global Monitoring Report.

¹² Learning Metrics Task Force. 2013-2014. Toward Universal Learning. Report 1: What every child should learn; Report 2: Global framework for measuring learning; Report 3: Implementing assessment to improve learning. UNESCO-UIS and Center for Universal Education.

¹³ UNESCO NEQMAP, <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/quality-of-education/neqmap/>.

Schools, (iv) school-related gender-based violence,¹⁴ and current projects on (iv) Promoting Intercultural Dialogue and a Culture of Peace in South-East Asia through Shared Histories; (v) Preparing Teachers for Global Citizenship Education, and (vi) Enhancing Girls' and Women's Right to Quality Education through Gender Sensitive Policy Making, Teacher Development and Pedagogy.

No doubt, other studies and projects have been, or are being, conducted to enhance the quality of education. Research into the multi-faceted aspects of quality education is critical for increasing our understanding about the dynamics and interactions of context, culture and values that influence (i) what is being, and should be, taught, (ii) to whom, and by whom, the information, knowledge and values are being transmitted, (iii) how such information, knowledge and values are being transferred, (iv) how they are being assessed and evaluated, and (v) how the knowledge and values are used and transformed into actions on the ground. The findings and recommendations can contribute substantially to ongoing dialogues and efforts as we begin our journey to meet the SDG 4 targets.

UNESCO-APEID International Conference

The UNESCO-APEID International Conferences, organized since 1995 to provide a forum for policy dialogue, and information and knowledge sharing on development-oriented education innovations and exemplary practices in and beyond the Asia and Pacific region, is one of UNESCO Bangkok's flagship programmes. The 18th UNESCO-APEID International Conference, *In Pursuit of Quality Education: The Past, Present and Future*, will facilitate discussions on leading-edge thinking about the quality of education, and identify gaps where more research and efforts are needed to achieve inclusive and quality education by 2030.

The specific objectives of the Conference are to:

- Increase knowledge on how quality is understood in education;
- Showcase innovative approaches and practices that improve the quality of education;
- Enhance understanding of the assessment, monitoring and evaluation of the quality of education;
- Facilitate collaboration and networking to improve the quality of education.

Eminent speakers and paper presenters will share their rich experiences in linking theory and practice. Policy makers, academicians, researchers, school leaders and administrators, educators, parents, students and representatives from international organizations, local communities and the private sector attending the Conference will be able to interact and engage in stimulating discussions about policies, strategies, approaches, tools and resources for quality education. Participants are encouraged to discover how they can optimize their knowledge and contribute to efforts towards SDG 4 – Education 2030 agenda.

Sub-themes of the Conference

I. Getting the Big Picture: Concepts and Frameworks of Quality Education

- Defining the quality of education in the past, present and future
- Investigating factors and inputs that lead to quality education
- Reviewing the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders to ensure the quality of education
- Examining platforms and channels for effective dialogues about quality education

¹⁴ UNESCO Bangkok. 2014. Policy Brief on Skills for Holistic Human Development; UNESCO Bangkok. 2014. Learning to Live Together: Education Policies and Realities in the Asia-Pacific; UNESCO Bangkok. 2016. Happy Schools. A Framework for Learner Well-being in the Asia-Pacific; UNESCO Bangkok. 2014. School-related Gender-based Violence in the Asia-Pacific Region.

II. Putting into Practice: Innovations for Increasing the Quality of Education

- Promoting good practices that impact stakeholders of quality education (learners, teachers, school leaders, policy makers, families, communities, private sector, development agencies)
- Developing effective and appropriate curricula, contents, and teaching and learning materials
- Enhancing innovative learning processes, pedagogies, technologies and tools for quality education
- Optimizing supportive environment, infrastructures, facilities and resources for quality education

III. Keeping Track: Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation of Quality Education

- Establishing standards and competencies frameworks for quality education
- Identifying indicators, approaches and tools to measure and monitor the quality of education
- Exploring alternative models for the assessment and evaluation of quality education
- Building the capacity to assess, monitor and evaluate the quality of education

IV. Sustaining the Commitments: Effective Policies and Strategies for Quality Education

- Formulating evidence-based policies and strategies for the effective governance and management of quality education
- Empowering leadership to foster and improve the quality of education
- Determining gaps and weaknesses in the provision of quality education for further research
- Strengthening partnerships, collaboration and networks to enhance the quality of education

Call for Papers

We welcome presentations of papers (in English) on the four sub-themes. Submit an abstract, no longer than 200 words, at www.apeidconf.org. Preference will be given to papers on innovative ideas, research, best practices or lessons learned, and to materials not previously published and information supported by current or recent research.

The closing date for submission of abstracts is **15 July 2016**. All abstracts will be reviewed and authors of selected papers will be notified by mid-August 2016. Accepted paper abstracts will appear in the Conference documentation and website, provided the participants concerned pay their Conference registration fee in time and actually present the paper.

After notification of acceptance, presenters must submit their full papers as MsWord documents at www.apeidconf.org, following the guidelines below:

- A4 size paper
- Single-line space, preferably Times New Roman 12 font
- Abstract of maximum 200 words on the first page (after the Title)
- Total paper length to contain a maximum of 6,000 words (approximately 12 full pages)
- Short bio-data of author(s) (maximum of 200 words for each author) at the end of the paper

Paper presenters encountering any difficulties should contact the Conference Secretariat by sending a message to apeidconf@unesco.org.

Conference Fees

International participants	US\$ 350
Early bird*	US\$ 250
Full-time student	US\$ 150
Resident of Thailand	US\$ 150
Group registration**	US\$ 250 each

* Payment for Early bird registration must be received by UNESCO Bangkok by **15 September 2016**.

** For 5 or more individuals from the same organization/institution.

The Conference fees will cover only the following items:

- Attendance at all sessions
- Conference materials
- Lunches and refreshment breaks
- Welcome reception

Send a bank draft payable to “UNESCO” at the following address:

UNESCO-APEID International Conference Secretariat
UNESCO Bangkok
920 Sukhumvit Road
Bangkok 10110, Thailand

Registration

Register online at www.apeidconf.org, or contact UNESCO Bangkok at apeidconf@unesco.org for further information.

Important dates

Submission of abstracts	15 July 2016
Notification of abstract acceptance	15 August 2016
Payment for early bird registration fees	15 September 2016
Payment of registration fees	21 October 2016

For more information, contact:

UNESCO-APEID International Conference Secretariat
UNESCO Bangkok
920 Sukhumvit Road, Prakanong
Bangkok 10110, Thailand

Tel: (66-2) 391 0577

Fax: (66-2) 391 0866

Email: apeidconf@unesco.org

Website: <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/apeid/apeid-international-conference/2016>

“The right to a quality education is, I believe, the perfect path to bridge the gap between different cultures and to reconcile various civilizations. Without such a right, the values of liberty, justice and equality will have no meaning.”

Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned