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Future Competences and the Future of Curriculum

A Global Reference for Curricula Transformation

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A world where
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relevant education and
lifelong learning



This is the second of a series of normative documents that are to guide the future of curriculum. Through Document 2, the IBE offers a global normative guide for competence-based curricula that can support the attainment of the Education 2030 agenda, and that can prepare learners (young and old) for Industry 4.0. It defines competence, it outlines markers of competence-based curricula, and it presents a framework of competences to serve as a global reference point for future curricula transformations. It articulates future competences and the future of curriculum, and proposes an institutional mechanism for keeping competences current.

Executive Summary

This is the second document of a series of normative documents that are to guide the future of curriculum. Document 1 presented a paradigm shift that reconceptualizes curriculum along eight dimensions. It spells out the repositioning of curriculum implied in some of the eight dimensions. Document 1 also underscored the reality that the global Education 2030 Agenda will mostly be implemented within Industry 4.0, and this implementation context can hardly be ignored.

Document 2 operationalizes the first of the eight dimensions presented in Document 1, which recognizes *curriculum as the first operational tool for ensuring the sustained development-relevance of education and learning systems*. It argues that accepting this dimension compels the repositioning of curriculum at the center of national and global development dialogue and agendas. It further notes that to support development, curricula must enable learners (young and old) to acquire competences for effective uptake of opportunities and for effective addressing of challenges across fast changing, and sometimes disruptive 21st-century development contexts. Industry 4.0 is fully acknowledged as a formidable accelerant of change and complexity in the 21st century, and as having significant implications for curricula.

Accepting the first dimension for reconceptualizing curriculum also demands the adoption of competence-based curricula as most appropriate for equipping learners (young and old) with competences for optimal contribution to development in the 21st century in general, and in Industry 4.0 in particular. The reorientation of future curricula toward competence-based approaches has already gained momentum. This is evident in the number of countries that have been, or are in the process of this reorientation. The IBE is inundated with country requests for technical support to reorient their curricula toward competence-based approaches. There has also been an exponential growth in articulations of frameworks for competence-based curricula and lists of future competences. A fair sample of these is reviewed in this Document.

While appreciative of these burgeoning efforts, Document 2 cautions of the potential confusion emerging from these initiatives. There are varying, and sometimes contradictory, understandings of competence, and of competence-based curricula. There is a fair amount of confusion between competence and its constituent parts. Different entities offer diverse lists of "competences" for inclusion in curricula, which actually turn out to be a mix of competences and their constituent elements. The lists are often presented as current but most often without mechanisms for keeping them current, despite the fact that they are motivated by the need to respond to rapidly changing 21st-century contexts. The lists of competences are often offered with sparse, if any, advice on how to implement them, and how to ensure their impact. Concepts remain unclear and undifferentiated, with the same labels used to denote different things and vice versa. There is therefore need for normative instruments that regularize dialogue and initiatives in the field, and that safeguard the integrity of technical assistance offered to countries. As a global Center of Excellence in Curriculum and related matters, this is the role of the IBE, and this is what this series of Documents seeks to do.

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The normative guide herein presented benefitted from a critical review of existing efforts, consultations with thought leaders in the field, consultations with heads of curriculum across UNESCO Member States, and the IBE's own expertise and experience. This Document is followed by Document 3, which focuses on the transforma-

tion of teaching, learning, and assessment to suit competence-based curricula; and Document 4, which speaks on the creation of enabling systemic environments for effective implementation of competence-based curricula.



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