New approaches to education

The way in which education is delivered has changed profoundly due to increased connectivity, the use of computers and web-based apps, new pedagogical approaches and an emphasis on lifelong learning. As a result, the reach of education is increasing. However, there are still important challenges to address such ensuring inclusive quality education and closing the gap for women, as outlined by the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. [1]

In the old model of institutional education, children learn, become students or apprentices for a limited period, and then head off into the working world. Today, rapid change to ways of working mean professionals need to develop new skillsets throughout their lives; few people have one career in one sector, rather moving between professions such as engineering, law, academia and business, and increasingly establishing their own practices as entrepreneurs or consultants.

Learning practices now include massive open online courses (MOOCs); informal sharing online via YouTube and other forums; 'flipped learning', where students are responsible for their own learning and come into class for specific guidance, and games. Community learning is also taking root through the comeback of home schooling and DIY movements such as the Maker movement and hackathons.

Rapid change in both educational needs and modes of delivery raise the question of policy: how to decide what to learn and what skills to prioritise, in a world where automation might displace many jobs?

Despite these changes, poor educational outcomes and inefficient education systems persist worldwide. Governments, businesses and communities need to invest in improving educational quality and accessibility in order to engender greater socioeconomic mobility and improve quality of life.

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Footnotes:

1. United Nations (2015)

Implications

- Governments that quickly take advantage of recent advancements in low-cost access to education could make significant inroads into issues of educational equality and quality. This could lead to a corresponding boost in socio-economic performance, giving a country's firms and industries a significant competitive advantage in global markets. [1]
- While higher education has been the subject of the bulk of low-cost delivery innovations, in future more alternative pathways into early education will be needed for children both in and outside the formal system. [2]
- As a result of the digital revolution and the emergence of new practice, the historical link between education and school-based learning may weaken in future, with new educational systems appearing in the form of home schooling, learning centres, workplace learning and distance learning. If education becomes more informal in this way, one effect may be to give greater agency to the individual to organise their own education.

Footnotes:

1. World Economic Forum (2014) - Page 91.

2. [World Economic Forum (2014) - Page 96.](#)

Current trajectory

• Today, there are over 30 million more children in school than there were at the beginning of the decade. Primary school enrolments have increased dramatically in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, as well as in South and West Asia. In Ethiopia there are three million more children in school than there were in 2000. [1]

• Worldwide, females aged 15-24 have lower literacy rates (87%) than males (92%). However, the gap has closed somewhat since 1990, when the corresponding figures were 79% and 88%. [2]

• Despite large improvements made in access to education, there is still a long way to go. About 121 million children and adolescents are estimated to be out of school. Globally, 1 in 5 adolescents is excluded from the classroom, compared to 1 in 11 primary school aged children. As children get older, the risk that they will never start school or will drop out increases. According to the UNESCO and UNICEF, there has been almost no progress in reducing this number since 2007. Children living in conflict, child labourers and those facing discrimination based on ethnicity, gender and disability are at the greatest risk of exclusion from education. [3]

Footnotes:

1. [UNESCO (2014)](#)
2. [World Economic Form (2014)](#)
3. [UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF (2015)](#)