Skills for Holistic Human Development

Key Points

- People today live in a rapidly changing and increasingly interconnected world. Change will only accelerate as we move into the future. Therefore, education and training systems need to equip learners not only with knowledge and skills\(^1\) that enable them to cope with the foreseeable social and economic changes, but also to adapt to and manage often unpredictable realities. This requires a transformation of education and training to nurture skills towards holistic human development. Such skills are acquired not only in formal systems but in a variety of contexts throughout life.

- In this brief, three broad skills categories are explored in view of holistic human development: (1) foundation skills, (2) specialized skills and (3) transversal skills\(^2\). At the basis, education and training systems should ensure that all individuals acquire basic foundation skills. It is upon this basis that education and training systems can help impart an appropriate mix of specialized and transversal skills in learners. To achieve this, much effort must be geared toward ensuring that holistic human development supported by all-round skills development, is effectively promoted and well valued by all stakeholders.

- Holistic human development requires that education and training systems ensure strong alignment between education goals, curricula, pedagogies and assessment. This means placing learning at the core of any education reform agenda so that any action to bring about changes in the education sector can contribute to improving the quality of learning and eventually supporting holistic human development.

- Teachers remain key to holistic human development. Teacher quality and effectiveness shape the way knowledge and skills are effectively acquired by learners. Given their critical role, policy-makers should consider all necessary arrangements to help ensure that teachers are well prepared, well supported, and well incentivized to employ teaching and assessment practices that support quality learning. This includes practices that recognise learners’ prior knowledge and skills, as well as their potential.

1. What sorts of skills are required for holistic human development?

The Asia-Pacific region is in no way exempt or sheltered from the rapid socio-economic changes of the 21\(^{st}\) century. For this reason, “building knowledge-based societies” has become the “motto” behind socio-economic policies of many governments within the region. To support the formation of productive, peaceful and sustainable societies, governments must rethink and reform their education and training systems to ensure that students acquire the knowledge and skills needed for the future, skills that will enable them to be more creative and innovative, to think critically, to communicate effectively, to solve problems.

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\(^1\) Skills is used as a generic term to encompass knowledge, competencies, values and attitudes.

\(^2\) For definitions of these three skill categories, see the Table.
independently, to develop resilience and to adapt to change. Just as our world has entered a period of rapid change, so too is the discussion around the type of skills needed for the future constantly evolving. Nonetheless, there is general agreement among the education community that youth and adults need to acquire a wider set of skills and values that can enable them to enjoy secure lives, participate actively and responsibly in their communities, embrace diversity, live and work together harmoniously, and contribute to peaceful and sustainable development in the years to come. In order for education systems to support the holistic development of all learners, policy-makers must pay attention to the importance of imparting three broad categories of skills through education and training (see Table):

### 2. Current trends and challenges

#### Foundation skills

Despite significant progress towards expansion of education systems, educational attainment in the Asia-Pacific is generally low across the region. In fact, as of 2012, there were more than 17 million out-of-school children of primary school age (UNESCO, 2014a). At the same time, the Asia-Pacific comprises top performers in

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**Table: Skills framework: categories of skills and definitions**

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<th>SKILLS</th>
<th>DEFINITIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1  Foundation skills</strong></td>
<td>Foundation skills include the basic academic knowledge and skills that learners acquire often as result of their participation in formal school education (primary and secondary schools) or sometimes through non-formal and informal learning opportunities. These skills, which include basic literacy and numeracy skills, provide the foundation upon which learners receive further education to deepen their capacity for fulfilling, meaningful lives and decent jobs.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2  Specialized skills</strong></td>
<td>Specialised skills include the specific “know-how” needed for a fulfilling and meaningful life and decent employment which learners acquire often as result of their participation in post-basic education, including through technical and vocational education and training (TVET) or extra-school activities. These skills may relate to a specific job, task, academic discipline (e.g. teacher, geographer, medical doctor or journalist) or area of particular knowledge and skills (e.g. hobby). Depending on their interest and further learning, individuals may possess one or several specialised skills.</td>
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| **3  Transversal skills** | Transversal skills are those typically considered as not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge but as skills that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings (IBE 2013). These skills are increasingly in high demand for learners to successfully adapt to changes and to lead meaningful and productive lives. Examples include:  
  - **Critical and innovative thinking**  
  - **Inter-personal skills** (e.g. presentation and communication skills, organizational skills, teamwork, etc.)  
  - **Intra-personal skills** (e.g. self-discipline, enthusiasm, perseverance, self-motivation, etc.)  
  - **Global citizenship** (e.g. tolerance, openness, respect for diversity, intercultural understanding, etc.)  
  - **Media and information literacy** such as the ability to locate and access information, as well as to analyse and evaluate media content (UNESCO 2014c). |

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3. This categorization is informed by the 2012 Education for All Global Monitoring Report on youth and skills which classified skills in three broad categories: foundational skills, technical and vocational skills and transferable skills. This conceptualization of skills is also informed by the Delors Report, which defined the four pillars of learning: learning to know (foundation skills), learning to do (specialized skills), learning to be and live together (transversal skills), as well as the outcome of the 2014 Asia-Pacific Regional Education Conference, and the Education Research Institutes Network (ERI-Net) study: Integrating transversal competencies in education policy and practice, UNESCO 2014.

4. Other terms are often used to cover similar skill sets, such as 21st century skills, soft skills, higher-order skills, non-academic skills, non-cognitive skills and generic skills.
international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). However, many countries in the region still lag behind. The situation is particularly alarming for socio-economically disadvantaged, marginalized and/or vulnerable groups, such as poor women, girls, people in remote or rural areas, those from ethnic and language minority groups, migrants and people with disabilities, suggesting that across the board, greater attention should be focused on ensuring that all children and youth obtain functional literacy and other foundation skills (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2012).

**Specialized skills**

Achieving continued economic growth and social development in the region will involve overcoming various challenges such as those related to labour markets, income inequalities, changing demography, youth unemployment and climate change, all of which will influence the skills needed and the ways in which such skills are imparted. Of particular significance is youth unemployment in the region, including among university graduates, which in 2012 stood at 10.6% and which is expected to rise in the coming decades (UN ESCAP, 2013). At the same time, a survey of 8,600 hiring managers in select countries of the Asia-Pacific revealed that a shortage of applicants (32%) closely followed by a lack of occupation-specific, technical competences (31%) and lack of workplace competences or “soft skills” (28%) were the most cited challenges in filling jobs (Manpower Group, 2013). As countries become knowledge-based economies, education and training systems will need to pay more attention to improving the quality and relevance of education and learning, particularly in TVET and higher education.

**Transversal skills**

While globalization and rapidly changing socio-economic landscapes have opened up new opportunities for development in the region, there are political, social, demographic and technological pressures that create new tensions and which call for appropriate responses from education and training systems. In recognition of this, governments have increasingly been promoting the socio-emotional and behavioural domains of learning through the integration of so-called “transversal” or 21st century skills in education and training policies and practices. Such crosscutting skills include creativity, problem solving, critical thinking and communication, among others. Moreover, education and training is expected to foster values and attitudes among students such as empathy, respect for diversity and intercultural understanding and ultimately contribute to building peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies (UNESCO, 2014b, UNESCO, 2014c).

3. **What policy actions can help support holistic human development?**

There are a number of policy actions that are needed to support holistic human development through education and training. The following three actions are considered, among others, relevant and important to most if not all countries of the Asia-Pacific region, and can be implemented with necessary adaptation.

**Scaling up advocacy and awareness raising**

Policy-makers in the Asia-Pacific region are increasingly recognizing that societies and workplaces are rapidly changing and that people nowadays require more than cognitive and job-specific skills. They should, in addition, be adaptable, collaborative, innovative, enterprising, and so on. Holistic human development is critical not just in the strengthening of employability and national economies, but also in the fostering of just, peaceful and sustainable societies. Unfortunately, a general bias toward academic success, often measuring solely by examinations, over other aspects of learning still tends to linger among parents, employers and the broader community. A lack of appreciation for the broader significance of different types of skills can severely weaken the implementation of policies aimed at holistic human development, encompassing foundation skills, specialized skills and transversal skills that contribute to meaningful, inclusive and peaceful livelihoods in increasingly globalized and multicultural societies. Therefore, governments must strengthen advocacy and awareness raising activities to improve understanding of holistic human development and ensure support from the general public.
Stronger alignment between policies, curricula, pedagogies and assessment

Most education policy and curriculum frameworks in the region consider holistic human development an important education goal. The challenge, then, is to ensure that efforts go further than the mere preaching of their significance; holistic human development must be understood by teachers and effectively practiced by learners. In some countries of the region, curricula are overloaded and rigid regulations on curriculum implementation often prevent teachers from integrating pedagogies that are flexible and tailored to the needs of learners. Even when curricula emphasize the importance of transversal skills, assessment practices may focus on academic achievement instead of ensuring that learners expand their skills (UNESCO, 2014c). These realities need to be addressed through policies that place learning at the very centre of reform efforts. At the same time, effort must be made to help ensure that pedagogy and assessment reflect curriculum objectives which in turn reflect broader policy objectives. Given that in most countries education provision is a shared responsibility, stronger cooperation and coordination is required both horizontally (between different institutions within and across ministries) and vertically (among different levels of education management, from the central ministry down to school level). Policies that are developed through an integrative effort between key stakeholders and are updated and adjusted to meet socio-economic realities, are likely to be better understood and implemented in practice. Stakeholder consultations at all levels will also help identify ways in which policies are effectively deployed so as to support the practical application of holistic skills development.

Teachers as change agents

It is often emphatically argued that no education system is better than its teachers. Indeed the quality of teaching is a strong determinant of quality learning. Despite efforts to shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred pedagogy, traditional teaching practices – including a focus on rote learning – are still prevalent in many classrooms of the Asia-Pacific region. For learners to develop a broad range of skills, the role of teachers needs to shift from that of “knowledge transmitters” to “learning facilitators” while students develop from passive to active learners. As important role models, teachers are required to be equipped not only with solid pedagogical and subject-specific knowledge but also with requisite transversal skills such as empathy, communication, leadership and teamwork. For these skills to be strengthened, policy-makers should improve and transform teacher preparation and recruitment. Teachers who themselves were trained by “chalk and talk” teaching will find it challenging to implement alternative pedagogies in their classrooms. They will therefore need to be retrained, supported and rewarded for being able to use teaching and assessment practices that are more innovative, flexible, recognize learners’ needs and dispositions, and value the full potential of each and every learner.

References:


Human rights education: the case of education systems

Human rights education is the process of equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for an understanding of human rights. It is integral to the development of a human rights culture and is a key tool for promoting respect for human rights. In the Asia-Pacific region, human rights education is predominantly focused on the promotion of non-discrimination and the elimination of violence against women and children. It is often seen as a tool for promoting gender equality and the rights of marginalized groups. However, human rights education can also be used to promote the rights of all learners, including those with disabilities, indigenous peoples and refugees.

Human rights education can be achieved through a variety of methods, including formal education in schools and universities, informal education in communities, and non-formal education through the media and the internet. It is important to ensure that human rights education is integrated into all levels of education and is accessible to all learners. Human rights education should be based on the respect for the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and respect for the rights of others.

Human rights education should be grounded in the understanding of the importance of human rights for the well-being of individuals and society. It should be designed to educate learners about the importance of human rights and to develop their skills to respond to human rights violations.

Human rights education should be integrated into the curriculum of all levels of education. It should be taught in a way that is relevant to learners and that helps them to understand the link between human rights and their daily lives. It should also be integrated into the training of teachers and educators.

Human rights education can contribute to the prevention of human rights violations. By educating learners about human rights, they can be equipped with the knowledge and skills to understand and respond to human rights violations. It can also contribute to the protection of human rights by raising awareness of the importance of human rights and by promoting respect for human rights in society.

Human rights education can also contribute to the promotion of justice and peace. By educating learners about human rights, they can be equipped with the knowledge and skills to understand and respond to human rights violations. It can also contribute to the promotion of justice and peace by raising awareness of the importance of human rights and by promoting respect for human rights in society.

Human rights education can also contribute to the development of peace and security. By educating learners about human rights, they can be equipped with the knowledge and skills to understand and respond to human rights violations. It can also contribute to the development of peace and security by raising awareness of the importance of human rights and by promoting respect for human rights in society.

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