

Globalization and Education

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Distinguished Forum Members and Guests,

It gives me great pleasure to join all of you in this highly important and timely meeting. I am very grateful to the UNESCO Forum for inviting me to address this 2nd Regional Research Seminar for Arab States.

Today we are united here to look at the impact of globalization on education systems in the Arab Region and reflect on what reforms and adjustments need to be achieved in the future.

The momentum occasioned by the recent Resolution emanated from the Arab Summit in Riyadh, which calls on Member States to have a fully-fledged review of their education systems in order to face the realities of the new millennium, will help us in our stocktaking.

At its core, this Resolution established that education systems in Arab countries share common concerns that should be addressed regionally. More importantly, it is unequivocal in its assertion that reform should cover all aspects of the education system. This is a core business Agenda of fundamental change covering all critical areas of concerns that we should work upon seriously together.

On a personal note, I was privileged to participate in the preparatory research and dialogue conducted within and among concerned regional organizations [the Arab

League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), the Arab League General Secretariat and the UNESCO Regional Office] ahead of the summit meeting, and to take the role as a lead author for the document submitted by ALECSO to the Heads of Arab States.

In my opinion, your platform can play a critical role in moving this Agenda forward, and in energizing the debates on all issues of reform. Equally significant are your roles in monitoring commitments made by Arab governments.

Your Forum, I believe for a variety of reasons, can serve as a meeting point for research and scholarly discussion, not only analytical and critical, but also as a means of providing education leaders and policy-makers in the Region with insights, tools and strategies for action that offer new directions and possibilities for Arab education in this twenty-first century: the age of globalization, knowledge and information.

All of us agree I believe that education in our Region seems to lack vision policy and is in a state of disarray at a time when global transition is at its utmost. Nowhere is it that evident than in the slow response of our educationalists who are lagging way behind compared to their counterparts in other regions of the world.

In fact, there is an urgent need from the Arab intellectual community – and especially those who are majoring in social sciences – to address the dramatic changes inflicted on and promised to our era: (i) philosophically; (ii) sociologically; (iii) culturally; (iv) politically; (v) economically; (vi) physically; and (vii) aesthetically.

Above all, revitalization of our most important or central beliefs, values, morals, and ethical heritage with a philosophical depth of our culture must be the core business that binds the Arab World together at this epoch. The challenges we face in education in the new millennium are indeed monumental endeavours for all of us. This world of a new mainstream socio-economic and political order affects every community and region. It is

a world that seeks a new balance between global and local values, thoughts and ways of life amidst existing national and cultural diversity.

Truly, the era of globalization has arrived with many implications on national and regional stability. Only those countries and regions, which take pre-emptive measures but are endowed with vision, strategic thinking, and determination to understand the globalization process and, nevertheless, its oncoming threats and opportunities, will be able to secure a strong foothold and productive co-existence in the global pluralistic international community.

I firmly believe that the globalization we are experiencing today is not cyclical, as some might argue. No, indeed it is here to stay, and we are obliged to adjust to and manage in a different way.

By this, I mean that we should address the challenges of globalization to education in the Arab Region, not only to chart the future of this field, but to study the relationship in as broad a societal context possible, and to treat this in various perspectives, through different disciplines and topics, within which the challenge of globalization is conceived as the most profound dynamic of this historical moment.

Let me begin by exploring the term 'Globalization', or *AWLAMA*, as is translated into Arabic. How will it be approached and tackled, when this meeting contemplates its impact on education? While the term is nowadays the *leitmotiv* of almost every discourse within all fields of social science, including that of education, there are confused and often conflicting definitions and conceptions of the phenomenon. In order for this concept to maintain any analytical usefulness, it must be unpacked, carefully defined and examined regarding its impact on society, the economy, and the world system in general and, for our intentions, on the education system in particular.

Let us agree on the following: At its most organic and fundamental level, globalization is about the monumental structural change occurring in the process of production and

distribution in the global economy. One critical issue that emerges from all these restructuring processes is the central role of knowledge, education and learning. These are becoming increasingly crucial factors of production, more important, some analysts would argue, than the traditional production function factors: (i) land; (ii) labour; and (iii) capital.

The global system of production and distribution is now progressing from the Fordist-Taylorist development model to one based on Innovation-Mediated Production. Fordism-Taylorism was the dominant paradigm of the twentieth century and rested upon three major pillars. The *first pillar* was the factory system and mass production. The *second pillar* was the application of scientific management. And finally, the *third pillar* was the moving assembly line.

These practices enabled by this model to more efficiently harness physical labour of huge masses of relatively unskilled shop-floor workers. Although it was only fully implemented in the advanced industrialized countries, the implications for the developing countries were tremendous.

The newly emerging Innovation-Mediated Production model refutes those imperatives, and rebels against them. This new model is based, instead, on the blurring of the distinctions between mental and physical labour and the increase in the application of knowledge to the production process itself. This change is so significant that it represents a fundamental shift, for much of the world, in the underlying techno-economic paradigm of industrial organization.

As the economies of the world shift steadily away from the force of things into the powers of the mind, from *resource-based bulk processing* into *knowledge-based design and reproduction*, so it is shifting from a base of *diminishing returns* to one of *increasing returns*. Knowledge in this emerging techno-economic paradigm is increasingly seen as both the raw material and major products of organizations. The competitive advantage of an organization is deeply affected by its capacity to learn.

The underlying assumption here is that, in the new context of intense competition, rapid change, and increased interconnections between geographically different parts of the world, organizations are living systems, and therefore, smart, creative, adaptive, self-organizing, and value-seeking organisms. Accordingly, success does not come about through blueprints that are perceived *a priori* correct. Exploration and experiments can only make way for new opportunities and venues that are different and that give successful results. They are not necessarily better or worse paths to take, but they work well at this moment in time.

Today, there are increasingly fewer things which have clear-cut boundaries and multiplicity of connections, this makes for greater uncertainty and speed of change. This condition demands adaptability, rather than dogged pursuit of efficiency. The simplest reason for the obsolescence of the machine metaphor, as a guide to modern thinking, rests with intelligence. In the ideal machine, the intelligence runs itself and there is no need for redesign. In intelligent systems, characteristic of human societies, everything can be redesigned and everything is of a temporary nature. Each element in the system is capable of thinking, as well as taking action. Societies function, as a result, more as a form of parallel, rather than serial, processing.

The second critical component is the idea that we live in a relational world with increasing connectedness and that symbiosis is strength. The increasing connectedness of the world also brought to the fore the growing awareness of interdependence of existence. The modern world is increasingly shaped, in its essence, as a dynamic system. In such a closely connected world, many more things interact and shape each other and many more domains of activity take on the properties of a complex system. Every organization struggles to find its niche.

Many of the concepts that one used in the schools' curricula to understand such dynamically changing societies and conditions, however, are pre-systematic and flow from an image of the world as a self-contained static machine.

This leads us to the conviction that not only do living systems contain their own solution within themselves, but also the solution always works to bring various parts of a system together so that it can learn more about 'itself from itself'. Again, in systems or organizations, one works with webs of relationships. It matters not where the solution or change begins: it will work its way to the rest of the system in the most innovative and remarkable of ways, since healthy relationships within the system plus the spirit of teamwork are a source of great energy. In sum, what matters the system should be provoked and/or stimulated rather than ordered about.

The real transformation in life occurs when the nature of relationships has been revisited and the members of any given system share new meanings. Hence, systems work best through partnership as opposed to hierarchical structures: in partnership people create meanings and set regulations together, instead of having others impose them. Change truly comes about when old meanings are questioned and no longer work. Life is intent on finding what 'works', not what is 'right'.

It is a truism to say that we must learn new ways of living in the context of what are called self-organizing systems: systems that are static and in motion simultaneously. These 'new habits of mind' require toleration for, and understanding of: (i) ambiguity; (ii) complexity; (iii) interrelatedness; (iv) change; (v) uncertainty; and (vi) flow.

Traditional institutions and models of education, however, still prepare people for the world of passing on recipes for 'thinking, seeing and living'. This focus on recipes rests on an assumption that learners seek reassurance and answers from their learning experience and would somehow be troubled and anxious in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity.

These recipes or algorithmic ways of approaching problems and understanding the world, however, are increasingly maladapted to a world characterized by rapid, never-ending, pulsating and interconnected change. In fact, when recipes and recipe-learning no longer

provide a basis for making sense of the world – let alone assigning meaning – anxiety and fear are the end result. It is for this reason that there is emerging a view, at all levels of education systems, of the need to develop ‘new habits of the mind’ for a ‘new world’. Part of this appreciation entails a moving away from recipes and algorithmic thinking toward complexities and complex thinking.

An example is clearly evident of this movement towards non-algorithmic thinking and an embracing of complexity in what has come to be called problem-based learning (PBL), and the formation of students with problem-solving capabilities and critical minds.

PBL, an approach that is being applied to all levels of education and professional training has, at its organizing centre, an ill-structured problem which is messy and complex in nature; requires inquiry, information gathering and reflection; changing and tentative; and has no simple, fixed, formulaic or right solution.

Such an ill-structured problem becomes the focal point for all subsequent learning in this method. Teachers assume the role of the cognitive and meta-cognitive coach, rather than knowledge holders and disseminators. Students assume the role of active problem-solvers, decision-makers, rather than passive learners. In the teaching and learning process, information is shared, but knowledge is a personal construction of the learner. Thinking is fully articulated and held to strict benchmarks.

As it happens, this instructional approach is not necessarily interdisciplinary, but is always interactive. In what is called ‘running the problem’ teachers constantly ensure that the situation is problematic, ill-structured and that students approach different problems, with different problem-solving and strategic-thinking strategies. In short, there is no single problem-solving methodology that is utilized.

Recent evaluation research has empirically shown that problem-based learning promotes:

- *Motivation*: by engaging students in learning, resolving dissonance, and feeling that they are empowered to have an impact on the outcome of the investigation.

- *Relevance and Context:* PBL provides students with an answer to the questions: “Why do we need to learn this information? And also: What does, what I am learning in school or university, have to do with the real world?”
- *Higher Order Thinking:* The ill-structured problem scenario calls forth critical and creative thinking by suspending the guessing game of: “What is the right answer the teacher wants me to find? Instead it orients students toward meaning-making over fact-collecting.
- *Learning to Learn:* PBL promotes meta-cognition and self-regulated learning by asking students to generate their own strategic definition, information gathering, data analysis, and hypothesis building, and sharing them with other students, teachers and mentors.
- *Authenticity:* PBL involves students in the types of problems faced in real-life settings.

Let me now shift to the second part of my speech where I intend to elaborate on another feature of globalization and share with you the discussion of its possible impact on education. By this I am referring to the ‘information revolution’ and the ‘information age’ that it engenders.

We all know that formal systems of education came about largely through a context of information scarcity. It is not surprising then, that one of the key functions of such systems historically has been the storage, codification and transformation of information. Indeed, one of the functions of credentials in education systems is to indicate the degree to which an individual has closed the information gap between his/her bank of knowledge and the knowledge resident within the institution of learning.

The old assumption in this regard is the one that views the student’s mind as a container and teachers as wise ‘sages on the stage’, delivering data, information, knowledge and wisdom, to the eagerly awaiting students, whose minds were empty vessels waiting to be filled.

This approach is also a holdover from the Fordist-Taylorist industrial organization model, when only a few people, that is, the heads were required to plan and innovate, while the rank and file, that is, the hands, were expected to execute boring and repetitious tasks. Schools were therefore the perfect selection and hierarchical mode of individual management.

As a result of this modality prescribed to education a number of assumptions continue to survive, rendering many aspects of today's schooling systems irrelevant to the world we actually live in. It is worth mentioning in this regard that while other disciplines are relatively adjusting their paradigms to the new demands and realities of globalization and making great strides forward, education theory and practice continues to lag far behind.

Policy-makers in our region should wake up to the warning call that with increasing intensity today, information scarcity is being replaced by information abundance, a process that inevitably should force our educational planners and policy-makers to coin a new definition of the role of formal-learning institutions. Accordingly, the school should alter its function from being a primary provider of information and knowledge, to serving as a context in which one can learn how to: (i) organize; (ii) manage; (iii) analyze; (iv) verify; (v) apply; (vi) interpret; and (vii) give meaning to information. As we can see it, the actual learning paradigm will shift from information acquisition to information management on the part of the learner.

This is indeed a profound shift in the core function of formal-learning institutions, the implications of which extend to all dimensions of educational enterprise in the countries of the Arab Region: curriculum, teaching, assessment, credentializing, organizational structure, as well as their relationships to time and space.

Students usually are smarter than we think! They have a very clear, sometimes critical and demanding but also stimulating opinion of what they regard as quality education and what should be done to attain it. They like schools to teach them how to think, not only teaching them facts. Young people are not interested in learning experiences that simply

lead them to reproduce information – which moreover, will soon be outdated – mainly because they are aware that they can find that information for themselves, provided that they have been taught to do so. They want to shift away from ‘education for conformity’ to ‘education for creativity’.

It is the sheer evidence of recent research that tells us how schools were increasingly observed to fail to produce self-motivated individuals who can live in the complexities and ambiguities of today’s world. The new organizations of today need people with high cognitive and affective skills, who are creative and adaptable. More specifically, today’s world requires individuals who possess: (1) an inner appreciation of inter-connectedness; (2) a strong identity of sense of being; (3) a sufficiently large vision and imagination to see how specifics relate to each other; (4) the capacity to ‘go with the flow’ and to deal with paradox and uncertainty; and (5) a capacity to build communities and live in relationship with others.

The stronger source of curriculum and instruction capable of harvesting those objectives is, in my opinion, through involving students in projects. More specifically, student’s exploration and experience can be the essence of any course of study. Everything in life is in constant process of discovery and creation. Hence sources of the curriculum should be diversified and not confined to textbooks. They could be national, communal and, thanks to the multi-media and to the abundance and easy accessibility of information, they could also be international.

This normative outlook will help us reach the conclusion that in the information age, children do not learn in boxes, thus the strict division of curriculum into subject matters does not lead to effective learning. Thinking-based curricula, which encourage and allow children to think, if handled in an integrated fashion, yield the best results. Bearing this in mind, the sources for a relevant update curriculum in a fast-moving age will rely far less on standardized textbooks.

Moreover, with regard to learning objectives, considerable emphasis should be placed on collaboration and teamwork in classroom interaction. Management experts worldwide have noted that behind the Japanese technological, economic, and educational success story has been the ability to work in groups and develop group loyalty. The ability to work in groups is now being recognized as an educational objective, just as important as literacy and numeracy.

Also, important to group formation and on a par with literacy and numeracy are communication skills that are not necessarily reducible to reading and writing, such as planning, presentation, critical and logical thinking, and non-verbal communication.

In knowledge-based societies and economies, another learning objective is not just clear access to and use of knowledge, but the processing of that knowledge: verification, analysis and interpretation, utilization and attaching deep meaning to it in the daily life activities of learners.

To close, I would like to review a few lessons these conclusions teach us about what is required for Arab countries to reform their education system in order to meet the sweeping changes introduced by globalization and by radical shifts in the new systems of production and distribution based on knowledge in the first place.

Let us agree that all societies evidence a learning architecture, that is through their conscious intentions, they establish the boundaries and rules of who learns what, with whom, where, when, how and for what purpose. The existence of a learning architecture is, thus, common among societies and nations.

In the global and dynamic world of today, the pressures of such force and significance is to cause us to examine carefully our learning architecture and engage in an equally serious process of redesign.

One of our greatest needs, now, is for what can be described as ‘strategic imagination’: the willingness and ability to envision new possibilities for the development of the new potential and, in parallel, to conceive, explore, test and demonstrate innovative strategies that can contribute toward making these possibilities a reality. In the document submitted to the Arab Summit meetings, I proposed the establishment of a wide number of regional working groups composed of Arab and international intellectuals, planners and experts to examine all components of the educational process and render alternative scenarios of reform.

Planning in and for education as part of the development process today confronts the very same context as that faced by other institutions and organizations in society: A dynamic change process that interacts constantly producing a new stream of problems, issues and opportunities.

Conventional Static models of planning are not able to cope with such dynamic complexity, and, for that reason, offer policy-makers only limited assistance in decision-making, crafting strategies and priority setting. The world changes so rapidly that the static plan loses its value as a guide to action and in many cases becomes a problem itself. Alternative conceptions and models of learning, which treat education and learning processes as a complex adaptive system, are desperately needed in the development process of our Region which is bombarded by vague alternatives and by fluid and uncertain opportunities, and alarming threats.

One promising approach to this quandary is the use of strategic thinking and scenario planning and learning techniques. Scenarios help policy-makers to organize what they know and what they can imagine into a logical vision of the future and to discern and consider the implications and develop planned out alternatives and prepare medium-term and long-term agenda of reform to be adjusted periodically.

In sum, the strategic thinking and scenario learning and planning process for education system reform helps policy-makers deal with two of the processes and conditions that most affect their decision-making in a globalized world: *uncertainty and complexity*.

Some of you might argue, after listening to my speech, that most of the countries in the Region need to attend to 'first things' first; that is, to ensure basic literacy, numeracy, and access and only when this is complete should they attend to the other matter that I have recommended and think on how to adjust their education systems to the dictates of globalization.

The problematic aspect of such arguments, if any, is that it assumes that the world economy and the attendant pressure of globalization and knowledge intensity will stand still and wait for the first process to complete itself before further change processes are set in motion. This, of course, is highly improbable and flows against the grain of the extremely rapid changes occurring with the global economy and modern world.

Thank you again for inviting me to join you, and presenting a united front, today.

I feel truly honoured to stand here before all of you to deliver my Keynote Speech.

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