DETAILED EVENT REPORT

Date: 16-05-2020
Event: Webinar on 'Futures of Education and Knowledge Economy with a special focus on Sri Lanka and South Asia
Organised by: [Brainwiz](#)
Supported by: UNESCO New Delhi, UNESCO National Commission for Sri Lanka

Eric Falt
- Education has been disrupted by COVID 19. Student communities are one of the most affected ones. We need to constantly engage with the stakeholders in the education sector to overcome the challenges.
- Brainwiz has been a great partner in organising discussions on Futures of Education
- UNESCO's response to COVID-19
    - Essay competition, cyberbullying, mental health

Tarush Jain
- Thanked UNESCO New Delhi for giving Brainwiz an opportunity to partner and organise such events
- Welcomed the panelists, the guests, and all participants
- Presented registration stats and the format of the webinar
- Lockdown has given us the opportunity to rethink and reimage education

Huma Masood
- UNESCO invites organizations and networks to mobilize their stakeholders and partners to conduct focus group consultation sessions on the futures of education.
- UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative is an ambitious attempt to rethink education and help shape the future.
- The key points for discussion and takeaways from the webinar will include:
    - The academic nature of education
    - 2. Increasing gap between the skills that the youth has versus those that the industry demands
    - 3. Challenges in reforming education to a skill based education system with a special focus on Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Nepal
    - 4. Strong, continuing and consistent policy commitment to education on the part of the state

Himali Jinadasa
- Introduced the panelists
    - Dr. Upali Sedere, Senior Adviser to the Minister of Education, Govt. of Sri Lanka
    - Dr. Punchinilame Meegaswatte, Secretary-General, Sri Lanka National

Commission for UNESCO
  o Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Professor Emeritus at BRAC University in Dhaka
● Introduced the moderator
  o Tarush Jain, Founder of Brainwiz

MODERATED SESSION

Q1. What is a knowledge economy? What drives knowledge economies?

Dr. Sedre
- Education has always looked for knowledge
- Earlier, factors of production were mainly land, raw material, and capital but today everything is knowledge intensive
- Garment industry in Sri Lanka, India, and Bangladesh has been intensified with knowledge now. Each step within the industry chain is now very specialised and is governed by knowledge
- Earlier, the purpose of education was to develop Human Resource. But now, we wish to develop Human Capital. That means, the employees that any organisation hires is expected to start generating capital for the organization right away
- From text books, we are moving to deepening our knowledge. It is through practice only that we can deepen the knowledge
- Explicit knowledge is the knowledge that we already know. Knowledge Economy runs after Implicit knowledge. It means new ideas and insights that people learn from doing things. This is not found in books
- When a person takes a risk, they don't know if it will function or not. Entrepreneurs and Innovators do that all the time
- Technology is also important for a Knowledge Economy. It is beyond ICT
  - Robotics
  - Artificial intelligence
  - Big Data
  - Cyber Security
- These driving forces will govern the industry in the future. Without these skills, humans will not be of much use
- Nearly 80% of the youth, if they receive the same kind of education that we are receiving today, they will become redundant in the coming years
- These are new developments in education with the 4th industrial revolution
- Learning was earlier guided by IQ. Person's EQ is as important now
- Instead of transferring of knowledge, we are talking about transferring of skills
- How can we change conventional education systems to meet the needs of the world today

Q2. Education has to power the knowledge economy? How can education help in strengthening the knowledge economy of a country?

Dr. Manzoor Ahmed
- If we just focus on Knowledge Economy in a narrow sense, it becomes limiting
- 5 Ps for development - Peace, People, Planet, Prosperity, and Partnerships
- Knowledge Economies only focus on Prosperity. Other 4 Ps need to be brought in
- COVID 19 is the big elephant that needs to be addressed. We will have to learn to live with it and the education has to evolve to minimise its ill impact
- We are at the risk of losing the educational gains we could achieve in the last few decades
- Futures of Education focuses on multiple futures for all. Education systems have to evolve accordingly
- Majority of the population in the South Asian region is still in the 2nd industrial revolution. We have to move forward together with them
- While we talk about Knowledge Economy and 21st century skills, we have to think about plugging the gaps that exist in the society

Q3. How can Online Education define the new system of education for countries in the South Asian region?

Dr. Meegaswatte
- 'Learning outcomes' are the most important thing that we need to focus on in the entire process
- Ultimate intention is to enhance the human capital, that is the productivity and the skills of a person
- Human capital needs to be embedded with employability and successful living. These need to be our learning outcomes
- **Social and Emotional competence** is the foundation of successful living. It helps a person in all three areas of their life, that is home, workplace, and the society
    - Family friendliness
    - Civic competence
    - Responsibility
    - Accountability
    - Physical and Mental fitness
    - Global Citizenship
- **Employability** depends on certain skills as well
    - Orientation to the world of work
    - Higher order thinking skills
    - Technology skills
    - Psychomotor skills
    - Entrepreneurship
- **Generic skills** for the students are

- Effective and efficient use of language
- Effective use of mathematic concepts
- Critical thinking
- Collaboration
- Ability to transfer knowledge to skills
- The entire world has to save the environment. Students have to become the protectors and preservers of the environment. Students should learn more about environment
  - Green consumer skills
  - Personal and environment health conscious needs to be developed
- Online learning can be used as a tool to improve explicit knowledge. We also need to focus on implicit knowledge and other skills and competencies needed for the 21st century

Q4. Can societies evolve to learn society skills and employability skills that Dr. Meegaswatte mentioned through online means?

Dr. Manzoor Ahmed
- Online learning and Ed-tech has had limited success in South Asia region
- It is primarily because of lack of proper infrastructure
- Access to resources is creating a new kind of digital divide
- Individuals can learn immensely from online resources. They can even learn the new skills of the 21st century. But, only the privileged and tech savvy individuals can learn there. This is not inclusive
- In Bangladesh, only about 5% of students have access to broadband access and a device to learn online
- Private Universities are taking advantage of online education
- There needs to be a proactive priority action from policy makers
  - Make an education workforce of teachers to become a mediator between the internet resources and students
  - Build up the infrastructure and make the internet available to all. We can achieve these through forging partnerships
  - Optimise content on the internet and localise it for the masses. With English as the medium of teaching, many miss out on

Q5. Accessibility and inclusivity have emerged as a major challenge with Online Education. We see a divide developing between those who have access to online resources vs. those who don't. In a few decades this problem will get highlighted further.

1. **How does the government of any nation address this? Do they solve for today or for the future?**
2. **In times like these, how do the governments prioritise what infrastructure to develop first?**

Dr. Sedre
- Digital divide exists even within a school/university. Students come from different socio-economic backgrounds
- Online learning works well in a blended mode where online and offline learning methods are included together. It ensures development of a varied set of skills
- Only 23% of households have access to a laptop/desktop/smartphone. There exists a huge digital divide
- Under the guidance of the Hon'ble President of Sri Lanka, the country is focussing on providing education through television, which is accessible to more than 90% of the population
- Sri Lanka is considering replacing textbooks with laptops for all learners. This will not replace school education. It will just add a new dimension to it
- In many countries in South Asia, even literacy is an issue. Skills of literacy and numeracy are paramount to start thinking about education for the 21st century

Q6. When we say that there is a gap in the demand and the supply of skills, what skills will the industry will look for in employees after the COVID19 crisis

Dr. Meegaswatte
- Things are changing due to the COVID19 crisis. New skills needed will be
    - Health practices
    - Communication
    - Associating with people
- Higher order thinking skills becomes extremely important for employment
    - Leadership quality and teamwork form essential components of management skills
- School education should provide all these skills

Q7. Basic sense of citizenry is changing. Will we need new skills to even live in the society post COVID19? Can education also help individuals develop stronger emotional skills so that they can deal with situations like these better?

Dr. Ahmed
- Education systems are supposed to provide skills for life and livelihood
- On one hand we hear that the employers do not find people with the right skills to do a job, and on the other hand we hear that the youth is not able to find jobs. There is a mismatch and this is very concerning
- It is unfair to say that it is the fault of the education system
- The skills needed are changing constantly. It is impacting even the informal economy
- Can the education system really prepare people for all these skills?
- We need to conceptualise the skills
- **Basic skills** and competencies of reading, writing, thinking, understanding basic science, and having people skills. Education systems can do this

- But to expect schools to prepare students for specialised skills is a little too much to ask for
- The employers should take up the role of upskilling the workforce according to their needs
- There has to be a gradual transition that the governments can facilitate
- We need to improve our education systems to provide the basic skills
- When we say we need to give vocational skills in schools and colleges, we will never be able to accommodate the needs of all the employers
- Underprivileged Children's Education Program in Bangladesh provides basic skills for employment to the underprivileged

Q8. Who initiates reforms in the education sector? The government, multilateral agencies, or the corporate? What reforms would you suggest for education systems post COVID19?

Dr. Sedre
- "The best brains of the nation may be found on the last benches of the classroom" - APJ Abdul Kalam, Former President of India
- It is the responsibility of educators to make education relevant and practical for all learners
- There need to be curriculum reforms and mapping of learning outcomes with the needs of the industry
- We need a practical based learning, where learning can be linked to real life
- If a child learns within communities, at home, and at school by actually doing things, then we will never have a gap in the rich and the poor, because everyone will acquire skills through practical experiences
- If education needs to feed into the industry, the industry needs to come forward and support
- Each stakeholder has to participate in the process of transformation

Q9. Vision for education for the year 2050?

Dr. Meegaswatte
- Online learning is a tool, just like a book
- Humans have to be with humans, and hence emotional intelligence and social skills are very important for students
- We have to move from an explicit knowledge to implicit knowledge system
- We have to create a skill/performance oriented process. Any child must be able to perform any activity effectively, efficiently, and accurately at any stage in their lives
- The entire education system needs to reform, and we must teach students how to relate education to real life

Dr. Ahmed

- Quality Education is a public good, and hence the government has the ultimate responsibility to make it accessible for everyone
- The tools of online learning are great but we need teachers to facilitate learning using these online tools
- We have failed to attract talented teachers and keep them in the system
- Social schemes, awards, compensation, and other such incentives that the more developed countries provide to their teachers is lacking in our part of the world
- Quality and relevance of education can change with the quality of educators

Dr. Meegaswatte
- Capacity building and teacher training is important for South Asia for any kind of transformation in the education system
- Empathy will help in the process of peacebuilding among communities

Q10. What are the key takeaways of this webinar for the listeners?

Mame Omar Diop
- Major themes that have emerged out the discussion
    - Online Education
    - Existing Skill Gaps
    - Education for 21st-Century Skills
    - Reforms and Actions
- Online education is good but is not good enough to replace the existing systems
- Digital divide needs to be addressed
- Social and Emotional competencies need to be made a part of online education
- Teachers need to be a part of the process of skill based education
- Competency based teacher training can help reorient the system
- Sustainable Development Goals also focus on social and emotional competencies
- We need social and emotional literacy, wherein it becomes a part of the curriculum
- We have to redefine what is the 'new teacher' and then provide enough support and opportunity to teachers
- **Personalised professional learning** can enable students to explore and specialise in multiple areas of interest
- Grading is not serving the purpose of education. We need to move to assessing a learner