

Implementing Smart Education for Development: Fixing priorities



20 August 2020

2020 Global Smart Education Conference

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It is a pleasure to be virtually present at the opening ceremony of the 2020 Global Smart Education Conference to mark the launch of the “Joint Project on Rethinking and Redesigning National Smart Education Strategy”. I would like to thank Dr. Ronghuai Huang, Dean, Smart Learning Institute of Beijing Normal University and Director Zhan Tao, UNESCO Institute for Information Technology in Education, Moscow for the kind invitation.

As you know, the Commonwealth of Learning is an intergovernmental organisation that supports Member States to use distance education and technologies for expanding access to education and training. With headquarters in Vancouver we work in 54 countries that cover all regions of the globe.

The theme of this conference, “Artificial Intelligence and Future Education” is both timely and relevant as we address the challenges thrown up by the COVID-19 pandemic. As institutions pivoted to online learning, they found that the challenges of teacher capacity, lack of quality content and appropriate assessments could only be addressed by smart approaches. Developments in AI, Blockchain, Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality, along with the increased access to broadband networks can make smart education possible. While you will deliberate on the research into these aspects, I urge you to look into how Smart Education can also fix the problems of those on the other side of the digital divide so as to leave no one behind.

At COL, we have been focusing on promoting technologies which are appropriate, affordable and accessible. We believe in a holistic approach which includes technology integration capacity development and improvement of infrastructure for equitable and inclusive education. How can Smart Education reach the unreached with quality education at low cost?

Smart Education is about the 5Es – Education that is enjoyable, engaging, efficient, effective, and ethical. First, enjoyable learning helps the retention and transfer of knowledge to long-term memory. Second, making learning engaging requires pedagogy as well as innovative applications of technology such as gamification. Third, learning needs to be efficient in terms of time and resources. Fourth, Smart Education must be effective not only for achievement but must focus on accomplishment, which means going beyond individual success to make the world a better place. Fifth, Smart Education is ethical, for it addresses issues of privacy, cyber security and equity.

The Commonwealth of Learning is proud to be part of this joint international project in partnership with UNESCO IITE, Beijing Normal University, International Society for Technology in Education (USA) and National Research University Higher School of Economics (Russia). The project will develop frameworks/ guidelines/ standards that will provide a roadmap for implementing Smart Education. The overall objective is to fast track learning which has been disrupted due to the pandemic.

Let me wish you all a very successful conference!