

New Dynamics of Higher Education: New Dynamics of Distance Education



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Keynote Address

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Abstract

UNESCO's 2009 World Conference on Higher Education charted a course for higher education in the second decade of the 21st century. The conference identified important and emerging trends, notably rising demand that has created the phenomenon of mass participation, diversification of providers, the use of new learning methods, and a sharper focus on quality assurance. However, higher education is marked by large differences in participation rates and quality in different parts of the world. It is by resolutely embracing the new dynamics that developing countries will bridge these gaps.

Open and distance learning (ODL) and ICTs offer particularly important opportunities. Indeed, developing countries in Asia have led the way in the large-scale use of these technologies. The second part of the paper focuses on the new dynamics of distance education. Now well-established in higher education; ODL will now expand at secondary level and in non-formal learning. The growing pool of Open Educational Resources will both raise the quality and lower the cost of ODL materials as they are shared and adapted around the world. Mobile technology will become an important tool in non-formal learning and the advent of very low cost computing devices will hasten the end of the digital divide.

Ms. Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić presenting: Introduction

Sir John Daniel and I are very pleased to lead off at this important conference in the beautiful city of Mysore. Your topic is the Open Learning System in a Global Environment and our aim in this keynote address is to situate open and distance learning in the global higher education environment.

Our joint keynote is in two parts and our title is: *New Dynamics of Higher Education; New Dynamics of Distance Education*. I shall begin by enumerating some of the new dynamics that are determining the evolution of higher education around the world.

My principal point of reference will be the World Conference on Higher Education that UNESCO convened in Paris in July 2009, for which I served as Executive Secretary. Many new trends and issues emerged during those discussions but I shall focus on just eight of them.

Sir John will then explore these same eight issues through the lens of new dynamics in distance education and technology-mediated learning.

Let me give some background about the World Conference on Higher Education before presenting the new trends that emerged from its debates.

To express its global coverage and give voice to regional and national specificities, the World Conference was preceded by six regional conferences. They were held in Cartagena de Indias for Latin America and the Caribbean; Macau for East Asia and the Pacific; Dakar for Africa; New Delhi for South Asia; Bucharest for Europe and North America; and Cairo for the Arab States.

The world event was organized at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris and its recommendations will determine UNESCO's agenda in higher education for the next decade. UNESCO is working through this agenda under the guidance of its Director-General, Ms. Irina Bokova from Bulgaria, who is the first woman ever elected to this post, and Dr. Qian Tang, Assistant Director General for Education, the first Chinese citizen to be appointed to head UNESCO's Education Sector.

The WCHE brought together leaders from countries big and small.

Present from small countries were the President of Slovenia, the Governor-General of Saint Lucia, and the Minister of Higher Education of Oman. They spoke alongside Ministers from Egypt, France, and India. Philip Altbach, a well-known American researcher, led the contribution of the academic community by presenting the most salient elements of his study *Global Trends, Tracking an Academic Revolution*, which set the scene for the debates in the parallel sessions. These gave an academic buzz to the conference as female and male scholars from around the world spoke in the sessions and mingled in the foyers. The broad HE community was also well represented by students, who were vocal in all the political and professional debates, both as individual voices and through their associations.

The private sector, notably Hewlett Packard and Microsoft, took advantage of the event to profile partnerships with UNESCO in higher education.

Africa was a major focus and the Rapporteur General for Africa, Nigeria's Peter Okebukola emphasised the great importance of higher education for Africa.

THE NEW DYNAMICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Let me now identify eight new dynamics in higher education that came out of the WCHE debates.

Rising demand and massification

The first is rising demand. Higher education's role in constructing the knowledge society is now acknowledged by all. University degrees and diplomas have become passports to a good future and the demand for higher education has been growing rapidly.

As a consequence, we now talk of *massification* as the dominant trend. Today there are 165 million people enrolled in tertiary education. Projections suggest that that participation will peak at 263 million in 2025. Accommodating the additional 98 million students would require more than four major universities (30,000 students) to open every week for the next fifteen years.

Globally, age participation rates in higher education grew from 19% in 2000 to 26% in 2007. In low income countries, however, these percentages were much lower and rose from 5% in 2000 to a modest 7% in 2007. Enrolment grew at a rapid pace in China in the last decade,

But projections suggest that by 2020 India will have the world's largest higher education system with 44 million students.

Diversification of providers and methods

It will not be possible to satisfy this rising demand, especially in developing countries, by relying on traditional approaches based solely on public universities.

A multitude of new providers of higher education is emerging.

A major recent trend is creating so-called World-Class Universities. In some countries these are designated by governments; the China 211 and 985 projects and the Brain 21 programme in South Korea, being examples. India has plans to increase the number of Indian Institutes of Technology.

This trend feeds on the mushrooming phenomenon of university rankings which, while controversial, are undoubtedly influencing governments. The Shanghai University Rankings have certainly increased the visibility of the Shanghai Jiao Tong University throughout the world. However, many question the criteria used in rankings and point to methodological limitations. In particular, rankings focus on the research output of universities and do not usually try to assess the equally important teaching function.

One of the conclusions of the WCHE was that countries should build world-class higher education systems adapted to local needs rather than focusing on a few world-class institutions. A World Bank publication, launched at the WCHE - "*The Challenge of establishing World-Class Universities*" – explores this issue.

At the other end of the spectrum, as an increasing proportion of the population seeks higher education, transition programmes between schools and universities, such as community colleges, are attracting worldwide attention. Ms Jill Biden, the wife of US Vice-President Joe Biden, who teaches in a community college herself, presented the community college model at the World Conference. Community colleges provide access for non-traditional students, offer flexible curricula – include skills-based training, and allow progression to university.

Private provision

Corporate structures of higher education are also changing. Private higher education is now the fastest growing sub-sector and some 30% of students are enrolled in private higher education institutions globally. Some countries (Japan, South Korea) enrol 80% of their students in private higher education institutions and in parts of Latin America these percentages reach 50%. For-profit higher education is also growing and developing specific business models that have not yet been explored sufficiently because these institutions tend to operate in an opaque and secretive way. The Conference stressed the importance of including the private sector in all quality assurance arrangements. In North America and Europe for-profit institutions are moving more rapidly into eLearning than the public institutions. Here in India the private sector plays a major role in higher education but seems to be a constant source of controversy.

Distance education

Modes of teaching and learning are also changing. Indeed, applications of ICTs have impacted higher education significantly. Open universities like KSOU are multiplying around the world and are increasingly powerful players in national higher education systems.

These institutions are an important response to the challenge of scaling up higher education in response to growing demand. Later Sir John will examine the new dynamics of distance education in detail.

Cross-border Higher Education

The two trends of private provision and distance learning come together in a steady increase in cross-border higher education. As defined by the 2005 UNESCO-OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education, the term designates higher education that occurs when ‘the teacher, student, programme, institution/provider or course materials cross national jurisdictional borders’.

Cross-border higher education can take different forms, ranging from branch campuses and franchises of universities offering courses abroad to e-learning across borders. Cross-border Higher Education, if regulated properly, offers great opportunities for capacity building at institutional level both in teaching and learning.

This example from China is the University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China, a cross-border provider representing a partnership between the University of Nottingham in the UK and the Zhejiang Wanli Education Group – University. The world is waiting eagerly for India to promulgate its legislation on foreign providers. However, in the absence of proper regulation, CBHE easily lends itself to fraud and low quality provision, the most striking example being degree mills that sell diplomas for money.

The internet is an attractive tool for these bogus providers. One used Blenheim Palace, Winston Churchill’s birthplace, on their website claiming it as their campus. Others misuse UNESCO’s name to appear legitimate. Fortunately, quality assurance provides some protection against spurious providers.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance – and especially the internationalisation of quality assurance – was one of the most striking new developments since UNESCO held its previous World Conference on Higher Education in 1998. This new emphasis on QA was reflected not only in the conference Communiqué but also in both political and academic debates during the Conference.

The Indian Minister of Human Resource Development, the Honourable Kapil Sibal, expressed his approach to internationalising quality assurance rather well at the WCHE:

“The globalisation of higher education has added newer challenges in terms of quality assurance system, issues of mutual recognition and equivalence of degrees and transparency in the regulatory structures of national systems of higher education. (...) Quality Assurance Systems should encourage effective learning processes which are adapted to the needs of various categories of learners. The systems should encompass not merely conventional programmes in higher education but also the borderless, private and continuing education.”

The internationalisation of quality assurance is a response to the growing policy challenges facing higher education systems and institutions as a consequence of the trends we have identified, such as private higher education, cross-border higher education, eLearning and ODL, and the growing role of the Internet.

UNESCO has prepared the ground for this process of internationalisation through the standard-setting tools that were highlighted at the WCHE. These are the Conventions for the Recognition of Degrees; and the 2005 Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education.

UNESCO’s capacity-building initiatives in quality assurance were also reported, notably the organisation of Global Forums on Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications. In many countries, these have facilitated the revision of quality standards within universities and accreditation processes.

A more recent initiative is the UNESCO - World Bank Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC). GIQAC supports regional networks of quality assurance agencies. In this region, it supports the Asia and Pacific Quality Assurance Network (APQN).

An important contribution to global quality assurance is the Web Portal on Recognised Higher Education Institutions. This provides students and all stakeholders with white list of accredited institutions provided by governments so that they can check the bona fides of institutions in other countries.

Finally I should mention the joint publication with the U.S. Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) of a document entitled - *Toward Effective Practice Discouraging Degree Mills in Higher Education*.

All of this work, which began after the previous WCHE in 1998, has fostered the worldwide elaboration and sharing of good practices. It has stimulated much activity in the form of regional discussions, preparation of tool kits, online courses, workshops, and quality assurance documents.

Teacher Education

The growing challenges of teacher education within higher education were highlighted as one of the global trends, underlined in Conference Communiqué in these words:

“Our ability to realize the goals of EFA is dependent upon our ability to address the worldwide shortage of teachers. Higher education must scale up teacher education, both pre-service and in-service, with curricula that equip teachers to provide individuals with the knowledge and skills they need in the twenty-first century. This will require new approaches, including open and distance learning (ODL) and information and communications technologies (ICTs). (Article 11)”

The teacher shortage is the core challenge. According to UNESCO’s Institute of Statistics, a global total of 10.3 million teachers should be recruited between 2007 and 2015. However, this is a global figure. Actual needs vary greatly from country to country. The 96 countries that have not achieved Universal Primary Education will need to recruit 1.9 million teachers for this purpose alone.

Academic profession

The teaching force in higher education was naturally a particular focus of the WCHE. The stresses on HE systems and their academic staff caused by rapid expansion are manifest in various ways.

First, pressure of student numbers has required the hiring of less qualified faculty. For example, in China only 9 % of academic profession has doctorates, while in India it is 35%.

Second, the use of part-time professors is becoming more widespread. For example in Latin America and the Caribbean, up to 80% of the faculty have part-time status.

Third, part-time faculty seek adequate salaries by working in several institutions. In particular, private higher education institutions tend to rely heavily on part-timers, some of whom are moonlighting from public institutions, which can cause tensions between the two sub-sectors.

Fourth, the academic labour market is now global. Academics migrate from poorer to richer countries. Singapore, the Gulf States, Western Europe and North America tend to import faculty whereas regions like the South Asia, the Caribbean and Africa are exporters.

Fifth, one side effect of the rapid spread of technology is that young people who are used to using digital devices in everyday life expect to use them as students – whereas many faculty continue to teach in traditional ways.

Sixth, however, ICTs provide new opportunities to expand access to quality learning and facilitate the tasks of teachers. In particular, the growing trend to develop Open Educational Resources means that academics and students will be able to draw on a worldwide pool of excellent teaching and learning material that can be fully adapted to local needs.

UNESCO is working with COL to empower HE institutions, ministries of education and quality assurance agencies to take full advantage of these resources. A major goal of this work is to ensure

multidirectional flows of Open Educational Resources so that developed countries use resources from developing countries as well as vice-versa. This was the topic of a vigorous debate between two South Africans, Barney Pityana and Brenda Gourley, at the World Conference.

Last year UNESCO and COL worked together to publicise OER beyond the OER community. They held workshops in Africa and Asia, including one at the PCF6 conference at Kochi here in India.

Since then the two organisations have published a Basic Guide to OER and Guidelines for OER in Higher Education. They are now alerting governments to the importance of Open Educational Resources in preparation for a World Conference on OER at UNESCO next June. In particular we shall encourage them to ensure that all educationally useful material or research that is developed with public funds should be made freely available for use and adaptation by others.

That is our summary of the new dynamics of higher education that emerged at the World Conference. Sir John will now examine them again through the lens of the new dynamics of distance education.

Sir John Daniel presenting:

THE NEW DYNAMICS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

I am a frequent visitor to India but this is my first time in the beautiful city of Mysore. It is a pleasure to be here. The Karnataka State Open University has had a somewhat turbulent history but you have done important work and the Commonwealth of Learning has been proud to work with you. My message today is that future will be even better. The steady evolution of technology will give technology-mediated education – for which I will use the traditional term distance education – a pre-eminent place in higher education. All universities will begin to emulate your methods.

In looking at the new dynamics of distance education I shall use the same framework as Stamenka, namely the eight new dynamics in higher education from UNESCO's 2009 world conference: rising demand; diversification of providers and methods; private provision; distance education; cross-border education; quality assurance; teacher education; and the academic profession.

We shall touch on each of these topics in order to show how the new dynamics of distance education complement these new dynamics of higher education. However, you must remember that not all of the important dynamics of ODL are new.

Sometimes the frontiers of learning are behind us! In implementing new technologies we must hold fast to the lessons that we have already learned about how to use technology successfully.

Rising demand and massification

The first new dynamic of higher education that we talked about earlier was rising demand. The figures show that tremendous attempts are being made to expand access to higher education in India. You are still a long way from having a mass higher education system but you are on the way there and some of the state open universities are playing an important role in expanding the availability of quality programmes.

Here we simply want to insist on the revolutionary role that technology can play in ensuring that the massification of higher education occurs with higher quality and lower costs

Governments want three outcomes from their higher education systems:

- Access: to be as wide as possible
- Quality: to be as high as possible
- Cost: to be as low as possible

The nature of the challenge is clear when you create a triangle of vectors. With traditional methods of face-to-face teaching this is an iron triangle.

You want to stretch the triangle like this to give greater access, higher quality and lower costs.

But you can't! Try extending access by packing more students into each classroom and you will be accused of damaging quality. Try improving quality with better learning resources and the cost will go up. Try cutting costs and you will endanger both access and quality.

This iron triangle has hindered the expansion of education throughout history. It has created in the public mind – and probably in much Indian thinking – an insidious link between quality and exclusivity. This link still drives the admission policies of many universities, which define their quality by the people they exclude.

But today there is good news. Thanks to globalisation successive waves of technology are sweeping the world – and technology can transform the iron triangle into a flexible triangle. By using technology you can achieve wider access, higher quality and lower cost *all at the same time*. This is a revolution – it has never happened before.

How does it work? The fundamental principles of technology, articulated two centuries ago by the economist Adam Smith, are division of labour, specialisation, economies of scale, and the use of machines and communications media. Adam Smith wrote more than two centuries ago so the revolution of technology is not a new dynamic. Sometimes the frontiers of learning are behind us and we must not forget the wisdom of the past.

My basic point here is that each new generation of technology can, if we use it properly, do even more to make massification possible at low cost and high quality.

The economies of scale inherent in the technology are becoming greater and greater. But we must remember that specialisation and division of labour in the organisation of our institutions are the keys that unlock those economies of scale.

Diversification of providers and methods

The second trend we highlighted earlier was the diversification of providers and methods.

Distance education has proved itself at university level through splendid examples like the 40 years of success of the UK Open University. It and some of the other open universities, like Athabasca University and the Open University of the Netherlands, all rank consistently among the top three universities in their countries for student satisfaction – and all of them have come first in those surveys in recent years.

Here in India I think it is fair to say that IGNOU, KSOU and the other open universities have concentrated on widening access rather than being voted tops for student satisfaction. Nevertheless, your open universities have brought distance education in India a long way forward from the dismal days when low quality correspondence courses and support exploited millions of students.

Today distance learning is spreading to other levels, notably secondary education. Providing quality secondary schooling to all of the world's young people is now our biggest educational challenge. Much of my new book is about how distance education can help us respond to it. There are already several mega-schools that are the secondary equivalent of mega-universities. The book has much praise for the leadership that India is giving to the mega-school movement through the National Institute for Open Schooling.

Private provision

One aspect of the diversification of providers is private provision of higher education. We are thinking particularly of private, for-profit provision. Private provision is a complex reality.

Take the example of Open University Malaysia, a private institution that pays dividends to its shareholders, which are Malaysia's public universities. That must make it a for-profit institution, although it feels quite different from others such as the American University of Phoenix.

We make three comments about distance education and private providers.

First, private, for-profit correspondence education has a long history, and private providers of distance education such as Phoenix Online, with over 100,000 students, are now moving strongly into eLearning. Ten years ago most of the providers who created fully online learning programmes failed to attract students, but today online enrolments are growing much faster than classroom enrolments in North America.

We may expect this sector to continue to expand, because commercial companies are good at the basics of technology: division of labour, specialisation, economies of scale and the use of machines. In India private companies seem to be better than the state at running airlines. Is that true for distance education as well?

Second, private providers respond to clear rules and incentives. The good private providers prefer to work in a clear legal framework. If they are given incentives to get their students to complete courses, rather than drop out, they are good at that too. For example, private providers are more robust about reminding their students to submit assignments than most public providers. We all hope that before too long some of India's new legislation about private and foreign providers will finally make its way through Parliament.

Third, as we already noted, in the absence of regulations degree mills will spring up, and these are a menace to legal providers.

Distance education

The fourth new dynamic that we identified was distance education. Here again I make three comments.

First, conventional universities are expanding into distance education to expand their reach but also because they expect it to cost less. In fact, unless they remember Adam Smith's principles of technology, it will cost more, and the programme will not last.

Second, if you do follow Adam Smith's principles, each new generation of technology does allow you to reduce costs, except in one vital area, which is the development of courses. This is inherently expensive because it requires a team of academics and skilled people.

But as we pointed out earlier, we now have a major advance in this area with the development of open educational resources. India is well engaged in the open educational resources movement.

Third, technologies are changing. For people in many of the countries where the Commonwealth of Learning works mobile phones, rather than laptops, are the main vehicle for information and communications technology. We are already using these very successfully to help farmers improve their livelihood here in India.

Cross-border higher education

We come now to cross-border higher education. Here we simply want to make a plea that we think of cross-border higher education in terms of bi- and multi-directional partnerships. Simply pushing programmes in one direction at another country is not sustainable.

A nice example of a multi-directional cross-border partnership is a project called the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth that the Commonwealth of Learning is facilitating. It is not a new institution but a collaborative mechanism that permits small states all over the world to work together on producing open education resources. We are grateful to the Government of India for offering to help this initiative through your aid programme.

In this slide a dozen countries got together in Mauritius to develop courses on eco-tourism. This group of experts from 18 small countries worked together in the Maldives in March of last year to develop a diploma course in sustainable agriculture for small states.

Quality assurance

Earlier we emphasised the importance of quality assurance and noted how it is becoming a worldwide concern with global mechanisms to match. I shall make just two comments from the perspective of distance education.

First, quality distance education is a subset of quality education. Distance education should be subject to the same quality assurance mechanisms as education generally. This also has the advantage that comparisons can be made between the quality of distance and face-to-face provision.

This table indicates that the UK Open University outperforms Oxford, where I once studied, in the quality of its teaching. We can show such a table because all UK universities were assessed in the same way.

Second, distance education should not fear quality assurance. It is easier to demonstrate quality in distance education than in face-to-face teaching. That is because everything in distance education: the courses, the student support and the administrative processes, are explicit, public and available for scrutiny.

I consider that the major issue in quality assurance in India is that the QA arrangements for distance education are part of the IGNOU structure rather than part of a wider framework like the NAAC. However, hard IGNOU tries it will inevitably be perceived to have a conflict of interest under the present arrangements.

Teacher Education

Earlier we made two points about teacher education. First, training teachers is the major contribution that universities can make to achieving education for all. Second, there is a massive shortage of teachers worldwide. Half of my new book is devoted to the challenge of teacher education and I make four key points.

First, many countries will not be able to train the new teachers they need without using distance education. The conventional facilities for training the millions of teachers required are simply not there. Moreover, distance education has been used to train teachers very successfully for many decades.

Second, distance education allows the emphasis of teacher education to be shifted from pre-service training to in-service training. This allows the focus of training to be on the classroom, which makes training much more effective.

Third, by using open education resources we can conduct teacher in-service education at scale while also customising it for every country and every school. An example is the TESSA programme in Africa, which is a consortium of 13 African universities, the UK Open University and five international organisations. It works across nine African countries – with more participating informally – by creating teacher education materials in Arabic, English, French and Kiswahili.

Fourth, this kind of training has a direct and beneficial effect on the children. Last year nearly half a million African teachers worked with materials and resources produced through the TESSA community. Since these are classroom-based in-service materials they have a direct impact on millions of children through their use in the classroom.

COL was proud to work with India's NAAC on developing a pan-Commonwealth Toolkit for quality assurance in teacher education at a distance that has proved highly successful.

Academic profession

We come finally to the implications of the growth of distance education for the academic profession. Earlier we noted the multiple stresses on teachers in higher education. We pointed out that, while some of those stresses are caused by the spread of information and communications technology, ICTs and notably open educational resources also have the potential to make teachers' work more productive and satisfying.

We shall make one final point here, which is that to take advantage of ICTs and open educational resources teachers will need to work more in teams and less as isolated individuals.

If you want to do distance education and eLearning well you must use the principles of division of labour and specialisation that I have continually emphasised. Some people in higher education find this difficult. They want to continue with the cottage industry approach, where each academic does their own thing and takes care of every step in the instructional process.

My fellow Vancouverite, Professor Tony Bates calls this the 'Lone-Ranger' approach to eLearning. For teachers to operate with low productivity like this may not matter in rich countries; but it matters a lot where resources are scarce and access to education woefully limited. We think it matters in India.

The insidious links between quality, cost and exclusivity are balls and chains holding nations back. Distance and eLearning should be liberating forces not a throwback to the past. Our aim must be to use the technology of distance education to stretch the iron triangle. So that quality education is accessible to all at reasonable cost.

Conclusion

Let us now conclude. We began by outlining the new dynamics in higher education that were identified at UNESCO's World Conference last year.

Then we took those trends and commented on the many ways in which the new dynamics of distance education can help to advance higher education generally.

Our conclusion is that universities like the Karnataka State Open University, which focus on distance education and do it well, have a great future ahead of them.

Thank you. It has been an honour for the two of us to address you.