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The Workshop Reports are a new series published by The HEAD Foundation, a think tank focusing on education and leadership development in Asia. Workshop Reports No. 1 entitled “Asian Education Futures” represents the views of four leading educators Dr. Mohamed Waheed Hassan, Dr. Sheldon F. Shaeffer, Dr. Molly N. N. Lee and Prof. Mok Ka Ho. All have extensive experience in both the great strides made in Asian education development and in the challenges that still remain.

The four essays collected in this volume are based on presentations made at a Planning Meeting held at the Foundation in March 2015. The meeting reviewed the progress made in education since the “Education for All” initiative and the emergent concerns that are represented in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. As expected equity and education quality emerged as important issues; and the Foundation was urged to help promote greater inclusion in education.

The meeting also acknowledged the progress made by noting that demand for opportunities in higher education is increasing even as enrolment rates are rising. Massification, and indeed universalisation in some countries, was acknowledged as a reality even as concerns were raised about rising levels of unemployment and underemployment among graduates and the determination of teaching quality.

These analysis and insights will provide directions for the Foundation’s research and policy recommendations.

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The Persistence of Inequity

The equity of development outcomes has emerged as a crucial part of the discourse around both the extent to which the world has achieved the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) targets proclaimed in 2000, and the nature and content of the new global development goals and targets which will be set for 2015–2030.

Equity has become particularly important in this discourse because current assessments of progress in regard to the development agenda point to two results. First, many of the current goals and targets will not be reached; second, where achievements have been made in reaching the goals according to nationally aggregated data, these have not been equitably distributed. Sub-national areas and population groups that were marginalised before and during the development process have remained so or have fallen even further behind.

In other words, marginalisation and the inequities that arise from it are often masked by the global reporting process which seeks national and statistically comparable data and presents these data in global or regional trend analyses and league tables. But going below these national aggregates to analyses by population group, administrative level, and geographic location almost always demonstrates significant disparities. And in many countries of the world, such disparities in social and economic development outcomes are increasing between those “included” and those “excluded” – men and women, majority and minority ethnic/
linguistic groups, urban and rural areas, the rich and the poor, and the abled and the disabled.

The world is waking up to this issue. United Nations instruments of the past decade have gone beyond the obvious at-risk populations of children (the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and various child labour documents) and women (the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*) to new declarations on indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, refugees, and migrants. Global statistical agencies such as the UNESCO Institute of Statistics in Montreal and periodic reports on development outcomes such as the *Human Development Report* and the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* focus more on sub-national, group-based analyses and disparities.

But despite this better understanding of the importance of equity, the world seems to become more inequitable and exclusive every day. Social and economic disparities within and across countries and communities are increasing, as are conflict and violence within and across nations, religions, and cultures. The digital divide is a growing reality. Food security is becoming more tenuous, and climate change is already exacerbating the gap between those who have access to water and arable land and those who do not.

**The Role of Education: Mitigating or Maintaining Inequity?**

During the final decades of the last century, education was often seen as the panacea for such development challenges. It was assumed that more schools and better education would necessarily reduce poverty; promote democracy and social justice; reduce intolerance and conflict; spread the benefits of information and communication technologies; and guarantee a sustainable future – and, in the process, ensure that all of humankind would be equitably included in these achievements. As time has passed, however, and such progress has not been made, more voices have been heard in regard to the role education plays in maintaining, rather than reducing social, economic, and political disparities, and in continuing, rather than interrupting, the inter-generational transfer of poverty and exclusion. To these voices, education systems reinforce disadvantage and ensure that society remains unequal in both opportunity and achievement.
These views, however, are too simplistic. Education by itself can neither perform miracles of guaranteeing equitable development nor be solely blamed for social injustice and inequalities. Yet more and better education is certainly necessary. And it becomes more powerful to the extent that the opportunity for achieving a good-quality education is universally and equitably available to all – in other words, Education for All, not “education for the advantaged”.

The fundamental challenges in achieving this essential outcome include the satisfaction of ministries of education with what has already been achieved, an emphasis on quantitative enrolment numbers rather than qualitative achievement outcomes, and a lack of high-level commitment to do more. The national net enrolment ratio (NER) represents a visible sign of development to ministers of education, their constituents, and higher-level politicians. Getting close to achieving an official NER of 95 to 98 per cent is their priority, not looking at the accuracy of their data or at other household-based data such as school attendance rates. Satisfied with what has been achieved and indifferent to what has not been, they are reluctant to discuss their system’s net non-enrolment ratio – a figure that would focus attention on inequities and on potential learners the system does not see, count, or serve.

Equally ignored, despite mounting evidence, is the persistence of poor-quality education, especially for disadvantaged populations, as indicated by achievement scores in nationally and internationally comparative assessments. The “non-achievement rates” of children in more countries (tested, for example, through Early Grade Reading Assessments), with Grade 5 pupils reading at Grade 2 levels, are staggering.

**What Is an Equity-focused Approach to Education?**

Equity in education is a complex phenomenon. The nature of prior experience, knowledge, skills, and abilities that learners bring to the educational setting from their home and family will never be equitable; not everyone has the same start in life, and each individual is unique. Many children arrive in school without having had adequate stimulation – visually, linguistically,
Asian Education Futures

Arguably the most fundamental rationale for equity is the universal right of all individuals to quality education...

What is imperative in terms of achieving greater equity is what occurs during the process of turning the inputs learners bring to the educational setting into the outcomes they derive from education. This means not only equitable access to education – enough places in affordable, accessible schools so that all learners have the same opportunities to enrol, or equitable access to a desk in a classroom which does not necessarily lead to the same opportunity to achieve an education of good quality. But this also insists on equity in the quality of the education provided – system inputs (books and materials, facilities, and teachers); the school environment (healthy, safe, protective); and the teaching-learning process (learner-centred, relevant, and focused on what children want to and need to learn).

Elements of an equity-focused approach to education therefore encompass calculating, analysing, and publicising non-enrolment and low-achievement rates; developing organisational cultures, policies, and programmes to improve these rates; and, at the same time, increasing the quality of education for all. Above all, such an approach to education requires a genuinely inclusive education system and schools, targeted to reach all excluded children. This includes

- those completely excluded from school – who have never enrolled because of where they live, of how they live, and of who they are;
- those who once attended school but then dropped out or were “pushed out”; and
- those enrolled in school but are not learning – who sit in class but do not learn due to individual or group characteristics (language, gender, poverty, ability), teachers who cannot respond to their individual learning needs, too many children in the classroom, or the low quality of education provided.
Specifically, such an inclusive approach:
• insists on getting all children into regular schools and education systems;
• is concerned with increasing enrolment, attendance, completion rates, reducing repetition and dropout rates, and ensuring longer-term school success; and
• requires an analysis of what causes exclusion, the active searching for and targeted support to those excluded, and new school cultures, policies, and practices to meet the diversity of students.

And who usually are these children who are excluded from learning? There are many categories of such children including, but not limited to, the following:
• learners from very poor and very large families, remote and rural communities, indigenous groups, lower castes, and religious, linguistic, and ethnic minorities
• learners with disabilities
• girls and women, especially from rural/ethnic minorities
• stateless children and learners from migrant families and refugees
• street children and working children
• orphans, abandoned children, and children in difficult circumstances affected by armed conflict or natural disaster
• at-risk boys
• children affected or infected by HIV and AIDS

Why Worry about Achieving Equity in Education?
There are several reasons why the world should be more concerned about achieving genuine equity in and through education, including those outlined below.

To realise a human right
Arguably the most fundamental rationale for equity is the universal right of all individuals to quality education, whether defined as basic, fundamental, or primary (e.g., see Tomasevski, 2004). A wide range of international conventions and declarations, including those mentioned above – some binding to governments and some not – have proclaimed this right. These documents all make clear the obligation shared by a large range of duty bearers, from ministers of education to teachers and parents, to realise the right of all to education. To work from such a rights perspective has far-reaching implications for education development. It necessarily entails promoting values, knowledge, and skills that incorporate the basic principles of non-discrimination,
protection, and participation. Achieving equity in education is therefore actualising the right to non-discrimination.

To promote more equitable economic, social, and political development
If we accept the assumption (and not everyone does) that more and better education results in greater individual and social development, then equity-based investments and reforms in education – getting all citizens educated to a higher level of quality – will lead to a broader, stronger, and healthier human resource base able to participate more actively, effectively, and responsibly in the development process, with greater equality of outcomes. This, in turn, will promote the more effective and efficient use of development resources as well as a greater reduction in poverty and a more inclusive growth.

In the long run, it will lead to cost savings, especially in the social development sectors such as health and social welfare. Failure to reap the economic and social benefits of globalisation, while resisting its negative effects, by guaranteeing an equitable opportunity for all citizens to pursue education to their fullest potential will increase the already growing disparities found both within and across nations around the world.

To promote social cohesion and inclusion
An increasingly important function of education is to more effectively teach learners how to live together (admittedly, some systems try to do the opposite). This implies tolerance of diversity and pluralism, including affirming one’s own identity rather than negating it, and the promotion of mutual understanding, cooperation, and solidarity. Schools in education systems that focus on equity of access and opportunity are expected to be able to change attitudes towards a positive view of diversity. This can be accomplished by educating all children together in an inclusive and participatory manner on issues such as social justice, human rights, and sustainable development; thus forming the basis for a just and non-discriminatory society. It can be argued that such schools do much more than tolerate diversity. They welcome it, celebrate it, and see it as an opportunity to be used to provide better-quality education, rather than a problem to be solved.

To aspire towards internationally mandated goals
Although they are not binding on governments, two major
education declarations made the same obligation clear. The World Declaration on Education for All adopted in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 states that providing basic education to all children requires consistent measures to reduce disparities by reaching underserved groups, including the poor; remote rural populations; ethnic, racial, and linguistic minorities; refugees and migrants; people with disabilities; and those affected by war (UNESCO, 2000, p. 75). The *Dakar Framework for Action* refers to the need for “developing ‘inclusive’ education systems which explicitly identify, target, and respond flexibly to the needs and circumstances of the poorest and the most marginalised” (p. 18). Thus, inclusive, equity-based education became the guiding principle to transform education systems from vision to practices and to achieve both the EFA goals and the Millennium Development Goals related to education.

*To improve the efficiency and cost-benefit of education systems*
It seems counter-intuitive that equity-focused approaches to education that target populations which are the most difficult and often the most expensive to reach can actually help reduce ministry of education budgets. But an emphasis on marginalised, disadvantaged, and at-risk learners leads to less wastage – wastage that is caused by the large numbers of children subsequently repeating grades or dropping out entirely. With such an emphasis, learners enter the system at the mandated age and progress both on schedule and more successfully. In addition, many equity-based approaches to education – multi-grade and multi-age teaching, initial literacy in the mother tongue, and the conversion of special schools for learners with disabilities into resource centres to help regular schools genuinely include these learners – are either less expensive from the outset or save money in the long run through reduced unit costs and greater effectiveness and impact.

**What Can Be Done to Promote Equity?**
Actions to promote equity can be taken at both the macro- and micro-levels.

*Macro-level*
At the macro-level, these actions may include the following:

**Start with early childhood** – develop comprehensive, inclusive early childhood care and development/education programmes. There is
now a wealth of evidence from a wide range of fields – neuroscience, genetics, economics, health, education – showing that early childhood is the most important developmental phase in the human lifespan and that preventive early interventions yield higher returns compared to later remedial services. This evidence demonstrates that greater investment in such early childhood interventions is essential not only for the well-being of the young children themselves but also for the greater good of the society as a whole – in terms of the development of human capital, social cohesion, and economic success.

Evidence also shows that the most disadvantaged children, such as those listed above, experience the most dramatic gains from good-quality early childhood care and development programmes; but it is exactly these children who are least likely to be participating in these programmes (Global Child Development Group, 2011). (For example, in one Southeast Asian nation, 67 per cent of children from the highest socio-economic quintile attend pre-school compared to 6 per cent from the lowest quintile.)

**Strengthen inclusion** – promote the “child-seeking” nature of inclusive education systems and schools with more targeted affirmative action to reach excluded learners. To help achieve this, it is necessary to build stronger links with a wide range of education stakeholders in sectors such as health and nutrition, water and sanitation, and labour and gender equality – especially in areas vulnerable to conflict, disaster, and extreme poverty. It is also essential to focus pre-service and in-service teacher education – and training for head teachers, administrators, supervisors, and district officers – more towards issues of inclusion and equity and to develop national policies in areas such as mother tongue-based multilingual education, the greater inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools, multi-grade teaching, and special support (e.g., conditional cash transfers) for children of the extreme poor.

**Develop national standards, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms towards inclusion** – focus these standards and mechanisms on the various components and dimensions of inclusion related both to access...
and quality. In terms of physical infrastructure, this means ensuring that the ministry of education constructs or renovates all schools to international standards of accessibility, health, and disaster-risk reduction. This also means developing a monitoring and assessment system and a good-practice mechanism to measure progress towards more equity-focused education outcomes and disseminate examples of good practice.

Micro-level
At the micro-level, advancing towards equity-focused, inclusive education will include taking action to:
- implement school self-assessments and develop planning and management processes leading to more equity-focused school improvement plans;
- develop stronger links with local health and nutrition programmes and services;
- provide support services and personnel required at the school level to assist in the achievement of greater equity;
- help schools develop genuinely local curriculum content; and
- promote community involvement as an integral part of child-friendly schools.

Conclusion
This focus on equity is now on the way to becoming the cornerstone of the new global development agenda for education. The draft Sustainable Development Goal for Education, which is likely to be endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations later this year and endorsed as well at the World Education Forum 2015 held in Incheon, South Korea, in May 2015, reads: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all”. The essential goal of equity, both in access and in quality, long lost in the focus on increasing national averages, has now come in to its own.

References

Countries in the Asia-Pacific region are diverse in terms of geographical size, economic wealth, political ideologies, and educational traditions. There are island states in the Oceania region, while there are countries like China, Indonesia, and India which have large geographical areas and huge populations. Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand are advanced industrialised countries; Malaysia and Thailand are newly industrialised countries; and Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam are countries in transition – that is, from an agricultural economy to an industrialised economy, and also from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented economy.

Many countries in the region have a colonial history and their education systems are part of the colonial legacy. Despite the diversity of countries in the region, it is possible to identify a number of trends and sets of challenges that are commonly found in higher education systems in the region. The purpose of this short article is to examine each of these trends in higher education and the challenges associated with them (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009).

**Massification**

A global trend in higher education is the rapid expansion of higher education. The percentage of the age cohort enrolled in tertiary education has grown from 19 per cent in 2000 to 26 per cent in 2007, with the most dramatic gains in the middle-income and upper-income countries. In East Asia and the Pacific region, increases ranged from 15 per cent in 2000 to 26 per cent in 2007. In this region, the high-income countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia have
achieved universal higher education with gross enrolment ratios over 50 per cent, while the middle-income countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines have achieved mass higher education with gross enrolment ratios ranging 20 to 50 per cent. As for the low-income countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, and Cambodia, the tertiary gross enrolment ratio is below 20 per cent (Lee, 2013).

The massive expansion of higher education is due to ever-increasing social demand partly brought about by population growth, the democratisation of secondary education, and the growing affluence of many societies in the region. A UNESCO report (UNESCO Institute of Statistics [UIS], 2014) observed that as demand for tertiary education continues to rise across the region, countries are expanding their higher education systems outwards by constructing new universities, hiring more faculty, and encouraging private provision. At the same time, they are also expanding upwards by providing more graduate programmes so as to ensure a steady supply of qualified professors and researchers.

Massification of higher education brings with it a whole wide range of issues and challenges (Shin, Postiglione & Huang, 2015). Although there is an excess demand for higher education in many developing countries, quite a number of the developed countries such as Japan and South Korea are experiencing an oversupply of places in their higher education institutions because the number of students in the 17–24 age cohort is declining due to low birth rates in recent years. Therefore, countries with an oversupply of higher education places have to consider how to best use their higher education capacity.

In expanding the higher education systems, many governments also have to widen access to accommodate first generation students from disadvantaged groups such as rural populations, the poor, women, and minority groups. While female students are under-represented in countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Laos, and Cambodia, they are over-represented in other countries such as Australia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand.

With the rapid expansion of higher education and the rising unit cost, many governments are faced with fiscal constraints, as well as increasing pressure to seek other sources of funding and restructure their higher education systems.
**Diversification**
The diversification of higher education is observed in the diversification of funding sources and the differentiation of higher education institutions. The restructuring of higher education in the region is aimed at finding innovative ways of financing higher education which include the privatisation of higher education, the corporatisation of public universities, the implementation of student fees, and the formation of strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors in the provision of higher education (Shin & Teichler, 2014).

While private higher education has a long history in countries such as Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines, it is relatively new in other countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and China. In the newly established private sectors, governments liberalise and deregulate education sector policies to allow private higher education institutions to be established to absorb the increasing demand which cannot be met by the public sector due to budgetary constraints.

The corporatisation of public universities is a move to allow public universities to operate like business enterprises by charging student fees, seeking research grants and consultancies, franchising educational programmes, renting out universities facilities, and investing in other business ventures. Another policy reform is the policy of cost-recovery from students. In recent years, countries such as China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, which did not charge tuition fees in the past, have begun to collect fees from a large portion of their university students.

Different types of higher education institutions with different missions have evolved to meet the needs of the diverse learners. The different types of institutions include community colleges, polytechnics, technical institutions, university colleges, universities, and others.

There are also many private providers, many of which are for-profit and some are not-for-profit. The for-profit providers have different modes of ownerships such as individual proprietors, private companies, family business, stock companies, as well...
as government-linked companies. On the other hand, not-for-profit educational institutions were set up by foundations, philanthropic organisations, faith-based organisations, and community-based organisations.

Some interesting examples are the people-founded universities in Vietnam and China, Catholic universities in the Philippines, and universities owned by political parties in Malaysia. In addition, foreign providers either set up branch campuses or franchise their programmes to local higher education institutions. Examples of foreign branch campuses are the RMIT in Vietnam, and Monash University, the University of Nottingham and others in Malaysia.

The diversification of higher education results in another set of challenges which include the coordination of the different types of higher education institutions as well as higher education providers. Much needs to be done to regulate and monitor the quality of educational programmes offered by various higher educational institutions. Different resources from various sources, from either the public or private sector and from either the individual or the community, need to be mobilised for better coordination in the higher education sector.

**Bureaucratisation**

As higher education systems expand, they become more bureaucratic and regulated so as to ensure consistency of treatment in various areas pertaining to the governance and management of higher education institutions (Chapman & Austin, 2002). But as higher education systems expand, they also become more complex, comprising a wide variety of institutions with different missions, scattered in different geographical locations; thus making it increasingly difficult to be managed centrally.

A more decentralised management is needed to cope with new challenges. As many universities continue to grow and expand with limited resources, their stakeholders including the state are concerned with the quality of education they provide. Thus, universities are increasingly subjected to external pressures to achieve greater accountability for their performance.

In general, the relationship between higher education institutions and the state is largely dependent on the degree of autonomy and
accountability. They are constantly engaged in the redefining of their mutual relationship, with the state demanding more accountability and the higher education institutions insisting on more autonomy. A significant global trend is an increase in institutional autonomy in return for more accountability.

In some countries such as the Philippines, institutional autonomy is closely linked to the level of accreditation of that particular higher education institution. Many public and private universities have also adopted “New Public Management” practices in their attempts to improve their accountability, efficiency, and productivity. Management techniques from the corporate sector such as mission statements, strategic planning, total quality management, ISO certification, right-sizing, and benchmarking are being institutionalised in higher education institutions.

The set of challenges in the management and governance of higher education institutions is related to issues such as quality, efficiency, productivity, accountability, and transparency. Quality issues dominate higher education discourse in many countries as ministers, bureaucrats, employers, and business interests become increasingly concerned about the outputs of higher education institutions and the suitability of graduates to meet the needs of employers.

The main issues in the quality discourse are the maintenance and improvement of levels of teaching, learning, research, and scholarship; improvements in the quality and adaptability of graduates; how to define and measure quality; management approaches likely to improve outcomes from universities and colleges; the use of benchmarking and performance indicators; and how to convince stakeholders that institutions and systems are doing a competent job in ensuring quality of outputs.

It has been observed that the state will tend to favour performance indicators as a means of assessing quality. On the other hand, the academic community will tend to favour peer review, whereas a market-led higher education system will generate consumer-oriented approaches to quality assessment.
The general trend is a shift away from peer review to both state-led performance indicators and to market-led approaches.

**Internationalisation**
The internationalisation of higher education is reflected in the increased mobility of students, academic staff, educational programmes, and higher education institutions across national borders (Marginson, Kaur & Sawir, 2011). The driving forces for internationalisation have included greater demand for foreign education by students, families, and governments.

UNESCO Institute of Statistics’s (UIS) data show that in 2012, four million students went abroad to study, up from two million in 2000, representing 2 in 100 students globally. The top five destinations were the United States (18 per cent), United Kingdom (11 per cent), France (7 per cent), Australia (6 per cent) and Germany (5 per cent). Australia and Japan, the traditional destinations in the East Asia and the Pacific region, were rivalled by newcomers such as China, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, and New Zealand. Overall, the largest number of mobile students comes from China, India, and South Korea.

As for the mobility of educational programmes, there are different ways by which this can be achieved. Partial mobility occurs through twinning arrangements where part of the programme is offered both domestically and abroad. More substantial mobility is achieved when a domestic programme is offered abroad through a different institution under a franchise arrangement. Complete mobility is achieved when the parent institution establishes a branch campus in its own name in another country. There is also the case of distance and e-learning where the programme can be delivered in another country through the use of information and communication technology.

With the internationalisation of higher education comes plenty of numerous challenges including the issue of quality assurance and qualification recognition. With the increasing mobility of students, academic programmes, and labour forces across national borders, the issue of qualification recognition is very pertinent. There is, however, a close link between recognition of higher education qualifications and quality assurance and accreditation.

With regard to the recognition of qualifications, it is becoming more
difficult to determine exactly what the value of a foreign qualification is, because of the diversity of programmes, qualifications, delivery modes, and the proliferation of non-formal learning. Assessing the value of a qualification has become much more complicated and yet at the same time, evaluators, employers, and professional bodies are becoming more and more interested in determining the quality of an institution, programme, or qualification. Therefore, recognition and credential evaluation agencies increasingly appeal to quality assurance agencies to inform them of the quality of a particular institution or programme. There is a need for international cooperation and information sharing (Lee, 2013).

Conclusion
In brief, despite the diversity of countries in the Asia-Pacific region, it is possible to observe some common trends and challenges in the higher education sector. The common trends that are highlighted in this article include massification, diversification, bureaucratisation, and internationalisation of higher education. These trends are a manifestation of higher education reforms that are aimed at widening access and equity, enhancing quality and relevance, improving efficiency and productivity, as well as ensuring transparency and accountability in the management and governance of higher education.

References


Success in Higher Education in Asia: Issues and Challenges
The development of higher education in most countries in Asia in the last two decades is a remarkable success story. Higher education across the region enjoys a high level of government support. Government leaders understand that it is an important ingredient in the economic and social development of their countries. They recognise that the globalisation of markets, the interdependency of international financial systems, the expanded role of technology, and high-speed communications have created an enormous need for highly skilled technical, professional, and managerial leaders.

In addition, government leaders also understand that primary and secondary school graduates are unable to manage modern economies (Shaw, Chapman & Rumyantseva, 2011).

Enrolment has grown and participation in higher education has diversified. New universities have been created and universities are experimenting with new forms of instructional delivery. Figure 1 clearly shows the steadily increasing trend of student enrolment in higher education across the Asia-Pacific region. Comparing to other regions, the expansion of higher education in the Asia-Pacific region is relatively significant. Nonetheless, the rapid expansion of higher education, especially the significant increase in student enrolment, has inevitably challenged conventional higher education governance and management structures and processes, graduate employment,

*Some of the material in this article was adopted and revised from Mok (2015).
and the competitiveness of individual institutions in the highly competitive global market place.

State sources of funding and support will never meet the pressing demands from students and parents in Asia for high-quality tertiary education. Asian governments have therefore adopted policies to encourage the private sector to be involved in developing an education market and to encourage public universities to engage with the industry and business for more and stronger cooperation. States want to see improved synergy between the university and the industrial and business sector for promoting innovation, knowledge transfer, and different kinds of entrepreneurial activities (Chan & Mok, 2015; Mok, 2013a).

Figure 2 clearly indicates the increase in costs being borne by students because of insufficient state funding but increasingly privatising and marketising higher education no matter whether it is for profit or not (Hauptman, 2011).

Through a comparative study related to university-enterprise
cooperation in selected East Asian economies such as Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, and Hong Kong, Mok (2013a) clearly showed a growing regional trend in Asia in fostering stronger and closer relationships between the university sector and industry and business. The development of these relationships has diversified economic activities and provided strong impetus to the development of new economic pillars in South Korea and Singapore, with innovation and creativity playing a large role in the creation of new industries. It has also affected the way universities are managed and how performance is measured (Mok, 2012).

Mok (in press) conducted surveys and field interviews to examine how academics assess and evaluate the call for deeper university–enterprise cooperation in East Asia. His study revealed diverse views and opinions of faculty members from different academic disciplines: while engineering and business groups showed more support, humanities and social sciences colleagues have criticised higher education for becoming more commercialised and jeopardising education ideals (Mok,
2013b; Mok & Nelson, 2013). The call for a closer relationship between university, industry, and business has no doubt made academics more critical towards the imposed forms of privatisation, marketisation, and commercialisation of higher education (Turner & Yolcu, 2014).

Thus, while we have seen success in higher education developments in Asia, we have also identified certain issues and challenges, particularly when Asian governments have sought to increase higher education enrolments by massifying their systems.

After conducting a critical review of higher education development, the Asian Development Bank (2011) not only generally confirms the success story of higher education developments in the region, but they also point out the widely recognised problems and controversial solutions adopted by the governments in East and Southeast Asia. The massive growth of higher education has led the Asian Development Bank to caution these governments to be more careful in their planning, especially in paying attention to issues like quality, efficiency, and equity of post-secondary education. They have also raised issues related to finance and costs, research and learning, and institutional governance when governments intend to further expand higher education enrolment.

**Massification of Higher Education: Challenges for Labour Market and Employment**

As highlighted above, higher education systems in East and Southeast Asia have experienced significant expansion in the last few decades. Calderon (2012) reported that enrolment in higher education in Asia has increased by over 50 per cent in the last decade and by a higher percentage in various countries of Asia. The rapid expansion of higher education in the last decade, however, is not without problems: for instance, it has led to issues regarding academic standards and the quality of universities in mainland China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan (Mok, 2013a).

Well aware of the importance of increasing higher education opportunities to prepare their citizens for the knowledge-based economy, the Taiwan government allowed the higher education sector on the island state to upgrade a number of colleges focusing on technology. Such an expansion has inevitably resulted in more supply
than demand mainly because Taiwan is the country with the lowest birth rate in the world. The significant demographic change and massification of higher education in Taiwan have led to heated debates on the ways in which quality in higher education can be ensured, as well as how the labour market can provide sufficient employment opportunities for university graduates (Mok, Yu & Ku, 2013).

Chan and Lin (2015) critically reviewed how the higher education system has massified in Taiwan since the 1990s. They report that Taiwanese higher education has evolved from an elite system to a universal one in the past two decades. The rapid expansion of higher education is also characterised by salient features, such as the pursuit of higher degrees, an enlarged private sector, and diminishing numbers of junior college institutions or students. The authors explored whether these macro changes at the national level have posed challenges to the labour market. The findings clearly reveal that increased participation has eased the pressure of access to higher education in Taiwan.

Intensified competition for employment, however, has increased costs and led to uncertain wage prospects at the individual level because of the increased number of graduates. Moreover, disadvantaged students might suffer the most in terms of the financial investment in higher education and rate of return because of massification.

The problem faced by young Taiwanese university graduates is the most socially and politically significant issue related to massification. Young university graduates must often decide whether to take up relatively low-pay and low-skill jobs available in the labour market.

Most of these graduates prefer to be employed in professions with a high social or professional status, but such jobs are not in adequate supply, as the global and regional market economy became insufficiently dynamic after the 2008 global financial crisis. Comparing their present salary with that of their cohorts 10 years ago, many young graduates complain about the stagnation of salaries in Taiwan.
Therefore, most of these university graduates openly declare their anxiety and feelings of being under-valued in the labour market represented by their unpromising futures in the job market. Ku (2014) pointed out that the dissatisfaction of students with their economic future has culminated in anti-establishment attitudes and also in an anti-government movement in Taiwan. During the Sunflower Social Movement in March 2014, university students staged a show of their dissatisfaction with a bill, passed by the ruling party, for fostering more economic cooperation between Taiwan and Mainland China. Ku provided a social and political analysis for the movement and argued that Taiwan has democracy without governance. Ku further explained why policy implementation against the aforementioned particular social, political, and economic contexts has failed in Taiwan.

Similar to Taiwan, Mainland China has massified its higher education system. According to the Education Blueprint 2020 (also known as Outline for Medium and Long-Term Education Development), the Chinese government is keen to increase higher education enrolment from the present 24 per cent to 40 per cent of the relevant age cohorts of high school graduates. In line with this policy, higher education institutions in China have experienced a significant increase in student populations. The increase in higher education enrolment begun when former Chinese President Jiang Zemin called for producing world-class universities in China in the early 1990s. Subsequently, the higher education sector in China has experienced significant increases in university students not only in the mainland, but also with students studying overseas.

By privatising and marketing higher education through the neo-liberal approach, the higher education sector in Asia has expanded significantly in the last few decades but experienced negative social and economic consequences when higher education is run on commercial lines (Carnoy et al., 2013). Wang and Mok (2014) critically reviewed how higher education in China has been massified through neo-liberal ideas and practices. They found that the efficiency gained by running higher education through market-driven strategies has...
inevitably compromised education quality and equality.

Similarly, Qing Zha and Jing Lin (2014) offer an interesting analysis on how China has massified higher education by policy execution, whereas Wolverton (2014) outlines how China and the United States have made serious attempts to produce more dynamic knowledge creators by increasing the number of higher learning opportunities. With these research findings, the importance of increasing the number of higher education opportunities for the young generation cannot be doubted.

We should be aware, however, that the massive expansion of higher education unquestionably creates pressure on the employment of graduates. Wing Kit Chan (2015) argues that the number of Chinese citizens who are unsure of their prospects after graduation has reached an unprecedented level of two million since the summer of 2013. This group of graduates is not entitled to claim any benefits from social insurance schemes based on formal employment. In addition, if they are away from home, they do not have any access to other supplementary benefits of the social protection system based on household registration status, which is financed and provided by the local governments of host cities.

The Chinese government has introduced a range of policy measures in the past years with an emphasis on “flexible employment”, which is an umbrella term for several types of atypical jobs. Nonetheless, we have observed the growing anxiety commonly shared by university graduates in Mainland China because over seven million university graduates are produced annually.

In view of the research findings noted above, the role of education in upward social mobility is therefore questioned. Education may contribute to increased earnings and offer possibilities for the upper social class in a less globalised and elite higher education system. The status quo has, however, changed, particularly against ever-intensifying globalisation and massification of higher education. Specifically, a degree does not assure employment, high earnings, and upward social mobility.

Social mobility through university credentials has become less certain in both developed and emerging economies. Haveman and Smeeding
(2006) showed the growing income-related gap both in access to and in success in higher education in the US. In top-tier colleges and universities, almost three quarters of the entering class is from the highest socio-economic quartile. The pool of qualified youth is far greater than the number admitted and enrolled.

Equivalent developments can be easily found in other parts of Asia, particularly when higher education expansion is not matched with changing labour market needs. According to Hugh Lauder (2014), a similar story is unfolding in East Asia with around three million economically inactive graduates in South Korea who are still struggling for job placements. In Japan, some 38 per cent of graduates in 2009 were unemployed 8 months after graduation, and that figure has not improved. In India, one in three young graduates is unemployed; while in China, it appears that in 2013 only 38 per cent of graduates were issued contracts, contracts being an indicator of quality jobs although accurate data is hard to come by.

What makes the situation worse is when there is a greater supply of high-skilled, well-educated, and young labour force than jobs available, especially since developing economies have tried extremely hard to enhance their population’s capacity to become globally competitive through higher education (Mok, in press). An oversupply of talent in the context of the Global Auction, as Brown and his associates argued (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2011), is now creating the pressure to create jobs, and that these jobs will not be the high-wage jobs originally envisaged.

It is against such a wider policy context that in a recent issue, *The Economist* (2015) raised a very important point by publishing a featured article entitled “The world is going to university: More and more money is being spent on higher education. Too little is known about whether it is worth it”. This article sheds light on a very important issue confronting policymakers and higher education practitioners with regard to the sorts of skills and knowledge sets that we have to provide for the students who will most probably face uncertain futures and unclear

Social mobility through university credentials has become less certain in both developed and emerging economies.
global labour markets. As many people still believe that having higher education qualifications would get them better career prospects, we will certainly confront the following situation:

When the value of a degree from a selective institution depends on its scarcity, good universities have little incentive to produce more graduates. And, in the absence of a clear measure of educational output, price becomes a proxy for quality. By charging more, good universities gain both revenue and prestige. (p. 3)

Putting these findings together, we can observe that the expansion of higher education has had important effects on graduates in the labour market and social mobility. On the one hand, the expansion of higher education does not necessarily lead to upward social mobility. On the other hand, it has changed the role of higher education in the lives of the graduates in both social and economic regards to some extent. The cruel reality confronting many university graduates is intensified competition, and they have no choice but to face the “opportunity trap” pointing to increasing social congestion for decent jobs as people scramble for highly rated schools, colleges, and jobs (Brown et al., 2011, p. 135). If everyone stands on tiptoe, however, nobody gets a better view. But if one does not stand on tiptoe, there will be no chance of seeing.

**Conclusion: Implications for Education Equality/Quality and Repurposing University Education**

Our discussions and analysis above show that the massive expansion of higher education has not promoted equality in education but further intensified education inequality in Asia, particularly in China. This resonates with the study of Hawkins and Neubauer (2014), who argued the following:

The majority of the enrolment growth in coming years will be in two countries, China and India, both of which have massive populations, but both of which also are characterised by very significant patterns of income and social inequality, a characteristic both within urban populations but especially existing between urban and rural populations. (p. 3)

Similarly, Mok’s (in press) critical review showed how privatisation has affected families with children and that are from lower socio-economic status in Hong Kong have
suffered most from the privatisation of education. Based on the census data in Hong Kong, Chou (2013) found that young adults from middle- or upper-class families enjoy far more higher education opportunities (nearly threefold) than those from relatively low-income groups.

The number of children in a household also has a significant bearing on poverty risk. Specifically, the more children in a household, the higher the poverty risk. The burden of childcare may constrain the ability of household members to exploit employment opportunities. Thus, ways to design measures that target low-income households with children must be considered in formulating new poverty-relief initiatives (Mok, in press). Such students are not sufficiently prepared for higher education.

Findings have suggested that even if the diversity of students in higher education increases, this will increase the propensity of dropping out. An additional projected effect is students attending low quality and sometimes exploitative higher education institutions, which are created to “serve” these underprepared populations and whose continued existence is often rationalised by their ability to maintain “head count” irrespective of educational quality (Bettinger & Long, 2009). Graduates from these universities cannot secure a good job. If such graduates desire better work, they must first obtain a higher education degree.

With massification and privatisation of higher education, youths are currently confronted by highly complicated graduate employment and social mobility problems. Therefore, student movements in Europe and Asia, in which anxieties and anger are expressed against the ruling regimes, are unsurprisingly widespread. All the issues discussed above will inevitably affect the academic profession. The rapid expansion of higher education in Asia implies that teaching and research are carried out by staff who are less qualified, overworked with heavy teaching loads have to teach large classes, paid low salaries, and given little opportunity to provide personal attention to students. Hawkins and Neubauer (2014) observed that...
in many of these contemporary massified higher education systems in the Asia-Pacific region, faculty at “lesser regarded” institutions are often forced to hold positions at multiple institutions, a situation that leads to a downward cascade of professional preparation, timeliness of knowledge, as well as energy to teach effectively. (p. 4)

This situation may be seen to approximate a “beggaring” of this fraction of the academic profession as Chapman (2009) argued. Academics commonly experience intensified pressures when performance is not only related to research and teaching, but also when knowledge transfer and income generation from their engagements with industry and business are emphasised (Chan & Mok, 2015; Mok, 2013a).

Asia should be congratulated for its efforts to improve standards in higher education, but we should not drive reforms to make changes without placing equally important emphasis on universities achieving excellence holistically (Mok & Nelson, 2013). Bringing back the humanistic perspective in university governance and transformation is urgently needed.

Academics and administrators in Asian higher education systems should shift attention towards the quest for excellence not only for efficiency and economic gains, but also for human well-being and enhancement. Questing for “Excellence with a Soul” should become the core business of the Asian academic community. Let us work together to rediscover and reinvent Asian values and traditions to make Asian universities preferred institutions for nurturing caring leaders with global vision and regional perspectives.

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Introduction

The provision of quality education for all is the most fundamental public policy imperative for any government in order to achieve national development goals. It is the foundation for creating a just society where all citizens have equal opportunity to succeed. Too many children in developing countries, however, are still unable to participate effectively in education. Many children are being excluded from initial enrolment and many who enrol in schools drop out before completion.

In Pakistan for example, 34.4 per cent of the total primary school-age population or 6.6 million were out of school as reported in 2007–2008 (UNICEF, 2014). Finally, among those who remain in school, only few succeed in achieving minimum grades to proceed to higher levels of education.

Ministries of education and other educational institutions need to better understand the reasons why some children are not being reached, why some are being left outside the education system, why some cannot participate effectively after they are enrolled, and why many children have difficulties with learning. It is important to understand that there is no single solution that works for all schools or all children. But since the problems are often common, it is possible – and necessary – to develop a process for addressing them systematically.

The problems facing national education systems have been known for years but few countries have been able to address problems seriously. What makes it difficult sometimes is that governments expect ministries of education to solve problems by themselves. This
is not effective because problems of access and retention are often linked to problems outside of school. They are linked to poverty, disease, geography, and in some countries increasingly different views on the value of education and increasing religious conservatism. No ministry of education is capable of dealing with such issues by itself.

Effective educational development is the result of interventions by many different actors. What is needed is a national process that involves all relevant actors in planning and executing coordinated programmes for educational development. That does not mean that ministries of education have less of a role, but for many countries, they are the principal implementing ministry.

Quality of Education
Quality of education is often measured in quantitative terms, primarily with examination scores. Parents and teachers, however, have always known that a good quality education is a well-rounded education that helps a student to develop in intellectual, social, and emotional spheres. Parents, teachers and regional and national education authorities have respective roles and responsibilities to ensure quality education.

Education ministries have the primary role of making the education process more flexible and relevant. Local authorities and schools must have some room for making education more relevant and meaningful to their children while maintaining national standards. They have a responsibility to provide teachers and other education staff with training that empowers these teachers and staff with the expertise and the creativity needed to make education exciting and meaningful for all children, and to address the special needs of children who are most vulnerable to failure.

Governments need to provide the vision for quality education. Such a vision must consider the challenges and opportunities that exist, and the desired future scenarios. Educational planning for the 21st century must consider the state of the world, including the threats to environment, global security, declining natural resources including food availability, and technological developments. Global targets and efforts to come up with sustainable development goals must also inform nation educational policies. The post-2015 sustainable
development goals (UNDP, 2015) and the Incheon Declaration at the World Education Forum (UNESCO, 2015) will not mean much unless education systems of both developed and developing countries are able to adopt them and translate them into concrete learning experiences. The current levels of environmental pollution and climate change would not have been reached if the last two generations were better educated on the perils of emitting dangerous greenhouse gases.

Within education systems, teacher quality is regarded as the single most important factor in improving education. A McKinsey report (Barber & Mourshed, 2007) famously asserted that no education system is better than the quality of its teachers. As a result, much attention has been given to teacher preparation in most countries. A closer examination of programmes, however, reveals that there is much room for improvement. Training programmes are often too theoretical with insufficient practical experience. Trainers do not have practical experience themselves especially in the delivery of in-service training courses and tend to have no previous or recent teaching experience in schools. Often, primary school teachers are trained by university professors who have little or no experience in teaching young children. Finally, in-service training programmes are still not systematically linked to career development and remuneration.

Successful education systems, by contrast, seek to attract high-quality entrants into teaching, prepare them in a balanced way, and seek effective ways to ease the transition from campus to school via induction and mentoring programmes. They continue to support teachers after they are trained and assigned to schools. They provide continuous professional development and supervision. This is especially critical for schools in rural and remote areas where teachers remain isolated from professional communities.

Teacher performance and effectiveness can improve, especially for children with various learning and behavioral difficulties, if they are able to work in teams and have support staff. For greater inclusiveness, teachers have to be...
supported with additional staff and children have to be supported to progress at a different pace.

In the absence of good teaching, and sometimes, even when there is good teaching, parents “purchase” supplementary instruction for their children outside school hours. Such is the competition to get into better or elite education institutions. In countries that are showing high achievement in comparative educational assessments like TIMMS and PISA, there is significant growth in private tutoring services. These services are becoming highly organised, well-funded, and competitive. These models are likely to emerge in other countries as they are better known. As with schools, these tuition entities also vary considerably in quality. Thus, while they provide a useful supplementary service, they can also further widen the gap in educational achievement of children from poor and rich families (Bray & Lykins, 2012).

It has been argued that school organisation and routines are increasingly influenced by the modern work place. Given that rapid changes are taking place in the modern work environment due to automation and information and communications technology (ICT), it is plausible that such trends can also influence the schooling environment. We are beginning to see much more use of ICT in classrooms; in the future we may also see more learning taking place without being bound to a physical classroom and more use of virtual technology and robotics.

The “flipped classroom” concept now being used at the tertiary level may soon appear in elite schools within a system. Public school systems may need to provide the flexibility and space to teachers and school administrators to innovate and try out more engaging and flexible learning experiences for children. This implies that schools will need hard and software resources, and it is especially important that teachers are well-prepared and motivated to use technology.

**Decentralisation**

Three main areas need to be addressed in decentralising the administration of education. First, the extent of decentralisation of education administration depends on the powers given to local governments under relevant
laws. Second, the capacity of local government officials to carry out the functional responsibilities is critical. The training they receive in the management and organisation of education and its support services at the local level will determine the provision of quality education. Third, legal powers and technical capacities of local governments work only when there is matching financial and material provision.

In many countries, responsibility is given to local education officials with inadequate skills and resources to carry them out. But looking at certain rural schools where all three aspects of decentralisation converge, these schools have performed well. Such schools are able to produce results that compare with more privileged city schools. These are schools where school administrators have greater autonomy to structure their instructional programmes, create more friendly learning environments, and involve parents and communities in school activities.

One of the key areas that require policy attention is the need to ensure adequate levels of provision of professional support to teachers. Are teachers receiving regular in-service training? Are they regularly supervised and receiving useful feedback, and where skills are lacking, are there efforts being made to improve them? Once training has been completed, are there efforts on the part of principals to see if skills are deployed in the classroom? While the provision of in-service training is decentralised in most countries, there is also an important role for central educational authorities to ensure that support services are well managed and adequately resourced.

Early childhood education is usually left to the local communities in most countries for the wrong reasons. First, it is assumed that early childhood education does not require the level of technical sophistication required for primary and secondary education. Second, it is assumed that it is the least important phase of educating a child. Third, it is also assumed that it takes fewer resources which communities can easily raise by themselves. All these are wrong assumptions.

Research and experience show that it is time that all countries take investments in early childhood more seriously. Financing of early childhood education cannot be left entirely to parents and local communities. It is time that governments begin to start providing public funds to preschools and
include early childhood education in their annual budgets. All children must receive high-quality early childhood education.

It is especially important that a higher degree of decentralisation be considered in large countries and countries with remote and hard to reach communities. Investing in physical infrastructure is necessary for countries with poor communication and transport facilities. This is essential if all children in a country are to have access to quality education.

**Investment in education is a reflection of the way governments envision the development futures of their countries.**

Educational Financing
Investment in education is a reflection of the way governments envision the development futures of their countries. Countries that under-invest in education are likely to accord low priority to the role of human resources in national development. Newly industrialising countries may not see the importance of highly educated manpower because of the expansion of low-skill manufacturing jobs. This may be true for the early years of industrialisation; but the experience of the industrialised Asian economies shows that in a highly globalised world economy, higher stages of national socio-economic development require higher levels of education.

No country will want to remain as a manufacturing economy that requires only minimum education and skill levels. Countries with medium- to long-term education and development plans have to consider greater investments in education at all levels, including primary and early childhood.

Most countries have achieved basic primary education for a majority of their students. It is, however, now clear that a basic primary education is insufficient for engaging in most occupations, including those in the agricultural sector. As economies grow and national revenues increase, governments have to start reviewing basic education policies to assess if the level and type of education that is included in basic education are relevant and adequate for the changing needs of the country and the economy. Before long, many countries will recognise the need to extend basic education to 10 or 12 years.
With the expansion of secondary education, more students will need to proceed to higher education. Except for a very few rich countries, it is not possible to provide free higher education, but it is necessary and possible to devise financing modalities that could cater to the higher education needs of most of the qualified students. A higher education financing structure that corresponds to policy priorities can be developed using direct subsidies to higher education institutions, scholarships, and education loans. Public and private banks would be willing to develop loans schemes provided the state is willing to underwrite such schemes.

**Conclusion**

The continuous review and reform of education systems are necessary to overcome the challenges of student retention and of successful completion at all levels of education. Purposeful changes are also necessary to ensure that education remains relevant and instrumental to national development. Sustainable social, economic, and political development require appropriate educational inputs. Therefore, educational planning requires broad participation from all stakeholders, and the implementation of education programmes needs adequate resources. True innovation in education will need fresh perspectives on the relative importance of various levels and types of education. It also requires greater flexibility in the design of instructional programmes, and more creative ways to deliver education and to engage the learner.

Greater attention must be paid to education personnel at all levels with regard to their training and incentives. At the same time, the educational organisation must include strengthened support services for teachers and school principals – support services that are situated closer to schools, especially in rural and remote areas.

Finally, it is time that all countries begin to assess the reasons for educational failure at the individual and societal levels, and to recommit themselves to human development for greater prosperity and peace.
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