
Foreword

The *World Education Report 2000s* focus on education as a basic human right is a fitting choice for the International Year for the Culture of Peace. Education is one of the principal means to build the 'defences of peace' in the minds of men and women everywhere – the mission assumed by UNESCO when the Organization was created more than half a century ago. The twentieth century saw human rights accepted worldwide as a guiding principle. Our ambition for the new century must be to see human rights fully implemented in practice.

This is therefore a good moment for the international community to reflect on its understanding of, and commitment to, the right to education. Education is both a human right and a vital means of promoting peace and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms generally. If its potential to contribute towards building a more peaceful world is to be realized, education must be made universally available and equally accessible to all.

The challenge is daunting. Despite the progress made in the decades that have passed since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed, there are more than 800 million illiterate adults in the world today, and nearly 100 million primary-school-age children (and an even larger number of secondary-school-age children) are not in school. Moreover, millions of those who are in school do not benefit from an education of sufficient quality to meet their basic learning needs. These needs are daily becoming more pressing as the vast changes in the world wrought by globalization and the revolution in information and communication technologies threaten to marginalize entire populations still living in dire poverty.

This report, the fifth in UNESCO's biennial series of *World Education Reports*, is aimed at

promoting reflection on the many different facets of the right to education, extending from initial or basic education to lifelong learning. The report is also designed to complement the Education for All 2000 Assessment undertaken by the international community as a follow-up to the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990). This assessment process, culminating at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000, is leading to a global renewal of and re-commitment to Education for All as a bedrock of peace and all forms of development, to pledges to intensify efforts and accelerate progress towards EFA, and to the resolve to find new and better ways to achieve EFA goals. The perspectives in this report should serve both as a backdrop to, and motivation for, this commitment and the new intensive courses of action that it is generating.

It is my hope that this report, through its wide-ranging and yet concise overview and analysis, will contribute to a better international understanding of the nature and scope of the right to education, of its fundamental importance for humanity and of the challenges that still lie ahead to ensure its full implementation.



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Chapter 1: A multi-faceted right

Summary

This chapter highlights the several different facets of the right to education as stated in the three paragraphs of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights:

- (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.*
- (2) Education shall be directed towards the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*
- (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.*

The chapter also describes the various kinds of commitments to the implementation of this right that have been adopted by the international community over the past half-century: international treaties, declarations, recommendations and programmes of action. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), are highlighted.

Attention is drawn to shifts of emphasis in the international community's commitments over the years, for example in regard to 'free' education, as well as to the emergence of new concepts such as 'basic education', 'lifelong education' and 'lifelong learning' that are not mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The report warns that such developments need to be watched carefully by the international community in case they imply any dilution of the right to education as originally proclaimed: 'If different principles are emphasized today over those that are embodied in one or more of the rights proclaimed in the Declaration, especially the right to education, how can it be convincingly explained to young people that such rights, indeed any of the rights proclaimed in the Declaration, are inalienable?'. The report adds: 'It would be through apparently small exceptions to particular rights... that the hopes embodied in the Declaration as a whole could eventually be undermined'.

Chapter 2. Towards basic education for all

Summary

The first paragraph of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights refers to education at the 'elementary and fundamental stages'. Today this level of education is more usually referred to as 'basic education', that is to say, education designed to meet 'basic learning needs', whether of children, youth or adults. These were the terms adopted by the World Conference on Education for All at Jomtien in 1990. Thus, over the past half century a 'learner-' and 'learning-centred' way of looking at education has gained ground. Chapter 2 considers how this shift in thinking came about, and argues that it is consistent with the original vision of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, even though there remain questions of interpretation, for example, as to whether 'basic education', like education at the 'elementary and fundamental stages', should also be 'free' and/or 'compulsory'.

In terms of access to education at the 'elementary and fundamental stages', there has been substantial progress in the years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. Whereas half a century ago only a minority of the world's young people had access to any kind of formal education, and barely half the world's adults could read and write a simple passage about their everyday lives, today a majority of the world's young people go to school, and participation in formal education beyond the 'elementary and fundamental stages' has greatly increased. Four out of five adults in the world today have at least some simple literacy skills.

However, educational opportunities for females still lag behind those for males. Moreover, in a 'learning-centred' view of education the world's overall progress towards Education for All is not as impressive as the figures on the numbers of literate adults and school enrolments indicate. Many of the adults to which the statistics refer have acquired only rudimentary literacy skills. The extent to which they can be classified as functionally literate in their respective societies is uncertain. The majority have received only primary education, often of dubious quality. Recent surveys in some OECD countries suggest that as many as one in five adults in these countries are functionally illiterate. In the less developed regions of the world the figure is undoubtedly higher.

In the post-Jomtien perspective of Education for All, therefore, implementation of the right to education has become less a question of access to education as such than one of access to relevant learning opportunities, i.e. opportunities for everyone – children, youth and adults – to satisfy their 'basic learning needs'. In this perspective, the right to education is still far from being realized. In all parts of the world, both developed and developing, millions of people (especially women and girls) have not benefited from an education of sufficient quality to meet their basic learning needs.

Chapter 3. An expanding vision of educational opportunity

Summary

While coming to represent an expanded vision of 'elementary and fundamental education', the concept of 'basic education' has at the same time come to form part of a larger vision that extends beyond that of 'meeting basic learning needs'. The Declaration adopted by the World Conference on Education for All at Jomtien in 1990 proclaims that 'Basic education is the foundation for lifelong learning'. Thus, in place of the view which prevailed in most countries in the years before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, that elementary education is something complete in itself provided to the great majority of children who will go to work at an early age, while a majority are prepared for secondary and eventually higher studies, there has emerged the view that elementary (or 'basic') education is just the first phase of a continuous process that can and ought to extend through everyone's lifetime.

Chapter 3 examines the genesis of the concepts of 'lifelong education' and 'lifelong learning' in the early educational programme of UNESCO in the 1960s and 1970s, and traces the development of these concepts down to the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (Hamburg, 1997), which adopted a Declaration proclaiming that 'The recognition of the right to education and the right to learn throughout life is more than ever a necessity'. Both 'lifelong education' and 'lifelong learning' have come to represent in different ways the expectations that societies now have of education and of the scope that should be provided for every individual to develop his or her potential.

The adoption of 'lifelong education' and 'lifelong learning' as guiding principles of educational policy, both in countries that are currently able to provide extensive education and learning opportunities, and in those that are still struggling to eradicate illiteracy and get all children into primary school, represents a commitment to the democratization of education that is limited only by the resources available for its implementation. As shown in the chapter, this commitment has provided the impulse behind a tremendous expansion of education at the secondary and tertiary levels over the past half-century: enrolments at these levels taken together account for nearly half of the total enrolment in the world's formal education systems today, compared to barely one-fifth at the time when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed.

Nevertheless, in the majority of developing countries, the opportunities for access to secondary and tertiary education are still limited. Indeed, UNESCO's most recent estimates suggest that the number of out-of-school secondary-school-age youth is actually increasing in sub-Saharan Africa, where only a quarter of the relevant age-group is enrolled in school. In tertiary education, which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares 'shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit', enrolments in Africa and Asia amount to less than one tenth of the relevant age-groups, and the gaps between these regions and Europe and North America have widened over the last two or three decades.

Chapter 4. A renewed concern for education's purposes

Summary

While it is apparent that there has been much progress worldwide over the past half century towards implementation of the right to education in terms of access to education, whether at the 'elementary and fundamental stages' or at the secondary and higher levels, it nevertheless remains that the vision that came to be embodied in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was not just a quantitative one. It was also a qualitative one concerning the purposes and hence contents of education. For those who drew up and adopted the Declaration, education should aim to foster the best elements in the human spirit while promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms generally.

Quite early in the drafting of Article 26, therefore, as is described in the report's Appendix on the writing of the Declaration, the question of education's purposes and contents, and the related question of parental choice, emerged as central to the task of formulating a complete conception of the right to education. Paragraphs (2) and (3) of Article 26 (see Chapter 1) were the result.

The final chapter of the Report examines the international community's changing vision of education's purposes and contents in the perspective of both the original vision proclaimed in Article 26 and the various international treaties, declarations and programmes of action that have been adopted over the years since the Universal Declaration was proclaimed. This vision, the Report shows, has been broadly focused on two main themes: Education for peace, human rights and democracy, on the one hand, and Education for development on the other.

With consensus now having been reached in the international community that peace and development are closely interrelated and mutually supportive, 'Education for peace, human rights and democracy', and 'Education for development', can be seen more clearly today as ultimately directed towards the same end: to wit, a world which recognizes (in the words of the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) 'the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family'.

Yet, as the Report points out, this is a world of 'learning choices' as much as one of 'learning needs', whether these are considered from the standpoint of the individual or that of society. This was understood from the beginning when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drawn up: recognizing the scope that exists for different approaches in pursuing the agreed purposes, and fearing to accord too much power to the State vis-a-vis the family, those who drew up and adopted the Declaration added the third paragraph to Article 26 ('Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children').

Mindful of the challenge that still remains to ensure the provision of Education for All, the Report concludes:

'For the populations still excluded altogether from education, there is of course no choice, indeed among many perhaps not even the knowledge that they ought to have a choice. Yet, if their 'inherent dignity' and claim to the 'equal and inalienable rights' that belong to all are better recognized today by the rest of the world than they were fifty years ago, this is surely an indication that progress has been made towards implementation of the right to education'.