

Global Campaign for Education

Briefing paper on key priority areas informed by the Strategic Plan 2023-2027 Transforming Education

1. Background

As the previous GCE Strategic Plan states, the concept of transformation in education primarily refers to the emancipatory notion of change. Envisioned as a catalyst for change, education aims to challenge unfair economic, social and cultural structures and promotes knowledge as the way to expand individual and collective freedoms, opportunities to enjoy their human rights and contribute to a democratic and fairer society. This notion is also inspired by the SDG4, especially SDG 4.7., in relation to the role of education promoting sustainable development practices, global citizenship and the respect and promotion of human rights within and beyond education systems.

The Transforming Education concept that the new Strategic Plan (2023-2027) has adopted has as reference the Transforming Education Summit led by the UN Secretary General in 2022, which intends to mobilise political ambition, action, solutions, and solidarity to revitalise national and global efforts to achieve SDG-4.

The concepts "transforming education" and "transformative education" can be complementary, but they do not necessarily mean the same thing. While the first refers to the necessary transformations of the institutional mechanisms of education, the second is related to the transformative role of education. In other words, one is linked to the system's characteristics and the other one to how the aims of education are realised. So, for education to be transformative, transforming education is required.

The search for transformation of and through education is not new. In learning theories, the notion of transformative education is influenced by Paulo Freire's thought and more recently by Jack Mezirow's theory on transformative learning. It suggests that people learn when they critically think and question the social and cultural context in which they are embedded. By using one's own experiences, individuals can influence not only the objectives of education and the ways in which education as a process takes place. Transformative education facilitates the involvement of school leaders, teachers, trainers, students, and all other learners in developing education systems and with this the doors are opened to transformations in education.

Through critical thinking and questioning the unstated assumptions that preserve unequal distribution of power and resources, individuals may bring social change by decolonising the curriculum. Transformative education thus challenges education approaches which reduce the purpose of education to the acquisition of labour skills rather than aiming at the expansion of individuals' capabilities and freedoms. More generally, the concept of transforming education questions education systems that prepare young people for a lifetime of work and consumption

but overlook the value of reflective and critical thinking. In this regard, transformative education translates into how high-quality education for all is expected to create the necessary conditions to build a fairer society in which the life and rights of every person are effectively respected, protected and guaranteed.

2. The GCE Strategic Plan (2023-2027)

The GCE Strategic Plan (2023-2027) is inspired by the outcomes of the Transforming Education Summit, and is committed to holding governments to account, including through processes under the different functional areas and the upcoming UN Summits.

The Education sector holds a profound responsibility to utilise the transformational potential of education in the pursuit of learners to aid the development of more sustainable and inclusive societies. With our Strategic Plan, we want to hold states accountable for this responsibility and mobilise our members to move toward necessary reforms.

Profound education reforms are required to both rethink educational content and prepare education systems to continuously adapt to changing realities, by decolonizing curricula and addressing challenges related to the language of instruction. Education reforms will need to be contextually and culturally sensitive to reach those who are currently furthest behind with education, such as indigenous peoples. Despite critical skills gaps in the labour market in many countries, which could be filled more easily if education systems adopt a lifelong learning approach, lifelong learning is still far from being realised. Particularly, the Strategic Plan considers Early Childhood Education, Adult Learning and Education and education for Out of School Children and Youth as critical areas in which governments must step up on.

According to the Strategic Plan, digital and technological solutions, human rights education, and comprehensive sexuality education can play the role of catalysts in education reform and enable the access to learning, retention of girls in the school systems and continuity in education for students with critical access barriers such as those with disability or in emergencies.

Transforming education cannot be achieved without the recognition of learners and teachers and their unions as central actors in the presence and participation of democratically elected representatives in global spaces. Their transformative participation, in any case, should lead to public policy reforms in local contexts, which should materialize based on dialogue among multiple actors. This dialogue implies a continuous process of consultation (rather than consultancy), capable of inspiring new cultures of popular governance, in which decision-making is the result of strengthened democratic environments.

3. Critical challenges

The necessary transformations in and through education must recover its holistic sense, so that teaching and learning aims to protect human dignity, and not solely respond to the market needs. This is only possible if we move education from neo-colonial, capitalist, extractivist and patriarchal frameworks towards human rights cultures in which people can learn to live together in a peaceful, egalitarian, and truly democratic world.

That said, the biggest challenge is to promote an understanding of transforming education that strengthens rather than weakens its relationship with the aims of education, as required by international human rights law, thus moving it away from the commercial and utilitarian sense that the corporate sector tries to hit. So, the crucial question now is: for what do we want to transform education?

In defending the transformative role and power of education, GCE challenges attempts to frame education as a source of human capital or a narrow set of learning outcomes.

For the Committee of the Rights of the Child, for instance, education transcends access to formal schooling and embraces the right to a specific quality of education, including a broad range of life experiences and learning processes that enable children, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents, and abilities and to live a full and satisfying life within society¹.

Ensuring quality, inclusive, and free education requires innovative approaches and insights considering: the emancipatory and decolonising role that education can play as well as school governance models, teaching systems, curricula, language of instruction and textbooks; the respect of human rights within the education systems, in particular the obligation that school's discipline procedures respect children's rights².

What is learned and taught in school is as important as how people learn, teach, and relate to each other in the education environment. A comprehensive assessment of education relevance should also include the financial and material resources, along with the teachers' training and working conditions.

4. Way forward

The Global Campaign for Education is committed to remain vigilant of the Transforming Education Summit agreements, so that together we can really make transformative education inclusive for all, according to the Education 2030 Agenda and the Right to Education conceptual and normative framework. This implies responding creatively and urgently to climate crisis, poverty, and discrimination, using methods that democratise digital technology as a systematic effort to improve teaching and learning.

¹ General Comment N° 1 (2001): The aims of education (CRC/GC/2001/1)

² Corporal punishment within the school is one of the critical challenges in terms of acceptability of education. It affects children's opportunities to learn and even continue in the education system in different countries. However, it has been often overlooked in education policy agendas.

We will tirelessly continue working so that States are accountable to their obligations and especially to the commitments made at the Summit and we reaffirm our determination to fight for a world where no one is left behind.

GCE's contribution focuses on supporting government commitments around the right to education, including gender equality, justice for people with disabilities, early childhood education, adult learning and education, and the growing participation of children, youth, and students in education governance.

In particular, the Global Campaign for Education is committed to supporting the transformative finance agenda and calling³ for a global compact based on this - making sure that the transformative finance agenda (which includes action on tax, debt, austerity, and public sector wage bills) frames national and global debates on financing in the coming years, for overcoming the colonial relations that continue to weigh on developing countries.

Colonial visions continue to offer wrong interpretations about the nature of financial problems, leading to believe that the scarcity of resources is attributable to the lack of people's capacity to solve their national problems, for which international aid is frequently proposed as a panacea to domestic budgeting, thus hiding the business ambitions and political domination behind it.

International aid and cooperation are not called upon to define the contents of public policy in developing countries. The donor-oriented and aid-oriented actions could be examples of colonization, when their programs not only impose the payment conditions but also the way in which the resources should be invested.

No transformational progress can be achieved without trained and qualified teachers, whose shortage is around 69 million⁴, so the transformative process should reach meaningful agreements to ensure their labour rights and provide them with opportunities for continued training and decent working conditions, including teacher's right to participate in decision-making, especially in emergency situations or humanitarian crises.

Conflict and climate change-related emergencies are leaving millions of internally displaced people, refugees, and asylum seekers without the opportunity to enjoy their right to education. For example, the destruction of schools and the murders of teachers and students during armed conflicts and occupation produce such serious consequences that the mere possibility of reorganising education is itself a huge challenge, so the GCE calls on governments and the international community to always protect and guarantee the right to education and ensuring that quality climate change education is provided at all levels of education and is transformative in scope and approach.

³ <https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit/financing-education>

⁴ <https://uis.unesco.org/en/document/world-needs-almost-69-million-new-teachers-reach-2030-education-goals>

Comprehensive sexuality education⁵ is an essential part of transformative education, as it enables children and young people to develop accurate and age- appropriate knowledge, attitudes and skills; positive values, including respect for human rights, gender equality and diversity, and attitudes and skills that contribute to safe, healthy, positive relationships.

⁵ UNESCO (2018) International technical guidance on sexuality education:
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002607/260770e.pdf>