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Moving forward with secondary education reform: issues, challenges and proposals

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**Seventh Conference of Ministers of Education
in the Arab World**
**The Structure of Post-Basic Education (Secondary Education)
and its Diverse Routes**

4-5 March 2010, Sultanate of Oman - Muscat

Core questions

How should secondary education **face future cultural, social and economic challenges and opportunities?**

What are the incentives to reform in terms of **access, retention and achievement?**

Are stakeholders willing to re-consider the **identity, objectives, contents and scope of secondary education, as well as themselves**, within reform processes?

Do stakeholders agree on the need for developing a **common conceptual curriculum framework** from childhood to tertiary studies, which facilitates **diverse, relevant and flexible settings, provisions and competencies** for students' lifelong learning?



How far are policy-makers, supervisors and teachers moving away from the objective-based tradition towards a **competency-based approach?**

Outline

Secondary Education Today
Key Policy Issues
Strategic Directions
Competency-based Reforms



Secondary Education Today

Role: pivotal status (not just a bridge)

- education as an economic and social policy
- develop the learner i.e. life and citizenship skills
- foster learning to live together

Global Trends:

- divided into **lower and upper** (non-compulsory) levels
- traditionally **separated schools/tracks** (i.e. academic/technical) but now the tendency towards more comprehensive, competency-based schooling
- **comprehensive, competency-based schooling** – entails strengthen the culture of collaboration and working together at the school level (i.e. teachers team work, project work, cooperative learning and tutorial guidance)

Secondary Education Today

Gross **enrolment** for secondary education uneven and disappointing (i.e. 65% in the Arab states). Advances being made but not sufficient.

Gross enrolment in **upper secondary education 20% lower** than in lower secondary education (key drop out point)

Inequalities in access and outcomes exist **between and within countries**, based on gender, income, location, conflict etc.

Quality of achievement in Arab states tends to be below other countries with similar income levels (e.g. TIMSS maths results)

No. of **TVET students** remains stable but low in Arab states (average 10%). TVET is increasingly encouraged due to high unemployment (up to 60%) and secondary education drop-outs (average of 50%)

(EFA GMR 2010)

Key Policy Issues

High-quality secondary education undermined by:

Curricula which is **over academic, subject-orientated and irrelevant** (World Bank)

Strong hierarchical separation between different levels, schools and tracks, creates **segregation and disruption** (OECD)

TVET especially suffers from **poor government coordination, meagre budget, lack of qualified teachers, irrelevant curricula, lack of standards and insufficient coordination with the private sector** (UNESCO EFA GMR 2010)

Strong societal perceptions of secondary education only as a spring-board to tertiary studies and TVET as a « second class » education

Secondary Education Reforms

Reform must visualise **equity and quality as going hand in hand** and secondary education as a **key component of lifelong learning** opportunities

Global reform increasingly **curriculum-based** (Moreno) – complex feedback relationships between curriculum objectives, structures, contents and assessment around the principles of equity and quality

Comprehensive vision of the curriculum = learning outcomes, pedagogical and didactic strategies, supports, content, assessment and management

Curricula = «a **dense and flexible contract between politics/society and teachers**» (Braslavsky) – combining political and technical issues involving multiple stakeholders, especially teachers (key consideration for reform to be **truly implemented and sustainable**)

Strategic Directions

Piecemeal approach (accommodating specific aspects of the education system, e.g. physical facilities, learning materials, curricula)

Transformative approach (holistic perspective)

e.g. a broadened concept of inclusive education which holistically supports secondary education reforms:

addressing all learners' needs effectively, by supporting the unified design and implementation of education policies and programmes at different:

- dimensions (access, processes and learning outcomes)
- levels (lifelong learning opportunities, settings and provisions)
- units (national frameworks, school-based curricula, classrooms, and learners)

Strategic Directions

This implies, amongst other things:

- expanding **basic education** to include the traditional branch of lower secondary education
- providing **diverse, flexible and navigable avenues** between academic disciplines and TVET in higher secondary education
- **smooth transitions** from ECCE to tertiary studies
- other **learning possibilities** and **second chances** within universal public policy frameworks
- **later differentiation** between schools and disciplines
- **inclusive curricula and assessment** (relevant, flexible e.g. competency-based)
- **supporting stakeholders** to participate effectively in curricula development, implementation and evaluation (i.e. teachers, schools, civil society and employers)

Competency-based reforms

Competency-based reforms could strongly support secondary education as a **cross-cutting dimension of curricular design and implementation** in terms of objectives, structure, content, processes, assessment, outcomes etc.

It does **not replace traditional knowledge and disciplines but strengthen learning processes and outcomes**

It **encourages learners to find out and mobilize knowledge** among other resources (i.e. values and attitudes) related to their life, citizenship and employment markets.

Competency-based curricula is suitable for **advancing a common curriculum framework to secondary education and TVET**. This facilitates the **navigability** between the different branches and levels, **breaking up with stratification and social stigmas**.

Competency-based reforms

There is still a strong tradition and practice of subject programmes being **principally designed and structured around a series of generic objectives, a list of content and summative assessment.**

Therefore it is **essential to support stakeholders for incorporating competencies into the curriculum** effectively. It would be risky to set up general competencies without orientating their development in each field of knowledge and/or subject.

“Those working on the development of new curricula are faced with the **challenge of building a new structure with nothing but outdated tools at their disposal**”. (Jonnaert)

Competency-based reforms

Linking competencies and objectives:

General Objectives:

(i) individual and social development; (ii) ethical and civic formation of a responsible citizen; (iii) the role of young people as active actors and (iv) the appreciation of work as a human means of personal and collective development.

Competencies to attain these objectives:

(i) personal (ethics and emotions); (ii) social: (communication, solidarity, democratic participation, creativity); (iii) technical: (organizing and applying scientific and technological knowledge); (iv) methodological: (gathering, processing and critical analysis of information) and (v) cognitive: (self-evaluation, and self-knowledge).

Competency-based reforms

Incorporating competencies into the curricular structure for their development at the subject level:

The curricular structure can be seen as **pathways** and **spaces**:

Example of pathways (developing competencies through the different fields of knowledge)

Table 1: Proposed pathways and competencies in the Higher Secondary Curriculum

(grades 10-12).

<i>Pathways</i>	<i>Competencies</i>
Arts and Communication	Communicative and expressive competencies
Natural Sciences and Mathematics	Scientific-technological competencies
Social Sciences and Philosophy	Philosophical and societal competencies

Competency-based reform

Table 2: Proposed curricular spaces and competencies in the Higher Secondary Curriculum (grades 10-12).	
<i>Curriculum spaces</i>	<i>Competencies</i>
Space of equivalence	Core competencies: common to all secondary branches and orientations (General, Technical and Vocational).
Specific space	Specific competencies: related to the fields of knowledge under the different branches and orientations of General, Technical and Vocational Education.
Optional or exploratory space	Vocational competencies: abilities that allow young people to take decisions regarding their project of personal development.
Decentralized space (school-based curricula)	Extensive competencies: these ones, selected by the school, responding to youth and community interests, complementing the development of other competencies.

Example of curricular spaces (developing competencies through disciplinary contents organized by fields of knowledge or subjects).

Inclusive, Quality Education for All in Higher Secondary Education

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Do stakeholders agree on the need for developing a **common conceptual curriculum framework** from childhood to tertiary studies, which facilitates **diverse, relevant and flexible** settings, provisions and competencies for students' life-long learning??

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