



Challenges and Opportunities of the Global Market for Education

Taler
Øystein Djupedal

Dato
28 juni 2006

Sted
Athen

Omstendigheter
OECDs ministermøte

1 Honourable ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

Access to higher education on the basis of merit is a human right and was confirmed as a priority concern in the World Declaration on Higher Education.

5 Nevertheless the capacity of higher learning institutions lags far behind demand in many parts of the world.

Only a week or two ago, the Education Minister of Zambia on a visit to Norway told me that he is concerned because the successful development of primary
10 education in Zambia has created a bottleneck at the entrance to higher education. The capacity needed to solve the problem is financially out of reach for the strained Zambian economy.

It is natural for countries like Zambia to look across their borders for education
15 resources to fill the gap. Probably help is available - but at what cost?

In my opinion, globalization is an irreversible process. But it is by no means a one-track course where outcomes are already given - we can and must manage it well and try to maximize its potential. If we do, globalized trade in education
20 may be the solution to the desperate education shortage of Zambia and many other developing countries. But it is a solution that will also bring serious challenges. And the ultimate result depends on how we, the OECD countries and the affluent North in general, manage it. We must decide what to allow and what to prevent.

25

But Zambia's need for higher education is matched by the need for skills and

excellence in our parts of the world. In an unregulated education market this is a recipe for brain drain.

30 In the days of my youth the words 'brain drain' were used to describe a problem of global equity. In poor countries a foreign education often opens the door to better-paid foreign jobs in a more stable and more desirable employment market. In particular when this applies to scholars, future scientists and teachers, the effect can be crippling on the capacity for academic renewal and
35 growth.

Today that clear-cut concern seems to have been diluted into a more complex and more general phenomenon we choose to call "brain circulation", and we are being persuaded that it is no longer a bad thing. I am afraid I am hard to
40 convince on that point. To concentrate on the European scientists who prefer the salaries in the USA while we forget the thousands of African nurses and teachers in Europe is in my opinion to neglect our responsibility. I note with alarm that other countries in the global North begin to guard their own interests, even going so far as to actively encourage talented youths from
45 developing countries to follow a career in their European exile.

The demands made on our global brain power in the future are such that we need to share resources. Globalization makes that possible, and internationalization of higher education already exists and thrives. In theory
50 everybody benefits.

But we know that capacity for research and innovation is very unevenly distributed in the world - like almost any other global resource. From history we learn that such trade flows have benefited the rich nations of the North at the
55 expense of the poor in the South. I see no reason to expect a different outcome this time, unless we make an effort. We need firm steps to ensure that our own need for new brain power does not lead us to condone the plunder of the South - again.

60 I have no ready-made solutions to offer you today, but I believe in equal partnerships between the North and the South and in the open-minded collaboration between academic thinkers. Our responsibility is to ensure a different outcome of the growing trade in education in our time from the disasters of the past.

Quality in education is often an early victim if we leave trade to develop at its own pace and on its own terms. Experience shows that only responsible action by governments can bring about the kind of safeguards that are required when something as precious as education is at stake. I remind you, ladies and gentlemen, that Education for All is high on the list of UN goals for this new millennium.

Especially in cases of distance learning or e-learning, enforcement of quality standards will depend on international joint efforts. I have to mention in particular the Guidelines for Quality Provision of Cross-Border Education, developed by the OECD and UNESCO. We have supported that effort, and I consider it a good example of precisely the kind of responsible action that the OECD can and should initiate.

Quality, or particularly the lack of it, has many faces. Within the little time I have today, let me just quickly mention a few of the aspects we need to address:

- Local higher education tends to lose prestige in competition with imported foreign credentials. How can the impoverished public-sector institutions in the South compete with transnational institutions in terms of wages and work conditions? We cannot accept a situation where qualified academic staff disappears from public institutions into foreign private universities and companies. If the local labour market prefers international education brand names when they evaluate job applicants, soon students will react the same way, and home-grown talent becomes second-class.

- And what about the weaker public education systems in the South? How can we think that they have the capacity to regulate and licence education providers in a globalized market?

The sector management of higher education is an important public responsibility and under the pressure of trans-border supply a number of undesirable effects may need to be dealt with. Opening a vital public service to participation by commercial operators depends on transparent structures and practices. In a transnational market many factors may make this is hard to enforce.

This is why we regard it as vital to reserve full control of basic education for national authorities by placing it squarely outside the ambit of GATS. Many

105 developing countries are tackling almost impossible problems just to meet the most fundamental needs in their schools systems. It is unfair and irresponsible to expect them to cope with the regulatory challenges of transnational operators in a public sector at the same time.

110 - Left to market forces and price competition in a global trading system, the market is soon swamped by standardized courses, with little regard for the needs of the individual learning environment.

This effect is known as McDonaldization. The market on its own promotes education that is culturally inappropriate, inappropriate to the needs of the
115 local labour market, not offered in a local language or is not in keeping with public strategies and policies.

All this is up to us, ladies and gentlemen. We need concerted policies to prevent a widening quality gap between North and South, to prevent the loss of
120 brainpower in the South and to strengthen the capacity in the South. Our own concerns about our need for skilled personnel are important, but they are definitely secondary to the real challenges of Education for All.

Education is a marketable service, but it is also a human right, a condition for
125 development and the job of governments.

If we are to support the self-determination of governments, we must also initiate dialogue with commercial education providers. Unfettered standardization in the manner of other globalized markets will produce
130 flavourless, globalized content of limited relevance to local needs and local resources. Norway will support measures that assist countries in setting up partnerships with crossborder suppliers in order to produce localized learning materials and course contents of high quality.

135 None of the problems listed above are crises, but they challenge us to pool available resources and strive for joint solutions across national policies. We see internationally accepted standards of quality control as a crucial step. While each country retains the right to establish its own norms, it is in the interest of all to define applicable benchmarks for quality in education services. In the view
140 of the Norwegian authorities the OECD/UNESCO initiative for an information bank and competence centre on trans-border education services deserves support, and could be an important boost to international capacity in

this regard.

145

We are also concerned, however, that the potential problems in an open market for education services must not be allowed to overshadow the benefits of a global free flow of learning. The growing demand for higher education challenges us to explore new avenues, and the international education market seems to show amazing vitality in its capacity for distributing global sources of learning. Surely that is a resource to be harnessed for the good of all.

150

Thank you!

155

Kilde

<http://odin.dep.no/kd/norsk/aktuelt/taler/minister/070021-990061/dok-bn.html>

Emner

Globalisering, Innlegg, Utdanning

160

URI

<https://www.virksommeord.no/tale/challenges-and-opportunities-of-the-global-market-for-education>

165

170

175

180