



VOTE FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR EDUCATION POSITION STATEMENT

“We re-affirm the vision of the World Declaration on Education For All (Jomtien 1990), supported by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that all children, young people and adults have the human right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term, an education that includes learning to know, to do, to live together and to be. It is an education geared to tapping each individual’s talents and potential, and developing learners’ personalities, so that they can improve their lives and transform their societies.”

Education For All: Meeting our Collective Commitments, Article 3, World Education Forum, 2000

The right to education, as every treaty or convention that touches on this right makes clear, is not simply a right to schooling or to instruction, but to receive an education of quality and of substance. In line with these treaties, GCE recognises quality education as embracing the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values, as well as creativity, critical thinking, cooperation, imagination and emotional development. Quality education must also be about positive and inclusive learning experiences. Achieving these experiences and these outcomes necessarily requires – in particular – qualified, professionally-trained, motivated and well-supported teachers; safe, secure and inclusive learning environments; broad curricula that are sensitive to difference and to cultural diversity, including the language of instruction; relevant, high-quality teaching and learning materials; and democratic governance of schools and the education sector.

In reality, however, the education being delivered in much of the world is lagging far behind this ideal. Since the world committed to achieving the Education For All goals, enrolment in education has greatly increased, but the quality of education has often stayed poor, or worsened. The extent of the crisis in the quality of education in many countries must not be underestimated: in some school systems, the majority of children have not even learned to read and write basic sentences in the language of instruction after two or three years of formal schooling. With such gaps, it is clear that radical action is needed to deliver education of good quality around the world.

The challenge

The poor quality of education should not be surprising if we consider how little has been invested in assuring the quality of education over the years. In particular, multiple studies recognise that having sufficient, well-trained teachers is the key to improving the quality of education and learning. Yet there are massive and persistent shortages of teachers, and in many countries, tight education budgets have led to reliance on hiring teachers with little or no training, or “parateachers”, on low salaries and in poor conditions – undermining the teaching profession and the quality of teaching and learning. UNESCO estimates indicate that around half of teachers in Africa, for example, have had no training, while other studies show that teacher salaries have approximately halved in real terms over the last 40 years.

Moreover, quality education requires safe, secure and inclusive learning environments; sufficient, high quality materials; and relevant, broad curricula encompassing human rights education, education for sustainable development and global citizenship, and that value individual and cultural diversity. Yet in huge numbers of schools, children are without desks, textbooks, sanitary facilities, permanent classrooms, or instruction in a language that they can understand. In too many cases, education is not tailored to children with disabilities, meaning that – from the start – quality education is inaccessible to many. Remedying all this will take increased and improved financing; not remedying it will mean that the right to education will continue to be denied to hundreds of millions of children, young people and adults.

Too often, policy debates about quality education reduce it simply to reading, writing and basic numeracy. These are undeniably of crucial importance; but if these are all an education system strives for, it will not deliver on the purpose of education and will deny learners their aspirations to decent work, active citizenship and a life of dignity. Even worse, quality is often equated with test scores. Assessment for the sake of producing comparative statistics, or of ranking schools, students or teachers, and even allocating resources based on results runs the danger – on the contrary – of distorting education processes and undermining quality. Appropriate assessment, on the other hand, is about improvement; it can provide information to educators that enable decisions to improve teaching and learning. It must therefore be tailored to learners and to context – and not become “high stakes”.

The next steps

States must embrace the fact that quality inputs and processes are needed to ensure quality education, to ensure that all learners have a positive educational experience, and come away with the foundational learning, skills, values and capacities that a quality basic education should foster.

This requires:

Policies:

Government education policies must engage with the full range of conditions necessary to achieve quality, encompassing teachers (recruitment, training, deployment, salaries, conditions and ongoing professional development); pedagogy; learning environments; curricula; infrastructure; mother tongue instruction; and tools and materials. And to ensure that quality education is available to all, education must be free.

Investment:

Achieving this will require a significant step up in resources; governments cannot, for example, achieve quality education while treating teaching as a low-skill, low-wage job, rather than a valued profession. Achieving inclusivity in education will also require investment, recognising that the rewards – for the individual and for the nation as a whole – are well worth it.

Monitoring:

States must agree on global benchmarks and national indicators for quality that embrace the full range of inputs, processes and outcomes, and in particular track the quality of education for the most marginalised. This should include, for example, global indicators of teacher qualifications, pupil-to-trained-teacher ratios, and the percentage of schools with access to all the necessary infrastructure and facilities.

Twenty-five years ago, the Jomtien World Declaration on Education For all stated that *“to serve the basic learning needs of all requires more than a recommitment to basic education as it now exists. What is needed is an “expanded vision” that surpasses present resource levels, institutional structures, curricula and conventional delivery systems while building on the best in current practices.”* As we embark on achieving the next set of education goals by 2030, all education actors must commit to such an expanded vision.

ABOUT THE GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR EDUCATION

The Global Campaign for Education is a civil society coalition that calls on governments to deliver the right of everyone to a free, quality, public education.

Operating in over 90 countries and dozens more across our regional and international networks, GCE members include grassroots organisations, teachers’ unions, child rights groups and international NGOs.