

INSIGHT

Reforming Postsecondary Education to Support Employment and Inclusive Growth



How to best leverage technology-mediated modalities in education is one of the postsecondary education challenges that must be addressed. Photo credit: ADB.

There is a need to explore opportunities for reforming the system structures, content designs, and delivery strategies of postsecondary education.

Introduction

The postsecondary education space is confronted with several simultaneous challenges such as (i) increase access and equity, (ii) improve quality and relevance, (iii) respond to an exponential increase in new knowledge, (iv) integrate new understandings of human learning into teaching and learning, and (v) consider options and innovations in new delivery modalities including technology-mediated modalities in education. These expectations are fuelled by a growing middle class as the majority of developing countries transition to middle-income status.

To resolve these challenges within the existing linear, hierarchical structures, reliant on traditional rigid time frames, may not be possible. External pressures are already blurring some of the boundaries of the postsecondary education landscape. It is apparent that doing more of the same may not provide the necessary solutions; it requires disruptive thinking. There is a need to commit to exploring new options

and opportunities for reforming the postsecondary education space, including system structures, content designs, and delivery strategies.

A reluctance to recognize and embrace disruptions in an educational culture that tends to be wary of change can stifle thinking about innovative ways to improve education and skills training services and about an equitable provision by expanding opportunities to all.

Analysis

Disruptive thinking is necessary for exploring opportunities for service providers and innovative modalities.

Historically, in most countries, the provision of postsecondary education services has always been the role of government, and consequently a mix of legislation and public sector regulations has been adopted for governance and management. However, in recent years, education has been rebranded as a commodity for trade and has thus generated interest from nontraditional service providers.

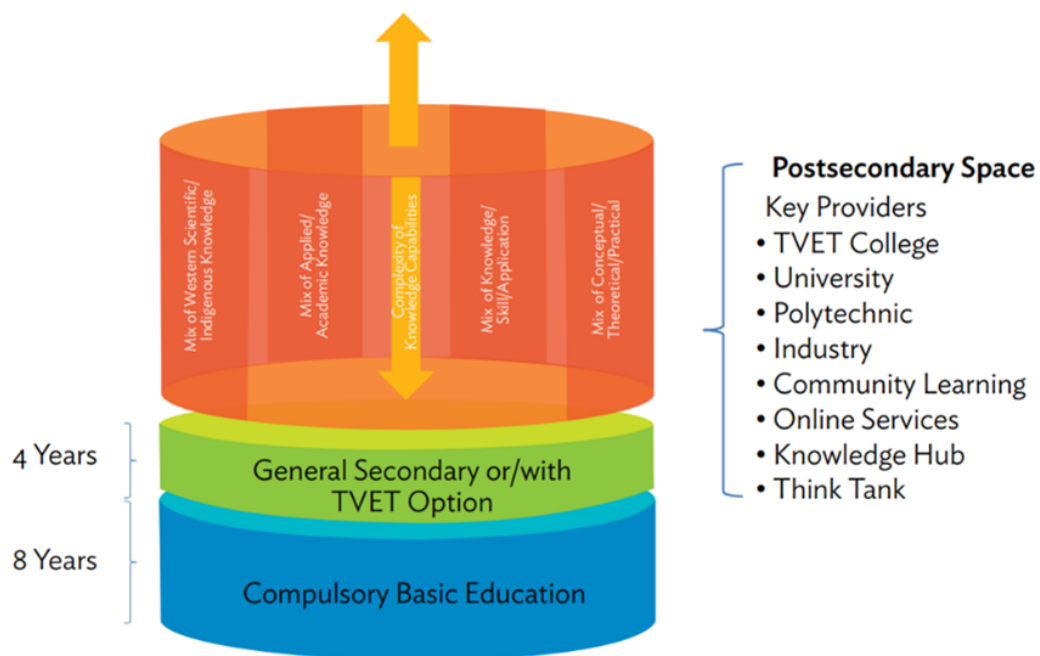
Consequently, traditional structural, legal, and functional boundaries within the public education system are blurring. Existing governance and regulatory mechanisms need revisiting to encourage nontraditional service providers not only to participate but also to ensure that equitable access to increasingly diversified education opportunities is available to all. Also, the commercialization of education services risks exploitation to maximize profits. It is important for the government to implement an effective regulatory framework to provide quality assurance and transparent governance and to monitor the quality of education services provided by both public and private institutions, and to implement appropriate social protection measures.

Service providers in the postsecondary space can be categorized as public, private, or cross-border providers. Accompanying their proliferation are high levels of competition and innovative programs at all levels within the postsecondary space. The competition warrants new investments in infrastructure, equipment, appropriate human resources, and relevant programs to establish and maintain a competitive advantage over others. In most of the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) developing member countries (DMCs), public-sector postsecondary education facilities and programs require serious modernizing.

A range of innovative modalities for partnerships among local public and private providers and with internationally recognized private and public education service providers is becoming the norm. Development partners' support and philanthropy are also helping strengthen public postsecondary education services. While investments in infrastructure and physical facilities may be necessary, they need to be conceptualized and built to maximize utilization—the luxury of having dedicated facilities for each level (technical and vocational education and training, polytechnic, university) and at each institution may no longer be possible. Overzealous competition can undermine collaborative opportunities to achieve mutual benefits. Often, reinventing programs, duplicating open educational resources, building dedicated online platforms, etc. are driven by non-education agendas and seriously undermine the expansion and quality of education services.

Emerging Knowledge Types in the Postsecondary Space

Knowledge Continuum

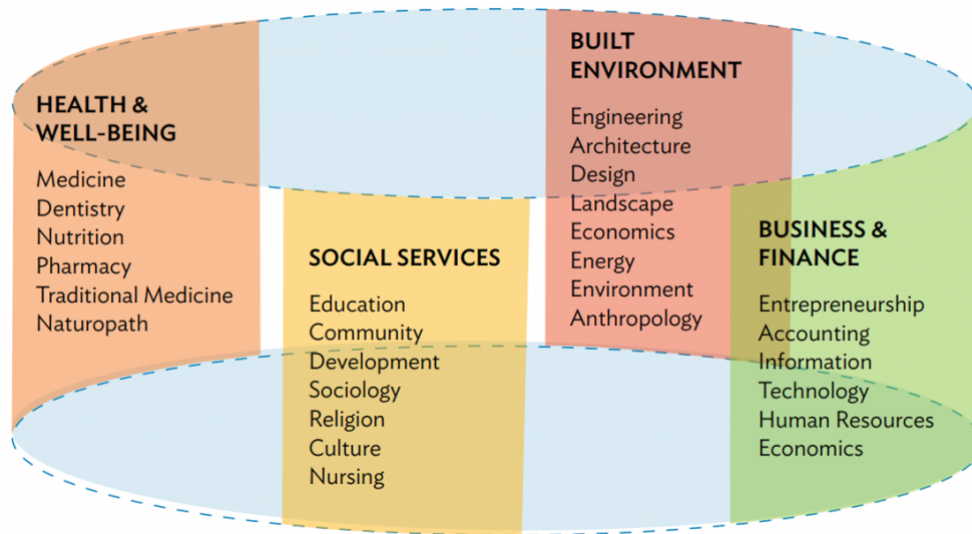


Designing knowledge clusters can increase cross-discipline knowledge sharing.

The push for highly qualified human resources in DMCs has unintentionally skewed the focus toward university degrees and selected highly specialized areas when the human resources needs of many DMCs are very diverse. This has led human resource development programs to be out of sync with workforce demands, resulting in an increasing incidence of overqualified graduate unemployment in some DMCs. This mismatch is being partly remedied by additional training, often in practical skills, or by lower-paid jobs, which risks creating wage distortions. Obtaining a perfect match may not be possible; however, providing flexibility—by having core foundational subjects and options to choose courses to supplement evolving knowledge gaps—may be possible. Programs around “knowledge clusters” can help graduates adapt to emerging demand areas without having to go through extended retraining programs or start new degrees. This requires transparent articulation between programs and pathways. The increase in portfolio workers (individuals who reject the notion of a single permanent job) and self-employment requires workers to be equipped with knowledge, skills, and applications within their

respective knowledge clusters.

Emerging Knowledge Clusters to Increase Cross-Discipline Knowledge Sharing



Also, the increasing use of technology to continuously support professional discussion forums is gradually providing an alternative means for individuals and institutions to respond to the ubiquity of knowledge and learning, and the continuous need to upgrade oneself.

Various disruptions must be considered when deciding the most efficient delivery strategy.

As the demand for postsecondary education increases and more nontraditional service providers emerge, the means through which education services are delivered also evolves. While some infrastructure may be necessary, designs will be different to include e.g. teaching studios and e-libraries.

One has to be mindful of the disruption caused by information and communication technology, transnational delivery, work-integrated learning, flipped classrooms, and other hybrid modalities when investing in huge physical assets in central campuses. Delivering services through global partners by adopting franchising models similar to the Cisco Networking Academy and its partners, the use of satellite colleges both locally and off-shore, and institutional twinning arrangements all require a different conceptualization of university facilities. Often huge infrastructure investments are made for symbolism and marketing to capture the burgeoning demand for postsecondary education.

To support new modalities of delivery, some DMCs may leapfrog and establish e-libraries instead of huge centralized physical buildings. The service providers have to be agile and responsive to changing labor market demands and able to deliver efficiently and at all geographic locations.

Implication

Since the majority of ADB's DMCs have progressed to middle-income status, diverse and multiple points of disruption will likely be needed to support human resource development that is in line with the diversification of economies and pace of development in these DMCs. Small, incremental changes in human capital development driven by industrial era thinking are no longer sufficient.

Resource

Sarvi, J. and Pillay, H. 2017. *Innovations in Knowledge and Learning: Postsecondary Education Reform to Support Employment and Inclusive Growth*. Asian Development Bank.



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Jouko coordinates policy and strategy on ADB's support to education development in Central and West Asia region. He leads knowledge sharing on good practice and innovation in education development, and coordinates external partnerships in the sector in the region. Having served as Chair of ADB's Education Community of Practice in 2010-2015, Jouko continues to contribute as a member of ADB's Education Sector Committee. Prior to joining ADB, he worked in education development in various leadership and consultancy positions in Asia and the Pacific, Africa, the Middle East, and the Balkans.



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Hitendra has a multi-disciplinary background ranging from education to engineering to cognitive science. Prior to his current role, he served as learning and innovation consultant for Asian Development Bank, World Bank, Australian Aid, and European Union. His current research interest is synthesizing the fragmented research agendas into more holistic and cross-disciplinary models of knowledge creation, innovation, and global development.



Asian Development Bank (ADB)

The Asian Development Bank is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.

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