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INTERNATIONAL AGENDA EDUCATION 2030: AN UNCERTAIN CONSENSUS OR A TOOL TO MOBILIZE EDUCATION ACTORS IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

Abdeljalil Akkari
University of Geneva, Switzerland.

A B S T R A C T

Analysis of the global education agenda: *Education 2030* reveals the importance of international influences on national education policy. It's conception is the product of a joint effort by several influential organizations. An examination of the principal international guidelines of the agenda highlights the mixing of humanist and neoliberal education ideas that has led to an uncertain agenda where contradictory tendencies interact. We posit that the concept of global citizenship education appears to be an innovative proposition for the international development of education. Finally, we analyze how the agenda can be used in African education contexts, where there is the danger of accelerating the establishment of a multi-tiered education system. It could also, with help from progressive educators and structural reforms by the state, open up the access to a liberating, quality basic education for all in Africa.

Keywords: Auditor/Auditee, Curricula, Pedagogy, Quality-Audit, Audit-Quality, Science, Engineering.

INTRODUCTION

National education policies have long been under the exclusive responsibility of the nation-state. For a long time, the preferred policies were essentially derived from preoccupations within national borders, even if the adoption on a few "good practices" from around the world were possible. However, over the last thirty years, education within national borders has been subject to growing international influences (Ramirez, Meyer & Lerch, 2016). There are many reasons for this radical change. Economic globalization puts education systems in competition with each other to attract investments and corporations. In addition, regional economic groupings such as the European Union, Mercosur[i] or ASEAN[ii] urge their member states to synchronize educational and curricular policies. Moreover, international migration and the globalization of information enable innovations and education research to be better circulated around the world. Finally, international organizations[iii] shape national education policies through their expertise programs and projects.

This paper is essentially based on an analysis of international documents related to the 2030 agenda: *Education 2030* (UNESCO et al., 2015a), the observation of debates at the World Education Forum held in Incheon, South Korea, in May 2015, and a synthesis of the scientific literature devoted to this theme. Our primary focus is the influence of international education organizations through an analysis of the 2030 agenda's aims. First, we highlight the relative importance of the 2030 agenda on education policies and discuss its main goals. Next, we pinpoint its ideological forebears and their ambivalent influences on education systems. In the third part, we focus on the innovative concept of global citizenship education. Finally, we illustrate the educational challenges facing Africa in light of this new international agenda.

The importance of an international education agenda: The global education agenda is one of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals that make up the Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030. We question the importance and the usefulness of international education declarations. The previous ambitious objectives from the 1990 Jomtien Conference in 1990 were later taken up by the Dakat Forum Education for all in 2000 in which, yet again, not all the goals were met by 2015. The targets for the 2030 Agenda are equally very

* Corresponding Author:
Email: abdeljalil.akkari@unige.ch

ambitious and many countries of the world are unlikely to be able to achieve them.

It is necessary to emphasize the utopian, but also mobilizing, the nature of these guidelines. Their value lies in the ability to mobilize resources (tangible and intangible) for education. Of course, it will be understood and interpreted in different ways depending on the countries and the regions of the world. However, the international agenda that has been adopted by the UN has very clear symbolic value for all nations across the world. It marks a milestone, a horizon towards which the international educational community wishes to strive.

The novelty of Education 2030 is that it aims to submit all countries to similar objectives. Indeed, the previous agendas (1990-2000 and 2000-2015) separated the regions of the world and focused mainly on the Global South, with an emphasis on access to basic education.

For the first time, the world finds itself part of the same international education agenda. The symbolic value of the common objectives that it entails is important for all education stakeholders, including researchers. It opens the door to more exchanges, partnerships and perspectives on education and training.

Education 2030 illustrates the growing influence of international organizations, and yet, their impact on education policies is not clear. For example, it is obvious that UNESCO, although specializing in education, is no longer as conspicuous in education reform as it was when Faure (1972) or Delors (1996) published their reports. While maintaining its historical prestige, especially in the Global South, UNESCO has been displaced by UNICEF and especially by the World Bank and the OECD[iv]. This succession concerns not only education funding but can also be seen in how international education priorities are conceived. In the South, the World Bank has long been the dominant player in international education and development policies (Mundy & Verger, 2015; Zapp, 2017). In the North, and in certain emerging countries, the OECD (which promotes the international PISA[v] study), and to a lesser extent the Council of Europe and the European Union, have the greatest influence on education policies.

Drawing from Abélès (2011), the 2030 agenda can be placed in the broader framework of the *global-political governance*, which is not limited to a set of negotiating and decision-making bodies:

> […] It is also the place where collective power is created, made up of tensions, even confrontations, mobilizing protagonists from heterogeneous layers. The new dimension of global-political cannot be reduced by simply sticking to a purely institutionalist viewpoint. The global-political propels us into a system of anticipation and bears the sign of incompleteness. It cannot be circumscribed in terms of a balance of power, nor thought of as a supra-state form, but as an inducer of norms, of transversal concepts, of discussion parameters, of negotiating terms that spread into the pores of societies and infuse the minds governing them. The global-political is not only a place for trading arguments; it encompasses ideological negotiations that will progressively take place at the local and national levels. (p. 111).

A battle over influence among certain nations and regional blocs plays out within international organizations, which it must be remembered are not autonomous, independent entities. Indeed, they receive funding from these nations who do not hesitate to use this as leverage to exert their influence or to legitimize their domestic or international agenda in the education sector. For example, there is a tendency in certain countries to push international organizations towards standardization, accountability and privatization in the education sector. These countries are essentially the same whose national governments have set up years before charter schools, vouchers, or low-fee private schools in the domestic setting.

Ultimately, it is useful to ask what the member states of the United Nations to do with an international agenda. The answer to this question depends on the power of the country and its place in global geopolitics. For the most powerful states, the agenda has a relatively limited influence on domestic education policies, excepting from the one-time shock associated with the publication of the results of the PISA or TIMSS[vi] studies. On the other hand, for the most fragile nations and those dependent on international aid in education, conformity with the guidelines of an international agenda can open the doors to the international financing necessary for the development, or continuation, of their education system.

The general guidelines of Education 2030: In this section, we summarize the guiding principles of the international education agenda as reflected in Education 2030. The task is not easy given the richness and density of two sources. They consist of one hand of the various

documents produced by the Incheon conference and on the other hand of the framework for action that was subsequently published by the institutions that organized the event. These guidelines are best interpreted through the observation of the debates and the analysis of the speeches delivered during the conference. The 2030 agenda has six main guidelines, which we analyze in turn.

The first guideline stipulates the need for fair and inclusive education. This means ensuring universal access to a wide-ranging, equitable and quality education and to promoting lifelong learning opportunities:

> An integral part of the right to education is ensuring that education is of sufficient quality to lead to relevant, equitable and effective learning outcomes at all levels and in all settings. Quality education necessitates, at a minimum, that learners develop foundational literacy and numeracy skills as building blocks for further learning, as well as higher-order skills. (UNESCO *et al*., 2015a, p. 8).

This first guideline, through universal targets, would allow the completion of the "unfinished work" of the EFA agenda and the *Millennium Development Goals* on education. It is inspired by a humanist vision of education and development, based on human rights, dignity, social justice, inclusion, protection, the promotion and preservation of cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity, as well as responsibility and shared accountability by all stakeholders. *The Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action* reaffirm that education is a public good and a fundamental human right essential to the exercise of other rights. The indispensable nature of education has been reaffirmed in order to achieve the objectives of peace, tolerance, individual development, access to employment, poverty eradication and sustainable development. Inclusion and equity are therefore the cornerstones of the 2030 agenda. It is consequently necessary to make important changes to education policies and to focus efforts on the most disadvantaged, especially women and people with disabilities. Specific policies and learning environments that are responsive to audiences lacking equitable access to education are needed.

In short, this first guideline is based to a large extent on social sensitivity and a humanistic conception of education. It is both the historical legacy of UNESCO's philosophy of education and additionally an attempt to correct the mistakes of previous agendas (Jomtien, 1990; Dakar, 2000) with regard to inequalities and exclusion. The World Bank's acceptance of a text that states that education is a public good to be funded by the state can only be seen in a positive light.

The second guideline of the 2030 agenda is to lengthen the duration of schooling. To start, the agenda calls for the introduction of at least one year of free, compulsory pre-primary education. Secondly, it calls for 12 years of free, equitable and publicly-funded primary and secondary education, of which at least 9 years are compulsory, with relevant learning outcomes. The notion of relevance is not clearly defined in the framework, but it can be assumed (or hoped?) that it would be adapted to different contexts. Compared to the previous international agendas of education, it is thus an extension at both ends of basic education (pre-primary and secondary and beyond) with the addition of the requirement of relevant learning goals.

A few observations should be made regarding this guideline. First of all, this lengthening would seem too burdensome for many countries in the Global South. For example, West Africa still struggles to ensure quality primary education for all children. As they stand, the guidelines of the 2030 agenda are too ambitious for many parts of the world. Realism suggests that they will not be reached by 2030, but the idealism of the agenda gives a new impetus, much like previous declarations have done.

Another observation concerns developed countries, where a reflection on the lengthening of the duration of studies is also necessary. For example, during the Incheon conference, the president of South Korea presented the success and pride of her country’s education system, which, it should be recalled, was dependent on UNESCO for their textbooks in the 1950s. Today it is one of the best performing education systems in the world in terms of the results of the PISA survey. However, outside the conference, South Korean students were protesting against the difficulties of entering the labour force after years of sacrifice and debt. Additionally, the notion of relevant learning implies thinking about the nature of the most germane knowledge and on how to measure it.

We charge schools with preparing children for life but increase the gap between what we do in schools and in life is broadening. We require them to stay in schools long years (12 years required by the 2030 agenda) and

demonstrate proficiency in skills and knowledge without the use of the electronic resources that are a ubiquitous part of their daily lives. It is necessary to utilize information and communication technologies (ICT) to enrich learning opportunities and to rethink education beyond the number of years of schooling (Burbules, 2018). It is important to analyze what is happening at schools regarding the integration and use of *ICT* and to examine teachers' perceptions about what teaching and *learning* processes can be improved through the use of *ICT*.

The second guideline thus constitutes a double bind of sorts: to extend the duration of schooling and to improve learning outcomes at the same time. This is paradoxical in the sense that research has clearly demonstrated that longer schooling does not automatically mean an improvement in learning. Moreover, the lengthening of schooling at the secondary level, and even at the tertiary level, as recommended by the 2030 agenda, ignores the difficulties of integrating young graduates into the world of work, including those with university degrees. Developing greater access to schooling without analyzing the shortage of skilled jobs seems shortsighted. In many places around the world, the need is for skilled jobs and not necessarily more schooling. Education must be relevant to local contexts in culture, language, and employment. If schooling does not guarantee some social mobility, it can reduce social cohesion and increase the frustration of the younger generations. As Bourdieu and Champagne (1992) wrote more than 25 years ago, *schools always exclude but keep the excluded on the inside*.

The third guideline concerns the necessity of providing quality education. This guideline would seem to be a transversal one as it can also be seen in the previous guidelines. The agenda advocates that public education policies should explore a variety of avenues in order to push for quality education and improved learning outcomes. To begin with, it would seem imperative to boost resources, processes and performance evaluation and to establish mechanisms that measure progress. Second, motivated teachers and educators should be adequately recruited and should have the means at their disposal to act appropriately. Their training and professional qualifications should be first-rate. Third, education systems should be managed effectively and efficiently and should be adequately equipped.

The notion of quality underlying this third guideline, however, could lead to the triumph of a global culture of testing and international accountability. The latter would be based on the belief that tests are necessarily synonymous with accountability and automatically produce quality education (Smith, 2016). Of course, our goal is not to question the importance of measurement and evaluation in educational activities, but the latter makes no sense if it is not concerned with its impact on the learner. The problem is to believe that by putting in place a culture of testing and accountability, we will automatically achieve substantial results in terms of reading, writing and numeracy skills. These skills seem to be at the heart of the concept of quality in the agenda, however, it must be recognized that the definition of education quality adopted by certain passages in the 2030 agenda seems to go beyond reading, writing and numeracy. Quite often, the authors of the 2030 framework indicate that alongside these three core competencies there are more complex skills, as well as attitudes and values:

> There is an urgent need for children, youth and adults to develop throughout life the flexible skills and competencies they need to live and work in a more secure, sustainable, interdependent, knowledge-based and technology-driven world. Education 2030 will ensure that all individuals acquire a solid foundation of knowledge, develop creative and critical thinking and collaborative skills, and build curiosity, courage and resilience. (UNESCO et al., 2015a, p. 7).

In addition, the agenda does not explicitly address the issues that can explain poor student achievement in many parts of the world. For example, countries where instruction is provided in a language that the children do not understand. Looking solely at the African context, Burundi's good results in the PASEC[vii] survey are mainly due to the use of the pupils' mother tongue as the language of instruction, unliall of the other participating countries.

The right to native language education, or even bilingual education, for children who do not speak the official language of instruction, is not explicitly mentioned in the agenda. Obviously, in an international arena where decisions are taken by consensus, themes such as "the right to mother tongue education for ethnic minorities" would cause insurmountable obstacles and would prevent the adoption of an international declaration on education. Indeed, on the language question, the agenda

adopts a pragmatic and consensual approach. For example, on pages 14-15 of the 2030 framework:

> Addressing inequality and ensuring inclusion in the provision and in quality education outcomes requires deepening the understanding of teaching and learning in a given learning environment. In multilingual contexts, where possible and taking into account differing national and subnational realities, capacities and policies, teaching and learning in the first or home language should be encouraged. (UNESCO *et al*., 2015, p. 15).

Further on, in the list of indicative strategies, it is also written, "In multilingual contexts foster bi- and multilingual education, starting with early learning in the first or home language of children".

Still further along one can read, "Particular attention should be paid to the role of learners' first language in becoming literate and in learning. Literacy programs and methodologies should respond to the needs and contexts of learners, including through the provision of context-related bilingual and intercultural literacy programs within the framework of lifelong learning" (p. 22).

In fact, the theme of language is an integral part of the new vision of education promoted by the Incheon Declaration, "It (this new vision) is inspired by a humanist vision of education and development based on human rights and dignity; social justice; inclusion; protection; cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity; and shared responsibility and accountability" (UNESCO *et al*., 2015, p. III).

In brief, the appropriation of the third guideline can give rise to two perspectives on national education policies: (1) to place evaluation at the heart of education; or (2) to consider the measurement of learning outcomes as a virtue in itself. The first perspective, which we regard in a positive light, would place the assessment of learning outcomes at the heart of national education policy. Although some specialists in the field tend to associate it a little too easily with an instrumental conception of education, we believe that this vision is a bit simplistic. Indeed, the desire to evaluate learning achievement has long been an integral part of education, especially when much basic learning has not been mastered by a large segment of the population. In this respect, the agenda offers interesting footholds for this perspective. Indeed, the agenda foresees evaluating the quality of education both at the process level and concerning outcomes, and it does not only deal with basic skills.

The second perspective on this guideline sees measurement as a magical instrument to improve the quality of learning. It will lead to the importation of one-size-fits-all tools to test students without any preliminary thought on a nation's ability to design standardized assessment or the exorbitant costs of some international surveys for low-income countries (Wagner, 2011). The World Bank by both its knowledge production on education but also through its own projects has played a crucial role in legitimizing education policies that prioritize learning and to put the weight of attention towards the learners and their adaptive competencies (Verger, Edwards Jr & Altinyelken, 2014; Zapp, 2017).

The fourth guideline of the 2030 agenda discusses *education for sustainable development* (ESD) and *global citizenship education* (GCED). ESD and GCED aim to develop the skills, values and attitudes that enable citizens to lead healthy and fulfilling lives, to make informed decisions, and to respond to local and global challenges.

While ESD is not a new proposal, the presence of GCED in the agenda is a breakthrough that deserves to be acknowledged. Indeed, talking about global citizenship means calling into question the traditional national core of identity and citizenship. However, global citizenship remains to be operationalized and to truly come into existence in national education systems. In other words, it would have been wiser to speak of "citizenship education in the context of globalization" rather than "global citizenship education " (Tawil, 2013, p. 136). This latter wording underestimates the strong national fabric of identity and the negative connotations in public opinion of the term "global citizenship".

The fifth guideline of the agenda is on *lifelong learning*. The aim is to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, in all contexts and at all levels of education. This implies equitable and expanded access to education and technical and vocational training, as well as to higher education and to research, with particular attention on quality assurance. Again, we note an emphasis on the notion of quality. The fifth guideline stresses the importance to not forget the generations that have already been missed by decades of injustice in access to education, and to a quality education. This guideline of lifelong learning can address parent education and low literacy rates, particularly among adults. In addition to literacy and numeracy education is intended to ensure

"citizens" have a basic level of "readiness for life," which includes social and emotional development as well as communication and other interpersonal skills. These issues are most prominent in many countries where individuals charged with educating have not themselves received a quality education as children or as adults in teacher training.

The sixth guideline, education in conflict zones, indicates the international community's recognition of the urgency and longevity of humanitarian crises. A significant proportion of the out-of-school population in the world lives in conflict-affected areas. Crises, violence and attacks on educational institutions, as well as natural disasters and pandemics, continue to disrupt education worldwide. The agenda calls for the development of more inclusive, responsive and resilient education systems to meet the needs of children, youth and adults facing these situations, including internally displaced persons and refugees.

If we attempt to classify the six guidelines we have just described, which are a mix of old and new, we can see that they can be divided into three paradigms (see table below).

Table 1 Agenda 2030: An uncertain consensus combining the sometimes contradictory traditional paradigms[viii] of international organizations with new trends.

The humanist paradigm UNESCO	The intermediary paradigm UNESCO, OECD, World Bank	The instrumental/neoliberal paradigm OECD, World Bank
Guideline 1 Fair and inclusive education	Guideline 4. Education for sustainable development and global citizenship education	Guideline 3 Education quality defined primarily by testing, standards and norms
Guideline 2 Lengthening the duration of schooling	Guideline 5 Lifelong learning	
Guideline 6 Education in conflict zones		

Guidelines 1, 2 and 6 are clearly inherited from the humanist paradigm of education, which is considered to be closely linked to human rights. These guidelines are mainly backed by UNESCO. On one hand, access to education is a basic human right and, on the other hand, the knowledge acquired through education enables the realization of other rights.

Guideline 3 is clearly part of a neoliberal view of education, considering education as a producer of human resources for the economy and responding to the demands of parents, customers and consumers. This ideology emphasizes the need to move from "education for all" to "learning for all" as measured by learning outcomes through standardized tests (Bruns & Luque, 2014; Nielson, 2006; The World Bank, 2011). However, many researchers have highlighted the harmful consequences of reforms based mainly on the generalization of standardized tests (Hursh, 2013; Connell, 2013). It is probable that guideline 3 will go in the same direction as the first and lead to a transformation of the traditional conception of social justice (Lingard, Sellar & Savage, 2014). In addition to the place of honour given to the measurement of learning outcomes, there is a range of proposals leading to a rather narrow definition of quality. In particular, there are notions of efficiency and effectiveness, governance and accountability, expertise and quality assurance.

Education literature is frequently imprecise and inconsistent in the use of the concept of quality. Quality and its related concepts are usually defined as outputs, outcomes, process or inputs. Outputs typically refer to changes in student achievement, completion rates, certification, skills, attitudes and values. Outcomes are conceptualized as the longer-term consequences of education such as employment and earnings. Inputs include characteristics of teachers, pupils, facilities, curriculum and other resources necessary for the maintenance or change of the educational enterprise (Adams, 1993). Barett and al. (2006) identified five key dimensions of quality:

> "Effectiveness, efficiency, equality, relevance and sustainability. These five dimensions can serve as a basis for analyzing the quality of educational innovations aimed at any aspect of the education system (e.g. policy changes, national administration,

> local administration, classroom interventions). However, it is possible on the basis of this review to conceive of other ways of conceptualizing quality" (Barrett and al., 2006, p. 15).

As suggested by Sayed and Ahmed (2015), the risk for the post-2015 agenda is that the quality of education be defined solely in terms of literacy and numeracy. This amounts to restricting quality to what can be measured and ignore the various contexts of teaching and learning. A dynamic approach, focusing on education quality/pertinence as regards social justice, is needed.

It is important to note that the above table oversimplifies the dominion of the various guidelines. This does not prevent international organizations from venturing into the territory of other guidelines. For example, UNESCO has issued certain publications on education quality that have prioritized learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2004) and the World Bank has adopted a new discourse that recognizes the right to basic education (Klees, 2002). Indeed, there has been a certain amount of convergence of the agendas of international organizations during the last decades (Akkari & Lauwerier, 2015).

> Ensure that education acknowledges the key role that culture plays in achieving sustainability, taking into account local conditions and culture as well as building awareness of cultural expressions and heritage, and their diversity while emphasizing the importance of respect for human rights. (UNESCO et al., 2015a, p. 21).

Guidelines 4 and 5 are new and can be claimed both by the humanist and the neoliberal paradigm. This will depend on the connotation that they are given. For example, lifelong learning can mean either the right of all individuals to learn throughout their lives and the responsibility of the state to provide them with the means to do so or for businesses to have the possibility of a flexible workforce and the requirement for employees to be retrained in perpetuity.

The promotion of ESD is equally not free of ambiguity. Indeed, development and economic growth precede sustainability. As noted in a recent UNESCO report (2015b), current trends in economic expansion, combined with population growth and rapid urbanization, have resulted in the depletion of non-renewable natural resources and environmental pollution, leading to climate change and irreversible ecological damage. The current model of development is not being challenged in today's international agendas. On the contrary, China's rapid economic development is sometimes presented as the model for other developing regions despite its ecological cost. Because of this, some authors believe that a strategy of economic reduction, work sharing, and social solidarity is necessary to ensure the possibility of human sustainability (Latouche, 2005, 2015; Rist, 2015). Development and sustainability do not seem to be compatible.

Another fundamental element of Education 2030 that should not be ignored is informal education: "[...] lifelong learning [...] requires the provision of multiple and flexible learning pathways and entry points and re-entry points at all ages and all educational levels, strengthened links between formal and non-formal structures, and recognition, validation and accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education" (p.12). This would seem an innovative and welcome element in an international agenda. Indeed, in many contexts, the educational alternatives offered to children who have finished or never attended school deserve to receive funding from the state and other sources.

Looking at the whole framework for action, the presence of these six guidelines in the same agenda is likely a *pragmatic choice* resulting from long negotiations. It can also be seen as a *weak consensus* or the *lowest common denominator* on which countries and international organizations can build their mutual educational strategies and policies.

It must be said that this ambivalent consensus does not really address any controversial subjects. For example, while the agenda asserts that education is a *public good* and emphasizes the responsibility of the state, it does not address the subject of public school fees. It also fails to clearly address the subject of the public financing of the private sector, nor how this should be regulated. Each country, according to the balance of power between its various social groups, will take its own particular approach to the agenda. It represents the highest-level agreement with which all countries can live and is, therefore, a non-explicit agreement based on fuzzy concepts (quality of education, inclusion, global citizenship) that avoids conflicts (public education versus private education). We will illustrate this in the last section of the article by focusing on the case of Africa.

Operationalizing GCED: One of the most innovative

directions of the new 2030 agenda is *global citizenship education*. This is an important challenge for education and for education researchers (Miedema & Bertram-Troost, 2015; Pashby, 2015; Banks, 2015). Indeed, divergent interpretations of this concept, along with conceptual difficulties in making it operational, would seem inevitable. Some countries believe that GCED is about encouraging young people's mobility, their flexibility, their aptitude in international languages (especially English) and in social networks and their mastery of the global challenges of the economy. In this reading, GCED is above all an instrument of international understanding and dialogue among nations, and this was the dominant interpretation during the Incheon conference for the countries of Asia and the Middle East. For other countries it is more about schools needing to develop intercultural skills, to foster an understanding of the global challenges of migration and to encourage the ability to live together in multicultural societies. This interpretation was primarily offered by the representatives of the countries of Western Europe and North America. These countries are heterogeneous societies made up of ethnic and religious groups that no longer correspond to the traditional national identity forged during the constitution of the nation-state.

Despite the potential fertility of the concept of GCED, it raises some fundamental questions. First of all, citizenship is historically formed within a nation's borders. Even so, access to citizenship for certain national minorities remains virtual. What sense can citizenship have for a Brazilian youth living in a "pacified" favela who must be careful to not fall victim to a stray bullet from the police or criminal groups? What amount of citizenship is available for a North or South-American indigenous community whose ancestral lands have been flooded in order to create electricity for neighbouring cities? The transition to global citizenship requires a world based more on solidarity and equal rights, but does the world currently function this way? What does global citizenship mean for African and Asian castaways in the middle of the Mediterranean, or for illegal immigrants, or for people trapped in lawless areas and armed conflict?

Pushing further, who will develop this concept and promote it in schools? Here again, we point to a contradiction in the 2030 agenda which advocates an approach of education quality essentially based on standardized tests while calling for the establishment of GCED. Will this also be evaluated by standardized tests and multiple-choice questions?

Additionally, a concept as seductive as global citizenship education should not conceal the fact that we live in a world of inequalities, conflicts, competitions, and local, national and international tensions. Moreover, the progress in the conceptualization of GCED must be an opportunity for researchers from all over the world to collaborate and must not be limited to certain northern countries or international organizations. During the Incheon conference, we observed the passivity or even the indifference of many southern countries in relation to a concept that they will nevertheless have to implement.

Ultimately, it seems that the concept of GCED will have a challenge even greater than that of globalization, which is increasingly contested by public opinion and even by contemporary economists. The latter is presented by some as being advantageous for the world as a whole, while it is clear that it creates winners and losers at both the national and the individual level. Globalization visibly does not work for the world's poor, for economic stability or for the environment (Stiglitz, 2002; Svizzero & Tisdell, 2016). Skepticism about the notion of global citizenship can be observed at all levels of the political spectrum. If we want to take advantage of the potential fertility of the concept of GCED, we must be able to show that it will be beneficial for all.

Perspectives and debates from education systems in Africa: The 2030 agenda has six main guidelines: (1) A fair and inclusive education (2) lengthening the duration of schooling (3) education quality primarily defined by testing, standards and norms (4) ESD and GCED (5) Lifelong Learning and (6) Education in conflict zones.

How will African countries seize these guidelines to reform their education systems? We will examine the six guidelines in order to explore avenues that may be useful for Africa.

***(1) A fair and inclusive education*:** African education systems are faced with exclusion and inequality. If we look at the chances that a female child from a rural region, belonging to an ethnic minority, has of attending a few years of schooling, they remain minimal. African education systems still operate on the extractive model (Serpell, 2010). For example, when a child succeeds in the village school, it most often means that they are lost to their community. Issues of inclusion and equity are intimately linked to the financing of education. On one

hand, parents, and especially the poorest, bear part of the costs of educating their children. On the other hand, in many countries, public education is not accessible because it is not free and parents must pay fees. This guideline would seem a positive step insofar as it would make it possible to confront the public financing of basic education. If education is a public good, community teachers, currently paid by parents, must be the responsibility of the state. Similarly, tuition fees and the prevalent enrollment systems of public schools should be banned. Fair and inclusive education (at least during the first years of schooling) cannot be achieved in Africa through a two-tiered system, private and of high-quality school for a minority and public and precarious for the majority.

***(2) Lengthening the duration of schooling*:** This strategy would not seem relevant in the present context of many African countries. Indeed, offering a universal primary education of quality for six years is already an ambitious goal. Many countries are currently unable to provide a non-precarious classroom, a teacher who has completed secondary education, a reading textbook for each pupil and a reasonable number of pupils per class for all children, would need to concentrate on the development of preschool and secondary education (12 years of schooling with 9 compulsory). Given their limited resources, including those provided by the international community, this would result in the spreading out of resources over too many ambitious targets. Moreover, extending the duration of schooling without modifying the African development model would seem counterproductive. Educating cohorts of high school and university graduates just to unleash them on a labour market that is incapable of absorbing them will lead to an impasse, including more emigration to OECD countries; the brain drain in African countries persists. These graduates often find themselves, for a lack of professional options, choosing the teaching profession without having the professional skills necessary to teach.

***(3) Education quality primarily defined by testing, standards and norms*:** The need to measure learning outcomes concerns Africa just like anywhere else. However, it seems to us that on this continent the need stumbles on three snags. The first is related to the use of exogenous instructional languages, which children and even teachers struggle to understand. Without a general and mandatory introduction of national languages into school, it will be impossible to improve the learning outcomes of African students. The second concerns curricular reforms that are essential to making learning outcomes tangible. However, most of the reforms undertaken failed to proceed beyond the experimental stage (Lauwerier & Akkari, 2013). The third snag concerns the inability of national education systems to develop standardized tests and to collect reliable statistics.

***(4) ESD and GCED*:** Africa faces many environmental challenges. Reconstructing education systems on the continent to help contribute to more sustainable development is a promising avenue. A concrete proposal would be to make the environment of African schools healthier and more sustainable. One can start with practical measures such as providing sufficient drinking water and functioning toilets, in sufficient quantity, in all public schools in the region. The concept of GCED has the potential to become operational in Africa if it can help reduce inter-ethnic conflicts and integrate traditional approaches to conflict management. Nevertheless, in the 2030 agenda, the constant reference is to access and participation in education as necessary components of development, with little indication of the learning objectives, the content or the pedagogy that would be relevant for sustainability (Lewin, 2016).

***(5) Lifelong learning*:** Many young people (and their parents) in Africa find themselves out of school after only a few years of schooling. Others, in remote rural areas, have been completely left out of schooling. The principle of lifelong learning is thus particularly significant for this public. Non-formal and informal education, as well as education alternatives, have been widely developed throughout Africa. There is a long tradition of appropriate pedagogy in non-formal educational programs, and it deserves adequate funding and could even have a positive impact on formal schooling.

***(6) Education in conflict zones*:** Many regions in Africa are the scene of persistent conflicts that have lasted for decades, such as in Sudan or Somalia. In recent years, major crises have occurred in Central Africa, Congo and Nigeria, among others. These conflicts, often cross-border, call for a thorough reflection on the type of education to be promoted in these areas.

This synthesis of the six main guidelines of the 2030 agenda regarding Africa shows the potential stimulated by this instrument of international education policy.

Nevertheless, certain guidelines must be adapted to the realities of Africa and need to be examined in a critical manner. Increased schooling is likely to divert African countries from the need to universalize quality primary education (which may include 1 year of preprimary education) that would allow for real learning outcomes.

Ultimately, Education 2030 will remain simply a virtuous wish if it does not lead to in-depth reflection on the model of development enabling the greatest number of Africans to live in dignity. The current international economic (dis)order and Education 2030 still have to show that they are coherent and compatible. The true test will be the reconstruction of a global framework conducive to a decent private and professional life for all, a human rights-based approach that will encompass everyone (Hinzen & Schmitt, 2016).

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have tried to discuss the challenges of the new 2030 education agenda. Without denying its symbolic importance, it is undeniable that it was the fruit of an ambivalent consensus between the humanist tradition and the neoliberal approach to education. Despite a rhetoric of transformation, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has primarily adopted a pro-growth development model and a utilitarian approach to education (Brissett & Mitter, 2017).

The humanist approach is present in many of the guidelines. However, educational neoliberalism is quite active in the omnipresence of the issue of measurable learning outcomes through standardized testing. A sort of cognitive capitalism is emerging on a global scale (Morgan, 2016). The problem is not the insistence on learning outcomes or accountability, but the fact that the tests become a virtue *in and of themselves*.

The way in which this agenda will be translated and debated remains to be seen, yet it looks like it will serve to consolidate the status quo or the structural inequalities that are present within the education system. As a major innovation, GCED opens new perspectives that deserve to be made concrete and above all be made operational.

In summary, the 2030 agenda appears to be a necessary treatise for all emerging and ambitious democracies. However, the most generous texts do not necessarily make the best democracies. In other words, it is the participants in the field who will determine the relative fruitfulness of this agenda by implementing, where possible, the most promising guidelines for the greatest number of children. It is, therefore, the prerogative of nation-states, especially the poorest, and of civil societies, to take control of this agenda and translate the most relevant elements into their national educational policies; this control will determine the final value of this global instrument of education governance.

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[i] Mercosur (from the Spanish *Mercado Común do Sur*) is an economic community which regroups several South American countries.

[ii] The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a political, economic and cultural organization consisting of ten Asian countries.

[iii] An international organization is an organization with an international membership and presence. There are two main categories: International nongovernmental organizations and Intergovernmental organizations. This paper focuses on the second category.

[iv] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

[v] PISA: Program for International Student Assessment.

[vi] The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.

[vii] The Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems.

[viii] [viii] The table may seem a bit exaggerated but provides a useful illustration to guide future actions that would result in international organizations working in paradigmatic silos. Indeed, UNESCO is no longer as deeply rooted as it once was in the humanist paradigm. The World Bank has called for the adoption of national languages in education and for the support of the informal sector, particularly in Africa, which corresponds to a rather humanist vision. As for the OECD, it has produced numerous reports focusing on social cohesion and inclusion.