Economic and Social Council

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Statement submitted by the Diplomatic Council e.V., a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Statement

Educational Justice with the QualityLearning platform

For us as a society, justice plays a very important role, especially in regard to education. Educational justice seems to be the most important factor for providing equal chances in life and there are many examples that prove how education makes a huge difference to poverty and women's rights. So, what does educational justice actually mean?

For many societies, educational justice means educational equality. Consequently, it is assumed that educational justice can be achieved whenever all students are granted the opportunity to learn the same things. Unfortunately, this is not the case, as it ignores learners' skills, circumstances and interests. Nonetheless, it is a common approach to treat students as equally as possible to make sure no one is blamed for differences in outcome. Hence, schools usually start at the same time and offer the same learning experience to a whole class of individuals. Moreover, if students need extra support, they often, especially in Germany, need to pay for private lessons.

This leads to and is influenced by content dominating our institutionalized learning, in both schools and universities. Instead of creating educational justice by giving every learner the content he or she needs to succeed, the same content is provided for everyone regardless of prior knowledge and/or interests. Although teachers are allowed to choose the content and how it is presented, it needs to serve the teaching goal, which is predefined by a certain curriculum. Furthermore, the content format often is not aligned with the personal learning goals of the student. This is compounded by the teachers' lack of autonomy, which prevents them from shaping or changing the classroom experience to match the needs of the students, as they are expressed during a lesson or course.

The ideal solution would be that students' learning goals define learning and teaching. The satisfaction of individuals achieving those goals has the potential to make students happier, to keep their motivation and thus to contribute to educational justice. By focusing on the individuals' learning goals, every student learns not just what he or she wants but also needs.

For the purpose of achieving the goal of more individualized learning, we created QualityLearning. QualityLearning is a learning platform designed to support the learning goals of the student by offering suitable content combined with different learning methods.

Learners start by choosing their learning goals, as well as their current status of expertise. Furthermore, they need to decide which quality goal they want to pursue. This quality goal provides context as to why the learner needs the content e.g. to pass an exam or to teach someone else. After creating a learning goal, the student receives a list of recommended content or curricula that serves the particular learning goal.

When using our first prototype, we learned that it is really important for our learners to have a lot of freedom in choosing personal learning goals. Moreover, first results indicated that learners have a special need for being supported in creating their own timetable to work towards their personal learning goals. The learning goals are displayed at the starting page and each item of content consists of different learning tasks, surveys, quizzes and other pedagogical methodology. For example, scripts and scaffolds to support an adaptive gaining of knowledge. Consequently, learners do not just get individual feedback about the current state of their knowledge but also receive further assistance in achieving their learning goals.

In offering the QualityLearning platform, we wish to support learners to find and achieve their own learning goals, in order to make them the centre of their own learning experience.

Most learners know the feeling when attending a workshop or seminar highly motivated in the morning and leaving it highly disappointed in the evening. This often happens when the learner does not have a learning goal addressed during the learning session. Therefore, clarifying learning goals in QualityLearning before interacting with learning content is very helpful and may increase motivation as well as learning outcomes. This kind of procedure may also help learners to focus on their strengths and get deeper into topics they are passionate about instead of mainly focusing on content they are not familiar with and are directed to by people like teachers or supervisors.

In offering the QualityLearning platform, we wish to help learners monitor where they currently are in their own learning journey.

In many aspects of our daily life we want to know where we are at present compared with where we want to be in the future. For example, we would like to control whether we are eating healthy, getting enough sleep or completing our daily step count. With respect to the assessment of their own learning process, it is quite interesting that many learners do not know much about their own learning styles. Some learners choose their learning format based on circumstances (like a commute in a car or on a train) rather than whether they help them understand the topic or not. This might be due to the fact that many learners do not know that format or medium can influence their learning outcome. Therefore, QualityLearning supports students by presenting them potentially new information about their learning process, not just in regards to content understanding but also with respect to other factors: motivation, interest or even psychological personality factors.

In offering the QualityLearning platform, we wish to give an individual and tailored support for learners as well as instructors.

During online tutorials, it is quite common that content or quizzes combined with the content are either too difficult or too easy. Providing an adaptive learning system supports learners by presenting them with content at an appropriate level of difficulty or by guiding them back to an earlier step, when learners might have misunderstood an important issue. In this way, QualityLearning helps students to achieve their actual learning goals faster and to stay motivated through the whole learning process.

In order to give learners, the same chances for a happy and successful life, it is important to walk in the shoes of learners. From this new perspective, we can support their individual goals and dreams instead of using the same concepts we use with everyone else. Offering individualized learning is an important step to support the strengths of learners and help them to live the life they want to live. Thus, offering different ways of achieving individual learning goals does not mean people will have unequal chances.

The Diplomatic Council is happy to provide more information on the QualityLearning platform and to offer this learning platform free of charge to the United Nations to offer it to schools in developing countries. We truly believe that education is the key to eradicate poverty. Providing education to the poorest people and helping them find their talents and skills will pave their way for a better future that provides a job, social well-being and a happy life.

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