

Some Considerations on Globalization and its Effects on Education

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Abstract

Nowadays globalization is the most widespread conversation topic. Endless discussions are being carried on and both intellectuals and non-governmental organizations, official representatives of governments or other different national or international organizations are studying the impact of globalization on social and political life, on the environment and demographic variations, on culture and on the system of values in different corners of the Earth and, last but not least, on the educational phenomenon at global level. While it is true that globalization has some positive aspects, it is also true that it triggers a number of negative aspects, especially for developing countries which seem to be at a disadvantage compared to the developed countries. That is why some people reject or refuse to accept this phenomenon, others try to

understand and to accept it, whereas others even associate it with the progress made in the cultural and educational environment of the 21st century.

Key words: globalization, globalism, global village, webinar, global skills, multiculturalism, uniformization, mobility, brain drain, competitiveness.

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“Globalization” and “globalism”, although still ignored by a large number of citizens of our Planet, have given birth to the best-known “brand” of our present days. The changes brought about by globalization have widely opened the gates of national and international economies, giving rise to new studying and employment opportunities, to the workforce mobility and its ever increasing qualification, to the development of exports and imports, to an increased transfer of information technologies and to an unprecedented development of communications. Although the concept of international community later changed into that of global village was introduced as early as the 1960s by the famous visionary of the breakthrough in communication (World Wide Web), Marshall McLuhan (*The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 1962), it was only in the 1980s that it began to be taken into account. And, starting precisely from this concept, Ronald Robertson, one of the greatest theoretician of globalization, defines it as “an accelerated compression of the contemporary world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a singular entity”[1]. Indeed, as Ronald Robertson asserted, moving towards a single, interconnected world whose most remote spots can be reached within seconds, we feel that our space has shrunk. Besides, there is above all a set of ideas spread worldwide that underlies this process of globalization and gives its uniqueness.

Although highly controversial, due to both its positive and negative aspects, globalization has had a powerful impact on the evolution of

mankind, on its consciousness and on the way education is viewed at world level. In this context, the human beings have gained a new perspective not only on their own set of values, but also on the challenges they are looking forward to as far as the educational system and their own self-actualization are concerned. Everybody has started to feel the need of acquiring new competences and to be aware that these competences must cope with international competition. "Already our Asian rivals are competing not just in low-skilled manufacturing, but in high-tech products and services. Once, we worried about a global arms race. The challenge this century is a global skills race and that is why we need to push ahead faster with our reforms to extend education opportunities for all...In a globally competitive national economy, there will be almost no limits to aspirations for upward mobility. Globalization dictates that the nations that succeed will be those that bring out the best in people and their potential. And this is the new opportunity for Britain. Put simply: in the past, we unlocked only some of the talents of some of the people; the challenge now is to unlock all the talents of all of the people." [2] said the former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, referring to the globalization of national economies and even of national cultures. Globalization implies fierce competition, and not only between companies from the same city or from the same region. Globalization means breaking down barriers regarding investments, production and innovation. Companies from different European countries can manufacture electronic components in Singapore or Hong Kong, low-paid Chinese workers do unskilled work for American or Australian companies. The products are being sold all over the world, no matter the distances or cultural differences. Under these circumstances, people need higher qualification, their own talent and skills in one field or another being also taken into consideration that is, and above all, their personal creativity. Not only must people be competitive internationally, but they also have to adjust to the ever-changing requirements of the market. This implies flexible educational systems, which should lay greater emphasis on the ability of

making use of knowledge than on memorizing it, on thinking and liaising rather than on the mechanical accumulation of knowledge. All these have given rise to the necessity of an educational system based on competence, thinking and innovation.

As Marshall McLuhan argued almost 50 years ago, the main factor of globalization and changing the world into a global village was the development of information and communication technologies. The spreading of the Internet brought about dramatic changes for people's possibilities to get informed and implicitly for the educational systems. The Internet became the main source of current information for users, the place where one can find both general and specialized information turning into a real tutor both for students and teachers, an indispensable tool for the whole teaching and learning process. The distance learning of E-learning type has opened the access to education, especially to higher education, for some persons who had found it practically impossible before: disabled people, women with very young children or those who were compelled to work as they were the breadwinners in their families. Education is now accessible anywhere, whenever you want, provided you sit in front of a computer and you can get connected to the network. At the same time, the costs of education are lower regarding both the material and human resources. We can refer now to two types of universities: the physical, traditional universities and the virtual ones that offer on-line education. In a report released by UNESCO that examines models and messages for virtual universities it is said that "Information and Communication Technology (ICT) offers the university both an opportunity and a challenge. By using ICT the university can provide increased flexibility to students while reaching students beyond the usual catchment area. However, institutions need to develop and apply appropriate policies, and to plan and manage effectively for a new mode of teaching and learning. The virtual university warrants examination as it represents an important development in the use of ICT to increase flexibility and extend provision of higher education in both developed and

developing countries." [3]. Although the diplomas provided by on-line higher education institutions do not enjoy yet the same recognition as those provided by the physical universities, we can speak now about mass higher education.

As a result of the massive development of information technology, the products can be sold in every corner of the world in real time – the “Internet time”, a continuous time that is the same everywhere in the world. Therefore, a global economy is an economy that operates worldwide in real time. But we would like to point out that it must not be mistaken for the world economy existing for more centuries. Globalization has been possible only lately, due to the new information and communication technologies, including the Internet and the computerized means of transportation. Globalization, along with its information technology and innovative processes, has revolutionized the organization of the workforce market, the production of goods and services, the relationships among nations and even the local cultures. Every single community has been touched by this revolutionary force which eventually led to fundamental changes of human relationships and social life. The educational on-line process – courses and seminars for students – also takes place in real time owing to the new multimedia interactive technologies, while the students are in their own offices or at home. Thus, the new method “webinar” which began as “web-based seminars and have now evolved into interactive online conferences” led to an even greater increase in the beneficiaries of this type of education. “Some may have as many as 1,000 people participating in them. And while those at the back of a classroom can never see, in a webinar everyone has a perfect view – and can see everyone else's annotations. What is more, each webinar can be recorded, and watched again”[4]. Equally, a special place in carrying out the educational policies at all levels, but especially at higher education level is held by the link between theory and practice, between the academic and business environment. The emphasis should be laid on the development of personal skills, but also on the market's possibility of absorbing the workforce. The

new models of universities would be those in partnership with the social and business environment, which, in their turn, trigger new models for educational financing and organization. We are talking about the change of some universities into the so-called “charter universities” which, in exchange for less state funds, will enjoy more autonomy in performing their own activities.

Nevertheless, globalization has some negative aspects. Globalization, especially under the circumstances of the present economic crisis, leads to a decrease in unskilled or low-skilled workforce, to salaries kept at a low level so as not to have an alarming increase in unemployment and, finally, even to a high rate of unemployment. Similarly, the new information technology leads to a fall in the number of workers and this can influence education and investments in personnel training in the short run. What is more, deepening the gap between rich and poor, between developed countries and developing countries can have a negative effect on education, denying the access to education for the latter. But from these critical perspectives new educational models have emerged, such as new models of rural education for marginalized areas, for poor people and for street children, for immigrants, for girls and women from traditional societies who have no access to higher education, for the unemployed who need a re-qualification or new courses in order to be able to accede to a workplace. Such reform initiatives have been supported by UNESCO and other UN agencies. We have already mentioned the unprecedented development of mass education and this includes, besides higher education, tertiary education, which is not necessarily meant for people who have an academic degree. These methods refer to non-formal education and include lifelong learning, education for human rights, for peace, tolerance or democracy. Among these, lifelong learning has a significant importance as both those who have a degree and those who don't have one need continuous training in order to be able to keep up with the swift changes at scientific, technological, economic and social level. In this way, the influence of globalization upon educational policies and

practices has multiple effects, which sometimes can prove to be conflicting ones.

In a **knowledge economy**, which produces knowledge goods and services, globalization also has a powerful effect on the transmission of knowledge that is felt in all educational systems. The questions arising are: what kind of knowledge should be conveyed to students nowadays and how should it be conveyed? Firstly, we should turn to the curriculum. In order to design a suitable program it is necessary to identify a set of objectives and abilities required by each particular form of education and to define the learner outcomes from that particular educational program. All these should be stated clearly so that the learner may be provided with a great flexibility, a sound base of skills, business and/or technical knowledge, behavioral skills and mobility. In fact there is no one single way to design the best curriculum but a framework based on experience and best practices can lead to a set of extremely useful guidelines. The school/university needs to adapt it to its particular context and even the teacher needs to adapt the curriculum to its particular class of students. That is why schools and universities need more freedom to perform their own activities. However, in a world full of mobility where changing the workplace can mean changing the country you live in and even the continent and culture, a revision of certification procedures is in high demand. There is a need of certification standardization so as qualifications should be widely recognized and applicable and thus facilitate people's mobility. We come across a very controversial problem as, on the one hand, globalization requires more freedom and flexibility at local level and, on the other hand, the assessment of knowledge and skills has to be standardized. Secondly, the graduate needs a good qualification, that is a set of competences required to exercise the profession, rather than a great amount of knowledge acquired in the education process. That is why we speak today about student-learning process where roles of teachers and students have completely changed compared to the traditional

education. The information is handy for students and they no longer need a teacher to convey this information. Yet, the amount of information is huge and it comes in great quantities and they need to be guided throughout this maze. It is normal for the roles of teachers and students to have changed in a society which turned from an industrial one into an information-based society. The teacher's role is therefore to guide his students, to help them select the precise piece of information they need out of the ocean of information they are diving in and to manage his class of students. In order to accomplish this new role of guider and manager, the teacher must be trained in the information technologies and dispose of the necessary equipment, he must have a certain freedom to choose his teaching methods and to adapt them to his classroom environment, to the specific needs of his students.

Another **challenge of globalization** at educational level is raised by the very mobility of students and workers that leads to multiculturalism which takes on a special meaning in the global context. In order to deal with this problem we have to state clearly that globalization does not mean uniformization, but the integration of the own set of values in a global world. Students and workers' mobility provide them with the opportunity of changing their cultural environment quite early in their life. Most students study at least one semester in another country through the students' exchanges programs, many young workers, especially skilled ones, are tempted to take up a job and to sample life in a foreign country and, why not, to learn a foreign language. The Ace foundation which "helps promote cultural and international understanding through the advancement of education, serving communities in the UK and worldwide", carried out a survey as early as 2000 which proved that students found it more important to interact with their peers from other countries, to take courses on international topics and to take part in study abroad programs which offered them exposure to a different culture rather than to acquire knowledge and career-related experience. Just like the

representatives of Ace foundation, many young people nowadays believe that “true multicultural education is the key to a brighter tomorrow in the Global Village”. At academic level, students and teachers’ mobility implies a series of requirements: transferable credits for students, a wider approach of diploma recognition, the possibility of both virtual and physical mobility and the necessary financial means both for students and teachers, transparency of quality assurance system in all fields of study, adequate services for foreign students which turn the European higher education institutions into hospitable hosts. Last but not least, this leads to competitiveness at academic level, between universities which are in the same country, on the same continent or on different continents requesting them to create some strategic network and partnerships in order to survive.

Due to globalization, we also witness a **change of force poles** not only in economy, but also in education. Emerging countries like China and India which have known a high economic development lately have more students in tertiary education than USA. Multiculturalism has led to the teaching and learning of multiple languages, to a cosmopolitan population in many parts of the world. The European experience with youth who are proficient in several languages has proved that such skills facilitate interpersonal, academic, and social communication, broadens cultural horizons and encourage appreciation and tolerance for different cultures. Therefore, we speak more and more about multicultural and intercultural education which strives to offer people, and especially youngsters, an equally opportunity, to facilitate learning for every individual student regardless his/her social or cultural background, to help students become active participants in an increasingly intercultural world. It is a student-centered progressive approach in education meant to transform the individual and therefore the society. And, indeed, in order to achieve some changes at social level, these changes must occur at individual level firstly, in terms of individual mentality. In a more and more competitive and

individualistic society, multicultural educations attempts to promote cooperation rather than competitiveness, to bring people together rather than to see them drifting apart, to make lofty ideals such as social justice and education equity become true, to make from today’s learners tomorrow’s accomplished and aware human beings who will be able to carry out all these ideals for their welfare and for the planet’s survival.

It is true that people tend to communicate more nowadays, but since old times they have felt the need of communicating and understanding each other swifter and easier, of having a lingua franca. This role was played, in turn, by Latin and French and now globalization has given rise to English as a global language. We are entitled to ask ourselves why English has taken over this role, especially that in the late 60s and early 70s an artificial language, Esperanto, which conquered the academic environment, was invented. But Esperanto did not manage to conquer the world and impose itself as a global language. Instead, the English language did. It is spoken in more than a hundred countries and has more than a million words. Many argue that English has such simplicity and flexibility that it allows the learners to make quick progress, but the truth is that the colonial expansion of Great Britain and then the economic boom of the USA made it the world language. It was the language of Hollywood films and music which greatly spread it all over the world, the language of international air flight directions but above all the international language of computers and finally the language of scholarships which managed to provide people with the fundamental value of a common language and opening possibilities for mutual understanding and international cooperation. As David Crystal shows in his book entitled “English as a global language” in order to “achieve such a status, a language has to be taken up by other countries around the world. They must decide to give it a special place within their communities, even if they have few (or no) mother-tongue speakers.” And, indeed, wherever you may be in the world, English is a global language and, by mastering it, you can

get a better job, you can climb up the career ladder and above all you can be up-to-date with everything that happens around the world. The fact that 85% of all written material is published in English is a good reason to learn it.

However, the positive effects of multiculturalism and people's mobility have their negative counterparts. Many students from developing countries who have been studying abroad find good jobs in the host country and no longer return to their home country. Also, many specialists educated in their own country find work in a developed country and emigrate in search of a better living standard. The phenomenon, known as brain drain or human capital flight has a bad impact on poorer economies that never recoup their investment in the education of these persons. Unfortunately, in the process of globalization, our country witnesses this phenomenon both in terms of students who go to study abroad and specialists, especially in the field of medicine, who take up jobs abroad and are absorbed by richer countries.

Conclusion

All in all, the global world triggers an education based not so much on information quantity but on information quality, not so much on what we learn but on how we learn. Under these circumstances, it is normal to ask ourselves how the higher education institutions, and especially the European ones, will be able to cope with the increasing pressure from a globalized society. An answer would be that the European universities are ready and willing to direct themselves, in a common effort, towards the modernization and reinvigoration of the higher educational system in an attempt to redefine it at European scale, promoting the graduates' employability and the mobility of both students and teaching staff.

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