

OECD FORUM 2006
BALANCING GLOBALISATION
22-23 May 2006, Paris

Access to education

Vernon Johnson, Senior Vice President Business Development, Whitney International University System (WIUS), United States

Having access to higher education is not a realistic dream for young people in many countries in the world today. They are either not prepared adequately to be accepted to a post secondary program, or the barriers of cost and availability of space keep them from participating. As a result, their future in life and the future of their nations' economy are at risk.

Another troubling trend facing many nations is the significant number of university graduates (sometimes more than 50%) that are not employable because there is poor alignment between their degree path and the availability of jobs in the economy. The lack of harmony between higher education and workforce needs and requirements is creating a substantial problem for many countries in their ability to get the economic engine running in order to take advantage of the opportunities of the global economy.

To address these problems, nations will need to take immediate steps to:

1. Improve the quality and results of primary and secondary education by providing pre-service and in-service training programs for teachers that teach them the scientifically based methods and strategies proven to increase student performance.
2. Provide mass access to high quality, low cost post secondary education programs that are aligned with and effective at producing graduates that are prepared for success in the workplace.

When one examines the issue of student performance in either the primary or secondary school level, it is clear that the single most important factor in whether a student performs well academically is the quality of the classroom teacher. Research shows that if a child experiences a bad teacher for one year, they may have the ability to recover if they have a good teacher the next. But if the child experiences a bad teacher two years in a row, the likelihood of him recouping the learning loss is not likely. Thus, we cannot afford to have teachers who are ill trained and ineffective in any classroom.

In a recent study done in the U.S. by the National Council on Teacher Quality, it was found that less than 17% of the teacher training universities in the nation have incorporated the scientifically based teaching methods and strategies that we have gained from more than thirty years of research. It is likely that the same thing is true internationally in teacher training programs. The impact is that we are preparing teachers for failure in the classroom. Ultimately, their students will pay the price of ineffective teaching and the result will affect them for a lifetime. Having a literate population is essential to economic and social growth of any nation.

Fortunately, there are solutions to the problem of teacher training. In addition to setting new standards for teacher training institutions, upgrading curriculum and textbooks, and professor capabilities, Governments today also have the option to partner with outside resources to leverage change much faster and more effectively. Governments and schools of education generally lack the infrastructure and resources to address the problem at scale in a way that will make a more immediate impact on student performance. Today, creating a partnership with an outside group who has the capability to deliver teacher pre-service or in-service training using a scalable, low cost model that delivers effective training that results in student performance change can help a government make the necessary change in overall teacher effectiveness nationally in a shorter time than would otherwise be possible.

Governments in partnership with external providers can now deliver highly effective teacher training programs that:

- Are based on current scientific research about teaching and learning and not based on ideologies or untested theories
- Can produce improved student achievement as a result of the training
- Utilize a learning model that ensures teachers understand the research, apply proven instructional methods in the classroom, and frequently assess the impact of the teaching on student learning
- Deliver the training using a scalable model that takes advantage of the most current technologies
- Provide training in an affordable manner so that the entire problem can be addressed and sustained

The second issue of providing mass access to high quality, low cost post secondary education aligned with workforce needs is also critical to address. In fact, it is essential if a nation is to achieve its economic plan and social development goals. The traditional university model is more than a thousand years old and simply cannot keep up with the challenges and demands of the global community. Throughout history, colleges and universities have been designed grant access to relatively few, privileged individuals.

Adapting today's traditional university model to the demands of a global economy and for the needs of the many people who must have a quality education to succeed in life is not a mysterious process of happenstance. It is the result of thoughtful planning, of relevant and effective teaching, of applying proven technologies, and of challenging outdated ideas.

Today in many countries, access to universities and/or post secondary programs is limited to a small percentage of the students who could benefit from the program due to several factors including:

- Not enough seats in current universities to accommodate the growing need
- The cost of the programs are too expensive to the individual or are beyond the governments capacity to fund additional free access
- The locations of post secondary schools are not accessible to all areas of the country where students live
- The program schedules are inflexible and do not meet the needs of people who work and who have family related responsibilities

Fortunately governments may now address these problems by entering into public-private provider partnerships. Governments can establish formal collaborations with groups outside the current system that provide low cost, high quality, mass access models. These models available in a number of program areas, can be customized to meet the exacting needs of each nation's economic plans. For any government-private partnership to be effective, the providers must be able to provide the following value add services:

- Research - Programs provided must be built on the most current and scientifically accurate content. The program must be designed to deliver instruction using research based instructional methods, to ensure strong student performance.
- Relevance - Programs must be aligned with the economic requirements of the country and sensitive to the workforce needs.
- Effective - Programs must produce graduates that are prepared for success in the workplace.
- Affordable - Low cost enables a government to put in place a scalable training solution to address the economic needs of the country.
- Accessible - The delivery system should provide the capability to provide programs in any region of the country, making programs accessible to all targeted students.
- Results - Programs are closely aligned with career requirements and relevant content which emphasizes a practical application approach ensures competent graduates.

The problems of teacher effectiveness and access to quality, and affordable post secondary education are serious. If not addressed, these problems will have a negative impact on the future economy of every country. Fortunately, there is a solution that governments can utilize to solve the problem - private partnerships with programs that can meet their specific needs and provide the innovative value added services that would justify the government expense.

An example of one such entity is Whitney International University System (WIUS). Whitney was founded to address the issues of effective teacher training, and mass access to high quality, low cost higher education aligned with workforce needs. Whitney offers affordable education solutions that enable a country to address scalable training needs essential to their economic plan. Governments will need to engage in such education partnerships to ensure the sustained economic growth of their countries.