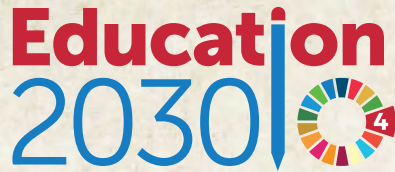




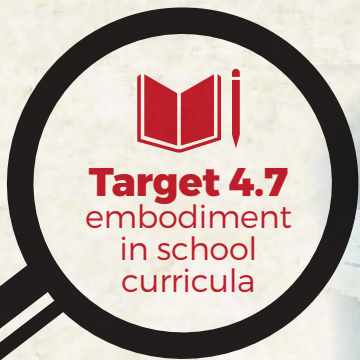


# Redefining the Purpose of Schooling



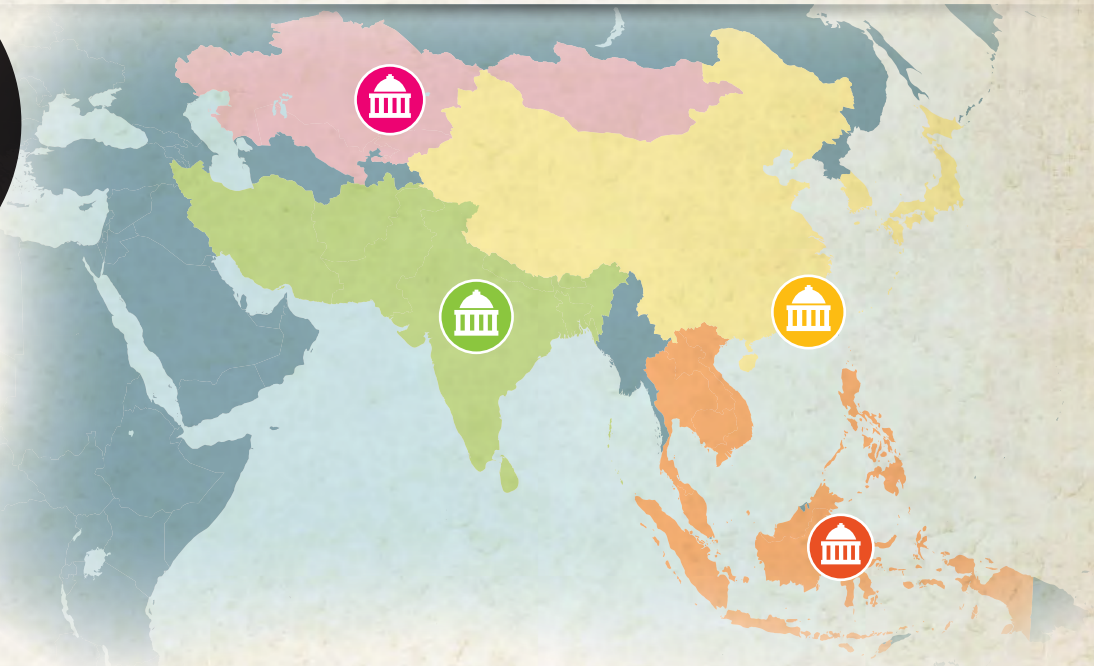
The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a shared global ambition and intergovernmental commitment to meet a range of targets by 2030. SDG Target 4.7 rearticulates a humanistic agenda for education and underscores the significance of knowledge and skills to engage creatively and responsibly with the world.

Analysing how far the ideals of SDG 4.7 are embodied in policies and curricula across 22 Asian countries, this study establishes benchmarks against which future progress can be assessed. It also argues forcefully that we must redefine the purposes of schooling, addressing the fundamental challenges to efforts to promote peace, sustainability and global citizenship through education.



**22**

Asian countries were covered in this study



- EAST ASIA**
- China
  - Japan
  - Republic of Korea

- SOUTHEAST ASIA**
- Cambodia
  - Indonesia
  - Lao PDR
  - Malaysia
  - Philippines
  - Thailand
  - Vietnam

- SOUTH ASIA**
- Afghanistan
  - Bangladesh
  - Bhutan
  - India
  - Islamic Republic of Iran
  - Nepal
  - Pakistan
  - Sri Lanka

- CENTRAL ASIA**
- Kazakhstan
  - Kyrgystan
  - Mongolia
  - Uzbekistan

Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations





## QUALITY EDUCATION

ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL.



### TARGET 4.7

By 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. (United Nations, 2015)

The global indicator for **SDG 4.7** is the 'extent to which **(i) global citizenship education** and **(ii) education for sustainable development**, including **gender equality** and **human rights**, are mainstreamed at all levels in (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment'.

Source: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/>

**This study is focussed on (a) national education policies and (b) curricula**

## Context

alls to gear up schools for the 21st century are ubiquitous today. Some Asian education systems are held up as models for an innovation-led utopian future. Across much of Asia, however, neither the reality of schooling nor the patterns of development with which it is associated give cause for blithe optimism.

This study is informed by UNESCO's commitment to realizing the Sustainable

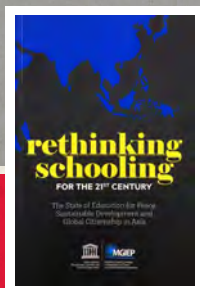
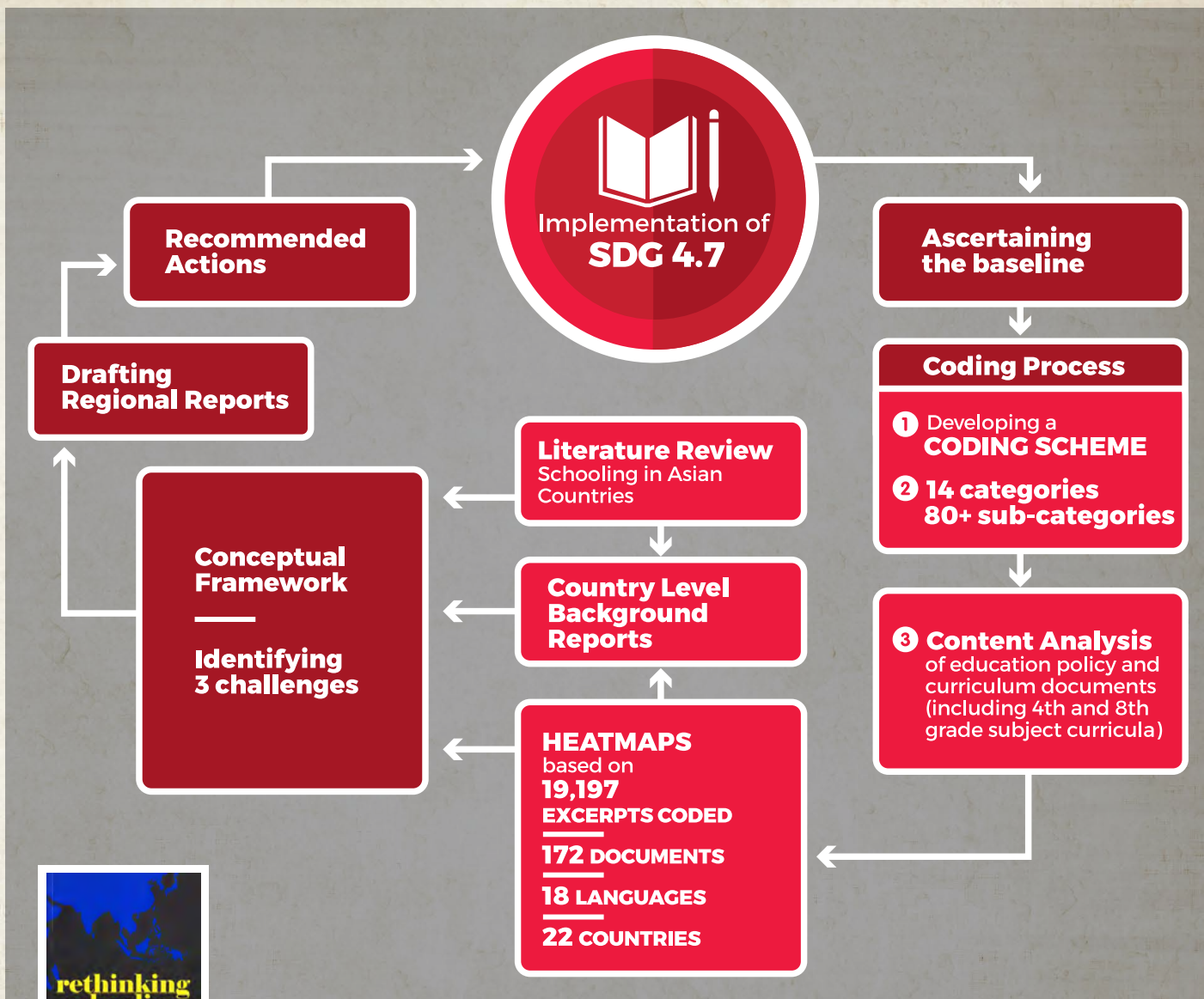
Development Goals (SDGs) through educational reform worldwide. Since its inception, UNESCO has championed a humanistic vision of education (UNESCO, 2015)—a vision today encapsulated in SDG 4.7. These ideals need to be strongly restated and defended in an era when educational debate has come to be framed by a narrowly economic and instrumentalist agenda.

Deriving urgent significance from this broader context, the RETHINKING

SCHOOLING report analyses how far the ideals of SDG 4.7 are embodied in policies and curricula across 22 Asian countries (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017a). The report seeks to develop benchmarks against which future progress can be assessed. It also argues forcefully that the fundamental purposes of schooling need to be reconfigured, if the ideals to which the global community has subscribed are actually to be realized.



# Process



The RETHINKING SCHOOLING report builds on a project conducted by UNESCO MGIEP in partnership with the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok) in 2016 and 2017 to review the current state of incorporation of SDG 4.7 concepts in national education policies and officially-mandated curricula of 22 countries in Asia. It focuses on basic schooling (primary and lower secondary education).

Key education policy and curricular documents were collected from these 22 countries (including national curriculum frameworks and 4th and 8th grade subject curricula). They were analysed using a common

coding scheme adapted from previous UNESCO studies (UNESCO 2016a; IBE-UNESCO & APCEIU, 2016).

Based on the coding results, 22 country-level background reports, and an extensive review of literature on Asian schooling, we developed a conceptual framework to guide the drafting of the synthesis report. Three key challenges were identified, and recommended actions were proposed to contribute to the meaningful implementation of SDG 4.7. The final report was written by the Core Drafting Group, endorsed by the Peer Review Committee, and launched at the 39th UNESCO General Conference in November 2017. The project involved more than 60 researchers from the region, including peer reviewers.



# Approach and Limitations



A review of the current state of **incorporation of SDG 4.7 concepts** in national education policies and officially-mandated curricula of 22 countries in Asia, focussing on basic schooling (primary and lower secondary education)

Previous studies have focused on so-called ‘carrier subjects’ of 4.7-related concepts such as civic and citizenship

education and history. However, the current study also looked at the official curriculum of ‘core subjects’ (mathematics, science, social studies and language), given the proportion of instructional hours they occupy, their mandatory and examinable status, and their consequent role in forming the enduring dispositions of children and adolescents. The coding exercise produced a rich and voluminous dataset that amounted to a total of 19,197 excerpts coded.

## Limitations of Content Analysis

The coding data suggested intriguing regional trends (see Key Findings). However, the use of the common coding scheme posed challenges inherent to content analysis as a methodology for cross-country comparison.

1 There were limitations in the design of the coding scheme due to the ambiguity of the concepts encompassed in SDG 4.7, as well as in the coding methods employed, which inevitably faced the challenges of coder variability and coding validity. 1

2 There were also limitations in the dataset. To complete coding within the time frame of the project, the decision was taken to code subject curricula only for the 4th and 8th grades. However, this sampling of grade levels may have skewed the coding results. There is always a possibility that a topic reported ‘missing’ in a country’s policy and curricular documents is in fact being addressed in the curricula of other grades. It would therefore have been ideal if documents

from all grade levels at primary and secondary level could have been coded. This would also have enabled analysis of the relative emphasis certain concepts receive at different stages of education.

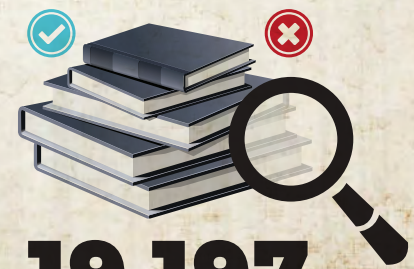
3 The coding data alone tell us little about the state of education in individual countries. This is because policy and curricular documents frequently perform symbolic functions—conveying official aspirations or deflecting public criticism—rather than signaling a definite commitment to change.

## Need for Contextualisation of Data and Lessons for Future Monitoring Efforts

Analysis of the coding results thus required grounding in the historical, economic and geopolitical context as well as in theoretical understanding of education policy and curriculum. At one level, the study sought to develop benchmarks against which future progress can be assessed. It also showed that key concepts associated with SDG 4.7 could be deployed in ways that are not in fact aligned with pursuit of the goals of sustainable development. This points to the severe limitations of mainstream monitoring efforts based on:

1 Administrative self-reporting in relation to international standard-setting instruments

2 Tracking the ‘presence’ or ‘absence’ of key terms in official documents.



**19,197**  
EXCERPTS CODED





# Key Findings

The results of the content analysis of 172 documents have illuminated the **prevalence** or the **relative weight** of different concepts embedded in SDG 4.7 (e.g. human rights, gender equality, global citizenship) in education policy and curriculum in Asia.

Across all 22 countries and among more than 80 sub-categories included in the coding scheme, 'nation as privileged referent of identity' was found to be the most prevalent concept, with the normalized weightage score of 85 (out of 100). Making a sharp contrast, 'humanity as a privileged referent of identity' scored 31.<sup>ii</sup>

Concepts most prevalent in the policy and curricular documents analysed:

**nation as privileged referent of identity** 85

**critical thinking** 82

**culture and heritage** 81

**problem solving** 79

**human resource development** 78

**creative thinking** 77

**empathy** 77

**collaboration** 72



## Curricular Emphasis

BASED ON THE CONTENT ANALYSIS THROUGH A COMMON CODING SCHEME, FROM

**22** COUNTRIES IN **18** LANGUAGES OF **172** DOCUMENTS RESULTING IN **19,197** EXCERPTS CODED

**HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**



**HUMAN WELLBEING & FLOURISHING**

CONCEPTS MOST PREVALENT

CONCEPTS LARGELY ABSENT



## 1 Challenges of instrumentalism and ethics

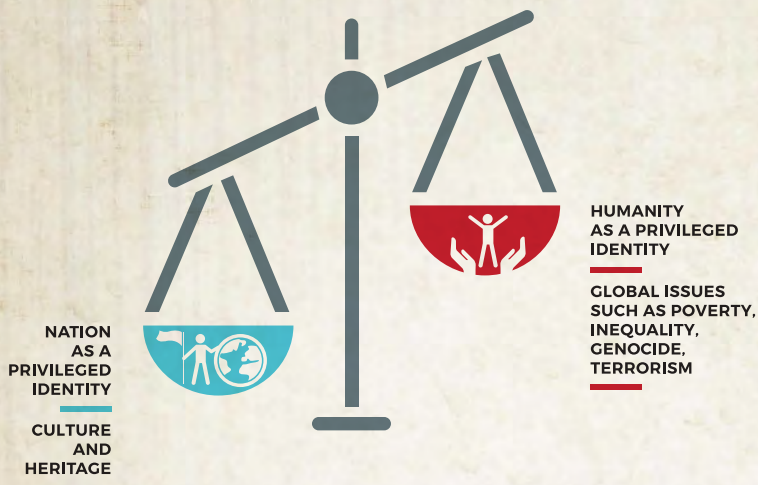
- The purpose of education narrowly conceived in economic and instrumentalist terms, rather than to ensure sustainable, flourishing societies.
- Instrumentalism is strongly evident both in countries recently opening up economically and in those that have already achieved 'developed' status.



## NATIONAL IDENTITY VS GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

CONCEPTS MOST PREVALENT

CONCEPTS LARGELY ABSENT



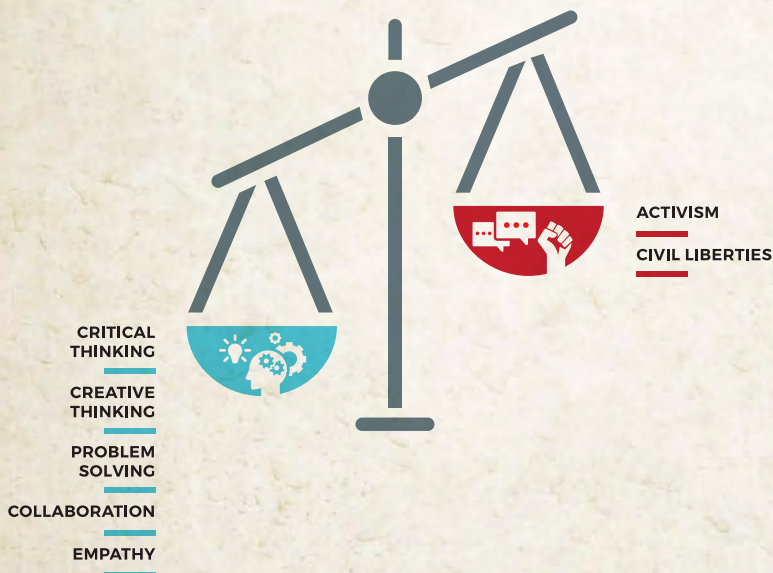
## 2 Challenges of nationalism and identities

- The goals of schooling commonly prioritize the inculcation of uncritical state-centred patriotism over all other ends (see Vickers and Kumar, 2015). Curricula in many Asian countries endorse strongly ethno-nationalist identities, often reducing minorities or migrants to second-class status.
- The explicit and positive embrace of regional or transnational identities in curricula is strikingly absent.

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS VS SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ACTIVISM

CONCEPTS MOST PREVALENT

CONCEPTS LARGELY ABSENT



## 3 Challenges of competitiveness and regimentation

- Emphasis on preparing children for competitive participation in the global economy, rather than on empowering them to critically and responsibly engage with the world.
- Little or no emphasis on nurturing autonomous, critical and engaged citizens with a voice in determining their own collective future. For example, '**activism**' was absent in 15 countries, and '**civil liberties**' did not feature in policy and curricular documents of 9 countries covered by the study.
- The spread of examination-preparatory 'shadow education' has fueled competition, with serious implications for equity and the quality of public education (see Bray and Lynkins, 2012; Bray et al., 2015).
- In many societies, differentiated schooling experiences for the 'elite' and the 'masses,' along with endemic credentialism (excessive reliance on academic credentials as the measure of a person's ability), threaten to undermine solidarity and a sense of shared humanity.



# Key Messages

SDG 4.7 should take centre stage in the implementation of SDG 4 on education, and the sustainable development agenda at large.

If sustainable development is to be pursued through schooling, we must address the intertwined, fundamental challenges to efforts to promote peace, sustainability and global citizenship through education. These challenges are not simply the often-cited obstacles, such as a lack of awareness, collaboration and resources, to scaling ‘good practices’. They encompass rather more fundamental and complex barriers to meaningful implementation of SDG 4.7:

## 1 Challenges of instrumentalism and ethics

## 2 Challenges of nationalism and identities

## 3 Challenges of competitiveness and regimentation

Both the instrumental utility and intrinsic value of education are important, but a focus on the former should not blind us to the significance of the latter. A vision of education as a tool for success in the ‘global knowledge economy’ must not be allowed to distract from an emphasis on the crucial role of schooling in promoting equity, valuing diversity and fostering active, participatory citizenship. Similarly, in seeking to challenge and transcend a narrowly nationalistic outlook, superficial or symbolic insertion into curricula of concepts associated with SDG 4.7 will achieve nothing.

Designing curricula conducive to achieving SDG 4.7 requires not just technical adjustments at the periphery of the existing education system, but a far-reaching reassessment of the nature and core purposes of schooling. For sustainable development to become a reality, policy-makers are encouraged to uphold Target 4.7 as the key to the implementation of SDG 4 on education and also the other 16 SDGs.

“Preaching the virtues of peace, harmony, tolerance, environmentalism and creative autonomy within the classroom means little if the reality confronting children outside it consists of savage competition for individual, familial or national advantage; denial of shared public responsibility for the less fortunate; impotence in the face of state authority; the branding of political critique as deviant and treacherous; and the habitual demonisation of ‘enemies’ abroad and at home.

All of us, not just teachers, who wish to nurture in the next generation the qualities required for peace, sustainable development and global citizenship, are going to have to lead by example.”

Rethinking Schooling for the 21st Century: The State of Education for Peace, Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship in Asia (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017a, p. 222)

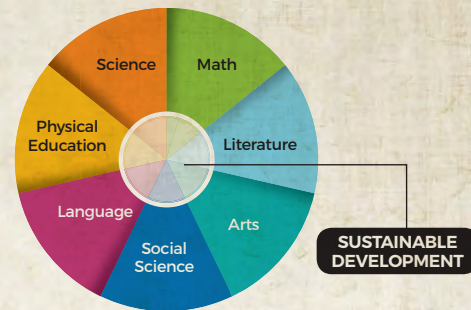


# Recommended Actions



Policymakers urgently need to rethink the fundamental priorities of education and make **promoting peace, sustainability and a consciousness of shared humanity** central to their vision for educational development.

**Embedding sustainable development at the core of every subject is the key to curriculum design**



While ‘sustainable development’ and ‘global citizenship’ are often presented as add-ons designed to gear up schooling for the 21st century, they in fact challenge us fundamentally to rethink and redefine the purposes of education. These notions, if taken seriously, require us to make a radical departure from how education is conceptualized and organized today.

Capturing this transformative aspiration of SDG 4.7 is a daunting yet pressing task. Policymakers urgently need to make promoting peace, sustainability and a consciousness of shared humanity central to their vision for educational development.

## Rethink the fundamental priorities of education policy.

- Avoid taking a fragmented approach to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED). Acknowledge the central importance of education for peace in SDG 4.7 implementation.
- Reassess the priorities of subject curricula. Consider rebalancing the curriculum to give greater space for the study of Asian languages other than one’s ‘mother tongue’, and to the study of nature and the arts.
- Enhance the role of educational research in informing policy and curriculum development.

## Create a platform to bring together expertise in child-centred education and

## curriculum design in core subjects at primary and secondary levels.

Redesigning core subject curricula, through an approach to embed sustainability and global citizenship in the discipline- or subject-based content (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017b), demands considerable multi-disciplinary expertise.

## Promote a participatory model of curriculum development.

Treat teachers as partners in curricular design and planning debates rather than simply as delivery technicians. Restore the confidence of teachers as autonomous professionals capable of modeling the kind of active and engaged citizenship we seek to promote amongst students.

## Reassess international emphasis on monitoring and measuring educational outcomes.

Policymakers should focus much more on improving inputs, such as curriculum development, teacher training and the improvement of teaching materials (for the imperative of improving the quality of textbooks, see UNESCO, 2016b; UNESCO MGIEP, 2017b), rather than simply on monitoring outputs. Policymakers should be aware that claims that economic growth results directly from the success of schooling in fostering economically relevant skills, as measured by cross-national assessment exercises such as PISA, lack a solid grounding in the statistical evidence (Wolf, 2002; Komatsu and Rappleye, 2017).



# Literature



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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> National researchers coded in their own languages using a coding scheme in English (except in the case of Uzbekistan), and they were tasked with capturing cases where a concept was either explicitly or implicitly present. Although measures were taken to ensure inter-coder reliability, different coders may have coded sub-categories differently due to ambiguity in the concepts embedded in SDG 4.7, a lack of consensus regarding the translation of these concepts into different languages, their own divergent understandings of what these concepts meant in the local context, their propensity to ‘overcode’ (to ‘read between lines’) or ‘undercode’ (to take a text at face value), or any combination of these reasons.

<sup>ii</sup> Given the variability in the number of documents and excerpts coded for each country, there was a need to normalize the data for cross-country comparison. The data for each sub-category was normalized by the total number of excerpts coded for each country. Weightage of each sub-category was calculated as the number of excerpts coded under a sub-category as a percentage of all excerpts coded for all documents for a particular country.

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{Total number of sentences reported for a particular category}}{\text{Total number of sentences reported for all categories}} \times 100$$

Very high prevalence or weightage	more than 5 per cent*
High prevalence or weightage	1-5 per cent
Moderate prevalence or weightage	0.5-1 per cent
Low prevalence or weightage	less than 0.5 per cent**
Absence	0

\*This means that there are 40 or more references to the concept when the total number of excerpts coded for the country is 800.

\*\*This means that there are 4 or fewer references to the concept when the total number of excerpts coded for the country is 800.

The normalized weightage score for each concept was calculated by assigning graded points to five levels of weightage (very high=4; high=3; moderate=2; low=1; absence=0) and normalizing the total points of 22 countries by the highest possible points (very high weightage across all 22 countries= 4 x 22 = 88). The score ranges between 0 (total absence of the concept in policy and curricular documents analysed across 22 countries) and 100 (the concept receiving “very high prevalence or weightage” in all 22 countries).

<sup>iii</sup> The category ‘activism’ has three sub-categories: ‘participation in civic protest’; ‘engagement in debates on socio-political issues’; and ‘action on issues of global reach’.





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