Balancing Market Needs and Education Objectives
(The Case of Higher Education Transformation)

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Abstract: Today, the orientation toward success in life is becoming one of the leading life strategies of college students at higher educational institutions, and of young people in general, under current market conditions. Starting from “Deweyan perspective, educational transformation must be seen as strictly connected to social change, and education should be understood as a process that facilitates and supports social growth and development.” This paper aims to:

- Discuss connections between teaching and learning processes.
- Discuss connections between transformation and learning.
- Discuss Peters’ critical perspective on teaching as it relates to the learner’s transformation through education.
- Examine connections between transformations and learning within classical and contemporary education philosophical discourse.

On the other hand the current paper will also highlight:

- The role of the economic factor in the choice of a future profession.
- The motives for enrolling in an institution of higher learning.

Finally, conclusions and some recommendations for development of education will be presented.

Key words: Educational Transformation; Vocational Education; Student Discourse; Teaching and Learning; Education Theories.

INTRODUCTION

There is a huge debate regarding the roles of higher education. In fact this issue has gained more attention recently because of the new trend adopted by higher education institutions that brings the education process to the market culture. It is argued that the spread of market culture in the higher education has led to the distortion of education roles to the extent of becoming a commodity provided by an entity to its customer (student). It is often argued that education is a service that can be marketed like any other services or products. In this context educational institutions are service providers or marketers provided that education as a service is regarded as something of value that customers appreciate and are willing to enter into the process of exchange to obtain it. Others argue that education is a social asset or right that needs to be enjoyed by members of society. Therefore, this paper attempts to highlight how marketisation is creating more divergence in the learning and education social roles.

Literature Review:

According to Striano (2009) “education should be considered as a practice of exploration and appreciation of the resources that individuals and communities own and are able to use in order to activate and sustain methods of development and growth. The primary task of education, then, is to promote awareness, growth, responsibility, and self-governance.”

On the other hand, Peters’ discussion of teaching acknowledged two models of teaching namely moulding model and growth model of teaching (English, 2010). His main concern was the difficulty that the teachers face when trying to reconcile between the two core objectives of education. That is the task of conveying knowledge and at the same time improving the critical thinking of the learners. The moulding model of teaching looks to the teacher “as one who imprints a fixed body of knowledge onto the learner’s mind and leaves no room for the learner’s individuality and critical thought.” Conversely, the growth model ignores the teacher’s task of guiding the learner’s gaining of knowledge and understanding of the world and only recognizes the learner’s self-realisation. In fact, Peter argued that neither the moulding nor the growth models of education is considered efficient to achieve the education purpose (English, 2010).

English (2010) defined learning as a“ transformational process that takes place between right and wrong and changes how we conceive of right and wrong. ” The negativity experience notion plays a vital role in understanding the learning process. This is based on the basic idea that we are generally looking for information.
when we recognize that we do not have it. According to English “the term ‘negativity of experience’ points to an interruption in experience, which occurs when we encounter something unfamiliar, strange, different or unexpected in our experiences.” This notion is usually coupled with undesired feeling experience such as confusion, frustration, discomfort and irritation. These negative feeling however are necessary to create the motivation to learn. This issue has been discussed widely in the traditional and contemporary theories. English (2010) summarizes the relationship between learning, negativity experience and transformation based on Meyer-Drawe’s point of view as follows: “When our experience breaks with itself, then we can learn in a way that is not just a matter of adding on or correcting the content of our thought, or exchanging one aspect of knowledge for another. Rather, this negativity and discontinuity makes a different type of learning possible: learning becomes Umlernen, a transformative restructuring of one’s entire horizon of foregoing and possible experience.”

Likewise, educational transformation concept from Deweyan perspective “must be seen as strictly connected to social change, and education should be understood as a process that facilitates and supports social growth and development.” (Striano, 2009).

This debate raises the following question: is this view applicable also in the high education situation? In other words, does the lack of knowledge motivate students to pursue their education?

In fact, there are many studies conducted to investigate the motivation of pursuing higher education. Some of studies show that there are many other aspects that motivate the students to pursue their education. For instance, Shashkova (2010) discussed the motivations behind students’ decision to pursue their higher education in Russia. He pointed out that in 2001, Russia witnessed two important phenomenons; the first one is massive increase in the number of applicants who want to pursue their higher education and the second one is the increase in the number of people obtaining a second higher education. It was found that concern of employment and level of income constitutes the major motivations. Moreover, the survey’s result revealed that there was a high percentage of “noneducational” motives such as their parents’ wishes, the opportunity not to have work for a time and “it is not cool not to have a higher education these days” and “the opportunity not to have to serve in the armed forces” which totally account 42.4 percent of the respondents. Additionally, it was found that about 80 percent expected to be appointed in a well paid job when they obtain their higher education.

It is therefore expected that demand in the labour market to be an importance factor in determining the specialty. Shashkova, (2010) considered this trend as a divergence from the educational norm as a result of a negative role played by the media, which promotes utilitarian model of behavior.

Similarly, Andrew et al., (2005) explored the motivation and attitudes of students on entry into higher education in three different countries namely England, South Africa and Russia. The results showed that students enter higher education mainly for economic reasons.

Molesworth et al., (2009) argue that higher education institutions contribute to this diversion. They criticize the way of looking to the student as a consumer, not a potential scholar, by the higher education institutions in England. They further raise the warning of losing the roles for education because of the new direction that links between the higher education institutions’ and business and the extension of vocational courses in business, marketing at the expense of other courses. They assert that parts of British higher education are pedagogically restricted by the marketisation trend. This in turn “promotes a mode of existence where students seek to ‘have a degree’ rather than ‘be learners’”. Therefore, the success of the HEI is assessed based on its profitability, number of student attracted and satisfaction of student regardless of sound pedagogy provided. Ironically, this strategy may result in people with low level of competency to deal with the fast changing in technology and society. Bryant et al., (1999) pointed out that the transformation of higher education in Australia has altered the education values where less attention was paid to the teaching function. That is the academic criteria of appointment was based on the research experiences and number of paper published regardless the ability of teaching. Furthermore, the payment system puts no consideration to the teaching effort.

However, Gornitzka and Maassen, (2000) demonstrated that both viewpoints of higher education institution as either a social institution or a business entity are extremes. They claimed that both perspectives can be incorporated in the higher education institutions. They suggested maintaining the current structure of higher education institutions to perform the basic function of higher education system and establishing units within the universities that responds to the new trends. Striano, (2009) on the other hand argued that the substantial transformation of the organization, role, and social function of educational systems is a normal result of the globalisation competition pressure and request. Within this context some of international organizations play role in determining the agenda and the goals in the national level. For example the Dakar Framework for Action identifies “improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that [there are] recognized and measurable learning outcomes” as one its goals for global development. This entails a strong focus on quality indicators that represent a normative frame of reference for educational change. He provided another example i.e. the European Commission educational policies are strongly influencing national educational agendas, “requiring educational systems of member states to become increasingly comparable and competitive on the basis of a shared framework of guidelines and requirements.”
Implications:

It may be said with confidence that the majority of stockholders of higher education are caught in a paradigm paralysis. It is not easy to change the way we think and the way we behave. What kind of essential changes are we making in our educational system to address the weak spots of knowledge every seven years? Neither our courses, our curricula, our reward system or our funding models are changing at this rate.

To break this model paralysis, we should investigate and examine through asking ourselves some new questions. For example, should business take some responsibility for the sort of education that is important for us to remain economically competitive? Higher education system has been ready to work to fund educational projects. But why not merge business more closely in the educational process? Would establishing curricula helping us to benefit from business? In which way the business could help us to educate our student? We all should stand to not take advantage or benefit from answer this questions.

Conclusion:

Although there is a consensus about the importance of education, there are different theories that discuss the role of education on the society. Recent years have witnessed transformation in the higher education role. It is argued that the spread of market culture in the higher education has led to deform the education roles to the extent of becoming a commodity that provided by an entity to its customer (student). In addition, the motivation of pursuing higher education has also changed. High percentage of the higher education students joins educational institutions to secure better jobs. This trend is expected to last long because of the globalization and the competition pressure. As a matter of fact this new trend provided some advantages to the education sectors such as research grants and application of advanced technology in the education system which enables it to establish distance learning. Therefore more efforts need to be undertaken in order to correct the direction of the higher education so that it can serve the market needs without ignoring the education objectives.

REFERENCES


