A Living Letter on Ethics of AI in Higher Education

Dear Futures of Education,

We, educators and leaders in education from all over the world, having gathered in Geneva for the ICDE Leadership Summit 2024, realise how critical our commitment to shaping the futures of education is. This is not a one-dimensional nor an imposed act of stating what education means and how it has to look like. We consider this living letter as the attempt to articulate our concerns and hopes, our recommendations and commitments for a values-driven, quality education in a rapidly evolving context of emerging technologies and Artificial Intelligence. This living letter constitutes an open invitation we wish to extend to other stakeholders. An invitation to join in this reflection, to strengthen collaboration, and to develop strategies and practices conducive to a responsible use of emerging technologies.

Our Concerns and Promises

We noted that new technologies and AI are an inescapable reality today. Their rapid evolution will continue to mark the educational sector with impacts on all its dimensions: learning, teaching and the creation, dissemination and sharing of knowledge. We are also cognisant of the fact that these impacts do not affect us equally and that they are dependent on our respective social, economic, and cultural locations.

Some of the *concerns* raised during our intensive conversations comprised, inter alia:

- The danger of an accentuated digital divide and epistemic injustices;
- A lack of control over tools used and their value after novelty wears off;
- Educators becoming consumers rather than co-producers;
- The weakening of teachers' and administrators' accountability;
- AI development not being aligned with the educational vision, purpose, and needs;
- Universities not having the mechanisms to pool resources for collaboration and innovation;
- A lack of diverse content representation, such as other languages, norms and beliefs, and societal standards, in AI systems;
- Losing human agency and autonomy in the usage of technologies;
- The challenge of the overwhelming reality of technological evolution with the risk of being left behind, and
- A lack of integrity in the use of AI calling for ethical criteria and frameworks.

Despite these and other crucial concerns articulated, we also identified *promises* of using AI in education deserving to be further explored, including:

- Providing better means of personalised and meaningful learning and reinforcing understanding;
- Smart task allocation allowing more space for human creativity;
- Improved epistemic diversity, if the potential continuation of historic and new biases are unveiled and critically engaged with, and
- Fostering experimentation, evidence-based and evidence-informed applications of AI based on openness and collaboration.

Our Recommendations

A selection of our proposals for educational stakeholders includes the following:

- Learn to mediate a new reality as an ongoing journey of critical improvement;
- Nurture critical thinking for human agency and accountability;
- Embed AI literacy in the educational practice and experience;
- Promote training, re- and upskilling of all educational stakeholders in an ethical and responsible use of AI and emerging technologies;
- Include ethics as the institutional vision and foundation;
- Organise inclusive, multidisciplinary and participatory discussion and decision-making on AI tools in educational settings;
- Engage students in the conversations and let them lead the way;
- Invest more efforts in policy dialogue and implementation in HEIs to tackle emerging challenges posed by AI, and
- Call for collaboration to generate economies of scale as a collective of institutions to ensure no one is left behind.

Our Commitments

We commit to ethical leadership in our respective professional contexts. We will contribute to a critical and constructive engagement with the transformations in education induced by emerging technologies by:

- Actively fostering a more inclusive and collaborative development of AI tools and systems benefitting all;
- Cultivating originality and critical thinking as cornerstones of educational institutions;
- Developing systemic and bespoke policy frameworks for the usage of AI in higher education, and

- Ensuring the future of higher education serves a greater purpose for good in the world.

We are conscious of the world's diverse approaches and stances on AI and education. There will never be a definite conclusion. However, as educational leaders we take our responsibility in shaping the future(s) of education seriously, not only for the benefit of learners but for our societies. This living letter is deliberately non-comprehensive and open-ended. It invites all stakeholders to continue the conversation.

7 June 2024 – To be continued