

# Democratization of Education in Emerging Countries

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## **Abstract**

Education is a democratizing catalyst that enhances choice, individual welfare, and productivity by increasing access and equity of opportunity. However, there are significant challenges to democratization of education, particularly in emerging countries. Superficial changes have not eliminated corruption, poor educational quality, or excessive administrative control. Lack of government support and transparency, conflicting goals, and educational and socio-political ideologies further limit progress toward truly democratic ideals. New styles of education management are needed to flatten governance structures, open access to programs and resources, enhance learning relationships, and empower students to direct their own learning. This paper presents a literature review of these issues with special emphasis on personal perspectives of the authors related to Russia, Iran, Pakistan, Ghana, and Ukraine.

## **Democratization of Education in Emerging Countries**

### **Democratization of Education – Theory and Practice**

Education provides, at every level, fundamental access to knowledge and power. Michel Foucault asserted that “every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses with the knowledge and power they bring with them” (Ball, 1990, p. 3). Freire described education as an active dialogue “to make and remake, to create and re-create... which is not a privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all men” (2013, p. 158). As such, education is a democratizing catalyst that enables a person to have more choices, enhanced personal welfare, and improved productivity. A democratic education emphasizes open access and equal opportunity (Liqing, Berci & He, 2011), “with freedom of choice and a fair chance of success” (Kanwar, 2012). Educational access and equity, including gender and class equity, have become fundamental issues of political and social change in modern culture, especially in emerging regions of the world most affected by pressure for change in government and society (Liqing, Berci & He, 2011).

Traditional educational structures and processes have not always been amenable to attempts to institute democratizing reforms. Democratization of education has led to “explosive demands...for open admission to institutions of higher education” (Heydenrich, Higgs & Van Niekerk, 2004, p. 91). However, as Lambert (2006) has asserted, many social educators argue that as schools have developed, they have become increasingly bureaucratic, with top-down administrative and instructional paradigms that leave education so homogenized it has little meaning to the individual. Bureaucracy itself presents artificial barriers to open and equitable access. The success of democracy in higher education depends in large part on a dramatic shift to less restrictive management and governance styles (Heydenrich, Higgs & Van Niekerk, 2004).

Accountability, transparency, and appropriate regulation of data management are essential to re-establish confidence in the fairness and equity of administrative processes (Mylovanov, 2014).

It is not enough to simply make education more accessible. Accessibility must be combined with high quality materials, rigorous expectations, and accountability for student engagement (Liqing, Berci & He, 2011). As the costs of education increase and open-access alternatives proliferate, there has been a remarkable boom in online programs and resources (ICEF Monitor, 2012; Kanwar, 2012; Kolowich, 2014). New technologies “can play a critical role in dramatically improving education quality” and “catalyze economic growth” through the democratization of knowledge (Starr, 2013). Democratic collaboration, in both face-to-face and virtual learning environments, empowers students to direct their own learning, democratizing teacher-student and student-student learning relationships (Mentz, 2014) to actively cultivate autonomous, reflective thinking, and decision-making (Liqing, Berci & He, 2011).

### **Importance of government and/or institutional support.**

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948, everyone has the right to free and compulsory education, “at least in the elementary and fundamental stages” with technical and professional education “accessible to all on the basis of merit.... directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (United Nations, 2015). Free and accessible public education, is also a prerequisite for nation-building and social and political stability (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2001; United States Diplomatic Mission to Nigeria, 2013), especially in *emerging countries*. These countries, sometimes described as developing nations, are still actively establishing and consolidating core social, political and economic institutions.

Public education is by definition dependent upon government authority to act as a public institution. To varying degrees, public education is dependent on government funding through tax subsidies or designated program grants. Consequently, the government assumes to some degree responsibility for infrastructure, governance, and administration of operations and accountability for compliance with regulations and mandates of state, regional, and local bodies.

Complex, shifting networks of government funding and accountability, with overlapping and sometimes conflicting policies and regulations, can be a substantial challenge (Longanecker, 2003). The absence of consistent coordination between government policies and institutional practices can result in negative and low-grade examples of practice that adversely affect public perception (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MES), 2013, June 17). Systemic reform agendas often fail because they rely on coordination of independent policy makers across multiple levels when such coordination has no precedent. In an already-fragmented system, “every decision-making body thinks it should be the one to bring coherence to the system, which only increases fragmentation” (Bartell, 2001, p. 190). On the other hand centralized state regulatory control presents risks to curricular and pedagogical diversity (Bartell, 2001), educational rigor (Endo, 2003; Poyant, 2010), and freedom of information in favor of conformity to a controlling political ideology (Endo, 2003).

### **Stumbling blocks:**

Grandiose public policy announcements serve little purpose if they are followed up by half-hearted support and superficial changes. Institutional and bureaucratic inertia further confound attempts to modernize and democratize practices. “New” courses or programs are often just re-packaged versions of outdated practices (Powell, Kuzmina, Kuzmin, Yamchynska & Shestopalyiuk, 2014). Extensive commitments to technology require considerable revision of

funding, training, and pedagogical priorities, as well as major investments in hardware, software and Internet access. Even attempts to modernize and democratize traditional face-to-face education in emerging countries suffer from lack of basic infrastructure (Russians Abroad, 2009), low teacher salaries, declining prestige for teaching, inadequate training and lack of motivation to modernize methods and practices (Heyneman, 2010).

Probably the most pervasive and resistant stumbling block to democratization, especially in emerging countries, is corruption due to the lack of transparency and accountability in public institutions (Transparency International, 2015b). Education is particularly prone to corruption at all levels because education typically represents 20-30% of a country's annual budget (Transparency International, 2015a). In a corrupt system, kickbacks, deceptive contracts, patronage, and retroactive tenders are widespread (Abramovich, 2012). Theft of resources exacerbates overcrowding and infrastructure decay, increasing costs to students and families for basic texts and materials, and encouraging the creation of unauthorized fees and placement costs (Come, 2012; Heyneman, 2010; Osipian, 2012), which increases the dropout rate, especially for female students (Council of Europe, 2011; Transparency International, 2015a). The costs of corruption in education are "particularly burdensome for the poor, who...are twice as likely to be asked to pay bribes for basic services as wealthier people" (Transparency International, 2015b). As access to education is limited and quality is degraded, social acceptance of corruption increases, perpetuating a defeatist cycle (Transparency International, 2015a). In a society habituated to corruption, students report that engaging in corrupt practices is "the easiest and most reliable way to solve problems" in higher education (Osipian, 2008, p. 325).

Education is a crucial leverage point for combating corruption in government services. Merit-based grades and reward systems bolster student confidence in the validity of individual

effort and trust in public education (Mylovanov, 2014). Higher wages for teachers and administrators and independence from over-regulation and arbitrary supervision (but not from public accountability) build resistance to dishonest practices, as does impartial monitoring and transparency of supervision, with reliable prosecution for abuses (Mylovanov, 2014). Above all, education itself presents a proactive and democratizing potential for combating corruption by teaching an anti-corruption culture and agenda in the classroom, encouraging young people to cultivate a personal ethic of integrity (Transparency International, 2015a).

### **Case Studies: Exemplars in context**

In the next several sections, we will inquire more deeply into issues of democratization of education in emerging countries by examining their application in specific instances, as they relate to countries or regions with which we, the authors, have personal experience. For clarity (and brevity) we will limit the discussion to one or two issues per country, in order to focus on key challenges that are particularly characteristic of the countries chosen.

#### **Russia – Social and political traditions of authoritarian cultures**

Almost two centuries ago, Alexis De Tocqueville asserted that historical experience, geopolitical conditions and political traditions predisposed Russian culture to centralize “all the authority of society in a single arm [in] servitude.” This prevailing culture persists even now. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russia, as the core republic of the Soviet Union, had “the most...deep-rooted system of authoritarian rule the world has ever seen,” resulting in “lack of experience of democracy, and cultivation of civil society” (Rutland, 2005, p. 3).

The educational system inherited from the Soviet Union was highly centralized according to the policy of the ruling Communist Party, inflexible and uniform. The curriculum, classroom environment, management strategies and teaching methodologies were all dedicated to one

purpose: the validation of communist ideology according to Marxist-Leninist theory (Endo, 2003). Although some of the vocabulary of democratization first appeared in official documents in the time of perestroika in 1988, the first real reforms were not introduced until the mid-1990s.

According to Kovbasyuk (Kovbasyuk & Kuznetsova, 2012), a reform philosophy gradually emerged in the first years of democracy, abolishing centralized state control over educational policy and guaranteeing freedom in developing curricula, teaching methods, educational strategies and finance. Article 43 of the 1993 Constitution guaranteed each citizen the right to education, with “general access to...free pre-school, secondary and high vocational education in state or municipal educational establishments” (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 1993). Compulsory schooling was extended from 9 to 11 years and provisions were included to customize school management (Endo, 2003), improving accessibility, quality and efficiency of educational services (Kovbasyuk & Kuznetsova, 2012)..

However, early efforts to improve accessibility, quality and efficiency of educational services were greatly impeded by overcrowded classrooms and decaying school infrastructure. By the 1980s, 21% of students attended schools with no central heating and 30% had no running water (Russians Abroad, 2009). Social and economic changes resulted in low and slow-growing teacher salaries, loss of prestige for teaching as a profession, and a general teacher shortage (Heyneman, 2010; Samedova & Ostapschuk, 2012; Titus, 1997). Older teachers, equipped with outdated knowledge, relied on lectures without the benefit of technology and were neither willing nor motivated to adapt to changes in society and education (Heyneman, 2010).

Curricular revisions promoted focus on the arts, humanities, and social sciences, as teaching methodologies and classroom culture shifted away from socialist ideology to democratic principles of competition, initiative, self-management, and individual responsibility



(Kovbasyuk & Kuznetsova, 2012; Endo, 2003). In 2003, as a means to eliminate corruption and establish merit-based admissions criteria for higher education, the Ministry of Education launched the Unified State Examination (USE) for all applicants. Not only did this fail to curb corruption, it increased the number of university applicants beyond the capacity of the higher educational system to meet demand and shifted the emphasis of secondary education to passing the test at the expense of meaningful learning (Samedova & Ostapschuk, 2012).

Under the Soviet Union, higher education funding and oversight were distributed over 21 different federal ministries, most of which had nothing to do with education, rendering responsible allocation and accountability for resources nearly impossible (World Bank, 1995; Heyneman, 2010). Though the process of reformation since then has lacked a clearly defined strategy (Andreeva & Golovanova, 2003), there has been some progress toward financial independence in planning university budgets and a significant shift in responsibilities assigned to regional and city authorities. Kuznetsova (Kovbasyuk & Kuznetsova, 2012) also cited recent positive changes in institutional organization, infrastructure, personnel policy, content standards, educational technologies, and quality assessment. There have been innovations in the augmentation of teaching by technology and utilization of distance education in some central Russian universities, but, she added, distance learning programs in Russia set low entry requirements for students and there is still an authoritarian pedagogical focus on the transmission of knowledge rather than development of competencies or collaborative learning.

According to Petrov (2008), the emergence of an economically strong and politically stable Russia depends on the willingness of young people to adopt democratic values, which largely depends on the quality of education. It is extremely challenging to adapt and accept such

values in a social and political climate that remains essentially authoritarian, politically and economically corrupt and unpredictable on the world stage (Motyl, 2006).

### **Iran: The challenge of total conformity under theocracy**

The Islamic Republic of Iran is the only country (besides the tiny Vatican City State) that is a true theocracy. Although Iran is a modern republican state with a popularly elected parliament and president, the clergy retains ultimate supremacy in decision-making under Shi'ite Islamic law (Cole, 2015). Iran's population is 99% Muslim, with the largest proportion of Shi'ite to Sunni adherents (90-95%) of any country in the world (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015).

In 1979, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was selected Supreme Leader upon Khomeini's death in 1989, a position which he still holds today (Nasr, 2007). In the late 1990s, President Mohammad Khatami briefly challenged the supremacy of clerical rule (Cole, 2015), but hardliners regained control in 2005, with the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In 2009, the Green Movement again attempted to shift Islamic legitimacy toward popular rule, with less stringent controls on personal liberties and speech, but this too failed (Milani, 2015; Cole, 2015). In 2013, the election of Hassan Rouhani once again seemed to present an opportunity for reform but those reforms have been largely superficial (Nader, 2015).

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Iran's political and religious leadership have by turns used education for their own agendas of national and religious identity (Tamer, 2010). Under Shah Muhammed Reza Pahlavi, education became a vehicle to promote a modern, westernized and secular national identity. In January 1963, the Shah announced a national referendum billed as the "White Revolution," which included the establishment of a Literacy Corps to recruit young men to work as village teachers in lieu of military service (Metz, 1987; Wolfe, 2012). This had

significant effects on literacy rates, especially in rural areas. By 1976, the literacy rate of the youngest cohort of adults, aged 15-24, was 174% higher than the entire adult population among women and 147% higher among men. By 2012, young Iranian adults of both sexes had attained nearly universal literacy, with 97.7% for women and 98.34% for men (Index Mundi, 2012).

By 1980, universities, formerly allied with Ayatollah Khomeini during the revolution, re-emerged as centers of resistance against strict clerical control. In retaliation, all schools and universities were closed and 40,000 teachers were expelled or forced to retire. Textbooks and instructional materials were revised to purify them from un-Islamic influence and many courses of study in the humanities were eliminated, with religion courses added instead. Eventually, popular demand forced the government to reopen schools, but many teachers had already fled Iran to escape persecution, which weakened the quality of education (Tamer, 2010).

Compulsory education, strictly segregated by sex, is free and lasts until eighth grade, divided into two levels, primary (five years) and guidance (three years). An additional three years of public upper secondary education is also free, but not compulsory, with students tracked into an academic, technical or vocational program, depending on the results of the eighth grade exit examination. University admission is based on a very competitive national entrance examination. Tuition at public universities is minimal (a fee of just a few dollars) or free in exchange for a commitment to work for two years in government service. In recent years almost 60% of accepted applicants have been women (World Education Services, 2013).

As women became more literate and prominent in public life, Iran's clerical leadership and conservative government officials considered female education to be a threat to traditional Islamic values. In November 2009, Iran's Science Minister, Kamran Daneshjou, announced that segregation of the sexes would be put into practice in Iranian universities, and that exclusive

gender specific fields would be established for men and women in accordance with the “Islamic worldview.” The primary focus of this policy was not so much to establish suitable fields for women as it was to restrict women from competing with men for traditionally male jobs, especially in science and technology (Payand News, 2009).

Despite campaign promises to not discriminate between men and women, President Rouhani’s government experienced significant clerical resistance to change in gender quotas. On April 19, 2014, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei reiterated his position that “There are some professions that are not commensurate with a woman’s make, so they shouldn’t pursue those.... Just because she participated in the University Entrance Exam, or because she scored a certain score, we must not force her to study a certain major which may not be compatible with her feminine nature...and where the jobs she will be offered as a result of these studies are not compatible with her.” (International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, 2015, para. 12).

### **Pakistan: Gender politics, poverty, and isolation in a traditional society**

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is both a majority-Muslim country (96%) (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015), and a former British colony. After 70 years of independence, Pakistan is still struggling with adherence to an outdated system of education that perpetuates very low standards. (Ghazi, Ali, Khan, Hussain & Fatima, 2010; Talpur, Napiyah, Chandio & Memon, 2014). Isolation and neglect of rural education, gender inequity, lack of funding, and a tiered system of private and public schools contribute to stagnation of education, impeding socioeconomic development.

Over 70% of the population live in rural areas, which are chronically underdeveloped, lacking basic facilities and resources including education, health and transportation (Tayyaba, 2012). Government policies, which favor urban centers over rural areas, are not properly

implemented, lack oversight, and reward inefficiency (Talpur et. al, 2014). Most of the rural population is illiterate because access to education is difficult and facilities are substandard. In the rural province of Sindh, 25% of public schools have no buildings, 80% have no electric power, 47% are without toilets, 55% lack drinking water, and class sizes often exceed 40 students per teacher (Mahmood, 2013). Because rural students often live far from schools without transportation, education is not accessible (Talpur, et al., 2014). Only 75% of children nation-wide attend primary school, with barely two-thirds of them completing (Mahmood, 2013). Rural primary school enrollment is much lower, at only 46%, one of the lowest in South Asia, while female enrollment is barely 18% (Tayyaba, 2012). Much of this difference is because rural parents want boys to attend school so they can get employment, but girls are only expected to know the Quran and basic Islamic doctrine.

In urban areas, the situation is very different. In last 40 years, the government has taken several steps to improve the status of women. In 1979, the government established a Women's Division, which was upgraded to the Ministry of Women Development in 1985, to train women in various technical and vocational fields. A women's bank was also established to provide loans to help women establish their own businesses. Pakistan has had several women in top positions, including a female Prime Minister, Speaker of the National Assembly and Governor of the State Bank. However, only some of these benefits have reached rural women, partly due to the tribal system which exists in all four provinces. Without the permission of tribal leaders, government officials are unable to implement policies that would empower rural women on par with the benefits enjoyed by their urban peers (Ghazi et al, 2010).

Pakistan spends just over 2% of GDP on education (Ghazi, et. al, 2010; Mahmood, 2013). Chronic lack of funding results in infrastructure decay, lack of resources, inadequate

teacher training, and poor student outcomes (Ghazi, et al., 2010; Iqbal & Arif 2011). Federal and provincial bureaucracies allocate large portions of the budget for official perks, rather than teaching and learning. Funds are misappropriated by corrupt officials, who then file the false reports for completing work. Thousands of “ghost schools” exist only on paper, with buildings that are too dangerous to use, seized by feudal lords, or converted into barns. Teachers and officials are transferred, appointed, and promoted based on political affiliations and connections or in exchange for political or financial benefits. As a result, lack of qualification and general incompetence exacerbates existing problems, especially in rural areas (Ghazi, et al., 2010).

Mismanagement and inadequate government funding have prompted parents who can afford it to send their children to private schools, relegating poor children from laborer-class families to overcrowded government schools with mismanaged, unhygienic and unsafe physical facilities in gross disrepair (Mahmood, 2013). Without adequate textbooks, computers, and instructors, any resources must be provided by parents or done without. In contrast, elite private schools have up-to-date facilities, including a full-time doctor, child care for teachers and staff, and a modern academic liberal arts curriculum with advanced options in science, math, English, and the arts. Instruction is usually in English and graduating seniors must pass the University of Cambridge International Examinations. Although private school standards and fees vary, some elite private schools are quite expensive, with fees for admission and the first two months’ attendance that often exceed annual per capita income (Mahmood, 2013).

Madrassahs are a third type of school, mostly for the lower classes. These religious schools usually do not charge tuition, relying on donations from individuals and religious groups, most of whom have ties with various political and religious factions. Many madrassahs provide room and board, since almost all of their clients are rural children from low socioeconomic

strata. Madrassahs are isolated places where children are sometimes treated inhumanely and brutally punished. Children leave madrassahs with some religious education but it is notoriously biased and narrow, with little information of current and world affairs (Ghazi et al., 2010).

### **Ghana and Anglophone West Africa: Post-Colonial Policies and National Priorities**

The most contested legacy of colonialism in Ghana and other Anglophone West African countries, is a colonial educational system which educates students while “keeping them out of touch with their local culture and community” (Dei, 2004, p. 211). The British colonial administration originally exported the Hampton-Tuskegee model of industrial education from the Southern United States. Despite an assumption that political neutrality of the United States would make this model more acceptable to the colony (Quist, 2003), Steiner-Khamsi (2004) pointed out that its emphasis on industrial education simply legitimized the existing colonial administration. The Ghanaian elite ultimately rejected the borrowed model, describing it as racist, with its dependency implications and, ironically, advocated for grammar school education similar to that in England (Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000). Post-independence governments and policy makers have since called for an educational system that is practical, technical-oriented, and relevant to a context of African culture and values. However, educational reforms instituted by subsequent administrations have failed to achieve that. Western forms of knowledge continue to be at the center of the educational system relegating African traditional knowledge to the periphery (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2002) in order to retain power under the status quo.

The vested interests of African elites continue to present a major barrier to curricular reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa (Tikly, 1999). Incumbent governments often divert Western aid to politically important regions, despite significant efforts of donors to minimize host government discretion (Briggs 2012; Morrison 2012). It is common practice in several African

countries, including Ghana, to funnel substantially larger financial support to political leaders' own birth regions rather than other parts of the country (Dreher, et al., 2014). Political party activists and public officers also regularly grant "protocol admissions," which bypass democratic merit-based procedures, encouraging brokers to take money from prospective applicants and lobby political bosses to support unqualified admissions (Joy News, 2015).

Enrollment in tertiary education in Ghana increased 13-fold from 1990 to 2008. Before 1992, only three institutions were considered "institutions of higher learning," with a total enrollment of 14,500 (World Bank, 2010). Enrollment doubled two years later when public polytechnics were upgraded to tertiary education status. In 2007, the number of tertiary institutions jumped nearly 50%, to over 120, when all 38 teacher training colleges were also upgraded to three-year Colleges of Education. By the 2007-2008 school year, there were over 128,000 students enrolled in Ghana's tertiary education system (World Bank, 2010).

At the same time, however, the government eliminated monthly allowances, insisting that these students needed to source loans to fund their education. Students who meet minimum admission requirements but do not meet program cut-off points are admitted as "fee-paying students," whereas those who do meet cut-off points receive government subsidies for fees. While this would afford fee-paying students opportunities they would not have had without the policy higher education in Ghana is by several orders of magnitude "disproportionately 'consumed' by the richest 20% of the population" (World Bank, 2010, p. 156).

Ghana has also emphasized primary education, some say to the point of neglect of post-primary education (Palmer, 2005). This has been exacerbated by an acute shortage of trained teachers. In 2006-2007, there were 81,000 unqualified teachers in Ghanaian basic schools, including 22,000 new graduates doing a year of national service, 12,000 National Volunteers,



and 9,000 students in their final year at a teacher's college (World Bank, 2010). In an effort to strengthen the teaching force and increase access to higher education in Ghana, universities have relied on distance education and the use of open education through the African Virtual University (2015), allowing working adults to pursue courses without resigning from their jobs. The most successful and prominent distance education programs are run by the University of Education in Winneba (UE) and the University of Cape Coast in Cape Coast (UCC). The government does not provide financial support for this training, but non-governmental organizations have assisted some trainees in deprived areas of the country. Since most of these distance education students live in deprived areas and do not have access to the Internet, this can negatively impact their participation in the program.

### **Ukraine: Technology to transform access and quality of education**

Technology is an important lever to democratize teaching and learning through open access and equal opportunity (Liqing, Berci & He, 2011), “freedom of choice” (Kanwar, 2012), content personalization (Dorman & Fraser, 2009; Starr, 2013; Acemoglu, Laibson & List, 2014) and empowerment of students to direct their own learning (Mentz, 2014). Course quality is enhanced by making the work of highly skilled lecturers and curriculum developers broadly available via the Internet, augmenting the work of instructors with less skill, experience, or access to quality resources (Acemoglu, Laibson & List, 2014) and “jump-starting” efforts to improve educational quality in emerging countries.

The Ukrainian government has struggled to integrate the technology necessary to upgrade and democratize education. In 2000, the Ukrainian President endorsed support for Internet access (Alekseychick, 2001) and the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) established a Ukrainian Distance Learning Center (Shunevych, 2002; EdNU, 2010). This initiative was expanded in

2002, to create a consortium of six universities to establish “a pedagogical experiment in distance learning.” On January 21, 2004, MES Order #40 created guidelines for distance education, preparatory to joining the Bologna Process in 2005 (Government Portal, August 12, 2005). However, once the Bologna Process had been officially adopted, there were few new developments in policy or practice for several years.

Renewed interest in technology-assisted distance education re-emerged in 2011, as a way to optimize work plans and reduce “obsolete forms of work and themes.” (Government Portal, September 12, 2011), with a significant surge in official government support in 2012 and 2013 (MES: October 17, 2012; January 18, 2013; April 19, 2013; April 23, 2013; April 25, 2013; June 12, 2013; June 17, 2013). However, official support has not always translated into meaningful practice. Lack of funding, technological infrastructure, training, and access remain significant barriers to success (Shunevych, 2002; Vasiliev, Lavrik & Lyubchak, 2007; Klokar, Benderets & Borbit, 2011; MES, January 18, 2013). Lack of systematic coordination and standards often resulted in ineffective or unsuccessful programs (MES, June 17, 2013). Many Ukrainian Internet sites claiming research or practice in distance learning are outdated or without substance. Many courses that do exist appear little different from correspondence courses or remote lectures via television or Skype. Despite the obstacles, a handful of Ukrainian universities are significantly involved in distance education (Powell, Kuzmina, Yamchynska & Shestopaliuk, 2015).

According to Oleksandr Shestopaliuk, former Rector of Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University (VSPU), “Introducing technology into teaching is one of the most noticeable traits of great change that will take place in the future of Ukraine through today’s changes in education” (Personal communication, 2013). Despite the lack of centralized funding, innovative universities such as VSPU have made it a priority to acquire a critical mass of computers, whiteboards and

other basic peripherals, computer laboratories with Internet access for student and instructor use, and suites of software for instruction, administration, and data management (Powell, et al., 2014). Professors are now required to have an electronic variant of their handouts and tests, electronic manuals are being developed for student use, and several individual initiatives have been undertaken to integrate technology-assisted learning into face-to-face instruction as well as pilot classes employing interactive Skype sessions, blended learning, asynchronous forum discussions, and social networking sites. According to Tamara Yamchynska, Dean of the Institute of Foreign Languages (Personal communication, 2013), “Instructors are required to use technology, but not all are eager to quickly change their attitudes to teaching with technology.” On the other hand, “many of them don’t need to be required as they understand the potential of technology and its benefits for making the educational process more effective.”

One of the most significant technological reforms democratizing education in Ukraine is in student data management. Accountability, transparency, and appropriate regulation of data management is a key factor in overcoming endemic corruption and restoring confidence in administration (Mylovanov, 2014). Automated record-keeping systems digitize student records with password protection and security protocols to make access and maintenance of student records more efficient. Unauthorized access is limited and time-stamped logins discourage attempts to make arbitrary changes. Increased transparency in maintaining records of student data discourages tampering and facilitates inspection for accountability audits. Additional data management and statistical programs facilitate real-time tracking of student progress and “just-in-time” instructional intervention to provide remediation and prevent student failure. However, acquisition of the necessary hardware and software remain crucial for integrating fragmented records into a university-wide data management system (Powell, et al., 2015).

## **Implications for Further Research**

Issues of democratization in education are very complex and many questions remain unanswered. Seemingly simple “practical” measures are often layered with hidden pitfalls of unintended favoritism or bias. For example technology can be liberating, but at the same time adds yet another barrier to access and success. Differential access to technology has disproportionate consequences for the poor, hindering them from acquiring technological skills that are essential not only for success in the modern marketplace, but in education as well (Soltan, 2016). At least initially, a shift to web-based technology in education can present a dis-equalizing effect due to high startup costs and unequal access to the Internet. A range of potential solutions could alleviate this inequity, including the introduction of low-cost, alternative-energy devices, such as simple computer tablets or laptops with solar or hand-cranked battery packs. Some of the burden of start-up cost can be balanced by economizing on textbooks and other non-digital resources and, in the long term, broader-based use of digital resources overcomes initial inequities (Acemoglu, Laibson & List, 2014). Implementation and research projects in partnership with donor corporations, international universities, or wealthier nations could provide much-needed resources and technical assistance. Fortunately, there is a wealth of experience worldwide, with many successful exemplars that can be emulated and adapted as needed; reform-minded institutions in emerging countries can benefit from these lessons to bypass many of the missteps and uncertainties endured by early innovators in previous decades.

Merit-based access to education is often touted as the great leveler, especially to combat systemic corruption and eliminate arbitrary factors such as class, race or gender. However, class privilege has consolidated superior educational resources for generations, ensuring that the children of traditionally privileged groups become most meritorious, creating a self-perpetuating

cycle of “merit” defined by exclusion (Stanford University, n.d.). Rather than a lever for upward mobility, education - especially higher education - becomes a gatekeeper, sorting individuals by class and family income (McNamee & Miller, 2004), as well as race and gender. Education cultivates merit, but since opportunities for education are unequally distributed, merit itself becomes one more privilege of the few at the expense of the many (Stanford University, n.d.). The merit admission process should be reconsidered to identify bias and critical points of access for students who would be successful, but do not have the hidden advantages of privilege.

An even more difficult problem is the challenge of reconciling the ideals of democratization with religious and cultural norms that run counter to democratic principles. There is a certain degree of implicit arrogance behind the attempt to insert an alien value structure of democratization into a culture that has no historical foundation to support it. Radically different social, political, and religious world-views result in radically different moral codes and value systems. Efforts to superimpose democracy on societies with fundamentally different social, political or religious cultures will always be viewed with suspicion or even outright hostility. When these values clash, the conflict can become intractable (Maiese, 2003). Any attempts to introduce democratic reforms in education in such a culture will only be successful if they can build on pre-existing elements of that culture that show potential to provide access and voice for the disenfranchised, gradually establishing proto-democratic norms from within. This will require careful analysis and a deep understanding of the culture in its own context. This must necessarily be a long-term goal that requires resilience and patience. Changing the fundamental norm of a culture does not come easily or quickly.

Issues of democratization in education are not limited to the few cases described in this article. Nor is the study of democratization only relevant to emerging countries. Gross disparities

of privilege and opportunity exist in wealthy “first-world” nations as well. Comparative analyses of both problems and solutions across cultures and political structures will be critical to developing a systematic understanding of the challenges of democratization in education in a variety of contexts.

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