

OECD FUTURE OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS 2030

Student voices on curriculum (re)design



STUDENT VOICES ON CURRICULUM (RE)DESIGN

Curriculum reform is one of the most politically sensitive and high-stakes reforms undertaken in education systems, and resistance to change is often much stronger than the desire to change. The OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 (E2030) project produced a series of thematic reports on the following six issues facing policy makers and curriculum designers. Students are critical stakeholders in the E2030 project, and this brochure showcases their voices, which help to personalise and put into context the impact these issues have on those curriculum reform aims to support.

(1) WHAT STUDENTS LEARN MATTERS: TOWARDS A 21ST CENTURY CURRICULUM

Economic, societal and environmental changes are happening rapidly, and technologies are developing at an unprecedented pace, but education systems are relatively slow to adapt. Trends in the types of skills required in the labour market have shifted dramatically over recent decades. While routine manual and cognitive tasks were once the norm, many of today's jobs require non-routine analytic and interpersonal skills. Building a peaceful and sustainable future requires education systems to foster a range of competencies that go beyond preparing students for performing specific jobs.

(2) CURRICULUM OVERLOAD: A WAY FORWARD

Attempting to keep curriculum aligned with newly emerging needs of the economy and society can create a situation where curriculum becomes overloaded. The more policy makers try to accommodate the demands from various sectors or interest groups, the greater the risk of creating an overcrowded curriculum, particularly if there is inadequate consideration at the curriculum design stage of what is included, what is removed, and why. Overload may lead to narrow, fragmented or distorted ways of implementing curriculum, with consequences for the quality of student learning. A decrease in well-being of both teachers and students is likely if they are required to work and study extensively outside of school hours to meet new curriculum requirements.

(3) EQUITY THROUGH CURRICULUM INNOVATION

The types of curriculum innovation that may promote equity include personalised curriculum, digital curriculum, cross-curricular or competency-based curriculum, and flexible curriculum. While there is a risk that curriculum design can lead to or compound inequities, there is also much potential for curriculum to help increase fairness, justice and inclusion for all students. Research on individual differences, particularly on disparities in learning and access related to students with special education needs and students of lower socio-economic backgrounds, suggests that curriculum design approaches can be leveraged to respond to the needs of diverse students.

STUDENT VOICES ON CURRICULUM (RE)DESIGN

(4) CURRICULUM FLEXIBILITY AND AUTONOMY

Curriculum flexibility is conceptualised as adaptability and accessibility of the curriculum, allowing schools and teachers to respond to students' needs and capabilities. It assumes autonomy of schools and teachers with regard to the curriculum or parts of it. Curriculum autonomy is the autonomy of local authorities, schools and teachers in making decisions and having responsibility over the curriculum domain for planning and organising teaching and learning. It also suggests an amount of autonomy on the part of students, who can have a say in designing and selecting their curriculum, notably during secondary school. Student agency and co-agency between students, teachers, parents, and the community can be a critical part of learning as students navigate educational systems.

(5) VALUES EMBEDDED IN THE CURRICULUM

Embedding attitudes and values into curriculum refers to explicitly recognising their importance as part of a holistic education, beyond knowledge and skills, to support and guide students in navigating an uncertain future. As countries are increasingly moving towards a holistic approach to competency development, there are growing expectations for schools to address values to enrich students' learning experience and their school life.

(6) ECOSYSTEM APPROACH TO CURRICULUM REDESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Decades of research on the efficacy of curricular reforms has found that implementation dictates outcomes. Moreover, assessments, particularly high-stakes assessments, have an impact on what is taught and, ultimately, on what and how students learn. Curriculum implementation is a complex process at the intersection of multiple policy dimensions, a range of people and diversity of places – ideally linked in an ecosystemic way, building on a co-agency approach.

(1) WHAT STUDENTS LEARN MATTERS: TOWARDS A 21ST CENTURY CURRICULUM — CRITICAL COMPETENCIES —

Globalisation and rapid changes in technology are accelerating social, economic, and environmental challenges worldwide, and students recognise the need to be equipped to handle these changes. Digital literacy, ethics, teamwork and organisation skills are emerging as more valuable than a student's ability to memorise and recall information, or pass an examination. Learning such 21st century competencies is not as simple as taking a class: it requires collaborating with peers and building trust with teachers. Many students stress the importance of interactive, group projects that foster communication and project development skills as a powerful example of competencies they feel they will need to thrive after graduation.

We are not taught how to get the essence of information we learn. We are taught how to learn information by heart, but we are not taught how to analyse information, how to get information from different sources. I am studying at university now, and I really see the difference between learning at school and university. At university, you have to work with a lot of information, and it's up to you to understand which source is more trustworthy. It would be great if they prepared us for this in school. There is no connection between schools and universities in my country, because schools prepare us for exams, and in university, it's a completely new environment and new approach.

— Yelyzaveta, 17, Ukraine



Morals and ethics don't just affect our studying or online classes. Before we are students, we are all human beings, and morals affect not only your studies but also who you are becoming. When you are honest, and you're honest even when you're alone [and no one is monitoring you to make sure you don't cheat], you can perform better when you're studying, or working at your job, or whatever you do in this world. Honesty is a really important attitude to have. The way that we teach it is by building trust between teachers and students.

— Soo-a, 17, South Korea



Resilience and proactivity are values that are hard to teach without having experience, but it's very needed, especially these days. If we can learn by experience, it would be helpful for us, because it's not something that we can memorize. Involving more students in student organizations, for example, can help; it is, of course, already being done at this moment, but not all the students are involved. It would be very useful because everyone would have to work together with someone else. At the end of the day, [in-class] group work is something that's being forced to be done for a grade, so most students will do the work but won't actually interact with their group members. So student organizations are a better way to learn these values.

— Danya, 14, Indonesia



(1) WHAT STUDENTS LEARN MATTERS: TOWARDS A 21ST CENTURY CURRICULUM — ONLINE EDUCATION —

The biggest challenge of online education for many students has been the lack of social interactions with their peers and teachers. Students reported having difficulties concentrating and absorbing new material because they were unable to easily discuss it with classmates in and outside of class. At the same time, online education offered some advantages: students were able to pursue hobbies and activities they previously had less time to try. With the transition to online education, some students also raised concerns about the security of their personal data, such as email log-in information. A number of schools have yet to develop clear cybersecurity protocols and communicate online safety guidelines to students and parents.

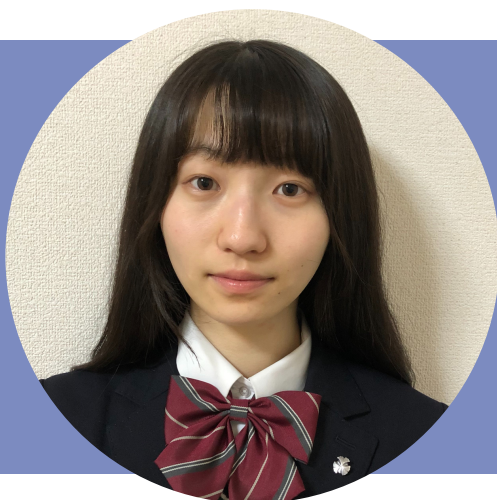
When you're not meeting classmates face-to-face, obviously it's much harder to talk [and work together]. How it usually works in class, after we've been divided into groups, we are put into different Google Meets with our group members. Sometimes, especially when we don't have our cameras on, no one is there, we're just using the chat room, typing. Sometimes, someone tries to initiate the conversation, but it's easy to ignore.

— Danya, 14, Indonesia



In school, we talk with friends every day, and we are teaching each other every day. In my school, studying is a teacher asking questions and we have to [answer] that question, only students. So, we need some friends to study with. I can think by myself, but I want to have a co-worker, and talking makes it easier to understand [assignments], it's very useful. During COVID times, we suffered from not being able to speak to each other. In Zoom, we can talk but many students don't turn their cameras on, so it is not good for talking because I can't see their faces. I wanted an opportunity to have time to talk, not only to learn, but also to have breaks with friends.

— Mahiro, 16, Japan



I think I got advantages from online education. I started some new projects that I couldn't start during my previous years of education because of a lack of time due to spending time on the road [going to and from school]...I became a member of clubs like Model UN and some other commercial projects due to the possibilities of extra time with online education. I may not sleep as much due to my many extracurriculars, but the reason I'm doing it is, I understand that now is the time you should start trying all these things...Online education is more efficient for me, and I'm a bit worried that if we return to in-person education, all the stuff I added to my schedule will not be possible.

— Dzhafar, 17, Kazakhstan



(2) CURRICULUM OVERLOAD: A WAY FORWARD — TIME MANAGEMENT AND WELL-BEING —

Curriculum overload has a major impact on student well-being, in particular when students feel that they have to forego fun activities or self-care rituals in order to finish their schoolwork. Students from different countries report getting between three and six hours of sleep on average due to an overwhelming amount of assignments. Many feel forced to choose between sleep and an after-school activity or hobby. There is a common expectation among students that they need to be productive all the time and pursue as many activities as possible in addition to performing well in school.

Students are too overloaded with everything in their curriculum. There are students who resolve this problem by becoming at some point totally unmotivated and discouraged from completing their homework. It's too much for them, so they stop doing it and just go to sleep. It makes students less responsible. The reason students sleep so few hours is that, due to online education, school work can last from 8 a.m. to 12 a.m. because students aren't good at managing their time. A very crucial point in online education is making a tool or a strict timetable to recommend to students how they can plan their time, hour-to-hour, when each homework should be done in order to lower the number of hours students spend on schoolwork.

— Dz hafar, 17, Kazakhstan



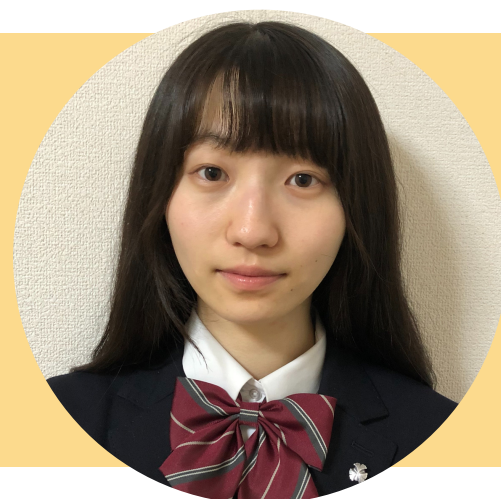
Currently, I'm in one of my busiest periods because our final exams are coming up soon. Teachers don't manage the time well enough so [we have] all the exams they haven't given to us and all the work and projects they haven't assigned to us, which were supposed to be assigned before the exams. [Outside of exam periods], I tend to feel unproductive when I'm not doing anything. Even if it's not schoolwork, I tend to do things like painting, reading, even making summaries of laws, just anything to make me feel more productive. [...] Maybe it's the fact that we have periods that are super busy so that we are working almost all day, so that's why we tend to feel that we're not accomplishing anything and overworking ourselves when there's not really work to do.

— Danya, 14, Indonesia



I always decrease my sleeping time to study and do homework. If I don't join student club activities I have more time, but I enjoy them. I get home late: my house is far from my school, it takes 1,5 hours to get home. I have to get up early, and I have to study or do other tasks. I often sleep during school lessons. It's not good but I can't stop myself from falling asleep. Many students are sleeping during lessons so the teacher can't really teach the lesson, and we can't talk to each other if students in the same group are sleeping. It's not a student's responsibility, it's a difficult problem. We can't increase total day time, so we have to think about time management.

— Mahiro, 16, Japan

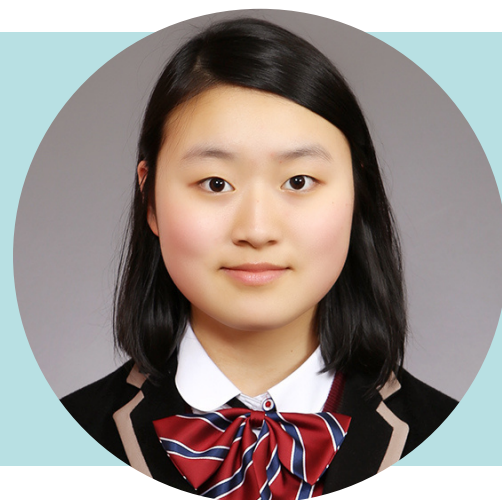


(2) CURRICULUM OVERLOAD: A WAY FORWARD — LEARNING THAT MOTIVATES STUDENTS —

Assignments and lessons that encourage critical thinking and creativity are increasingly important for students. Repetitive schoolwork that emphasises rote memorisation may instill factual knowledge but does not inspire students or get them excited about learning. Students also appreciate having the ability to form and express their own opinions about the learning material. Lessons that connect with significant local and global issues and facilitate lively discussions are popular, and teachers who encourage students to step outside their comfort zone receive lots of student praise.

We had a literature teacher who was very passionate. We have the same assignments [as in other classes]: we have to write reports. With most assignments, when we write enough words for the report and we follow the instructions exactly, we can get a perfect score. Even if the report isn't that great in quality. But this literature teacher, even when we satisfy the evaluation criteria, doesn't give us a good score if the report does not reflect our own thinking. She always emphasises that thinking your own thoughts is very important. Almost every student feels positive about this [assignment], even if our grade is not as great, because we notice that we are encouraged to think and are very thankful.

— Soo-a, 17, South Korea



At Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, there are some classes implemented into the main lessons—like classes on global citizenship and global problems resolution—into the curriculum of lessons on languages, for example. When we have English or Russian or Kazakh, we are talking about global issues, global citizenship, combining these ideas together with grammar. We also have classes on economics and geography that focus on teaching us about global problems. We've come to a new stage [in education] of not only explaining to students what it is to resolve global problems or earn money, but also how to make a positive impact and how to succeed in doing it.

— Dzhafar, 17, Kazakhstan

At school, we were performing a lot of small tasks, for example solving some math problems. It would be more useful if we learned how to engage with bigger tasks but with a lot of steps. For example, if we have to analyse information, so we have to choose the best sources and explain why we chose them. It would be great if our thoughts were heard and we had to think about a given problem, write down our own opinions, and explain it.

— Yelyzaveta, 17, Ukraine



(2) CURRICULUM OVERLOAD: A WAY FORWARD

— ROLE OF TEACHER FEEDBACK —

Receiving feedback from teachers is a crucial part of the learning experience. Whether students receive feedback consistently and how that feedback is delivered plays a role in how much they appreciate individual teachers. Many students expressed frustration with having their efforts reduced to numerical grades, wishing that they had more opportunities to share their ideas and engage in conversations with teachers beyond studying exam materials. Positive feedback is extremely important to students of all backgrounds, because it helps to remind them that their worth is not attached to their grades and motivates them to learn more.

Teacher feedback is important because we can search for the right information on the Internet, but [personalised] feedback is more valuable. Teachers observe students and they're able to give some advice. Teachers have to monitor each student's life situation and achievements. It is good motivation for us to receive feedback. However, if the teacher only pays attention to your test scores, it is not good because we are making an effort over a long period of time, not only during exams. If I have a headache on exam day, for example, it is not reflecting my real skills.

— Mahiro, 16, Japan



For me, the best type of feedback was when we heard something positive about our work, not just negativity or describing our mistakes. Yes, that's really useful, no doubt. But it would be great if we were able to hear what we did right, what was good in our work. When I was getting this type of feedback, it inspired me to learn more about the given topic or put more effort into my future work. I suppose that a lot of students felt the same way as me.

— Yelyzaveta, 17, Ukraine



Some teachers just see our work as a grade, it's just a number. If it's good, then they'll say, 'OK, they understand the concepts of the lesson, and this is a good grade.' If they show the test score on the screen [when giving feedback to the class] with my name on it, it will seem like I got a good grade. But it doesn't mean anything more. But when a teacher says that my ideas are very interesting, even though they may not agree with my opinion, the fact that they value our opinions as something more than a grade feels very nice.

— Danya, 14, Indonesia



Forthcoming: Quotes from students on the remaining themes of the curriculum (re)design report series

The OECD curriculum report launches are accompanied by a student voice campaign. To this end, this brochure will be enriched by student videos on experienced curriculum (the curriculum as perceived and actually experienced by students). The videos will be shared on the OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 website.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- **OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 project website:** <https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/>
- **OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 curriculum analysis:** <https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/curriculum-analysis/>
- **The OECD Learning Compass 2030:** <https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/>
- **The Future We Want - Student voices from the OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 project:** <https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/well-being/>
- **OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 publications:** <https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/>

