

CULTIVATING STUDENT EMPOWERMENT THROUGH KNOWLEDGE, INQUIRY, AND INNOVATION

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There is an emerging dilemma in current education systems. Traditionally, education systems have been concerned with equipping learners with the necessary information, skills, socialization, and certification to enable them fit into the societies. But scholars and education policymakers now increasingly appreciate that education should go beyond this scope and engage with developing critical thinking of learners and empowering them to envisage and create new possibilities for the future (Garcés et al., 2022).

A key issue for understanding the transformation and future orientations of education and learning is how we engage students in processes of learning and development and how this is embedded within the communities in which they belong. Traditionally, student engagement and participation have been developed by assigning learners projects defined primarily by instructors. In this framing, student activity is often limited to increasing engagement through structured activities that still provide a bounded degree of freedom in task selection, collaboration, and output (Erstad et al., 2025). Higher education systems are now facing a deeper and more fundamental challenge, which is how to genuinely engage students with the pressing issues that will shape their future lives in a world defined by complex social problems. This calls for moving beyond a narrow emphasis on the socio-cognitive and emotional aspects of learning and toward what has been described as transformative intervention. This approach highlights the evolving relationship between culture and mind, as well as the connection between meaning-making and participation in community life.

Within this broader perspective, empowerment in education begins with knowledge, but not the kind limited to memorizing facts and definitions. Instead, it is knowledge that helps learners make sense of principles, questioning, exploration, interpretation, and apply what they learn in real-life situations (Pedaste et al., 2015). Given that the learners are grounded in such deep understanding, they will be able to be confident about their capabilities as well as developing control over their learning processes. In other words, the learners will be more active participants in the whole process of learning rather than mere recipients of information. Inquiry will take advantage of such an approach because it is based on encouraging curiosity, establishing questions, and exploration. When using inquiry to learn, the learners are encouraged to ask meaningful questions, analyze evidence, and create their own understanding of the topics being covered.

Innovation represents the highest expression of this kind of empowerment. When learners are given the space to innovate, they move beyond understanding and analysis and begin to create, design, and solve problems. Innovation in education is not limited to technology. It can also appear in creative thinking, new perspectives, or better ways of addressing community challenges (Ukowitz, 2021). By promoting innovation, universities help students become more adaptable and better prepared to contribute to a changing world.

The integration of knowledge, inquiry, and innovation requires deliberate efforts in higher education. The educators have a major part to play as far as formation of the environment where the learner engages through participation, inquiry, and innovation. Moreover, the institutions should be able to promote curriculum that is flexible, interdisciplinary and responsive to local and global needs rather than with formats, fonts, and documentary pictures. Empowerment is, thus, directly connected to inclusivity and accessibility. Students should have equal access to education and learning processes that will empower them. Empowerment can never take place when the social, economic, or institutional barriers hinder the ability of the learners to participate fully and learn. It is, therefore, important that empowerment of the learners involves the promotion of equity. Students should be mentored and inspired rather than spoon-fed and controlled.

In conclusion, the empowerment of students through knowledge, inquiry, and innovation is important to enable them in facing life challenges. Education should not just be the transfer of knowledge but should be dynamic in nature that makes the individual curious, competent, and innovative.

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