

The New Frontiers of Higher Education

Redefinition of the teacher's role, equal opportunities and digital transition: three upcoming challenges for higher education

according to an international survey conducted by EDHEC Business School and OpinionWay, in partnership with Institut Montaigne.

Press release

Paris – 7 July 2020 - EDHEC Business School today unveils the results of an international survey conducted on the future of higher education, in partnership with Institut Montaigne. At a time when the covid-19 crisis is challenging certainties, the survey seeks to capture the opinion of five prominent countries in the higher education field – France, UK, USA, India and South Africa – and to compare their visions and perceptions of the challenges that educational systems need to overcome for the benefit of future generations.

Reinvention: a must for higher education

With the covid-19 pandemic having forced schools and universities into unprecedented efforts to adapt, higher education is more than ever obliged to reinvent itself. All in all, 80% of French respondents are in favour of such a change, embracing not just formats and learning media, but the role of the teacher as well.

Commenting on the survey, Emmanuel Métais, Dean of EDHEC Business School, says, *“This survey highlights the extent of the challenges confronting our societies today. Faced with disruptive crises, higher education must play a driving role and prepare young generations for the task of building a sustainable world. Whether equal opportunities, digital acceleration or ecological transition, the issues are global and resonate with the analyses underpinning our strategic plan”*.

Digital is seen as a driver of transformation in the higher education sphere. The take-up of new technologies is considered beneficial by 87% of French respondents, who also consider their education system to have begun the digital transformation process (81%), a higher result than in the UK, the USA (64% for each) and India (49%).

The current situation, which is boosting the use of digital, is energising new forms of learning. 86% of French respondents expect digital to accentuate the development of collaborative working and 80% see it as a powerful booster of motivation, by fostering more diverse teaching formats and improving students' knowledge and the pace at which they learn (73%).

The health crisis has accelerated the use of digital. Distance learning during confinement was perceived as a positive experience by 67% of French and British respondents, and by 87% of Indians. Although almost half of French respondents (45%) consider a mixed learning model combining face-to-face and online formats to be the preferred way forward, this fundamental trend is even more pronounced in South Africa (70%), the UK (63%) and the USA (53%).

The teacher: the chief figure in the transmission of knowledge

In the eyes of French respondents, the teacher occupies a strategic position that new technologies cannot replace. Nevertheless, more than two thirds of them imagine a different knowledge transmission process in the future that leaves greater scope for connected objects or artificial intelligence (70%).

Far from doing away with professors, new technologies will play a complementary role. For French respondents, new technologies will primarily help teachers on a day-to-day basis, by relieving them of routine tasks (67%) or giving them more time to personalise their teaching and get to know their students better.

Nevertheless, students remain deeply attached to the teacher's role as a vector of knowledge and know-how (56%), while also perceiving the need for this role to change. Adaptability, an outward-looking approach and the ability to analyse, feature among the key soft skills to be developed in the opinion of close to half of those questioned in France. Faced with these changes, teachers need to take up the challenge of teaching new competencies: how to use new technologies to acquire information, and the development of motivation and behavioural knowledge are now part of the range of skills expected to be learned by a large number of those questioned in France.

Employability and equal opportunities: major social issues

Among the big challenges facing French higher education, the question of gaining a foothold in the job market is crucial. Only 41% of French respondents consider France's education system to be fit for preparing young people well enough for the world of employment (versus 75% in the UK, 72% in the USA and 81% in India).

An optimistic current is nevertheless visible in two main respects. Firstly, the development of an entrepreneurial mindset is seen as a factor of employability by 85% of those questioned in France, while 90% are in favour of the promotion of entrepreneurial skills via the introduction of various initiatives geared to raising awareness of entrepreneurship, such as business start-up competitions or meetings with entrepreneurs. Secondly, new technologies are considered as a way to gain entry to working life, with 80% of French respondents believing they will better prepare young generations for the professional world.

Although equal opportunities are a priority for 9 out of 10 French respondents, efforts in this area must first of all concentrate on the geographic accessibility of higher education institutions (58%) and then on the conditions of student life (51%), such as housing, food and transport.

The covid-19 pandemic has heightened the above expectation and, here again, digital appears to provide a possible response. For 59% of those questioned in France this June, the development of 100%-online university campuses could be a way to improve access to higher education in areas most remote from France's urban centres. 69 % of those under 35 adhere to this idea

More broadly, French respondents want their education system to raise awareness of societal issues more, and more especially the question of social inequality (51%), the environment (42%) and respect for male-female equality (40%). The health crisis has prompted interest in health-related disciplines - the topic most commonly cited in all countries (between 61% and 77%, 67% in France) - as well as in the social economy (between 48% and 62%, 50% in France).

Internationalisation of higher education amid the challenge of covid-19

Before the health crisis, the range of international exchanges was identified as the strong point of the French system, with 73% of respondents in France considering that French higher

education fosters an international outlook among the young, notably via exchanges offered abroad and through the foreign students hosted in France.

The possibility of going abroad during studies is a big expectation of students: for 85% of French respondents, doing at least part of one's studies abroad is a plus point, and to a greater extent than in the other countries surveyed (61% in the UK and 58% in the USA and India).

Although the covid-19 pandemic represents a threat to student mobility for most of the countries surveyed, France ranks as an exception. French respondents remain split on the prospect of international exchanges: although 52% consider the pandemic will limit their movements in the coming years, 47% do not see the crisis having any repercussions in this area.

For more information, the full survey is available [here](#)

Survey methodology

Quantitative survey conducted by OpinionWay for EDHEC Business School on 5,246 people in five countries: France – 1,049 interviews; UK – 1,053 interviews; USA – 1,023 interviews; India – 1,071 interviews; South Africa – 1,050 interviews.

Each sample was representative of the national population aged 15 and over, and was compiled using the quota method.

Interviews were conducted online from 3 to 9 January 2020. A complementary survey was then conducted on the five populations from 10 June to 19 June 2020, in order to update results for the consequences of the covid-19 pandemic.

Contacts Presse

Béatrice Malasset - beatrice.malasset@edhec.edu - 01 53 32 76 55 / 07 62 52 37 47

Angèle Pellicier - angele.pellicier@edhec.edu - 01 53 32 87 67 / 06 68 11 39 04

A propos d'EDHEC BUSINESS SCHOOL

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L'école a développé un modèle unique, fondé sur une recherche utile à la société, aux entreprises et aux étudiants. L'EDHEC est ainsi aujourd'hui tout à la fois un lieu d'excellence, d'innovation, d'expérience et de diversité, propre à impacter les générations futures dans un monde en profond bouleversement. Avoir un impact positif sur le monde est notre raison d'être.

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