



The Future Studies: A Neglected Necessity in Iran's Higher Education System

*Khatereh Shariati¹

¹Department of Medical Education, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran.

Dear Editor-in-chief

Future studies represent a systematic exploration of possible, probable, and preferable futures, encompassing the underlying worldviews and myths that shape human perspectives. In recent years, the discipline has evolved from merely predicting future scenarios to mapping alternative futures and actively shaping desired outcomes at both collective external and individual inner levels (1-5). Futurology emerges as a dynamic, interdisciplinary field that aggregates and analyzes trends using professional and lay methodologies, composes potential future scenarios, examines sources, patterns, and causes of change and stability, and develops strategic foresight. Internationally, this academic domain is known by various terminologies, including future studies, future research, strategic foresight, futuristics, future thinking, futuring, and futurology, with "future studies" and "strategic foresight" being the most prevalent terms. The field can be conceptualized as a branch of social sciences and an extension of historical analysis, seeking to understand continuity and potential transformations. Its core objective is to systematically comprehend past and present patterns while exploring potential future events and trends (8). Recognizing its significance, UNESCO designated December 2 as World Future Day to promote inclusive, cross-disciplinary dialogues about future studies (9).

Research demonstrates that contemplating the future is not a novel concept; human wisdom and inherent desires for immortality and progress have long motivated individuals to anticipate and prepare for potential scenarios across personal and collective domains—including family, business, society, and global contexts. Throughout history, people have consistently sought to understand and prepare for future events and transformations. The fundamental distinction between contemporary foresight and historical approaches lies in the systematic application of scientific principles within future studies. The emergence of modern futurism over the past half-century is primarily attributed to the accelerating rate of societal change. Increasingly rapid transformations generate greater uncertainties, thereby emphasizing the critical importance of future research (10-12). Contemporary crises and dynamic global changes represent the most compelling rationale for strategic future-oriented thinking, underscoring the discipline's relevance in navigating complex, unpredictable landscapes (13).

Key Words: Higher Education, Iran, Future Studies.

*Please cite this article as: Shariati Kh. The Future Studies: A Neglected Necessity in Iran's Higher Education System. Med Edu Bull 2024; 5(1): 879-81. DOI: **10.22034/MEB.2024.467072.1093**

**Corresponding Author:*

Khatereh Shariati, Department of Medical Education, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Mashhad, Iran.

Email: shariatikh1@mums.ac.ir

Received date: Jul. 25, 2023; Accepted date: Dec.12, 2023

The relationship between education and future studies is unequivocal, with educational objectives inherently forward-looking and employing strategic approaches that promote individual, social, and professional development. "Future studies" emerges as a prospective discipline that plays a crucial role in education by providing theoretical and methodological tools to project expectations, anticipate potential effects, and encourage critical reflection in educational processes (14). Since the late 20th century, significant efforts have been directed toward future studies in higher education, focusing on identifying and analyzing potential threats and opportunities. The primary objectives of future studies in higher education encompass systematically identifying change drivers, recognizing opportunities and threats, designing visionary and desirable futures for higher education, and creating effective strategies to achieve strategic educational goals (10). Additionally, a substantial component of future studies in universities is dedicated to researching higher education itself, with specific focus areas including student population projections, financial forecasting, predicting future university courses and disciplines, and university marketing strategies (15).

In recent decades, universities have undergone significant transformations, with evidence indicating that these changes will become increasingly extensive and profound in the future. Four primary factors influence university development: First, societal growth drives rapid educational expansion covering diverse needs, necessitating moving beyond historical perspectives. Second, universities' institutional boundaries are expanding with increased private sector educational providers. Third, substantial differences in global educational systems and orientations introduce complex challenges and varied approaches. Finally, rapid information technology development fundamentally transforms educational paradigms and innovations (10, 11).

These multifaceted issues demand comprehensive consideration in future studies. While prospective research predominantly focuses on countries with advanced higher education systems like the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, perceptions about educational challenges vary globally. Despite these differences, a consensus emerges around three fundamental questions guiding higher education's future: 1) Where are higher education and universities heading? 2) Where should they proceed, and why? 3) How can they effectively achieve their future trajectory? (2, 10)

The primary objective of future studies is to construct a desirable educational future by comprehensively analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Given the rapid global transformations in educational systems, developing a forward-looking perspective becomes crucial for effectively navigating critical conditions (16). Merely increasing quantitative and qualitative research and educational activities is insufficient for achieving dynamism in today's complex world. Developing a strategic and managerial perspective, coupled with designing organizational processes aligned with specified goals, is paramount for meaningful progress (17). Despite the critical importance of future studies, this field remains marginalized in practice within the country, with most domestic faculty members and researchers being largely unfamiliar with its principles and potential (18). Recognizing future studies' fundamental role in constructing a more robust educational landscape, it is imperative to establish necessary infrastructural platforms, create opportunities for researchers, facilitate deeper engagement with future studies' literature, enhance understanding of methodological approaches, and illuminate the substantial benefits of strategic future-oriented thinking.

REFERENCES

1. Masini, Elenora. *Why Futures Studies?* London: Grey Seal; 1993.
2. Parvaneh M, Niaz Azari K, Enayati T. *Future Studies: Dimensions and Components in the Educational System of a University of Medical Sciences*. Strides Dev Med Educ. 2021; 18(1):e1024. doi: 10.22062/sdme.2021.194978.1024.
3. Saul, Peter. 2001. *This Way to the Future*. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 2001; 6(1):107–20.
4. Wendell Bell. *The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies*. Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia: DDM Media Group; 1996; 1:28-56.

5. Sardar, Ziauddin (ed.). *Rescuing All of Our Futures: The Futures of Futures Studies*. London: Adamantine Press; 1999.
6. Sardar, Z. The Namesake: Futures; futures studies; futurology; futuristic; Foresight – What’s in a name? *Futures*, 2010; 42 (3): 177–84.
7. Hoseini Moghadam, M., Hamidi, M. The future of interdisciplinarity in higher education: experiences of medical universities in Iran. *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities*, 2022; 14(3): 87-122. doi: 10.22035/isih.2022.4642.4586.
8. Futurology". Wordnet Search 3.1. Princeton University. Retrieved 16 March 2013.
9. World Futures Day.| UNESCO". www.unesco.org. Retrieved 2022-12-12.
10. Mahdi R. Futurology in Higher Education: Strategies and Consequences of the Compatible University with Environment and Society. *JMDP* 2015; 28 (1):31-54.
11. Mahdi, R. Future Studies in Higher Education: The Conditions and Features of Excelling Universities in the Future. *Rahyaft*, 2013; 23(55): 79-90.
12. Hasanpor F, Taheri F, Fallah V. Identifying Effective Components on Futures Studies of Medical Sciences Education Based on Competitive Dynamics Approach. *Iranian Journal of Medical Education* 2021; 21: 376-86.
13. Weber, C., Sailer, K., Katzy, B. Real-time foresight—Preparedness for dynamic networks. *Technological forecasting and social change*, 2015;101: 299-313.
14. Miller, R., Poli, R., & Rossel, P. The discipline of anticipation foundations for futures literacy. In R. Miller (Ed.), *Transforming the future: Anticipation in the 21st century* (pp. 51-65). Routledge, 2018.
15. Aminbeidokhti AA, Rastgar A, Nameni A. A future study on higher education approaches in training human capital: A plausible scenario for 2030. *Journal of Research and Planning in Higher Education*. 2015; 21(3):31-55.
16. Tabatabai Sh. The Necessity of Futures Studies in Medical Education and health System in Iran. *Strides in development of medical education*. 2015; 12(2): 433-35.
17. Zakersalehi G. Futurology on the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on higher education. *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities*. 2020; 12(2): 181-211.
18. Mehravar Giglou, S., Khorsandi Taskoeh, A. Future Studies International Scientific Cooperation in Iran's Public Universities and Providing Policy Solutions and Recommendations. *Higher Education Letter*, 2023; 16(62): 35-66. doi: 10.22034/hel.2023.705096.