SDG Graduate Schools Alliance
Midterm Conference
Digitalization in Higher Education
and Research in International Cooperation for Sustainability

- Takeaways from experiences of 7 SDG Graduate Schools-

Bonn. June 7, 2023

Objectives of the conference

To advance cross-regional reflections on the role of higher education; on the role of digitalization in higher education and research as to achieve the SDGs and strengthen international cooperation.

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- Practices
- Lessons
- Challenges
- Open Questions

Background: Common assumptions

on digitalization in higher education and research

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Digitalization processes have the potential to contribute to transforming research and ways of thinking (systems thinking of SDGs).

Digitalization is not a panacea for quality & sustainable education (unsustainable consumption patterns, energy consumption, water and material consumption, digital divide, misinformation, rights violations (privacy issues), unsolved ethical questions).

We need to break the dichotomy of qualitative vs. quantitative or hard science vs. humanities and keep complexities in mind .

Digitalization is increasingly required by funders / open data policies.

Digitalization is a central tool for many of us, e.g. to avoid losing knowledge and making industrial production more sustainable.

Digitalization in higher education and research

PRACTICES

- Implementation or improvement of technical equipment, but also software.
- (All) have digitalized data & repositories in one or another way.
- Communication: webpages, instagram,...
- Rigorous process of revision before providing material.
- Many Graduate Schools are pioneers in digital transformation in their respective universities .

CHALLENGES

- Digital divide: north-south, gender, rural-urban.
- Connectivity: also within countries and regions (Germany).
- Risk of deepening inequalities.
- Legal challenges (sharing information and data protection).
- General lack of understanding of the importance of RDM (scarce inputs)
- Lack of infrastructure for long-time storage.
- Sharing of data under different hard-software (languages).

LESSONS

- Crises are to be considered (Ethiopia & Peru).
- Not all data is usable or of high quality.
- Many actors are to be involved in Data Transition (researchers, Uni-admin, local voices).
- We need to start sharing data now!

QUESTIONS AHEAD

- How do we ensure that digital transformation advances FAIR & CARE?
- What would be the impact on communities? Particularly those with colonial past (What is development?).
- How to deal with local knowledge regarding protection of rights and data? Who produces knowledge, who collects it and what for?
- How to get people to work on data collection management and protection? (incentives)
- How to share data and, which kind of data?

Background –
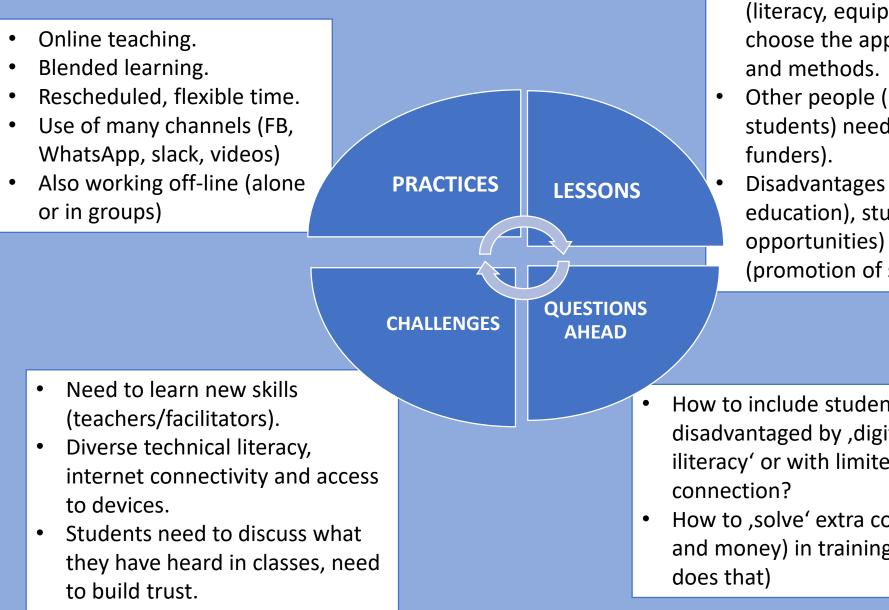## common assumptions

on online teaching

Covid Pandemic has been a catalyst.

Online teaching has proven a resource in times of crises, but is also here to stay.

Online teaching works better if supported by other strategies/tools (not a panacea in itself).

Some of us are going back to „old normal", while others are settling to the „new normal".

Online teaching

PRACTICES

- Online teaching.
- Blended learning.
- Rescheduled, flexible time.
- Use of many channels (FB, WhatsApp, slack, videos)
- Also working off-line (alone or in groups)

LESSONS

- Assess where we are starting from (literacy, equipment, software) and choose the appropriate technology and methods.
- Other people (rather than teachers & students) need to be involved (admin, funders).
- Disadvantages for teachers (quality of education), students (lack of career opportunities) and funders (promotion of shared values).

CHALLENGES

- Need to learn new skills (teachers/facilitators).
- Diverse technical literacy, internet connectivity and access to devices.
- Students need to discuss what they have heard in classes, need to build trust.

QUESTIONS AHEAD

- How to include students disadvantaged by ‚digital iliteracy' or with limited connection?
- How to ‚solve' extra costs (time and money) in training? (who does that)

Points for discussion

Are there any other relevant types of practices or strategies that we apply for data management in research? Other relevant challenges, lessons or open questions?

Are any other relevant types of practices or strategies that we apply for on-line teaching? Other relevant challenges, lessons or open questions?

With which kind of actions can we support each other? (Sharing of ethical guidelines, a webpage, a working group?)

How to go ahead?