

Concept Note

Book Title: *On-Demand Learning in a Changing World: Philosophical, Technological, and Practical Perspectives on Workforce and Vocational Education*

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Background and Rationale

The world is experiencing a transformation in education like never before, not only in the way knowledge is produced, shared and consumed but also in the way it is datafied, platformitized, valued and legitimized (Hassan et al., 2024; Komljenovic et al., 2025a; Komljenovic et al., 2025b; Williamson et al., 2023). The educational ecosystem was already being shaken by new providers, formal and informal, who were disrupting long-held assumptions about qualifications, delivery models, and access to learning even before the COVID-19 pandemic (Barnett, 2000, 2023; Trondsen & Vickery, 1997). The pandemic greatly increased the digitalization and datafication of education, increasing the dependence on platform-based, hybrid, modular, and increasingly, learner-driven methods (Ahsan et al., 2023; Hutson & Ceballos, 2023; Williamson et al., 2021). The introduction of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) systems like ChatGPT in 2022 further destabilized traditional ideas of teaching, learning, and competence validation, forcing to think immediately about the future of education, work, and human development (Kovalchuk et al., 2022; Kovalchuk et al., 2023; Prasetya et al. 2025).

The core of this change is On-Demand Learning, a paradigm that focuses on immediacy, flexibility, and relevance to the real world. The conventional paradigms of degree-based, time-constrained learning, based on standardized curricula and institutionalized organizational frameworks, are becoming more and more out of step with the fast-changing requirements of workplaces and societies that are being transformed by accelerated technological innovation and changing labor markets (Hanshaw, 2024; Prasetya et al. 2025; Wilkins et al., 2022). In comparison, On-Demand Learning provides flexible, modular, and learner-centred pathways that allow individuals to learn and develop knowledge and skills

where and when they are most required, in direct response to particular situations, objectives, and professional needs (Ahsan et al. 2023; Peterson & Cox, 2025).

In this respect, On-Demand Learning is much more than a delivery mode: it is a reorganization of the knowledge-learner-work relationship. It offers career-oriented and skill-based opportunities that match educational experiences with personal goals, industry requirements, and the needs of the society at large. On-Demand Learning, driven by new technologies, such as AI, mobile learning platforms, micro-credentialing systems, and adaptive digital ecosystems, is not only convenient and personalized but also more closely connected between learning, employability, and lifelong adaptability (Ahsan et al. 2023; Hutson & Ceballos, 2023; Hooi et al., 2025; Morandini et al., 2023).

Yet, this promise is neither inevitable nor unproblematic. On-Demand Learning raises pressing questions about philosophical, political, and economic assumptions: How do we understand the acceleration and demand for constant innovation, lifelong learning and the increasing precariousness of employment? Who defines how we understand knowledge and competencies, and how is the demand for different types of knowledge and skills impacting on more traditional ways of educational delivery? Which forms of learning are legitimized, credentialed, or excluded from recognition? How do accreditation systems, institutional readiness, and regulatory environments shape the ability of On-Demand Learning to achieve its potential? Beyond these structural concerns, On-Demand Learning also challenges us to revisit the epistemological and ontological foundations of education: What does it mean to learn, to know, and to be human in increasingly technologized, globalized, and resource-constrained contexts? (Calzada, 2024; Latif, 2024; Matheson & Matheson, 1996; Regmi, 2015; Rosa, 2003; 2013; Vostal, 2014). On-Demand Learning therefore also represents a broader philosophical and pedagogical shift toward just-in-time, skill-oriented, and learner-driven education, which unsettles traditional hierarchies of knowledge, reconfigures credentialing systems, and challenges institutional monopolies over learning.

Despite its growing relevance, scholarly engagement with the deeper epistemological, political, economic, and social implications of On-Demand Learning remains fragmented and underdeveloped. This edited volume seeks to address that gap. To be published by Springer, it will convene leading scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and designers to

critically and constructively examine the possibilities, limitations, and futures of On-Demand Learning. By bridging theoretical debates with practical innovations, and integrating global case studies with local experiments, the book aims to provide comprehensive insights into On-Demand Learning as both a conceptual framework and a practical strategy. Ultimately, it aspires to articulate pathways for reimagining education in a world where just-in-time, demand-driven learning is no longer a peripheral option but an essential response to the challenges and opportunities of contemporary life.

Why This Book Now?

The publication of this volume is particularly timely. Education systems around the world are under increasing pressure to respond to the fast-evolving economic, technological, and social realities. Automation, AI, and platform economies are redefining the future of work and require new types of adaptability, ongoing reskilling, and just-in-time learning. Both governments and industries are focusing on lifelong learning and workforce readiness as key measures to stay competitive and inclusive in an unpredictable global economy.

Meanwhile, global agencies like UNESCO, OECD, and the World Bank have alluded to the need for new forms of education that are more flexible, equitable, and learner-centered, which are consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) on inclusive and quality education to all. Efforts like the Futures of Education report by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2021) and the OECD work on skills and lifelong learning (OECD, 2019) highlight the necessity of ecosystems that are not limited to traditional institutions and qualifications, and which are dynamically responsive to changing labor markets and societal demands.

Moreover, the internationalization of micro-credentials, digital badges, and modular learning pathways is indicative of the potential and the disputed landscape of On-Demand Learning. These innovations provide new possibilities to learners to have access to affordable, targeted, and stackable learning experiences. However, they also pose pressing concerns regarding equity, quality assurance, recognition, and social justice, especially in the Global South, where digital divides and systemic inequalities threaten to marginalize those who need opportunity the most.

This urgency has been further increased by the introduction of GenAI technologies in 2023. As AI systems can generate, curate, and personalize content at scale, the lines between human and machine learning, formal and informal knowledge systems, and institutional and learner agency are being redefined. The emergence of these technologies highlights the transformative nature of On-Demand Learning and the ethical issues that it involves.

This book, therefore, responds to an urgent scholarly and practical need: to critically analyze, systematize, and rethink On-Demand Learning as a paradigm that can play a significant role in more flexible, fair, and sustainable educational futures. The volume seeks to influence the new discourse on On-Demand Learning by incorporating global insights, theory-practice, opportunities and risks, and situating it in the wider discussion of the future of education, work, and society.

Aims and Objectives

The book aims to explore the foundations, challenges, and practices of On-Demand Learning for vocational, skill-centric, and inclusive workforce development, mainly including:

- Critically examine the philosophical, political, economic, social, technological, pedagogical and psychological assumptions and principles that underpin our understanding of On-Demand Learning, with particular attention to the changing landscape of work, vocational education and workforce development.
- Explore the linkages, tensions, potential and future of On-Demand Learning with formal and/or professional qualifications and forms of delivery;
- Consider the epistemological and ontological assumptions and principles that guide lifelong, skill-centric, career-focused applications of On-Demand Learning;
- Highlight technology-enabled practices (e.g., AI, mobile, micro-credentialing) that support flexible, modular, and learner-driven pathways aligned with societal, workplace and industry needs;
- Examine implementation challenges, including accreditation, quality assurance, equity of access, and regulatory and institutional readiness, across both formal and informal education and training systems;

- Explore under what conditions On-Demand Learning serves inclusion, social justice, and equitable opportunities in/for resource-constrained environments and/or for vulnerable, marginalised individuals and communities;
- Share practical models, case studies, and toolkits from diverse learning environments, including postschool, higher and vocational training institutions, apprenticeships, corporate training, and lifelong learning contexts.

Excluded from scope:

This book will focus specifically on On-Demand Learning as a distinct approach to skill-centric, context-driven, and outcome-aligned education. The following falls outside the aims and scope of this book:

- General online, blended and hybrid forms of learning that form part of academic/professional degree programs;
- Research on (traditional) Massive Open Online Courses
- Research on the use of GenAI in online, blended and hybrid forms of learning that form part of academic/professional degree programs

By drawing these boundaries, the book situates itself as a critical and forward-looking exploration of On-Demand Learning in contexts where flexibility, responsiveness, and industry relevance are key drivers.

Significance and Contribution

The book will contribute both academically and practically:

- Theory: It will promote conceptual clarity of On-Demand Learning by placing it in the context of philosophical, epistemological, and socio-political discussions of knowledge, skills, and work in vocational and technical contexts.
- Policy: It will educate policymakers, regulators, and accrediting bodies about frameworks required to legitimize and quality-assure On-Demand Learning in diverse vocational education contexts and labor market environments.

- Practice: It will equip educators, vocational institutions, industry partners, and corporate trainers with case studies, models, and tools to design, implement, and evaluate effective skill-centric On-Demand Learning programs respond to rapidly changing workplace demands.
- Equity and justice: It will critically evaluate the promise and constraints of On-Demand Learning to marginalized learners, particularly in the Global South, and suggest inclusive models of vocational learning and skills recognition.

Structure (Proposed Sections)

1. Foundations and Frameworks
 - Philosophical and epistemological underpinnings
 - Historical trajectories of vocational education and lifelong learning
 - Political economy of On-Demand Learning
2. Technologies and Practices
 - AI, mobile platforms, and micro-credentialing
 - Flexible modular learning pathways
 - Institutional readiness and accreditation challenges
3. Equity, Access, and Inclusion
 - On-Demand Learning in resource-constrained and marginalized contexts
 - Gender, class, and geography as barriers or enablers
 - Social justice and workforce participation
4. Global Case Studies and Models
 - Vocational and post-school institutions
 - Apprenticeships and corporate training
 - Lifelong learning systems and national policies
5. Future Directions
 - Reimagining qualifications and credentials
 - On-Demand Learning and the future of work
 - Opportunities, risks, and unresolved tensions

Suggested Topics

Chapters may address (but are not limited to):

- Philosophical, political, and economic foundations of On-Demand Learning.
- Epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning just-in-time and skill-centric education.
- Understanding the proposition and practices of On-Demand Learning through a broader critical investigation and mapping of the digitalization, artificialization, commercialization, and acceleration of vocational education and skill development.
- The ethical and moral implications for the design, development and delivery of skill-centric On-Demand Learning.
- Tensions between On-Demand Learning and formal accreditation, institutional legitimacy, and quality assurance systems among vocational training.
- Micro-credentialing, digital badges, and stackable qualifications as alternatives to traditional certifications.
- The risks, challenges, and potentials of personalized learning in vocational and workplace contexts.
- Cognitive and motivational foundations of demand-driven learning.
- AI, generative technologies, and adaptive tutoring in shaping On-Demand Learning.
- Modular content, nano-learning, and iterative knowledge deepening.
- Learning ecosystems, data interoperability, and digital infrastructures for On-Demand Learning.
- Alignment of On-Demand Learning with vocational education, workplace competencies, and industry-recognized credentials.
- Policy and regulatory frameworks for accreditation, recognition, and inclusion.
- Global South perspectives: On-Demand Learning in resource-constrained contexts, addressing digital divides, gender equity, and marginalized communities.
- Case studies of On-Demand Learning adoption in vocational training, higher education, corporate training, and lifelong learning systems.
- Ethical and social justice implications: when and how On-Demand Learning supports empowerment vs. exploitation.

Audience

The book will appeal to:

- Educators, trainers, and instructional designers seeking flexible learning solutions.
- EdTech professionals and developers building personalized and modular platforms.
- Higher education leaders, TVET administrators, and workforce development practitioners.
- Policymakers, regulators, and accreditation agencies.
- Researchers in education, technology, and the learning sciences.
- NGOs and global organizations working toward equitable lifelong learning.

Review Process

The submitted book chapters would be reviewed under double-blind review process by external experts and other chapter authors. By submitting the book chapter, we kindly request authors to act as peer reviewers.

Important Dates

- **Proposal Submission Deadline:** October 22, 2025
- **Notification of Acceptance:** November 15, 2025
- **Full Chapter Submission:** February 15, 2026
- **Peer Review Feedback:** March 30, 2026
- **Final Chapter Revisions Due:** April 30, 2026
- **Publication (Expected):** Late 2026 (Print and SpringerLink)

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