



Education in the Arab World

A Grim Picture of Scarce Cheerful Colors!

(Translated)

Education in the Arab world is in a tragic situation, suffering a severe crisis. It is true that you cannot deal with all the Arab countries in the same way in terms of research and analysis of the educational reality in them, given the specificity of each country and its relation to the internal events of revolutions, wars, conflicts and other events that have affected the education, as well as affecting other sectors. But despite these differences, the situation of education in the Arab world is almost one, and share common problems.

The low quality of the education is a problem facing the Arab world, with a simple disparity between its countries; these countries received poor ratings in the quality of education index issued by the World Economic Forum of 2015-2016. For example, Bahrain ranked 33, Jordan ranked 45, while Tunisia came in 84th place globally, while Morocco ranked 101 and Algeria ranked 119 and Mauritania at 129, while Egypt was one before the last out of 140 countries covered in the report.

This decline in the quality of education is due to several factors. The most important is the education curricula and its methods based on memorization without analysis and understanding, and the absence of subjects that develop critical thinking and thinking among students. Here we cite what one Egyptian mother said, who participated in the so-called "Mothers' Revolt against Curricula": *"The current curriculum does not produce knowledge nor real development in the children's mentality as much as it has left our boys with back curvature due to the weight of the books in school bags."* Also we must not forget about the failed education policies, like the automatic promotion of students (to upper grades). In addition to factors like the allocated budgets for education in the Arab world. These budgets remain inadequate and far from parity with allocated budgets to other sectors, for example, an international report by the Social and Economic Rights Observatory, confirmed the decline in government spending on education in Jordan since 2000 till today, as government spending was about 13% in that year, then it fell to around 9% in 2010. In addition to the lack of interest of these countries in scientific research, it is measured by GDP at least 0.8% in Morocco and Tunisia, and 0.5% in Egypt and Jordan, and 0.2% in Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Iraq and Kuwait.

After these countries failed to provide a good education with equal opportunities for all people because of corruption and poor planning, private education surfaced, which benefits the investments and not quality of education.

The low quality of education and the lack of care and attention to the creative and talented in the countries, in addition to the lack of job opportunities for graduates has pushed many students to migrate to Western countries, to seek knowledge or to work after graduation. Some of the studies carried out by the Arab League of Nations, the UNESCO, and the World Bank, the Arab world contributes to one-third of the brain drain from developing countries, and that 50% of doctors and 23% of engineers and 15% of the total Arab skilled graduates migrate to Europe, the United States and Canada, while some reports cited that 54% of Arab students, who are studying abroad do not return to their countries. Egypt is at the lead of countries exporting the "minds" abroad specially to Canada and the United States, and Germany, and according to data from the Union of Egyptians abroad, the number of scientists and academics from Egypt living abroad, is about 86 thousand scientists and academics, of whom 1883 are in rare nuclear disciplines, and they include 42 University Deans around the world.

From the problems of education in the Arab world which affected its quality, is assigning unqualified teachers who do not have the competence to teach the students, especially in the

early years of school where students learn the basic skills of reading, writing and Mathematics, or teachers might be forced to teach subjects that are not their university specialization. In its annual report on Education for 2014, the UNESCO said that 43% of children in the Arab countries lack access to the basic principles of education because of the deteriorating abilities of teachers, and lack of appropriate training to perform their job. On the other hand, the Arab teacher is burdened with life's expenses, his salary is not sufficient to meet them. Some teachers are forced to take extra work not related to their profession to meet these costs. They are overloaded with teaching schedules and the demands of the ministry, which are endless, including the plans, means, and activities, and there is lack of facilities and means that will help the teacher to perform his job. Add to this the lack of respect and prestige of the teacher's status which affected his performance and productivity, researchers believe.

We cannot talk about education in the Arab world without talking about schools and their poor infrastructure. In some areas there are no sufficient number of schools, making the schools run two shifts, for example, 80% of the total schools in the Gaza Strip run two shifts as explained by Dr. Ali Khalifa, Director General of the General Department of Education. In addition to the problem of the lack of schools, some schools lack adequate classrooms, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, affecting students' understanding and absorption of the subjects because of the chaos and the large number of students, and this had impact on the teacher's performance. For example, the number of pupils per class in some of the Egyptian school reached 120 students, according to the BBC website, and in the majority of Yemeni schools, a single classroom takes 90 to 120 students, In Jordan, the number students in some schools is 50, particularly in Aqaba. The shortage is not only in the classrooms but also in the school's facilities: school yards, libraries, science and computer laboratories, and some schools lack reasonable levels of hygiene, heating, cooling and ventilation, as well as they lack a sufficient number of health units and toilets. But worse still if the structure of these schools is corroded and have water leakages in classrooms in winter. This is like what happened in a number of elementary and middle school in the state of Al-Mustaneera in Tunisia in December 2016, the studies were brought to a standstill completely in the Al-Imtiyaz Middle School because there was a water pond in front of the school, students were unable to enter the school. Lessons also were disrupted in the primary school, Qairawan Road, where rainwater flooded six halls, and water also leaked from the roof of two halls. The delegate added that the lessons were disrupted in Salim Bashir Middle School after water leaked into several halls.

School drop-outs is one of the problems plaguing education in the Arab world. According to the statistics issued by the United Nations in 2015, about 21 million children in the Arab world have dropped out from education or are at risk of dropping out of education. There are reasons for this, the most important one is the underachievement of students and learning difficulties, as well as the economic factor that forced these students to leave school to work and help their parents in providing requirements of life, especially if the father is deceased or was sick and unable to work.

One of the main problems also plaguing education in the Arab world is illiteracy. According to estimates issued by UNESCO, one out of every five adults suffer from illiteracy in the Arab world. According to the report, Mauritania had the highest rate of illiteracy in the Arab world. In Morocco there is still 10 million people suffering from the scourge of illiteracy. Last census indicates that the population of Morocco is nearly 34 million, which means that nearly a third of the population, are illiterate. And half of the Moroccans above the age of 15 are illiterate. In Egypt, one quarter of the adult population suffer from illiteracy. In the report, the organization also confirmed that about 43% of children in the Arab countries lack access to the basic principles of education. According to the report, one out of every four children in poor countries, including Arab countries, cannot read one sentence.

This was a summary of the state of education in the Arab world, and the most prominent problems it is facing, in addition to other problems resulting from the specificity of each country, such as the destruction of schools and the targeting of teachers and students and

their displacement from their country, in the countries which are witnessing wars and conflicts such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and the difficulties facing students and teachers in Palestine in order to access schools as a result of the barriers erected by the Jewish entity, and other problems that we do not have space to mention here.

The question remains: What is the way to improve this situation and advance the education in the Arab world?

Some call for the importing of educational models that are leading worldwide and implement them in our countries for the advancement of education, and some schools in UAE began to apply the Finnish model, and Egypt sought to apply the Singaporean model at one time then returned and signed agreements to implement the Japanese model in its schools, but this option has not been successful, because how can we bring a plant from its native country and cultivate it in another place which does not have suitable conditions and expect it to grow and survive?!

The education policy and curricula in these countries stem from the ideology it carries, as well as the structure of education and the success and failure rates system and way of teaching they follow, which are different from what we follow. And the most basic factors that lead to failure of the application of this experiment is that these countries make education a priority and cares for the learners, and provide the infrastructure and components necessary for the success of the educational process. This is missing in our countries, these countries pay for teachers lucrative salaries sufficient to meet their needs and make them dedicate themselves to teaching and to be innovative, and they hold regular training sessions for teachers to renew their qualifications and professional development, and provide an infrastructure that help and motivate the teacher and the learner with buildings and facilities like laboratories, libraries, and provide the tools and technology necessary, computers and smart boards and projection screens. Japan have now introduced robots into its schools.

To change the gloomy picture of education in the Arab world and to advance and improve its quality globally, it should be through effective education policy worthy of the children of the Ummah as an Islamic Ummah. A policy that does not view the educational institutions as profit making institutions generating money to the country, but consider them as institutions with the mission of building generations and formulating ideas. This will only be achieved when the right political decision is provided by an ideological state that takes care of the affairs of people, in all of life's affairs, not just in the education sector, and this state is the upcoming righteous Khilafah State (Caliphate) on the method of Prophethood, soon with Allah's help.

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