

The Challenges of Educating the Adults of the Middle East and North Africa

Sandra Ratcliff Daffron
Western Washington University, USA

Follow this and additional works at: <http://newprairiepress.org/aerc>

 Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education Administration Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#)

Recommended Citation

Daffron, Sandra Ratcliff (2007). "The Challenges of Educating the Adults of the Middle East and North Africa," *Adult Education Research Conference*. <http://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2007/roundtables/3>

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Adult Education Research Conference by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

The Challenges of Educating the Adults of the Middle East and North Africa

Sandra Ratcliff Daffron
Western Washington University, USA

Abstract: The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is a diverse region with 7.7% of the world's population and 4.3% of the world's GDP (Abed & Davoodi, 2003). The region has approximately 75% of the world's oil supply. In spite of the oil exports, the 21 Arab countries, Afghanistan, Iran, and 2 territories of the region have some of the highest rates of unemployment and poverty in the world. The region also has a significantly large and growing population of children under 14. Couple this with serious environmental issues and there are critical consequences for the future. To avoid these consequences, the region has to face economic development now. Before it can promote any type of economic development in the region, the MENA countries must first invest in knowledge. The current MENA educational systems are outdated and will be inadequate to handle all of the needs to effectively prepare their youth and adults for the workplace. One case study provides hope for this challenging situation through the use of adult education methodologies.

The challenges of educating these young adults of the MENA region are among the most daunting in the world's developing countries. Yet progress is being made and one case study provides hope for this challenging situation through the use of adult education methodologies. Law professors in the two territories of West Bank and Gaza have made significant improvements in their teaching methods and have incorporated adult education practices. The professors are now using a wide variety of teaching techniques to encourage critical thinking skills and problem solving and the students are responding.

Daffron and Davis (2005) found four variables were present for this change to take place in the classrooms. First, the professors felt their interests were represented during the planning process so the topics for the project were the topics they chose. Second, the professors were motivated to participate and they wanted the information, skills and resources provided by the project. Third, the professors said they gained skills, knowledge and ideas from other professors making changes in the way they teach their classes as a direct result of talking with professors from the U.S. They were able to put the skills they acquired immediately into practice in their classrooms. There was a direct relevance and modeling of good practices. Finally, all professors reported barriers that prevented them from accomplishing everything they wanted on the project. The barriers were due directly to the effects of the second Intifada. However, they also said they overcame many of these by pulling together with other faculty and with the students. This moved the work of the law school forward.

Conclusions

Demographic figures today provide a picture of a MENA region that has about half of the population under 30, with trends showing this very large population continuing to grow, and at a significant pace. If major improvements are made today in the educational systems of the MENA countries and the youth and adults receive knowledge and skills to prepare them for work in a

global economy, along with improvements made in the social, political, environmental and economic settings, then a positive scenario is likely to occur. (Daffron & Riedel, 2007)

The educational reforms will take time for the MENA region and should continue over time. To reach a positive scenario, the MENA region needs a vision and requires collaborative efforts with other educational systems across the world.

As one professor from Gaza said, "I just want always to advise all people to stand against all obstacles, to try hard to develop self-confidence and build hope in the students. To do this we have to encourage ourselves, to become united and stand up by helping each other. Then we have to help those people who support us in redeveloping the project of improving our laws." (Daffron & Davis, 2005).

The World Bank has studied the Middle East and North Africa extensively and concluded,

Tomorrow's workers will need to be able to engage in lifelong education, learn new things quickly, perform more non-routine tasks and more complex problem solving, take more decisions, understand more about what they are working on, require less supervision, assume more responsibility, and . . . have better reading, quantitative, reasoning, and expository skills. Again, education will be center stage. (The World Bank 1998, p. 1).

Abed (2003, pp 4-5) says, "Rapid labor force growth has outpaced growth in employment. Thus, although other human development indicators in the region have improved, significant challenges remain. Moreover, MENA countries are poorly integrated with the world economy. The region receives only one-third the foreign direct investment expected for a developing country of an equivalent size." Perhaps it is now time to invest in the education of the adults in the Middle East and North Africa.

References

- Abed, G.T. (2003). Unfulfilled promise: why the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has lagged in growth and globalization. *Finance and Development*, 5 (1), 4-5.
- Abed, G. T. & Davoodi, H.R. (2003). *Challenges of growth and globalization in the Middle East and North Africa*. Washington: International Monetary Fund.
- Daffron, S. & Davis, W. (2005). Lessons learned from Palestinian law professors about transfer. *The Journal of Legal Education*, 55 (4).
- Daffron, S.R. & Riedel, A. (2007). The challenges of educating the adults of the Middle East and North Africa. In K. P. King & V. C.X. Wang (Eds.) *Comparative adult education around the globe* (pp. 31-58). Hangzhou, China: Zhejiang University.
- World Bank (1998). *Human development/Middle East and North Africa, education in the Middle East and North Africa: A strategy towards learning for development*. Washington, DC: World Bank, pp. 1.