

مركز البيدر للدراسات والتخطيط

Al-Baidar Center For Studies And Planning



Book review

Expectations and Aspirations: A New Framework for Education in the Middle East and North Africa

Research Department

About Center

Baidar Center for Studies and Planning is a non-governmental and non-profit organization established in 2015 and registered with the NGO Directorate in the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers in Baghdad.

The Center seeks to contribute to developing the state and its institutions, by proposing ideas and practical solutions to the main problems and challenges facing the state, including improving public sector management, policies and strategic planning, using reliable data and best practices. The Center engages the relevant authorities in the state with regular meetings to support this objective and utilises the support of international organizations dedicated to assisting Iraq's development. The Center also seeks to support economic reforms, sustainable development and provide technical assistance to the public and private sectors. The Center also seeks to support development of the private sector to provide job opportunities for citizens through training and upskilling, in a way that reduces dependence on government institutions and contributes to supporting and diversifying the country's economy.

The Center aims to utilise the vast amount of potential in Iraq's human resources by organizing programs to prepare and develop promising young people, including leaders capable of proposing, adopting and implementing visions and future plans that advance society and preserve its value system based on the commitment to a high moral standard and rejection of all types of corruption.

Book review

Expectations and Aspirations: A New Framework for Education in the Middle East and North Africa

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A 2018 World Bank report, “Expectations and Aspirations: A New Framework for Education in the Middle East and North Africa,” identifies the obstacles and constraints that impede the realisation of the potential of education in the region and provides guidance and solutions to unlocking this potential. The countries of the region have the potential to rise to new heights. To achieve this, they must make a concerted effort to embrace and advance modern ways of learning, break away from traditional ones and pursue ambitious goals. However, they must push for the skills needed to create the economy of the future and it also needs a new pact between all parties for better education and a commitment to support it.

Pushing to learn requires investment in the early years of children, starting with the early grades. Scientific evidence shows that public investment in education, especially in the early stages of a child’s life, when the brain is still in its early developmental stages, achieve the best return on investment.

It is critical that educational systems reach all children regardless of gender, race, ability or background, not only through access to schooling, but also through quality learning. It is also essential that educational systems employ, train and involve both men and women

in order that they have the best potential to become competent teachers and educational administrators. Motivated teachers and school administrators are the foundation of successful educational systems, who should also be given the opportunity for continued professional development.

In recent years, governments in the region have become more aware of the importance of early childhood development. For example, the UAE has taken it upon itself to support early childhood development with the aim of achieving universal kindergarten enrolment by 2021.

However, all this has failed to translate into greater levels of human capital and wealth, and thus the aspirations of the region's 435 million have not materialised. Despite a series of reforms, the Middle East and North Africa region continues to suffer from a deterioration in the levels of learning and skills.

What can the countries of the MENA region do to get out of this predicament and to restore their erstwhile primacy in the fields of education and innovation?

The report 'Expectations and Aspirations' identifies four key sets of tensions that are holding back educational potential in the Middle East and North Africa region:

1. Credentials and skills: academic credentials are usually in the form of a scientific degree or diploma linked to the acquisition of a specific set of skills and knowledge and is considered in the labour market as an indication of productivity based on the assumption that more years of education are associated with higher levels of productivity....

2. Discipline and inquiry: discipline ensures adherence to norms in societies characterized by strong social norms. The concepts of

discipline and inquiry are closely related to methods of instruction and curricula, and to the daily interactions within schools and classrooms between principals, teachers and students...

3. Control and autonomy: the tension between control and autonomy is embodied in the debate on decentralizing the provision of educational services and the balance of power between central government, regional offices and schools....

4. Tradition and modernity: the biggest challenge facing the MENA region is – according to some scholars – aligning the developmental needs of the modern world with the conventions of a religious society. This has resulted in tensions between modernity, or the forces of change, and tradition.

These challenges are deeply rooted in the region's history, culture, and political economy and are sadly reflected in schools and classrooms. In order to realize the potential of education, MENA countries must address these four challenges and create an educational system that prepares every student for a productive and successful future. Unless addressed, the Middle East and North Africa region will continue to operate below its potential.

A framework for improvement

This report presents a new framework for a three-faceted strategy that can help address these tensions and unlock the potential of education in the Middle East and North Africa, namely:

- A collective push for learning that begins early in life for all children, regardless of their background, involving qualified and motivated teachers, which exploits technology, employs modern methods and monitors learning.

- A stronger pull for skills by all stakeholders in the labour market and society, which involves coherent, multi-system reforms within and beyond the education system.
- A new pact or charter for education at the national level, involving a unified vision and shared responsibility and accountability. Education is everyone's business, not just the responsibility of the education system.

Push, pull and pact framework

The push, pull, and pact framework presents an opportunity for the MENA region to forge ahead and to reclaim its heritage as a cultured region and thereby meet the expectations and aspirations of its people.

The pull for the promotion of skills must come from the private sector. If educational institutions and private sector institutions work side by side, students will have a clearer idea of the skills required in the labour market. Students can then pressure the education system to adopt new trends away from the traditional methods of simply preparing young people to qualify for government jobs and instead to focus on vesting them with skills appropriate to the needs of the modern economy and the labour market. Governments must play their role by creating favourable conditions for the private sector to flourish and to provide the necessary opportunities.

Enhancing the pull for skills also demands that curricula be modernised in order to focus on providing the economic and social skills needed by the students in their daily lives. Curricula should provide a link between the multiple actors in society, the labour market and the educational system, such that the skills taught are the ones in greatest need.

All of this requires strong leadership to align the interests of the

different groups within the framework of a common vision of education, shared responsibility and accountability.

Note. The World Bank defines MENA as including these countries and economies: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Arab Republic of Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, West Bank and Gaza, and the Republic of Yemen. This report excludes Malta from the analysis as it has little in common with the rest of the region.

Book Identity

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