



Above:

Mohammed bin Rashid during the launch of the Literacy Challenge

Literacy Challenge Forum as a Beacon of Light and Knowledge

She was unable to control herself when a journalist asked her about her achievements in literacy. Her eyes filled with tears as she recalled the days she spent with the people who helped her and took her out of the darkness of illiteracy to the light of knowledge and the visions that illuminated her life. Zahra bint Salman Al-Oufiya, the Omani woman who was honored at the first edition of the Literacy Challenge Forum just studied up to the fifth grade of primary school, yet she established her societal educational project in the Sultanate of Oman and devoted all she had to achieve her mission in the creation of an educated society and the eradication of illiteracy among women in her native country. She saw volunteering work as a hope and a future for a society free of illiteracy.



left:
Hamdan bin
Mohammed
and Ahmed bin
Mohammed
honor the 2018
Challenge
winners with
the presence
of Jamal bin
Huwaireb.

It is not surprising that the concerns of Arab youths are on the list of priorities of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as its aspirations were and still are to empower Arabs and restore their glory based on knowledge and science. Hence, Dubai has been one of the first cities in the world to introduce specific initiatives and activities in support of education and development of humanity, thanks to the insightful vision of our wise leadership that pays great interest to education in all its development strategies that make people their primary focus. And based on the investment in the Arab people, the "Literacy Challenge" initiative launched by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to raise the level of knowledge among illiterate members of the population whose big percentage is a problem that impedes development and prosperity that all countries aspire for.

The Literacy Challenge Forum, which was launched under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed, and under the directives of His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Rashid

Al Maktoum, Chairman of the Dubai Media Council and Chairman of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation (MBRF), was a global conference in the heart of Dubai, through which the Foundation worked to provide a comprehensive platform for experts in the field of illiteracy eradication from around the world, to exchange expertise and experiences, consolidate cooperation and work jointly to provide effective solutions to end illiteracy in the Arab world. The Forum also aimed to highlight the experiences of individuals and inspiring institutions in the field of literacy, in addition to honoring those with achievements in the field of illiteracy eradication as well as organizing workshops to present the latest regional and international studies and experiences related to illiteracy, and to try to reach the best experiences appropriate to the Arab region.

A Fortune to be Invested

The Literacy Challenge Forum was the fruit of many months before it, and great efforts to search for those heroes who pledged to dedicate their energies to the service of their societies. Science and knowledge are the only ways to advance society and bring countries to development and progress. Illiteracy - as stated by His Excellency Jamal Bin Huwaireb in his meetings and visits with Arab officials - is a threat to national security, and illiterate and illiterate people are a wasted wealth that must be invested.

Innovative Standards

Illiteracy is a threat to national security, and illiterate people are a wasted wealth that must be invested



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Based on the universality of the sublime message that the UAE and Dubai always seek in all its initiatives and projects, the Literacy Challenge initiative came as a torch of hope launched from Dubai to illuminate the path for the entire Arab world. Hence, the criteria for selecting the honored projects were based on the criteria for innovation in education for sustainable development that requires going beyond “thinking about business as usual”. The candidate project should also demonstrate an innovative approach to education for sustainable development, whether in the topics that it covers, the methodology it uses, or the approach for designing the learning environment. Reaching out to sectors outside of education and working with new partners can be a sign of innovation. In addition to making a significant improvement in the numbers of learners and a significant increase in their efficiency with the continuous pursuit of improvement.

The project or program should also practice education as transformational education to support sustainable development, leading to individual and societal change, as transformational education enables learners to change themselves and the society in which they live. Therefore the project/program should enable learners to make changes in a more just, peaceful and sustainable world. This could mean, for example, changing mindsets, optimizing natural potential and resources, developing social entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods, or supporting efforts to eradicate poverty.

Heroes of Challenge... Beacons of Light

In its 2018 edition, the Literacy Challenge honored the pioneers who contributed to confronting illiteracy with constructive projects and initiatives that yielded positive results in enhancing the role of science and knowledge within Arab societies. This was during the proceedings of the Knowledge Summit 2018, under the slogan “Youth... and the Future of the Knowledge Economy”. The Ministry of Education in the Arab Republic of Egypt was honored in the government category, for its pioneering role in modernizing and developing the pre-university education system in Egypt, within the framework of the National Education Project.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also won the award in the category of international institutions and organizations, for its quality projects in various countries of the world to eradicate illiteracy. Dr. Al-Shifa Hassan, Director of the UNESCO Chair and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ISESCO at the University of Science and Technology in the Republic of Sudan, also won the award for the individual category, as she worked on establishing a comprehensive scientific and technological literacy project for women in Sudan, which benefited 2,420 women.

Global Platform

MBRF considered that the literacy challenge is

a pioneering initiative for which an independent summit should be devoted where officials and specialists come together to discuss opportunities and challenges facing Arab countries to eliminate illiteracy, in addition to providing a comprehensive platform that brings together experts in the field of literacy from most countries of the world to share their experiences. The Forum, which was held in Dubai, was under the slogan “Challenges and Solutions.”

In the category of governments, Egypt’s New Valley Governorate took the accolade which was received by Major General Mohamed Salman Ibrahim. The New Valley Governorate gave hope to the illiterate with high-impact programs which resulted in a decrease of the illiteracy rates in the governorate to 2% – the lowest in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

In the institutions category, the Vodafone Egypt Foundation for Community Development was honored for implementing programs in 100 Egyptian villages where it facilitated the construction of 100 schools. Its literacy campaign benefited 419,000 people while 100,000 benefited from provision of medical services in addition to teaching 57,000 students, and training nearly 2,500 teachers.

In the category of individuals, Zahra bint Salman Al-Awfiyah, an inspirational owner of a voluntary educational project from the Sultanate of Oman, was also honored in the individuals’ category for her efforts in creating an educated community and literacy for women across the Omani villages. Zahra holds a fifth-grade primary certificate but she saw volunteerism as a hope and a future for a literate society. Mahmoud Abbas, founder and director of the Children and Fatwa Association, Palestine, was also honored for his 1996 project The Child and Fatwa Center, which is the first Palestinian social institution in Lebanon. Its main focus is implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Constructive Recommendations

The Literacy Challenge Forum brought together experts to share successful experiences in the field

The Forum’s recommendations represented a roadmap towards literacy and promoting knowledge dissemination to achieve comprehensive Arab development



Above: Jamal bin Huwaireb during a press conference to announce the details of the Literacy Challenge Forum

of advocating for literacy at the level of international organizations, national institutions and individuals. This made it an opportunity for minds to meet and exchange ideas about the problem of illiteracy. The participants studied documents prepared by the organizers, participated in the forum and discussed the various interventions presented by international experts from UNESCO and experts from the UAE. The forum came out with recommendations that represent a roadmap towards literacy in the Arab world.

- Providing support and assistance at the national and regional levels to gain more support for literacy and adult education.
- Supporting countries’ capabilities in adopting contemporary policies, trends and programs in adult education in the context of lifelong learning.
- Enhancing the Arab countries’ benefit from the global report on adult education.
- Encouraging Arab countries to benefit from the inputs of the UNESCO Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy 2020-2025.
- Developing electronic content on the concepts, contents and methodology of lifelong learning.
- Contributing to creating global spaces and platforms that would enhance the exchange of experiences and information and link what is happening at the international and regional levels.
- Preparing the means for Arab countries to make most of the inputs and outputs of the World Conference on Adult Education and Learning, expected to be held in the Kingdom of Morocco 2022.
- Recommending toughening penalties for families whose children drop out of education.



Above:
Jamal bin Huwaireb chairs the jury committee meeting to select the 2019 Challenge winners

- Establishing different primary education paths to attract children who drop out of education.
- Working to change the laws determining the age of illiteracy.
- Calling on the Arab Organization for Education, Culture and Science to adopt these recommendations and submit them to the Council of Arab Education Ministers for approval.

Lifelong Education

The issue of confronting illiteracy is not detached from the issue of adult education, as they are two sides of the same coin, and based on the challenges faced by continuous education for adults represented in crises such as overpopulation, the new economy, political conflicts, as well as the refugee crisis, and the lack of equal educational opportunities for women, making it a central issue in the Literacy Challenge Forum.

The sessions on this important issue of confronting illiteracy resulted in constructive recommendations, in which the participants emphasized the need to adopt them so that the children of Arab societies enjoy a life full of knowledge.

Summary of the Recommendations:

- The need for lifelong learning to be an internationally mandatory requirement, and for the learning stage to reach the ability to understand, analyze and transfer knowledge to others.
- Focusing on adult education on acquiring professional, life and patriotic skills, and ensuring that the teachers are well qualified.
- Benefiting from the successes achieved in this field such as the interest in vocational education and the diversity of adult education programs, with the use of multiple media in these programs, and the orientation towards open education, launching creative initiatives that help life-long learning, most notably the Arab decade and the challenge of illiteracy.
- Poor availability of data constitutes a major obstacle to addressing inequalities for adults' participation in learning and education, as well as the weakness of funding.
- Linking the standards and intellectual vision of adult education programs to the mechanism of its development and its strategic objectives, and here it is necessary to link it with a forward-looking vision aimed at building a sustainable learning society.
- Adult learning does not depend on educational basics such as reading and writing, but rather aims at empowerment and achieving social integration.
- The necessary need for the sustainability and continuing education, the development of skills, the use of digital and practical skills, and providing opportunities for learners.
- The need for providing educational and social awareness programs for children and adults in zoned conflict zones, in addition to the importance of measuring the social impact of these projects.