

Literacy Challenge Forum Discusses Trends in Adult Education across the Arab World

Below:
Samah Shalaby speaks during the session

The efforts being made to raise the level of adult education in the Arab region was the opening topic on day two of Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation's Literacy Challenge Forum.



Titled 'Modern Trends and Strategies in Adult Education and Learning,' the session saw presentations from Dr Hegazi Idris, Regional Program Specialist in Basic and Adult Education; Hechmi Ardhaoui, Education Specialist at ALESCO (Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization) and Samah Shalaby, Assistant Program Specialist at UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. The panel was moderated by Ahmed Yousif, journalist and current anchor for Egyptian TV news.

Dr Idris opened the session by reiterating the importance of adult learning and education in empowering people and enabling them to make a living. He called for lifelong learning across the world to be made compulsory and stated that education must reach a level that passes on the ability to understand, analyze and transmit knowledge. Stressing that adult education must focus on building professional, life skills, he highlighted the milestones that the Arab region has achieved in adult learning and education, such as the increased interest in vocational education, the variety of multimedia programs now available to promote literacy, and the initiatives such as the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation's Literacy Challenge.

Samah Shalaby shared the latest UNESCO Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (2015-2018), with the report published each three years. The latest edition includes 159 countries, 18 of them Arab, and monitored adult learning

and education activities in relation to five pillars: policies, quality, governance, funding and participation. Shalaby highlighted the report's findings that said that women experienced inequality in adult learning, despite an increase in their participation since the previous published report. She also drew attention to the lack of data that is the main impediment to tackling such inequality, pointing out that of the 103 countries out of the 152 surveyed that responded to questions about participation in adult learning and education, only 67% said that their answers relied on reliable statistics.

Finally, Hechmi Ardhaoui discussed the reasons for illiteracy in the Arab world, which he said are classified according to social reasons, such as poverty, unemployment, marginalisation and inequality; economic reasons, such as weak growth rates, lack of investment opportunities and the high cost of education; and legislative reasons, such as the absence of legal provisions for free education and making education compulsory. He gave statistics from the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO) report that said that the number of illiterate people in the Arab world is around 75 million, with the highest percentage being youth, women and girls.

He also spoke about ALESCO's efforts in promoting literacy and adult learning, having strived since its establishment to raise awareness on the importance of education, calling for it to be both free and compulsory across the Arab world.