

## **MIDDLE EAST**

# **Teaching the skills for a global future**

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Promoting cultural diplomacy will give students in the Middle East and North Africa region the skills they need to thrive in a globalised world. Quality education is a necessary component for the foundation of a successful society. It plays a major part in solving many problems that the Middle East and North Africa, or MENA, region is now facing.

Although this region currently enjoys a 'youth bulge' that is the highest globally, with two-thirds of the 350 million population under the age of 30, youth unemployment is currently at 25%, the highest globally in any single region.

Unfortunately, the investment in education which some MENA countries have engaged in has not led to higher levels of employment in that region, thus raising concern about the quality of education that learners there are currently receiving.

Reforming education in the MENA region requires the adoption of a global agenda that clearly addresses the demands of the 21st century and outlines the role of educators in addressing the dynamically changing needs of an ever-changing world.

Successful education programmes in the 21st century should equip students with depth and breadth of knowledge and a variety of skills that enable them to work, live and contribute in a highly competitive global society. To achieve these goals, educational institutions in the MENA region must achieve the following objectives:

- Develop course subject matter through designing up-to-date curricula, books, e-content and teacher guides;
- Coordinate between all study cycles;
- Engage learners in peer and group activities delivered inside and outside class to simulate real-life tasks and facilitate cooperation among learners;
- Offer teacher training and professional development; and

- Select suitable evaluation methods to assess educational objectives.

## **Cultural diplomacy**

In terms of subject matter, educators must teach learners the skills of cultural diplomacy, which are based on knowledge taken from various disciplines, namely human rights, international relations, cultural anthropology, communications, international education and development.

Cultural diplomacy skills include non-confrontational communication, mediation and negotiation. Educating learners in cultural diplomacy provides them with the unique ability to influence the attitudes and ideologies of individuals and cultures, thus accelerating the realisation of cultural diversity, global intercultural interchange, justice, interdependence, human rights and global peace.

Indeed, cultural diplomacy is critical to promoting an appreciation of different cultures and fostering reconciliation and stability in an increasingly globalised world.

With respect to coordination between study cycles, educators and expert academicians should thoroughly examine all the courses taught at the pre-university level, particularly social sciences, arts, communication and research and introduce in these courses the values of cultural diplomacy.

The gradual and consistent incorporation of these values in a variety of courses from different disciplines creates interdisciplinary links between different subject matter and prepares global citizens capable of assuming a variety of jobs, cooperating productively with different nationalities and functioning in a multi-cultured world.

It is important to note here that the skills of cultural diplomacy are not only needed in the public sector, but also in the private sector.

Private companies moving towards more socially responsible business practices need to be aware of the differences between cultures in their strategic decision-making processes. The adoption of cultural training and

cultural immersion systems would prepare private companies to meet cultural challenges in foreign markets, such as miscommunication and inappropriate behaviour, thus saving them time and money.

Indeed, companies with culturally sensitive strategies, whether to cultural minorities within the country or to cultural differences if seeking to expand abroad, have a higher chance of success than those that do not incorporate cultural diplomacy models since their employees learn to anticipate, appreciate and manage the expectations of their business counterparts who belong to a different culture.

## **Engagement**

Moreover, educators should encourage the active application of the goals of cultural diplomacy through designing certain curricular activities, such as discussing topics from different cultural perspectives, working on international assignments and participating in cultural exchange programmes.

Other opportunities for engagement include involving learners in extracurricular activities, like taking part in sports competitions and international summer camps, all of which highlight the importance of teamwork, leadership and respect for the other.

Equally important is providing teachers with training and opportunities for professional development. Such opportunities would empower them to successfully apply periodically updated curricula and make use of new teaching methods and state of the art technology that motivate students to learn.

Finally, and after fulfilling the above objectives, educators must close the education loop through regularly evaluating and assessing the teaching tools and methods used in order to confirm their validity and reliability and to ensure that high educational standards are met and maintained in the MENA region.

In conclusion, successful educational institutions in the 21st century need to apply the skills of cultural diplomacy. They should transform these skills into live practices that shape the intellectual framework of the young learner, who then evolves to become a rational adult.

Incorporating cultural diplomacy skills in MENA educational systems is highly recommended to address their educational challenges, improve global collaboration and empower educators to support international education policy development while remaining sensitive to local and regional education needs.

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