Illiteracy in the Arab Region: A Meta Study

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ABSTRACT
There are many opinions as to the causes of illiteracy in the Arab region. The issue is debated and researched by both those from within and outside of the Arab region. This paper is a consideration of seventeen different studies and papers researching and expounding upon the causes of illiteracy. Four of these are distilled from the literature to provide what this author believes to be the four major reasons for illiteracy in the Arab region.

Introduction
Presented in this paper is a meta study, or a gathering of studies and papers, that delve into the cause of illiteracy in the Arab region. It is a descriptive presentation of the issue of illiteracy in the Arab region and seeks to, "paint a very general, broad and inclusive picture of research literature."1 To what extent is illiteracy an issue in the Arab region? How extensive is its damage and what lies at its root? Seventeen studies and papers will be considered in answering these research questions.

The Problem
The Arab region includes the following countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen (see Figure 1). In 2008, UNESCO estimated that in the Arab region, “40% of those over 15 years of age – nearly 70 million people - are illiterate.”2 Table 1 shows the increase of illiteracy over the past decades.

Figure 1: Map of Arab Region Countries.

Five countries in the Arab region claim the majority of the individuals who are illiterate. In 2003 Yemen’s illiteracy rate was 53.6%, Morocco’s was 51.2%, Egypt’s was 44.7%, Sudan is 42.3% and Algeria’s was

33.3%. The other 10 countries that make up the Arab region only account for 3.6% of the illiterate population. It should be noted that the enrollment of school aged children has increased from 30 million in 1990 to 39 million in 2000. This increase in enrolment, however still leaves 9 million or 22% of the school aged children not enrolled and it remains “a matter of great concern to the Region.” These high rates of illiteracy seem to point to the view held by some that, “the educational system is failing and that there is a growing inadequacy and deterioration of education in the Arab states.”

Table 1: Arab Region Illiteracy from 1970 to 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Illiterate Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>50 million illiterates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equals 73.5% of the total population 15 years old and over.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>61 million illiterates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>65 million illiterates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>70 million illiterates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40% of those over the age of 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The root causes of these high illiteracy rates are not agreed upon. Various factors have been accused as causes which include the following:

- The disconnect between high Arabic used as the medium of instruction in schools and the various dialects of Arabic spoken in Arab region.
- Poor pedagogical practices connected to the teaching in the Qur’anic schools.
- Complication of the Arabic orthography because of the lack of vowel diacritics and the various forms of each letter depending on where it falls in a word.
- Social reasons such as the prejudice against female students.
- Economic reasons such as low economic status of parents and the lack of funding for schools.
- Political reasons such as the instability of the region, etc.
- School repetition.
- Children’s lack of exposure to literary Arabic before they begin school.

Very few individuals agree on the reason for the low literacy rate in the Arab region. In the following discussion I endeavor to analyze and synthesize the conclusions of seventeen studies and articles that attack the issue of illiteracy in the Arab region.

Criteria for choosing these studies

The seventeen studies under consideration where chosen because of presenting the issues regarding illiteracy in the Arab region from various perspectives with various political backing and/or funding. These studies also represent a plethora of conclusions as to the cause of illiteracy in the Arab region. The background and funding of the various researchers were considered as well. Most of the writers are Arabic speakers. Some of them reside in Arabic countries and some, like Mohamed Maamouri, live in the United States and offer an insider’s view removed from the situation.

Three major researchers in this study are Mohammed Maamouri, Daniel A. Wagner and Salim Abu-Rabia. Maamouri is the Associate Director of the International Literacy Institute (ILI) at the Graduate School of Education/University of Pennsylvania. He lived and taught in Tunisia for fifteen years and has, “developed language teaching materials in Arabic and English and has made numerous research contributions to the fields of language and literacy acquisition, language policy and planning, sociolinguistics and education as they relate to the Arabic and French-speaking regions.” He earned his Ph.D. from Cornell in linguistics. Daniel Wagner is an American who began his work in the Arab region as

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4Ibid., 3.
5Ibid., 4.
8Vowel diacritics are included in the Qur’an and in beginning reader materials.
a member of the Peace Corps in the 1960s. He then returned to Morocco to begin years of fieldwork in the Arab region. He earned his Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from the University of Michigan. He is a professor and director of the International Literacy Institute. He has served as a literacy consultant for many UN and donor agencies. Salim Abu-Rabia is a professor in the education department of the University of Haifa. He received his M.A. in Education, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning from Ben Gurion University of the Negev in 1990. He then received his Ph.D. through the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto Canada in 1993.

Aside from Maamouri, Wagner and Abu-Rabia, UNESCO studies are also included. It was considered beneficial to allow for a balance between the findings of smaller and more specified individual studies and the larger studies with more resources. UNESCO also presents their findings from a political perspective.

Criteria by which these studies will be analyzed

The following basic information will be given about each study when applicable: where it took place, the purpose of the research, the instruments used and the conclusions/findings. Each of these studies will also be analyzed by the following criteria when applicable:

1. Is the sample large enough?
2. Do the instruments measure accurately what the construct of the studies calls for?
3. Are the conclusions based on the findings of their studies?
4. Are there other external factors that might define or determine the results found in the study?

Crucial definitions

The following definitions will be necessary to understand the argumentation used to describe the various studies.

- **Functional literacy**: The ability to accomplish, “such reading and writing abilities [that] make it possible for people to actively participate in their societies politically, civicly and socially.” According to Wagner, literacy is, “not an ‘object’ that can be mandated by government authorities; but, rather, its acquisition and maintenance are surely dependent on the cultural beliefs, practices, and history within which it resides.” According to Maamori, however, the dominate definition of literacy is less inclusive and demanding. He defines literacy as, “a universal set of transferable reading and writing skills.”

- **Arabization**: The process by which individuals become more Arab by learning Arabic, being integrated into Arabic society; this happens through trade and intermarriage.

- **Fusha**: Fusha is high, literary Arabic used in education. Fusha is no one’s mother tongue. This is in contrast to the local dialects of Arabic that are typically used in the home. There is similarity in the etymological structure of Fusha words, but many times native speakers of lower Arabic don’t recognize these similar words because of phonological and semantic characteristics differ.

- **Diglossia**: Ferguson’s definition of diglossia or classical diglossia is appropriate to describe the situation of literary versus commonly spoken Arabic. Ferguson specifically speaks of literary versus commonly spoken Arabic as being a case of classic diglossia. According to Ferguson, diglossia is, “a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community,”

11 "Prof. Salim Abu-Rabia" https://marvel.haifa.ac.il.
13 Wagner, Daniel. Literacy, Culture & Development: Becoming literate in Morocco (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), 270.
which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.”

The high variety many times has a more complex grammar, has large respected body of literature, is used for formal and educational purposes and is not spoken in community for personal/ordinary conversation.

In the case of Arabic the Qur’an is the prestigious body of literature. The low variety is the “regional, popular dialects of the same language” and is considered the vernacular and more likely to be learned in childhood. It is typically learned w/out the structure of grammar.

The dialect of Arabic used in education is the highly codified variety while the commonly spoken Arabic is the dialectal language. Another writer describes these two languages as being “two language worlds.”

The 17 Studies & Papers

A Study of Development and Educational Statistics in the Arab Region


The following data in Table 2 was gathered by UNESCO Institute for Statistics by the education authorities of the specific countries listed. Statistics for countries throughout the world were gathered but only the results of a few of the countries from the Arab region are listed here. The countries included are countries with the highest and lowest illiteracy rate with others at intervals along the continuum. In Table 2, teacher training doesn't necessarily show the competencies of the teachers only the fact they received training. It should be noted other factors such as “work experience, teaching methods and materials, or classroom conditions…” may affect the quality of teaching.”

Table 2: Range of Illiteracy Rate Among Arab Countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arab Country</th>
<th>Trained teachers in primary education % of total 2000</th>
<th>Primary pupil-teacher ratio&lt;sup&gt;22&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Net Enrolment rate&lt;sup&gt;23&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Primary % of relevant age group</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Secondary % of relevant age group</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>62</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East &amp; North Africa</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The net enrolment rate is the “ratio of children of official school age (as defined by the national education system) who are enrolled in school to the population of the corresponding official school age.”

Primary education is the initial state of education which is designed to provide children with the ability to read


<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 9.


<sup>22</sup> Ibid.


<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 83.
write, and to acquire “an elementary understanding” of mathematics, history, geography, natural science, social science, art and music. Secondary education is the completion of primary education which “aims at laying the foundation for lifelong learning and human development, by offering more subject- or skill-oriented instruction using more specialized teachers.”

Table 3 shows the progress of a group of children from grade one to grade five and gives the primary completion rate of the age relevant groups. The primary completion rate is considered the best estimate of a countries progress towards the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education. These numbers are the completed last year of primary school divided by the number of official graduation age in the population. The average years of schooling is the average years of formal education received by adults 15 yrs and older.

Assessment: Over reporting for a financial incentive is a potential cause of skewing of these numbers. The numbers for the net enrolment rate were also taken at the beginning of the year hence they do not indicate any drop out rates.

Table 3: Education Efficiency in World Development Indicators Among Arab Countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arab Country</th>
<th>Net intake rate Grade 1 % of school-age population</th>
<th>Share of cohort reaching grade 5 % of grade 1 students</th>
<th>Primary completion rate % of relevant age group</th>
<th>Average years of schooling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>88 85</td>
<td>92 --- 88 ---</td>
<td>99 104 92 5.5 6.5 4.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>76 71</td>
<td>--- --- ---</td>
<td>55 59 51 4.0 4.6 3.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>70 71</td>
<td>100 98 98 97</td>
<td>104 102 106 6.9 7.7 6.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>68 66</td>
<td>--- --- ---</td>
<td>70 69 71 7.1 7.2 6.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>5 7</td>
<td>--- 95 ---</td>
<td>70 --- --- 7.1 --- ---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>68 65</td>
<td>79 79 78 81</td>
<td>55 63 47 --- --- ---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>59 62</td>
<td>100 98 100 98</td>
<td>80 76 86 --- --- ---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East &amp; North Africa</td>
<td>62 58</td>
<td>--- --- ---</td>
<td>86 90 83 5.3 6.1 4.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Descriptive Study of Education

The first study is a descriptive study of education in Jordan. It was done in conjunction with the Jordanian government, the Jordanian Ministry of Education and with the Jordan National Commission for UNESCO. Jordan boasts the fact that they are the country with the lowest illiteracy rate in the Arab region. The illiteracy rate in Jordan dropped from 33% in 1960 to 45% in 1970 to 7.9% in 2007.


- Where: Jordan

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25 Ibid., 83
26 Ibid., 83
Basic education in Jordan.
- Preschool: 2 yrs not required; Basic education: 10yrs, free and compulsory; Secondary education: 2 yrs, free, not compulsory.

- **Purpose of research:** To assess the progress of education in Jordan and to determine the priorities for future intervention in Jordan.
- **Sample:** the Jordanian schools (but no specific sample is cited).
- **Instrument:** UNESS or the UNESCO Education Support Strategy. It is, “an instrument for planning within the broader framework of the Organization’s EFA Global Action Plan, Medium-Term Strategy and biennial programmes, as well as for defining UNESCO’s programme priorities and implementation strategies aligned with the socio-economic priorities in each country.”

- **Conclusions/Findings:**
  - Infrastructure is going to be challenged with population growth and influx of refugees.
  - The content of curriculum is gender biased and emphasizes the inability of girls to engage in public or professional lives.
  - There are high drop out rates.
  - There is, “limited quality of education programmes.”
  - Positives: When compared to previous findings there is a decrease in gender discrepancies and an increase in the access to education.
  - See pg 25 list of goals and the assessment of completion for each of these goals.

- **Assessment:** This study was done in conjunction with the Jordanian government and began with the following statement: “The vision of the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for education is essentially based on the strong belief of His Majesty King Abdallah II that education is a key pillar for the advancement of the country and it is the State’s key responsibility to ensure justice and equal opportunities for all.”

  Because of the apparent pressure for good education from their king and the pressure of wanting to remain as part of UNESCO’s priority, there may have been a tendency to over report or underreport as would maintain their king’s belief and UNESCO’s funding. It is also suspect because no specific sample of schools was cited.

**Studies on Primary School Repetition and School Drop Out**

This second study is a study of primary school repetition. It tackles the issue of primary school repetition by describing the dimension of repetition, factors associated with repetition, social attitudes towards repetition, and strategies to overcome repetition. Since school repetition is an issue identified in the Arab region this study was thought to be relevant to the discussion. The second is a descriptive outline of education in the Arab world produced as a result of a conference held by the Arab Regional Literacy Organization (ARLO). They identify school drop out as a major cause of illiteracy.


This information was gathered by UNICEF and UNESCO’s International Bureau of Education at a workshop to which these organizations invited 15 scholars from different areas and various fields including curriculum, linguistics, pedagogy, psycholinguistics, teacher education, administration and statistics. The consensus of this workshop is that repetition is, “a significant quantitative phenomenon throughout the developing world, that it is concentrated within the first grades of school and in schools attended by students from low-income sectors, that it has devastating social and psychological impact on the students who repeat and their families, and that is has a high financial cost.”

An estimate of rate of school attendance in the Arab Region and the number of repetitions in the Arab Region is provided in Table 4. Massimo in his paper emphasized the potential lack of validity for the sake

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29 Ibid., 8.
30 Ibid., 25.
of comparison on the repetition numbers between countries or areas. One example of confounding is the fact that in some countries parents send their children to first grade various years before they are of age for first grade as a type of pre-school. Thus their records would show a great amount of repetition but only because of the parent’s prerogative and not because of the student’s ability.\textsuperscript{34} In Arab states, Massimo and contributing authors believe there are many instances when girls drop out of school are not given an opportunity to repeat a grade; thus, the rate in the Arab world could be greater if social conditions allowed girls to return to school.

In some instances repetition has produced positive results. A sample of 1,800 sixth grade students was considered in Burundi. Those students who had repeated a grade showed an increase in their academic ability.\textsuperscript{35} However repetition is mostly connected with poor results. There is a correlation between repetition and dropouts. In Hebei, China a study of 18 communities was conducted supporting this correlation.

![Table 4: School Attendance and Repetitions in the Arab Region.](image)

<p>| Arab Region\textsuperscript{1} | Rate of school attendance in 1995; each number is a percentage of the total population of that age group |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 6-11 yrs | 12-17 yrs | 18-23 yrs |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arab Region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study results showed that 68.6% of dropouts had repeated a grade and only 21.6% of dropouts had never repeated a grade.\textsuperscript{36} In Sri Lanka a study was also done which showed that 60% of dropouts were irregular attendees of school, 21% had repeated a grade three times, 31% had repeated twice, and 64% had repeated once.\textsuperscript{37}

The following factors were shown to be causes of repetition. In most cases, however, it is assumed there is more than one cause creating a situation in which children repeat grades.

- Low socio-economic status is well documented as a classic predictor of repetition and dropout especially with children above the age of 10; 10 years old in most countries is considered a viable age at which children can begin adding to the income of the family.\textsuperscript{38}
- Teacher’s inability.
- Inadequate teacher training.
- A great mixture of ages in one class which creates a great challenge to the teacher.
- Curriculum, created for the expected age of children at that level of education, is considered irrelevant to children who are for some reason older than the expected age for that grade.
- Education in minority languages is the exception not the norm because most countries do not recognize the need for education in minority languages. For example, in Thailand the national literacy rate is 93.3% but the literacy rate among national minorities is only 16.4%.\textsuperscript{39}
- Reading is taught to encourage memorization and not actual decoding of a text, thus the frustration in the process of learning to read and write is exacerbated. Dropout rates are highest in the first grades.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 12-13.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 19.
This committee gives various recommendations for improving repetition rates. Some of the recommendations include the following: initial and pre-school education, food programs and distribution of school supplies, changes in the teaching of reading and writing, greater awareness of cultural and linguistic aspects, and teacher training preparation.

Assessment: This paper is the opinion of only 15 individuals thus it should be considered as such. These individuals have a variety of expertise in relevant areas but their conclusions are still based on their experiences within the countries they have worked. They do add credibility to their argument in the citing of various research studies conducted. The entire paper contained more external support than was cited here.


This regional report is from the fifth conference of Arab nations to discuss the issue of literacy in the Arab region. It includes recommendations, conclusion from the conference, individual updates of how individual countries are doing in respect to illiteracy and various success stories. Table 5 is a list of the illiteracy rates in the Arab Region as of 2000.

Table 5: Illiteracy Rates in the Arab Region in 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population 15 &amp; Over 40</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Illiteracy rate (%)</th>
<th>Illiteracy rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lybyan Arab Jamahiriya</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrian Arab Republic</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djibouti</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The group of Arabs at the conference sees the high rate of adult illiteracy as a huge issue in the Arab region. One primary cause of adult illiteracy is child drop out from schooling. The following list gives the major causes of child drop out.

1. Armed conflicts, wars and threat of wars.
2. Lack of “concrete, measurable, quantifiable goals, timelines, implementation mechanisms, and monitoring and evaluation systems” for the goals made by the conferences.

40 UNESCO. Literacy and Adult Education in the Arab World: Regional Report for the CONFINTEA V, Mid-Term Review Conference. (Bangkok, September 2003), 12.
Specifically in **Israel and Iraq** UNESCO adds the following:
1. The deteriorating security situation, drawn-out armed conflicts, economic sanctions, prolonged curfews, the inability of students to reach their schools, the destruction of schools and educational facility and physical degradation of the learning environment.

Specifically in **Lebanon** UNESCO adds the following:
1. The deteriorating economic situation causing rapid inflation and rising unemployment, leading families to spend on what little they have on necessities at the expense of school fees for their children.
2. The lack of government-funded schools in some regions of the country, particularly those in rural and poorer areas.
3. The lack of awareness of the importance of education by the parents who themselves may be illiterate or semi-literate.
4. The lack of confidence among a large percentage of the population in future prospects for the country and consequently for their children.
5. High cost of private education, making it prohibitive to all but the privileged few.
6. The rapid increase in youth and child employment, itself a result of the deteriorating economic conditions, forcing families to send their youngsters out to **earn** instead of **learn**.41

**Assessment:** The illiteracy rates of this conference are a bit higher than other numbers such as the numbers gathered by the World Bank cited later in this paper. It could be assumed that numbers given in a less threatening arena, such as in the presence of all Arab countries, is more prone to be closer to reality. Individuals from Arab countries can also be determined as better evaluators of the illiteracy issue in their own respective countries given personal assessments of the very real detrimental effects of historical events on the education of their countrymen.

**Studies Regarding Arabic Orthography**

These next studies deal with the difficulty of the Arabic orthography. There are twenty-eight consonants in Arabic and three long vowels. Each of these consonants has a base shape and three or four variant shapes. The variant shapes are determined by their position in the word and may have a different shape when they are isolate, initial, mid or final. In written Arabic, excluding the Qur’an and initial readers, most vowels are not written. Both these factors create great complications for beginner readers or Arabic.


Daniel A. Wagner conducted research concerning the condition of literacy in the country of Morocco. His research was called the Morocco Literacy Project and took most of the 1980s to complete.
- **Where:** Morocco.
- **Purpose of research:** “to provide a profile of the variability that exists in Arabic literacy acquisition in Morocco.”43
- **Sample:** The sample for Wagner’s study was purposive. He chose children that met certain characteristics for each type of study. For example, he needed children who were learning to read and write Arabic for the reading comprehension tests, samples where there was a high drop out rate, children who spoke either Berber or Moroccan Arabic but not both. He also did some stratified sampling because he needed random samples from urban and rural areas and also from children that had attended preschools and children who had not attended preschools.44

Three main cohorts of children were used for his study.

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41 UNESCO. Literacy and Adult Education in the Arab World: Regional Report for the CONFINTEA V, Mid-Term Review Conference. (Bangkok, September 2003), 10-11.
43 Ibid., 10.
44 Wagner, Daniel. Literacy, Culture & Development: Becoming literate in Morocco (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), 69.
1. **Preschool sample** - 146 children who were finishing their second year of a traditional or Qur’anic school with a mean age of 6.45

2. **Cohort 1** - primary school sample of 350 children with a mean age of approximately 7 years of age; they were from Marrakech or al-Ksour; the 350 included 166 Arabic and Berber speaking boys and girls from rural areas who attended Qur’anic preschool or no preschool and 183 Arabic speaking boys and girls who attended Qur’anic, Modern or no preschool.46

3. **Cohort 2** - primary/secondary school sample of 464 children with an age range from 11-15 and a mean age of about almost 13 years of age; it included boys and girls from urban and rural areas.47

4. **Parent Interviews** - taken from the homes of Cohort 1; 300 home interviews were conducted but only 289 were used because of missing data or wrong classification.48

- **Experiment:** In his testing Wagner included the following four types of testing which were conducted between 1983 and 1987.
  1. Nine Arabic reading measures which included a Morocco Pictures Vocabulary test, an Early Reading test, Word Decoding, Word-Picture Matching, Sentence Maze, Paragraph Comprehension, Oral Reading Arabic, Dictation, Qur’anic Verse Completion and Household Literacy Assessment.49
  2. Five French reading measures which included Word Decoding, Word-Picture Matching, Sentence Maze, Paragraph Comprehension and Letter Recognition tests.50
  3. Seven Cognitive measures which included Concept Identification, General information, Memory Tests, Children’s Embedded Figures Test, Mathematics, a Perception task and a Logic task.51
  4. Interviews with students, parents and teachers.

- **Conclusion:**
  - **Learning to Read Arabic:** Wagner and his team conducted many tests on the initial acquisition of Arabic and they also tested Cohort 1 over 5 years to see their progression of ability to learn Arabic. They found some social issues affecting the scores of the children. Urban students consistently outperformed rural students. Arabic speaking students outperformed Berber speakers and pre-schooled children outperformed non-preschooled children. Wagner specifically highlighted the test scores of the word decoding test. There was a very high correlation showing urban and Arabic speakers scored higher in word decoding.52 The five year longitudinal study produced some very interesting results. High scores in Letter Knowledge and Word Decoding, “made the most significant contribution to later performance.”53 Based on their studies, they concluded the following: “we found ample evidence to suggest that early letter recognition and decoding skills are critical in Arabic literacy acquisition in Moroccan schoolchildren.”54 Wagner also found, “children’s early reading skills are critical for subsequent success in literacy development.”55 In his study those with high skills in first grade or preschool have “consistently superior abilities 5 years later.”56
  - **Social factors in literacy acquisition:** Wagner identifies two significant sociolinguistic issues affecting the condition of literacy in Morocco. These two issues include the growth of Arabization in “long-standing bilingual communities” and the increasing numbers of Qur’anic and modern preschools.57

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45 Ibid., 73.
46 Ibid. 73.
47 Ibid., 74-75.
48 Ibid., 75-76.
49 See Appendix 2 pp. 283-289 in Wagner’s book for full explanation of these tests.
50 See Appendix 2 p. 289 in Wagner’s book for further explanation of these tests.
51 See Appendix 2 pp. 289-292 in Wagner’s book for further explanation of these tests.
52 Wagner, Daniel. Literacy, Culture & Development: Becoming literate in Morocco (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), 94.
53 Ibid., 96.
56 Ibid., 97.
57 Ibid., 269.
• **Assessment:** Sampling is a point of potential confounding in this study. There is a high drop out rate in Morocco thus maintaining a consistent sample was challenging. Wagner’s purposive sampling was also less than ideal and leaves him open for questioning about the subjectivity of his sample. The size of the sample, however, is sufficiently large for solid conclusion about the tendency of this sample. It should also be mentioned there was a government change in the midst of Wagner’s research resulting in a change in grading policy.58 This grading change complicated assessing the progress of students.


• Where: the Arab region (assumedly Palestine).
• **Purpose of research:** to test the reading accuracy of paragraphs and lists of words read aloud.
• **Sample:** highly-skilled Arabic readers 17-18 years old.
• **Experiment:** students read aloud paragraphs and lists of words that were vowelized and unvowelized.
• **Conclusion:** “vowels were a significant facilitator of work recognition in Arabic orthography.”59
• **Assessment:** By only testing highly-skilled readers this study did not test the reading ability of the average reader. Non-skilled readers may have produced poorer results. Only reading words also took away the natural context the average reader would have when reading. Rarely does an individual come to a word that has no written, visual or audible context that help them determine its meaning.


• Where: the Arab region (assumedly Palestine).
• **Purpose of research:** to test “the effect of vowels on reading accuracy in Arabic orthography.”60
• **Sample:** 64 native Arabic speakers in first grade; included skilled and poor readers (their results were contrasted to each other’s).
• **Instrument:** 4 texts in Fusha including narrative, informal, poetic, Qur’anic; Each text given correctly vocalized/ unvocalized/ wrongly vocalized.
• **Conclusion:**
  o Vowels influence “significantly” the reading of poor and skilled readers.
  o Skilled & poor improved reading in texts w/ vowels.
  o "vowels and sentence context were significant factors for word recognition for both skilled and poor Fusha readers.”61
• **Assessment:** The use of poor and skilled readers eliminated the possibility that simply the reading ability of the student was being tested and not their ability to read the Arabic script. The wrongly vocalized portion of the instrument may cause more errors in the students especially if they are poor readers. Poor readers would already have hesitancy in their reading of vowels and potentially make them more nervous for the rest of the testing. The wrongly vowelized texts also do not seem to serve the conclusions of study. This is a small but sufficient sample.


• Where: the Arab region (assumedly Palestine).
• **Purpose of research:** to test the accuracy of reading when students read narrative stories and newspaper articles.

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58 Ibid., 75.
61 Ibid., 12.
• **Sample:** 109 10th grade native Arabic speakers; this 109 included 39 poor readers and 70 skilled readers.
• **Experiment:** The stories and newspaper articles were given to the students vowelized, unvowelized, vowelized word naming and unvowelized word naming.
• **Conclusion:** "vowels in Arabic orthography were important variables for facilitating word recognition in poor as well as in skilled readers." 62
• **Assessment:** Again the use of poor and skilled readers eliminated the possibility of only the reading ability of the student was being tested and not their ability to read the Arabic script although here the ratios favor skilled readers. Testing students with different texts that were vowelized and nonvowelized is prone to confounding because the same text is not being used again. Students may be more interested with one topic or more familiar with the vocabulary in one story than another and thus read it easier. You may be testing the familiarity of a student to a specified group of vocabulary and not necessarily their ability to read vowelized and nonvowelized passages. This sample is small but, if the results of poor and skilled readers were not contrasted, the sample would be sufficient.


• **Where:** The Arab region.
• **Purpose of research:** To test the accuracy of reading paragraphs, sentences and words.
• **Hypothesis:** “reading theory today should consider additional variables, such as vowels, and sentence context, when explaining the reading process in Arabic orthography.” 63
• **Sample:** 77 native Arabic speakers.
• **Instrument:** 15 paragraphs, 60 sentences, 210 isolated words; the following 3 reading conditions were used: full vowelized, partially vowelized, unvowelized.
• **Conclusion:** "vowels were important variables for facilitating word recognition in both poor and skilled readers of Arabic" 64; sentence context is also crucial for word recognition in vowelized and unvowelized texts.
• **Assessment:** Again the use of poor and skilled readers eliminated the possibility the reading ability of the student was being tested and not their ability to read the Arabic script. The partially vowelized texts seem extraneous to the purpose of the study. The sample is minimal but sufficient.


• **Where:** Haifa and Nazareth.
• **Purpose of the research:** To test.
• **Sample:** Randomly selected second- and sixth-grade native Arabic speakers from two elementary schools in Haifa and two elementary schools in Nazareth; 71 second-graders and 74 sixth-graders.
• **Experiment:** Both age groups were given texts that were vowelized and unvowelized; the sixth graders asked 10 multiple-choice comprehension questions on each text and the second graders were asked 7 multiple-choice questions on each story.
• **Conclusion:** "vowels were a significant facilitator of reading comprehension in both age groups" 65; "word recognition and reading comprehension of Arabic script is accomplished through information derived from vowels and context." 66

63 Ibid. 324.
65 Ibid., 325.
Abu-Rabia did a very similar experiment with adult, highly proficient readers and his results also showed that vowelization “positively affected the participants’ reading comprehension.”

**Assessment:** The differing scores on the different types of texts may be because of the interest the student took in the text or their familiarity with the topic and not necessarily the presence or lack of vowels.


- **Where:** Abu Dhabi.
- **Purpose of the research:** to test the misreading and misspellings of primary school children.
- **Sample:** primary school children that were beginning readers.
- **Instrument:** ?
- **Conclusion:** She “identifies vocalization and its use of diacritic markings as the main culprit” of misreading and misspelling.

**A Study Regarding Pedagogical Issues in Qur'anic Schools**

This following study is a review of the pedagogical issues in Qur'anic schools. It was funded by Ford Foundation, US Social Science Council and the IDRC.

**Daniel A. Wagner. “New Days for Old Ways: Islamic Education in a Changing World.”**

- **Where:** 5 countries in Africa, Asia and Middle East (Senegal, Indonesia, Yemen, Sudan, Egypt).
- **Purpose of the research:** a comparative study of traditional Islamic education.
- **Conclusions/Findings:**
  - The teaching in Islamic schools basically consists of the following three elements: “elements of Islamic belief and custom,” “basic literacy in Arabic” and “advanced Islamic studies” focus on recitation of Qur’an.
  - Various cultures and histories are affecting the teaching in each of these countries. Some are being challenged by more modern schools and are changing some of their methods. Yemen is an example of this.
  - Some are rapidly losing teachers.
  - The draw of the indigenous schools is large.
  - “Qur’anic schools are thus continuing to play important educational, social and economic roles in Islamic societies in today’s world...The Islamic school is one of the most culturally embedded and least understood institutions that touches the lives of the rural poor of the Third World.”
- **Assessment:** This was a more qualitative study by Wagner. His conclusions must be interpreted as having come as a result of his specific experience and according to his estimation.

**Studies Concerning the Use of Fusha**

These studies conduct research into issue of illiteracy of the Arab region but came to the conclusion the use of high Arabic or Fusha as the medium of instruction in schools was the major cause of the high illiteracy rate.

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66 Ibid., 325.

- **Where:** the Arab Region.
- **Purpose of research:** to test the reading comprehension advantage of children exposed to literary Arabic during preschool.\(^{72}\)
- **Sample:** 282 children total including 135 1st graders and 147 2nd graders; 144 children made up the experimental group that were exposed to literary Arabic during preschool and 138 made up the control group and were only exposed to spoken Arabic during preschool.\(^{73}\)
- **Instrument:** reading comprehension pre- and post-tests.
- **Experiment:** Children were experimentally exposed to literary Arabic throughout their preschooling period. Their reading comprehension was compared to the parallel control group that was only exposed to spoken Arabic during the same period.
- **Conclusion:** “Early exposure of Arab preschool children to Fusha text (stories) enhances their reading comprehension abilities and improves their performances in reading comprehension tests two years later.”\(^{74}\)
- **Assessment:** This appears to be a classic quasi-experimental research style. This model doesn’t exclude the exposure pre-schoolers could have to literary Arabic outside of the classroom although it is thought to be minimal. This conclusion is fully supported by the research done.


- **Where:** the Arab region.
- **Tested:** She tested the, “role of oral language in the acquisition of basic Fusha reading processes with purpose of researching the interface between exposure to Fusha and top-level comprehension skill development” and, “phonemic awareness and pseudo-word decoding in kindergarten and first grade Arabic native children.”\(^{75}\)
- **Hypothesis:** “the linguistic differences between the two Arabic language varieties would interfere with the acquisition of basic reading processes in Fusha.”\(^{76}\)
- **Sample:** first grade native Arabic speaking children.
- **Instrument:** ?
- **Conclusion:** “diglossia and the phonological distance between the two varieties of Arabic were related to the native decoding ability of the young Arab children.”\(^{77}\)

**A Synthesis and Critical Analysis of Previously Discussed Studies Against the Maamouri and Ayari’s Studies**


Ayari conducted a type of meta study as well. He concluded the main reason for the high illiteracy in the Arab region is “the mismatch between spoken Arabic (local vernacular) and literary Arabic” which is called diglossia.\(^{78}\) He believes this mismatch “is not conducive to the acquisition of literacy.”\(^{79}\) He identified a second cause of illiteracy as the lack of exposure of young children to Fusha. He cites a study that was done by Iraqi in Palestine to determine the amount of exposure kindergarten children had with Fusha.

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\(^{75}\) Ibid., 12.

\(^{76}\) Ibid., 12.

\(^{77}\) Ibid., 12.


\(^{79}\) Ibid., 251.
Only 1.8% of the 290 families studied bought and read books to their children. The study also showed most teachers believe children younger than five years old are unable to understand stories in Fusha, thereby they are purposely not exposed to it.

http://papers.ldc.upenn.edu/EALL/ArabicLiteracy.pdf. University of Pennsylvania.  and


Maamouri conducted a meta study of his own. According to Maamouri, there are various variables within the Arab world affecting the percentage of illiteracy. These variables include the following:

1. The use of Fusha, or formal Arabic, in education. 
2. Gender.
3. Region and geographic location.
4. Socioeconomic status.

Maamouri believes education in the Arab states is deteriorating and is in desperate need of reordering. He believes all Arab states share negative characteristics, including “a questionable relevance, an unacceptably low quality, a high repetition and dropout rates, especially in poor or rural and urban communities.”

**Conclusion**

In conclusion four major sets of issues are listed and expounded upon. These four sets of issues are listed in descending order according to my opinion as to the causes of illiteracy in the Arab states. The first set is considered to be the greatest issue affecting illiteracy and the fourth is the least.

1. **Fusha & the Complexities of the Arabic Script**

The distance between Fusha and the spoken dialects of Arabic and the complexities of the Arabic script are many times ignored as issues causing illiteracy. The reason for this may be the language of Arabic is very closely tied to identity of individuals from the Arab region. It was not mentioned in any of the studies done by Arabic countries. Arabic is also tied to Islam as it is considered the language of heaven and the language in which the Qur’an is written. Thus, not as many studies pinpoint this as an issue. All this considered, I do not believe the issue of Fusha and Arabic script alone are the most paramount issues in the illiteracy rate of the Arab region. The use of Fusha is one of the only consistent factors in the Arab region, but the illiteracy rate ranges from 60.7% in Iraq to 10.2% in Jordan. Jordan has obviously devised a way to cope with the issue of Fusha and Arabic script. Possibly the institution of preschools in which children are exposed to Fusha is where Jordan has began coping with these difficulties. Perhaps it is the combination of Fusha, Arabic script, and a lack of preschools in which children are exposed to Fusha that constitutes the most paramount cause of illiteracy in the Arab region.

2. **Socioeconomic Status & Gross National Income per capita**

There is some correlation between the gross national income and the illiteracy rates of the countries in the Arab region. In Table 6, the countries are listed from lowest illiteracy rate to highest. The countries are color coded according to which bracket of GNI per capita each are a member. The countries with the

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81 Ibid., 400.
82 UNESCO. Literacy and Adult Education in the Arab World: Regional Report for the CONFINTSEA V, Mid-Term Review Conference. (Bangkok, September 2003), 10-11.
84 Taken from UNESCO. Literacy and Adult Education in the Arab World: Regional Report for the CONFINTSEA V, Mid-Term Review Conference. (Bangkok, September 2003), 12.
lowest GNI are clumped at the bottom of the chart, the lower middle GNI are dispersed throughout the bottom half of the chart and the upper middle GNI are clustered towards the top. The reason for this correlation is believed to be the monetary resources which more well to do countries are able to spend on teacher training, curriculum, school facilities, etc. Gender disparity may also be partially answered here. Parents in the Arab world are typically the decision makers as to the future of the daughters. In some situations, "parents may feel that the anticipated returns on their investment in a daughter’s education do not justify the expected cost, and they will prefer income-generating activities or marriage."

The monetary situation of countries and individuals are a large factor in illiteracy rates in the Arab region.

Table 6: Correlation between Gross National Income and Illiteracy Rates in the Arab Region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>GNI per capita</th>
<th>Difference between Male and Female illiteracy rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>$1,750</td>
<td>108 10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>--- 8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>$4,010</td>
<td>77 11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>$18,270</td>
<td>31 4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>--- -2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lybian Arab Jamahiriya</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>Estimated $2,976-9,205</td>
<td>--- 22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>$8,460</td>
<td>57 16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>Estimated $9,206</td>
<td>--- -4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrian Arab Republic</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>$1,040</td>
<td>131 27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>Estimated $2,976-9,205</td>
<td>--- 18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>$2,070</td>
<td>100 20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>$1,650</td>
<td>114 19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djibouti</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>--- 21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>$340</td>
<td>175 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>$1,530</td>
<td>116 22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>$1,190</td>
<td>128 25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>$450</td>
<td>163 42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>$360</td>
<td>172 20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>Estimated $746-2,975</td>
<td>--- 31.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key indicating level of income:
- Low= $745 or less
- Lower middle= $746-$2,975
- Upper middle= $2,976-$9,205
- High= $9,206 or more

3. Wars and Conflict

The following issues related to conflict and wars are not addressed by researchers but are acknowledged as very relevant issues by the committee of Arab nations.

- Relentless wars, armed conflicts, and the continuous threat of war.
- Global political unrest affecting the region specifically.

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85 Jordan is obviously an exception to this observation.
86 Nagat El-Sanabary “Middle East and North Africa.” In Elizabeth M. King & M. Anne Hill (eds.) Women’s Education in Developing Countries: Barriers, Benefits, and Policies. (Baltimore: for the World Bank by Johns Hopkins University, 1993), 153.
• Deteriorating economic situation in post-war, post-conflict countries. Education can become entirely impossible and a very minor priority in light of any of these issues. Wars and conflict pose a great barrier to literacy in the Arab region.

4. Region and geographic location

Approximately half of the inhabitants of the Arab region live in rural areas. For example, 53% of Moroccans and Turks and 52% of Egyptians live in rural areas. Schools tend to be concentrated in urban areas. There tends to be a cultural undertow that does not esteem education in rural areas, and education is many times seen as more irrelevant when a family's livelihood comes from a profession not requiring any education. The large population living in rural areas is considered a very large determiner of illiteracy rate.

Gender

Concerning gender issues Maamouri disagrees with the assessment of many others already cited in this paper. He says, “The Arab region continues to show very alarming illiteracy rates among woman and young girls, especially in the rural and underprivileged areas and sectors of society.” He continues by saying, “Woman’s illiteracy is linked to other serious indicators of underdevelopment, such as infant mortality and family size.”

There are many causal factors that may contribute to the lower literacy rate among women in the Arab region. Many individuals blame this discrepancy on the influence of Islam. It has also been considered that, “it is the Arab cultural tradition, rather than Islam itself, that have constrained girls’ education.” In general, cultures with a majority Muslim population show a, “strong concern for the modesty and safety of girls and women.” This concern is seen in the use of veils and in many instances protective fathers will not allow their girls to be taught by male teachers or to be in school of mixed genders. The expectation for a girl's future is very different from the common Western expectation for girls. As El-Sanabary states, “Middle Eastern girls are socialized into accepting that marriage and raising a family is their ultimate goal.” This expectation is actually similar to what the average expectation for American women was a few decades ago. El-Sanabary suggests this attitude may be a symptom of less developed countries. More developed countries in the Arab region, however, have shown a priority on education of girls among the higher class families. In the Middle East and North Africa women make up the largest part of the population in private schools. In more affluent countries such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, there has been a significant implementation of schools for boys and girls. Even in Saudi Arabia, before schools were open to girls in the 1960s, affluent families sent their daughters to private schools in Egypt and Lebanon. The main issue keeping girls away from school remains the problem of illiteracy even though this is substantially less in the more developed Arab countries of the region.

More Sources of Interest


