

1. Vocational Training

Introduction

The countries in the MENA region face many challenges when it comes to decreasing the high unemployment rate – especially among the youth. This is essential for the economy, but also for the political stability of the countries in the long run.

For decades, the governments of the MENA region have subsidised the economy and increased public sector jobs to maintain employment and to promote stability. This has resulted in a misallocation of resources and a skills mismatch on the labour market. There is a need for a more competitive private sector that is more capable of exporting manufactured products to other countries. For this to come true a qualified work force is needed, and to facilitate this, the education system must be transformed.

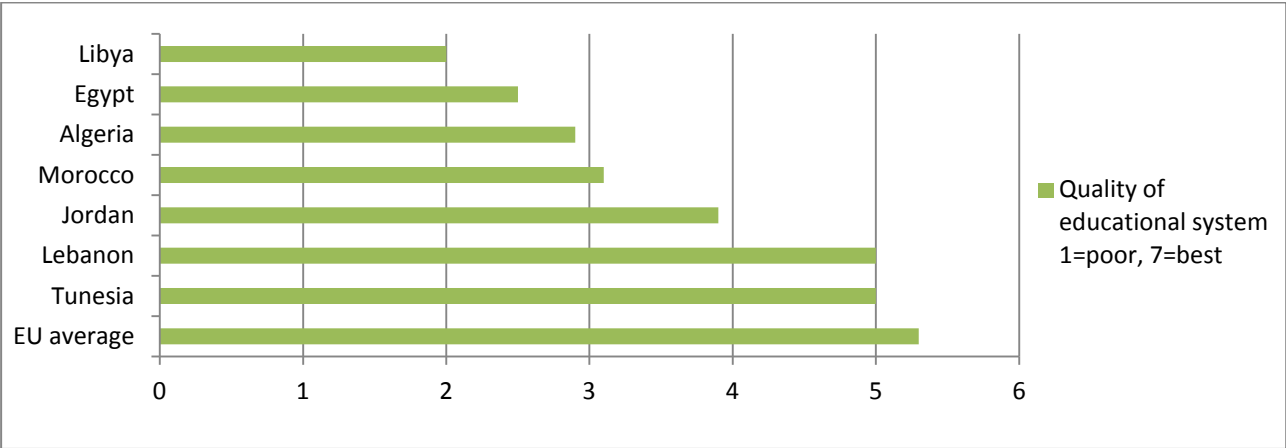
An increase in the overall educational level will improve the efficiency of each individual worker. Moreover, workers who have received little formal education can carry out only simple manual work and find it much more difficult to adapt to more advanced production processes and techniques. Lack of basic education has therefore become a constraint on business development, with enterprises finding it difficult to move up the value chain by producing more sophisticated or value intensive products. Education and especially the right kind of education is one of the answers to this challenge.

There are big challenges in creating a coherent education system that responds to the need of the labour market in a globalised world. From the private companies' point of view, the challenges are especially big regarding the need to supply the private enterprises with the right kind of qualification – especially from vocational education and training.

Current situation

“Member companies throughout the region have expressed concerns regarding the current condition of the work force, and many member organizations question the efforts made by previous governments to build a proper education system to meet today’s business needs”, Member AE-network

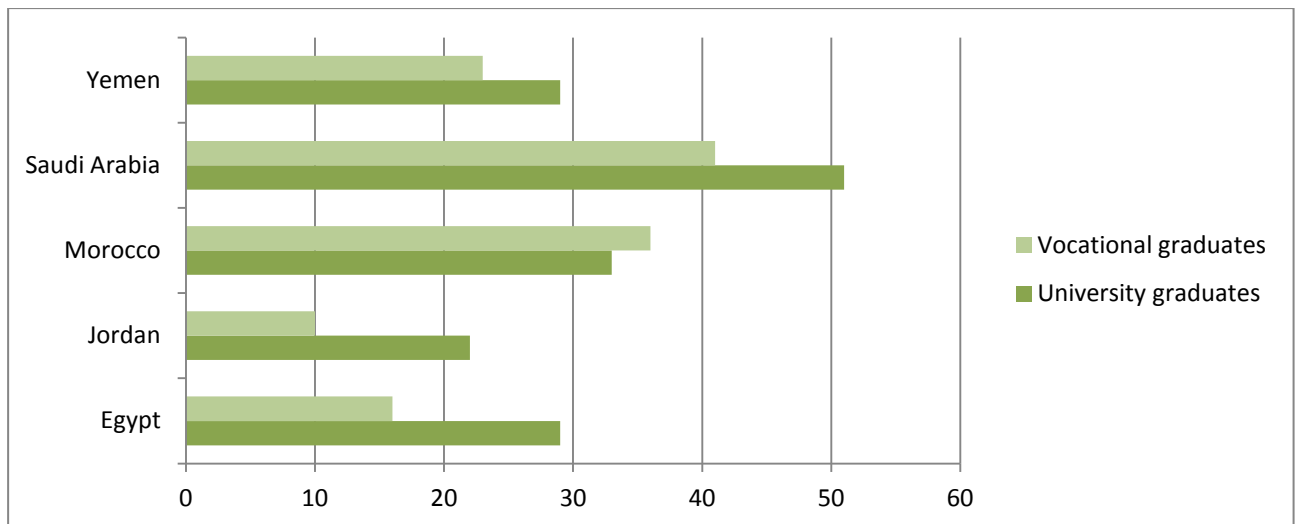
MENA countries spent an average of 5.3% of public expenditure on education from 1995 – 2003. Asian and Latin American countries spent 3.6 and 3.9 percent. At approximately the same time (1990 – 2003) the GDP growth pr. capita was 0.8 percent in MENA and 4.3 in Asia and 1,7 in Latin America. All else equal it is thus evident that the MENA region has been performing poorly in transforming expenditure on education to economic growth.



Quality of education system: (0 is poor and 7 is best)
 Source: Global competitiveness report 2010-11, WEF

Furthermore, a survey in the MENA region highlighted that employers do not find that graduates from universities and vocational education have the appropriate hard or soft skills. The lacks are most severe regarding vocational education. Emphasis should especially be put on improving the vocational education system and curricula should to be adapted better to the needed competences on the labour market.

Percentage of manages who agreed that newly hired students have appropriate skills:



Source: e4e

Key challenges

No long term strategy

As mentioned above, MENA countries have had a lower return on the investment in education in terms of economic growth if compared to the countries of Asia and Latin America. One reason could be the lack of focus according to what kind of education investment that yields the best result in terms of economic growth. One finding of the ARAB-EU Network is that there is a lack of long term strategy at national level on skills development and that governments do not engage in public-private dialogue in order to match education in general and vocational training in particular with the needs of the private sector.

Best practice from the region

Improving technical education is given special emphasis by the Egyptian Government through its TVET program (technical and vocational education and training), which seeks to upgrade and reform vocational training. Egypt Economic and Social Development Plan (SDP) 2010-2011, stated that the education policy and in particular vocational training centers should be linked to the needs of the labour market.

Another Egyptian initiative is the SDP, project partially funded by the World Bank. It was Established in 2006 within the context of the efforts of the GOE to increase the competitiveness of the private sector and particularly SME's, through improving the productivity of labor by providing technical and vocational training according to the needs of SME's.

Low quality and outdated curriculum

High quality primary, secondary, higher and vocational education and training are fundamental to our future prosperity. In the rapidly changing and globalized world, education is the key to employment, economic success and allowing people to participate fully in society.

The education system in the region, however, is widely criticised among the members of the AE-Network for clinging to an outdated tradition of rote learning methods and teacher-oriented pedagogy that prevent the emergence of pupils who are capable of independent and critical thinking. Basically, the education system in the region has focused more on repetition and knowledge of facts and concepts, and less on developing problem-solving capacities.

Reforms are therefore called for that support active learning and problem solving skills among pupils, as well as reforms that ensure an adaptation of curricula to the needed competences on the labour market.

Best practice from the region

Tunisia has undergone a pedagogical reform inspired by the Competency Based Approach. The motivation has been to shift away from the topic/information-based curriculum towards a new curriculum that focuses on knowledge, skills, and attitudes with emphasis on the core skills of reading, writing, and numeracy skills. Each unit of the curriculum embodies learner-centered activities that integrate these three types of competencies. The new curriculum is also characterized by the introduction of English at the eighth grade of basic education to expand the multilingual skills of the Tunisian students. The adoption of the new curriculum has been followed by the design and production of a new generation of textbooks and assessment handbooks.

Skills mismatch

Up-to-date skills that address the needs of the labor market are crucial for all economies. Skill mismatch refers to various types of skill gaps or imbalances, which may be quantitative or qualitative in nature, between the labor force and the needs of the employers. Skill mismatch has important implications at various levels. In addition to possible adverse impacts on individuals and companies, skill mismatch may hamper economic growth, competitiveness and innovative capacity at macroeconomic level.

Best practice from the region

Public and private-sector institutions in Lebanon plan to work together to shape cooperative vocational training. 27 public and private schools now offer initial cooperative vocational training in eight occupations, based on the dual system. Demand is on the rise: in the 2010/2011 school year, approx. 1,680 young people underwent dual training and more than 650 companies offered apprenticeship positions. About two-thirds of the qualified apprentices found a job straight away or decided to study further.

Recommendations for the governments of the MENA region

- Bring together partners and institutions from public and private sectors to shape cooperative vocational training. Cooperative training can only be shaped by pulling together, making the necessary adjustments and setting the legal framework.
- Educational institutions should establish strong ties with industrial institutions in order to help students procure training and secure employment upon graduation. The educational programs should better merge theory and practice in accordance with international standards, and make use of up-to-date curricula.
- Set up goal for the educational system that can support economic development in our countries and a strong competitive private sector.
- Focus on the quality of TVET Programs (technical vocational education and training) to attract young people. We need to increase of the funding for TVET because TVET is very important for the development of the economy and the further qualification of unskilled employees.