

2nd AHAED Webinar

20 May 2020

The second webinar of the Arab House for Adult Education and Development AHAED under the title "Challenges of Adult Education in the time of Corona" (civil society initiatives) was held on the Zoom application on Wednesday, May 20, 2020 at 3:00 pm Beirut time. The meeting was moderated by Mrs. Elsy Wakil, Secretary General of AHEAD.

The aim of this webinar was to reflect on the reality of challenges in adult education during the Coronavirus pandemic, and to share helpful or successful instances from the civil society in the face of the challenges.

Dr. Ekbal Elsamaloty presented a paper, under the title of “Adult Education and Learning during the Coronavirus Crisis”. In her presentation she addressed three main points:

1. The concept of Adult Education, what it should be, and what happened to it because of the crisis.

The UNESCO defines adult education as the basic foundation of political, economic and cultural transformation for individuals and communities. So, Adult Education is a major factor in meeting the needs for jobs, decreasing unemployment, keeping up to date with technology, industry, etc... in addition to culture and community development. The vision is to transform from teaching to learning, and there is a big difference between the two. Then, she mentioned the 4 roles reasons of why we learn.

She presented the concept of what Adult Education should be according to the Belém framework; (The Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI)): policies, quality, governance, participation, funding, basic education, vocational training and application, popular and community learning (citizenship).

2. The Challenges of Adult Education.

She talked about the challenges that was adopted by the Arab ministers before Corona in 2015. And shed the light on the following:

- The financial and technical resources, teachers' competences, living conditions and financial status of the workers in adult education.
- The political conflicts, violence and occupation in some countries also impacted the infrastructure and resources for adult education.
- The overloaded and crowded formal education system is leading to increased dropouts with a big gender gap, and inability to implement proper reintegration in economy and communities for those who drop out.
- The curricula that doesn't address issues of tolerance, violence and extremism lack of integration and coordination.
- Lack of databases and ability to measure impact.

In addition to all the above mentioned challenges, Adult Education is facing new challenges during the current crisis:

- The obligation to use the digital education and distant learning, which introduced new challenges in terms of teachers' digital competences. The current situation (according to studies) show that it is possible to dismiss 45% of workers because their competences don't match future market. Also, challenges in terms of ensuring the right to education for everyone, as there are millions of people who don't have access to infrastructure for digital education.

In Adult Education, we now need innovative approaches in using the available technology. We also need to ensure humanistic and psychosocial empowerment for teachers and learners, even in digital education. Also, we need to find alternatives for measuring and evaluating the learning outcomes and impacts in digital learning. Finally, there is a complete control over this sector from big companies, therefore, it is important to keep ensuring empowerment of smaller community level of businesses and projects.

3. The role of civil society in light of the repercussions of Corona: Can civil society face these challenges?

The strong point of civil society is in its ability for networking and partnerships (with governments, with media, with economies). The role of civil society in this crisis is to ensure awareness raising in prevention, health issues, and safety

measures. The second role is to provide psychosocial support for most affected groups (women, unemployed youth, families), especially as more domestic violence is reported. The third role is to face the economic impact.

We need to adjust and focus on learning programs for social and entrepreneurial skills:

- investing in opportunities from the technology sectors
- investing in opportunities of partnerships and alliances

There is a recommendation to establish a resource center to collect successful examples.

Initiatives Presentations:

- Ms. Hoda Nakouzi, Coordinator of the Training Section at "Mouwasat Association"

The first presentation is from Lebanon about a training for a group of young women who will provide face masks to health workers. The same group is doing a second training in sewing full protection gears for health workers. They also receive daily payments for their productions. The center is taking smaller numbers of participants to ensure social distancing, at the same time, is making sure of the safety measures taken for and by the participants.

The project has other humanitarian aims. Because the center is taking new groups of unemployed youth on a rolling bases to make sure they all get a chance for developing new skills. The organization is also providing payment for transportation, so that they don't risk safety measures. The participants are equally treated and consist of Lebanese individuals, Syrian refugees, Palestinian refugees, and Egyptians.

They started with one course, and now, they have 4 different courses.

- Mr. Hussein Alrabei, Project Manager at "German Association for Adult Education"

This initiative comes from Jordan and is a response to the current learning needs in Corona crisis. This initiative is a set of interactive sessions that aim to continue the learning approach with the targeted parties, so that they have made education a requirement and priority for those targeted in emergency and crisis situations, and their eagerness to do so. There were two pathways: positivity and responsiveness. The first pathway is to respond positively to limit acute stress and

anxiety under Corona with the groups, and to promote positive practices and develop a sense of citizenship and positivity, highlighting that in this, the source of learning and dialogue is the participants. The second pathway is the response to learning. This was designed to make sure that learning is the first priority for the target groups all the time, and the work was done by developing a plan and an alternative plan for the initiative; so, new concepts were prepared, facilitators were trained and prepared, and also, the participants were trained in using the digital tools. The main theme of discussion in this learning approach is the corona crisis, and reflection is a main part of this approach.

- Mr. Hany Shawky, Director of the Training Program “Caritas Egypt”

This initiative involves literacy classes, with women making 90% of participants. They adopt Paulo Freire’s emancipatory approach.

During the Corona time: they worked in awareness raising, humanitarian relief, and assistance and preparedness of communities.

In the beginning all activities were frozen, and priority was given to relief and health awareness, but as time moved, they started looking into the new challenges especially that awareness classes in literacy education was stopped and participants didn't know how to use phone applications. One big challenge was in compensating for the direct interaction in their literacy classes. Also, is learning and education really a priority and important value in our communities? Little motivation to join digital learning is connected to how much learning is a value.

How they faced these challenges:

Before the crisis they were already providing training for their coordinators to do community research. This was used with the participants and even women from the communities participated in preparing research in their households. Women also were supported to write stories and share them. They were provided also with books to read collectively with their families. Also books for them to read in topics such as harassment and violence. In addition, they implemented training for their coordinators in using the digital tools.

Starting from last week, they re-opened their local libraries with keeping safety measures. They also trained women who are learning in the literacy classes to be teachers of literacy to other family members during the closures.

The general challenges were presented in terms of prioritizing education on decision making level, very poor capacities in technologies, the value of learning (collective vs. individual learning).

Questions and answers:

Dr. Ekbal responded to El Said regarding the seriousness of the fifth and sixth challenges mentioned in her paper saying that there are many online programs for literacy, but this challenge of measuring and evaluating results of literacy education is raised by the Egyptian council of adult education. The biggest measurement is that the adults become literate, but higher education institutions are invited with the civil society to develop mechanisms. And regarding control of the big companies she said, if this means anything it means the very important role of us as civil society to make the balance and ensure through Adult Education that communities are empowered enough. She also wished to see in all of these seminars at least one point on which we follow up and build in order to achieve practical change.

Mr. El Said answered to the question on the access to internet and said that he agrees a lot that the most marginalized and in need don't really get to use the internet, regardless of the quality of available programs.

The speakers mentioned some of the specific problems. These problems were highlighted more in the Corona time. Before that, the companies were making an image for themselves without really caring about the targeted groups. For the future, and as Hussein said, we need to focus on alternative plans. So as civil society, we need to advocate for more support from official systems to digital tools in emergencies.

Mr. Hussein said that to solve this issue we need to be flexible, if people can't read and write, we use voice messages, if they can't use anything else but Facebook, we use Facebook.

Mr. Hany said that the issue is not only poverty in technology, it is also what people consider as priority in terms of cost. It is important to do research on these

challenges, and find practical solutions that might not be involving governments, but, smaller scales.

Dr. Ekbal said that they did advocacy with the media to raise the question of literacy education and free access. The mobile phone companies responded with many discounts, but people are not using it for learning.

After the discussions, the following set of recommendations and proposals were stated:

1) It was suggested to establish a concept that links the two types of needs, both of which are indispensable, and that civil society study changes in the labor market needs, and then, promote awareness about them among the adults in order to generate individual needs for it, thus achieving self-interest and economic benefit.

2) Develop alternative plans for the established master plans, and include contingency plans and an exit strategy.

3) Inviting the involved educational authorities: "Adult Education Authority, adult education centers in universities, etc..." under the umbrella of the Arab House for Adult Education and Development, and the Arab Network for Literacy and Adult Education to hold a meeting to discuss ways to address how literacy course students obtain online degrees, and how will they be qualified to deal with technology?

4) Dr. Ekbal recommended to rephrase the initiatives and the various success stories that were presented in a literary form so that they become real-life stories that we are living. This suggestion received everyone's approval, and Dr. Nahla Jamal immediately initiated to implement it directly.

5) It was suggested that a region be adopted within the Arab societies (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon), and an inventory of the region's needs be made, and a model and report be created to present them to the donors to receive the support to meet these needs and work to adopt this model and generalize it to the Arab countries level. (A proposal from Dr. Ekbal)

6) A seminar was suggested for the Arab House about the topic: "Understanding the Future Beyond the Corona". (Mr. Sayed Musaad)

7) The need to set Arab standards for technical education and learning.

8) A suggestion was made by Dr. Nahla Jamal to establish a center with internet services for sessions with only 4-6 attendance per day, taking into consideration the physical distances and the other health safety measures and procedures.

9) Mr. Sayed Massad made a proposal for a seminar for the Arab House about the future of assessment and evaluation in adult distance education after the Corona.

After presenting the suggestions, an evaluation was done through which the participants showed a great interest in the important topic presented through this webinar. They also suggested other topics for the coming webinars, as the following:

- A- The concept of adult education, innovation and challenges (41%)
- B- Policies in Adult Education (32%)
- C- Training Approaches, Concept, and Practices (59%)
- D- Gender and adult education (18%)
- E - Adult and civic education (23%)

You can access the Video of the Webinar on the following link:

https://www.facebook.com/2200987049948690/videos/287529048944792/?_tn=%2Cd%2CPR&e_id=ARCUPTHqd7dRzk75on11lWTigL_VNFa76kpGNvDlx0mWmWPBAVDRAZ37yNYEz7PRI7coIFXIBNH103iS