



ARAB NEWS

[SAUDI ARABIA \(/SAUDIARABIA\)](#) [MIDDLE EAST \(/MIDDLEEAST\)](#) [WORLD \(/WORLD\)](#)

[BUSINESS \(/ECONOMY\)](#) [MEDIA \(/MAIN-CATEGORY/MEDIA\)](#) [LIFESTYLE \(/LIFESTYLE\)](#)

[OPINION](#) [SPORT \(/SPORT\)](#) [RESEARCH & STUDIES \(/RESEARCH\)](#)

[PODCAST \(/PODCAST\)](#)

[EDITORIAL \(/CATEGORY/MAIN-CATEGORY/OPINION/EDITORIAL\)](#)

LATEST NEWS / [Business & Economy \(/Taxonomy/Term/4\)](#) [ids youth movement at Real Madrid as Modric takes a dm](#)

[Home \(/\)](#) / [Adult literacy rate likely to plummet in post-pandemic era](#)

Adult literacy rate likely to plummet in post-pandemic era



[\(/taxonomy/term/80411\)](#)

RANVIR S. NAYAR
[\(/TAXONOMY/TERM/80411\)](#)



Education had largely been impacted by the pandemic, and adult literacy is the hardest hit. (Shutterstock image)

Short Url

June 10, 2022

[Opinion \(/Opinion\)](#)

Osama Al-Sharif

[\(/taxonomy/term/13361\)](#)



[Jordan studies its options as Assad fails to stop drug smuggling \(/node/2384721\)](#)

[\(/taxonomy/term/13361\)](#)

Zaid M. Belbagi [\(/taxonomy/term/13041\)](#)



[Hunger at home haunts Syria's international outreach efforts \(/node/2384651\)](#)

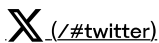
[\(/taxonomy/term/13041\)](#)

23:23

<https://arab.news/zh6mm>



5573



Follow

(<https://twitter.com>

[/intent](#)

[/follow?original_referer=https](#)

[%3A%2F](#)

[%2Fwww.arabnews.com%2F&](#)

[ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Ebuttonembed%7Cterm%5Efollow%7Ctwtgr%5Earabnews&](#)

[region=follow_link&](#)

[screen_name=arabnews\)](#)

Nations around the world have committed to eradicating adult illiteracy as part of the UN Sustainable Development Goal of providing education for all by the year 2030. However, with time running out

and as the world struggles with bringing children's education back on track following the 30-month disruption due to COVID-19, the education of adults who either missed out on school or dropped out seems to have fallen by the wayside.

According to a UNESCO report published last year, the global adult literacy rate remained unchanged between 2015 and

Yossi Mekelberg

(</taxonomy/term/12971>)



Oslo Accords' gloomy 30th anniversary
(</node/2384636>)

(</taxonomy/term/12971>)

Maria Maalouf

(</taxonomy/term/348846>)



COP28 can infuse optimism into world's climate change battle
(</node/2384606>)

(</taxonomy/term/348846>)

Michael Kindsgrab

(</taxonomy/term/539791>)



Strengthening diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia in a changing world
(</node/2384371>)

(</taxonomy/term/539791>)

MORE IN OPINION (</OPINION>)

Latest Updates

Saudi Arabia aims to be among top 10 countries in logistics: transport minister
(</node/2385281>)
(</business-economy>)



(</node/2385281>)
(</business-economy>)

2019, with the number of illiterate youths and adults dipping by a marginal 10 million during that period, leaving a mountain of 773 million illiterates in the world. Some 100 million of these were aged 15 to 24, giving that demographic a literacy rate of 92 percent. The real challenge lies in reaching out to the 673 million other illiterates.

As with practically everything, the challenge of adult illiteracy is unevenly distributed around the world. Three-quarters of the world's illiterate adults live in three of the poorest regions in the world: 47 percent in South Asia and West Asia combined, along with 27

[Turkiye says Ankara attack assailants trained in Syria \(/node/2385276/middle-east\)](#)



[\(/node/2385276/middle-east\)](#)

[Dubai launches family-business support program \(/node/2385271/business-economy\)](#)



[\(/node/2385271/business-economy\)](#)

[Bellingham leads youth movement at Real Madrid as Modric takes a diminished role \(/node/2385261/football\)](#)



[\(/node/2385261/football\)](#)

[Egypt, Maersk's C2X sign \\$3bn agreement to produce green fuel in Suez Canal \(/node/2385256/business-economy\)](#)



[\(/node/2385256/business-economy\)](#)

percent in sub-Saharan Africa. As usual, the gender bias is greatly reflected here too. Almost two-thirds of all illiterate adults are women. What is especially worrying here is that, despite all the talk of gender parity and several efforts to put this into practice, the gender gap in adult illiteracy has remained stubbornly at the same level for almost two decades.

Surprisingly, while the issue of adult non-literacy may be more severe in poorer countries, the challenge is not limited to these nations. As many as 19 percent of adults living in the world's richest nations — the members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development —
have low literacy
skills and 23
percent have low
numeracy skills.

It is also crucial
to note that, as
the data predated
the two years of
COVID-19
pandemic, when
access to
education around
the world
suffered in an
unprecedented
manner, the
situation on the
ground is likely
to have taken a
severe beating in
every single
nation, but
particularly in
the world's least-
developed
countries.

There are several
factors that have
changed. One is
the sheer
disruption of
education,
especially in the
in-person
format. Another
is that a number
of teachers have
given up their
careers and
sought early

retirement, as
has been
witnessed in
other sectors of
the economy,
creating a severe
shortage of
workers as
economies
recover from the
pandemic.

**“ The
situation
on
the
ground
will
have
taken
a
severe
beating
in
every
single
nation,
but
particularly
in
the
world’s
least-
developed
countries**

**Ranvir
S.
Nayar**

Most importantly, the funding for education, which has historically been low in poor countries, is likely to dry up even further as governments try to balance their budgets after three years of running unprecedented levels of fiscal deficit. This has fueled the current inflation crisis that has taken hold of the whole world and is forcing governments to adopt sharp cutbacks in their spending.

Sectors like education and health are likely to take a back seat when governments sit down and draw up their budgets. State investment in education is likely to have declined compared to before the pandemic, even

though the need of the hour is to spend significantly more on education in order to help students and teachers recover from the COVID-19 shock. In the face of limited budgets, a number of schools that were already vulnerable to closure before the pandemic either have been or will soon be shut down. Other measures seen as a result of budgetary cutbacks include reducing the number of teachers and support staff.

As a result, in a scenario where education is set to suffer in the near future, it is certain that the focus of societies, governments and nongovernmental organizations will likely be on restoring

education for children and youths first. Adult literacy is almost certain to be given a back seat, perhaps justifiably.

And while some reports have been published on the pandemic's impact on the education of youths and children, and many more studies are being conducted, the issue of adult literacy has gone almost unnoticed.

Hence, the hit that it may have taken during the pandemic is also relatively well hidden.

But some studies are being completed and the initial data from these is shocking, though hardly unexpected. The gap between rich and poor countries is

believed to have expanded. By exactly how much will become clear when a report by UNESCO is released next week. There has also been anecdotal evidence and media reports on the impact of the pandemic on rural and indigenous populations, as well as people with disabilities, who have been hit much harder than others.

Even before the pandemic, UNESCO had warned that the world would miss its SDG target on literacy, as only 94 percent of youths were likely to be literate by 2030, and this figure declines to 90 percent for adults. The figure is even scarier for low-income nations, where less than 70

percent of adults and just over 80 percent of young people are projected to have basic literacy skills by 2030. Exactly how much the SDG target will be missed by is a matter of conjecture right now, but hundreds of millions of adults are likely to remain illiterate in 2030.

• *Ranvir S. Nayar*
is managing
editor of Media
India Group.

Disclaimer:
Views
expressed by
writers in this
section are
their own and
do not
necessarily
reflect Arab
News' point of
view