

Placing 21st Century Skills at the heart of every learning experience:

Readying 21st Century Learners
for a 21st Century World



“An individual’s ability to thoughtfully employ skills like critical thinking, real world problem solving, collaboration and communication correlate directly with their ability to succeed”

Mark Neiker, President and CEO of the Pearson Foundation.



“One of the most pervasive and endemic problems in education in just about every country is the lack of attention paid to skills provision. Even in the richest countries employers often find themselves re-skilling school leavers. Just as importantly, in an era where a ‘job for life’ is ancient history, older workers want continuous development too”.

John Fallon,
Chief Executive Officer, Pearson

Pearson - A Global and Regional Commitment to 21st Century Learning

In a knowledge-driven economy, a better education will help people progress throughout their lives. The availability of effective education for employment and vocational skills is becoming as imperative as traditional literacy and numeracy learning.

Our education systems, however, are failing to fulfil this fundamental requirement. A national study¹ undertaken in the United States in 2014 found that the majority of respondents (59%) agreed or strongly agreed that they developed most of the skills they use in their current job outside of school. Only 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, Pearson’s Effective Education for Employment Study² – the culmination of 2,000 interviews conducted across 25 countries – found a significant global disconnect between education systems and the needs of 21st Century employers, both public and private. At the heart of the Report’s findings was that the match between what employers, individuals and governments seek, and what respective education and training systems provide, is ill-fitting. And the Arab World is not immune.

According to a recent report³ from the World Bank, nearly 40 percent of MENA private sector employers identify skills shortages as a major constraint to business operation and firm growth. The skills shortage is also a key contributor to the region’s youth unemployment problem, and with 55% of the region’s population under the age of 24, this dilemma looks set to worsen unless drastic action is taken.

Pearson is working closely with governments and education providers to redress the skills gap crisis, all around the world. We want to place 21st Century Skills at the centre of every individual’s learning experience. Because regardless of whether a learner is entering kindergarten or completing a professional development programme, 21st century skills are critical to that person’s future workplace success and to the economic and social standards of the communities in which they live.

¹ 21st Century Skills in the Workplace: A 2013 Microsoft Partners in Learning and Pearson Foundation Study, <http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/162821/21st-century-skills-workplace.aspx>

² Effective Education for Employment: A Global Perspective Report prepared by Pearson and White Loop, <http://eee-edexcel.com/Home>

³ 2013 World Bank Report: Building Effective Employment Programs for Unemployed Youth in the Middle East and North Africa, http://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/9780821399040_Overview#

Quantifying the need for 21st Century Skills: Lessons for Every Educator from Global Education Data⁴

Lesson 1:

The OECD estimates that half of the economic growth in developed countries in the last decade came from improved skills.

Lesson 2:

In recent years it has become increasingly clear that basic reading, writing and arithmetic are not enough. The importance of 21st Century non-cognitive skills – broadly defined as abilities for social interaction – is pronounced.

Lesson 3:

Making sure people are taught the right skills early in their childhood is much more effective than trying to improve skills in adulthood for people who were let down by their school system. But even when primary education is of a high quality, skills decline in adulthood if they are not used regularly.

Lesson 4:

Lifelong learning, even simple reading at home and number crunching at work, helps to slow the rate of age-related skill decline; but mainly for those who are highly skilled already. Teaching adults does very little to make up for a poor school system.

Lesson 5:

Technology can provide new pathways into adult education, particularly in the developing world, but is no panacea. There is little evidence that technology alone helps individuals actually develop new skills.

Lesson 6:

Developing countries must teach basic skills more effectively before they start to consider the wider skills agenda. There is little point in investing in pedagogies and technologies to foster 21st century skills, when the basics of numeracy and literacy aren't in place.



“Even the highest performing countries in the Learning Curve Index are far from providing education that would ensure every single student is prepared for informed citizenship and 21st century employability.”

Sir Michael Barber,
Chief Education Advisor, Pearson.



⁴ The Pearson Learning Curve, compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit: <http://thelearningcurve.pearson.com/>



“The world economy no longer pays for what people know but for what people can do with what they know”.

Andreas Schleicher, Deputy Director for Education, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Pearson has drawn on the world’s best educational minds to create dynamic, innovative and proven solutions that bring positive 21st century learning experiences to people wherever they are, and however they learn. In schools, colleges, universities and workplaces, Pearson is making 21st Century skills a priority. Whether it is through our intuitive digital learning portfolio, internationally recognised qualifications or pioneering professional development programmes, our offerings seek to prepare learners for life beyond the classroom.

To find out more,
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