

Can STEM education guarantee job security in the Middle East?

Thu, 2020-07-09 18:48

DUBAI: Advances in technology continue to redefine the ways in which we think, work, live and interact with people and our surroundings. As a result, many traditional careers are in decline, which raises important questions for young people in particular.

Will the number of jobs that are rendered obsolete by the rapid pace of technological change be greater than the new opportunities and career options it creates? And, crucially, what are the key subjects to study and skills to learn to keep in step with the times and future-proof career options?

According to Manal Hakim, the founder and CEO of Geek Express, an educational-technology platform, the key to future job security lies in predicting changes in employment roles and learning the skills needed to adapt to them. In the next decade, for example, it is estimated that the increased use of AI in all sectors will eliminate 75 million jobs, but create 133 million, she said.

Many future jobs will be based, to a significant degree, on “coding, robotics and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) skills,” said Hakim, adding that demand will grow for workers proficient in jobs such as data analysis, software and app development, robotics, and e-commerce and social media.



According to Manal Hakim students who acquire technological skills in a focused, purposeful way, and also gain familiarity with learning in a technological environment, end up as assets for potential employers.
(Supplied)

The importance of, and emphasis placed on, STEM education lies in the fact that it focuses on real-world applications of the four disciplines through a cohesive learning approach. Considered by education experts as a driver of sustainable growth in Gulf Cooperation Council countries, STEM-related classes are offered across the region, through workshops in schools and also as standalone courses.

By teaching students as young as five years old the fundamentals of skills such as coding, robotics and design, STEM education is laying the “foundation of both education and innovation,” said Hakim.

She describes coding, robotics and design as the “new universal language,” and an integral part of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics) education, which is an integrated approach to learning designed to encourage students to think more broadly about real-world problems.

There is already a shift underway in education, with a growing emphasis on

dedicated lessons on coding and STEM skills for children in the earliest grades, according to Cody Claver, general manager of accredited online school iCademy Middle East.

“Students are drawn to the futuristic skills they see as fun and engaging,” he said.



According to Cody Claver, general manager of accredited online school iCademy Middle East, there is already a shift underway in education, with a growing emphasis on dedicated lessons on coding and STEM skills. (Supplied)

He believes that students who acquire technological skills in a focused, purposeful way, and also gain familiarity with learning in a technological environment, end up as assets for potential employers.

Currently, Geek Express provides private, live online coaching to 1,200 students between the ages of 5 and 17 in Beirut, Dubai, Jeddah and Doha. It uses a “futuristic school” model that offers a range of learning options, in English and Arabic, that students can work through at their own pace, including hands-on projects, private lessons, semester-long classes and educational holiday camps.

The main focus, said Hakim, is to teach young people how to code so that they become “creators of technology” and not simply passive users. More than 30 courses are available, beginning with block-based coding logic for the youngest students, followed by more complex algorithms, game design, app and web development, and advanced classes on data science and AI.

“A child should be able to design his or her own app, not only use it,” Hakim said.



Caption

The importance of preparing young minds to adapt to future job-market demands might transform our ideas about, and approach to, education, said Claver.

“I believe we will see a continued re-imagination on the part of companies such as Google, Amazon and the like, to have students bypass traditional university structures and train directly with them,” he said.

Given the rapid changes in technology, and the resultant evolution of the job market, how prepared are education authorities to ensure students meet future employment demands? This is a particularly important question for the Middle East and North Africa region, where nearly half of the population is under the age of 24, according to data from UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund?

Three main criteria will determine job security in the years ahead, particularly for those born since 1995: flexibility, diversity of qualifications, and technological skills.



Caption

Emma Whale, vice president of Schools education company Pearson Middle East, said that educators and regional governments are making concerted efforts to ensure these criteria are recognized as the gateway to future employability, but there are also other factors that create a gap between skills and jobs.

“The gap is also about language proficiency, and those uniquely human skills that will differentiate us in the future from AI,” said Whale.

Hakim said that efforts are already being made to ensure young people learn the skills they need for the future but more can be done.

“There have been great initiatives in the region, such as the UAE’s One Million Arab Coders and the Saudi Vision 2030 for education,” she said.

However, she said that the growing need for STEM skills is outpacing the slow process of change to curricula in the region and around the world.



“I believe the best ways to fill the gap are broader and bolder (education) reforms, and consistent collaboration between the private and public sectors to build momentum for STEM adoption across private and public schools, homes, activity centers, camps and youth programs, with this model as the foundation for all education,” said Hakim.

Proper analysis of employment trends is also important when preparing for the future as it provides valuable pointers for educators and policymakers. A survey by education provider Pearson Global, for example, found that 79 percent of respondents felt they should do more to develop their knowledge of STEM subjects.

“An understanding of in-demand skills such as coding, UX (user experience) design, cloud computing and analytical reasoning helps people to expand their knowledge and capabilities and set themselves apart from other (job) candidates,” said Whale.

She also listed creative thinking, reasoning, collaboration, strong interpersonal communication, emotional quotient, diversity and cultural intelligence as ranking high among sought-after personal skills in the job market.



The Fourth Industrial Revolution is being fueled by a fusion of technologies that blur the lines between the physical, digital and biological and the key to success in the job market during this era will be to welcome change and celebrate it, according to Emma Whale, vice president of Schools education company Pearson Middle East. (Supplied)

The half-life of job skills – meaning the amount of time it takes for half of the knowledge associated with those skills to become irrelevant – has fallen

from 30 years to an average of just six years. As a result, Whale said: "Companies in the future will look at hiring candidates with a desirable mix of hard and soft skills." Hard skills are related to technical knowledge and training, while soft skills are personality traits such as leadership and communication.

While endorsing the value of a broad academic grounding, she said it is important for students with a clear idea of the industries they might want to work in to follow a clear vocational pathway, which can provide a faster track to employment.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is being fueled by a fusion of technologies that blur the lines between the physical, digital and biological. The key to success in the job market during this era will be to welcome change and celebrate it, said Whale.

"It's time for all of us to begin acquiring skills that will make us valuable resources in the future workplace," she added.

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[Yemen court begins trial of Houthi Leaders](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-07-08 22:02

AL-MUKALLA: A Yemeni military court in the government-controlled city of Marib held the initial session of the trial of Iran-backed Houthi leaders on Tuesday, accused of masterminding the coup against the internationally recognized government of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi in 2015 and the subsequent military campaign.

The defendants faced charges of forming a terrorist armed group called Ansar Allah, colluding with the Lebanese group Hezbollah and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), revolting against the republican system, putting Masur Hadi under house arrest and trying to kill him.

Along with the movement's leader, Abdul Malik Al-Houthi, among the 175 accused figures were Mohammed Al-Houthi, a member of the country's Supreme Political Council, Abdullah Yahiya Al-Hakim, a senior military commander, the Houthi ambassador to Iran, Ibrahim Mohammed Al-Daylami, and dozens of ministers, intelligence, military and political officials.

According to the official Saba news agency, the prosecution demanded the maximum available punishments for the defendants, including the death penalty.

By the end of the session, the court decided to publish the names of the accused figures in local newspapers and demanded that they appear the same court on Sept. 25, or face prosecution in absentia.

With the help of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Houthi militias seized control of the capital Sana'a in September 2014, and placed Mansur Hadi under house arrest, dismissing his government and replacing it with their allied Revolutionary Committees. The Houthis killed Saleh in late 2017 after leading a brief military uprising in Sana'a.

Dismantled Houthi cell

Also in Marib, Yemen's defense and interior ministries said on Tuesday that

the Houthi cell that was dismantled in Marib's Wadi Abeda area late last month was responsible for masterminding many attacks against government, military and security targets in Marib.

In a joint statement, the two ministries said the cell, led by Mohsen Saleh Subayan, planned and carried out attacks against local security forces and Saudi-led coalition troops in Marib, planted landmines and improvised explosive devices, assassinated military and security officers and smuggled weapons. The statement noted that Subayan, along with several of his associates, were killed when they resisted security forces that came to capture them, and that drones, weapons and munitions were found in the area.

Local security and military officers believe that Houthi sleeper cells were involved in directing drone and missile strikes that targeted military camps in Marib since late 2015. The deadliest Houthi attack was in January 2020, when a drone and missiles fired by the Houthis landed at a camp, killing more than 110 soldiers, triggering heavy clashes between government forces and the Houthis, which disrupted diplomatic efforts to reach a peace deal led by the UN Yemen envoy Martin Griffiths.

Official media reported on Tuesday that Prime Minister Maen Abdul Malik Saeed called the governor of Marib, Sultan Al-Arada, to congratulate him on dismantling the cell and foiling plots to undermine security and stability. Marib has hosted thousands of Yemeni army troops and coalition forces since the beginning of the Saudi-led military operation in Yemen in March 2015.



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Yemeni tribes who fight Houthis 'should not be let down,' says army
UN warns Yemen on brink of famine again

US military commander stresses the importance of Lebanon's stability

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Wed, 2020-07-08 22:23

BEIRUT: Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, commander of the US Central Command (USCENTCOM), has stressed the importance of the strong partnership between the US and the Lebanese Armed Forces.

He reaffirmed the importance of preserving Lebanon's security, stability, and sovereignty, and underscored the importance of the strong partnership between the US and Lebanese militaries.

Gen. McKenzie arrived in Beirut amid protests against this visit organized by supporters of Hezbollah on the road leading to Rafic Hariri International Airport, while Lebanese troops took extreme measures to prevent protesters from approaching McKenzie's convoy.

The Information Office of the Lebanese Presidency issued a statement noting: "(General) McKenzie met with President Michel Aoun who praised the cooperation between the Lebanese and US armies in matters of training and armament, and hoped to further develop the military cooperation between Lebanon and the US."

Aoun pointed out to "the support that the Lebanese Army received from the US Army in 2017 during the battle of Aarsal against Daesh and Al-Nusra," and added "the (Lebanese) army succeeded in eliminating terrorist dormant cells and continues pursuing them."

The statement noted that McKenzie confirmed the "continuous support of the US military command to the Lebanese army that is defending Lebanon's independence and sovereignty at all levels including combat and continuous high-level training."

Gen. McKenzie was accompanied by USCENTCOM officials and officers, as well as the US Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy Shea, and US Defense Attaché Robert Meine.

The US Embassy in Lebanon said: "The one-day visit to Lebanon also included meetings with senior Lebanese political and defense leaders, including representatives of the Ministry of Defense and the Lebanese Armed Forces, office calls at the US Embassy, and a brief stop at memorials honoring the memory of those who have perished in service to their country."

Since 1997, the US has classified Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. Hezbollah's influence on state affairs has increased since the formation of Hassan Diab's government last January.

This was McKenzie's fourth visit since he assumed his duties on March 28, 2019 as successor to Gen. Joseph Votel, commanding US military operations in several countries, including Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Afghanistan. The visit of the general coincided with the announcement by the Lebanese army command of the closure of three roads in Hermel region, used to smuggle goods between Lebanon and Syria. In addition, it announced the closure of two illegal crossings and five roads that are used to smuggle stolen cars and goods.

Smugglers between Lebanon and Syria operate under the protection of Hezbollah, which asserts that it is not capable of curtailing smuggling. Sheikh Naim Qassem, deputy secretary-general of Hezbollah, said on Tuesday "Hezbollah is unable to close illegal crossings and holds the army responsible for achieving the task."

On Wednesday, opposition lawmakers and activists ridiculed the Hezbollah chief, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, after he called for "an industrial and agricultural jihad to cultivate the land to avoid starvation."

Nasrallah's opponents called it a "sign of impotence," given his additional call for "negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF)."

Nasrallah did not mention any specific reforms, while he continued his campaign against the US ambassador, calling on her to: "Stop interfering (in Lebanese affairs)." He also renewed his calls for "opening up to China, Iran, and Syria."

Lawmaker Rola Al-Tabash, member of the Future Parliamentary bloc, said that Nasrallah's words were like those of a man "who kills a man and (then attends) his funeral."

Former lawmaker Fadi Karam, member of the Lebanese Forces bloc, said that Hezbollah's leadership "depict national meltdown as if the solution was only confined to securing foodstuffs from rooftops, balconies, or from the bankrupt axis. For us, life is not only about eating and sleeping, but it is also about education, culture, institutions justice, citizenship, and independent judiciary."

Meanwhile, Qassem Tajeddine, 64, recently returned to Lebanon after his release from a US prison. The US State Department warned that any US citizen who did business with him would "be subject to severe sanctions."

Al-Hadath news channel quoted a State Department official saying: "Tajeddine, who provides financial support to Hezbollah, will remain on the US sanctions list and the State Department objects to his release from prison, but respects the court's decision. Sanctions will be imposed on any American who deals with Tajeddine."

Tajeddine spent three years in prison, and was released two years before the end of his five-years sentence. In May 2009, Tajeddine was first accused of being an important contributor to Hezbollah; he was arrested in 2017 in Casablanca, Morocco, at the request of US authorities, and was extradited to the US where he was accused of "circumventing the US sanctions against terrorist groups and money laundering."



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US general sees smaller but enduring troop presence in Iraq
Pompeo: We are trying to prevent Iran from selling crude oil to Hezbollah

[Pompeo hints at Iran links in killing of Iraq expert](#)

Wed, 2020-07-08 19:21

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday demanded justice over the killing of a prominent Iraqi extremist expert and highlighted threats against him by Iran-linked groups.

Hisham Al-Hashemi, an internationally known scholar whose vast contacts inside Iraq made him a mediator among rivals, was gunned down outside his Baghdad home late Monday by masked assailants on motorcycles.

"In the days leading up to his death he was repeatedly threatened by Iran backed armed groups," Pompeo told a news conference in Washington, without

explicitly blaming Tehran.

“The United States joins partner nations in strongly condemning his assassination and call(ing) for the government of Iraq to bring to justice the perpetrators of this terrible crime... swiftly,” he said.

Hashemi was an authoritative voice on extremist movements including Daesh, which are violently opposed to Iran.

But he infuriated Tehran-backed factions in Iraq’s Hashed Al-Shaabi military network through his support of popular protests last year against a Baghdad government seen as too close to Iran.

Some experts have voiced fear of a new violent phase in Iraq and believe the turning point may have come in January when a US strike in Baghdad killed a top Iranian general, Qasem Soleimani.

President Donald Trump’s administration has sought to check Iran’s regional activities and choke its economy and frequently seeks to throw a spotlight on purported nefarious activities backed by the clerical state.



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Iraqi analyst Hisham Al-Hashimi killed in Baghdad after pro-Iran militia threats
Iraqi analyst Hisham Al-Hashimi killed in Baghdad after pro-Iran militia threats

Wedding season brings new virus outbreak in West Bank

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RAMALLAH: By the end of May, the Palestinian Authority appeared to have quashed a coronavirus outbreak in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, with only around 400 confirmed cases and just two fatalities in the territory, following a nearly three-month lockdown.

Then the wedding invitations went out.

Over the last few weeks, infections have skyrocketed across the West Bank, with more than 4,000 new cases and an additional 15 deaths. Authorities blame the surge on widespread neglect of social distancing and mask-wearing – and on the summer wedding season.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh told a Cabinet meeting on Monday that 82% of cases in the West Bank were linked to weddings and funerals, saying that such large public gatherings must stop “immediately” or security forces would start breaking them up.

The Palestinian Authority imposed a strict five-day lockdown on Friday, forcing nearly all businesses to close and heavily restricting travel between towns and cities. The stay-at-home orders were renewed for another five days on Tuesday.

The epicenter of the renewed outbreak is in Hebron, the largest Palestinian city and a commercial hub of the territory. It accounts for around 75% of all active cases and more than two-thirds of all deaths, according to Ali Abed Rabu, a Palestinian Health Ministry official.

Palestinian weddings, usually held in the summer months, are major community events in which large families typically invite hundreds of guests. They feature lavish meals, often served buffet-style, as well as dancing and music late into the night.

“Hebronites are proud of their traditions and maintain them even at risky times like these,” Abed Rabu said. “They brag about how many people attend and how many sheep they slaughter to feed them.”

The virus causes mild to moderate flu-like symptoms in most patients, who recover within a few weeks. But it can cause severe illness or death, particularly among the old or infirm. The virus is highly contagious and can be spread by those showing no symptoms.

That makes weddings and other large public gatherings particularly risky. A major outbreak could overwhelm the Palestinian health sector, which has just 350 ventilators for a population of more than 2.5 million people.

Hebron’s mayor, Tayseer Abu Snaineh, points to other potential vectors, including the fact that large numbers of workers and merchants in Hebron travel back and forth from Israel, which is battling a much larger outbreak

that has also surged in recent weeks.

Abu Snaineh said the Palestinian Authority, which governs parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, has tried to prevent large gatherings. But Palestinian security forces are not allowed to operate in a large part of downtown Hebron known as H2, which under past agreements is under complete Israeli military control.

Several hundred hard-line Jewish settlers live in H2, protected by Israeli troops. The area is also home to more than 30,000 Palestinians.

With the PA barred from the area and the Israeli military focused on securing the settlements, Abu Snaineh said there is no authority to impose virus restrictions. As a result, residents have held large weddings and other gatherings in recent weeks that appear to have accelerated the outbreak.

"People celebrate, hug each other and eat together in this area with no restrictions," he said.

Odeh Al-Rajabi, the head of an informal local committee that administers H2, says it has been reaching out to people and has convinced many to hold small family weddings rather than the usual massive feasts.

"Some people feel it is embarrassing to not hold a feast and invite people, but we tell them not to feel embarrassed, that we all understand, it's an emergency situation," he said.

The committee hopes to convince most large families to sign a code of conduct in the coming days that would prohibit such gatherings.

Abu Snaineh, the mayor, said ultra-conservative Muslims have also defied restrictions in order to pray in mosques. One group, known as Hezb Al-Tahrir, has openly called on people to defy restrictions on group prayers, accusing the PA of "using coronavirus as a pretext to fight Islam." The group is particularly influential in Hebron, where the population is more conservative than in other parts of the West Bank.

Alaa Abu Diab, a popular Palestinian comedian, posted a video this week in which he criticized people for holding weddings during the pandemic.

"I've just seen a video of a wedding party in which people are dancing and hugging as if there is no coronavirus," he said. "Why are you hugging and kissing each other in these sweaty, crowded gatherings?"

He also mocked those trafficking in conspiracy theories about the restrictions. "Who in the hell is conspiring against who? The whole world is collapsing, and you say it's a conspiracy."



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