

Rania Khaled Al Hussaini: Media Literacy for Future Education



What are the main lines of action of the media literacy department at the Doha Centre for Media Freedom?



The **Media Literacy program** at the Doha Centre for Media Freedom encourages citizens to become critical thinkers rather than passive receivers to all news related information. Most people are on line in Qatar, certainly the young, and are inundated with an abundance of information, news and opinions.

MIL contributes to the ability to **analyse value and select information and to understand the criteria applied to create journalistic output**. As the region is still developing and overcoming bumps, we believe it is imperative that the people understand how media work. The centre conducted a survey that showed that 80% of Qatari schools do not teach media literacy courses and 90% of the students use media daily. Our objective is that all schools in Qatar will implement a MIL-program program by 2015, so as to ensure a media literate future for the Qataris and non-Qataris in this country.



We launched the MIL Program after the Alliance of Civilizations Conference in

Doha in December 2011, and now we have 45 schools participating in the MIL-program, with

teachers and students participating in our training program and other activities.

This month of April we are having the first MIL Awards Ceremony, to distribute the awards for the first three winners in the School News project in which almost 280 students of the participating schools took part.

How is the media literacy understood in the Arabic context?
What are its main objectives?



Media literacy is understood as a discipline to **enable the students to interpret and make informed judgments as users of information and media.** At the same time our program teaches

the students about media through practicing: they become skilful creators and producers of information and media messages in their own right.

The **main objectives** of the media literacy program are:

- **Create** youth who are equipped with **critical and analytical thinking skills** & teach them how to evaluate media content.
- **Transforming** average media consumers to active media participants, and develop a strategy **to empower citizens to engage** in developing national media.
- Incorporating the **ML program in School's Curriculum** throughout Qatar and the Middle East.
- **Targeting** not only students, but teachers as well as officials and regulators whom are

involved in designing the Youth Education and Development plans to **incorporate Media in various aspects of lives.**

In the long run our aim is to **empower the students** to have equitable access to information and knowledge and to prepare them for tomorrow's information society.

What are the main challenges of media literacy in that context?

As the media literacy program is still new in the region it is a challenge to overcome the barrier between the lack of understanding of the media and implementing the media literacy program. Many students and teachers have never heard of Media Literacy.

As it is difficult to implement any new concept on such a large scale a few challenges are always bound to pop up. In addition, as far as cultural constraints are concerned, we faced many students who would love to work in the media or at least study media and news, but with family barriers who prevent them to pursue or practice further. In addition, one of the main challenges is the lack of Digital information Skills for students & teacher so we need to equip the students with the digital information skills and main knowledge that will help them to understand all the digital communication tools that bombarding our lives.

DCMF recently joined the UNESCO-UNAOC University Network on Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue (MILID). What do you expect from this joint work?

I expect this to give us more chances to



participate in events that we can be a part of and bring over to Qatar. As the media literacy program teaches students to be junior reporters we cover many important events and really teach the students about many different cultural differences and how to overcome them. It is a good chance to share experiences, practices, learn from each other.

What are your expectations regarding cooperation and dialogue with European institutions?

I expect future cooperation's with European institutions to give us a wider database of information and experience to implement MIL in the Gulf region.

It is important to understand other views and perspectives of media and to teach the youth through media literacy on how media is understood in the West, how it is viewed in the Middle East. It is interesting and important to take a critical look at

how we view each other through the media and how we can improve to get a better understanding.

Is DCMF planning further cooperation initiatives with other international institutions (in Asia, Latin America, for example)?



Definitely. We are looking for all possible cooperation and collaboration.

Though DCMF first objective to get Media Literacy on the map in Qatar and the Gulf region, we have a great faith in international relationships and cooperation. Media Literacy is a relatively young discipline, certainly in our part of the world, and we are eager to learn from the MIL-practices in other continents.

What are the gaps or weaknesses in the field of Media Literacy in your opinion? What actions or projects need to be developed/encouraged in the area of Media Literacy?

There **are few gaps in the media literacy field** as the media literacy program is still a new idea in the Gulf. It is sometimes hard to find the correct people to train the ML program and find senior media literacy experts who can help implement the program in a framework that works with the students of the Gulf.

Regarding the actions or projects we need to **introduce a data base that include all information, MIL projects and practical approaches of launching MIL in various parts of the world**, so we can have different MIL practical References that suit everyone with best practices from different parts in the world.

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