

## **This House believes education is worthless without freedom of speech**

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*

According to the independent watchdog Freedom House, in practice this right is frequently restricted through tactics that include censorship, restrictive press legislation, and harassment of journalists, bloggers and others who voice their opinions, as well as crackdowns on religious minorities and other suppression of religious freedom.

According to their research, only 17% of the world's population has access to a totally free press.

But just how important is freedom of speech in the provision of education? According to the Philosopher AC Grayling, *"Without free speech there cannot be genuine education and research, enquiry, debate, exchange of information, challenges to falsehood, questioning of governments, proposal and examination of opinion."*

The Arab Knowledge Report 2009 (sponsored by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation and the United Nations Development Programme) states *"it is impossible to rely solely upon improvements in the domain of economic freedoms to bring about an Arab knowledge revival in development if there is a continued imposition of curbs on other freedoms, especially those of thoughts and expression. Relying on economic freedoms alone, in fact, leads to diminished development whose sustainability cannot be guaranteed. In addition, hopes of achieving a fair distribution of development's social yields will also recede in the shadow of an undemocratic climate in which the people have no oversight and in which corruption burgeons."* (AKR 2009, P. 61)

*"The freedom of thought and expression are still the weakest link in the cluster of freedoms and environments for advancement of Arab knowledge performance. And the possibility of separating the various freedoms and defining the role of each in the advancement of knowledge performance remain among the most problematic of considerations that must be addressed."* (AKR 2009)

In its 2007 report, 'The Road Not Traveled - Education reform in the Middle East and North Africa', The World Bank concludes:

*“Rote learning still dominates teaching, and little emphasis is put on problem solving and interactive teaching methods that would demand initiative from students. Foreign language and science do not take a sufficient share of the curricula. While pedagogical methods adopted worldwide incorporate inquiry-based learning most MENA countries continue to use a more traditional model of pedagogy (for example; copying from the blackboard and little interaction between teachers and students).”*

*In higher education, none of the MENA institutions has featured prominently in international university rankings or is producing significant research. Only 22.6% of MENA students pursue Science, technical and engineering degrees, much less than in other fast growing developing countries. “*

But should absolute freedom of speech be expected in education?

Many would argue we don't have complete freedom in anything else that we do. In the UK, article 10 (the right to freedom of expression) is tempered and superseded by the UK law preventing incitement to religious hatred and racial hatred. Having these checks on freedom of speech doesn't prevent the UK having 4 of the top 10 universities in the world. (source: QS rankings: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/sep/08/worlds-top-100-universities-2010#data>)

Another argument is that although free speech may be considered good, speech must necessarily be less free in a plural society. As the sociologist Tariq Modood puts it, 'If people are to occupy the same political space without conflict, they mutually have to limit the extent to which they subject each others' fundamental beliefs to criticism'.

Furthermore, some would argue that without education, the concept of freedom of speech in a society is redundant.

UNESCO's mission statement on the Right to Education reads: *“Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits...Education is a powerful tool by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully as citizens.”*

In 2000, 147 heads of State and Government, and 189 nations identified eight Millennium Development Goals of which 'achieve universal primary education' was one.

In the foreword to UNESCO's Education for All Global Monitoring Report, Director General Irina Bokova writes: *“Education is at the front line. Not only do schools teach literacy and lay the groundwork for productive lives, they also play a crucial role in promoting tolerance, peace and understanding between peoples, and in fighting discrimination of all kinds. Schools are the place where indigenous groups can learn to read and write in their mother tongue, where cultural diversity can thrive and where children can try to escape the hardships of conflict and displacement.”*