

# **BFDE: Education and development in Egypt**

## **INTRO:**

In order to assess a country's level of development, it is common to use the Human Development Index (HDI) as a reference. It is a measure of a country's overall social and economic development calculated by the United Nations Development Programme and is intended to provide a more comprehensive picture of a country's development than traditional economic measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The HDI value ranges from 0 to 1, with countries closer to 1 considered to have higher levels of human development. The HDI takes into account the following factors: life expectancy, education, and income indices.

This research paper is going to focus on the last two factors by analysing Egypt's education system and its challenges.

## **HISTORY OF EGYPT'S EDUCATION SYSTEM:**

Egypt's current educational philosophy is founded upon three cultural legacies: British, westernized Egyptian, and traditional Islamic Egyptian. These influences can be explained by Egypt's rich history:

In the early nineteenth century, the Ottoman rulers intended to establish the national army by developing an educated class of obedient administrators and army officers at the start of the 19th century, so they put in place the first version of the European-style education system. Then, during the British protectorate in 1882–1922, a segregated, state-controlled educational system that served the interests of the British aristocracy while limiting opportunities for the general public emerged due to a drastic reduction in educational investment. Egyptians and non-English-speaking foreigners were left with little choice but to rely on private and religious education. The goal of this downsizing was to reduce the likelihood of educated nationalists and to repurpose graduates as administrators in the colonial bureaucracy.

However, education became a key component of the modernization effort during Gamal Abdel Nasser's presidency in the 1950s, which led to the gradual introduction of free education for all Egyptian citizens, beginning in schools and later expanding to higher education. As a result, the Egyptian curriculum was adopted as a regional model and had a significant impact on other Arab educational systems, many of which used Egyptian-trained teachers. Nasser further ensured that all university graduates would have employment opportunities in the public sector, which resulted in a sharp rise in enrollment rates at universities in later decades.

As a result, a dichotomous educational culture emerged, with one track emphasising traditional Islamic values and religious education, while the other focused on Western science and preparing students for employment in the public sector. The Egyptian government recognizes the conflicts that exist between Islam and Western science and is working in order to create educational objectives that support both. Therefore, despite conflicts between an autocratic government that adheres to the Islamic tradition of the protective father and

initiatives to democratize education, there has been an increase in the number of schools and technical schools in Egypt after independence.

### **Inequality and Literacy in Egypt**

According to the Global Competitiveness Report for the 2017-18 period of the World Economic Forum (WEF), the quality of education in Egypt is ranked 133rd out of 137 countries measured. This ranking reflects the full extent of inequality and literacy problems in Egypt. The literacy rate stands at 75.8%, with a significant gender gap: 64.3% for females and 87.3% for males. Furthermore, the education system is plagued by disparities in access, quality, and resources based on factors such as region, gender, and socio-economic status.

The education system in Egypt faces numerous challenges that contribute to these disparities. Firstly, the access to education is still limited in Egypt, especially in rural areas, where schools are often poorly equipped. The limited number of schools in these areas in addition to inadequate infrastructures (according to UNESCO, about 20% of school buildings are unfit for use) leads to overcrowding.

Furthermore, the Egyptian curriculum and teaching methods have long been criticised for being outdated and overly reliant on rote memorization at the expense of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This approach often leads to students being unprepared for higher education and the labour market, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

According to a Unesco report, Egypt's average teacher-student ratio at the primary education level is 27:1; while the global average is 24:1 (UNESCO,2021). This disparity becomes even more pronounced at the secondary education level, where the average ratio is 19:1 compared to the global average of 16:1. It is important to note that these are only average figures, and in many underprivileged and rural areas, the teacher-student ratios can be much worse, with some schools reporting a ratio over 50:1 (Loveluck,2012).

Moreover, while public education is free, many families opt to pay for private tutoring due to the poor quality of public schools. In fact, a recent study found that nearly 70% of households in Egypt reported using private tutoring, with the average household spending 42% of their income on such services. This practice is particularly prevalent among middle- and upper class families, leaving lower income families at a disadvantage.

The overreliance on private tutoring not only puts financial strain on families but also exacerbates inequalities in education access. As private tutoring becomes more common, those who cannot afford it are left behind, leading to a high dropout rate among students who cannot keep up with their peers. According to UNESCO, the dropout rate in Egypt's public schools is around 12%, with the majority of dropouts occurring in the first four years of schooling (UNESCO,2019).

This growing dependency on private tutoring also negatively impacts the quality of education in public schools. Since private tutors often receive better compensation than public school teachers, it discourages qualified educators from pursuing careers in public schools. As a result, public schools are left with less-experienced and less-qualified teachers, which only serves to widen the quality gap between public and private education.

### **Measures taken by the Egyptian Government**

While the Egyptian government has taken several steps to address the challenges facing its education system, it faces significant obstacles in implementing meaningful reforms. One of the biggest challenges is the country's difficult economic situation. Egypt is grappling with high rates of inflation, unemployment, and debt, which limit the government's ability to invest in education and provide resources for reform efforts. As a result, the education system remains underfunded, with inadequate resources and infrastructure to support student learning.

In response to these challenges, the Egyptian government has launched several initiatives at improving the quality of education. The **Education 2.0** reform plan, launched in 2018, aims to shift the focus of education from memorization to critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The new curriculum includes a focus on technology, foreign languages, and practical skills to prepare students for the future. The government has also increased its investment in education, with 6% of GDP allocated to the sector in 2021, up from 3.8% in 2014.

By 2022, the Egyptian government had achieved some progress in implementing the Education 2.0 reform plan. The new curriculum had been partially introduced, and teacher training programs were being developed. However, the full implementation will likely take time and is dependent on the government's commitment to overcoming political challenges, providing necessary resources, and creating a supportive environment that fosters the successful execution of the reform plan.

### **Suggested Solutions and International Examples**

As we noted, despite the recent government efforts more needs to be done to address the deeply rooted issues of inequality and literacy in the Egyptian education system. Various reforms could be adopted to improve the educational system in the country.

One such reform is investing in early childhood education. Research has consistently shown that investing in early childhood education can have long-lasting positive effects on educational outcomes and social mobility. Countries like Finland and Sweden have prioritized early childhood education and achieved remarkable results, with high literacy rates and low inequality in education.

Another important reform is addressing the gender gap in education as it is crucial to achieving overall equality and improving literacy rates. Successful examples include

Bangladesh, which has achieved gender parity in education through targeted interventions, such as providing stipends and direct cash transfers for girls' education and launching awareness campaigns to change societal attitudes

Involving local communities in the education process is also crucial to ensuring that the unique needs of each region are addressed. An example of this can be found in Brazil, where the "Escola Família Agrícola" program successfully engages rural communities in the education process, leading to better educational outcomes and reduced dropout rates.

### **CONCLUSION:**

In closing, despite the numerous political, social, and economic challenges that Egypt has weathered, it has made commendable strides in development over the years, most notably in recent times. The country's HDI has risen from 0.452 points in 1980 to 0.731 points in 2021, slightly surpassing the world average based on 186 countries. The Egyptian government's introduction of reforms aimed at bolstering the economy, granting education and healthcare to the populace, lessening poverty, and advocating gender equality has encouraged progress. Nevertheless, there is still more work to be done in tackling the persisting issues of poverty, inequality, and governance.

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