

Egypt¹

I. A Brief Description of the Egyptian Higher Education System

Egypt operates two parallel education systems: the secular system and the religious, or Al-Azhar system. The secular system is organized as follows:

- (a) The first level known as basic education covers the first 8 eight years of state-sponsored schooling.
- (b) The second level divides students between three-year general academic secondary schools and three or five-year vocational schools.
- (c) The third level is comprised of universities. Universities also include teacher-training colleges that used to be separate institutes.

The Al-Azhar system, which maintains separate facilities for male and female from primary to university level, enrolls 4 percent of the country's total students, and is responsible for conveying the mission of Islam and revealing its contribution to humanity's welfare and progress. In this system, primary school extends over the first 6 years, and preparatory school for the next three years. Students who successfully complete 4 years of secondary school can enroll at Al-Azhar University.² Al-Azhar University, which is considered to be the bastion of Islamic knowledge in Egypt, was founded in AD 970.

The higher education sector in Egypt is comprised of universities and institutions of technical and professional training. The system is made up of 12 public universities, 51 public non-university institutions, and 4 private (for profit) universities. In May 2000, there were 18 pending applications to open additional private for profit higher education institutions. Of the 51 non-university institutions, 47 are two-year middle technical institutes (MTI), and 4 are four or five-year higher technical institutes (World Bank, 2000:1).

Depending on the field, a bachelor's degree is obtained in between three and seven years of study. Entry into the secular university system is based on the results of the Secondary Leaving Examination Certificate, and is highly competitive. Traditionally, only students attending general academic secondary schools were eligible to matriculate; however since 1970 universities have been enrolling some students from vocational schools. The Placement Bureau of the Ministry of Higher Education controls admission, and there is a *numerus clausus* imposed by the Supreme Council of Universities (SCU) on admission at institutional and state levels.

In order to be admitted to the Al-Azhar University system, students must hold a Secondary School Certificate from the Al-Azhar education system and a Certificate of Koran Recitation from a Koran Recitation Institute or hold an Al-Azhar diploma.

Higher education in Egypt can be categorized into the public higher education sector, comprised of public universities and non-university institutions, which is dominant and

¹ The Egypt country profile is a "work in progress" as we are still collecting information on higher education costs borne by students and their families.

² See http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/int_egypt.html

large, and the private higher education sector mainly comprised of a small number of private universities.

Non-university education is offered by industrial, commercial, and technical institutes that provide 2-year courses leading to diplomas in accountancy, secretarial work, insurance, computer or health sciences and electronics. Technical education schools provide 5-year courses leading to advanced technical education diplomas in commercial, industrial, and agricultural fields.³

Although the American University in Cairo (AUC) has existed for 82 years as a private university, Egypt only legalized Egyptian private universities in 1992 when the People's Assembly passed a Law # 101 allowing the establishment of private universities. The Law sets forth various regulations to exert a minimal level of government control. For example, the Minister for Education must approve the appointment of private university presidents, and non-Egyptians cannot occupy leading posts in private universities without the ministry's approval. In addition, the Supreme Council of Universities indirectly supervises private universities and is responsible for monitoring standards to ensure that graduation certificates from state and private universities represent an equal education level.⁴ In May 2002, the private universities' committee was replaced with the *private universities' council*. The council has the same powers as the Supreme Council of Universities, which regulates public universities.⁵

With the exception of the American University in Cairo, private higher education institutions in Egypt are perceived by many as institutions that “sell” degrees to those who can afford them.⁶ The establishment of private universities in Egypt has been opposed on the moral grounds that the ability to pay fees should provide no advantage in access to higher education.⁷ Critics of private higher education in Egypt also argue that private higher education is at odds with the principles of the *1952 Revolution*, which called for equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens.

Access and Participation in Higher Education

Egypt, which has one of the largest higher education systems in the developing world (1.670 million students in 1999/2000), relies on two-year technical institutes to continue providing access to all secondary school graduates while protecting the already bloated universities. Technical institutes enroll 40 percent of all secondary school graduates. Due to the lack of adequate financial, human, and material resources, most of these institutes provide poor quality education and are perceived by some observers as no more than “*academic parking lots*” for surplus students.⁸

³ “Education System in Egypt” Available at <http://firewall.unesco.org/iau/fre/educg.html>

⁴ http://www.wes.org/wenrarch/fall96/eg_f96.htm

⁵ See Mona El-Nahhas (2002). “Looking Over Private Universities Shoulders.” Available at <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/585/eg6.htm>

⁶ Iman Farag (2000). “Higher Education in Egypt: The Realpolitik of Privatization.” Available at http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News18/text11.html

⁷ <http://www.akunet.org/aku/creport/cha3-3-1.htm>

⁸ Thomas O. Eisemon & Jamil Salmi (1995). “Increasing Equity in Higher Education: Strategies and Lessons from Experience.” Available at <http://fiu/~iied/equity.htm>

Approximately 20 percent of the 18-22 age group (1.5 million students, of which 40 percent were females) were enrolled in higher education in 1998/99. Three quarters attended universities, and 25 percent were enrolled in non-university sector institutions. The overwhelming majority (99 percent) of all students attended public institutions.⁹ The number of higher education students per 100,000 inhabitants is 1,900 in Egypt compared to 1,132 in Morocco; 1,236 in Algeria; and 1,253 in Tunisia.¹⁰

Studies on the social class and educational backgrounds of state university students have revealed inequalities of access to what are considered as high status/elite faculties. Studies have indicated that most students in these faculties attended prestigious private secondary schools. This is because graduates of such schools generally do very well on their final secondary school examinations, which ensures them access to what are considered as elite faculties.¹¹ Currently 98 percent of graduates from secondary schools enter higher education.¹²

Governance and Control of Higher Education

There are three organs for governance and control of higher education in Egypt: the Ministry of Higher Education, the Supreme Council of Universities (SCU), and the Central Administration of Al-Azhar Institutes.

The Ministry of Higher Education has jurisdiction over higher education through supervision and coordination of all post-secondary education, planning, policy formulation, and quality control. It also oversees teacher training for basic education.

The Supreme Council of Universities, founded in 1950, formulates the overall policy of university education and scientific research in universities and determines the number of students to be admitted to each faculty in each university.¹³

Supervision and administration of the Al-Azhar higher education system is the responsibility of the *Central Administration of Al-Azhar Institutes*, which is a department of the Supreme Council of Al-Azhar that is responsible for the development of the general policy and planning to enable the propagation of Islamic culture and Arabic language through Al-Azhar higher education system.¹⁴

Financing of Higher Education in Egypt

In official discourse, education in Egypt is “free” from basic to higher education. The government provides the lion’s share of funding to both education systems i.e. secular

⁹ World Bank (2000). Arab Republic of Egypt. Higher Education. Report # PID9033 p.1

¹⁰ Nader Fergany (2000). “Arab Higher Education and Development: An Overview.” Cairo: Almishkat Center for Research.

¹¹ Iman Farag (2000) op cit.

¹² See World Bank (2002). Arab Republic of Egypt Higher Education Enhancement Project (HEEP) p.41 Washington D.C.: The World Bank

¹³ The structure and functions of the Supreme Council of Universities are discussed in detail in “Supreme Council of Universities” Available at <http://www.frcu.eg/www.supreme.html>

¹⁴ See http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/int_egypt.html

and religious. Only parents of children who attend private schools, which also receive some government funding, pay tuition fees.¹⁵

While officially the state is responsible for financing higher education in Egypt, the state's share of higher education finance for universities was reduced to 85 percent in 1994-1995, leaving the universities to generate the remaining 15 percent through various revenue diversification strategies.

Sanyal (1998:16), and the World Bank (2000:40-41) identify the following revenue diversification strategies adopted by Egyptian universities:

- (a) Charging nominal tuition fees for alternative academic programs that are perceived to be of high quality and introducing other relevant fees. For example, state universities have introduced foreign language programs for which they charge tuition. Some public universities charge £E1,000 as tuition for a degree program in Commerce which uses English as a medium of instruction. The number of applicants in some degree programs in public universities exceeds available spaces, a phenomenon which gives room for universities to charge tuition. While the tuition charged in this case is still only about 33 percent of the actual cost of the program, this arrangement sets a precedent towards cost recovery in public institutions (World Bank, 2002:40). Also, in recent years, a new system of admission to the faculties of Law, Commerce, and Arts allows a less qualified student to obtain a place on paying an admission fee of £E 360 (Sanyal, op cit). The impact of this practice on the quality has been negative as manifested by a high number of repeating students in universities.

Egyptian students pay between £E30-£E150 per year as a token tuition fee in government funded universities. In addition, they also pay necessary equipment, books, transportation, and residence fees. The practice of charging token tuition fees in Egyptian public universities goes as far back as 1924 when the Egyptian University (now Cairo University) started charging £E30 per year for all faculties with the exception of the pharmacology department that charged £E20 per year. This university also imposed a non-refundable examination fee of £E1.¹⁶ Tuition fee in private universities range from £E15,000-25,000. The American University in Cairo-the oldest private university in Egypt, charges a tuition fee of US\$ 2,813 for 6 credits and US\$ 469 for each additional credit.

- (b) Income generation by specialized university centers from:
 - (1) cooperation with industry;
 - (2) patent rights;
 - (3) provision of continuing education to industrial employees;
 - (4) access to laboratory and scientific equipment;
 - (5) manufacturing intermediate industrial products;

¹⁵ PES (2002). "Education Around the World: Egypt." Available at http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/int_egypt.html

¹⁶ Yunan L. Rizk (2000). "Al-Ahram: A Diwan of Contemporary Life." Available at <http://www.ahram.org/eg/weekly/200/511/chrncls.htm>

- (6) extension services
- (7) language instruction, and
- (8) private donations, especially for student fellowships.

Table 1
Higher Education Expenses Borne by Parents and Students
First Degree, Academic Year 2002/03
National currency Egyptian Pound (LE) converted to \$US by 2002 purchasing power parity
estimate \$1 = 1.94

		Public			Private	
		<i>Low Public</i>	<i>Moderate Public</i>	<i>High Public</i>	<i>Low Private</i>	<i>High Private</i>
	Special "One-Time" or "Up Front" Fees	LE30 (\$15.5)	LE100 (\$51.5)	LE30 (\$15.5)	LE150 (\$77)	(\$150)
Instructional Expenses	Tuition	LE10 (\$5)	LE350 (\$180)	LE2924 (\$1507)	LE10,000 (\$5,155)	(\$30,000)
	Other Fees	LE75 (\$39)	LE75 (\$39)	LE75 (\$39)	LE200 (\$103)	(\$515)
	Books & Other Educational Expenses	LE195 (\$100)	LE323 (\$170)	LE582 (\$300)	LE1,000 (\$515)	(\$500)
	Subtotal Expenses of Instruction	LE300 (\$154.5)	LE848 (\$440.5)	LE3, 611 (\$1861.5)	LE11,350 (\$5,850)	(\$31,165)
	Lodging	LE35 (\$18)	LE35 (\$18)	LE3880 (\$2000)	LE9, 000 (\$4,639)	(\$1500)
Student Living Expenses	Food	LE776 (\$400)	LE 1,200 (\$618.5)	LE 3880 (\$2000)	LE6, 000 (\$3,093)	(\$2000)
	Transportation	LE 240 (\$123)	LE 330 (\$170)	LE 1,165 (\$600)	LE1700 (\$875)	(\$600)
	Other Personal Expenses	LE 252 (\$130)	LE1,165 (\$600)	LE 3,492 (\$1800)	LE6000 (\$3,093)	(\$3000)
	Subtotal Expenses of Student Living	LE1,303 (\$671)	LE2730 (\$1,406.5)	LE 12,417 (\$6,400)	LE22,700 (\$11,700)	(\$7,100)
	Total Cost to Parent & Student	LE1,603 (\$825.5)	LE3,578 (\$1,847)	LE (\$8,261.5)	LE34,050 (\$17,550)	(\$38,265)

Low Public: public tuition, living at home with parents.

Moderate Public: public tuition paid by less qualified students, living in dormitory or shared apartment.

High Public: high public tuition, living "independent adult."

Low Private: low private tuition, living in dormitory or shared apartment.

High Private: high private tuition, living in dormitory or shared apartment. Tuition and fees are paid in dollars or in the equivalent Egyptian pound using the current exchange rate (Average exchange rate for one dollar in 2002 = LE4.72). The numbers in the table represent the equivalent Purchasing power Parity.

Student Loans in Higher Education in Egypt

In 1998, the *International Finance Corporation (IFC)* conducted an extensive feasibility study on *the market for student loans in post-secondary education in Egypt*. This study recommended *against* launching a student loan program due to the following reasons: (a) limited market size; (b) underdeveloped debt/credit market; (c) cultural attitude uncomfortable with personal debt and loans; and (d) lack of a consumer credit agency (World Bank, 2000 op cit: 41).

The above recommendations notwithstanding, the Egyptian Government by 2000 was planning to establish a *£E100 million-loan program* for needy university students. Under this proposed loan scheme, students who can *prove* that they are in need of financial assistance for education-related expenses will be eligible to receive up to *£E1000 per year* in government loans. The loans are to be interest free and repayment will be spread out over a period of 40 years after graduation.¹⁷

While university officials have applauded the proposed student loan scheme, they are wondering how the already overpopulated universities will cope with the influx of more students who will take advantage of the new loan scheme.

Problems and Challenges in Higher Education in Egypt

Problems and challenges in Egyptian higher education system are analyzed in the World Bank's *Higher Education Enhancement Project*, which is a part of a comprehensive reform strategy for higher education in Egypt. The higher education reform agenda was influenced by the National Conference on Higher Education, held in February 2000, and aims to address Egypt's need to upgrade educational quality in the university sector.

Egyptian higher education sector faces a number of challenges including: (i) antiquated system-wide governance and management; (ii) low quality and relevance at the university level; (iii) low quality and relevance at the middle technical level; and (iv) limited fiscal sustainability of publicly financed enrollments (World Bank, 2000:1).

The problem of financially unsustainable enrollments is related to the dramatic increase in enrollments in university education. For example, enrollments increased by 42 percent between 1997/98 and 1998/99 leading to an 8 percent decline in per -student spending that exacerbated disparities in resource allocation between faculties (World Bank, 2002:41).

While the overall expenditure on education as a proportion of GDP has grown from 3.9 percent in 1991 to 5.9 percent in 1998 with higher education receiving a 28 percent share of total expenditure in 1998, the dramatic growth of the higher education student population in Egypt poses a serious problem in financing higher education. Given the high population growth in higher education, to simply maintain the share of 18-22 age group at its present 20 percent level (this is an official policy) would require on average an additional 60,000 new enrollments in higher education for the next ten years (World Bank, 2000:2). The government has no financial ability to do this, let alone the overstretched limited capacity of the higher education sector.

¹⁷ See <http://www.wes.org/ewenr/00july/middleeast.htm> and Elghawaby, A. (2000). "Student loans needed for rising costs." Available at http://www.metimes.com/2K/issue-4/eg/student_loans_needed.htm

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