3 Chapter *three*

ENABLING CHILDREN TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL: THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

Ensuring that children reach their full potential is critical not only for the success of individual children but also for the continued progress of the entire country. For both these reasons, the Egyptian Government is strongly committed to providing children with opportunities to develop their abilities.

This commitment is illustrated most clearly by Government efforts in the education sector. Within the framework of an education reform programme that began in 1991 with the declaration of education as a matter of national security, a huge investment has been made in expanding access to and improving the quality of schooling. Some 11,000 new basic level schools, for example, were built during the 1990s, contributing to the near achievement of universal primary education in some regions. A new curriculum was introduced at the basic level reflecting contemporary issues and grounded in participatory learning approaches. A large-scale in-service teacher training programme began in 1993/94 as part of efforts to improve learning processes.

Reform efforts are based on a strong political commitment to education in Egypt. Article 15 of the Education Law emphasises the constitutional right of all Egyptian children to basic education starting at the age of six. It states that the State should be committed to provide basic education and make it accessible to children, and that parents should abide by the law throughout the designated eight years of compulsory basic schooling. Article 16 identifies the ultimate goals of basic education as developing the pupils' capabilities and providing them with the necessary values, knowledge, and scientific and vocational skills relevant to their conditions and environment.

This chapter examines the development of children's abilities, within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It focuses in particular on Article 6 of the Convention, which recognises children's right to development in a broad sense, i.e., to mental, emotional, cognitive and social, as well as physical, development, and Article 28, which, building on Article 6, deals with children's right to develop their talents and abilities to their fullest potential.

Section 2 of the chapter looks at indicators of children's abilities, an area where research and information is very limited in the Egyptian context. Section 3 examines factors affecting the development of children's abilities. It focuses on the key institutions – the family, the education system and the mass media - each of which is dealt with specifically by the CRC because of its special importance in the development of children's abilities and in the shaping of their values and beliefs.

2. INDICATORS OF CHILDREN'S ABILITIES

Are the talents and mental and physical abilities of Egyptian children being developed to their fullest potential? This question is of course not possible to answer definitively. There are no standard definitions, simple indicators or ready measures of children's abilities, in contrast to the case of children's survival and health examined in the previous chapter. What is more, children's abilities are age-specific – the abilities relevant to infants and young children are clearly very different from those relevant to school children and adolescents.

During early childhood, the development of basic cognitive and psychosocial abilities is of most relevance. These abilities form the building blocks upon which all other abilities developed at later stages of childhood are based. Unfortunately, very little is known about the cognitive and psychosocial abilities of young Egyptian children. While various data are collected pertaining to the physical development of young children, very little information is gathered relating to the psychosocial and cognitive dimensions of their development. This is not a shortcoming that is unique to Egypt. Indeed, relatively few countries have mechanisms in place to collect such information. But given the importance of young children's cognitive and psychosocial abilities, more research and better information in these areas is critical.

Learning achievement in school provides one of the few indicators of the abilities of school children and adolescents. However, this measure is obviously limited, focussing only on narrow academic abilities rather than the much broader range of abilities needed to equip children, in the words of the Convention, "… to lead a responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and respect for human rights." And even information on learning achievement is scarce in Egypt. School examinations are used primarily as tools for selection and certification, and offer only limited insight into learning achievement, and no other mechanisms exist for regularly monitoring learning achievement exists within the Egyptian school system.

The only national study that assessed scholastic achievement suggested poor acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills with evident differences by region and socio-economic status of the household, but with little difference by gender.[i] Another more limited achievement assessment, conducted as part of a broader study of the school environment in preparatory schools, found that students in 'high performing' schools scored an average of only 30 out of 100 in a mathematic achievement test. Pass rates in the preparatory stage leaving exam of students in these same schools, by contrast, exceeded 85 percent, underscoring the limited usefulness of formal exams as achievement benchmarks.[ii]

An earlier study of learning achievement among 10-17 year-olds in three governorates (Cairo, Kafr Elshaikh and Elminya) corroborates these findings.[iii] It found that children's average score in mathematics did not exceed one third of the expected mastery level, and that the average score in reading and writing was less than one-half of the expected mastery level. Girls outperformed boys in both skills areas. Ten percent of the students in the reading and writing component, and six percent in the mathematics component, scored zero on the test, indicating absolute incompetency despite the time spent in school.

3. FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S ABILITIES

3.1. The family environment

The family is by far the most important institution for learning and developing the range of abilities and skills needed for life. The family represents the first environment where children are introduced to the values, culture and norms of their society, and the first opportunity for children to experience tolerance, mutual respect and solidarity. In the Arab world in particular, the family has traditionally been at the very center of life for children and young people - their primary source of socialisation, education and security.[iv]

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the essential role of parents and more generally families as the primary caregivers of the child. In its Preamble, the Convention states that the family is the natural environment for the growth and well being of children, and stresses the importance of growing up in a family environment for the full and harmonious development of children's personalities and abilities. Article 18 of the Convention recognizes parents as having the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child.

Early childhood care and stimulation

The development of children's abilities depends, first and most importantly, on the care and stimulation received within the family during early childhood. A large body of research finds that children who are exposed to positive child-rearing experiences, early stimulation and nurturing care-giver relationships exhibit better social skills, perform better in educational and work settings, and are less likely to suffer from psychological and physical problems later in life. Children whose caregivers interact with them in loving ways are also better-nourished and less sick, underscoring the link between the physical and emotional dimensions of development during early childhood.

A study conducted in rural Giza using field observations from 1983-1984 and 1990 represents one of the few examinations of child-rearing practices in the Egyptian context.[v] The study suggested that mothers had two distinct styles of child rearing, depending on their level of education. Uneducated mothers were observed to be 'indulgent' in caring for their children during infancy. The infants were carried frequently, their crying was attended to immediately and they were breastfed on demand. Educated mothers, however, exhibited a lesser degree of indulgence towards their infants, nursing them for a shorter period, carrying them less, and using a crib rather than a shared bed. Uneducated mothers were much more likely to rely on their older offspring as caregivers, whereas educated mothers were more likely to use other adults (e.g., mother in law) or seek other care options (e.g. day care center). Uneducated mothers sought, above all, to instill in their children a sense of loyalty to family. The children of educated mothers, by contrast, were socialized to be self-motivated achievers.

In one effort aimed at promoting positive parenting practices, the Government has adopted a UNICEF-produced parenting manual aimed at improving parents' understanding of the child developmental phases and their important role as children's first teachers. Within the broader Ministry of Education (MOE)-UNICEF community schools initiative, the manual is being used in parent training efforts in underserved rural areas of Upper Egypt. Other agencies, including USAID/Cairo are supporting similar Government efforts to reach parents with basic messages relating to child rearing and developing children's abilities.

Freedom of expression within the family

The freedom to express opinions and discuss ideas within the family is another important factor in the development of children's abilities. Research from Egypt suggests that children who enjoy this freedom are far more likely to develop the confidence, maturity, coping skills and leadership abilities needed to success in adult life.[vi]

To what extent do Egyptian children enjoy the freedom to express themselves within the family? The traditional hierarchical and patriarchal structure of the Egyptian family would suggest that Egyptian children have very limited freedom of expression. In this family structure, parental, and particularly paternal, authority is supreme, and children are expected to show deference to and obey their elders. Expressing independent opinions is often seen as disrupting lines of authority or as disobedience, and therefore is discouraged.

However, the 1997 National Survey of Adolescents suggests that this does not reflect the family experience of today's Egyptian child. The survey found that adolescents in fact enjoy a considerable degree of freedom to express their opinions within the family – three-quarters of adolescents interviewed indicated being able to express their opinions openly to their families, of whom 80 percent reported that their opinions were also respected by their families (Table 3.1). Why this apparent contradiction? Profound social changes, including rapid gains in education, increased exposure to mass media and delayed marriage, which are changing the nature of the Egyptian family and the position of children within it, provide at least a partial answer. These changes have given young people, and particularly girls, greater intellectual and moral authority with which to challenge their elders and make themselves heard within the family.

TABLE 3.1
Adolescents' freedom of expression within the family

	Able to express opinions freely to family	Family respects opinions expressed
boys	77.4	83.3
girls	71.9	77.3
10-14 years	67.8	73.6
15-19 years	84.0	87.9
in school	76.2	80.5
out of school	70.3	80.0
working	74.1	80.4
not working	74.9	80.3
low income	71.3	77.9
middle income	74.7	80.8
high income	78.1	82.5
urban	79.5	82.7
rural	71.6	78.8
Urban Governorates	83.2	86.2
Lower Egypt	73.6	84.7
Upper Egypt	71.5	71.7
total	**74.6**	**80.4**

Source: National Survey of Adolescents, 1997

The 1997 survey found that boys, older adolescents, adolescents in school, those residing in the Urban Governorates and those from better-off households were most likely to enjoy the freedom to express their opinions. Not coincidentally, these groups were also the most ambitious and optimistic about the future. Girls, out-of-school adolescents, those from poor households, and those from rural areas of Upper Egypt, on the other hand, were least likely to be able to express themselves and more likely to receive a negative response when they did so. These groups were also the least optimistic, were less likely to exhibit leadership skills, and were more likely to be perpetrators or victims of family violence.[vii]

Gender socialisation in the family

Gender socialisation within the family has a critical bearing on the opportunities of girls to develop their abilities to the fullest. The 1997 National Survey of Adolescents found that adolescent attitudes towards gender roles in the household – one indicator of gender socialisation in the family – remain strikingly consistent with traditional patriarchal views of men as the authority figures and women as the subordinate, supporting figures. As shown in Table 3.2, an overwhelming majority of both male and female Egyptian adolescents believe that men should

TABLE 3.2
**Gender role perceptions of older adolescents (16-19 years)**

	responsibility of:					
	husband alone		wife alone		shared	
	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls
be breadwinner	87.2	82.9	1.3	2.2	11.6	14.9
buy provisions	23.6	21.9	70.3	67.1	6.1	11.0
wash clothes	1.1	0.6	98.7	95.6	0.2	3.8
clean house	0.4	0.2	93.6	92.5	6.0	7.3
cook	1.1	0.6	97.5	95.2	1.5	4.2
fetch water	27.0	9.9	60.4	72.8	12.6	17.3
play with/watch children	7.5	1.5	54.3	63.7	38.2	34.8
help children with homework	33.8	16.1	22.8	32.3	43.3	51.4
decide whether wife can work outside home	62.7	32.0	2.9	10.2	34.3	57.8

Source: National Survey of Adolescents, 1997

be the sole breadwinner while women should be solely responsible for household tasks such as shopping, washing clothes, cleaning, cooking, fetching water and bathing children. In addition,

almost two-thirds of adolescent males and one-third of adolescent females believe that husbands should be solely responsible for the decision of whether the wife works outside the home.

FIGURE 3.1
Differences in attitudes towards family formation between adolescents (16-19 years of age) and their parents
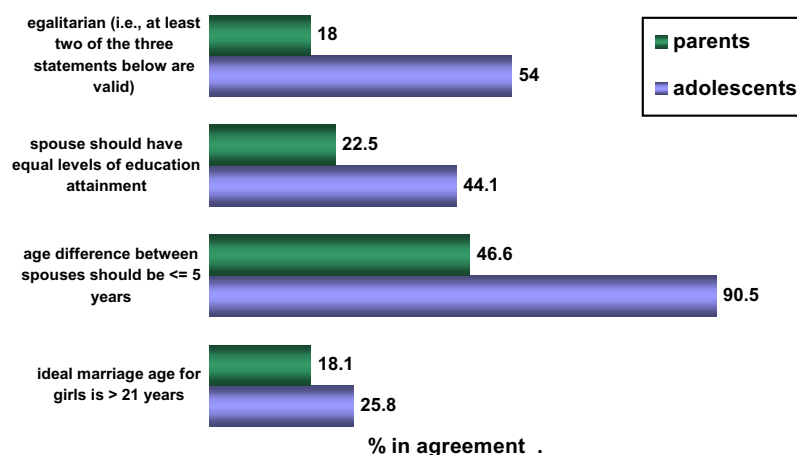
Source: National Survey of Adolescents, 1997

But the 1997 survey also indicated that inter-generational changes in attitudes towards gender are occurring. Examining one issue of particular importance from a gender perspective – family formation – the survey found that adolescents were "variably egalitarian"[viii] while their parents were almost consistently non-egalitarian in their attitudes towards family formation.[ix] As shown in Figure 3.1, 54 percent of adolescents agreed with at least two of three statements used as criteria for egalitarianism compared to only 18 percent of their parents. Nevertheless, non-egalitarian attitudes among adolescents were still found to be common – 74 percent believed that the ideal marriage age of females was less than 21 years; 56 percent believed that spouses should not have equal education; and nine per cent believed that the age gap between spouses should be greater than five years.

State support to the family

The Convention enjoins States to render appropriate assistance to parents in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities. To what extent does the Egyptian State fulfill this obligation? The government's role in supporting the family as the primary channel of socialisation appears in a number of legislative acts.

Articles 10 and 11 of the 1971 Constitution explicitly affirm "the State is obliged to protect mothers and children, with the objective of reconciling between women's duties toward families as housewives and mothers on the one hand, and their jobs on the other." The maternity clauses relevant to women in the Egyptian Labour Law reflect this obligation on the part of the State towards mothers and children. Article 71 of Law no. 47/1978 and 72 of Law no. 48/1978 state that "the female employee shall have the right to a maternity leave of three months. Such leave shall be granted to her three times during her employment life." Article 70 of the same law grants female employees the right to take up to two years unpaid leave to look after their children at any one time. Such unpaid leave is granted three times during the employee's period of service. The care for the child is further guaranteed through the provision of Article 158 of Law 137/1981, which obligates an employer that employs more than 100 women in the same place to set up a nursery or entrust the child care responsibility.

However, while female employees in the Government sector enjoy these rights, private sector women employees are frequently not as fortunate, as the application of these work privileges to working women in the private sector may subject them to discrimination. Often, female employees report incidents in which maternity leaves are denied because of "work needs." Another reflection of the discrepancy between legislation and actual practice relates to the provision of nurseries for

working mothers. Many cases have been reported where private sector employers hire only 99 female employees in order to avoid the legal commitment relevant to the 100 employees.

Complaints about the absence of nurseries in the work place are common among women employed in the private sector. The problem is critical for working mothers because of the shortage of day care centers/nurseries with qualified personnel. Nurseries that offer good quality services are often unaffordable and well above the average female employee's financial means.

The State also provides a number of family support services. The Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) operates a network of family counseling centers aimed at preventing family disintegration through providing support and guidance to families under stress. Resource constraints, however, mean that the coverage and scope of services provided by these centers are limited. MOSA statistics show that in 1997 there were a total of 104 counseling centers nationwide, serving a total 7,720 families. The centers are also distributed unequally, with some governorates, such as Luxor and South Sinai in Upper Egypt, completely unserved.

Preschools, however, are undoubtedly the most important of these family support services provided by the State. A wide body of research underscores the key role of preschools in complementing (or compensating for) early childhood learning in the home, and in equipping children with the basic abilities they need to succeed in school. In Egypt, children attending kindergarten are far more likely to enter and persist in formal schooling.

In 1991, the Ministry of Education issued a decree adding two school years at the kindergarten level to the basic education programme, and, in the subsequent decade, as a result primarily of a major expansion of public kindergarten facilities, total kindergarten enrolment more than doubled. The twin challenges of improving kindergarten access and quality, however, remain great. In 1999/2000, still only 13 percent of 4-6 year-olds, and an even smaller proportion of 4-6 year-old girls, were enrolled in kindergarten. Kindergarten costs, particularly in the private sector, can be prohibitively expensive for many low income families. At the same time, quality issues, including curriculum, facilities, and human resources remain priority concerns in the majority of kindergartens.

3.2. Access to and quality of the schooling system

The education system is the most important institution outside the family for the development of children's abilities. Schooling helps children realise their full potential and facilitates the realisation of their rights. It provides a key forum for changing behaviors and promoting equality of opportunity. The right to education is codified in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which calls upon States Parties to "make primary education compulsory and available to all…" (Art. 28.1), to "make secondary education available and accessible to every child" (Art. 28.1), and states that education of the child shall be directed to "the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential" (Art. 29).

Access to education

The decade of the 1990s saw major progress in Egypt in expanding access to schooling. During this period, the number of basic education schools increased by almost 11000 .The total number of pupils enrolled in pre-university education increased from 12.8 million in 1990/91 to 15.6 million in 1998/1999.

Enrolment data suggest that the country is approaching its goal of universal primary education. Nationally, Ministry of Education data show that the net enrolment ratio at the primary level reached 92 percent in 1998/99. Similar levels of enrolment are confirmed by household survey data. According to the National Survey of Adolescents, 89 percent of children aged 8-10 years where enrolled in school (any stage) in the 1996/97 school year, although regional variations were significant.[x] Rates were much higher in the Urban Governorates and Lower Egypt compared to Upper Egypt, and much higher among urban residents compared to rural residents across all regions (Figure 3.2). Female enrolment for this age group was roughly equal to that of male enrolment in urban areas, and was only slightly lower in rural Lower Egypt. But the gender gap in

enrolment remained very large in rural Upper Egypt, underscoring the importance of targeting this region for special girls' schooling efforts.

Enrolment rates are somewhat lower among older age groups, a concern in light of a labour market that is increasingly demanding advanced skills, beyond what can be acquired through the initial years of schooling alone. The National Survey of Adolescents found that 78 percent of children aged 12-14, and only 58 percent of children aged 15-18, were enrolled in school (any stage) in 1996/97. Again, national enrolment rates masked significant regional variations. Enrolment among both age groups was highest in the Urban Governorates and lowest in Upper Egypt, and lower among rural compared to urban residents across all regions (Figure 3.2). With the notable exception of rural Upper Egypt, gender disparities in enrolment among the older age groups, where they existed, favoured girls.
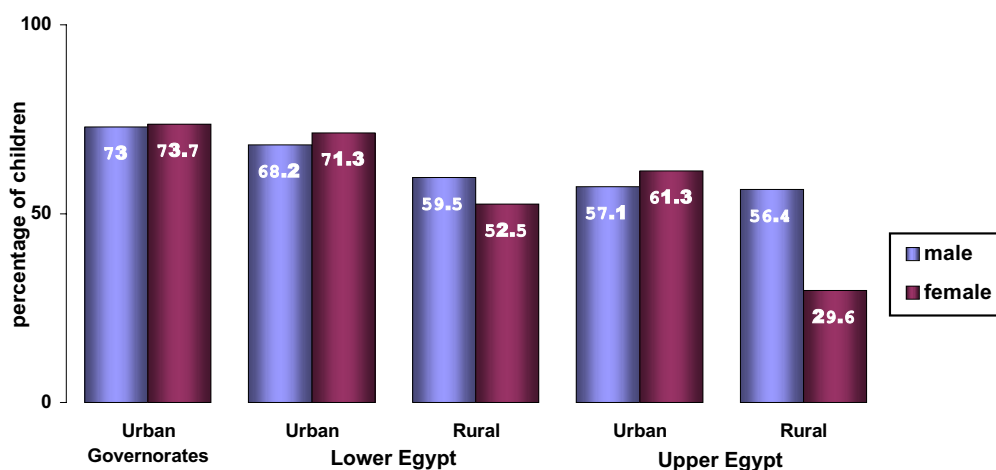
FIGURE 3.2
(a) Enrolment among 8-10 year-olds (any stage), by residence, region and sex, 1996/97
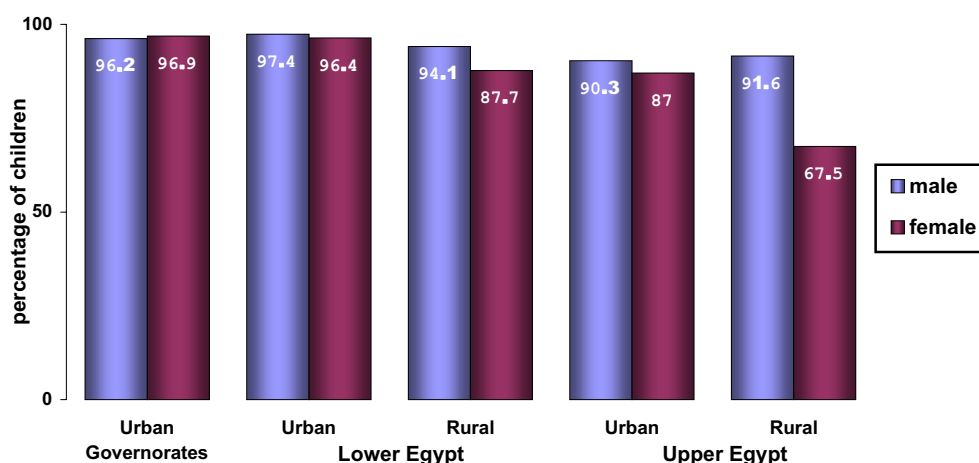
(b) Enrolment among 12-14 year-olds (any stage), by residence, region and sex, 1996/97
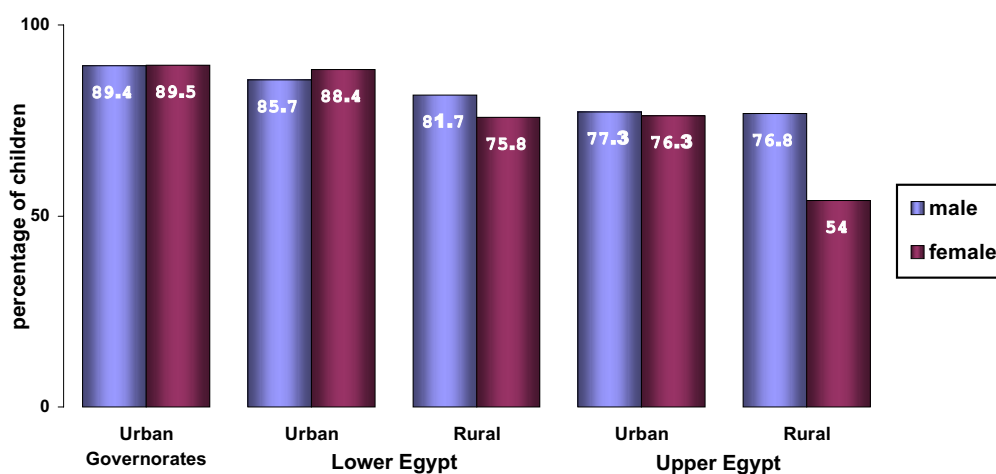
**(c) Enrolment among 15-18 year-olds (any stage), by residence, region and sex, 1996/97**

Source: National Survey of Adolescents, 1997

Enrolment rates at all ages rose among successive cohorts of students during the period 1983/84-1996/97. These overall gains were driven by rises in enrolment for disadvantaged groups and regions. Enrolment in the lowest social stratum increased by an average of 1.4 percent every year, and in rural Upper Egypt by an average of two percentage points every year, from 1983/84 to 1996/97. School enrolment among girls increased by an average of 1.3 percent per year over the same period, reflecting both a higher level base of enrolment from one cohort to the next and lower drop out rates at every age.

School non-entrants and dropouts

Despite these enrolment gains, an important minority of Egyptian children continue to be totally deprived of schooling. Nationally, over 13 percent of girls, and almost four percent of boys, aged 10-11 years in 1996/97 had never entered school. School never-attendance is a particular concern in rural Upper Egypt, where almost one in three girls never enters school. However, it is now a relatively rare phenomenon in the Urban Governorates and in urban Lower Egypt (Figure 3.3).

FIGURE 3.3
Proportion of children aged 10-11 years who had never entered school, by residence, region and sex, in 1996/97
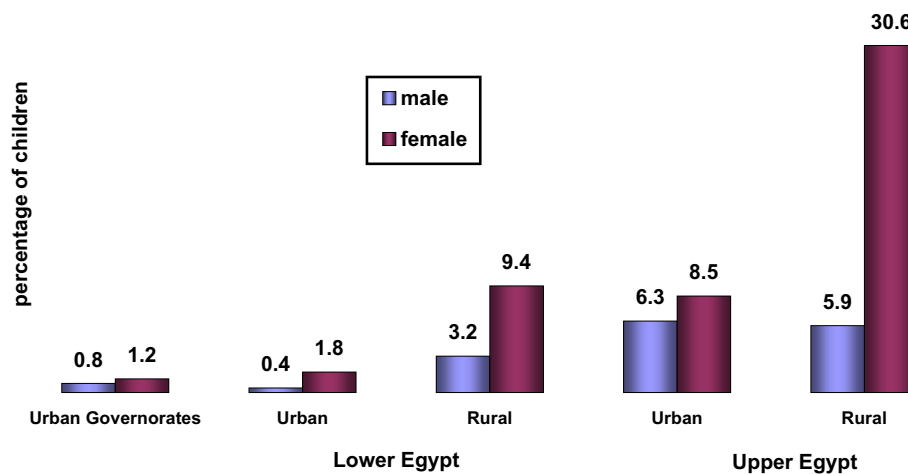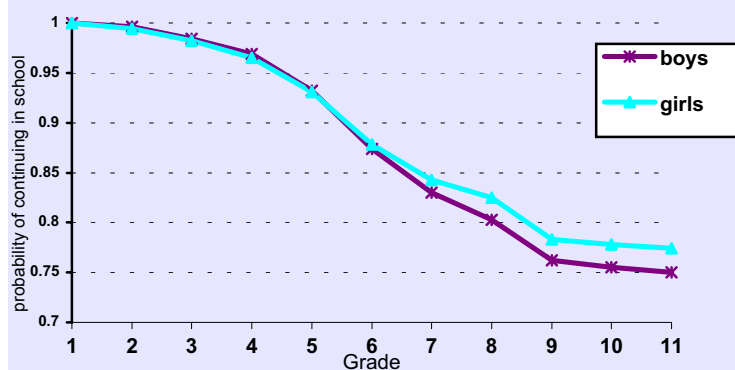

Source: National Survey of Adolescents, 1997

The level of dropouts in the Egyptian school system is relatively small in the initial years of schooling. Indeed, over 93 percent of both male and female students entering school persist until the end of grade 5. This is significant because five years of schooling is considered the minimum required for the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills.
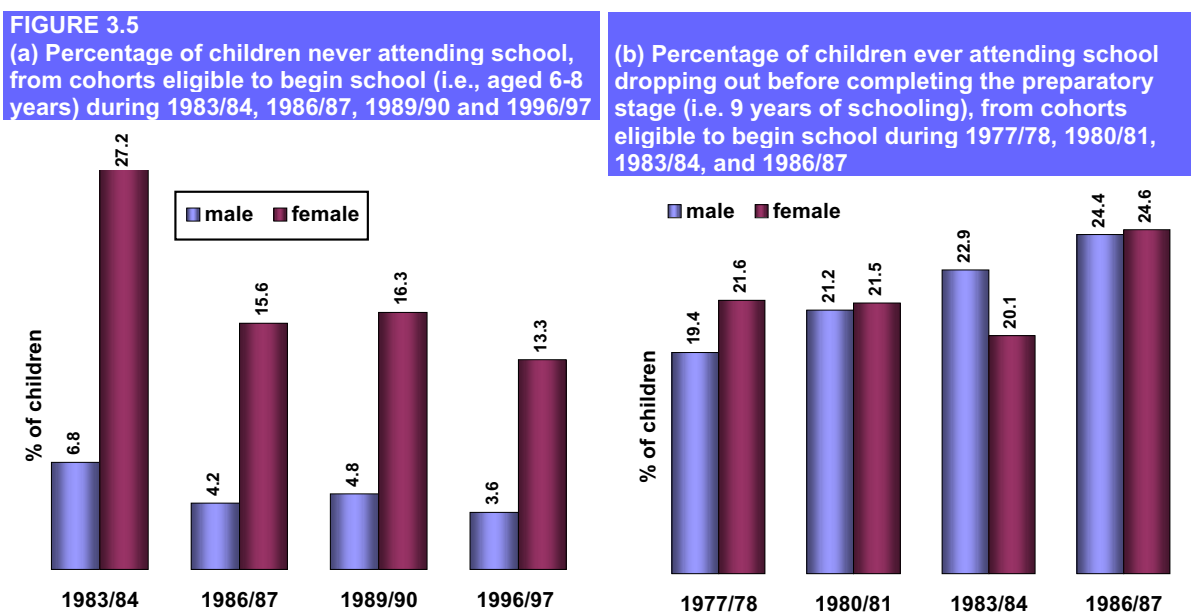
School drop-outs rise significantly after grade 5, which coincides with termination of the first phase of basic education (the primary stage) and also after grade 8, which signals the beginning of the transition from compulsory basic education to non-compulsory secondary education. On average, 13 percent of pupils in primary schools do not continue to the second phase of basic education and almost one out of every five children successfully recruited into the formal school system never reaches the last grade in basic education (Figure 3.4). Male and female dropout rates are roughly equal until grade 6, but a larger proportion of boys than girls dropout in the subsequent grades.

FIGURE 3.4
Probability of persisting in school, by grade and sex, 1996/97

Source: National Survey of Adolescents, 1997

FIGURE 3.5
(a) Percentage of children never attending school, from cohorts eligible to begin school (i.e., aged 6-8 years) during 1983/84, 1986/87, 1989/90 and 1996/97

(b) Percentage of children ever attending school dropping out before completing the preparatory stage (i.e. 9 years of schooling), from cohorts eligible to begin school during 1977/78, 1980/81, 1983/84, and 1986/87

Source: National Survey of Adolescents, 1997

How have the rates of school never-attendance and drop-outs changed over time? The 1997 National Survey of Adolescents shows that the rate of school never attendance has fallen significantly, especially among female students (Figure 3.5). Almost 17 percent of children aged 6-8 years in 1983/84 never entered school, compared to only eight percent of children aged 6-8 years in 1996/97. However, the 1997 survey indicates that the rate of children dropping out before completing the preparatory stage has actually increased over time. Twenty percent of the cohort of children that entered school in 1977 dropped out before completing the preparatory stage, while for the cohort of children that entered school in 1986, 25 percent failed to reach the end of the preparatory stage.

Factors contributing to school never-attendance and dropout

In total, there were some four million children aged 7-18 years, and 1.7 million aged 7-14 years (the official age range for compulsory education), who were out of school during the 1996/97 school year, either because they had dropped out or had never entered school in the first place. What are the reasons behind this persisting phenomenon of out-of-school children? The answer to this question is clearly critical to the development of strategies for the achievement of universal enrolment.
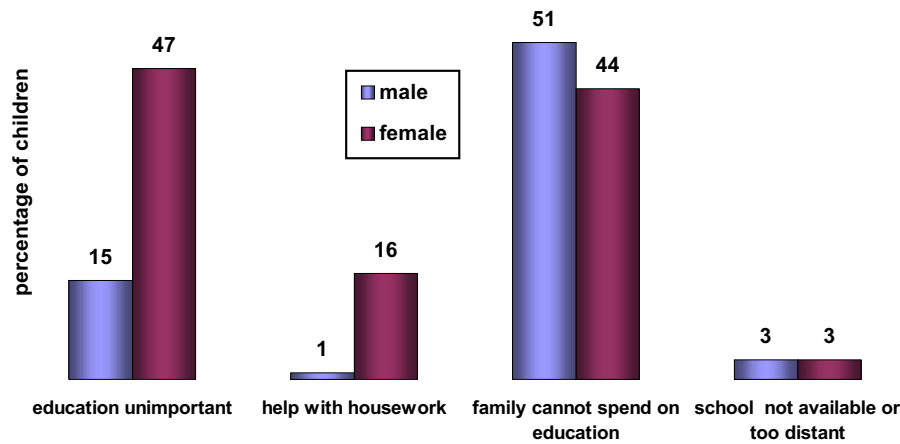
The 1997 National Survey of Adolescents found that the most common reason for never attending school cited by children was economic, i.e. family inability to cover schooling costs (Figure 3.6). These findings corroborate those of other surveys indicating that school fees, reintroduced in Egypt in the late 1980s, and private tutoring, combined with growing out-of-pocket costs for items such as school uniform, needed stationary, daily allowance, non-Ministry textbooks, and school donations, pose a major burden on poor households, and are a key consideration in deciding whether to send their children to school. It was estimated in the late 1990s that average per-pupil cost in basic education among poor households amounted LE125 per annum, with around 60 percent and 18 percent of this cost channeled to private tutoring and school fees respectively. The 1997 National Survey of Adolescents found that the second and third most important reasons for school never-attendance were the low value placed on education and the need to help at home, both of which were cited much more frequently by girls than boys.

Among children who had dropped out of school, the 1997 survey found that the most common reason cited was poor scholastic performance. This held for both sexes and in all five regions, regardless of the household social and economic status. Second in order of magnitude was the low value of or interest in education by the student and/or parents, followed by school-related reasons (i.e., dislike of school and teachers' bad treatment). Lack of economic means was only the fourth most common reason cited for leaving school. However, limited household economic resources

may exert indirect influence on scholastic performance through its effect, for example, on nutritional status, or on the need to combine work with education. Family-related reasons were cited by eight percent of girls but by less than two percent of boys. Work and marriage were rarely stated as main reasons for leaving school by either boys or girls. Instead, work and marriage may be options for those who have already left school for other reasons.

Legislative measures mandating that children attend school have not proved effective in dealing with the out-of-school children phenomenon. Education Law 139/1981 states that the school principal must notify a child's guardian if the child does not proceed to school in the time defined

FIGURE 3.6
a) Major reasons cited by children for never attending school, by sex

b) Major reasons cited by children for dropping out of school, by sex, 1996/97
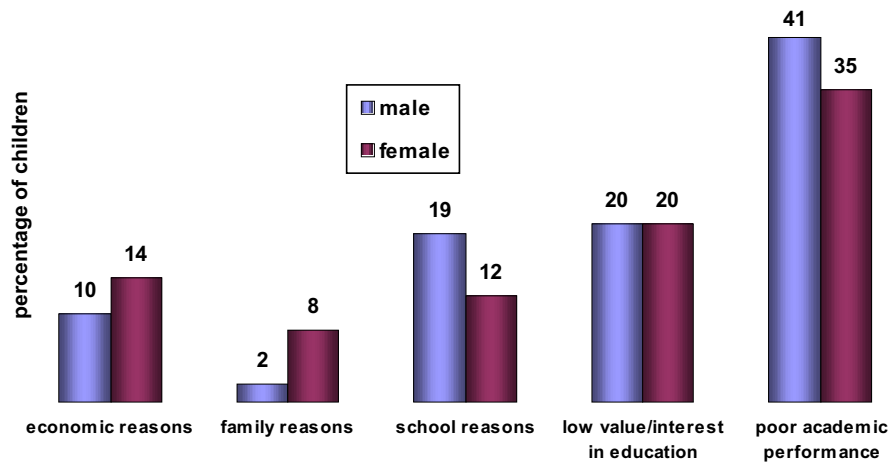
Source: National Survey of Adolescents, 1997

or does not attend regularly for a designated period without an acceptable excuse, but it imposes only a token fine of LE10 ($US 2.50) on the custodian should the child fail to return to school. As a result, principals rarely bother to follow-up or officially record drop-out cases. "Paper pupils", i.e., students who have practically dropped out, but whose files continue to be included in the registration system and in any head-count at school, are therefore a widespread phenomenon in Egypt. A Child Labour Law was passed in 1996 that bans children below the age of 15 from working, correcting a longstanding inconsistency between the age for mandatory education and the permissible working age, but the law does not cover the agricultural sector, where a large proportion of child workers are found.
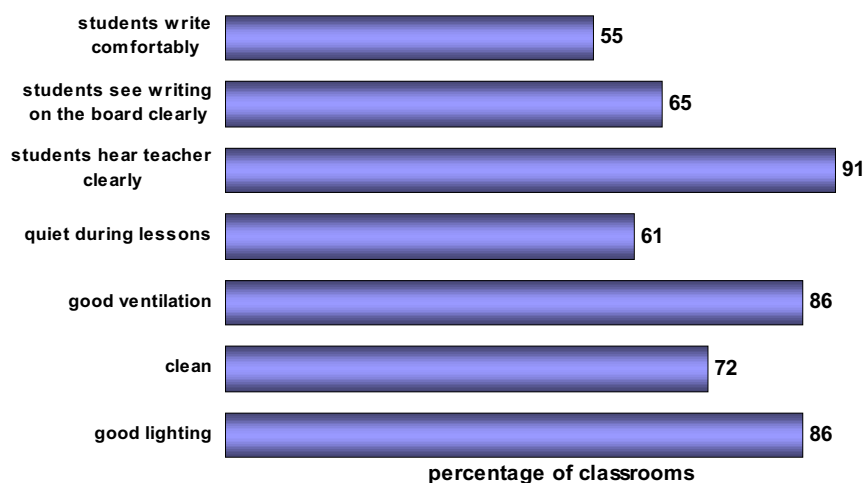
Education quality

The quality of schooling must be assured if the expanded schooling access enjoyed by Egyptian children is to be translated into learning gains. Three of the most important determinants of education quality are the school environment (where students are taught), learning processes (how students are taught) and learning contents (what students are taught). All three represent important concerns to Egyptian policy-makers, educators and parents alike, and are being addressed through education reform efforts.

School environment: Over 40 percent of school buildings in Egypt were declared to be unfit in 1992, but by the end of the decade, due to the high level of investment in the educational infrastructure, the situation improved somewhat. School buildings during the 1990s were renovated at a rate of about 3,000 schools per year, and large numbers of both renovated and newly-built were equipped with technological and visual aids such as computers, televisions and video players. The 1999 Survey of Public Preparatory Schools illustrated this progress. Close to 90 percent of the schools included in the survey had both a science laboratory and a library, and school yards and rooms for extracurricular activities and were also almost universally available. Over half (58 percent) of the schools were equipped with computers, and around one-half also had other equipment such as televisions, videos and telephones.

Despite these improvements, upgrading school facilities remains a major challenge. Many school buildings remain unfit for use, and although triple shifting has been eliminated, a number of double shift schools, particularly at the preparatory and secondary levels, continue to operate. Classroom crowding is a particular concern. There were an average of 42 pupils per class at the primary level and 44 pupils per class at the preparatory level in 1998/99, roughly the same ratios that prevailed 10 years earlier. The 1999 Survey of Public Preparatory Schools found that while almost all (91 percent) of pupils could hear the teacher clearly, 45 percent had insufficient space to write comfortably and over one-third could not see the blackboard properly (Figure 3.7).

FIGURE 3.7
Classroom conditions in preparatory schools, selected indicators

Indicator	percentage of classrooms
students write comfortably	55
students see writing on the board clearly	65
students hear teacher clearly	91
quiet during lessons	61
good ventilation	86
clean	72
good lighting	86

Source: Survey of Public Preparatory Schools, 1999

The 1999 survey also pointed to school sanitation facilities and classroom cleanliness as important issues. While all schools had toilet facilities available to the students, they were insufficient relative to the size of the school population. On average, the schools had less than one toilet per 100 students. Moreover, 42 percent of toilets were observed to be unclean, and a large proportion of both boys (51 percent) and girls (39 percent) felt that they offered insufficient privacy. Over one-quarter (28 percent) of students attended classrooms described as unclean.

A lack of appropriate medical facilities was another concern raised by the 1999 study. One-third of preparatory schools surveyed were found to have neither a doctor nor a nurse, and only schools in the Urban Governorates had doctors available on a daily basis. Inadequate school health services

were more frequent in schools in rural areas, in small schools, in schools serving poor communities and in schools in Upper Egypt. Two-thirds of schools providing health services had a designated school clinic. Almost all clinics had a first aid kit and aspirin but lower levels of availability of other devices such as thermometer, stethoscope, blood pressure device, scales and a bed. Three-quarters of school clinics had no water source.

Learning processes: Classroom observations undertaken as part of the 1999 Survey of Public Preparatory Schools suggest that Egyptian students have relatively few opportunities to actively participate in the learning process. 'Chalk and talk' teaching methods predominate, in which teachers write or explain problems on the blackboard, and students then record what is written into their copybooks. Questioning is considered the prerogative of the teachers alone, and is based on the premise that there is only one correct answer. Discussions are rare and not typically encouraged, owing in part to the perceived need not to lose time in covering the rigidly structured curriculum.

At the same time, only 24 percent of teachers in the sample used lesson time efficiently, i.e., used most of lesson time in actual teaching and interacting with pupils. About two-thirds of teacher wasted up to half of class time in non-teaching interaction. One-half of teachers arrived late at their scheduled class or left early. In addition, frequent interruptions to lessons were noted during classroom observations, affecting the concentration of teachers and students alike. Motives for these interruptions included taking attendance, pupils or teachers leaving upon the request of the school head, or a social worker meeting separately with a student or a group of students.

 The 1999 survey also found that facilities designed to give students 'hands-on' learning experiences are often under-utilised. While 89 percent of the schools had a library, only one-quarter of pupils went to the library in the week preceding the survey visits, most of whom went on their own initiative rather than as part of any classroom activity. Similarly, although 58 percent of schools had computers, only 18 percent of students had used a computer in the week preceding the survey visits. One-quarter of pupils had not been to the science laboratory during the school term, and only 13 percent of those visiting a laboratory were actually able to use the laboratory equipment themselves. The remainder were only allowed to passively watch as the teacher carried out the experiment.
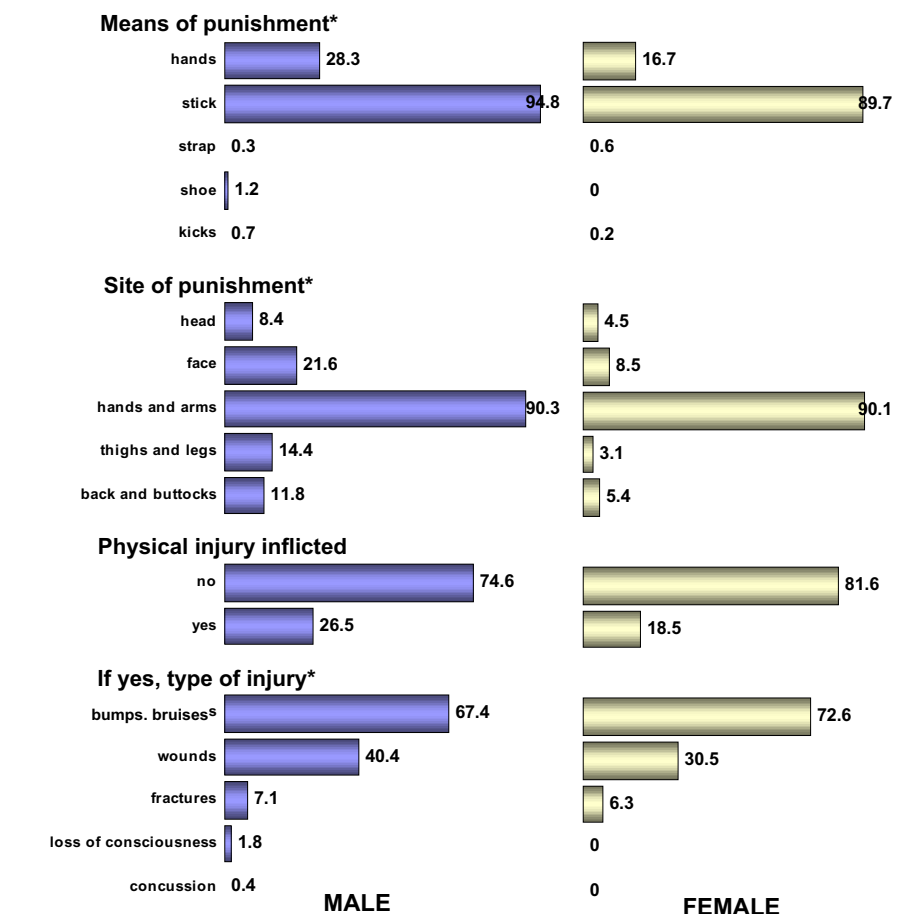
Other studies suggest that many Egyptian teachers continue to resort to physical violence in the classroom, in violation of the spirit of Article 28 of the Convention, which enjoins States to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with children's human dignity. In the 1997 National Survey of Adolescents, over half of 10-19 year-olds reported being hit by their teachers. Another survey, involving 2,170 preparatory and secondary students in Alexandria, found an even higher proportion – 80 percent of boys and 62 percent of girls – had been subjected to corporal punishment by their teachers.[xi] The latter survey found that punishment led to physical injuries, most commonly bumps and bruises, in over one-quarter of cases involving boys and in almost one-fifth of cases involving girls (Figure 3.8). The Ministry of Education, however, has completely banned corporal punishment, and is strictly applying the law when complaints are reported.

The verbal denigration of students by teachers also appears to occur frequently. Almost one-quarter of students interviewed for the 1999 Survey of Public Preparatory Schools reported a teacher at some point insulting their ability, telling them that they were failures or would not succeed in school. Over one-third of students who had been denigrated in this way said that they considered dropping out as a result. Students interviewed as part of a separate focus group study reported similar experiences. A number stated the teachers treated them "like dirt", swearing at them and telling them that they were worth "no more than a pile of garbage." Many also noted a link between classroom treatment and private tutoring, reporting that those paying their teachers for after class private lessons received much better treatment in the regular classroom than other students.[xii]

An expanded programme of in-service teacher training began in 1993/94 as part of the broader education reform effort. The training programme is aimed at improving learning processes and specifically at familiarising teachers with interactive pedagogical approaches on which the new

curricular materials (see below) are grounded. Some 388,000 teachers received in-service training through distance learning from October 1996 to July 1999. An additional 5,288 teachers received specialised refresher courses abroad between 1993/94 and 1998/99.

FIGURE 3.8
Distribution of students who were subjected to corporal punishment, by means and site of punishment, and injury inflicted

Means of punishment*

	MALE	FEMALE
hands	28.3	16.7
stick	94.8	89.7
strap	0.3	0.6
shoe	1.2	0
kicks	0.7	0.2

Site of punishment*

	MALE	FEMALE
head	8.4	4.5
face	21.6	8.5
hands and arms	90.3	90.1
thighs and legs	14.4	3.1
back and buttocks	11.8	5.4

Physical injury inflicted

	MALE	FEMALE
no	74.6	81.6
yes	26.5	18.5

If yes, type of injury*

	MALE	FEMALE
bumps. bruises[s]	67.4	72.6
wounds	40.4	30.5
fractures	7.1	6.3
loss of consciousness	1.8	0
concussion	0.4	0

MALE   **FEMALE**

*Categories are not exclusive
Source: Youssef R.M. et al, 1998.

However, implementing new skills acquired through training is often a major challenge even for well-intentioned teachers. Interviews with Egyptian teachers who attended specialised training in the United Kingdom, for example, found that most were frustrated in introducing even limited change to their teaching practices upon returning to their classrooms, owing to an unsupportive system and conditions that did not facilitate reform.[xiii] The quality and relevance of the training also remains an important question mark. The 1999 Survey of Public Preparatory Schools found that only 39 percent of teachers who had undergone local in-service training expressed satisfaction at its usefulness.

Learning contents: Considerable progress has been made in addressing the third key determinant of education quality – learning contents. A specialised Centre for Curriculum Instructional Materials Development (CCIMD) was established in the early 1990s, after which the curriculum was completely revised and new textbooks and teachers' manuals were developed, tested and published.[xiv]

The revision focussed on the introduction of contemporary issues into the curriculum (e.g., human rights, globalisation, tolerance and education for peace, life skills, education for citizenship, and the environment), and on the development of supplementary education materials (e.g., a multi-media educational kit covering health and the environmental issues) to

complement the formal curriculum. The revised curriculum is designed to promote critical and creative thinking, problem solving approaches and decision making skills, rather than the mere recitation of facts. It is premised on the adoption of new teaching methods in the classroom, including cooperative learning, individualised instruction and independent study and research.

PANEL 3.1
Community Education

In 1992 the Ministry of Education in partnership with UNICEF initiated the Community School project in the hard to reach areas of Upper Egypt. It aimed at establishing girl friendly schools for deprived communities in Assiut, Sohag and Qena. High standards for quality education were firmly established to develop life long learners. Values and life skills were emphasized to promote leadership and social change. Today there are 201 such schools that are fully recognized by the formal educational system. The project has reached some 7000 children 70% of whom are girls. The children are fully recognized by the educational system. The first cohort of children has nearly reached university. Children graduating from the Community schools not only completed beyond the basic cycle but have, as depicted by the many evaluations so far conducted, scored very highly on achievement tests, life skills, values and attitudes assessments.

In 1993 the One-classroom school national initiative was established aiming for 3000 girls' schools. It targeted girls and added vocational training to the multi-grade curriculum. Together the two initiatives supported gender parity and equality resulting in much reduced gender enrolment gaps.

In 1995 a twining process between those two initiatives marked the beginning of a "Community Education" movement in Egypt. The movement attracted many partners and stakeholders. Active partners in the movement have been CIDA, the social fund for development, USAID and several NGOs. The movement promises to greatly empower communities, women in particular. It has put in place true democratic practices in the schools and the surrounding communities through its participatory approach. Approximately 100,000 children are being directly reached through the movement to date, most of whom are girls. These children are being given the opportunity to go to school.

In the next phase, through a concerted diffusion flow of best practices from existing models of community education to mainstream education, the movement will affect millions of children in Egypt and other countries. It will be contributing to the global reforms for quality education.


Public expenditure on education inputs

Public spending on education has increased considerably in recent years in both relative and absolute terms, testament to the Government's commitment to education reform. Expenditures on education increased in real terms by 107 percent between 1990/91 and 1996/97, and average per-pupil real expenditures increased by 49 percent in pre-university education during the same period. Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GNP increased from 3.8 to 4.8 percent between 1990 and 1996.

Inefficiencies and inequities in education spending, however, are affecting progress towards reform goals. First and foremost, spending is heavily biased towards secondary and tertiary education at the expense of schooling at the basic level. Per student spending at the secondary level (expressed as a percentage of per capita GNP) is more than double that at the primary level. The distortion is even more pronounced at the tertiary level, where spending per student is almost

eight times greater than at the primary level (Figure 3.9). Lessons from elsewhere in the world show that one of the distinguishing features of countries that have achieved primary education goals is a relatively higher level of per student spending (as a percentage of per capita GNP) at the primary level, and a relatively lower level at the tertiary level, compared to other countries with poorer primary education records.[xv]

Compensation of education personnel accounts for the bulk – 82 percent - of total current education expenditure. Yet, teacher salaries remain too low to attract and retain good teachers, or to reduce the pervasive phenomenon of private tutoring. This is in part the product of the cost burden of a disproportionately large administrative support staff – 38 percent of total spending on wages and salaries goes to Ministry of Education staff members occupying administrative positions. Beyond wages and salaries, a significant proportion of the current budget is exhausted in printing textbooks, 170 million copies of 1,383 different pre-university texts, many of which are of questionable quality.

FIGURE 3.9
Per student public education spending as a percentage of per capita GNP, by education level, 1995/96
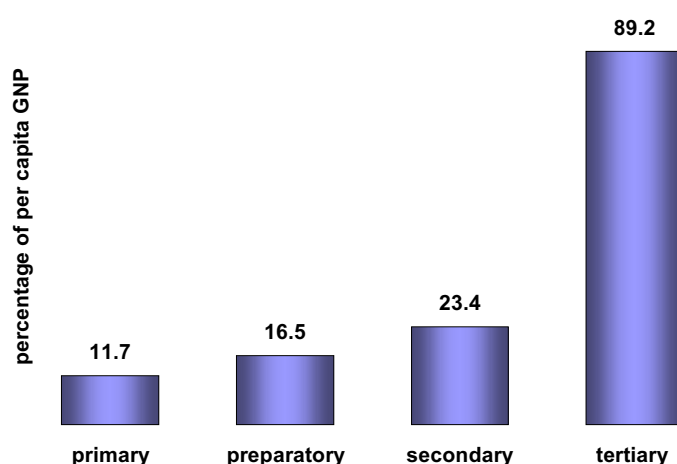
Source: Egypt Human Development Report 1998/99

Education spending is also biased in favour of better-off groups. An estimated 40 percent of total Government education expenditure goes to upper income groups while lower income groups receive only seven percent.[xvi] The resulting inequitable distribution of education inputs in terms of appropriate physical facilities and material resources, qualified and experienced teachers, technical supervision and support within the school and from outside, all result in significant differentials in the level of school performance and quality of services provided, in favour of well-to-do pupils and in better off communities. This situation inevitably results in lower achievement and poor acquisition of skills among students in schools serving poor communities in relatively remote areas. At the same time, this group is least likely to have the economic means or social resources to compensate for the low quality of education services they receive.

3.3. Exposure to the mass media

The mass media represent a third key agent for the development of children's abilities. The Convention on the Rights of the Child underscores this in enjoining States to recognise the importance of the mass media, and to ensure that children have access to mass media information and material that promotes social, spiritual, and moral well-being, and physical and mental health. The mass media have a particularly important role in compensating for development opportunities lost due to disadvantaged family environments or poor quality schooling.
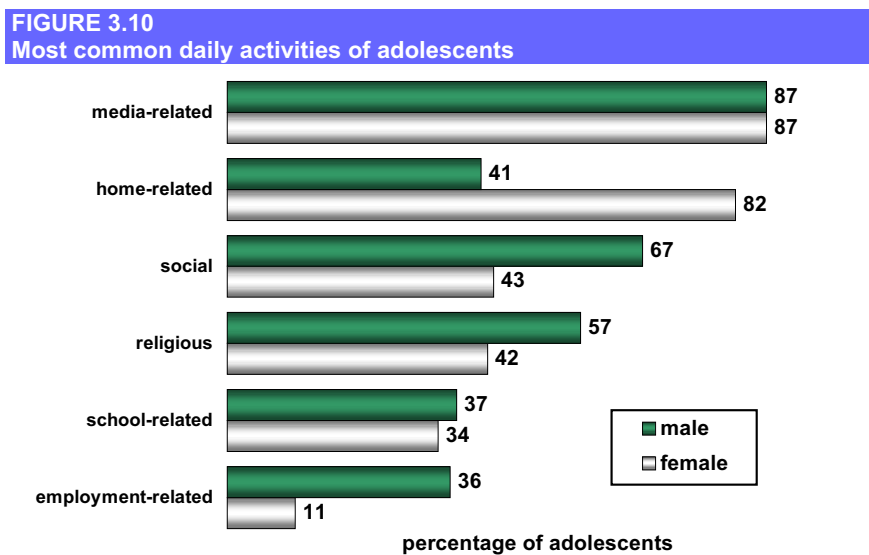
High levels of exposure

High levels of exposure to the mass media underscore their importance in the Egyptian context. The 1997 National Survey of Adolescents found that media-related activities (i.e., watching

television or listening to the radio) were by far the most common daily activities reported by adolescents – 87 percent indicated watching television or listening to the radio during the day preceding the survey, with little variation by sex (Figure 3.10). Of these, 97 percent reported watching television and 64 percent reported listening to the radio. A study by the Radio and Television found that children not only watch television frequently but also do so for very long hours. Children were found to watch an average of six hours and 50 minutes of television daily – almost half of their waking hours – during their summer vacations.

Reading appears to be a much less common daily activity. Only 15 percent of adolescents reported reading on the day preceding the 1997 National Survey of Adolescents. Girls reported reading less often than boys, and children from poor households less often than children from better-off families. Of particular concern, the 1997 survey found that children read progressively less as they get older. Other studies corroborate these findings. One showed that only one-third of children ever read any of the nine children's magazines published in the country,[xvii] and another indicated that only four percent of children regularly read the children's section in the daily newspapers.[xviii] Unattractive contents and high costs of children's magazines and newspapers have been identified as the most important reasons for low readership.[xix]

FIGURE 3.10
Most common daily activities of adolescents

Category	male	female
media-related	87	87
home-related	41	82
social	67	43
religious	57	42
school-related	37	34
employment-related	36	11

percentage of adolescents

Source: National Survey of Adolescents, 1997

Contents of children's programming

Despite the fact that children account for a large proportion of the television viewing audience, statistics from the Radio and Television Union indicate that children's programmes accounted for only seven percent of total television broadcasting hours during the period from 1 July 1998 to 30 June 1999. Children, therefore, are exposed to large amounts of adult programming, some of which is undoubtedly inappropriate for young viewers.

Studies also point to a number of concerns surrounding the contents of the relatively small proportion of programming that is specifically targeted to children. Male characters are much more prominent than female characters in children's programs, and gender-based stereotypes are common.[xx] Rural children appear only rarely in Egyptian children's programs, and urban contexts and scenes predominate.[xxi] Negative role models are presented much more frequently than positive ones; one study found that almost three out of every five children's TV characters resorted to illegal means to achieve their goals.[xxii] Programmes targeting preschoolers typically rely on uninteresting talk-based formats that do not engage children's imaginations. Adolescents complain that with a few rare exceptions, e.g., the TV series 'Whispers' and 'Dialogue with Grown-ups', children's programmes target only young children, and ignore the interests and information needs of youth.[xxiii]

PANEL 3.2
Alam Simsim: The Egyptian Sesame Street

'Alam Simsim, the Egyptian version of the international Sesame Street series, is an illustration of the mass media's potential to positively impact on children's abilities.

Launched in August 2000, the series is now being broadcast nationally daily from Sunday to Thursday in the late afternoon. Household survey data show that three million children under age eight regularly watch the series, an unprecedented coverage level for a children's programme.

The production of the half-hour Alam Simsim programmes is intended to improve children's school readiness, thus contributing to a reduction in primary school failure and drop-outs, while expanding access to preschool education and increasing literacy and numeracy skills. The education series helps to equalise opportunities for early school success, particularly among the disadvantaged.

The series is designed to reflect local culture and traditions, and features a curriculum emphasising local priorities. The series actively promotes girls' education and models positive images for girls as well as boys, thus encouraging girls' early and continued educational participation. Girls are portrayed as active, equal participants in every aspect of the series.

Research in Egypt is documenting the impact of the series. The Alam Simsim's research team in Beni Suef and Minya found that children who had watched the series showed tendencies toward a change in views on gender role (such as whether women can become pilots) and an increase in knowledge of hygienic practices (washing hands, brushing teeth, getting enough sleep, etc.). Number recognition also tended to increase after children had viewed an episode.

Source: Excerpted from Alam Simsim – Research Findings, USAID/Cairo, Education and Training, September 2001.

Not surprisingly, studies show that children are more interested in adults' programmes than in children's programmes. Almost half of 12 and 13-year-olds interviewed for one study described children's programmes as silly, naïve, and superficial.[xxiv] Reasons cited by these children included the repetition of items and scenes; presenters spending too much time talking; too few cartoons; too many foreign songs; too few contests; a lack of children's participation in presenting the programmes; inadequate discussion of the problems of children in the different locations; and the absence of drama.

The high level of violence in children's programmes is a particular concern. A 1998 study indicated that in terms of content, themes of violence and aggression ranked first in television programmess targeting pre-school children.[xxv] The 1997 National Survey of Adolescents found that more than 95 percent of 10-19 year-olds observed violence on television, with little variation by sex or social category. Violence is especially common in children's cartoons, almost all (97 percent) of which are imported.[xxvi] In a 1997 study on the effect of the imported cartoon on violence among Egyptian children, almost half of the 6-12 year-olds interviewed indicated that they emulate the violence they watch on television, and almost 60 percent indicated wanting to watch even more violence.[xxvii] Vulnerable children from disadvantaged families tend to watch more violent movies and programmes and to be more affected by their contents.

Capacity and resources in the children's programming sector

Quality concerns are in large part the product of limited resources and low levels of capacity within the children's programming sector. Studies indicate that the budgets allocated for the production of television programmes are insufficient, and that the raw materials and equipment necessary for production are often not available. The morale of many of the personnel involved in children's media is low because of an unsuitable work environment, a lack of encouragement on the part of supervisors, difficulties in working with children, and low levels of remuneration. There is no information on the characteristics, needs and reactions of the targeted audience, and the objective of children's programs is not clear to many of the personnel involved in their making.[xxviii]

A comprehensive training plan was prepared in 1999 by the Radio and Television Union aimed at enhancing the level of television presenters for women, family and children programmes. The German Hans Seidel Foundation, in cooperation with the Ministry of Information, organised 23 training sessions for communicators in radio and television. These sessions addressed child psychology, visual language, linguistic sociology, child literature, and child identity. They were accompanied by training sessions in script writing and directing children's programs. However, beyond these efforts, the training levels of television and radio personnel involved in children's programming remains low, and training opportunities remain limited. There are also no guidelines to help evaluate the impact of the training sessions on the improvement of the skills of media workers.

Similar challenges face persons working in the children print media sector. Individuals working in children's sections of daily papers report that their organisations do not provide any training for them on children's media, and that no efforts are made to evaluate the impact of their published materials on the targeted audience. A lack of material incentives, limited space for children's sections, and a shortage of competent authors and directors are other problems they reported in their work.[xxix]

Notes

[i] Ibrahim Barbara et al, *Transitions to adulthood: a national survey of Egyptian adolescents*, The Population Council, second edition, Cairo, January 2000.

[ii] The Population Council, *The School Environment: A Situation Analysis of Public Preparatory Schools in Egypt*, 2001.

[iii] Fergany Nader, 'Survey of access to primary education and acquisition of basic literacy skills in three governorates in Egypt', Almishkat Centre for Research and Training and UNICEF, Cairo, October 1994, p. 53.

[iv] Meijer R. (eds.), *Alienation or Integration of Arab Youth: Between Family, State and Street*, Curzon Press Richmond, Surrey, 2000.

[v] Brink, Judy H. "Changing Child-Rearing Patterns in an Egyptian Village." Children in the Muslim Middle East. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (Ed.), Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1996, p. 84.

[vi] Ibrahim Barbara et al, *Transitions to adulthood: a national survey of Egyptian adolescents*, The Population Council, second edition, Cairo, January 2000, p. 142.

[vii] Ibrahim Barbara et al, op. cit., p. 142.

[viii] El-Tawila S., Wassef H., Ibrahim B., 'Inter and Intra Generational   Dynamics in Egypt', Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo/Population Council, Egypt, undated.

[ix] Ibid.

[x] In Egypt, the range for school entry age has been set at 6-8 and now has been extended to 10 years. Because many Egyptian children enter school one or two years late, reported statistics on Egypt using the international specification of primary school age as 6-10 results in a significant underestimation of net enrolment , particularly in urban areas. The age range 8-10 falls short of the full primary stage, however, it provides a better and more realistic indication of the proportion ultimately attending primary school.

[xi] Youssef R.M., Attia M.S., and Kamel M.I. 'Children experiencing violence II: Prevalence and Determinants of Corporal Punishment in Schools, Vol. 22, No. 10, 1998, pp. 975-985.

[xii] Elkamel Farag, 'Dialogue with the future: findings of a study on adolescents in three Egyptian governorates', UNICEF, Cairo, 2001, p. 41.

[xiii] Johnson S., Monk M., and Swain J., 'Constraints on Development and Change to Teachers' Practice in Egyptian Classrooms', *Journal of Education for Teaching*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2000.

[xiv] UNESCO, *Education for All 2000 Assessment. Country Reports Egypt*, 2000, p. 3.

[xv] UNESCO, *World Education Report 2000*, UNESCO Publishing, Paris, 2000, p. 60.

[xvi] 1997/98 EHDR studies, as cited in Nassef A.F. and Osman O.M., Egypt Human Development Report 1998/99, The Institute of National Planning, Nasr City, Cairo, 2000, p. 74.

[xvii] Kandil, Ragia 'The relationship between the Egyptian child and mass media: Exposure and preference criteria', study presented to the First Scientific Conference of the Higher Institute for Childhood, Ain Shams University, 14-16 February 1993 (in Arabic).

[xviii] El Sandoussy Iman, 'Youth (12-15) columns in Egyptian daily papers – An analytical and experimental study', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Faculty of Mass Communications, Cairo University, 1994 (in Arabic).

[xix] Kandil, Ragia 'The relationship between the Egyptian child and mass media: Exposure and preference criteria', study presented to the First Scientific Conference of the Higher Institute for Childhood, Ain Shams University, 14-16 February 1993 (in Arabic).

[xx] Zein El Abdin, Mona. "The role of the Arabic series in presenting positive and negative models for the Egyptian child – An analytical and field study", unpublished MA thesis, Faculty of Mass Communications, Cairo University, 1999 (in Arabic).

[xxi] Mazid M., 1994.

[xxii] Zein El Abdin, Mona, op. cit., 1999.

[xxiii] Elkamel Farag, 'Dialogue with the future: findings of a study on adolescents in three Egyptian governorates', UNICEF, Cairo, 2001, p. 58.

[xxiv] Hamed, Susan Abdel Gawad. "Egyptian TV programs on Channel 1 – A comparative exploratory study on the two sexes (9-12 years), unpublished MA thesis, Higher Institute of Childhood, Ain Shams University (in Arabic).

[xxv] El Shorbagy, Sahar Ahmed Abdel Azim. "To what extent do Egyptian TV programs take into consideration knowledge and social aspects related to pre-school children? – An analytical study on the Programs of Channel 1", unpublished MA thesis, Higher Institute of Childhood , Ain Shams University, 1998 (in Arabic).

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[xxvii] El Qelliny, Susan and Hebatallah El Semary. "Impact of violent scenes in TV cartoons on children" Egyptian Journal of Media Research, Cairo: Faculty of Mass Communications, Issue no. 1, January 1997 (in Arabic).

[xxviii] Rawash, Atef Abdel Rashid. "The problems of the communicator in media production addressed to children – A field study", unpublished MA thesis, The Higher Institute of Childhood, Ain Shams University, 1997 (in Arabic).

[xxix] El Sandoussy Iman, op. cit., 1994.