

## Chapter One: The Egyptian Educational System

*Egypt has a population of 68 million, which is rapidly growing. Most of it consists of large low-income families in rural areas where the rate of illiteracy is relatively high. (No accurate figures are available.) Under such circumstances, and given the traditional character of most of Egypt's population, with its social bias against the equality of men and women, it is understandable that the Egyptian government, with its limited resources, cannot provide adequate education for all. The most vulnerable population in this respect is girls in the remote parts of the rural areas, especially in Upper Egypt, but there are other segments of the population too that have no access to decent education.*

*Nevertheless, the Egyptian government has committed itself to improving the situation, beginning in the 1990s. More schools have been built to accommodate the new students, the curricula of the various grades have been changed, and new projects for the less advantaged populations have been initiated. The government has set goals for further improvements in the framework of development programs that are scheduled to be completed by 2007.*

*Following are glimpses of various aspects of the Egyptian education system at the beginning of the 2000s.*

### **General Data**

*Education budget for 2001/2002: LE 20.4 billion.*

***Al-Ahram Weekly Online, 7-13 February 2002 –,  
<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/572/eg.2.htm>***

*The state is responsible for most of the education financing (excluding private education), but Egypt receives aid from the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, and from several countries.*

***International Affairs/Education around the World: Egypt –,  
[http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/int\\_egypt.html](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/int_egypt.html)***

*Total number of schools in 2001-02: 33,880*

*Total number of students in 2000-01: 15,179,246*

*Total number of teachers in 2000-01: 795,195*

***Egyptian Ministry of Education, –  
<http://www.emoe.org/development/buildings/pic.html>***

*School enrollment rate in 2000:*

*Primary phase: 92.62 percent*

*Secondary phase: 78.59 percent*

**nationmaster.com: Egypt Profile: Education-**  
**<http://www.nationmaster.com/country/eg/Education>**

### **Educational Policy**

*The Egyptian constitution of 1971 mentions education in three main articles, 18, 19 and 20, as follows:*

*18. Education is a right guaranteed by the State. It is compulsory in the elementary phase and the State is working on extending compulsory [education] to other phases. [The State] supervises all [types] of education...*

*19. Religious education is a basic subject within the general educational curricula.*

*20. Education in State educational institutions is free in all phases.*

**Arab Republic of Egypt, People's Assembly: The Constitution –**  
**<http://www.parliament.gov.eg>**

### **General Guidelines of Egyptian Education**

*Beyond the ordinary purposes of education in general, such as the acquisition of knowledge, development of personal capabilities and skills, socialization, and the promotion of human values, Egyptian education focuses on some specific issues, namely: National unity (that is, of Muslims and Copts); preservation of national, religious and cultural identity and social coherence; enhancement of the sense of loyalty and of belonging to the homeland; implanting faith and pride in religion as well as respect for other faiths, their holy places and worship; and the promotion of democracy.*

**Education Strategy in Egypt – Egyptian Ministry of Education**

### **Structure of the Egyptian Educational System**

*There are two educational systems in Egypt: State education and religious education, the latter being sponsored by the Al-Azhar religious university. Both have several parallel phases. In addition, there are private schools at all grade levels, but they do not constitute a separate system.*

### **Educational Phases**

*There are five phases in Egyptian education: Pre-school education, primary education, preparatory education, secondary education, and post-secondary (including higher) education. Since the extension of the compulsory education law in 1981 to include the preparatory phase, both the primary and preparatory phases have been incorporated together in what is called “Basic Education”. The post-secondary phase will not be discussed here, as its curricula fall outside the scope of the present report.*

### Pre-school Education (Kindergarten)

*This type of education is still rare in today's Egypt, as it is not compulsory and not offered free of charge. Pre-school education comprises two years in private institutions for children between the ages of four and six. It has been suggested that this phase, or at least its second year, be made part of the free and compulsory system, but so far such a change has not been implemented. Most of the relatively few kindergartens in Egypt are found in the largest urban centers and, according to the Ministry of Education statistics, there were in Egypt in the school year 1999-2000 3,527 such institutions with 354,435 students. Although all kindergartens are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, the curriculum may differ considerably from one institution to another. There are, for example, places that focus on Qur'an recitation and, at the other end of the scale – kindergartens that teach foreign languages, mainly English.*

### Basic Education (Compulsory)

*As already mentioned, Basic Education includes two phases, namely, primary and preparatory. Primary education used to be six years, was reduced to five years in 1988, and restored to six years again in 1999. Primary education covers ages six to twelve. The preparatory phase is three years, for ages twelve to fifteen.*

*The total number of students in the primary phase in the school year 2000-01 was 7,224,998, of whom 3,835,965 were male students and 3,389,033 female students. Boys and girls study together in this phase, except in the Al-Azhar educational system (see below).*

*The total number of students in the preparatory phase in the school year 2000-01 was 2,975,944, of whom 1,578,688 were male students and 1,397,256 female students. Boys and girls are separated in this phase, except in private non-religious schools.*

### Secondary Education

*Secondary education consists of three different types: general, technical, and vocational.*

#### *I. General Secondary Education*

*This type of secondary education extends over three years, of which the first serves as a preparatory year for the other two. In this first year the student studies both humanistic and scientific subjects. At the end of the year, and on the basis of his or her grades, the student enters one of three streams in which he will study for the next two years: humanistic, scientific, or mathematical, each with its specific curricular focus, although some subjects, such as Arabic and religious education, are taught in all streams.*

## *II. Technical Secondary Education*

*Technical education, which is given in three-year and five-year programs, includes schools in three different fields: industrial, commercial, and agricultural.*

## *III. Vocational Secondary Education*

*Secondary schools of this type operate in two fields: paramedical (three years) and tourism and hotel-keeping schools (both of three- and five-year program types).*

### *Al-Azhar*

*The Azharite education system is supervised by the Supreme Council of the Al-Azhar Institution and is independent from the Ministry of Education. But the Al-Azhar Institution itself is placed under government supervision, and its educational system is actually supervised by the Egyptian prime minister. The Al-Azhar schools are named "institutes" and include primary, preparatory, and secondary phases. All schools in all phases teach non-religious subjects, to a certain degree, although not as intensively as the state schools. The bulk of the curriculum, however, consists of religious subjects as described below. All the students are Muslim, and males and females are separated in all phases. The Azharite schools are spread all over the country, especially in rural areas. The graduates of the Azharite secondary schools are eligible to continue their studies at the Al-Azhar University only. The Azharite schools accounted in the early 2000s for less than 4 percent of the total enrollment.*

### *The Private Sector*

*Schools of the private sector are found in all phases. They are supervised by the Ministry of Education and teach State-approved curricula. But they are permitted to use additional textbooks. They differ considerably from one another in their goals and quality, as well as in the fees they charge.*

*Generally speaking, there are three types of private schools: ordinary schools, language schools, and religious schools. The ordinary schools do not differ much from government schools so far as the curriculum is concerned, but they pay more attention to the students' needs and to the school facilities. The language schools teach most of the government curriculum in English, and add French or German as a second foreign language. They are considered to be much better than the other schools but their fees are extremely high.*

*There are some religiously oriented private schools that are sponsored by the opposition Muslim Brotherhood movement, especially in the western delta region. Their curricula are different from those taught at the state or the Al-Azhar schools. The government from time to time imposes on these school new management and teachers, in order to strengthen its hold on these schools.*

*Private education in Egypt accounted in the school year 2000-01 for 1,143,142 students in 3921 schools.*

**Egyptian Ministry of Education –**  
**<http://www.emoe.org/development/buildings/pic.html>**

### **Special Projects**

*There are various projects initiated by the Egyptian government, sometimes with the participation of non-Egyptian bodies, in order to improve certain aspects of Egyptian education. Some of these projects are the experimental schools (575 in 2000-01) where new methods and curricula are tried out with a view to extending the successful ones to all other schools. Such a successful experiment was the teaching of English beginning in Grade 1, which was made universal in Egypt this school year. These schools are mostly found in the larger urban centers, such as Cairo and Alexandria. Their curricula are the same as those in the ordinary state schools, but some of the subjects in the experimental schools are taught in English, and, in some cases, French and German are also taught. In this they resemble the best private schools, in that the personal and professional level of the educational and administrative staff is superior, and the students who are carefully selected for these schools are of higher caliber. There are experimental schools at all educational phases.*

*Two other projects are designed for the needs of girls in remote rural areas who cannot attend regular classes. In one, girls between the ages of eight and fourteen are taught various subjects from the primary school curricula in accordance with their personal level. In schools that answer to the needs of the local population (with the participation of UNICEF), girls of ages six to twelve are additionally taught subjects of the primary school curriculum adapted to their environmental needs.*

### **Curricula**

*In general, curriculum guidelines for each subject – such as literature, mathematics, sciences and Arabic – are determined by a system of committees at the state level. Each committee consists of professional experts in the field, supervisors, consultants, professors of education and experienced teachers. After the committee has reached agreement, the curriculum guidelines are referred to the Supreme Council of Pre-University Education for official release. Each governorate (province) is responsible for implementation of the guidelines.*

*In the 1990s the Ministry of Education formed committees to develop and improve the curricula of the various educational phases. In 1993 a*

conference for the development of primary education was convened, and a similar conference for the preparatory phase was convened in 1994. The main changes included the introduction of technology both in teachers' training and in preparing the students to deal with technology. In 1998 three discussion sessions took place, headed by the Minister of Education, as well as workshops with the participation of foreign experts from the World Bank. In 2000 the Egyptian parliament confirmed the first stage of the education improvement project which is to be followed by other stages until 2007.

During the first three years of the primary phase, the curriculum comprises Arabic language, arithmetic, religious education, and basic principles of science. Beginning in the school year 2003-04 English is supposed to become part of the curriculum for the primary years in all state schools, having previously been taught from Grade 4 upward. In the latter three years, the curriculum comprises Arabic language, English, mathematics, sciences, social studies (geography and history), religious education, arts, and computer basics. It should be noted that religious education is a subject, that determines the student's passing from one grade to another in all educational phases in Egypt, but the achievement marks for it are not included in the student's total score.

In the preparatory phase, students study the following subjects: Arabic language (grammar and literature), English, French as a second foreign language, social studies (geography, history, national education), sciences (physics, chemistry, biology), mathematics, religious education.

The main subjects that are taught during the first year of the secondary phase are: Arabic language and literature, Arabic grammar, English, another foreign language – either French or German, mathematics, sciences, social studies, philosophy, logic and scientific thinking, religious education, arts, and physical education. In subsequent years the student specializes in specific subjects from this list taught in his chosen stream.

Students in the Al-Azhar schools are taught the following subjects: learning parts of the Qur'an by heart, reciting of the Qur'an, Qur'an commentary, Prophetic sayings (Hadith), Islamic jurisprudence, religious morals, theology, biography of the Prophet, reading and literary material, composition, grammar, Arabic script, rhetoric, basics of poetry, logic, history, geography, national education, arithmetic, geometry, sciences (biology, chemistry), hygiene, and drawing.

In the higher grades, the students in Al-Azhar schools choose one stream out of three:

*A. The Arabic language stream, which focuses on grammar, rhetoric, literature, logic, history, Qur'an commentary, Prophetic sayings, and composition.*

*B. The Islamic law stream, which focuses on Qur'an commentary, Prophetic sayings, various branches of Islamic jurisprudence, Arabic literature, logic, and rhetoric.*

*C. The religious fundamentals stream, which focuses on theology, logic, philosophy, morals, Qur'an commentary, Prophetic sayings, Arabic literature, Islamic history, psychology, and rhetoric. This stream puts special emphasis on polemics and debating.*