

Education Project II

Project Summary

Today, Egypt is in the midst of an ambitious plan that aims at transforming the country into a fully-sustainable nation “Egypt Vision 2030”. Therefore, in order to realize Egypt’s vision, policymakers and educational leaders should (a) formulate context-specific policies that aim at addressing current high graduate unemployment rates amongst females and (b) further investigate topics pertaining to female student career success. Failure to respond to this pressing issue in a timely manner not only increases poverty rates and jeopardizes Egypt’s vision of a prosperous future, but also shatters the dreams of young Egyptian females who believe that education is a means for social mobility, the key to success in life, and a remedy for past civic injustices. Participating students in the GSE Tomorrow’s Leaders initiative will engage in research to determine ways that bridge the gender gap in employment in the MENA region and the strategies that enhance gender equity in Egypt’s labor market. At the completion of this initiative, there will be a better understanding of the strategies that help enhance the employment of female graduates. Participants will deliver scholarly and practical deliverables that address disciplinary literacy, greater access regardless of gender, and improved education quality.

Introduction

In Egypt, the intellectual value of schooling is underappreciated because “for many of the women, education for employment did not seem to be encouraged; in fact whereas employment was the most important reason for male’s education (62%), raising family and being a better mother was listed as the most important reason for educating girls” (Ghazal, 2014, p. 27). With a literacy rate that exceeds 65%, “women constitute 23% of Egypt’s workforce and account for 12% of the trained employees and 10% of the executive employees” (Ostrosky, 2015, p. 24). In the third quarter of 2013, total unemployment rates in Egypt reached 13.4% (Nassar & Biltagi, 2017). One-third of the unemployed individuals were university graduates (31.1%); 24.4% of which were male graduates and 40.1% were female graduates (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics [CAPMAS], 2014).

Problem Statement

Throughout Egypt and MENA, youth increasingly find themselves in a state of NEET; that is “not in education, employment, or training.” Many young Egyptians with university education find there are insufficient employment opportunities, and this problem is exacerbated for the nation’s women and poorest individuals in rural areas of the country. Gender disparity in employment presents significant challenges female university graduates face. Because the Ministries of Education and Technology and Higher Education are currently investing heavily in initiatives to improve quality, relevance, and equity in education, and the government is supporting these innovative initiatives, the present proposal is situated to make an additional impact on the problem of youths’ and women’s unemployment.

Background

The Graduate School of Education at AUC is well suited to address these topics. Dr. Karkouti brings a wealth of experience in gender inequalities, racial disparities, and professional discourses to the project. The faculty of the academic unit is diverse with backgrounds in literacy, gender studies, and international education and they come from the United States, Lebanon, Egypt, and Ethiopia with experience in many regions of the world including Africa, China, Central America, and the Middle East. Research has led us to findings that indicate while the breadth and depth of knowledge of specific disciplines are extensive (see Wolsey, 2010),

there is little practical knowledge indicating the impact on secondary education and higher education or the intersections of disciplines across professions.

Significance

Given the Egyptian government emphasis on reducing unemployment rates amongst youth and the concomitant need to have a professional workforce that contributes to the enhancement of the economy, a project that aims at closing the labor market gender gap and expanding employment opportunities for female graduates seems both timely and important. Few, if any studies have addressed issues pertaining to gender inequity in Egypt's labor market. Thus, this project will address this literature gap and serve as a stepping stone for ending gender discrimination in employment.

Project description

The broad goal of this project is to develop a practical understanding of how societal norms and social structure affect gender inequity in Egypt's job market. Power dynamics related to gender and socio-economic status will be explored as a means of explaining and remediating gender gaps in employment and addressing social mobility for young Egyptians and MENA citizens, particularly in rural areas. Successful applicants will seek a degree in international and comparative education. The project team has identified existing coursework that addresses discourse analysis, gender studies, and international perspectives in education. Applicants will pursue the thesis track while working with Dr. Karkouti as the main thesis supervisor. The project duration is 12 months, with research conducted over a period of 9 months and the thesis document completed over a period of 3 months.

The Advancement of Scientific Knowledge and Broader Impact

In addition to the development of the instruments described above and the research conducted through the thesis process, successful applicants will participate in international conference presentations, prepare a themed issue for a selected journal, and write for other top-tier publications. The Graduate School of Education will sponsor a conference on the combined topics of all successful applicants at AUC's historic Tahrir Square campus with invited participants and plenary speakers from throughout the Egyptian and MENA business and education communities. Finally, applicants will produce and maintain a blog and open access library that makes their work available to those around the region.

Biographical Sketches

Ibrahim M. Karkouti is an independent thinker, a young scholar, and a life-long learner who recently defended his doctoral dissertation at the University of Hartford, CT - USA. Ten years of professional experience in Lebanon, Qatar, and the United States have taught Ibrahim that learning has no boundaries and that education matters the most when it is used to remedy the deleterious effects of segregation, racism, sectarianism, and other forms of discriminatory practices that prevent historically excluded populations from attaining their basic rights to education, healthcare, and prosperity. Dr. Karkouti's research focuses on (a) diversity issues in higher education, (b) the elements that aid in the facilitation of the use of technology in the classroom, and (c) the types of social support K-12 teachers need to embrace and implement reform.

Leveraging Resources

The Graduate School of Education is the home to the Middle East Institute of Higher Education. MEIHE's influence and connections to rural schools and to the Supreme Council for Higher

Education. The GSE Centennial Lab project provides additional capacity to the unit through its digital content development component that reaches out to school teacher leaders throughout the country. Partners in the professional educator diploma program, ERASMUS+ offer additional resources for conducting this research.

Deliverables

Deliverables include a master thesis deposited at the Digital Archive and Research (DAR) Repository of the American University in Cairo, publically accessible. In addition, the results of the research project will be disseminated through recognized venues in the field, such as international conferences and/or journals. Furthermore, they include an open access repository for Gender Discourse and Professional Literacies in MENA with accompanying blog, as well as the development of assessment instruments to be used in instruction in basic and higher education and in business applications. These would be subject to copyright and/or patent.

Professional Development and Mentoring Plan

The selected student will be provided with a single point of contact through the Graduate School of Education to help them adjust to life at The American University in Cairo and guide them to appropriate financial, residential, and academic resources. In addition, the Co-PI will act as the thesis supervisor of the student providing guidance for the development of the research plan, and through close supervision of the thesis work conducted would support the student in completing the work and disseminating the findings. Furthermore, the student will participate in 360-degree evaluations that help build an understanding of their strengths and build their ability to use such tools in the market place or public sector.

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