

## **The Power of Education**

"Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army."

*Edward Everett*

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Education is one of the most basic rights of children around the world. It is the key for reform in a society because once you have educated a child properly he ultimately becomes a person capable of giving back to his country. Recently, Egypt has been ranked the worst in terms of primary education (Bohen). In the times after the revolution, most people are concerned mostly with the political rights of the citizens and the creation of a new and stable democratic state, and while these rights are very important, but they mean nothing without implementing the necessary educational reform in order to maintain these political rights.

According to the latest statistics by the World Economic Forum, Egypt was ranked the 131<sup>st</sup> out of 144 countries around the world (El Dahshan). This is an indication that it has dropped a total of 11 places from last year (El Dahshan). The educational system, specifically the primary educational system is considered not sufficient enough to cover the basics for children to become productive members of society. According to other statistics by Chatham House the Egyptian government spends an average of \$129 per student per year (Bohen). This amount is absolutely deplorable and in comparison to other countries around the world is very little. Families often struggle to be able to afford the basic price to send their children to school and teachers are often considered less than cooperative. There are two basic roots to the problem of education in Egypt. The economic aspect is the fact that the government pays very little on the education system, the teachers are not given proper pay and resort to finding other means to get money, at the expense of the students. The social aspect is mostly revolved around the education and women. Education is a very important issue in order to create a stable democracy in Egypt.

The economic implications for education are very important to point out when it comes to the topic of education. As pointed out above, one of the main factors which are causing the educational system to be listed as one of the worst in the world is the economic factors. Expenditure on education has severely dropped after the Egyptian revolution. The Egyptian government spends very little on the education sector and as pointed out above spends around \$129 (Bohen). This is not enough to maintain a proper education system. Despite calls that there should be more money spent on the

educational system it can only do so much. The important factor when it comes to the education system in Egypt is to ensure quality. Upon looking at the statistics, “85 percent of all students, primary to university level, enrolled in public schools, this is the system that matters most” (Boutros). This number is not indicative to the quality of education which these children are receiving. One of the main factors when looking at the quality of education is looking at the fact that there is a problem of private tutoring which exists in the system. The teachers who work in these public schools are given very low wages and as a result they are forced to have to give private tutoring. Often there are teachers who employ psychological pressures on students in order to get them to take private lessons (El Sheekh). In an article by Ahram, an interview with a teacher in a private school comments saying, "My salary is 470 EGP; how am I supposed to live when my rent is 600 EGP?" he told Ahram Online. "How is a teacher supposed to live and work normally when he has to count how much money he is spending on breakfast?" (El Sheekh). And with the quality of education being low, families are forced to find their children tutors in order to help them. This is indicative of a continuing cycle where both parties are victims of a corrupt, dysfunctional system.

The Egyptian education system needs to be reformed in order to be able to make it more balanced. Through fixing the economic problem it is possible to fix the quality situation. One common proposed solution is the application of a maximum wage within the ministry. This could help have the teachers make more money and possibly teach better. The government needs to tackle the issue of making the teachers more qualified. If the teachers are possibly trained in the curriculum by the ministry would make sure that the teachers relay the information correctly. Another possible solution to help solve the issue of education is reforming the way the schools are set up, such as making sure that the schools are well equipped and include the correct amount of children per faculty and the correct number of students per desks. Fixing small issues like that would significantly improve the quality of education. In order to get extra revenue to fund such projects could possibly come from taxing the private schools and through this it is possible to fund these efforts.

In addition to taking the economic aspects in mind when isolating the reasons behind the deterioration in the educational, the social reasons are just as important. The most important issue to the social aspects is the fact that many families do not send their daughters to school. Education for girls especially at a primary level is very important. As Qasim Amin wrote years ago, education for women is very important for them to be good mothers, but apart from that education for women should be important for them as individuals. Women constitute a large portion of the society in Egypt, and educating them will lead to many benefits in society such as higher employment rates and more income to the family. An educated female will make sound choices when it comes to her health as well as her life in general. Helping educate women further will eventually solve other issues such as the problem of over population. Resolving this issue needs specific attention to the families. In the more rural areas, girls are denied anything past a primary education by their families. In order to decrease this occurrence the government must target the families through grassroots project where religious and rural leaders can help educate the families on the benefits of educating girls and could give them incentives in order to help them enroll girls in schools.

The reform of education needs to be the primary concern of the government. It essentially needs to completely support the efforts which have been undertaken by other entities in to order to help educate children in Egypt. Reforming the educational system needs to be both a governmental initiative as well as a societal one. One of the most famous initiatives is the Girls' Education Initiative in Egypt by UNICEF. This program has been very successful in helping increase the number of girls who get a quality education (Girls' Education Initiative). Since their beginning they have aimed at closing the gender gap between women and men, which will eventually help decrease the unemployment rates in Egypt (Girls' Education Initiative). This program helps show that the government needs initiatives such as these in order to help it provide education for children across Egypt. This specific initiative has helped enroll 180,000 girls (Nasef). This project shows a success story, a possible way to help end problems such as unemployment and illiteracy.

Education is more than just a political, social or economic issue. In Egypt the key to the future is education. The fate of democracy lies in the fixing the educational system. Helping educate children provides a country with economic benefits as it creates a more skilled workforce helping the output of a country as a whole. The political rights of people are very important in the upcoming time in the history of Egypt, but all these efforts will mean nothing without reforming the education system which must be taught the values of democracy and tolerance in order to help maintain the democracy which is being set up. The government needs to fix the allocation of money within the education system in order to make it more efficient. Able and educated teachers, schools and universities need to create community based programs in order to help reform the educational system or educate those who cannot afford it as best as possible. The government needs to open programs which teach children the values of democracy. Expenditure needs to be greed at scientific research as well in order to help reform society as a whole. An education generation will make sound political decisions without the influence of others who can sway their opinion using bogus fallacies.

When contemplating a topic for this essay, it is impossible to not to discuss the current political climate in Egypt. The issue of democracy is one which is very important to ensure that both revolutions are successful. The key to ensuring a fully functional democracy is more than simply a good constitution, it is a bottom up restructuring of society and the most important issue which needs focus is education. One should never underestimate the power of education when considering the future of a country, through empowering the individual with a proper education an entire nation. In Egypt, where the country is being restructured it is important to take care of the children and their education. The roots of the problem of the education system are economic, social and political, and their solution lies within making the system more efficient. The problem should be taken care of as a government and society. Education needs to be offered to all. The problem is qualitative and quantitative problem. The amount of money spent on education must be increased and must be spent properly. The teachers need to be paid better in order to ensure that they do their jobs properly. Girls must be educated in order to help benefit society as a whole. The curriculum needs to be reformed to reflect the new ideals which children need to be taught to maintain in a democracy and the

basic unalienable rights that they cannot be denied. Through empowering the individual, a democratic process is solidified for generations to come.

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