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# Views of Non-Formal Education in Egypt

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Schoolchildren in Egypt; credit USAID



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## Overview

Egyptians are deeply concerned about the state of education in their country. The vast majority are dissatisfied with the current education system as well as government efforts to improve it. Perhaps as a result, most are worried that there is no possibility to provide their children with a good education. This combination means that youth non-formal education (NFE) programs hold a unique opportunity to yield significant gains in the academic achievement of students in Egypt in the near-term. However, if such programs are to address both the perceived weaknesses of the Egyptian education system and the concerns of the population, issues like cost, which limit participation, must be seriously considered. Across all demographics, cost is overwhelmingly cited as the biggest barrier to participation. The prevalence of programs organized by private institutions only exacerbates this challenge.

In addition, programs must account for demographic differences. At present, the majority of youth who participate in NFE programs come from families with higher incomes, higher education levels and who live in urban areas. Expanding opportunities for accessing youth NFE programs requires special focus on targeting Egyptians who reside in rural areas, who have incomes below the median, and whose tend to have lower levels of education.

Non-formal education programs provide unique potential for bridging the gap between the existing education system and what increasing educational opportunities for the country's youth. However, careful consideration must be given to the types of programs most likely to be successful in the Egyptian context. Although youth NFE programs tend to be viewed positively across the country, a substantial portion of Egyptians are either unaware of such programs or do not look upon them favorably. Moreover, programs should target job-related skills as Egyptians consider these the most useful. NFE programs should be promoted to potential participants with this consideration in mind.

## Views on Government and the Education System

Based on data from the Arab Barometer public opinion survey,<sup>1</sup> very few Egyptians are satisfied with the state of the country's formal education system. Only a quarter of respondents say they are satisfied, while nearly three-quarters say they are not (26 percent vs. 72 percent). However, there are differences in levels of satisfaction by income and education. When disaggregated by income, those whose income is above the approximate median household income (LE 2625) are half as likely to be satisfied as those who are below this level (15 percent vs. 30 percent). Further, respondents who say their income

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<sup>1</sup> Arab Barometer data. 2016. "Egypt. Wave 4." Available at <http://www.arabbarometer.org>.

covers their needs and even allows them to save are less satisfied than those who face significant financial difficulties (25 percent vs. 32 percent). In terms of education level, those with a secondary education or above are 17 points less likely to be satisfied with the state of education compared to those with a basic education or less (36 percent vs. 19 percent). These differences suggest that wealthier and more highly educated Egyptians may hold higher expectations about the quality of education that should be provided by the state compared to poorer or less educated citizens, meaning that they are less satisfied overall with the state of the education system.

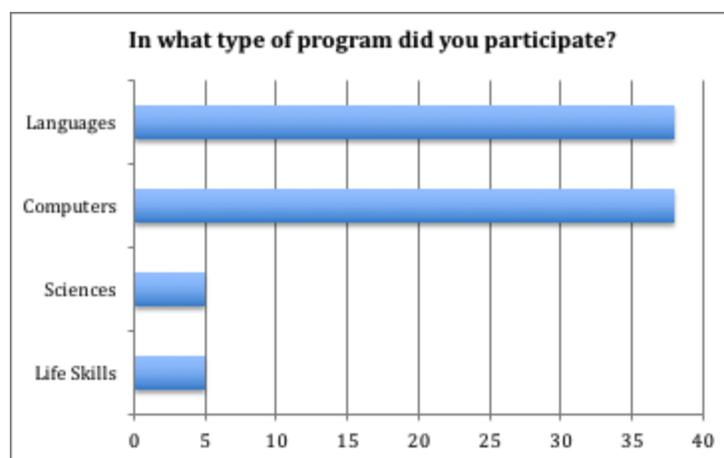
In addition, most Egyptians do not think the government is adequately addressing educational needs. Roughly two-thirds (68 percent) rate government efforts to improve the quality of education poorly. Wealthier Egyptians are, on average, more dissatisfied with government efforts to improve education than those who are poorer (75 percent earning LE2625 or more vs. 66 percent earning less than LE2625). Egyptians who have higher levels of education (secondary or above) are also more likely to be dissatisfied than their less-educated counterparts (basic or below) (74 percent vs. 60 percent). Further, Egyptians in urban areas are more dissatisfied than those living in rural areas (75 percent vs. 62 percent). Again, these differences may be due, at least in part, to different expectations among Egyptians. Likely, those who are better educated, earn more and live in more urban areas likely have higher expectations about the quality of education that the state should provide compared with those who are less educated, poorer and live in rural areas.

As a basis of comparison, Egyptians' level of satisfaction with other government-provided services are relatively similar. For instance, 28 percent are satisfied with health care services while 72 percent are dissatisfied. In terms of managing the economy, 30 percent of Egyptians feel the government is doing a good job, compared to 62 percent who feel it is doing a bad job. Satisfaction is significantly lower with government efforts to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, with nearly four-fifths of respondents saying the government is not doing a good job addressing this issue (83 percent).

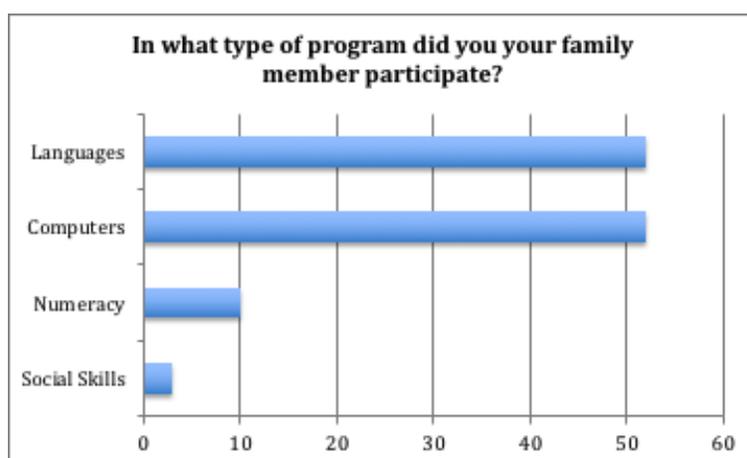
The vast majority of Egyptians are worried about the ability to provide their children with a good education (89 percent). Given that this sentiment is nearly universal, there are no major differences across demographic backgrounds. However, although it does not differ significantly across incomes, we see a slight difference in terms of education level. Those with a secondary education or higher are somewhat more worried than those with a basic education or less (92 percent vs. 85 percent). Nonetheless, it is clear that nearly all Egyptians, regardless of their socio-economic background, are worried about the ability to educate their country's children.

## Attitudes toward Non-Formal Education and Reasons for Attending

Few Egyptians have live in a household with a member who has attended a youth non-formal education (NFE) program (4 percent). Of the few who have participated, 40 percent participated themselves while 60 percent said a family member participated. Although the number of respondents who have participated is relatively small, we nonetheless see a difference in participation rates by education level, income level, and whether the respondent is from an urban or rural area. Households with a participant in such programs tend to have higher levels of education (83 percent vs. 17 percent) from families with a basic education or less and be wealthier (9 percent among households with an income of LE 2625 or more vs. 3 percent from households with an income below LE 2625). In addition, two-thirds or participants come from urban areas (67 percent). Private institutions, as opposed to NGOs, have organized the majority of the non-formal education programs in which respondents or their family members participated (73 percent), while just 15 percent are organized by international organizations or non-profits. For the remainder (12 percent), the respondent was uncertain about who organized the course. Given the cost of enrolling in private programs, it is unsurprising that more participants come from higher income families than from lower income families.

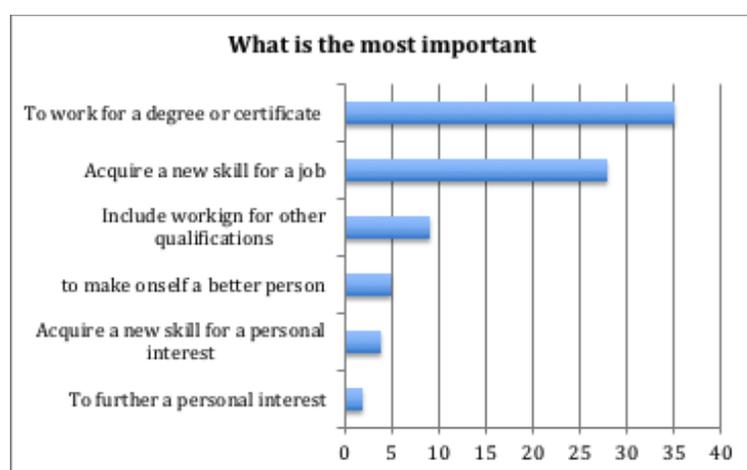


Of those who participated themselves, the most common types of programs are those emphasizing computer skills and language skills (38 percent, each), followed by programs teaching life skills or sciences (5 percent, each).



Among those who had a family member participate, programs teaching computers and languages were again the most popular (52 percent, each), followed by numeracy (10 percent) and social skills (3 percent).

The majority of Egyptians say the most important reason to participate in these programs is either to work for a degree or certificate (35 percent) or to acquire a new skill for a job (28 percent). Other reasons include working for other qualifications (9 percent), to make oneself a better person (5 percent), to acquire a new skill for a personal interest (4 percent) or to further a personal interest (2 percent). Among the second most important reasons to participate, 23 percent say to acquire a new skill for a job, to work for a degree or certificate (13 percent), to work for other qualifications (12 percent), to make oneself a better person (9 percent), to acquire a new skill for a personal interest (8 percent), to further an interest (6 percent) or to meet new people (1 percent).



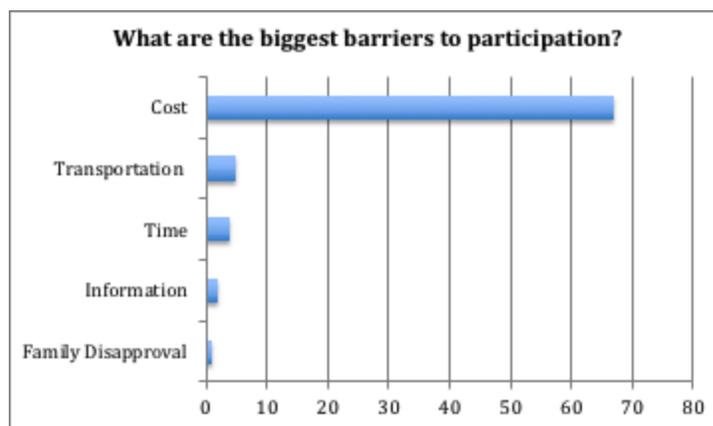
The overall perception of non-formal education programs is more positive among those who have either participated themselves or had a family member participate. Among those who do not live in a household with a participant, 58 percent think positively of NFE programs, 19 percent do not think positively and 23 percent say they either did not know

or declined to answer. In contrast, among those who either participated themselves or had a family member participate, 83 percent are satisfied or very satisfied, while only 15 percent say they are not satisfied.

## Barriers to Attending Non-Formal Education Programs

More than two-thirds of respondents cite cost as the biggest barrier to participation in non-formal education programs (67 percent). By comparison, no other barrier exceeded 5 percent, although small percentages listed transportation (5 percent), time (4 percent), information (2 percent) or family disapproval (1 percent). Notably, nearly a fifth of respondents say they do not know what is the biggest barrier to participation (17 percent). Somewhat surprisingly, cost is cited as a barrier to participation more frequently among those who say their income covers their needs and even allows them to save as opposed to those who say they face significant difficulties meeting their needs (78 percent vs. 62 percent). This difference, however, appears related to knowledge about such programs. More than 90 percent of respondents who say they “don’t know” what the biggest barrier is come from households earning less than the approximate median income in Egypt. Thus, unfamiliarity with the existence such programs appears to be a particular barrier for poorer Egyptians.

When asked about the second biggest barrier to participation nearly two-fifths said they had no further reply, meaning that for many cost is perceived as the only meaningful barrier. However, many Egyptians say that time (16 percent) or transportation (15 percent) represent the second biggest barrier, followed by cost (7 percent), lack of information (5 percent), lack of access (4 percent), family disapproval (3 percent) or lack of resources (2 percent).



In addition to these physical barriers, some youth may face cultural barriers. Although a majority of Egyptians say that in Islam it is acceptable for male and females to attend class together (63 percent), a significant minority says it is not (37 percent). The vast majority of

respondents also disagree that university education is more important for males than for females (84 percent disagree while 16 percent agree). Interestingly, when disaggregated by religiosity, those who self-identify as religious are about equally likely to hold this view as those who are somewhat religious or not religious (86 percent, 83 percent, and 82 percent, respectively).

## Views of Education

Egyptians primarily favor an education system that emphasizes critical thinking and emotional intelligence, although they have a stronger preference for a program promoting the former compared with the latter. Despite broad societal support for the inclusion of these concepts, there are some differences based on gender and, to a higher degree, education level and urbanity. Meanwhile, very limited, if any, differences are found by income.

When asked what type of education system they would like to see in the country, Egyptians prefer one in which students learn to think about how to answer the question as opposed to one that emphasizes just getting to the right answer (71 percent vs. 24 percent). Further, the majority of respondents say that a good education system encourages students to think for themselves even when it goes against what the teacher is saying, as opposed to encouraging students to simply accept the answer offered by the teacher (69 percent vs. 25 percent). Egyptians also prefer examinations that allow students to demonstrate how well they have made their own sense of what has been taught in class as opposed to tests that allow students to demonstrate how well they have memorized what has been taught in class (73 percent vs. 21 percent).

In terms of curricula that emphasize emotional intelligence, Egyptians are more evenly divided. Slightly more than half believe that there must be courses to teach students how to recognize and express their own emotions and respond to others' emotions (55 percent), while 41 percent believe the education system should focus primarily on developing the scientific skills of students. However, while three-in-ten Egyptians prefer an education system that places primary importance on academic achievement and certificates recognizing completion (28 percent), 64 percent prefer placing a primary importance on learning social skills such as the ability to understand the perspectives and feelings of others.

Although differences in attitudes between men and women and between higher and lower income Egyptians are limited, there are some interesting findings for the former. Of note, though 71 percent of men prefer an education system that encourages students to think for themselves even when it goes against what the teacher is saying, slightly fewer women say the same (67 percent). In addition, while three-in-ten men prefer placing primary

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1	<b>Statement 1:</b> The education system should focus primarily on developing the scientific skills of pupils and students	41%
	<b>Statement 2:</b> Just as there are courses to teach scientific skills there must be courses to teach students how to recognize and express their own emotions and respond to others' emotions	55%
2	<b>Statement 1:</b> Giving the correct answer to a question remains the most important goal for pupils and students	24%
	<b>Statement 2:</b> It is not important for pupils and students to always reach the correct answer. What is most important is that they learn to think about how to answer the question	71%
3	<b>Statement 1:</b> A good education system is one that encourages the student to accept the answer offered by the teacher because it is the best answer, there is no need for alternatives.	25%
	<b>Statement 2:</b> A good education system is one that encourages students to think for themselves even when it goes against what the teacher is saying.	69%
4	<b>Statement 1:</b> Examinations that allow students to demonstrate how well they have memorized what has been taught in class are the best test of learning.	21%
	<b>Statement 2:</b> Examinations that allow students to demonstrate how well they have made their own sense of what has been taught in class are the best test of learning.	73%
5	<b>Statement 1:</b> The education system should place primary importance on academic achievement and certificates recognizing completion.	28%
	<b>Statement 2:</b> The education system should place primary importance on learning social skills such as the ability to understand the perspectives and feelings of others.	64%

importance on academic achievement and certificates recognizing completion, 25 percent of women prefer the same.

In contrast to gender and income, differences in region and education level provide more insight in accounting for the differences in preferred education systems. For instance, when disaggregated by those living in urban versus rural areas, there are clear differences in attitudes with regards to critical and analytical thinking skills. Interestingly, urban Egyptians hold more favorable attitudes towards an education systems emphasizing rote memorization or other traditional methods. For instance, 30 percent of urban Egyptians say that giving the correct answer to a question is the most important goal, compared to 20 percent of rural Egyptians. Again, 30 percent of urban Egyptians also say that students should accept the answer offered by the teacher because it is the best answer, compared to 20 percent of rural Egyptians. Further, 27 percent of urban dwellers prefer tests that allow students to demonstrate how well they have memorized what has been taught, while only 16 percent of rural dwellers say the same. Finally, more urban Egyptians than rural Egyptians think there should be primary importance placed on academic achievement and certificates recognizing completion as opposed to learning social skills like understanding the perspectives of others (31 percent versus 24 percent).

Other notable differences are found between Egyptians with a higher level of education (secondary or above) and those with lower education levels (basic or below). For both emotional intelligence and critical thinking skills, there is a clear difference in the preferences of each of these groups. Overall, higher educated Egyptians are more likely to prefer an education system teaching critical thinking skills as well as emotional intelligence compared with less educated Egyptians. Additionally, Egyptians with a secondary education or above are more likely than lower-educated Egyptians to prefer an educational system where students learn to think about how to answer the question (76 percent vs. 63 percent) and to think for themselves even if it is against what the teacher is saying (78 percent versus 58 percent). Better-educated Egyptians also prefer tests that allow students to demonstrate how well they have made their own sense of what has been taught (79 percent vs. 66 percent). Similar differences in opinion are also clear in terms of emotional intelligence with more educated Egyptians being more likely to favor learning social skills such as the ability to understand the perspectives and feelings of others compared with less educated Egyptians (72 percent vs. 54 percent).

## Conclusion

The vast majority of Egyptians are dissatisfied with the education system in the country and concern about the quality of children's education is nearly universal. Yet, despite this worry, few Egyptians have turned to programs outside the formal education system. Notably, the perception of such programs is strong across the country, but especially among those who



live in a household with a recent participant in a youth NFE program. These findings make clear that youth non-formal education programs hold significant possibility for meeting the needs of Egyptian youth and improving overall academic outcomes.

However, increasing rates of participation requires finding solutions to the barriers cited by Egyptians, especially the cost of such programs. Second, it is clear that Egyptians would be more likely to participate if the program made them more competitive on the job market. Ultimately, a successful non-formal education program will be one that is affordable and helps participants achieve marketable and job-related skills. A focus on critical thinking and emotional intelligence would be welcomed, but such programs should emphasize the link with increasing skills demanded by potential employers. These findings suggest that programs that take these factors into account are likely to be popular, meet the needs of Egyptian citizens, and improve the lives of the country's youth.