

# Education System in Egypt

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**E**GYPT is a republic (official name: Arab Republic of Egypt) located in Northern Africa, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Libya and the Gaza Strip, and the Red Sea north of Sudan, and includes the Asian Sinai Peninsula. Being blessed with River Nile, Egypt became an ancient civilization of repute. A unified Egyptian kingdom formed in 3200 B.C. was ruled by a series of dynasties for the next three millennia. The last native dynasty fell to the Persians in 341 B.C., who in turn were replaced by the Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines. It was the Arabs who introduced Islam and the Arabic language in the 7th century A.D. A local military caste, the Mamluks took control in 1250 and continued to govern after the conquest by the Ottoman Turks in 1517. Following the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, Egypt

became an important world transportation hub. Britain seized control of Egypt in 1882; the country acquired partial freedom in 1922 and full sovereignty from British monarchy in 1952.

The total area of Egypt is 1,001,450 sq km (over 7 times larger than Bangladesh) and it harbors slightly over 80 million (81,713,517) people (about 1/2 of Bangladesh). Population growth rate is 1.6% (against Bangladesh's 2%).

The per capita income in Egypt is about US \$ 5,500 (2007 estimate). The literacy rate is about 72% (male: 80%, female: 60%; 2005 estimate). Egypt spends about 4.4% of its GDP in education. The figure is about double of Bangladesh (being 2.4% according to UNESCO data).

Education is the known way to enrich the people with required knowledge, skills and attitude in any country. Requirement for these qualities changes over time and curriculum needs periodic revision. Bangladesh completed the third revision of the primary curriculum and such a revision is overdue on the lower secondary, while secondary and higher secondary levels should follow. We can have a look into the education system of this African country influenced by European system (like us) to find some lessons for us. The description follows the usual format having Education

Policy, & Administration, the Structure, Program of Study, Assessment System and lastly Lessons for Bangladesh.

## I- Education Policy & Administration

The Egyptian constitution of 1971 mentions education in three main articles: 18, 19 and 20. Article 18 states: "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." Article 19 makes religious education a basic subject; while Article 20 guarantees State education free in all phases.

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.

## II- The Structure

Primary education in Egypt lasts for 6 years and along with the next 3 years' study at lower secondary the 9-year study is basic. This basic education cycle is followed by a 3-year secondary education: general or technical. University level Bachelor Course lasts for 3-5 years. The duration of Master's Course is 2-3 years. Therefore, including the higher education, the structure becomes 6+ (3) + 3 + (3-5+2/3).

## Higher Education

Higher education in Egypt is provided by universities and by industrial, technical or commercial institutions. University level studies are under three stages as usual. The Bachelor's Degree is conferred after 3-5 years' university study. The Master's Degree (MA/MSc) is conferred after 2-3 years' study following the Bachelor's Degree. The Doctorate is awarded for advanced research work culminating in the submission

of a thesis.

## Teacher Education

Primary school teachers must hold a qualification from a University Faculty of Education. There is also a distance learning programme to upgrade, through the medium of Arabic, primary school teachers who do not hold a degree. The course leads to a B. Ed in Primary Education. Secondary school teachers are trained in the Faculties of Education of the universities in four years and in higher teacher-training colleges. Both preparatory and general secondary teachers follow the same course which leads to the Bachelor Degree. Graduates who hold a four-year university degree can also teach at secondary level after following a one-year postgraduate course at the Faculty of Education where they are awarded the General Diploma. Teachers of technical education are trained at special faculties. Higher education teachers are required to hold at least a Masters (*Magistr*) in the field of higher education, but no professional degree is required.

## III- Program of Study

The primary curriculum is divided into two 3-year cycles. During the first three years of the primary phase, the curriculum comprises Arabic language, arithmetic, religious education, and basic principles of science. In the latter three years, the curriculum comprises Arabic language, English, mathematics, sciences, social studies (geography and history), religious education, arts, and computer basics.

In the lower secondary (called preparatory phase; Grades 7-9), students study Arabic language (grammar and literature), English, French as a second foreign language, social studies (geography, history, national education), sciences (physics, chemistry, biology), mathematics and religious education.

The main subjects that are taught during the first year of the upper (called general) 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. So study becomes specialized/group-based in Grades 11-12.

## IV- Assessment System

There is provision for public examination on completion of every major step of schooling to award a certificate like Primary School Certificate, Basic Education Completion Certificate and General Secondary Education Certificate (GSEC). Egypt follows a simple grading system consisting of 4 grading scales: Distinguished (75-100%), Good (65-74%), Pass (50-64%) and Fail (0-49%).

## V- Lessons for Bangladesh

The major characters of Egyptian education system that Bangladesh can follow or adapt can be as follows:

Egypt spends about 4.4% of its GDP in education while Bangladesh spends at best 2.4%.

Bangladesh can easily reach the Egyptian level of educational spending if we can realize the significance of education.

The duration of primary education in Egypt is 6 years, but basic education is up to Grade-9 (naming Grades 7-9 preparatory). So we can give up the unrealistic plan of 8-year long primary education, but can make primary 6 years and declare 9 years' education basic, integrated and compulsory.

In Egypt education is fully integrated up to Grade 9 and partially also at Grade 10; this is very similar to Indonesian system. The group-based study is only 2-year long (Grades 11-12). Bangladesh has a 4-year long (Grades 9-12) stream-based pre-university education for a long and tried to make that half abruptly. I suggest extension of integration from Grade 8 to 9 and curtailing the period of specialization from 4 to 3 years (rearranging Grades 10-12 as higher secondary at a stretch).

A subject named **computer basics** is taught at Grades 4-6 (upper primary) in Egypt. The grade level seems very suitable for quenching the thirst, aligned with capability. There is no subject like book-keeping or accounting at the secondary level in Egypt. Even there is no Business Education stream in the upper secondary. So it seems that we are putting undue emphasis on Business subjects and this stream in Bangladesh.