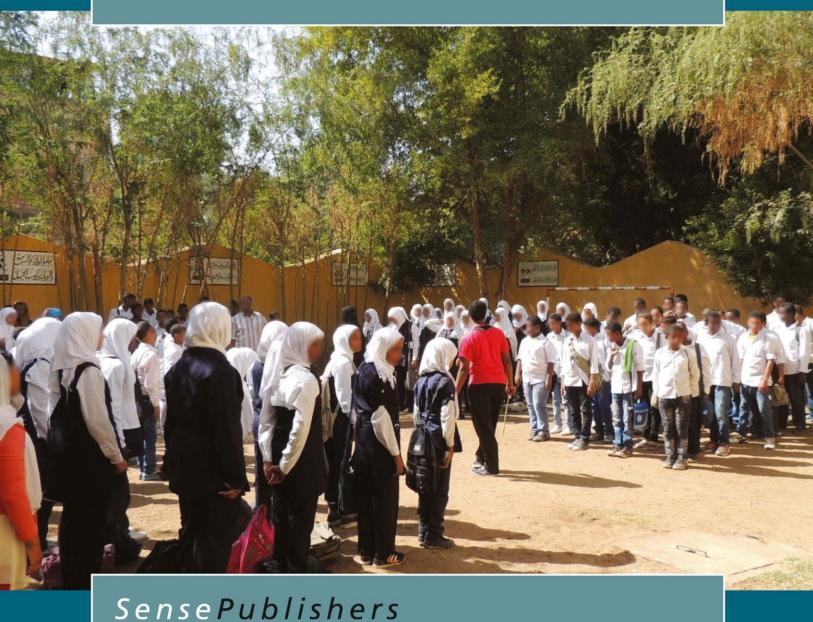# Education during the Time of the Revolution in Egypt

Dialectics of Education in Conflict

Nagwa Megahed (Ed.)

Education during the Time of the Revolution in Egypt

COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION:
A Diversity of Voices

Volume 44

Scope

Comparative and International Education: A Diversity of Voices aims to provide a comprehensive range of titles, making available to readers work from across the comparative and international education research community. Authors will represent as broad a range of voices as possible, from geographic, cultural and ideological standpoints. The editors are making a conscious effort to disseminate the work of newer scholars as well as that of well-established writers. The series includes authored books and edited works focusing upon current issues and controversies in a field that is undergoing changes as profound as the geopolitical and economic forces that are reshaping our worlds. The series aims to provide books which present new work, in which the range of methodologies associated with comparative education and international education are both exemplified and opened up for debate. As the series develops, it is intended that new writers from settings and locations not frequently part of the English language discourse will find a place in the list.

Education during the Time of the Revolution in Egypt

Dialectics of Education in Conflict

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Cover image: A public school in Egypt (photograph by N. Megahed)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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1. EDUCATION AMIDST CONFLICT IN EGYPT

Dialectics of Policy and Practice

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the current state of education in a given society requires in-depth analyses of the discourses and actions of different actors at local and global levels. The theme of the 2016 World Congress of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES), "Dialectics of Education: Comparative Perspectives," held from 22nd to 26th August, 2016 in Beijing, China, offered a global platform to present contemporary issues pertaining to educational theories, policies, and practices. The chapters of this book were presented at two panels during the 2016 WCCES, then were further developed, reviewed, and finalized in preparation for publication. The book tackles the roles of different actors, including stakeholders and governmental, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, in maintaining or changing the status quo of education and society during the time of conflict, social unrest and political transition in Egypt.

Aligning with the call for ethnographic research and case studies in the field of comparative and international education that examine teaching and learning in local contexts and produces indigenous knowledge that goes beyond the *Eurocentric* analysis and descriptive comparison between nation-states (see Mesemann, 1982; Crossley & Vulliamy, 1984; Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2009; Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2014; Epstein, 2016), this book focuses on education in Egypt during the time of the revolution as perceived by university students, youth activists, educational professionals, government officials and civil society organizations. Its chapters reveal the tension, contradiction and/or coherence among different players as related to their respective role in education for civic engagement, national identity, global citizenship, peace-building, teacher professional development, and women's and students' empowerment. The book illustrates the dialectics of education in conflict by articulating diverse meanings and perspectives given by Egyptian stakeholders when describing their actions and reality(ies) during the time of the revolution and its aftermath.

Since the January 25th, 2011 revolution, Egyptians experienced and engaged in a daily debate. Controversially, some argued that the conflict and revolts in Egypt, and the Arab region, were neither coincidental, nor the result of a "domino effect"

of collective actions by oppressed people against autocratic regimes. Rather, these revolts were the result of mobilization efforts made over decades by several activist groups, as well as national and international non-governmental organizations. Contrary to this view, others claim that despite the rapid economic growth of Egypt in the 2000s, there was a wide gap in the distribution of wealth and economic return, which left the majority of Egyptians suffering from poverty and high rate of unemployment, especially among youth. This, combined with three decades of autocratic governance under Mubarak's regime, provoked the January 25th, 2011 revolution. The latter argument is supported by the chanting of the revolution for "bread, freedom and social justice." Obviously, while national and international economic and political dynamics dominated the daily debate, education remains the forgotten arena amidst conflict. This readdresses Davies' (2009) inquiry concerning the *complexity* of education and conflict and questioning the stand of education in conflict. Davies (2005, 2009) emphasizes the need for further examination of education to be undertaken and contextualized in local communities during the time of turmoil and social chaos. With the exacerbation of conflict between militant extremists and modern states in the region, and most recently in many European countries, it became more important than ever before to understand the dialectics of education in conflict in different local contexts, starting in this book by the Egyptian context.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Egypt is the largest country in the North Africa and Middle East region in terms of its population. In 2017, the total population reached more than 92 million (92,128,271), with 49 per cent females and 57.2 per cent located in rural areas. Children and youth in the school-age (5–24) represents 39.9 per cent, plus 11.3 per cent aged 0–4. This makes 51.2 per cent of the population in the age of pre-K-12 and higher education (CAPMAS, 2017, pp. 4–6). This marks Egypt as a home to one of the largest populations of school-aged children and youth in the world, with a high annual population growth rate of 2.1 per cent. From a human capital perspective, this constitutes a challenge and opportunity for the nations' development, yet unemployment rate in the first quarter of 2017 was estimated at 12 per cent (CAPMAS, 2017).

    Educational services are offered by public and private providers though the public education sector remains the main provider that serves the majority of the population. In the school year 2015–2016, for the pre-K to 12 education, there were a total of 44,787 public schools with a total enrollment of 17,990,836 students versus a total of 7,235 private schools enroll a total of 1,938,751 students. In higher education, there were 24 public universities with 1,835,015 enrolled students comparing to 19 private universities enrolling a total of 111,602, as shown in Table 1 (CAPMAS, 2017, pp. 116–129).

Table 1. Egyptian public and private education, school year 2015–2016

	Sector	*No. Institutions*	*Enrollment*
Pre-K-12	Public	44,787	17,990,836
	Private	7,235	1,938,751
Higher Education	Public	24	1,835,015
	Private	19	111,602

Source: CAPMAS (2017, pp. 116–129)

The high demand for educational services in Egypt created a public pressure for improving the quality of learning and teaching and expanding educational opportunities. Thus, since the 1990s till the present, education has been declared as a national priority. During the 1990s, several educational reform projects and initiatives were undertaken and partially or fully funded by international bilateral and multilateral organizations (i.e., the World Bank, the European Union, and the United States Agency for International Development). Examples of these reforms included Basic Education Improvement Project, Secondary Education Enhancement Project and Education Reform Program. These state-led reforms aimed at improving opportunities and access to basic education, enhancing the quality of education (focusing on teacher professional development, use of technology, and school quality assurance and accreditation), and establishing a supportive, decentralized system for continuous quality improvement. In addition, attention were given to community education including, community schools, supported by UNICEF since 1992, and girls' friendly schools (Ministry of Education, 2014). Similarly, in higher education, attention was given to enhancing its quality and relevance to the labor market. In the 2000s, the Ministry of Higher Education with support from the World Bank embarked on a major Higher Education Enhancement Project that tackles different areas such as quality assurance, faculty and leadership development, and information and communication technology (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010).

In 2003, the document of national education standards was released, followed by the establishment of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education and the founding of the Professional Academy for Teachers. All these national bodies have functioned in parallel to the Ministry of Education and its equivalent entities for quality assurance and in-service training, already existed at different levels of the system (the state, province, district, and school levels). The situation in higher education was not much different. Although public universities maintain a level of autonomy, they were all obliged to establish units and centers for quality assurance and accreditation as well as for faculty and leadership development. On the one hand, these reform initiatives have duplicated the arms of the state and strengthened its control over professionals. On the other hand, they resulted in the intensification of duties of teachers and other educators who felt burdened by many

additional administrative tasks and requirements. In the meantime, the persistence of problems such as a high-stake exam system, widely spread practice of private tutoring, low educational quality, and high unemployment rate among youth – reached 30 per cent in 2008 (Megahed & Lack, 2011, p. 414) – increased the level of dissatisfaction among educators, parents, students and other stakeholders.

A brief portray of educational and socioeconomic statistics reveals the continuation of serious problems, such as school drop-out, illiteracy, inequality and poverty in Egypt in 2011. According to the Ministry of Education (2014), "the state has been able to absorb more than 90 per cent of the population at the age of basic education [grades 1 – 9]" (p. 7). Yet, in 2011, the drop-out rate estimated an average of 6 per cent, with higher rate than average in 14 out of Egypt's 27 governorates (provinces). The illiteracy rate reached 28 per cent in the age group 15–35, totaling 17 million people, and 40 per cent in the age group of 15+ (34 million people). It is worth noting that two-thirds of the latter group were female illiterates and about 64 per cent of all illiterate people were in rural areas (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 9). In addition, a high level of poverty (equivalent to two dollars a day), especially in rural areas continues to be a major challenge. The rate of poverty among children under the age 15 is reported to be 23 per cent and among youth-aged 15–19 is 28 per cent. Poverty is concentrated in rural than urban areas with 30 per cent versus 12.16 per cent, respectively (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 10).

By filling the gap of the state's social and educational services, Islamist groups, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, gained popularity in local communities, especially in rural and remote areas. It is well known that the conflict between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian state is dated back to the time of 1952 revolution, when the Brotherhood opposed Nasser's (the president of Egypt, 1952–1970) socialist approach of nation-state building. This longstanding conflict included phases of conciliation and confrontation during the presidency of Sadat (1970–1981) and Mubarak (1981–2011) (see Ginsburg & Megahed, 2002; Megahed, 2015). Thus expectedly, following the January 25th, 2011 revolution, the two main political forces prevailed were the Egyptian Armed Forces, representing the Egyptian state, and the Muslim Brotherhood. During the Brotherhood's one-year rule in Egypt in 2012, several confrontations took place between the Islamist government and political activists who called for liberal democracy and social justice. Several protests broke out and a movement, known as "*Tamarud*" (the Rebel Movement), against the Brotherhood's rule was initiated by young Egyptian men and women. The *Tamarud* movement quickly gained popularity and led to the uprising of June 30th, 2013 which ended the Brotherhood's rule. The support of this uprising by the Egyptian Armed Forces caused global controversy, yet it was celebrated nationally. Clashes, confrontations and violent actions took place in Egypt during the aftermath of June 30th, 2013 (Megahed, 2015). Nonetheless, in 2014 the Egyptian constitution was amended and two elections for the people assembly (parliament) and for the state presidency took place. Nowadays, Egyptians are heading toward a new presidency election to take place in 2018

while gaining the support of regional and global communities in "eliminating terrorism" and countering extremism.

In this national context, all chapters of this book were developed. The chapters are based on original research and fieldwork conducted in Egypt from 2012 to 2015. During these years and in anticipation of this book, I supervised and supported the work of many dedicated graduate students, research fellows, and visiting scholars at the American University in Cairo, some of whom I worked closely with throughout the development of their research and the refinement of their work, to the finalization of their included chapters. The authors of the book chapters investigate the discourses and actions of diverse groups during the time of revolts and uprisings, illustrating the dialectics of citizenship education, peace-building, global citizenship, women's empowerment, teacher professional development, and educational quality.

DIALECTICS OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND YOUTH MOVEMENT FOR PEACE-BUILDING

The dialectics and policy discourses of citizenship education, youth movement and peacebuilding are examined in three chapters. In Chapter 2, Jason Dorio employs critical pedagogy to connect participatory citizenship and citizenship education in the context of the Egyptian revolution. Illustrating this "historical moment in Egypt," Dorio presents an overview of the revolutionary Egypt, starting from January 25, 2011, through the 18th days of demonstrations and uprisings, to the aftermath of political change and unrest during the past five years (2011–2016). Dorio claims that "revolutionary transitions, such as the January 25th Egyptian Revolution, can be a critical pedagogical workshop where citizens engage with new forms of political intervention and resistance, critically reflecting upon consciousness-raising events, and experimenting with relationships between agency and power." In support of his claim, Dorio discusses participatory citizenship and citizenship education in Egypt and relays on qualitative data with in-depth interviews conducted with Egyptian university students during the 2014–2015 academic year. Dorio focuses on the narratives and perceptions of two university graduate student-instructors that reveal their perceived realities prior to, during, and post the revolution. His chapter demonstrates the characteristics of critical pedagogical workshops in the time and space of the January 25th Egyptian Revolution and subsequent events and concludes by implications of participatory citizenship(s) for universities in Egypt.

In Chapter 3, Shereen Aly focuses on a youth movement, known as "Selmiyah" (peaceful or in-peace) to articulate the actions and perspectives of Egyptian youth in promoting peace in local communities. Aly argues that throughout the period of conflict in Egypt since 2011, "it became clear that the Egyptian society is not as tolerant as it would like to be, there is still discrimination against religion, ethnicities, social classes, and political ideologies, etc. There has been a dire need to create a culture of tolerance, acceptance and co-existence that emerged and become obvious in the Egyptian scene." Aly questions the role of education in the Egyptian community;

"what are Egyptians educating for and can peace education be a viable solution?" She focuses her analysis on peace education, with attention given to a group of youth-led initiatives and organizations who in 2012 created a movement called "Selmiyah." She employs a qualitative approach where in-depth interviews and participant-observation were conducted with this group of youth activists. Her chapter clarifies the motivation and drives for this group of Egyptian youth to focus on peace education. Moreover, she explains the structure of their initiatives and whether they fit within Ian Harris (2007) categorization and model of peace education. Aly's chapter discusses the dynamic of creating a collective movement, and how this has affected the initiatives of peace education during the period of transition in Egypt.

While Jason Dorio and Shereen Aly focus on the dialectics and discourses of university students and youth activists, Soha Aly analyzes the state discourse as presented in the national textbooks of citizenship education. In Chapter 4, she presents a critical content analysis of six textbooks issued by the Ministry of Education and taught in public secondary schools during the school-years 2011–2012 through 2014–2015. Her content analysis tracks the extent to which the concepts and principles of citizenship education influenced by political unrest and conflict during the examined period. In other words, she explores to what extent have the curricula of citizenship education changed in terms of the type of citizen to be constructed among Egyptian youth. Soha Aly's chapter reveals how far did the political regime, after the January 25th revolution, influence the content of citizenship education in national curriculum in order to accommodate the revolutionary status among Egyptian youth who seek change for better political, social, and economic conditions.

DIALECTICS OF EDUCATION FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The dialectics of education for global citizenship and women's empowerment in the Egyptian context are presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Shaimaa Awad conducts a case study that focuses on the experience of a civil society organization in implementing a character building program for Egyptian children during the time of uprising and conflict. The program intends to contribute to the state's efforts for restoring social cohesion and promoting global values of citizenship. Awad employs a qualitative approach, using a survey with open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews, along with observation of the program implementation. Awad's chapter reveals the extent to which the civil society organization examined in this case study and its education program supports school and community in building well-rounded Egyptian characters who possess moral values and manifest those values in their relationships with others during a challenging time of conflict and unrest.

In Chapter 6, Ola Hosny gives attention to young women in rural, poor areas in Egypt. She examines some education development projects undertaken in the post-2011 revolution, and explores the perceived impact of these projects on young rural women. She focuses on three developmental projects implemented in the south of

Egypt (known as Upper Egypt governorates). Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from a group of young women who participated in these projects. Hosny's fieldwork also included interviews with project staff, parents, and community leaders to better understand the local community and the impact of its culture on women. Hosny's chapter identifies socio-cultural factors that enabled or hindered the potential impact of developmental projects on young rural women, the most deprived segment of the population in Egypt.

DIALECTICS OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

Focusing on school teachers, Amira Abdou examines school-based teacher professional development, which has been promoted as part of the state's reform initiative prior to and post- the 2011 revolution. In Chapter 7, Abdou analyzes the Egyptian policy discourse for school-based teacher professional development, then explores the extent to which this approach has been implemented in Egyptian public schools and how it has been perceived by teachers. Conducting fieldwork in an urban public school that includes primary and secondary education levels, Abdou's chapter identifies the gap between educational policy discourse and practice, highlighting problems and challenges confronting teachers and affecting educational quality at school level.

At the level of higher education, Sara Taraman explores university students' perceptions of the quality of education and whether there was any major improvement or change occurred after the January 25th revolution. Conducted her fieldwork in one of the public universities located in a remote area in Egypt, Taraman presents the university students' perspectives on educational quality, in terms of institutional facilities/infrastructure; organizational culture, especially in relation to students' freedom of speech; teaching and learning experience; and education for career pursuit and community service. Her research has been conducted in four university colleges, representing students in sciences and humanities majors. Taraman's chapter demonstrates the continuation of students' dissatisfaction in the post-revolution Egypt and clarifies the urgent need for genuine reform that would improve the quality of higher education for students in remote areas.

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PART I

DIALECTICS OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND YOUTH MOVEMENT FOR PEACEBUILDING