

Citizenship Education in Egypt

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Background information: brief history of citizenship education¹

In the Egyptian context, there are two ministries that are mainly concerned with citizenship education, the Ministry of Education (MoE) which is mainly concerned with the schooling system and the Ministry of Youth (MoY) which organizes activities and camps for youth as extra-curricular activities. For the purpose of this study, the efforts done within this framework will be referred to as Formal. On the other hand, the Non-formal sector is any non-governmental organization, whether registered in the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) or not registered or social enterprises, in other words Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

a. Formal Sector

Civic education can be traced back to 1922 after Egypt's independence. This period witnessed the beginning of Egypt's transformation into a nation state; courses in civics education were developed with the purpose to promote Egyptian nationalism, highlighting that Egypt remained an independent entity, despite its colonial history (El-Nagar & Krugly-Smolka, 2009).

Following 1952's revolution², the priority was to increase educational institutions' capacities to accommodate more students, this came at the expense of improving curricula and led to "an environment that discouraged students' participation, questioning and independent thought" (Baraka, 2008, pp. 6-7). CE was diffused within social studies, Arabic language and religion, mainly as a hidden curriculum (Baraka, 2008). Furthermore, the history textbooks focused on Arab nationality and students studied the history of all Arab nations (El-Nagar & Krugly-Smolka, 2009). After the war in 1973, the values of peace and dialogue were stressed on, highlighting the role that dialogue played in accomplishing Camp David Peace Agreement (Baraka, 2008). During Mubarak's era, history and geography were renamed to social studies and included more information on civics including human rights and the meaning of democracy (Baraka, 2008). With the new millennium, more attention was directed at CE to be utilized to confront growing threats of extremism and globalization

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² Where Egypt became totally independent and declared as a Republic.

(Baraka, 2008,). Another supporting factor to CE's growing prominence was pressure from international donor agencies on Egypt that required "quality learning that included interactive and democratic teaching styles" (Baraka, 2008, p. 6). After the January 25th revolution in 2011, Egypt underwent several political changes, every year thereafter a different political power was ruling the country. This led to three different curriculums from 2011 to 2014; one was issued for the academic year 2011/2012 under the ruling of the Supreme Council of the Army Forces (SCAF), the second was issued for academic year 2012/2013 under the ruling of former president Mohammad Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood Group and the first civilian president for Egypt, the third was issued for academic year 2013/2014 under the ruling of interim president Adly Mansour, who came into power for a transitional period after the events of June 30th, 2013 (Ali, 2014).

Regarding the CE programs for youth, first the definition of the age group of youth is not clear in Egypt, in the 2005 youth policy it was defined as 18-35 years old (Abdelhay, 2005), however other definitions exist within society; and since there is no current national youth policy this issue remains an unclear issue. In 2005 a unit for CE was established within the MoY in partnership with UNICEF, which focuses mainly on CE projects. Since then, this CE unit has developed several partnerships with other International agencies to implement different programs in different parts of the country.

b. Non-formal Sector

For the past 15 years, CSOs have operated carefully within the field of CE, especially during Mubarak's era, where organizations working on issues related to human rights and citizenship were not supported (Youniss & Barber et al., 2013). After the 25th of January revolution in 2011, Egypt witnessed a spike in the CE programs and initiatives, some of these programs were being implemented by organizations that existed before the revolution. Leaders within CSOs identified citizenship values and principles as essential for youth to learn at this period and programs varied in scope and direction.

Definition of Citizenship Education

a. Formal Sector

According to a publication issued by the MoE in 2003³, CE is based on eight core principles: 1) civic education (duties and rights); 2) life skills (negotiation, cooperation, tolerance, and managing diversity); 3) government system (democracy, constitution, People's Council, elections, citizens' role in elections); 4) preserving heritage (Arab and Egyptian heritage, Islamic and Coptic heritage, Arab and Egyptian values and traditions); 5) Egypt's relations with other countries (on the Arab, Islamic, African and global levels); 6) Non-governmental organizations (conditions to establish NGOs, the role of NGOs); 7) Arab organizations and institutions and 8) International organizations and institutions (Baraka, 2008). Research was conducted in the past years to examine to which extent the aforementioned principles were achieved within the school curriculums and environments. Textbook analysis of CE and history curricula in the Mubarak era shows over emphasis on authority, nationalism, tourism importance, cultural diversity and role of government in service provision; it also shows less emphasis on citizenship and human rights; and minimum emphasis on rule of law, social justice and political participation (Baraka, 2008).

With regards to MoY, there is no mention of CE and its definition in their official documents, however there is mention of several dimensions of CE. There seems to be more focus placed on participation in elections, especially parliamentary elections, and the focus on the values of belonging and loyalty to the country. When it comes to inclusion, there seems to be a focus on most of the governorates. To conclude, it seems that there are various efforts done within the formal sector to address issues of CE for Egyptian youth, however there is a

³ Mubarak and education (in Arabic).(2003). Cairo: Egypt. The Ministry of Education. Department of textbooks.

lack of unified definition and goals among the concerned ministries, and consistency in the approach.

b. Non-formal Sector

Due to the diverse nature of the non-formal sector, CE has different and interrelated definitions. However some CSOs in Egypt work now within the framework of developing: “well rounded, responsible citizens who know their legal rights and duties, and apply this knowledge to evaluate government policies and practices. Moreover, nurturing students to become citizens who work for the common good has a positive impact on their communities and societies” (Faour & Muasher, 2011, p. 12). Many CSOs in Egypt have developed and customized their programs to satisfy and address the specific needs and target audience, with a greater focus “on citizenship, democracy, human rights, tolerance, and political participation. Many of these programs began in the years leading up to the January 25 Revolution, and thus program leaders were prepared to adapt and expand their work during the post-revolution period” (Corbel & Pollock, 2012, p. 13).

Ecosystem of the non-formal citizenship education

According to the “Citizens in the Making” report conducted by Gerhart Center 2012, only 14% of the civic education programs carried out by the NGOs do not target youth, while the rest focuses on youth solely. This focus can be explained by the focus of MoY on CE for youth as well as the rising wave of youth activism from 2011.

Most programs carried out by the CSOs are centralized in the capital and big cities; Cairo, Alexandria and Menya, and the rest are neglected especially in Upper Egypt, Sinai and the Red Sea provinces (Corbel & Pollock, 2012). CSOs working in the field of Civic Education and Engagement are mainly International Donors and Agencies, Research Centers, Social Enterprises and registered and non-registered Youth Organizations and Student Activities.

Along with the public sector and the civil society organizations, there are other important and contributing stakeholders for the spread of civic education values and content; such as the media, political parties, private sector, and religious institutions as well as donors. Media is considered o “powerful because it is widely accessible to all irrespective of their level of education and sophistication” (El-Mikawy, 2013, p. 33).

Legal Environment

According to Article 19 in the Egyptian Constitution 2014, “Every citizen has the right to education. The goals of education are to build the Egyptian character, preserve the national identity ... and found the concepts of citizenship, tolerance and non-discrimination. The State shall observe the goals of education in the educational curricula and methods, and provide education in accordance with international quality standards.”

Regarding CSOs, the main law governing NGOs is Law no 84/2002, which governs all issues related to civil society organizations. This law defines the funding channels and processes for CSOs, as well as operational issues related to activities and scope. The law has posed several restrictions on the civil society organizations through state control. There are other controversial issues within the law related to the level of interference of the MoSS in the decisions and processes of NGOs. Needless to say, many CSOs prefer to maintain other forms of legal status other than being registered within MoSS to avoid such issues of bureaucracy and state control.

Challenges

a. Formal Sector

The challenges within the formal sector are related to the political environment, the school and university environment, the curriculum, and the teaching methods and teacher preparation. The political environment might be seen as a challenge to CE, because of the

real life situations the student has to encounter that contradict with the principles and values of CE; teaching students about human rights, social justice, freedom of speech, political participation and other concepts would only create further frustrations and issues because these practices are not allowed in real life (Waddel, 2013). The top down approach in the Egyptian education system that rests on principles such as Discipline, obedience, oppression, and commitment makes CE difficult (El-Nagar & Krugly-Smolka , 2009). CE curriculum is more based on information rather than skills, doesn't include any real life situations or participation from students (El-Nagar & Smolska, 2009, p.47). With regards to the teaching methods and teachers' preparation there is still a lot of effort needed in introducing new teaching techniques that are of participatory and creative nature, highlighting "the role of the teacher in a democratic classroom" (El-Nagar & Krugly-Smolka , 2009).

b. Non-formal Sector

The institutions working with CE in the non-formal sector are facing several challenges with regard to their program's outreach, impact, sustainability, curriculum development, trainers, and financial constraints. In Egypt, small and medium sized CSOs do not have the capacity nor the resources to manage media campaigns or any other marketing campaign, while the big local CSOs have been able to sustain a rather good image of CSOs in Egypt. With regard to the outreach, there is huge pressure on CSOs with regards to outreach, especially that the country is large on both a geographic and demographic level. There are huge differences between the urban and rural settings in Egypt in terms of culture and also interests. When it comes to content, the programs can use further improvement; there is a need for further emphasis on civic skills such as advocacy, organizing, and persuasive argument. Another challenge to implementation is finding trained and qualified trainers who can deliver the programs in quality, given the limited resources available to this sector. In addition, most CSOs receive funding from INGOs, international agencies, local and international corporations and community members; the funds are inconsistent and short-term which leads to many challenges and obstacles. Over and above, there are limitations from the MoSS and a very lengthy process to get the funds approved. Another challenge for CE is measuring the impact of their programs requested by donors, which is not easy to measure given the nature of the subject matter.

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