Learning; skills; children with disabilities; system strengthening – Learning of life skills at the heart of national curriculum reform in Egypt

**Problem:** With over 21 million students enrolled in the education system, consisting of pre-primary, primary and secondary education, the Egyptian education system is by far the biggest in the Middle East and North Africa. Yet there is a mismatch between the skills learnt at school and those needed to find decent jobs or engage positively in the development of the country.

**Solution:** In 2017, the Ministry of Education and Technical Education announced a full education sector transformation, including national curriculum reform that put students at the center of the learning process and integrate learning of core skills into the national curriculum for general education (pre-primary through to secondary education).
Advancing life skills and citizen education through national curriculum reform in Egypt

UNICEF engaged with the Ministry of Education and Technical Education and national stakeholders to mainstream life skills and citizenship education within the national curriculum reform process. This work began in 2017 as part of a full education sector transformation led by the Minister of Education and Technical Education. Education 2.0, as the reform was known, promotes a vision of learning, thinking and innovating, where education is the means to create passionate and creative learners, open-minded communicators, and creative innovators to compete in national and international markets and to contribute to the creation of a learning society as well as the economic and social development of Egypt.

The reformed national curriculum covers the 12 core life skills identified in the Life Skills Citizenship Education initiative. In addition, it also includes the skills of “Accountability” and “Productivity”.

An innovative approach for integrating life skills

Starting with the early grades in 2017-2019, the reformed curriculum is gradually being rolled out up to upper secondary education. The initial Education 2.0 rollout plan held that by 2030, the transformative reforms from Education 2.0 would be the only operating education system. More recently, the Minister of Education and Technical Education approved an accelerated plan whereby development of the curriculum frameworks would be completed by 2021.

The pre-school / Grade 1 curriculum framework was approved in March 2018 and presented to the Egyptian Parliament in April 2018. A detailed roadmap was developed in partnership with the International Center for Pedagogical Studies. The Center provides technical support to the Ministry of Education and Technical Education in the following areas:

- definition of the learning objectives for Pre-Primary and Primary 1, 2 and 3, articulating the core life skills adopted in the national curriculum framework;
- development of associated teacher training frameworks, including key pedagogical approaches in alignment with the grade-level curriculum frameworks for Pre-Primary and Primary 1, 2, and 3; and
- development of associated assessment frameworks based on the new curriculum, with a special focus on imbedded formative classroom-based assessment.

The graphic below summarizes the main changes compared to the previous, traditional approach to learning.

Over 36 million or 41% of Egypt’s population is under 19.
Life skills curriculum frameworks for children with disabilities

In parallel, UNICEF ensured that these transformative reforms also address the learning needs of children with disabilities. In collaboration with national academic institutions and international experts, UNICEF is supporting the development of life-skills-based curriculum frameworks for children with severe cognitive difficulties. These efforts also include the development of guidelines for the adaptation and accommodation of learning materials for children with hearing and visual impairments as well as children with mild and moderate cognitive disabilities. The guidelines include recommendations on required digital solutions and assistive technologies. UNICEF is also supporting the development of the Teachers’ Guidebook on Inclusive Education that highlights how the new adapted textbooks should be used in an inclusive classroom.

Preliminary results, lessons learnt and next steps

While the reform process is still ongoing, a few lessons may be drawn to inform similar processes in other countries:

- The consultative and upstream engagement adopted as part of the Life Skills and Citizenship Education Initiative has proved effective in capturing sensitive issues, agreement on definitions and adaptation to the social and cultural contexts of Egypt;
- The technical support provided by international and national experts showed the need for adopting a country specific focus relying on Arabic-speaking curriculum engineers;
- The rollout of the curriculum reform requires a phased approach with the adoption of large-scale and innovative teacher development programmes;
- Transformation of classroom teaching and learning practices requires a comprehensive and holistic approach, including the changing of contents, assessment methods as well as competency frameworks of teachers and teacher training programmes;
- Resistance at community level among teachers and parents needs to be factored from the onset and addressed through participatory awareness and communication campaigns to avoid a backlash.

Building on the experiences and lessons learnt of the early grade curriculum development and mainstream the core life skills, UNICEF will continue to support the vision of the Ministry of Education and Technical Education to transform the education system. It will also examine means to fill the expected skills gaps between the graduates of the old education system and the graduates of Education 2.0 and investigate the development of extra-curricular programmes that introduce life skills.

Cost effectiveness

The above collaboration was achieved with US $1,000,000.

Using curriculum reform as an entry point for engagement on life skills and citizenship education is a concrete way to keep learning at the center of all we do and ensure “Every Child Learns”.

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