

ALL IN SCHOOL كلنا في المدرسة

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN INITIATIVE

SUMMARY

EGYPT

COUNTRY REPORT ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Summary

Since the 1990s and under successive Egyptian governments, education has been a top priority. This has yielded significant progress in increasing the availability and access to education. Currently pre-university education is benefiting nearly 20 million students through three entities: two governmental entities, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Al-Azhar, and private education. The MoE is the main stakeholder in providing educational services and under its umbrella are 1,674,028 students, distributed throughout 37,239 schools in 184,369 classes, being taught by 867,051 teachers. The system is managed at the school level by 97,249 administrative staff, who are assisted by 231,768 employees, 100,614 specialists and 51,745 labourers. The MoE provides all levels of pre-university education, from pre-primary, primary and preparatory education to secondary education; including general, technical and special needs education. In addition to a religious education programme, Al-Azhar offers a parallel programme to the MoE programme. Al-Azhar educates almost 10 per cent of pre-university students or more than 2 million students distributed in 9,033 Azhari Institutes. Azhari education offers all levels of education, and recently has added kindergartens and technical education.

Private education includes 6,174 schools serving 1,674,028 students, representing almost 8 per cent of the total number of students in primary and secondary levels, as well as 6 per cent of the preparatory level. The majority of private schools are subject to the supervision of the MoE, while schools providing religious instruction are subject to the supervision of Al-Azhar.

This structure of three administering entities has contributed to providing opportunities for enrolment to more than 90 per cent of the basic education stage population, not including the pre-primary (pre-school) stage. Despite the continued growth in the number of enrolled children, the recorded growth rate during the past decade (2004-2013) for the age category of 4-5 years old reached 8.3 per cent, exceeding the demographic growth registered for age category, which was 1.6 per cent. This increase was also reflected in the enrolment ratio of net pre-primary education, which rose from 16.1 per cent in 2004 to 28.5 per cent in 2013.

In 2013, in an effort to achieve full absorption of children at school age, the Egyptian government joined the Global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI), which was launched by UNICEF and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) in 2010. OOSCI works to detect and expand on information analysis methods, policies and strategies that address the common profiles of out-of-school children, including those who have never enrolled, along with those who have already enrolled but dropped out or are at risk of dropping out. The study examines supply and demand barriers that lead to a lack of enrolment or delayed enrolment. For analysis, OOSCI uses the agreed Five Dimensions of Exclusion developed for the conceptual and systematic framework. The study also looks at national policy priorities and strategies. The aim is to develop answers to three key questions:

- Who are the out-of-school children and where are they located?
- Why are these children out of school (obstacles/barriers)?
- How can the number of out-of-school children be reduced (strategies/policies)?

According to the framework of the study, out-of-school children are classified into the Dimensions of Exclusion based on their age categories corresponding to an education phase, starting from kindergarten (5 years old) to primary schooling (6-11 years old) to preparatory schooling (12-14 years old). In addition to out-of-school children, those children at risk of leaving school before completing primary school make up Dimension 4 and those children at risk of leaving school before completing the preparatory stage make up Dimension 5.

The inventory, classification and the determination of the characteristics of the children belonging to each of the Five Dimensions of Exclusion necessitated the collection of administrative data, along with economic and sociocultural data. The databases of the MoE and Al-Azhar from the past 10 years were utilized for obtaining administrative data, which included the distribution of students per governorate, stage, grade, gender, age and case studies. With regard to determining the size of the population in each Dimension, population distribution data issued by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics were used and compared with United Nations information tables to adjust them on a single-age distribution basis. As for economic and social data, four household surveys were reviewed, two of which were primary sources, the Demographic Health Survey (DHS) for the year 2008 and Youth Survey conducted by the Population Council for UNICEF in 2009. The analytical tables of both the Labour Force Survey (2013) and analytical tables of the Child Labour Survey (2010), both conducted by Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, were also used. A limited survey was carried out in one educational department where students were dropping out. This survey explored the opinions of teaching and administrative staff about the reasons for students dropping out and was preceded by a desk analysis of the results of other studies and research on out-of-school children in Egypt.

Results

Dimension 1: Out-of-school children at pre-primary school age

The results of the study showed that the number of children at pre-school age who are enrolled in pre-school is approximately 423,000, which represents 22.6 per cent of the total population of five-year-old children. By calculating the number of children at pre-primary age who are enrolled in primary school, the total adjusted pre-school net enrolment rate (NER) is 30.8 per cent. The statistics highlight the fact that two thirds (1.3 million) of pre-primary school age children are not enrolled in kindergarten or primary school. Boys are only slightly more likely to be out of school in pre-primary than girls (69.9 per cent and 68.5 per cent, respectively).

Dimension 2: Out-of-school children at primary school age

The number of children enrolled in primary education has increased during the last five years (2008-2013) by 1.5 per cent annually, which exceeds the demographic growth of the 6-11 year age bracket (1.2 per cent), thus the NER rose from 103.3 per cent in 2008 to 104.8 per cent in 2013.

Although the NER has exceeded 97 per cent of the primary school age population, there are nearly 320,000 children still out of school. These children have either left school, are unlikely to ever enter school or are likely to enter school in the future. It should be noted that about 61,000 of these children are enrolled in pre-primary programmes and not being taken into account based on the methodology of the initiative. The number and rates of primary age girls who are out of school is only slightly more than boys.

The gap in primary school enrolment rates almost disappears between boys and girls, as the gender parity index (GPI) is 0.98.

Concerning those who do not attend school for two consecutive years at the primary level, 2011-2012 statistics indicate that the percentage of dropouts for two consecutive years was less than 1 per cent of the total students, reaching 0.72 per cent at a rate of 0.9 per cent for boys and 0.6 per cent for girls. The translation of these percentages into figures shows that there is a problem: the number of dropouts in primary education has reached 69,440 (43,801 boys and 25,639 girls). The dropout rates for boys and girls are 63 per cent and 37 per cent respectively, which indicates that the number of boys who drop out at the primary level increases more substantially than that of girls, despite the fact that the ratio of enrolled girls do not differ significantly from that of boys. The distribution of dropouts per grade indicates that the numbers and percentages escalate the higher the grade. Primary level dropout reaches its peak at Grade 6. From the analysis of the data at the administrative level, the variation between education departments in terms of number and percentage of discontinuity is clear. The Cairo governorate has the highest number of dropouts (7,038), while Damietta has the highest proportion of dropouts to total students (1.5 per cent). This may be due to child labour in the furniture industry upon which the economy of the governorate depends.

Although boys have the higher dropout rate at this level of education, the results of the 2008 survey indicate that the dominant profile of out-of-school children in Dimension 2 is 'poor girls from rural environments in the final grades of the primary stage', but analysis of the sub-components of out-of-school children at primary age indicates that 28.5 per cent of dropouts were 'poor boys living in an urban environment'. Those who do not wish to enrol were predominantly 'poor girls living in a rural environment', who represent 50.4 per cent of the children in Dimension 2.

Dimension 3: Out-of-school children at preparatory school age

Administrative data indicates continuous growth in preparatory education levels, whether in the number of public schools, private schools or Al-Azhar institutes. The rate of increase across all schools during the last five years reached 13 per cent, which is slightly less than the rate of increase in the number of students (14 per cent). The growth rate in the number of students was almost equal to the rate of population increase in the preparatory school age group during the last five years. Thus, the rate of quantitative expansion in preparatory education was almost within the limits of the natural increase of the population, where the number of students increased by 2.8 per cent annually compared to demographic growth for 12 to 14-year-olds (2.6 per cent). This led to a slight improvement in terms of enrolment as the NER increased from 94 per cent in 2008 to 95 per cent in 2013.

Dimension 3 of the study reflects the out-of-school children who are at preparatory school age (12-14 years old). The proportion of girls who are out of school at this age is slightly higher (6.8 per cent) than boys (6.4 per cent). This ratio means that there are more than 330,000 children out of preparatory education. The analysis of qualitative enrolment indicates that net qualitative enrolment rates are 76-86 per cent of the preparatory school age population. It has been noted that there are approximately 430,000 children belonging to the preparatory education age group who are still in primary education levels. It was also noted that there are students at preparatory school age that are enrolled in secondary education (58,000).

Indicators from 2012-2013 show that the rates of moving from primary to preparatory school for boys and girls are 84.9 and 91.6 per cent respectively, while the total rate is 88.1 per cent. This demonstrates that moving from primary to preparatory school causes dropout. For children at preparatory school age from rural areas, it was found that the dropout rate ranges from 6 per cent at 12 years old to 7 per cent at 14 years old. This rate is significantly less in urban areas. This problem can be targeted through community education schools in the rural areas. The number of preparatory school

students who dropped out in the period 2001-2012 reached 39,119, with 42 per cent of these boys and 58 per cent girls, indicating that the percentage of girls who drop out is higher than boys. This reflects the emergence of two stages where there is a rise in dropouts: primary education for boys and preparatory education for girls. This contradicts the 2008 survey, which did not indicate significant differences between the proportions of out-of-school boys and girls, 13.7 per cent and 13.6 per cent, respectively.

The dominant profiles of children in Dimension 3 are 'poor girls from urban environments' at the age of 14 years old, while the children who are dropping out are 'rich boys living in an urban environment' (66.5 per cent), and those who do not go to school are 'poor girls from rural environment', making up 32.9 per cent of the total children who belong to this dimension.

Summary statistics of the Five Dimensions of Exclusion

| | Girls | | Boys | | Total | |
|--|----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|
| | Number | Per cent | Number | Per cent | Number | Per cent |
| Out-of-school children | | | | | | |
| Dimension 1: Children 5 years old (pre-primary) | 623,500 | 68.5 | 673,854 | 69.9 | 1,297,354 | 69.2 |
| Dimension 2: Children 6-10 years old (primary) | 165,757 | 3.1 | 153,370 | 2.8 | 319,126 | 2.9 |
| Dimension 3: Children 11-14 years old (preparatory) | 166,611 | 6.8 | 164,462 | 6.4 | 331,074 | 6.6 |
| Total out-of-school children (5-14 years old) | 955,868 | 11.1 | 991,686 | 10.9 | 1,947,554 | 11.0 |
| Children at risk of dropping out | | | | | | |
| Dimension 4: Children enrolled in primary school | 21,046 | 0.4 | 88,401 | 1.5 | 109,447 | 1.0 |
| Dimension 5: Children enrolled in the preparatory school | 62,847 | 2.7 | 83,309 | 3.4 | 146,156 | 3.1 |
| Total children at risk of dropping out | 83,893 | 1.1 | 171,710 | 2.1 | 255,603 | 1.6 |

Dimension 4: Children at risk of dropping out at the primary stage

The results of Dimension 4 reflect ups and downs in the numbers and percentages of students likely to drop out of primary school before reaching the final grade over the past 10 years. However, it was within the acceptable limit of 1 per cent, as the automatic upgrading has a significant effect.

Dimension 5: Children at risk of dropping out at the preparatory stage

Over the last three years, the results of the Dimension 5 indicate a reduction in the expected number of dropouts from the preparatory stage before reaching the final grade. However, the rate is still high at up to 3.4 per cent for boys and 2.7 per cent for girls.

It should be kept in mind when analysing these statistics that in the primary stage there are more boys than girls enrolled, while in the preparatory stage the opposite is true.

The integration of administrative data with household surveys and the field study data has revealed the existence of detailed profiles for out-of-school children in each of the Five Dimensions. Each has compound features that impact the profiles, such as poverty, social and cultural environment, parents' education and gender. It has been possible to monitor profiles, diagnose and explore strategies for dealing with these factors. It has been found that they are linked to the demand side, the supply side and/or the enabling environment for education.

Barriers and bottlenecks

School exclusion represents a limited phenomenon in Egypt, with the exception of Dimension 1, which remains a challenge. Dimensions 2 to 5 are limited as ratios, yet together they represent nearly 1 million out-of-school children from the age of 6-14 years old. With the recent rate of 7 per cent of the school-age children being out of school, solutions will need to take into account the factors mentioned above regarding the profiles of out-of-school children.

Barriers associated with the demand side: demand-side barriers are primarily economic factors that may include poverty and child labour, and the relationship between these economic constraints and social and cultural factors. For example, illiterate parents may be poor and have negative attitudes towards education, and not be able to justify the cost of the opportunity and the economic return of education. The dynamic interaction of these factors, coupled with weak social protection programmes and increased direct costs, prevent parents from enrolling their children in school and completing their education.

The direct cost of schooling would not be a barrier to poor and middle-income households if the prevalence of private tutoring did not exhaust the economic resources of families. Therefore, this practice undermines the right to free education provided by the Constitution, and further disables the policies of social justice and equal opportunity.

Social factors and the lack of awareness of the value of education, represent the strongest barriers in Dimensions 2 to 5, as families believe that education and its minimal financial returns will create economic difficulties.

Barriers associated with the supply side: The policy to expand access to education aimed to accommodate more than 90 per cent of children at primary age. However, this expansion in many cases came at the expense of quality. This is evident in the disappearance of fields, playgrounds and activity rooms, along with an increase in classroom overcrowding and multiple schooling shifts in many educational departments. These disadvantages of the expansion to access destroy the appeal of schooling for children and decrease extra-curricular education-related activities. Schools lose their competitive advantage and the lack of interest of private tutors to the performance in their classes leads to poor achievement, which results in failure, then dropout. This situation will continue to worsen as long as governance and accountability are absent. The reforms of the curriculum and evaluation systems are not expected to bare fruit unless they address these problems in quality.

The policy of access expansion was wrong in that the focus was on building the base of the education pyramid, which is primary school. This was not accompanied by appropriate expansion in the upper level, secondary school and university education, sparking unhealthy competition levels that were the reason for the boom in private tutoring and external books as an alternative to textbooks.

Recommendations

The factors and causes that are addressed in connection with the demand side, are not of absolute effect, meaning that they do not work alone but interact with each other to form bottlenecks or barriers to enrolment or reasons for dropout.

Demand side: Cooperation and systematic coordination with CDAs and NGOs are needed in organizing programmes of awareness campaigns on the importance of education and its returns in areas that suffer from poor enrolment, dropout and illiteracy. Complementary programmes and in-kind support to poor families linked to enrolment and the continuation of their children's education, along with coordination with literacy programmes when the opportunity arises, are also required.

Child labour as a cause of dropout depends on the social environment, financial return, the economic situation of the family and the social norms for children at the beginning of adolescence. There are policies in place for supporting poor families and for providing social protection that reduce child labour, yet the activation of the Children Law and child labour laws are indispensable to eliminate this barrier.

Organizing free educational lessons by CDAs, whether inside or outside the walls of the school can be a short-term plan to deal with the phenomenon of private lessons.

Another recommendation is developing mechanisms at different administrative levels, starting with schools, to stimulate children in the target areas to enrol and continue their education.

Supply side: Interventions to detect the Five Dimensions of Exclusion must start from both ends of the spectrum, meaning that administrative databases should be examined to identify schools facing high dropout rates, as well as the communities that are characterized by poor enrolment. Then it should be determined if there are individual cases that can be addressed through the Education Department and the local community, or if they are more widespread issues that need attention at the Directorate level and require intervention at the central level.

The barriers in the supply side are not necessarily limited to being solved by the provision of a building or a class in the vicinity of the targeted community. The solution could extend to a system that provides student friendly curricula within the framework of variable school activities to make the school an attractive environment.

Dealing with the problem of private lessons begins with a quantitative and multi-dimensional diagnosis of the problem with all concerned parties. This would be followed by an integrated systematic approach, individual Interventions (e.g. teacher cadres) and comprehensive evaluation. Cooperation with the Ministries of Higher Education and Manpower in opening new education courses to accommodate those students who want to continue after completing basic education to obtain a degree linked to the labour market is another possible solution.

Governance: Recommendations for governance measures include:

- Linking the databases of enrolled students from the Ministry of Education and Azhari Education, as well as civil registry databases, to identify out-of-school children and then coordinating with community institutions to reach these children to get them into schools.
- Institutionalizing mechanisms to coordinate with civil society organizations in the inventory of out-of-school children to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of enrolment.
- Enhancing capacity building for the boards of trustees in schools to pursue cases of children at risk of dropping out, and sharing experiences on lessons learned and good practices in solving problems and overcoming barriers facing out-of-school children.
- Establishing mechanisms for the involvement of target communities in the development of policies to fight the phenomenon of dropping out and non-enrolment.
- Activating mechanisms in quality assurance departments at all levels to monitor and evaluate programmes to deal with the phenomenon of out-of-school children in order to ensure transparency and accountability in a framework of indicators and targets.

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