

Gender, Tutoring and Track in Egyptian Education

Eman Sh. Sayed, Ray Langsten

Abstract—In Egypt, girls have traditionally been educationally disadvantaged. This disadvantage, however, has been focused on the failure to enter school. Increasingly it is recognized that girls who ever-enroll are at least as likely to complete primary and secondary education as boys. Still the belief persists that girls, especially those from poor families, will be disadvantaged in terms of school expenditures and the transitions to secondary and higher education. We examine expenditures on tutoring during the final year of preparatory school, and the transition to specific tracks of secondary education. Tests during the last year of preparatory largely determine a student's educational future. Results show that girls, even girls from poor families, are not disadvantaged in terms of expenditures, whether for tutoring, fees or general expenses. Moreover, girls are more likely than boys to advance to general secondary education, the track that leads to higher education.

Keywords—Gender, Tutoring, Track, Egyptian Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

EGYPT'S education system is the largest in the MENA region [1]. It has grown rapidly, especially in the last 30 years [2]. The government's commitment to educate its children is strong [3], but sources note that despite this commitment, the rapid growth of education has been accompanied by a decline in quality [2], [3]. The decline in quality is largely a result of the government's inability to afford the high costs of quality education [4], [5].

In Egypt, children start school at 6 years of age. Basic education consists of six years of primary school, followed by three years of preparatory (middle) school. In secondary school, which in most cases lasts for three additional years, students are tracked into either general (academic) education or technical/vocational education. (Some courses of technical secondary schooling last five years.) General secondary school is the normal path to higher education, which also has two tracks: 1) vocational training provided by two-year institutes and four- and five-year higher institutes; and 2) university.

In the 1960s general secondary school graduates were guaranteed a place at university, and university graduates were guaranteed a position in the government bureaucracy [6]. The government also began a rapid expansion of secondary education. Among the consequences of these policies were: 1) a need to divert students from general to technical (T/V) secondary to avoid excessive demand for university places [3], 2) an "obsessive concern with exams" especially the exam at the end of preparatory school, and the general secondary school leaving exam ('thanawaya amma') [6], [7]; and 3) the

spread of tutoring in order to compensate for the poor quality of government education and to compete on the high stakes leaving exams.

Tutoring is said to have started to gain prominence in the 1970s among secondary school students seeking to improve their chances of entering a prestigious university faculty [6]. Over the years tutoring has become more prevalent and now is common at all levels of education from primary through higher [2]. Now, along with the thanaweya amma the most important examination for most students is that at the end of the preparatory stage of education which determines whether students qualify for the general track in secondary education or not. As a result, tutoring during the last year of preparatory school is viewed as particularly important.

Along with tutoring and track placement, gender is said to play an important role in determining a child's educational prospects. One of the most common paradigms in education research is that in most of the developing world girls are disadvantaged [2], [5], [8]-[12], in large part because of economic reasons. A recent review article on gender gaps in education in developing countries notes that "girls' schooling is more sensitive to expenditure, however defined, than boys' [schooling]" [13]. The "economic constraint thesis" [14], [15] suggests that girls will be particularly disadvantaged when the family is poor. For example, it is said that in Egypt "Poverty leads parents to choose sons over daughters when they cannot afford to send all their offspring to school" [16].

Although all state education in Egypt, from primary through university, is nominally free, still the "Private expenditures of public education are considerable" [4], [5]. Educational expenditures are said to consume 8% of total household expenditure [4]. Tutoring represents the main component of private expenditure on education [7], [17]. According to one study, private tutoring alone accounts for 28% of household expenditure on education [4]. A recent CAPMAS study found tutoring to be an even more important component of educational expenditures with "over 60 per cent of investments in education ... spent on private tutoring", cited in: [18]. Tutoring grew and spread widely even though it is forbidden by the government. Some have come to call it the "black market" for education [6].

What are the reasons for tutoring? The most important ones are: a) the poor quality of most public education; b) the willingness of the parents to invest in tutoring to improve their children's futures [6], [7]; and c) teachers' need to supplement their salaries [6]. Also, some parents may be afraid that if their children do not pay for private tutoring, teachers will retaliate by failing the students who do not take tutoring [17].

In Egypt, there are two types of tutoring; 1) group tutoring and 2) private tutoring. Group tutoring is lessons that take

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place in public schools after the regular school day. It is officially recognized and sanctioned by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Private tutoring is lessons that take place outside the school, either after school or on the weekends. Though technically illegal it is widely and openly practiced. Some private tutoring is presented in large classroom settings. But private tutoring may also be given to individuals or small groups [19]. Another difference is the expenditure. Private tutoring is generally substantially more expensive than group tutoring. The price may vary according to the educational level and the importance of the subject to the student [19]. In general, the aim of tutoring is to improve performance on examinations [6], [20]. Therefore students in the last year of an educational level, facing a high-stakes exam for promotion to the next level of education, are more likely to take more, and more expensive, lessons than do those who are in the earlier years of that level [7].

The amount spent on tutoring is said to increase substantially with wealth [20]. Both wealth and greater expenditures on tutoring and other educational expenditures are said to increase a child's chances of success in educational transitions [12]. Despite the pressures for students to be tutored, some families decide during preparatory school not to invest in tutoring. Tutoring during the final year of preparatory (middle) school is mainly to help students achieve a high enough score on the preparatory school leaving examination to allow them to attend the more prestigious academically focused, general track of secondary education that typically leads to higher education. If the student or his/her family does not aspire to general secondary then tutoring may be seen as unnecessary. All students, regardless of their score on the preparatory school leaving exam, may attend secondary. Those with low scores will be assigned to the less prestigious T/V track.

Some families may be unwilling or unable to pay the immediate expenditures of tutoring. But there are other reasons students or families may choose T/V education. In rural areas, T/V secondary schools are more likely to be located in villages, while general secondary schools are more likely to be in the larger towns and nearby cities [5]. Travel to distant general secondary schools imposes the direct expenditure of transportation. And for girls it also brings potential cultural expenditures when they must leave the protection of family and their immediate neighborhood [9]. The end of preparatory school and entry into secondary occurs when most girls are going through puberty and are reaching an age when marriage becomes possible in traditional Egyptian society. Some families may restrict the movement of their daughters at this time [9], [21], [22]. In general secondary tutoring expenditures are likely to be much higher than expenditures in T/V secondary. Moreover, general secondary study implies continuation into higher education with its direct expenditures, and potentially high indirect expenditures while earnings are foregone by students who remain out the labor force. Those who study in T/V secondary almost always leave education and enter the labor force following completion of secondary [23]. Finally some families choose T/V secondary

because they believe that academic studies and higher education are not appropriate for a family of their social standing [23]. Given all these issues, and especially the high expenditures of academic education, many families, and especially those facing economic constraints, will be less likely to spend money on education, and especially on tutoring.

Some argue that the cost of educating girls is higher than that of boys [24], which leads families to invest in educating boys not girls. The same is said for tutoring: "Resource-constrained families can be more likely to invest in tutoring for their sons" [25].

In some countries girls are said to be disadvantaged because they are "filtered out" of tutoring [26]. Research in Egypt, however, has shown that while girls are disadvantaged in terms of ever-enrollment in school, on average, a girl who starts school is as likely to complete secondary education as is a boy who enters school [25], [27]. Yet, the belief that girls are disadvantaged, for economic reasons and also because of cultural traditions that dictate that girls should be kept home after puberty or committed to an early marriage, persists [16].

In this paper we analyze the links between gender, tutoring and track. We ask whether girls are educationally disadvantaged or not, focusing specifically on educational expenditures. Previous research has focused on the expenditure for tutoring. But there are also other educational expenditures we will consider: 1) school fees; and 2) other general expenditures such as pocket change, transportation, school supplies, uniform, etc. We assess to what degree these private expenditures favor boys or girls. And we correlate expenditures with the educational track that boys and girls pursue--technical/vocational or general secondary.

Results of previous studies differ on whether girls are disadvantaged in terms of tutoring. For example, in Bangladesh, India, Kenya and at least one study in Korea boys were found to be advantaged [17]. In a different Korean study [28] girls were more likely to receive tutoring. Crucially, in Egypt, despite the view that adolescent girls are educationally disadvantaged and at risk of being withdrawn from school, previous studies have found no bias against girls in terms of tutoring or tutoring expenditures [29], [30].

II. DATA

The Egypt Household Education Survey [31] collected expenditure data for the school year prior to the year in which students were studying at the time of data collection. Therefore, in order to analyze expenditures during the final year of preparatory school we consider students studying in the first year of secondary school. As a result, there are no expenditure (or other schooling) information for those students who were in the last year of preparatory school during the previous year and who dropped out of school before the time of the survey. However, we have looked at the transition rate into secondary for all young people 14-17 years of age who completed preparatory school. Only 3% of young people stopped their studies after completing preparatory education, with girls only slightly more likely to drop out (3.7%) than

boys (2.2%). Given the low level of dropout following preparatory, we feel it is safe to focus the analysis on the subset of students in the first year of secondary school.

III. RESULTS

Among the 639 students in the first year of secondary school, 47.7% are female and 52.3% are male (virtually identical to the distribution of preparatory school leavers); 43.7% were studying in the general secondary track, while 56.3% were in the T/V track. Overall, 78% of the students received some tutoring with boys and girls being equally likely to be tutored. Group tutoring, which takes place in schools and is officially sanctioned, costs less than private tutoring. But among those who received tutoring there is no significant gender difference in the type of tutoring they received.

We have looked at three types of expenditures: 1) tutoring, of course, and also, 2) fees, and 3) other expenditures (books, supplies, transportation, etc.). Those who did not pay fees, or who did not receive tutoring are coded "zero" for the relevant expenditure variable. Over all, there are no significant gender differences for any of the three categories of expenditures. Table I shows that tutoring is the largest single category of expenditures, constituting about half of all education expenditures for both males and females. All types of expenditure are strongly related to wealth. Tutoring especially increases substantially in each wealth quintile (Table II).

TABLE I
EXPENDITURES BY TYPE AND GENDER STUDENTS IN FIRST SECONDARY EGYPT 2005-06

Type of Expenditure	Tutoring	Fees	Other Expenditure
Male	350.38	101.29	241.21
Female	363.54	91.90	227.23
Sig.	NS	NS	NS

TABLE II
MEAN EXPENDITURE BY WEALTH

Wealth	Tutoring	Fees	Other Expenditure
Lowest	137.33	50.00	171.97
Second	176.57	41.54	186.34
Middle	246.02	38.65	211.45
Fourth	476.17	69.03	259.73
Highest	707.73	285.96	331.11
Sig.	0.00	0.00	0.00

As noted in the introduction, girls from poor families are said to be particularly disadvantaged in terms of educational expenditures. It is commonly believed that resource constrained, poor families may not be able to send all their children to school. Even considering families who send their children to school it is said they are forced to choose between providing tutoring and other educational benefits for only some children. In these cases it is assumed that families will give preference in educational expenditures to sons over daughters. Basic results from the EHES survey provide little support for this view. In Table III, controlling for family wealth, there are few statistically significant differences in

expenditures by gender. For example, among children from families in the poorest quintile, although expenditures for tutoring and fees are slightly higher for boys than for girls, these differences are not statistically significant. "Other" expenditures are generally higher for boys but the difference is either not statistically significant, or of marginal significance for children from the poorest households. The only statistically significant gender difference in tutoring expenditures is found in the middle quintile. But, in this case, girls are favored.

TABLE III
MEAN EXPENDITURE BY GENDER AMONG WEALTH QUINTILES

		Tutoring	Fees	Other Expenditure
Poorest	Male	141.26	60.44	187.99 *
	Female	131.85	35.38	149.64
Second	Male	158.07	43.29	195.58
	Female	196.6	39.65	176.34
Middle	Male	181.88	37.07	217.18
	Female	314.23 **	40.31	205.42
Fourth	Male	533.66	91.67*	265.91
	Female	419.06	46.79	253.60
Wealthiest	Male	731.95	281.12	336.18
	Female	682.52	291.01	325.73

* (<0.1 /marginal significance), ** (<0.05 significance), *** (<0.01 significance), comparing males and females within a wealth quintile.

It has long been the case that T/V secondary predominates in Egypt. And, as noted above, in our sample 56.3% of students were in the first year of T/V secondary and 43.7% in the first year of general secondary. In our sample, girls are significantly more likely to enter the academic general secondary than are boys (47.9% versus 39.8%, respectively). And consistent with previous research [23] we also find that there is a strong relation between wealth and track. More than three-quarters of children from the poorest quintile enter the T/V secondary track, while only about one-quarter of children from the wealthiest quintile do so.

For students currently in the first year of both technical and general secondary, tutoring expenditures increase as wealth increases (with the exception of a couple of small reversals among children from families in the wealthiest group who continued their studies in technical secondary school and among children in the second wealth quintile who continued into general secondary) The strong relationship between wealth and expenditures on tutoring, controlling for track of secondary entered, is shown in Table IV.

TABLE IV
MEAN TUTORING EXPENDITURE BY TRACK CONTROLLING FOR WEALTH

	Tech. Sec. Tutoring	G. Sec. Tutoring
Poorest	117.51	203.24
Second	165.45	195.63
Middle	190.00	336.17
Fourth	469.78	484.53
Wealthiest	305.96	855.75

Despite the gender equality in expenditures and tutoring, there is an interesting interaction effect in the relationship between gender and secondary track attended. Girls from poor

families are less likely to enter general secondary than are boys from poor families. However, this relationship between gender and type of secondary school attended is reversed for those from middle income and wealthy families. Among children from these wealthier households females are significantly more likely to attend generally secondary. (Table V).

TABLE V
TRACK BY GENDER CONTROLLING FOR WEALTH

		T/V	Gen	Total
Poorest	Male	73.7%	26.3%	57
	Female	82.5%	17.5%	40
Second	Male	53.5%	46.5%***	71
	Female	74.2%	25.8%	66
Middle	Male	69%	31%	71
	Female	55.2%	44.8%*	67
Fourth	Male	68.6%	31.4%	70
	Female	44.3%	55.7%***	70
Wealthiest	Male	37.9%	62.1%	66
	Female	14.8%	85.2%***	61
Total	Male	55.8%	47.7%	335
	Female	44.2%	52.3%	304

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we find no evidence in these data that Egyptian girls are disadvantaged in terms of tutoring expenditures, or in their prospects for higher education. Even among students in the first year of secondary school who come from poor families, girls benefitted from the same level of expenditure on education as boys. Although many continue to argue that Egyptian girls are educationally disadvantaged, previous research has shown that girls who start school are as likely to complete secondary as are boys who enter school [7]. Plus there is no overall tutoring disadvantage for girls [7], [30]. This present work has shown that, in addition to these earlier findings, even amongst poor families girls are not disadvantaged, and that, girls are even favored in the likelihood of entering the more prestigious, academic general track of secondary education. We believe therefore, that the thinking about gender and education needs to be revised to take into account this more favorable perspective on girls' education.

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