

Doctoral Education in Egypt

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For further reference, see Cantini, Daniele (ed.). 2020. *Bounded Knowledge: Doctoral Studies in Egypt*. Cairo/New York: American University in Cairo Press.

Part I: Context

Opportunities for doctoral education in a modern sense (earlier possibilities of postgraduate studies within the Islamic schools, or madrasas, belong to the history of Islamic education) have existed for over a century, with the first doctorate being awarded in 1914, although the system did not become institutionalized until after 1925, when the private, philanthropic university became nationalized (Abbas 2008, Reid 1990). Since then, doctorates have been awarded almost exclusively by public universities, under the control of the Supreme Council of Universities at the Ministry of Higher Education. Exceptional doctoral programs may be run at some selected private universities, but this is the clear exception. Since the beginning of the modern university in Egypt, the establishment of a system at home went hand in hand with the prosecution of "study missions" (already begun in mid-XIX century) abroad, with or without governmental scholarship (Reid 1990). The first PhD holder, who later became Minister of Education and is considered one of the greatest modern Egyptian intellectuals, Taha Hussein, is a great witness to the presence of different layers and systems of higher education at the beginning of the XX century, to some extent continued ever since. Educated in the Islamic university of Al-Azhar, itself founded in the X century, he enrolled himself at the then private and philanthropic first modern university, what later became Cairo University, and obtained his doctorate in 1914. He was then awarded a governmental scholarship and went to France to pursue a *master* and later a *doctorat*, with which he came back to Egypt and became professor at what was becoming the national university (Al-Jumay'i 1983).

1. History: *Who were/are the drivers of doctoral training over time (state/regional, federal government, religious institutions? Do all institutions of higher education in your country award PhD/doctorate degrees? What types of doctoral degrees (professional doctorate, industrial doctorate) exist?*

A history of the doctorate in Egypt is still to be written, also in Arabic (available studies, limited to some disciplines and periods, tend to list MA and PhD theses with little or no explanation); as mentioned, it is closely linked with the history of the national university (Cantini 2020).

The beginning and inception of the doctorate may be illustrated in four phases.

First pioneering phase, 1908-1925. The University is still a private enterprise, although with financial support from the khedivial court; it is a balance between the occupying British power, the nascent nationalistic movement, the interests of different European countries (France, but also Italy, Belgium, Germany). Its teaching staff is mostly composed of European orientalist (some of whom teach in Arabic), and its student pool is largely an elite, also due to the very few secondary schools available. Clear link between university degree and state employment, and doctorate still for few people (6 in total between 1908 and 1925, when the university becomes nationalised) with an ideal of pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake (although contestations on the boundaries of the morally and scientifically acceptable and political intrusions were not unheard of also in this period). The subsequent period, 1925 to 1958/59, sees a gradual expansion of the still largely elitist institution, with 847 PhDs (42 to women) being awarded in all disciplines and faculties, also in the newly created public universities in some provinces.

Third, the revolution that started in 1952, which paved the way for Nasser's rule (until 1970). The expansion of access to education may be the single most successful outcome of the revolution (although this was happening at the same time in other countries, from France to the UK); the university is no exception. Explosion in numbers of universities, students, and also postgraduate students – to make an example, in 1969/1970 there were 1200 PhD students at Cairo University alone (Akrawi 1979). Importantly, during this phase research becomes partly externalised, with creation of research centres devoted to specific topics, seen as more directly respondent to the needs of the then socialist regime. Research becomes instrumental in the nation's development; scientists are to be responsible, and avoid sensible topics; institutionalization of censorship (Abdalla 1985, Cantini 2020).

Fourth, the present phase in which the system is still expanding numerically (see next section), but in which the developmentalist nature of the state enters into a crisis mode (many causes, military defeat 1967, integration within the capitalist world with Sadat policies continued under Mubarak, sheer exhaustion of the possibility of the public system to absorb graduates, economic restructuring since the late 1980s, and many more; only few of these are specific to Egypt; see Farag 2006). This is the situation in which Egypt finds itself today, and since decades (Reid 1990); parallel continued expansion of the system, largely within parameters set during a socialist phase that no longer exists, and loss of coherence and entrance into a crisis discourse (Ayubi 1983). The crisis is not just a discourse, but it is certified by international agencies; for example, in 2017 the World Economic Forum ranked Egypt 130 out of 137 countries for the quality of its education system; this is of course not specific to the doctorate, but it gives an idea of the overall context.

2. Size and Demography of Doctorate Pool: *Data on the number of doctorate degrees awarded annually in 2005, 2010, 2015, (current, if available). The distribution of PhDs among your country's universities? The demographic characteristics? (% international students, women & men, major fields of study)*

In 2003 PhD students at all Egyptian universities in all disciplines were 22,248, an increase from 13,354 in 1993, making up more than the half of the total of PhD students in all Arab countries, and reached 35,000 in 2009. In 2011-2016, the latest period on which statistics are available, PhD graduates at all Egyptian universities have been 37,519 (15,284 of whom, roughly 40%, females); in 2011-2013 there were slightly above 4,000 graduations per year, jumped up to over 7,000 in 2014-15, and up again to 9,016 (3,432 females) in 2016. In 2017 awarded PhD (in all disciplines and all over the country) were down to 7,656, still a staggering figure, particularly if compared to other African contexts. Of these, 47% were awarded to female researchers, and the vast majority was awarded at public universities – only 45 were awarded in "academies" (arts academy, police academy), 2 at the American University in Cairo, and 190 were awarded at foreign universities. Presumably this statistics, as all previous ones available on the website of the Center for Population Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS 2018) at the Ministry of Interior, refers to Egyptians abroad on government scholarships, as the actual number of Egyptians pursuing doctorates abroad is much higher; for example a recent study shows that between 2008 and 2014 766 Egyptians received their doctorate in the USA alone.

3. Time-to-degree and Completion of Degree: *Data on expected time to completion and actual average time-to-degree? Does the time include the master's degree time? The average completion/attrition rate? Any major disciplinary differences?*

In theory, doctoral studies should last between three and six years; this excludes the master's degree, which is a prerequisite for enrolment in a doctoral program, along with a year preparatory program. As a consequence of the crisis of the doctorate, and of the higher education sector in

general, salaries are generally no longer enough to sustain a family, and almost everyone is involved in some external activities to make ends meet: many doctoral, and indeed even master students are full time employees somewhere, often with family responsibilities, with obvious consequences on the time devoted to research. Since the introduction of the credit hour system in 2011/2012 (see below), it is not uncommon that MA and PhD classes are held in the late afternoon or in the early evenings, to allow working students to attend. Doctorates, particularly for those who are not already faculty members (see below), could take a long time to be completed, if at all; a source reports that successfully completed PhDs could be as low as 5-10%. Meaningful doctoral supervision is also often lacking, since professors are not adequately compensated for their time, and since they are themselves quite busy in other income-generating occupations.

4. Purpose and Goals of Doctoral Education: *If your country offers research (PhD) and professional doctorates, what is the purpose of each type of doctorate? Has the purpose changed in the last 20 years?*

While some professional doctorates exist (academies), the vast majority of doctorates are PhD, awarded at public universities. Importantly, there is a fundamental division among PhD candidates who are already faculty members and those who pursue their doctorates independently (official documents operate a distinction between employed and unemployed doctoral students). Scholarships are not provided; faculty members are paid their salaries, while external candidates pay a registration fee, and fees according to the credit hour system, which in some disciplines are rather expensive, and routinely create protests. Each year, a number of undergraduates (normally those obtaining exceptional grades, although this is far from being uncontested) are appointed demonstrators, thus becoming faculty members. They are required to complete their MA in 5 years and their PhD studies in again 5 years, publishing two articles, as formal requirements before they can be appointed lecturers and become permanent members of the academic staff. Within this group, which according to some statistics is the largest among doctoral candidates (thus making the problem of their entrance into the labour market redundant, since they are already hired as faculty members), completion rates are very high (failing to become lecturer after being already faculty member is an exceptional situation), and time-to-degree is significantly shorter than normal, in some cases down to two years after obtaining a master's degree. Doctoral candidates who are not faculty members enrol for many reasons; in some disciplines, a doctoral degree and research experience may be an interesting addition to a CV; for those already in a job, obtaining an advanced degree may mean obtaining a promotion or a salary increase; for all, a PhD means entering the cohort of those who could obtain academic positions, either in the private sector or abroad (in earlier times, also in newly founded public universities in provincial cities).

Part II: Structure of Doctoral Education

Please provide brief information on the **structure of doctoral education** and **weblinks to National Policies and QA frameworks**: *What is the predominant model of doctorate education (structured with courses and thesis; in a cohort; only dissertation; only apprenticeship model working with the adviser)?*

What are admission and degree requirements?

Do your institutions have central campus units that are advocating for and providing services to doctoral students? i.e. a central graduate school, training centers, etc.

a. Main National Policies/Reforms Affecting Doctoral Education: *Is policy for doctoral education developed by a Ministry or others?*

b. Funding: *What is the relative support for PhD candidates through various kind of support mechanisms (individual fellowships, project funding, structured PhD funded pro-grams/Doctoral Schools, Industry PhD's, Inter Institutional Collaborative doctoral pro-gram, etc)*

- c. **Quality Assurance/control:** Are there national guidelines? What role do the universities and possibly funding agencies play in the setting and monitoring of quality?*
- d. **Career paths of doctorate recipients:** Who collects data doctoral recipients' career path? data website? What level of career support for doctoral candidates is available in universities?*

Doctoral studies, PhD (دكتوراه) are organized at universities and last for at least two years, but could be extended to five years or more. A general pre requisite for the PhD is that the student should have completed an MSc. Ph.D. programs are based on scientific research and publication of papers in scientific journals. A Ph.D. thesis is the final part of the doctoral study programme, except in case of Medical studies, where candidates are required to pass an exam as part of the qualification for MD(Medical Doctorate). Postgraduate studies at the Faculty of Arts are subject to the Regulations of the Supreme Council for Universities, first issued in 1975 and reviewed every five years (Technopolis 2010). As per the old system, students could enroll for a PhD immediately upon completion of their MA, while a later regulation added the prerequisite of scoring at least 500 on the TOEFL exam in order to qualify for registration. A PhD preliminary year was added and remained in effect for a number of years, after which it was canceled. The Postgraduate Regulations for 2011-2012 apply the credit-hour system.

A complete list of requirements and details may be found on the website of Cairo University, the older and bigger university in the country. They are provided in Arabic and English

https://cu.edu.eg/Graduate_Programs

<https://cu.edu.eg/page.php?pg=contentFront/SubSectionData.php&SubSectionId=18> (English)

<https://cu.edu.eg/userfiles/4.pdf>

Higher Education Institutions individually determine their PhD enrolment rates in line with estimated needs of society for the development of science, education and arts, but also bearing in mind their capacities in terms of space and human resources. General admission requirements include having a Master Degree, a language certificate in at least one foreign language, a Certificate of Basic Computer Skills and Academic Writing Courses (EU 2017).

In order to organise PhD study programmes, the higher education institution has to observe specific selection criteria applicable to PhD teaching staff. Such criteria include the status of the staff. In Egyptian bylaws, only Associate Professors or Full Professors are allowed to teach in PhD programs and supervise PhD thesis. Lecturers might assist as Co-Supervisors or might assist in some lectures. Supervision might also be jointly between professors from the same department or different departments at the same faculty or different faculties. It might also be joint between professors from different Egyptian or foreign universities. This is however very rare, and it is much more common that the supervision is individual, with little to none external control.

Quality assurance in education was one of 6 top priorities recommendations released from the National conference on Higher education reform (2000), and was introduced officially at the Government level since 2001, thanks to support provided by the Ford Foundation. Current phase started in 2007 through the establishment of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Egypt (NAQAAE) by a Presidential Decree. NAQAAE is independent body belonging to the prim-minister, and is responsible for higher, pre- university, and Al-Azhar education (EU 2017). The introduction of credit hour system in 2011/12 (incidentally, the academic year after the revolution; this shows the resilience of reforms!) is part of the effort toward a greater accountability of doctoral programs.

Career paths are simpler than in other contexts, at least for the PhD candidates who are already faculty members. For the others, there is no reliable statistic I could find; it is however clear that a career in research involves flexibility, great mobility across the Arab region and elsewhere, and frequent employments outside academia, in research centres funded by international agencies etc.

Part III: Trends

1. International Collaboration: *Is collaboration in PhD training encouraged? What are the trends? (intersectoral - industry/government/non-profit collaboration; inter-institutional collaboration within the country). Are joint degrees and co-supervision with other universities encouraged?*

Egypt has been extremely active in the promotion of co-operation schemes with foreign counterparts and international agencies; approximately 10 % of funding for research activities is provided by international actors, and Egypt has signed over 128 international agreements with a variety of partners across the world (Technopolis 2010). The progressive integration into the European research market since 2002, when Egypt started participating in the Tempus program, created new opportunities to “support the modernization of higher education in Egypt” and provided, inter alia, teaching staff capacity building through mobility periods spent abroad. 121 projects have been funded with Egyptian participation since 2002.

2. Equal Opportunities: *Are there policies in your country aiming at diversity and inclusion in doctoral education focusing on overcoming inequalities in the larger social structure?*

3. Digital Transformation: *How has digital transformation influenced the process of doctoral education and training (e.g. MOOCs, live streaming of dissertation defense, new forms of digital dissertations, open science policy)?*

There is an attempt at making the publication of doctoral theses a requirement for obtaining the title. However, this has not been implemented yet.

4. Most Important Aspects for Your Country: *Currently what are the most burning issues in doctoral education in your country? For example, working conditions, job insecurity, and other pressures on doctoral students? Which issues in doctoral education does your country plan and/or need to address in policies for the future?*

Working conditions are overall not optimal in the country, and higher education is no exception, including doctoral studies. The very possibility of doing research is, to borrow a title of a recent book on research in Arab countries, an impossible promise; for the combination of political and societal pressures, a fundamental extraversion of the system, unclear research priorities, limited funding and even more limited research facilities, if at all. At the same time, Egypt is a powerhouse in the region, and has a solid and historical role in creating and disseminating knowledge – it is inserted in regional competitions to attract fee-paying students, for example, and it sends not only students (under- and postgraduate) but also teachers and professors abroad, since at least the 1970s.

As in all phases of modern Egyptian history, the political relevance of higher education and research is routinely reiterated; as a prime example, the 2014 Constitution restates that education is a right for all citizens. Before the revolution, the then minister of higher education, Hani Hilal, announced that the government wanted to increase numbers of students attending universities, at both under and postgraduate levels; despite protests in recent years for example against rising fees and the perceived lack of value given to the diplomas, the current government announced that 2019 will be “education year”, and the budget should grow accordingly; both capacity building and research excellence are priorities of Egypt’s sustainable development goals and Egypt’s 2030 vision. In the current political climate, it should thus come as no surprise that , when research is discussed, the emphasis on the needs of the state is being put forward again, such as in the post-independence period; to conclude with one example, in November 2018, the Alexandria University’s Council for Postgraduate Studies and Research demanded the dissertations presented to the institution comply with Egypt’s 2030 Vision, a long-term development scheme launched by the president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in 2016 (Cantini 2020).

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