Education Project IV

Project Summary

This project focuses on determining ways of improving the quality of, in, and through education throughout the MENA region. Assessment of effective strategies to improve the quality of, in, and through education in the region is also greatly needed. The inputs (financial, material and human resources; technologies; infrastructure), the process (the how of teaching, learning, assessment, evaluation); and learning outcomes (understanding, skills, competencies) are the thematic areas for research. At the completion of this initiative, there will be a better understanding of analysis and authentication of high impact practices that improve student movement toward success- acquisition of employable skills. Participants will deliver scholarly and practical deliverables that address education quality, relevance, and equity.

Introduction

The Charter of the United Nations considers education as a basic and inalienable right for every child. Basic education should be provided free and is compulsory. Unfortunately, progress to meeting this global goal seems to remain glaringly dismal and is continuing to capture the attention of world leaders in education. The meeting resulted in the World Declaration on Education for All. The Declaration aspires to benefit children, youth, and adults from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs including literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving as well as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required by human beings to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions and to learn lifelong. The capacity of citizens and employees to understand the complexity and to significantly contribute to socio-economic growth and development depends on the quality (including equity and relevance) in education delivery (Bekele a & b, in press). Unfortunately, compared to other regions, quality and relevance of education in Africa, the Middle East, and South-East Asia is minimal. Far more is yet to be done by governments and international development organizations before all children experience education of acceptable quality. Strategies for bridging the gap between education and the labor market need to be developed. Empirical education studies that consider socio-cultural, economic, political, and historical contexts and dimensions could enable the development of relevant strategies (Bekele, 2018).

Problem Statement

Throughout Egypt and MENA, youth increasingly find themselves in a state of NEET; that is "not in education, employment, or training" (Devarajan, 2016). Many young Egyptians with university education find there are insufficient employment opportunities, and this problem is exacerbated for the nation's women and poorest individuals in rural areas of the country. Gender disparity in employment presents significant challenges female university graduates face. The Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research are currently investing heavily in the Education 2030 initiatives to improve quality, relevance, and equity in education. This proposal is situated within this global and national education agenda and aspires to make an additional impact on the problem of youth and women unemployment. The inputs (financial, material and human resources; technologies; infrastructure), the process (the how of teaching, learning, assessment, evaluation); and learning outcomes (understanding, skills, competencies) are the thematic areas for research.

Background

The Graduate School of Education at AUC is well suited to address these topics. The faculty of the academic unit is diverse with backgrounds in literacy, gender studies, higher education, and international and comparative education and they come from the United States, Lebanon, Egypt, and Ethiopia with experience in many regions of the world including Africa, China, Central America, Europe, and the Middle East. Dr. Teklu brings a wealth of experience in policy analysis, technology use in education, quality and relevance of education, higher education and society linkages, international and comparative perspectives, and qualitative and quantitative research methodologies and methods.

Significance

Overall, workforce development in Egypt and the MENA region seems facing issues related to education quality, relevance, and equity (Bekele, in press; Devarajan, 2016; Johnson, 2018). There are few studies in the region addressing effective strategies and methods to improve education relevance and quality. This project aspires to enhance our understanding of how local realities shape education planning and practice.

Project description

The broad goal of this project is to develop a practical understanding of how language is used in and especially across various professional contexts in the MENA region. Power dynamics related to gender and socio-economic status will be explored as a means of explaining and remediating gender gaps in employment and addressing social mobility for young Egyptians and MENA citizens, particularly in rural areas. Development and testing of assessments that assist leaders in addressing youth unemployment through improved professional discourse, gender inequalities and access in disciplinary and workforce discourses, and the nature of professional discourse in MENA are part of the research project.

Successful applicants will seek a degree in international and comparative education. The project team has identified existing coursework that addresses discourse analysis, gender studies, and international perspectives in education. Applicants will pursue the thesis track and will work with Dr. Bekele as the main thesis supervisor. The project duration is 12 months, with research conducted over a period of 9 months and the thesis document completed over a period of 3 months.

The Advancement of Scientific Knowledge and Broader Impact

In addition to the development of the instruments described above and the research conducted through the thesis process, successful applicants will participate in international conference presentations, prepare a themed issue for a selected journal, and write for other top-tier publications. The Graduate School of Education will sponsor a conference on the combined topics of all successful applicants at AUC's historic Tahrir Square campus with invited participants and plenary speakers from throughout the Egyptian and MENA business and education communities. Finally, applicants will produce and maintain a blog and open access library that makes their work available to those around the region.

Biographical Sketches

Teklu Abate Bekele is Associate Professor of International and Comparative Education at the Graduate School of Education. He teaches graduate courses in policy and strategic studies, quality and relevance of education, globalization and education reform, and human rights-based education. Bekele 's research takes three interrelated trajectories in basic and higher education policy and practice, employing quantitative and qualitative methodologies and international

perspectives: Digital technologies in learning and teaching; quality and relevance of, in, and through education; and higher education-society engagements and context analysis.

Leveraging Resources

The Graduate School of Education is the home to the Middle East Institute of Higher Education. MEIHE's influence and connections to rural schools and to the Supreme Council for Higher Education. The GSE Centennial Lab project provides additional capacity to the unit through its digital content development component that reaches out to school teacher leaders throughout the country. Partners in the professional educator diploma program, ERASMUS+ offer additional resources for conducting this research.

Deliverables

Deliverables include a master thesis deposited at the Digital Archive and Research (DAR) Repository of the American University in Cairo, publically accessible. In addition, the results of the research project will be disseminated through recognized venues in the field, such as international conferences and/or journals. Furthermore, they include an open access repository for Gender Discourse and Professional Literacies in MENA with accompanying blog, as well as the development of assessment instruments to be used in instruction in basic and higher education and in business applications. These would be subject to copyright and/or patent.

Professional Development and Mentoring Plan

The selected student will be provided with a single-point of contact through the Graduate School of Education to help them adjust to life at The American University in Cairo and guide them to appropriate financial, residential, and academic resources. In addition, the Co-PI will act as the thesis supervisor of the student providing guidance for the development of the research plan, and through close supervision of the thesis work conducted would support the student in completing the work and disseminating the findings. Furthermore, the student will participate in 360-degree evaluations that help build an understanding of their strengths and build their ability to use such tools in the market place or public sector.

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