



Career Guidance as Educational Innovation: The Case Study of Egypt

Shahinaz Khalil

Phillips-Universität Marburg, Germany

Abstract

Many programmes especially in the field of career guidance wish to establish continuity and expand their impact through institutionalisation and policy development. This article highlights cultural contexts and conditions in the field of career guidance in Egypt, provides an introduction into programme design for career guidance, and discusses the methodological foundations and design used to address multiple stakeholders. Using a multi-stakeholder approach, programme staff, students, teachers, and parents participated in a career guidance programme with a transformative design. Career guidance in the case of Egypt can be seen as having potential for educational innovation and policy development.

Keywords: career guidance, Egypt, policy development, educational innovation

Career Guidance: From Global Perspectives to National Realities for Career and Livelihood Development in Egypt

Many countries in the international community have begun to regard career development and career guidance as pivotal in sustaining economic, societal, and personal development. Impact studies and reviews have indicated that career guidance can contribute to the creation of a sustainable future at the economic, social, environmental, and individual levels (e.g., Plant, 2001). In this regard, a number of policies have been formulated and bilateral cooperation programmes have been signed with the aim of promoting employment and career development (e.g., Sultana & Watts, 2007). It must be noted, however, that the notion of a “personal career” was originally born in a Western individualistic, industrialised context (Arulmani, Bakshi,

Leong, & Watts, 2014). In the contemporary context, in response to global policy shifts and according to developmental strategies, it has travelled into many other cultural and economic locations. It has even emerged in developing countries where the notion of “career” is not indigenous (Arulmani et al., 2014). Therefore, while career guidance can be theorised as a globally travelling idea (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2006), issues pertaining to cultural resonance and fit must be kept in view.

Egypt’s educational system reform faces numerous challenges (Loveluck, 2012). Egyptian society and economy are characterised by a high level of poverty, illiteracy, and (strongly) inequitable gender relation patterns that constrain economic performance (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014). According to Block (2014), following the 2011 revolution and the demand for “bread, freedom and social justice” which emphasised the absence of basic

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Shahinaz Khalil, email: shahinaz.khalil@staff.uni-marburg.de

social rights, the Egyptian state is now asked by its citizens to bring about inclusive and just development. According to Sakamoto (2013), inclusive development includes good governance, education reform, labour market reform, and small and medium enterprise development, which are needs as well as strategies. Here, the strengthening of education and technical and vocational training is an important element (Block, 2014).

Career guidance can be an important cornerstone for Egypt's social and economic development. As it assists individuals in learning to choose among different types of work, career guidance can help youth clarify their developmental experiences in the real world. Although approaches and concepts of career guidance may differ in practice, in general it is regarded as important for public policy. Over the recent past, career guidance has come to be viewed as a concept with global relevance and potential.

Career Guidance in Egypt: The Need for a National Strategy

As described by Ginzberg (1971), work and education become increasingly intertwined during early and young adulthood. Capacity building and career development programmes have been introduced into Egypt's national strategies through internationally funded programmes for the purpose of creating a sustainable future, particularly keeping this age group in view. It must be noted, however, that if these objectives are to be met and if sustainable programme outcome successes are to be realised, programmes need to address cultural-fit requirements (Arulmani, 2011). This is of major importance if the population being served is to be engaged. Not considering cultural aspects may lead to the rejection and failure of any kind of reform activity. A culturally-sensitive approach not only addresses the world of employment and the world of work, but also addresses development interventions that involve education, cultural contexts, training of professionals, and the development of

educational institutions in an innovative and a multisectoral manner (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2012).

A critical challenge faced by Egypt's educational system is the mismatch between educational system outputs and the needs of the job market. Although career guidance cannot be the answer to all the developmental needs of a nation, this paper argues that career guidance programmes not only carry the potential to help individuals develop self-esteem, knowledge, and skills, they can also become relevant for institutional transformation, regional development, and policy path creation. In 2010 the European Training Foundation (ETF) together with the National Taskforce submitted a proposal for introducing career guidance in Egypt, recommending a strategic and integrated approach to career guidance development. However, such strategy has not been created (ETF, 2010).

GIZ Employment Promotion Project: Career Guidance Programme

This section gives a brief introduction of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), followed by a deeper look into the career guidance programme design and strategy implemented by its Employment Promotion Project in Egypt.

GIZ is an experienced service provider and assists the German Government in achieving its objectives in the field of international cooperation. Working in 130 countries, it offers demand-driven, tailor-made, and effective services for sustainable development.

The Employment Promotion Project (EPP) is part of the Egyptian-German Technical Cooperation funded by the Federal German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and co-funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). EPP has been implemented by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and GIZ in three pilot regions from 2011 until 2015. The project focuses on active labour market policy,

especially in the fields of labour market information (implemented within another project component) and school-to-work transition management. It focuses on models and instruments for a better demand-orientation during the transition between school and the world of work and addresses professional qualification, transition management and career guidance. The career guidance programme was initiated as a pilot, starting only in two governorates (regions) in Egypt: a more urban and a more rural site. Addressing urban and rural areas, the career guidance programme intentionally works with contextual, cultural, and social differences within a nation and aims at being even more "fitting" to the needs of the given specific regional contexts.

Dialogue and Cooperation as Core Programme Goals and Objective

An overarching approach of the project is the expansion and intensification of dialogue and cooperation between public actors (especially the MoE) and the private sector. The aim is to address structural imbalances in the labour market in order to increase the employability of female and male graduates and to improve the competitiveness of companies. The entire project focuses on four fields of activities: (a) policy advice, (b) regional labour market information, (c) vocational information and career guidance, and (d) vocational qualification. EPP is based on a public-private-partnership approach as representatives of the public education sector together with representatives of the private sector are jointly developing and piloting a range of measures promoting youth employment. One of four project components is the career guidance component which is dedicated to support the school-to-work transition and career development of young Technical Secondary School (TSS) students and graduated job seekers. Its main focus is to ease the transition of students into the world of work. The career guidance programme aims at empowering youth to better manage the transition phase from school or

unemployment to employment by making informed decisions.

The Career Guidance Programme Design: Integrating Personality Development and Information

The programme comprises a variety of exercises and activities that have been developed and compiled for the Egyptian context. The programme is based on three main pillars: (a) self-awareness, (b) opportunity awareness, and (c) making transitions. The third pillar can be subdivided into career decision making, obtaining a job, and maintaining the job. The programme is implemented using creative methodologies in the form of presentations, imagination-based approaches, discussions, individual work, working in pairs, group work, role plays, case studies, practical experience, addressing multiple intelligences, lecturing, sport competitions, discussions, video clips, computer-aided activities, and motor and mental games. Examples of teaching aids used are moderation cards, videos, songs, and chalk and board.

Self-Awareness. These activities are designed to uncover the values, talents, interests, fields of knowledge, skills, strength, and personality traits of an individual. This section of the programme rests on the assumption that individual strengths and skills are not obvious to the person who holds them, but have to be "discovered". People, in particular, youth, may not be aware of their strengths, partly because these do not become visible or do not receive appreciation in the school setting or at home. In addition, talents and skills can be so taken for granted that clients (students) consider them just natural. The programme systematically supports students to search for skills that they acquire and use in all spheres of life (including leisure time, hobbies, community and family life). It re-activates the joy for learning, and strengthens not only self-awareness but also the self-confidence of students. The programme was guided by the ETF policy proposal submitted in 2010. For its content, the programme draws upon the Life Work Planning approach (Bolles, 1998) and

participants systematically go through a set of exercises. To illustrate a personal strength discovery activity, colleagues of the same group or from another group in the class are asked to write down one strength that they think their friend has on a card, and present it to him or her. Then each individual discloses his or her cards and starts grouping them. This is followed by a discussion with colleagues and the facilitators (teachers).

Opportunity awareness. This section is based on the understanding that the person's environment offers a wide range of information and opportunities. Activities are focused on helping clients detect the range of learning and working opportunities the local environment in fact provides. Clients are encouraged to explore labour market, learning opportunities, companies, and jobs through interviews, visits, conduct meetings with employers, and special training camps to learn how to enter the labour market. The programme provides clients with information on existing careers and jobs in the form of images or videos (video job profiles). This provides clients with alternatives to expand their choices and increases their vision. It is important to note that the programme is grounded on the notion of freedom of choice. Clients are encouraged to develop a mental image about their professional future, develop a sense of hope for their potential future, and form a sense of responsibility. For example, clients are asked to develop job profiles by visiting companies and asking a pre-prepared set of questions about a specific job. This is followed by poster preparation with information and images and students present the data they have gathered.

Making transitions. This part of the programme facilitates the transition from education to employment or into further education. An important aim of this stage in the programme is to teach students to identify core, realistic career goals. After this, they are equipped with a first set of career management skills: where to search for jobs, how to approach and impress a potential employer, the do's and don'ts of a job interview, and a self-

introduction in two minutes. These career management skills form the career guidance programme's third pillar. The activities include skills to persist at work activities and manage difficult situations at work. The methodology used by the programme helps clients develop a series of work-related soft skills such as the following: working in small groups; conducting informational interviews; collecting, compiling and presenting information; and giving and receiving feedback.

The programme is offered over three years in 43 90-minute sessions, totalling 65 hours of interaction time between facilitators and clients. In the first secondary year students receive 16 sessions, in the second year 14 sessions, followed by 13 sessions in the third year. Students need to complete different assignments outside the school setting (individually or in groups) as part of the programme. Hence they are actively involved outside the sessions as well. This is in addition to other optional activities such as the education, training, and employment opportunities camp, which usually takes place during the summer holidays and concludes with an employment event.

The contents of these three pillars have been developed by going through several reflection loops, led by experts in career guidance. First, the facilitators were trained. This was followed by the implementation phase in the schools, which provided feedback on the difficulties faced, students' comments, and opened up new ways through which the objectives of the exercises could be reached. Then the material was revised and finalised through a series of follow-up meetings.

The career guidance programme requires a setting that is very new to Egyptian TSS. Teachers become "facilitators", who support "clients" to develop, to make reality checks, and to follow up career aspirations. The facilitators relate to their clients with new and resource-oriented methodologies. Schools provide a special room that is different than a regular classroom and

parts of the programme are conducted out of school (e.g., in firms or factories while collecting data related to job profiles). Unlike other subjects in school, the career guidance programme activities are not graded by facilitators: Career guidance is not a subject where students pass or fail.

A “Train the Trainers” Approach: “Teachers into Facilitators” Capacity Building

The programme focuses on a train-the-trainers approach, developing teachers into facilitators, and providing regular sessions of school-to-work transition services to the students in their schools. It aims at transforming teachers from using conventional (traditional) approaches where students are steered towards memorisation and passive learning to becoming catalysing, experience-based facilitators who use an interactive style to support and promote students’ career-related learning. As the programme is strongly quality oriented, it selects the most successful and motivated facilitators among those who are already delivering the services, makes use of the experiences gained, and builds their capacity to be multipliers for the services. This multiplier approach intends to support the diffusion of educational innovations.

From Students, Parents and Teachers to Economy and Policy: A Systemic Programme Approach

The programme is focused on the inclusion of multiple stakeholders as a core element of programme success. The programme actively involves the Ministry of Education staff, representatives of the private sector, and parents. It has been

able to make a link between the local needs and global experience by bringing in international consultants in the field of career guidance and adapting their inputs to the needs of the community. During the programme life cycle, it connects both the Ministry of Education and private sector, initiating roundtable discussions with international organisations on national, networked strategies in the field of career guidance services.

Conclusion

The programme was piloted in two regions over three years (2012-2014). The programme employed 21 facilitators and reached out to 1,756 clients. Regular feedback, both from clients and facilitators, allowed programme learning and a bottom-up approach. Subsequently the programme has been requested by other governorates. A central unit for “School to Work Transition” has been established within the Ministry of Education to coordinate, sustain, and enlarge the number of schools providing career guidance and other services for clients from other institutions of the educational system. The expansion of the services by the end of 2015 reaches 7493 clients in 49 schools in 12 governorates.

As we have seen, the career guidance programme design and implementation offers a blueprint for a participatory approach to programme development. Integration of stakeholders’ perspectives into a policy for career development has been central to the development of the programme. In this way, a strategy for career guidance as educational innovation gives hope for the future development of Egypt.

About the author

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