Gender, Tutoring and Track in Egyptian Education

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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. I use data from the 2005-06 Egypt Household Education Survey to 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.

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Introduction

One of the most common paradigms in education research is that in most of the developing world girls are disadvantaged (Klasen, 2000; UNICEF, 2001; Bokova, 2003; Rousso, 2003; Gurun & Millimet, 2008; Tembon & Fort, 2008; Assaad, 2010), 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 cost, however defined, than boys' [schooling]" (Glick, 2008: 19). The "economic constraint thesis" (Boudon, 1974; Blossfeld & Shavit, 1993) suggests that girls will be particularly disadvantaged when the family is poor. 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" (Sultana, 2008: 14).

One way in which girls are said to be disadvantaged is that they are "filtered out" of tutoring (Hua, 1996:78). In Egypt, private lessons are essential if students want to succeed in their exams and advance to higher education. Research in Egypt 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 (El Badawy & Assaad, 2007; Langsten & Hassan, 2012). Moreover, previous studies have found that girls are at least as likely to be tutored as boys and there is no gender bias in spending on tutoring (El Badawy & Assaad, 2007; Lloyd et al, 2003). 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 (Sultana, 2008).

In this paper I examine if girls are educationally disadvantaged, focusing on educational costs. Previous research has focused on the cost of tutoring. But there are also other educational costs I will consider: 1) school fees; and 2) other general costs such as pocket change, transportation, school supplies, uniform, etc. I assess to what degree these private expenditures favor boys or girls. And I will correlate expenditures with the educational track that boys and girls pursue--technical/vocational (T/V) or general (academic) secondary.

Background:

Although all state education in Egypt, from primary through university, is nominally free, still the "Private costs of public education are considerable" (UNESCO, 2008: 19; see also: Assaad, 2010). Educational costs are said to consume "8% of total household expenditure" (UNESCO, 2008: 19). Tutoring represents the main component of private expenditure on education (El Badawy et al, 2004; Bray, 2009). According to one study, private tutoring alone accounts for 28% of household expenditure on education (UNESCO, 2008). A recent CAPMAS study found tutoring to be an even more important component of educational costs with "over 60 per cent of investments in education … spent on private tutoring" (cited in: Loveluck, 2012: 6-7).

There are many reasons for tutoring. The most important ones are: a) the poor quality education; b) the willingness of the highly educated parents to invest in tutoring (El Badawy et al, 2004); c) the need to supplement teacher's salaries; d) helping students to understand their lessons. Also, some parents may be afraid that if their children do not pay for private tutoring, they will not succeed on end of year exams. Some teachers use the threat of failure to force

students to take tutoring). Finally some students who attend sex-segregated schools may see tutoring as a good chance to meet young people of the opposite sex (Bray, 2009).

In Egypt, there are two types of tutoring; 1) group tutoring and 2) private tutoring. Group tutoring is lessons that take place in public schools after the regular school day. It is officially recognized and sanctioned by the Ministry of Education (MOE). On the other hand, 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 (Hartmann, 2008). Another difference is the cost. 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 (Hartmann, 2008). In general, the aim of tutoring is to improve official exam performance (Sobhy, 2012). 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 costly, lessons than those who are in the earlier years of that level.

The amount spent on tutoring is said to increase substantially with wealth (Sobhy, 2012). Both wealth and greater expenditures on tutoring and other educational costs are said to increase a child's chances of success in educational transitions (Gurun & Millimet, 2008). 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 usually leads to higher education. If the student or his/her family does not aspire to general secondary then tutoring may be unnecessary. All students, regardless of their score on the preparatory school leaving exam, may attend secondary. Those with low scores will be relegated to the less prestigious, generally terminal, T/V track.

Some families may be unwilling or unable to pay the immediate costs 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 lager towns and nearby cities (Assaad, 2010). Travel to distant general secondary schools imposes the direct cost of transportation. And for girls it also brings potential cultural costs when they must leave the protection of family and their immediate neighborhood (UNICEF, 2001). 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 (Ibrahim and Wassef, 2000; UNICEF, 2001; Mensch et al, 2003). In general secondary tutoring costs are likely to be much higher than in T/V secondary. Moreover, general secondary study implies continuation into higher education with its direct costs, and potentially high indirect costs 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 (Elgeziri & Langsten, 2010). Finally some families simply believe that academic studies and higher education are not appropriate for a family of their social standing (Elgeziri & Langsten, 2010).

Given all these costs families facing economic constraints may be unlikely to spend money on education , and especially on tutoring, if they intend to withdraw their child from school at the end of the preparatory stage, or if they are satisfied that their child should receive a T/V secondary education.

Some argue that the cost of educating girls is higher than that of boys (Pasqua, 2005) in general, and it was the same for tutoring. As 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 (Bray, 2009). In a different Korean study (Kim & Lee, 2010) 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 (El Badawy, 2006; Lloyd et al, 2003).

Data and Methodology:

I use data from the 2005-06 Egyptian Household Education Survey (EHES -- a component of the 2005 Egypt DHS) to examine educational expenditures and tracking in secondary school among Egyptian young people attending the first year of secondary school during the 2005-2006 school year. The data for tutoring and educational expenditures relate to the previous school year; that is, the last year of preparatory (middle) school. This final year of preparatory school is a critical year in Egyptian education, when expenditures for tutoring are particularly high (El Badawy & Assaad, 2007). Spending on tutoring during the final year of preparatory school implies a willingness to support additional tutoring costs during general secondary—costs necessary to score well on the secondary school leaving exam, and secure

admission to university, preferably to a prestigious faculty. Thus tutoring in the final year of preparatory school is a key indicator of the value that Egyptian families attach to education and the aspirations they have for their children.

Results:

Because the EHES expenditure data were collected for the school year prior to the year in which students were currently studying, in order to analyze expenditures during the final year of preparatory school I must consider students currently 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, I have looked at the transition rate into secondary for all young people 14-17 years of age who completed preparatory school in the EHES data. Females represent 47.8% and males 52.2%, of this group. 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, I feel it is safe to focus my analysis on the sub-set of students in the first year of secondary school.

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 seen in the previous paragraph); 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.

I have looked at three types of expenditures: tutoring of course, but also, fees, and other costs (books, supplies, transportation, etc.). In looking at costs, those who did not pay fees, or who did not receive tutoring are coded "zero" for the cost variable. Over all, there are no significant gender differences for any of the three categories of expenditures (Table 1). All costs are, of course, related to wealth. Tutoring especially increases substantially in each wealth quintile (Table 2). For tutoring, which constitutes about half of all expenditures for both males and females, female students had slightly higher expenditures than males. As noted above, girls from poor families are said to be particularly disadvantaged in terms educational expenditures. However even when I control for wealth, there are few statistically significant differences in costs by gender. (Table 3) For example, among children from the poorest quintile expenditures for tutoring and fees are about the same for boys and girls, although "other" costs are slightly higher for boys (the gender difference is of marginal significance). The only statistically significant gender difference in tutoring expenditures is found in the middle quintile. But, in this case, girls are favored.

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 Egypt, 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 (Elgeziri & Langsten, 2010) I also find that there is a strong relation between

wealth and track. More than three-quarters of children from the poorest quintile enter T/V secondary track, while only about one-quarter of children from the wealthiest quintile do so.

Finally, as expected, tutoring costs, but also fees and other costs are significantly higher for children who go to general secondary than for those in T/V secondary. This however could be a spurious finding, since we have seen the strong positive relationship between wealth and general secondary, and between wealth and all kinds of educational expenditures. When I examine the relationship between tutoring costs and track controlling for wealth, those attending general secondary still spend more, but the difference is much reduced (Table 4).

Conclusion

Although all public education in Egypt is technically free, families still pay a lot for it, especially for the tutoring. Almost half (44%_ of the household educational expenditures go to tutoring. It is widely believed that females are generally disadvantaged in progress through education—especially during adolescence when children are moving from preparatory school into secondary. This is a time when it is said that culturally girls should be protected and perhaps married, while the economic constraints theory says that poor families particularly will choose to focus resources on their sons rather than on their daughters. In looking at the relationships between gender, tutoring and track, however, I find that in Egypt girls are not disadvantaged. Expenditures on tutoring, as well as on fees and other educational costs, are not significantly different for boys than for girls. And girls are more likely to go to general secondary school, which implies a commitment to continue to support them with high tutoring costs during secondary and the direct and indirect expense of higher education.

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 (El Badawy et al, 2004). Plus there is no overall tutoring disadvantage for girls (El Badawy et al, 2004; Lloyd et al, 2003). 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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Appendix

Table 1. Expenditures by Type and Gender. Students in First Secondary. Egypt 2005-06.

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

Table 2. Mean cost by wealth:

Wealth	**Tutoring**	**Fees**	**Other cost**
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

Table 3. Mean cost by gender among the (Poorest, Second, Middle, Fourth, and Wealthiest):

		Tutoring	Fees	Other cost
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.

Table 4. Mean Tutoring Cost 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