Student Experience of Access to Egyptian Higher Education

Amal Abou-Setta

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Department of Educational Research,

Lancaster University, UK.

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

Signature: Amal Abou-Setta

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

Focusing on the relationship between Higher Education (HE) and social justice in Egypt, this study attempts to identify the main socioeconomic factors affecting HE access in Egypt from the students' perspective through tracing and comparing students' narratives of their access processes in distinctively different socioeconomic settings. The study investigates the perceived effects of the General Secondary Education Certificate (GSEC) students' socioeconomic conditions on determining their academic choices. Different socioeconomic dimensions, such as culture, social conditions and finance are examined. The study also looks at the way students incorporate issues of social justice such as fairness, distribution of resources and social connections into understanding the process of HE access.

Following a snowballing approach to recruiting the research participants, 55 students of the Egyptian GSEC took part in the research. The analysis is based on two sets of data: 1) Quantitative data were derived from two questionnaires examining the participants' socioeconomic classes, their perception of their academic experience, their aspirations and attitudes towards HE, determinants of their HE access process, and their views of the (in)equality of the access process. Allocating the participants into 3 socioeconomic groups, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used and cross-tabulation and comparisons were made between the three groups and correlations were examined. 2) Qualitative data were derived from interviews: Narratives of 17 students were sought through comprehensive semi-structured interviews that aimed at capturing the students' perceptions of their journeys through GSEC and the HE access process. The interviewed cases were regarded as instruments to dig into the impact of the socioeconomic factors onto the HE access process.

Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural reproduction was drawn upon to explain social

inequality as an outcome of inequitable access to HE and socially differentiated educational

attainment. The theory provides a framework of understanding that explains how education,

rather than becoming a means of social reform and equality, has become a tool for the

reproduction of classism. The study also examines social media as a research tool and discusses

its potentialities and limitations in social sciences research.

Introduction

Having received my school and higher education in a number of public and private

institutions in Egypt and having had a teaching career of 19 years moving between a private

school, five private universities and one public university in Egypt, I was given a golden chance

to have firsthand experience of problems of the educational system in Egypt. Over the years, it

was easy to make comparisons between public and private education and observe the inequities

between both.

Then came the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 with "social justice" being one of its main

demands. Millions of Egyptians, led by the youth, have taken to the streets protesting corruption

and deteriorating economic and social conditions. Limited freedoms, unemployment, rising

prices, low wages and an increasingly widening gap between socioeconomic classes were all

among the driving forces for the nation-wide demonstrations. The recent political developments

in Egypt cannot be divorced from discussions of the socioeconomic inequalities experienced by

the Egyptians and the role of Higher Education (HE) in the reproduction of such inequalities

(Buckner, 2013). Since the relationship between education on the one hand and economic and

social development on the other hand is well-documented in the literature (Ball, 2011; Haddad,

Carnoy, Rinaldi, & Regel, 1990; Sayed, 2006), it is logical to view educational reform as an

essential route to effect the desired change in the country. McArthur (2010) underlines the

intrinsic interrelatedness between education and society and holds social justice as the

fundamental purpose of education. Singh (2011) asserts that social justice interventions in HE

have become urgent, especially with the growing policy narrative on the latter's role in

knowledge economies and knowledge societies. Provision of equal educational opportunities in

Egypt has been a concern for many researchers but HE reforms so far have been taking the form

of privatization with little attention to its adverse consequences with regards to quality and equality (Buckner, 2013). It becomes necessary, therefore, to understand the impact of privatizing HE on equal opportunities, on the quality of HE, and on Egypt's social, economic, and political well-being.

The Egyptian Context

According to The Global Competitiveness Report 2014-2015 which is published in 2014 by the World Economic Forum and which provides an overview of the competitiveness of 144 economies, Egypt ranks 119 on the country economy indicator and 111 in the quality of Higher Education and Training indicator. According to the report, Egypt's population in 2013 was 84.2 million with a GDP of US$271.4 billion and a GDP per capita of US$3,226, which positions her 99 in the GDP per capita ranking (Sala-i-Martín, X., 2014). However, economic deteriorating conditions are not suffered by the whole population. While the poverty rate has risen from 16.7% in 2000 to 26.3% in 2013 (CAPMASa), the Global Wealth report 2014 issued by the Credit Suisse Research Institute indicates that the top decile share of wealth in Egypt in 2014 is 73.3% indicating 'very high inequality' in wealth distribution, which has only been rapidly rising from 61% over the entire period since 2000.

Such economic disparity and its subsequent social effects have had their impact on the education sector in Egypt. According to the UNICEF (2014), socioeconomic factors continue to affect students' access to school education. In 2006, 8.1% of school-aged children (6-17 years old) have either never been enrolled or dropped out of school, the majority of whom come from poor families (UNICEF, 2014). UNICEF describes the deteriorating conditions the students suffer from ranging from rigid traditional teaching techniques where participation is not welcome

and corporal punishment is common place to inadequate school physical environment. It

explains that about 20% of schools in Egypt are not fit for use due to lack of functional sanitation

facilities and adds that according to 2012 statistics the percentage of schools in Egypt that met

the national standards for quality education was less than 10%, which is quite an alarming

percentage.

HE Access as a Turning Point in Social Justice

This study adopts the Center for Economic and Social Justice's definition of the term

social justice being "the feedback principle that detects distortions of the input and/or out-take

principles and guides the corrections needed to restore a just and balanced economic order for

all. This principle is violated by unjust barriers to participation, by monopolies or by some using

their property to harm or exploit others" (Defining economic justice and social justice, 2015).

Social justice is concerned with the inqualities in society and the way burdens and duties are

unequally distributed in such a way that determines exclusion and inclusion (Keet and

Carolissen, 2012).

In a country where the poverty rate currently stands at 26.3% (CAPMASa) while interest

in HE continues to increase (CAPMASb), it becomes pressing to examine Higher Education

(HE) in Egypt and the role it plays in creating or eliminating social justice. Furlong and Cartmel

(2009) highlight the stratification of HE in spite of its massification. In their analysis of the

relation between HE and social justice, they identify key factors along the educational process;

namely, access to HE, HE experience, and gains of HE as related to social and economic status.

Furlong and Cartmel (2009) highlight the fragmented HE experience of the

disadvantaged students because of the necessity to earn money, which eventually limits their

academic and social engagement in university life. They denounce the "one-size-fits-all" structure and underline the need for accommodating structures that allow for gap years to cater for the disadvantaged students. They also stress the need to address the students' instrumental motivation instead of assuming an intrinsic motivational driver. In this respect, they pinpoint the need for HE to focus on student independence and becoming an adult as ultimate goals rather than focusing on pure formal and academic learning. In their report for the UNESCO (2009), Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley highlight HE completion rates as an indication of social (in)equity and a condition to benefit from HE and contribute to society and economy.

Furthermore, Furlong and Cartmel (2009) also examine equity of HE gains. They explore ways in which opportunities of the less advantaged families continue to be restricted due to institutional structures and argue that getting a higher degree does not in fact guarantee social justice. They maintain that in the UK the economically less advantaged individuals who receive less gain from their HE end up paying more for their education and are less likely to secure graduate jobs. The relationship between HE and employability comes at the core of expected gains. Whereas the youth ranging between 15 and 29 of age constitute 69% of the unemployed problem in Egypt in 2013, unemployment among holders of secondary school certificates upwards is 82.5% of the overall unemployed labor force; of those, 32.1% are HE graduates (MOP, 2013). Such statistics highlight an employability problem in HE in Egypt and question its economic value. Thus, it is becoming increasingly difficult to talk about comprehensive educational reform in Egypt without focusing on employability as one key educational goal.

A publication by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank in 2010, *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Higher Education in Egypt*, highlights cultural attitudes favouring particular qualifications and professions as one of

the main reasons of the employability problem. According to the report, the World Bank has

estimated HE enrolment rates to have risen from 18.1% in 1985 to over 35% in 2010. With this

percentage of enrolment, graduates comprise an over-supply to the job market. The report

affirms that there is a clear mismatch between HE graduates supply and the job market demand

resulting in the graduates' failure to find jobs matching their fields of study. The report further

asserts that employers seek not only technical knowledge but also practical skills, which students

complain about their inability to develop through HE. Graduates' main concerns also include HE

curriculum rigidness and irrelevancy, deficient preparation for employment, an over-focus on

memorizing, passive pedagogies and lack of facilities (2010). Such inability to meet the job

market needs on the HE part means the need for graduates to invest in Further Education, secure

a job through connections, find a non-graduate job, or remain unemployed – choices that once

again favour the advantaged and reproduce social inequality.

Equal access to HE on the basis of merit has been repeatedly emphasized in the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights signed in 1948 and in the UNESCO declarations since 1998.

However, while much progress has been made towards the massification of HE, in most

countries, especially the low-income ones, enrollment has not been representative of the whole

society, privileging the upper middle class against the poorer segments of the society. Cost and

culture remain the two most significant barriers to HE access that providing equal access to HE

simply means overcoming economic and social inequities (UNESCO, 2009). Allowing the

students' financial and cultural capital to favour them in the HE access process, HE massification

is promoting socioeconomic inequalities (Buckner, 2013).

In their joint report on HE in Egypt, the World Bank and OECD (2010) highlight social

inequalities emerging from unequal education opportunities as one area of HE where reform is

needed. They stress narrow access to HE and students' limited opportunities as one challenge. Among the proposed directions for reform was widening HE admission criteria to recognize potential capabilities. The report criticizes using the GSEC exam score as the only HE admission criterion due to its inability to reflect the students' diverse potentialities and proposes an additional critical thinking skills test. However, the report also suggested the continuation of cost-sharing policies though more equitably, without requiring students to make significant contributions – a suggestion that this study puts in question.

This study, therefore, is seeking to examine students' views of equitable access to HE in Egypt. It seeks to investigate a number of practices related to the access process and ways it is affected by socioeconomic factors. Practices include economic and academic support, decision-making as related to university and discipline choices, as well as those associated with social and family pressures.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural reproduction to explain social inequality as an outcome of inequitable access to HE and socially differentiated educational attainment. The theory provides a framework of understanding that explains how education, rather than becoming a means of social reform and equality, has become a tool for the reproduction of classism. Bourdieu's work explains how the interaction between structure and agency shapes the social world (Bourdieu, 1986). He highlights the role of different types of capital, particularly cultural, in determining an individual's position and status in society. The constant struggle to accumulate capital to upgrade one's position is what creates inequality (Hage, 2013).

Failing to eradicate social inequality, education has become a tool of cultural reproduction since educational attainment depends to a large extent on the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Hence, education and its accessibility are central to Bourdieu' theory. This study, therefore, uses his theory to explain the students' views on how cultural, economic, and social resources systematically favour the advantaged social group in Egypt through facilitating educational attainment and accessibility. The study offers an analysis of Egyptian students' understanding of the structure-agency interaction to determine their social position through examining their narratives of their HE access process.

Research Questions

In general terms, this study focuses on the relationship between HE and social justice in Egypt. It particularly examines one of the three key factors of HE stratification identified by Furlong and Cartmel (2009); namely, HE access, as perceived by the students. Given that access to HE is inequitable in Egypt as explained in chapters 1 and 2, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do the General Secondary Education Certificate (GSEC) students in Egypt perceive the impact of different socioeconomic resources on their Higher Education (HE) access experience?
2. To what extent are social justice factors apparent in students' estimations of the process of access to HE in Egypt?

The study aims at identifying the main socioeconomic factors affecting HE access from the students' perspective through tracing and comparing students' narratives of their access processes in distinctively different socioeconomic settings. The study investigates the perceived

effect of the students' socioeconomic conditions on determining their academic choices.

Different socioeconomic dimensions, such as culture, social pressures and particularly finance

are examined. The study also looks at the way students incorporate issues of social justice into

understanding the process of HE access. It seeks to expose their perception of issues such as

fairness, distribution of resources and social connections and explain where such issues are

located in their consideration and decision-making.

Methodology

Adopting a pragmatist theory of inquiry, this study follows a mixed-methods

methodology which provides the opportunity to offer multiple perspectives and develop a

comprehensive picture of the researched topic. Combining qualitative and quantitative research

makes it possible to target various levels of research (Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark, and Smith,

2011), which allows for in-depth understanding of the investigated issue. The adopted pragmatist

approach enables shifting philosophical focus away from the epistemological orientation to the

concrete problems of societies (Rosenbaum, 2002) and provides a practical outcome-oriented

method of research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It is context-specific and it claims that

reality is constantly reconstructed based on individuals' experiences (Younkins, 2005).

Following a snowballing approach to recruiting the research participants, 55 students of

the second year of the two-year Egyptian GSEC, cohort 2012-2013, took part in the research.

The transition of the students from High school to HE is traced. The students joined a closed

Facebook Group where communication of the study instruments took place. Adopting a

constructivist approach, the study sought to draw a comparison between the experiences of three

identified socioeconomic groups and examine the students' perceptions of the interrelationship

between their socioeconomic backgrounds and their accessibility of HE through a triangulation

of methods:

1. Two questionnaires, including primarily closed questions, were administered to examine

   the students' socioeconomic classes, their aspirations, as well as their views of their

   academic experiences, determinants of the HE access process, decision-making,

   management and modification of aspirations and expectations, and (in)equality of HE

   access.

2. Interviews: Narratives of 17 students were sought through comprehensive semi-

   structured interviews. The interviews focused on the students' perceptions of their

   journeys before and during HE access and sought to provide explanations and

   interpretations of the questionnaires data.

Concerning feasibility, accessing and retaining students belonging to the high

socioeconomic class was comparatively easier. As for the low socioeconomic group, two

obstacles emerged: 1) Sensitivity: Although the same snowballing technique was followed for

participants' recruitment, some resistance and sensitivity were traced in case the subjects sensed

they were selected for their socioeconomic conditions. Tactfulness, showing empathy and

stressing anonymity were the adopted tools to overcome that obstacle and eliminate its adverse

consequences. 2) While Facebook was chosen as a medium of communication for its expected

convenience, time/space-effectiveness, and widespread usability in the age-range of the target

population, it was less so towards the lower end of the socioeconomic continuum for economic

reasons. Sometimes, phone calls and face-to-face meetings had to replace Facebook as a medium

for communication, follow-up and retention of the research subjects.

The study also examines social media as a research tool. Rowlands, Nicholas, Russell, Canty, and Watkinson (2011) contend that we have only a vague understanding of how social media is used in research and of its impact on the research lifecycle. They add that in spite of the recent wide acceptance of its use as a research tool among authors and editors and despite its various applications at the different stages of the research lifecycle, reliance on social media is still limited. The study will, thus, examine the potentialities and limitations of Facebook as a social media platform in social sciences research.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured in 5 chapters. I start by offering a descriptive analysis of HE in Egypt where I draw comparisons between the private and public sectors. In chapter 2, I review the relationship between social justice and HE in Egypt over the past few decades. Drawing on the existing literature, I examine the history of privatization in Egypt, the effect of neoliberal reforms on HE equity, the role of private tutoring as a practice that clearly contributes to inequality, the discriminating admission criteria, and the role of adopted funding policies by the Egyptian government that result in exacerbating HE access inequality. Chapter 2 also identifies the research gap this study is addressing. In addition to providing the context necessary for understanding the nature of HE access process in Egypt and recent developments in the HE sector, this chapter also provides a more profound understanding of this context through discussing the theoretical lens through which equitable HE access is conceptualized. While chapter 3 offers an account and discussion of the adopted methodology for data collection and analysis, chapter 4 gives a detailed thematic analysis of the collected data. In chapter 5, I then offer a discussion, draw conclusions, and make suggestions for future research.

Chapter 1 - Descriptive Analysis of HE Sector in Egypt

Egypt's Educational System

The Arab Republic of Egypt operates two parallel educational systems: The national (or secular) system and the religious (or Al-Azhar) system. The latter is a system that concerns itself with the Islamic studies, Arabic language and Islamic Law in addition to non-religious disciplines. This system covers school and HE. It offers a six-year primary school, followed by a three-year preparatory school, then a four-year secondary school. Al-Azhar University, the oldest and largest University in Egypt in terms of the number of enrollment (about 20% of the total University students in 2005-2006), only accepts graduates of Al-Azhar school system. Al-Azhar HE system is governed by the Central Administration of Al-Azhar Institutes (ICHEFP 2011).

The structure of the national system is not very different. According to State Information Service (SISa), pre-university school education in this system is divided into two main phases: basic and secondary education. The former is divided into primary education (six years) and preparatory education (three years). Passing the basic education is a requirement for joining the secondary education, which, in turn, is a pre-requisite for joining the university. In the national system, there are two tracks for secondary education: general secondary education and vocational education (industrial, agricultural, and commercial). While the general secondary track is three years, the vocational track is offered in two programs: three and five years, with the latter being more advanced. All tracks qualify students to join HE. Different schools have different mediums of instruction: Arabic, English, or French.

The number of students joining the vocational track is bigger than that of students who join general secondary schools. In 2005-2006, 56.4% of the overall cohort of secondary school

students in Egypt attended vocational school while 35.6% attended general secondary school and

8% were in Al-Azhar (Buckner, 2013). However, graduates of the general secondary school are

the main source of transition into HE in Egypt with an 80.3% transition rate compared to 6.8%

for technical schools (Reviews of National Policies for Education, 2010). This study, therefore,

focuses on the transition of the General Secondary Education Certificate (GSEC) students into

HE and explores the question of the provision of equal opportunity in HE access.

Schooling Privatization in Numbers

Generally speaking, the national curriculum is offered in two types of schools: publically-

funded schools which require no (or very low) tuition fees and privately-owned schools with

high fees. Statistics of the scholastic year 2012-2013 show that 31.3% of General Secondary

Education Schools are private. Yet, while 11.5% of students attended private schools, 88.5%

went to public schools (Ketab al-ihsa'at al-sanawy lel-sana al-draseya 2012/2013a). Expansion in

recent years has been in favour of private schooling with 49.5% increase rate in the private

general secondary schools between 2008-2009 and 2012-2013 compared to 14.1% increase rate

for public general secondary schools in the same period (Table 1.1). Class density is consistently

better in private schools (Table 1.2).

	2008/2009	2012/2013	Percentage of Increase
Number of Public Schools	1,730	1,974	14.1%
Number of Private Schools	602	900	49.5%
Total	2,332	2,874	23.2%

Table 1.1: Increase of General Secondary Education School numbers between 2008/2009 and 2012/2013

Source: The Annual Statistics Book for the Scholastic Year 2012/2013b (in Arabic), The Egyptian

Ministry of Education.

	2008/2009	2012/2013
Density of Classes in Public Schools	33.66	39.16
Density of Classes in Private Schools	24.85	29.11

Table 1.2: Development of General Secondary Education Schools density between the academic years 2008/2009 and 2012/2013

Source: The Annual Statistics Book for the Scholastic Year 2012/2013b (in Arabic), The Egyptian Ministry of Education.

HE Sector in Egypt

Higher Education in Egypt is offered through Higher Education Universities (HEUs) and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). Education ranges from two years in vocational intermediate institutes to four, five or six years in universities and higher institutes. Generally, HE is offered in either Arabic or English (SISa 2013). Like schools, HE is offered in both public and private institutions. Making a comparison between public and private HE is necessary to understand the unequal HE opportunities offered to the GSEC students. In this respect, a number of indicators need to be examined, such as: numbers of institutions and enrollment, admission process and criteria, tuition fees, and quality of education.

- **Numbers of institutions and enrollment**

According to the numbers published by the State Information Service (SISa) in 2013, Egypt has 22 public universities and 20 private ones. In the scholastic year 2011/2012, 3.5% of the overall HE students in Egypt attended private universities (CAPMASc). Enrollment in HEUs increases quickly though. In the scholastic year 2012/2013, the total number of students attending universities in Egypt was 1.7 million, 5% of whom attended private universities (CAPMASd). Although the number of students attending private universities remains

significantly low, private institutes, on the other hand, comprise a significant portion of HE. According to the State Information Service (SISb), there are 218 private high and intermediate institutes in Egypt and according to ICHEFP (2011), there are 13 public ones. Therefore, taking a wider view of the HE sector in Egypt reveals that the private sector absorbs a big percentage of students. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank ((Reviews of National Policies for Education, 2010), over 35% of the university age group get enrolled in HE. Of these, approximately 20% attend private HE including both HEUs or HEIs.

- **Admission**

Expansion of private education marks a shift in HE access philosophy. In principle, admission into HE is meritocratic as access is supposedly based on a fair competition that favours the most academically talented students regardless of their financial ability. In practice, however, GSEC is based on extensive memorization and requires private tutoring which places a financial burden on families. In addition, wealth is used as a crucial determinant as substantial resources are used not only to gain access to HE places that are not available to the poor, but also to gain access to education of better quality (Buckner, 2013).

Admission of the GSEC holders into the national HE system has been based on the results of the last two years of the general secondary examination, which is highly competitive (ICHEFP 2011). Starting the scholastic year 2013/2014, the results are only based on the last year of the general secondary school. The rationale behind the change was to alleviate the cost burden of private tutoring placed on families' shoulders (ICHEFP 2011). While a centralized GSEC examination is administered across the State (SISa), admission to public and private

universities is managed differently. Admission to public HE is coordinated through the HE

Admission Office (HEAO), which is affiliated to the Ministry of Higher Education, through an

electronic admission system. Depending on their GSEC scores, sections, and geographical

locations, students are offered a restricted list of opportunities in the different public institutes

and universities' faculties based on the numbers and regulations specified by the Supreme

Council of Universities (SCU). Thus, the same discipline ends up requiring different minimum

qualifying scores in different public universities (HEAOa).

Admission to private HE, on the other hand, is regulated by the Council of Private

Universities (CPU), which specifies a minimum score for each discipline across all private

universities. Unlike public universities admission process, private universities applications are

made through the universities. Students apply directly through their desired university, and

universities, in turn, process their students' applications through CPU (CPUa).

A comparison of the minimum GSEC score requirements for a number of disciplines in

both the public and private sectors for the year 2013/2014 is revealing of the unequal chances

that clearly favour the privileged based on their financial capital (Table 1.3). The minimum

qualifying scores for all disciplines are consistently lower for private universities providing the

wealthy students with opportunities that are denied to the poor. The minimum cut-off scores for

the private universities published on the CPU website were last updated in 2012 at the time of

writing these lines end of 2014 (CPUb). The CPU minimum cut-off scores for the private

universities in the following comparison were published in many Egyptian well-read newspapers

such as Aalmasry Alyoum, Al-Ahram, and Youm 7 (Bed2 tanseeq al-game'at, 2013; I'lan al-had

al-adna, 2013; & Mofaga'a fi tanseek, 2013) whereas the minimum cut-off scores for the public

universities were retrieved from the HEAOb&c. The lowest minimum qualifying score for each

discipline at public universities is provided.

	Public Universities	Private Universities
Faculty of Medicine	98.2%	92%
Faculty of Dentistry	97.7%	82%
Faculty of Engineering	94.3%	75%
Faculty of Mass Communication	93.3%	60%
Faculty of Applied Arts	92.7%	60%
Faculty of Political Science	92%	60%
Faculty of Business	72.9%	60%

Table 1.3: Admission minimum GSEC cut-off scores for the private universities in 7 disciplines in 2013

- **Tuition fees**

In Egypt, theory is also in contrast with practice when it comes to the free-education

principle. In theory, free-of-charge education in all stages is guaranteed by the State in the

Egyptian Constitutions since 1971: article 20 in the 1971 Constitution (SISc), article 58 in the

2012 Constitution (The Egyptian Constitution 2012) and articles 19 and 21 in the 2014

Constitution (SISd). However, practice tells a different story. While tuition fees in public HE are

primarily nominal (30 – 150 Egyptian pounds per year), which goes in harmony with the 'free

education' notion, high-fee alternative academic programmes have been introduced in public

universities. Such programmes are perceived to have better conditions and provide better quality

education (ICHEFP 2011). Examples of such programs are foreign-language-medium

programmes of commerce and credit-hour-system programmes of engineering at Cairo

University. The student affairs at the latter programme reported that the annual tuition fees are

20,160 Egyptian pounds for the scholastic year 2013/2014 (A. Abdelghani, personal communication, November 2, 2014).

Furthermore, tuition fees vary drastically in private and public education. Private HE is all high fee. While tuition fees for private HEI range from 466 to 20,596 Egyptian pounds according to SISb, tuition fees for private HEU are more financially demanding. Following is a list of tuition fees in Egyptian pounds in some private universities in Egypt in 2013 and 2014 as indicated on their official websites (Table 1.4). These fees were indicated in addition to other inflicted fees.

	Dentistry	Engineering	Business	Applied Arts	Political Science	Year
The American University in Cairo	N/A	61,426	61,426	N/A	61,426	2014
German University in Cairo	N/A	58,760	58,760	63,150	N/A	2014
The British University in Egypt	49,000	49,000	39,000	N/A	39,000	2013
Future University in Egypt	53,000	41,000	30,000	N/A	30,000	2013

Table 1.4: Tuition fees in Egyptian pounds in some private universities in Egypt in 2013 and 2014

- **Quality of education**

According to the Economic and Social Development Plan for the Fiscal Year 2014/2015 published by the Egyptian Ministry of Planning (MOP) in 2013, HE in Egypt is facing a number of challenges including its failure to absorb the continuous demand for HE and to equip students

with the knowledge and skills required for joining the labour market. Severe lack of resources in public HE has detrimentally affected the quality of the educational process that is characterized by crowded classes, outdated curricula, and archaic teaching and assessment practices that promote memorization rather than analysis and evaluation. However, the strategic plan set by the ministry included the encouragement of private HE expansion.

Buckner (2013) holds that, with their lower admission standards, private universities are generally perceived to be of lower quality than public universities. Yet, according to ICHEFP (2011), private universities in Egypt can generally be divided into two categories: prestigious universities and lower-quality universities. The former are usually very expensive and are normally established based on a partnership with a non-Egyptian university or a governmental agreement with another country. The latter, however, are perceived as commercial institutions that are profit led. To accommodate for a big number of secondary school graduates, Egypt relies on HEI to provide access to HE, which, according to Eisemon and Salmi (1995), suffer from the lack of material, financial and human resources, which renders them "no more than 'academic parking lots' for surplus students" (p. 78).

Chapter 2 - A Review of Social Justice in Egypt: The Case of Access to HE

It is essential to study how the current HE access policies in Egypt came into existence

and the challenges equitable access to HE is facing to have a better understanding of the context

of the study. This chapter, therefore, provides a review of the neoliberal reforms in Egypt and the

history of privatization in the education sector. It then offers a discussion of the literature

regarding the major relevant challenges facing HE access in Egypt such as equity, admission

criteria, private tutoring, and funding. It concludes by identifying a research gap and offering a

discussion of a pertinent theoretical lens.

History of Privatizing HE in Egypt

Hamed Ammar (2007) holds that education is primarily a political process and that the

ministry of education is an executive body that works on supporting the existing regime. If we

were to understand the political regime and its sources of power in a given social context, so this

argument goes, a deep, critical understanding of the patterns, policies and conditions of

education would follow (Ammar, 2007). In 1952, there were 5 universities in Egypt (Buckner,

2013). After the 1952 Revolution, free education policies were adopted in schools by the

Egyptian government in accordance with the revolution's goals of social justice. The

abolishment of HE tuition fees in 1963 marked a full embracement of the right to education that

has been stated in all Egyptian constitutions since 1923 (Ammar, 1996).

However, following the economic openness policies officially announced in 1974, bias

towards the elite was obvious not only in the form of free economy, but also in the form of

educational and intellectual privileges (Badran, 2008). Ammar (2007) explains that, historically,

private schooling served the middle class under the British occupation, then provided a second

chance for failing or old students after adopting free education policies in schools following the

1952 Revolution. Therefore, there were no great concerns for inequality. However, upon

adopting the economic openness policies, private schooling started expanding and was

encouraged and facilitated by the State. As privatization advanced and investment was assigned

to the private sector, equal opportunity and social justice voices were diminishing and the

responsibility once allocated to education to shape the national, social and cultural unity with the

Arab world was lost to focusing on demands of the labour market and the role of money in the

provision of educational opportunities and technologies (Ammar, 2007). Altbach and Levy

(2005) contend that private HE worldwide tends to focus on its own position in the market rather

than on serving a national plan for the broader public needs. Levy (2006) holds that private HE is

normally a byproduct of neoliberal economic changes that promote privatization as a state-level

development policy. That is why global privatization of HE is for the most part unanticipated.

Consequently, roles are seldom specified. Rather, private HE has often emerged in contexts

marked by lack of coordination and design (Levy, 2006). Yet, on the expansion of the private

sector in Egypt, educational and otherwise, it was perceived to be of better quality (Ammar,

2007).

Since equal access to HE on the basis of merit was stated in the 1948 Universal

Declaration of Human Rights and since equal opportunity has been stated in the 1971

Constitution of Egypt, using the GSEC scores as an assessment of the students' cognitive

abilities as the basis for HE access has been based on a philosophy that capitalizes on the

democratization of education. Badran (2008) explains, however, that in the 1980s, there have

been calls to revisit the concurrent HE access policies and the numbers of enrolled students were

reduced on the pretext that supply exceeds demand of the labour market. Alongside, there have

been statements by the ministry of education that the government is committed to free education

in schooling only. Badran contends that such policies and discussions were in preparation for

Law 101 of 1992, which introduced private universities in Egypt. Before then, the American

University in Egypt, founded in 1919, was the only private university that existed in Egypt

(Fahim and Sami, 2011).

In 1996, the first 4 private universities were licensed. Up till, 1999, no further private

universities were open and the number of students enrolled in these universities were limited in

comparison to those in the public universities; around 0.4%. The year 2002 marked a real

expansion of the private sector with the establishment of 12 new universities between 2002 and

2010 (Buckner, 2013). In the year 2012/2013, private universities had an enrollment of about

80,060 students, equivalent to 5% of the total number of university students in Egypt

(CAPMASd).

Neoliberal Education Reform in Egypt

In his report on HE in Egypt published by the World Bank (1992), Richards provides

evidence for inequitable access and expenditure across socioeconomic classes and notes that

subsidies to HE are directed towards the middle and upper classes rather than students coming

from the low income-brackets. Regarding rural-urban equity, he highlights indications of

remarkable urban bias. Upon signing the Education for All international pledge for universal

basic education in March 1990, neoliberal education reforms in Egypt, led for the most part by

the World Bank and USAID, have allegedly aimed at decentralizing, standardizing, privatizing

and equalizing education (Dixon, 2010). Dixon explains that the World Bank called for more

private schools based on the belief that the private sector will fill the gaps in public provision,

which should eventually bring about progress. Reforms in favour of equal access to quality education were offered in the form of providing primary schooling in unprivileged areas, and reports coming from the World Bank repeatedly called the Egyptian government to redirect educational resources away from HE and into primary education on the grounds that favouring HE privileges the higher classes of the society who are more likely to join HE (Dixon, 2010).

Dixon (2010) further explains that in 2005, after 15 years of reform efforts, the results were indeed an increased enrollment rate in primary education at 94% and a 10% improvement of the literacy rate of the 15-24 age group. But alongside this progress, the overall education system was deteriorating due to a steadily limited public expenditure on education of around 5% GDP leading to high class density, declining school building conditions, a badly damaged teaching profession, and significantly low teachers' salaries, which were among the lowest of the civil servants in Egypt as of 2002. Low salaries meant low teacher status, poor working conditions, low professionalism, irregular attendance, and most importantly informal education in the form of private tutoring. Dixon further explains that under a record budget deficit, the implementation of the basic education reform agenda was taking place simultaneously with steady efforts to create a legal space for private education in all schooling levels following the ministerial decree 306 of 1993 (Dixon, 2010).

After the 2011 Revolution, the newly devised 2014 Constitution states in its Articles 19 and 21 that the State is committed to allocating a minimum expenditure of 4% GDP to school education and 2% to HE (SISd). Thus, neoliberal policies that entail limiting the financial role of the state and capitalizing on privatization are still adopted. In his attempt to explain the paradox of the neoliberal reforms, Dixon contends that "suppression of public spending is part and parcel of policies that are redirecting public wealth into fewer private hands" (Dixon, 2010, p. 42).

Equity Unachieved

In his report written in 1992, Richards could foresee the potential public-vs-private-universities social implications upon opening the door for private HE. He marked a fear that it might create a two-layered educational system where quality goes to the well-to-do students and the disadvantaged are left to an inferior HE. Yet, the social damage was not only predicted by Richards. In fact, the Egyptian society at large had similar fears in 1996 when the first Presidential decree to establish the first four private universities was issued. National surveys have shown that the public opinion perceived such step as harmful to social stability because the concept of these universities was based on profit (Badran, 2008).

Looking at the situation two decades later, a quick comparison between the governmental and private universities fulfills the prophecy and marks an inclination to broadly divide Egyptian HE into these two camps. While they are almost equal in number (22 public universities and 20 private ones in 2013 according to the State Information Service) (SISa), they are far from being equal in admission criteria, tuition fees, density, quality, and a number of other indicators as discussed in chapter 1. Thus, access to HE is expanding in both sectors yet expansion in either serves a different segment of the society on different bases. Whereas access in the public sector is governed by meritocracy and is in favour of the rural middle class Egyptians, access to the private sector favours the top wealth quintile and Cairo inhabitants since they are concentrated in greater Cairo (Cairo and Giza) (Buckner, 2013). Buckner suggests that continued expansion of the private sector is likely to promote inequalities whereas expansion of the public sector is expected to result in more inclusiveness.

Similarly, Dixon (2010) maintains that privatization of education that was aimed at closing the gaps through providing educational services that the state has failed to provide has in fact served the economically privileged sector of the society rather than brought about equity. Lower taxes, flexible regulations and cheap land have attracted private investors leading to a boom in the private schooling and HE business. Concerns of growing inequality were raised especially after reports that came out after two decades of reform indicating a deteriorating quality of public school education that was now heavily dependent on rote memorization. Since privatization has modified the purpose and meaning of development and education that once focused on human development has now become more geared at meeting market needs, the result, according to Dixon, was a privilege offered to the upper classes of the society in the form of not only education of better quality but also "the skills and acculturation needed to become players in the global market" (Dixon, 2010, p. 43). Buckner (2013) agrees that privatization reforms of HE initiated in 1992 has created a tertiary sector that is overly governed by market dynamics and biased against the poor. Badran (2008) holds that private universities provide a channel for low-achieving wealthy students to buy not only an HE opportunity but also an HE degree, which destroys equity and highlights social contradiction and educational duality.

Schooling and HE Access

According to Furlong and Cartmel (2009), 'unequal access' to HE has its roots in school education because of the way aspirations and qualifications are structured. They maintain that the socially and economically disadvantaged families continue to be disadvantaged when their choices are limited in institutions of lower status and less funding. Socially and economically stratifying funding policies reinforce inequality and protect advantage.

Richards (1992) makes clear links between HE and school inequalities. He maintains that

HE inequality does not start at the tertiary level; rather, it has its base in school education where

parents of the generally higher socioeconomic status send their children to private schools. In

their joint 2010 report, the World Bank and OECD maintain that the financially disadvantaged

students receive education in low-performing schools while their more advantaged counterparts

have families who can afford schools of better quality (Reviews of National Policies for

Education, 2010). Furthermore, it has been pointed out by a number of scholars that despite

claims of access based on meritocracy, HE access policies in fact offer a subsidy for the upper

classes because having access to better quality schooling, the wealthy students are more likely to

join general secondary schools (Buckner, 2013). Furthermore, Richards (1992) highlights the

fact that education in private schools is normally offered through a foreign language medium of

instruction. LaDousa (2006) and Webb (2004) both emphasize the negative power of foreign

language education, which results in widening the gap between social classes. It is basically a

game of power and the need to belong to a better world, which eventually leads to social

inequalities.

Private Tutoring

Dixon (2010) maintains that private tutoring in Egypt exploded in the mid 1980s after

limiting university enrollment. According to her, deteriorating education quality, a highly

competitive system and inadequately low teacher salaries were all factors that promoted the

practice. Time and money consuming, private tutoring was rated by families as the number one

problem with the Egyptian education system in the *Egypt Human Development Report 2005*

survey. A study conducted in 2004 estimated that private tutoring constituted 62% of the

Egyptian household expenditure on education (Bray, 2009). Dixon (2010) contends that private

tutoring is a byproduct of privatization and week public provisions where teachers are forced to

find extra jobs to face the increasing cost of living that their poor salaries cannot cover. Dixon,

therefore, confirms that neoliberal education reforms have failed to achieve promised

development and rather given rise to an unregulated informal education through private tutoring

and led to the deterioration of the quality of education and teacher conditions.

Richards (1992) also highlights private tutoring as a persisting problem pertaining to

secondary education, promoting accessibility not only to HE in general, but also to the more

prestigious disciplines. According to Reviews of National Policies for Education (2010), splitting

the GSEC into two exams over two years was a decision that aimed at alleviating the

psychological stress on students resulting from an increasingly competitive examination and

relaxing the financial burden thrown on the families' shoulder incurred by private tutoring. The

result, though, was a doubled psychological and financial burden and a further deteriorating

educational process at schools where more classes were empty because students pursued

informal education elsewhere (Reviews of National Policies for Education, 2010). The two-year

GSEC was changed back into one year as of the scholastic year 2013/2014.

A differential experience undergone by students based on their economic status is evident

though. While poor students have limited resources for private tutoring, the more advantaged

have more financial resources as well as more time for private tutoring and test-taking practice

(Reviews of National Policies for Education, 2010). Richards (1992) explains that while this

'tutorial system' favours the wealthier students who can pay for private tutoring during school

education, it continues to support them at the HE level where it is spreading in many disciplines.

While the practice is not as widespread in HE in Egypt, it takes a different form, which is that of

promoting textbooks written by faculty members who sometimes let buying their books interfere

with the students' chances of success (Reviews of National Policies for Education, 2010). In

other words, students' financial capital does not only mean greater accessibility to HE but also a

better opportunity to succeed in HE. Thus, Richards (1992) concludes that the current

educational structure reproduces the existing hierarchical social structure.

Cross-national research draws attention to private tutoring, or "shadow education", which

drains families' financial resources and maximizes students' chances to excel on standardized

tests (Buckner, 2013). Bray (2009) contends that social inequalities are evident consequences of

private tutoring worldwide since it is more affordable in greater quantity and better quality by the

wealthy and result in better student achievement, which, in turn, result into skewing the HE

admission process. He highlights deteriorating teaching performance at schools, shifting

students' focus from regulated school education to unregulated private tutoring, and adopting

test-led education approaches as negative consequences of private tutoring. Bray also stresses

social and family pressures driven by anxiety and pressure exerted by teachers as a major reason

for private tutoring.

Admission Criteria

Typically, access to public HE around the world is based on "the merit principle", which

refers to the students' ability and aptitude to benefit. In a mass HE system like Egypt's, where

about 35% of the age group join HE (Reviews of National Policies for Education, 2010), there is

a need to use admission criteria that cater for a diversified student body and an increasingly wide

range of HE and career options. In the meantime, admission is based on the GSEC examination

scores, which is not perceived as a valid system for appropriately placing students where they fit

in HE. Pure reliance on GSEC scores fails to present a comprehensive evaluation of a student's

discipline-related aptitude, diverse career-related abilities such as critical thinking abilities,

interpersonal skills, special talents and motivations; rather, it reflects variations in socioeconomic

input factors such as quality of school education, family economic and cultural capital as well as

access to private tutoring. Correlations between GSEC scores and student performance at HE

seem to be absent based on indications given by students and HE faculty. A complementary

approach to HE admission that combines both a single school-based examination (GSEC)

together with ability and aptitude tests is recommended for its inherent advantages. This more

robust approach takes into account achievement of secondary school educational outcomes as

well as a student's potential success in a chosen HE discipline. Another advantage of this

approach is that well-crafted ability and aptitude tests that assess the students' abilities in less

familiar contexts are not subject specific, hence do not lend themselves to private tutoring

(Reviews of National Policies for Education, 2010).

Students' ability to pay stands out as another admission criterion that waives "the merit

principle" and discriminates against the disadvantaged students. With two distinctively different

admission processes and academic requirements to access public and private HE, equitable

access to HE is not established. Centrally administering public HE admission means that choices

are limited by geographical factors, that students cannot apply to several institutions or

programmes, and that a given institution can freely allocate students to a different programme

from their initial preference based on space. Admission to private HE, on the other hand, ensures

a wider pool of choices to students where geography has no role to play and students can apply

to multiple programmes and institutions simultaneously. In addition, access to programmes in

public HE where students are taught in a foreign language is only made possible on cost-sharing

basis; i.e., if students pay high fees of several thousand Egyptian pounds. These programmes,

which are highly competitive for their perceived value, have no further academic requirements than those of the regular programmes (Reviews of National Policies for Education, 2010).

Different admission standards in public and private universities and the diminishing role of meritocracy being the one and only criteria for access in the private sector mean that the average academic level of students in the private universities is lower than that of students in the public ones. Examining a nationally representative sample drawing on the 2006 population census, Buckner's (2013) data reveals that students in private universities have lower GSEC mean scores compared to that of their counterparts in public universities (73 % to 82.15%). They were also more likely to have failed in their secondary school. Given the financial and cultural capital the wealthy students are generally offered at school and through private tutoring, and given the worldwide positive correlation between family wealth and academic achievement, Buckner (2013) concludes that the data might suggest that private universities are not sought in and of themselves as a first choice but are rather resorted to when public university choices are no longer available. In other words, the wealthy academically under-achieving students are exclusively provided an additional channel for HE access in return of their financial resources.

Funding and Cost Sharing

Saunders (2012) captures the debates on political economy of HE funding, which boil down to the debate on HE as public vs private good. The debate raises questions regarding the fundamental purpose and shape of HE and inevitably pinpoints social, economic, and political implications. Saunders highlights an international trend to individualize benefits of HE together with its subsequent funding decisions stressing that this position is a reduction of the public role of HE. Such debates come at the core of the relation between HE and social justice. The social

value embedded in a political position that adopts viewing HE as an overly private good is one that enhances unequal access to HE favouring elite to mass education and eventually leading to social injustice.

While the Egyptian government is still the main provider for HE in Egypt, according to Fahim and Sami (2011), public expenditure on HE fails to adhere to standards of adequacy, efficiency and equity. While the demand for HE has been increasing for reasons related to demographics, technological advancement, and labour market competitiveness, the public expenditure on HE in Egypt has declined between 1995 and 2005. Expenditure per student in 2005 is reportedly much less than OECD or Low and Moderate Income (LMI) countries. Fahim and Sami make comparisons between the decline of public expenditure on HE and the rise and steady expansion of private HE in the same period (Fahim & Sami, 2011).

Not only is public expenditure on HE in Egypt inadequate but it is also inefficient according to Fahim and Sami (2011) who maintain that public funds are misallocated. While 78% of expenditure was directed in 2007/2008 to current expenditure such as salaries and other operating costs and only 22% went to capital expenditure such as assets and infrastructure, the amount allocated to the current expenditure does not seem to favour the teaching staff. Fahim and Sami explain that public universities are crammed with administrative staff whose numbers are disproportionate with the academic staff. The ratio was 1:1.3 in 1998/1999 and 1:1.7 in 2005/2006. Low wages resulted in the academic staff being too busy trying to make extra money through taking up extra jobs and selling notes to students. Higher levels of absenteeism and lower levels of attention to teaching or student performance were natural outcomes. Inefficient funding also meant high student to teacher ratio; 32:1 in 2005, which is much higher than the ratio for the MENA region (23:1) or the world (16:1) (Fahim and Sami, 2011). This ratio has

risen to 42:1 in 2010 (CAPMASe). All of these factors contributed to low quality HE that does

not respond to labour market demands, and unemployment among HE graduates more than

doubled between 1995 and 2006 rising from 11.8% to 26.8% (Fahim and Sami, 2011)

constituting 32.1% of the overall unemployed labour force in 2010 (MOP, 2013).

With the public spending inadequacy and inefficiency came inequity. Statistics show that

access to HE in Egypt favours the privileged socioeconomic strata with the highest quintile

occupying 53% of all universities, while the percentage goes up to 65% in private universities

This favouritism came at the expense of the poor with the poorest quintile representing only 3%

of university students (Buckner, 2013). Figure 2.1 shows the unequal enrollment rate by income

quintile in 2004/2005 (CAPMASf). Buckner (2013) finds that moving from one wealth quintile

to the next increases the likelihood of joining private HE 33% more than the likelihood of joining

the public sector. She found, however, that academic achievement was a more indicative

predictor in accessing public HE.
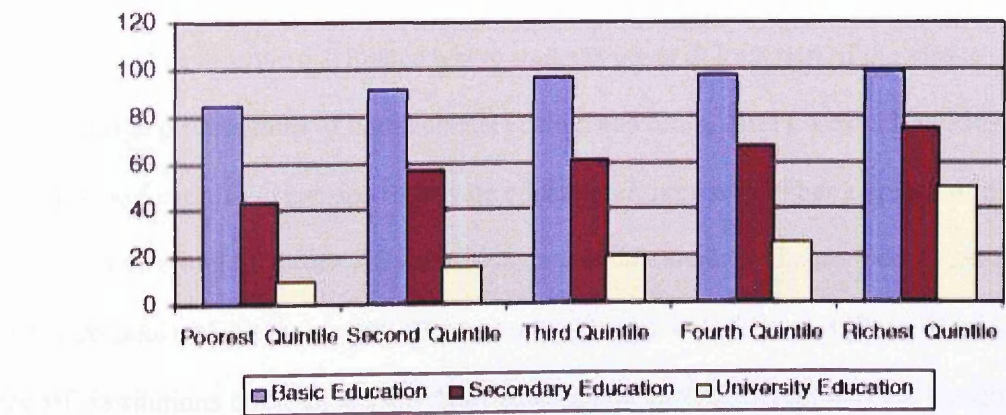
Figure 2.1: Unequal enrollment rate by income quintile in 2004/2005

Source: CAPMASf

Interestingly enough, Buckner (2013) finds that while HE expansion increases enrollment in all wealth quintiles, expansion of the public sector is more likely to serve the third and fourth quintiles. Although it does not seem to reduce the advantage of the wealthiest quintile, expansion of the public HE sector maintains the growth rates of the lowest and highest quintiles fairly equal; hence it is not likely to enhance inequality. Buckner finds that expansion in the private sector, on the other hand, marks a faster growth of enrollment rates for the highest wealth quintile while enrollment rates of the lowest 2 quintiles remain roughly the same. Thus, expansion of private HE is strictly in favour of the wealthy.

While public funding of HE was poorly sourced and managed, the demand for HE is expected to continue to increase due to the "youth bulge" demographic transition Egypt is going through. The number of people in the age range 20-24 is expected to increase from 7 million in 2005 to 9 million in 2035. Hence, additional pressure to finance HE is anticipated with increasing concerns for adequacy, efficiency and equity. Private universities were introduced in 1992 and continue to be encouraged in response to the challenges facing HE financing. In addition, the Egyptian government has taken some measures including applying cost-sharing to special programmes in some disciplines where students cover at least part of the fees to join foreign language programmes of high demand (Fahim and Sami, 2011). Levy (2006) explains that worldwide for-profit expansion of private education is normally either a breach of the law or a twist of it. Therefore, for-profit HE institutions normally announce themselves as non-profit and never go public about their profit distributions (Levy, 2006). Sure enough, most of the private HE institutions in Egypt are for-profit although the law states that they are "essentially" not for profit (Fahim and Sami, 2011). Being tax exempt, private universities in Egypt use high

student fees almost exclusively to cover expenditure and part-time faculty from public

universities are hired to reduce costs (Reviews of National Policies for Education, 2010).

Although attempts to face the challenge created by limited financial resources managed

to create more HE places, these were essentially created for the privileged socioeconomic class.

Failing to take advantage of having a high proportion of population in the most productive age

and to provide efficient public employment for the extra labour force to increase public income,

the Egyptian government has taken a short cut to fund HE, which ended up aggravating the

concern for equal access. Fahim and Sami (2011) make a list of suggestions to improve

efficiency of public funding such as reducing the number of non-academic staff, linking salaries

and promotions to performance, and allowing universities to exercise autonomy over their

expenditure. However, they do encourage the expansion of cost-sharing programs and private

HE while introducing a scholarship system for honour students, a grant system for poor students,

and a loan system with a low-interest rate. Fahim and Sami, however, did not work out the

percentage of students who would benefit from such plan in a population that suffers a 26.3%

poverty rate and disproportionate wealth distribution (Global Wealth report 2014, 2014). In

addition, a governmental corruption that would reward the well-connected rather than the

talented or the motivated makes a scholarship system potentially ineffective in Richards' (1992)

view.

Research Gap

Globally, the emergence of private HE has changed the face of HE. Although private HE

is fast-growing in many areas of the world including the Middle East, much of it is yet to be

understood (Levy, 2006). The literature suggests that the HE sector in Egypt is suffering clear

access inequalities based on socioeconomic factors and that the current structure exacerbates the existing social inequalities. The advantaged group of students have better chances to qualify for HE due to a greater chance to join in general secondary schooling, a higher probability to experience better school conditions, and more likelihood to use financial resources that facilitate their preparation for the GSEC exam. Furthermore, expansion of the private sector provides the same group with a wider pool of HE places and degree choices, that are generally limited for students falling towards the other end of the socioeconomic continuum. In other words, not only are the advantaged students given a higher chance to academically excel, but they are also given greater access opportunities in direct exchange of their financial resources.

Buchmann and Hannum (2001) maintain that educational stratification is a result of a dynamic interrelationship among a wide range of factors. They note that there has been a significant body of research in developing countries examining the effect of macro-structural elements, such as national and international policies, as well as family-related elements, such as socioeconomic status, family structure and material resources, on educational inequalities. However, they highlight the absence of research on education and stratification in the Arab World. Twelve years later, Buckner (2013) holds that we still have little understanding of the way privatization of HE and students' socioeconomic factors interact to shape students' and families' decisions when determining HE choices in Egypt. She adds that further research is still required to understand the effects of expansion in HE privatization on equity of access and to investigate relative prestige in each sector.

This study, therefore, will focus on educational stratification in Egypt and will present an in-depth analysis of the different factors contributing to HE access and students' and families' decision-making process when determining their HE route. The study focuses on students'

perceptions of the access process and uses their narratives to capture the way HE privatization

has impacted on access inequity. It also offers an analysis of the students' understanding of

issues of social and economic justice as related to HE access. Bourdieu's theory of social and

cultural reproduction is used as a theoretical lens to examine this topic. Drawing upon his work,

the study uncovers the way students' conditions shape their HE choices and, in turn, determine

their status in the Egyptian society.

Bourdieu's theory of Social and Cultural Reproduction

Following Saunders, Trowler, and Bamber's perspective (2011), the study is concerned

with behaviours and meanings ascribed to them by individuals and groups in order to unveil

patterns of behavior and ways of 'thinking and doing' associated to it. Embracing Reckwitz'

stance (2002), the study views its individual subjects as 'carriers' of practice or agents of bodily

and mental activities. Practices, according to Saunders, Trowler, and Bamber (2011), are

inherently social and cultural where social life can be depicted as a cluster of practices affected

by considerations of power, resources, identity, and place.

Social inequality as an outcome of inequitable access to HE and socially differentiated

educational attainment could best be explained in light of Bourdieu's theory of social and

cultural reproduction. Bourdieu approached the study of social and cultural reproduction drawing

upon anthropology and history to offer a new perspective of the sociology of education (Nash,

1990). Elaborating on Marx's account of social inequality as directly shaped by economy,

Bourdieu theorizes the interaction between structure and agency whereby neither alone controls

the social life. According to him, it is the interaction between both that shapes social class

(Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu uses four concepts to explain cultural reproduction and social inequality; namely, field, habitus, capital, and symbolic violence. A field in Bourdieu's work is a social setting within which an individual operates. The concept provides a framework of analysis to understand the social world. An individual's position within a field is determined by the interaction between that individual's habitus and the structure of the outer world. The term habitus in his theory refers to an individual's dispositions and characteristics encoded since early childhood in a socializing process. Although habitus does not determine action, it constrains practice and thereby has a capacity to classify. Therefore, habitus and the social world shape one another and the position of the agent is determined by the interaction of the habitus, structure of the field and the capital accumulated by the individual (Tabb, 2011).

Capital, in Bourdieu's work, means power (Tabb, 2011). Individuals' struggle to accumulate capital to maximize their opportunities in life is an attempt to occupy better positions in their fields. As a result, capitals are unequally distributed, hence social inequality (Hage, 2013). However, in Bourdieu's theory, economy is not the only form of capital as Marx suggests. Capital comes in the form of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capitals which constantly interact (Tabb, 2011). While the economic capital is the cash or assets an individual owns, the social capital is the resources available to an individual based on relations and social networks of influence and support. Cultural capital, which Bourdieu focuses on as the root of social reproduction, is the knowledge, experience, and the know-how that allows an individual to function in certain circles. Cultural capital, in Bourdieu's views, is not as easily accumulated as economic capital since it is acquired based on life experience and circumstances. Symbolic capital, on the other hand, is the amount of recognition, honour, and prestige that the accumulation of the other three types of capital gives an individual (Hage, 2013).

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Hage (2013) explains that capitals are not intrinsically valuable. Rather, they are arbitrary and inter-subjective. In other words, other individuals have to value a specific capital for it to enter the game of accumulation. As Bourdieu puts it, "the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world… which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 242). Therefore, individuals make every effort to accumulate capital. Bourdieu's is, therefore, a theory of agency within structuralism whereby the interaction between structure and agents shape the social world and determine the individuals' positions within fields. Moreover, the competition within a field could transcend the struggle to monopolize a position to the struggle to dominate a field through owning the power to define it as well as the valuable capitals within it, leading to symbolic violence. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence is defined as the imposition and control of system and culture within dominated social groups so that they accept their conditions as legitimate (Tabb, 2011).

While the economic capital was central to Marx, Bourdieu was most interested in cultural capital, but he did not undermine the importance of the economic capital and held that one form of capital could be easily converted into another (Bourdieu, 1986). In Bourdieu's work, social groups are continually competing to transmit real and symbolic capital across generations and to secure the appropriate structures that enable cultural reproduction (Nash, 1990).

In Bourdieu's theory, individuals share a similar habitus to that of other individuals sharing their class, so they end up making decisions based on factors outside their control through conforming to the tastes and dispositions of their social circles. Hence, individuals classify themselves and willingly accept their conditions (Bourdieu, 1990). Therefore, symbolic violence is exercised on individuals with their complicity. The resulting legitimated inequality

could be invisible to the individuals causing them to further contribute to this inequality through unconscious submission (Hage, 2013). Yet, Bourdieu's theory makes room for resistance against the dominant class since not everyone would take everything for granted (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Central to Bourdieu's theory is the role of education in cultural reproduction. Advocating the eradication of social inequality, education failed to achieve its goal and was rather overcome by symbolic violence (Tabb, 2013). Bourdieu holds that educational gains depend on the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). He argues that HE favoured certain cultures through its selection process, academic content, and language and through equating academic classifications to social classes, which eventually reproduces class. He claims that cultural capital facilitated educational attainment and the acquisition of jobs with higher status and income. He also maintains that HE is self-selective because internalized low self-esteem in lower classes makes it more likely for them to drop out (Tabb, 2013). Hence, rather than becoming a means of social reform and equality, education has become a tool for the reproduction of classism (Nash, 1990).

Given the increasing social inequality in Egypt and the inequitable access to HE, it is important to have a better understanding of how students' economic, social, and cultural resources interact with the current educational policies to exacerbate social injustice and reproduce inequalities. It is specifically essential to capture students' views on the issue and explore their consciousness of the inflicted bias, which is what this study concerns itself with. Drawing upon Bourdieu's theory, the study unveils the way students' accumulated capitals shape their academic choices and consequently determine their status in the Egyptian society.

Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

Attempting to identify the socioeconomic factors affecting HE access in Egypt from the students' perspective, this study focuses on educational stratification in Egypt. It seeks to offer a profound understanding of the determinants in the students' and families' decision-making process of HE access. The study traces students' transitions from high school to HE and uses their narratives of their journeys to examine their understanding of the impact of their different financial abilities and social conditions on their equal chances to access HE.

This chapter gives a narrative of the research process. It discusses the adopted research approach, being mixed methods, and gives a detailed account of the research design, including participants' recruitment, data collection, timing, allocation of participants to groups, as well as data analysis and undergoing processes. It also sheds light on the research strengths and limitations as related to the insider/outsider researcher dichotomy. Issues like familiarity, distance and researcher-independence, and trust are analyzed in full. Finally, the use of Facebook as a social media research tool is closely examined.

Following a snowballing approach to recruit the research participants, 55 Egyptian students of the second year of the Egyptian GSEC, cohort 2012/2013, took part in this research. The participants joined a closed Facebook group where links to Google-doc-based questionnaires were communicated. Seventeen interviews were then conducted to dig into the HE access experience. The study seeks to draw a comparison between the experiences of the students' sub-groups classified based on their socioeconomic status and to examine the interrelationship between the students' socioeconomic background and their accessibility of HE through a triangulation of methods.

Mixed Methods

Adopting a pragmatist approach, this study follows a mixed-methods methodology which offers an opportunity to integrate a variety of theoretical perspectives. The study follows a fixed design where the mix was predetermined with the intent to offer multiple perspectives, develop a complementary picture and provide a comprehensive understanding of the researched issue. Discussing pragmatism as the philosophical partner for mixed methods research, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) hold that it is important to mix research approaches in order to provide the best opportunity to answer the research question(s) and provide stronger evidence for its conclusions.

Symonds and Gorard (2010) hold that mixed methods could be viewed as emancipatory for welcoming methodological diversity. According to Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark, and Smith (2011), combining qualitative and quantitative research aims at targeting various levels of the investigated issue. While the quantitative methods are mainly good for collecting descriptive information and examining relationships between variables in numeric forms, the qualitative methods focus on contexts and meaning and allow for in-depth understanding. This research is using triangulation where a mixed method design is fully integrated, which means that "inferences from both methods are combined consistently throughout the research" (Symonds and Gorard, 2010, p. 10). In this research, the data is merged so that the qualitative data in the form of text is combined with the quantitative data presented in the form of numeric data, tables and figures.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) hold that pragmatism "considers the research question to be more important than either the method [pragmatists] use or the worldview that is supposed to

underlie the method" (p. 21). According to Rosenbaum (2002), it enables researchers to turn

philosophy away from the epistemological orientation and focus more attention onto concrete

problems of societies. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) explain that pragmatism "offers an

immediate and useful middle position philosophically and methodologically; it offers a practical

outcome-oriented method of inquiry … and it offers a method for selecting methodological

mixes that can help researchers better answer many of their research questions" (p. 17). They

maintain that the pragmatic method uses experiences and practical consequences of beliefs to

determine meanings and provisional truth values. In this study, experiences and practical

consequences of the participants' beliefs are captured through their eyes in an attempt to draw

meanings and determine provisional truth values of examined expressions. Cherryholmes (1992)

contends that values and visions of human action are driving forces of pragmatists.

According to Younkins (2005), pragmatism, as a theory of inquiry, is context-specific. It

claims that there are neither abstract principles nor certainty; rather, what is true is what works in

a specific situation or for a specific society. For pragmatists, led by John Dewey, there is no

reality out there; reality is constantly reconstructed by men based on their experiences.

Therefore, the truth of the explicit reality that is brought into being is what works for the group

(Younkins, 2005). Similarly, Rosenbaum (2002) explains that for pragmatists, the truth is not an

object to be found; rather, "it is an outcome of consummated inquiry" (p. 76).

Rosenbaum (2002) explains that the critique directed at pragmatism revolves around two

charges: the genetic fallacy charge and the self-defeating relativism charge. The former is a

critique concerned with the origin of philosophy. Pragmatism is viewed as not being serious in

its attempt to know the truth, which is regarded as the ultimate goal of intellectual inquiry.

Rather, it is condemned for vaguely sketching causal conditions, which is perceived as a

deviation from the main focus. In defense of pragmatism, Rosenbaum (2002) maintains that the

genealogical critique is off point and that the worth of a genealogical strategy depends basically

on the details offered by the explanatory account. The second charge directed at pragmatism is

that it leads to relativism. It holds that since pragmatism does not seek to make contact with

reality, then the value judgments made, such as true, good, bad, and beautiful, are culture-bound.

Rosenbaum (2002) explains, however, that this charge assumes that the truth must be

propositional. He holds that it does not have to be so and that pragmatism simply provides a

different account of the truth.

Research Design

Following is a description of the basic structure of this research including the research

questions, the data collection methods, types of data, timing, and allocation of participants to

groups:

- **Research questions**

This research is led by the following research questions:

1. How do the GSEC students in Egypt perceive the impact of different socioeconomic

   resources on their HE access experience?

2. To what extent are social justice factors apparent in students' estimations of the process

   of access to HE in Egypt?

- **Data collection and data types**

The research is based on two sets of data:

1. Quantitative data derived from the closed questions of two questionnaires:

A) The first was administered about 2 months before the GSEC Exams. Questions

targeted assessing the participants' socioeconomic classes, their perception of

their academic experience, and their aspirations and attitudes towards HE.

B) The second was administered during the first term of the following academic

year. Questions sought to identify determinants of the HE access process,

decision-making, management and modification of aspirations and expectations,

and their views of the (in)equality of the access process.

2. Qualitative data derived from interviews: Narratives of 17 students were sought through

comprehensive semi-structured interviews that aimed at capturing the students'

perceptions of their journeys through GSEC and the HE access process. The interviewed

cases were regarded as instruments to dig into the impact of the socioeconomic factors

onto the HE access process.

- **Timing and allocation of participants to groups**

Timing of data collection was critical in this study. Knight (2002) asserts that exploring

people's *logic-in-use* soon after the examined action is one way of getting closer to that logic.

That is essentially the reason behind clustering the data collection procedures around the relevant

social behavior being investigated. The first questionnaire, which is aimed in part at capturing

the participants' high school experience and assessing their aspirations, is planned by the end of

their final academic year at school. The second questionnaire, focusing on the HE access process

and its relevant decision-making processes and consequences, was administered towards the end

of the first semester of the following academic year. Since the access process was likely to

extend for a few weeks into the academic year for logistical reasons, the timing of the second

questionnaire administration was believed to be right at the end of the process. Interviews were

also conducted after the administration of the second questionnaire so that recalling critical

incidents is possible. So data collection was carefully timed around the HE access process so that

it is fairly possible to evoke the logic-in-use.

The sequential nature of data collection allowed for one phase of data collection to

inform a subsequent phase. Sequential quantitative-qualitative sampling was used in this study,

where the quantitative data informed sampling of the qualitative data. The qualitative sample was

a subgroup of the quantitative sample and selection was based on the socioeconomic indicator

drawn from the quantitative data. The data gathered from the first questionnaire made it possible

to allocate the participants into 3 groups based on their socioeconomic status. This information

was necessary to enable the collection of qualitative data from participants from all three groups.

Furthermore, much of the qualitative data collected from the interviews were aimed at better

understanding and providing explanations for the responses coming from the questionnaires'

quantitative data. Teddlie and Yu (2007) contend that sequential quantitative-qualitative

sampling is the most commonly used sampling technique by mixed methods researchers.

Data Analysis and Core Research Processes of Mixed Methods

All 55 participants took the first questionnaire. Of these, only 48 students responded to

the second questionnaire. The remaining 7 participants either could not be reached or had not

joined HE by the time the second questionnaire was administered. Adapting the scale used by El-

Gilany, El-Wehady, and El-Wasify (2012) for measuring socioeconomic status in Egypt, which

is tested for validity and reliability, a socioeconomic indicator has been allocated to each

participant based on data collected via the first questionnaire on 7 different domains: parents'

educational and cultural domain; parents' occupation domain; family possession domain; family

domain; home sanitation domain; economic domain; and health care domain. All 55 research

participants were then divided into 3 groups: Low Socioeconomic Group (LSG) (17 participants

ranging between 1 and 41 on the socioeconomic indicator); Medium Socioeconomic Group

(MSG) (26 participants ranging between 42 and 63 on the socioeconomic indicator) and High

Socioeconomic Group (HSG) (12 participants ranging between 64 and 79 on the socioeconomic

indicator) (See Figure 3.1). Gender was distributed among the groups as shown in Figure 3.2

(Table 3.1 in the appendix).
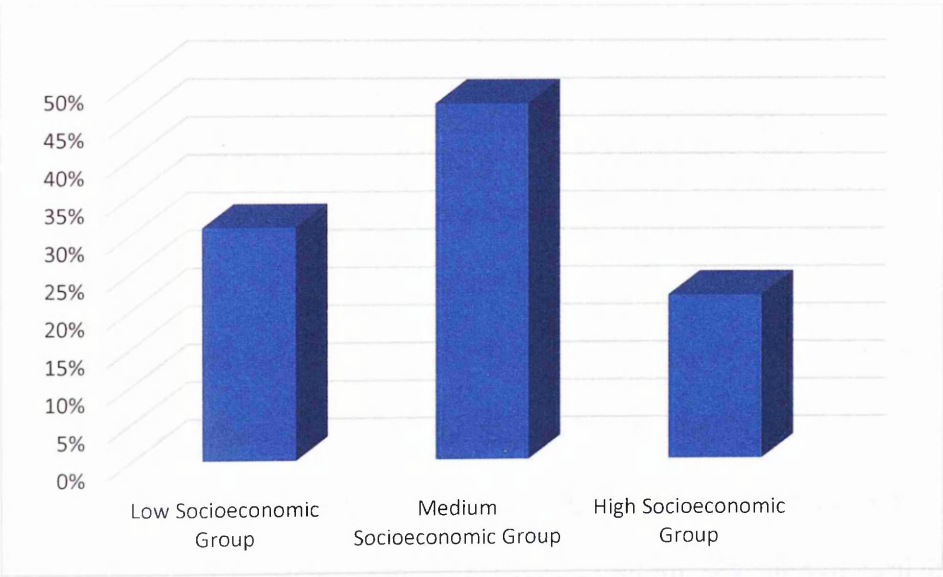
Figure 3.1
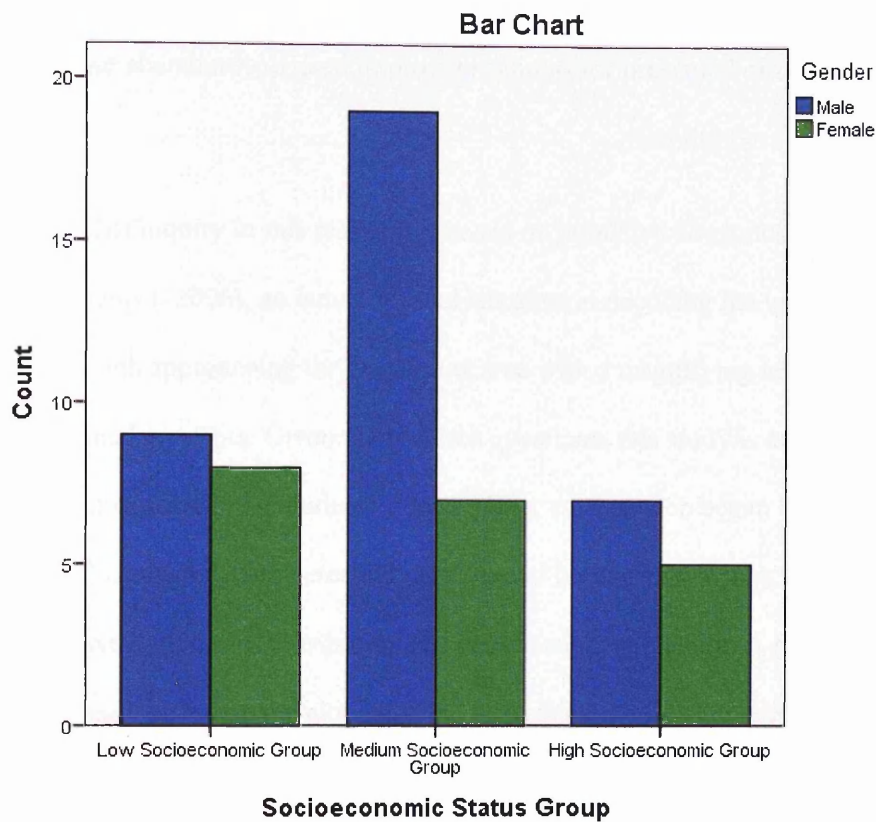
Figure 3.2

According to Symonds and Gorard (2010) mixing occurs "when elements of the research

process are used to construct, transform and influence each other" (p. 13). In this study, mixing

does not only occur when both types of data are brought together; rather, it occurs at an earlier

stage where the first questionnaire analysis was used to inform selection of participants in the

interviews. In addition, at the analysis and interpretation stages both text and numerical data are

used to provide different contextual levels to answer the research questions. While both types of

data are given equal weight in this study, the qualitative data are also used to provide

explanations and interpretations of the quantitative data. Data coming from interviews are

sometimes transformed into numerical data; agreement among interviewees on some questions is

examined and percentages are sometimes offered to represent the level of agreement. Graphs are

regularly provided to highlight comparisons among the socioeconomic groups and quotes made

by participants are abundantly offered to provide support for presented discussions and drawn

conclusions.

The logic of inquiry in this research is based on inductive construction of meaning.

According to Thomas (2006), an inductive analysis aims at decoding the underlying structure of

the raw data through approaching the researched area with a magnifying lens to derive the

inherent themes and concepts. Given the research questions, this study is adopting an open

approach to the investigation of students' views. Thus, the research began by seeking

observations and measures, then detecting patterns and regularities, which were used to

formulate tentative hypotheses to explore. The best possible explanations for results were offered

and the study finally ended up developing some general conclusions or theories.

Adopting this inferential approach of analysis, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences

(SPSS) was used to analyze the questionnaires data; cross-tabulation and comparisons were

made between the three groups and correlations were examined. The 17 interviews (7 from the

LSG, 6 from the MSG, and 4 from the HSG) were recorded then transcribed and the data were

coded. Both qualitative and quantitative data were juxtaposed and themes were derived from

them. Where corroboration of findings across different data sets was identified greater

confidence in conclusions was held and the qualitative data was used to provide explanations and

interpretations of the quantitative data. Where conflict was found, possible explanations were

discussed and the best set of explanations were used to understand the findings. According to

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), "in many cases the goal of mixing is not to search for

corroboration but rather to expand one's understanding" (p. 19).

Thus, mixing was evident all along the research process: in allowing one data set to influence the planning of the subsequent stages; in combining both data types together to answer different aspects of the research questions on different conceptual levels; in giving equal weights to both types of data; in transforming one data type into the other; and in constructing themes of analysis based on both types of data.

Constructivism of the Qualitative Data

Constructivism was used in interviews as a method of inquiry. Knight and Saunders (1991) explain that constructivism not only helps construct the participants' consciousness of relevant subliminal concepts, but it also captures people's confused, complex, and contradicting thoughts about the researched topic. They suggest that explicit accounts of the participants' experience and tacit knowledge could be constructed through a 'dialogic' interview where both the interviewer and interviewee collaborate to, not simply uncover truths, but to produce them. The role of the interviewer in this research was not just to listen to answers of interview questions, but to engage in a dialogue with the participants to construct meaning of their experiences and to make the tacit explicit. The semi-structure nature of interviews allowed for such a dialogue to take place. Like Knight and Saunders (1991), the interviewer in this study did not follow a fixed interview agenda, but was rather flexible allowing for non-linear recollection and analytical thinking. The interviewing process was marked by probing questions, requests for clarification, challenge and counterargument in an attempt to allow reflexivity. The resulting uncertainties, and acknowledgement of inconsistencies enriched the resulting data and made them more reliable.

Knight and Saunders (1991) highlight the danger of adhering to survey approaches that invite the participants to accept or reject the researcher's pre-determined categories, fail to account for cultural variations, and ignore the reasoning behind choices. They emphasize the role of individual agency in constructivism and its ability to capture both similarities and differences in the participants' experiences. They, therefore, highlight the necessity to use the concept of culture instead of cultures, because, like pragmatism, constructivism perceives action as context-bound. It seeks to capture not only the shared meanings within large groups, but also the variations within these groups. In this research, meanings shared by the whole interviewed sample as well as variations across and within the socioeconomic groups were all targeted through dialogic interviews. In other words, inconsistencies and diversity were equally valued as regularities and agreement in order to have an insight into the researched query.

Participant Recruitment

Recruitment of the study group was based on snowballing. I began by identifying a few individuals who fulfilled the sampling selection criteria, which basically involved being an Egyptian student of the second year of the GSEC. These individuals were then used to identify and put me in touch with other potential participants, who, in turn, were used to find more participants. The snowballing technique was selected due to the difficulty to gain access to students through schools, which requires long bureaucratic processes that were not likely to be successful. In addition to the fact that Egypt has a history of bureaucracy (Cook, 2000), the timing of the research, after the 2011 Revolution, did not make the situation any better. Cohen, Manion, and Marrion (2007) explain that snowballing is a useful sampling tool when access is difficult, when an outside researcher finds it difficult to gain access to schools, or when the topic is sensitive. Questioning the fairness of the national educational system is indeed a sensitive

issue that is not likely to be welcome under an unstable political regime. In addition, discussing

socioeconomic conditions is also sensitive especially towards the lower end of the continuum.

Therefore, since access to students through formal channels was problematic, informal networks

of friends and acquaintances were sought instead.

Snowballing limited the ability to recruit a big number of participants due to factors of

time, energy and limited resources. However, Cohen, Manion, and Marrion (2007) hold that

thirty is agreed by many researchers to be the minimum number of subjects in a study where

statistical analysis is included. In this study, statistical analysis is conducted on data collected

from 55 participants. While this study is adopting a mixed methods approach, the study was

designed to generate a sample that addresses the research questions with a focus on

transferability rather than representativeness. Teddlie and Yu (2007) maintain that it is a

common practice by researchers to make decisions about sampling that cater for the available

resources and that compromising the requirements of quantitative and qualitative requirements is

expected in mixed methods research. They emphasize the representative/saturation trade-off

practiced in mixed methods research. In this research more emphasis was put on the saturation of

the qualitative data than the representativeness of the quantitative sample.

All participants were promised and indeed granted confidentiality. Their anonymity was

preserved to protect their rights. In the data analysis chapter, the participants are referred to using

their serial number on a socioeconomic indicator list where 1-17 refer to LSG, 18-43 refer to

MSG, and 44-55 refer to HSG. The framework of the study and the data collection procedures

were explained to them and their consent was obtained before the beginning of the study. The

participants had the option and the right to withdraw from the study at any point. Permission to

record interviews was obtained from all the interviewees prior to conducting the interviews.

Insider/Outsider Research

According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009) insider researchers are ones who conduct research with populations of which they are also members and thus share common characteristics such as identity, language, and experience. However, they, and other researchers such as Mercer (2007), argue that since identities are always relative and can change by time, the insider/outsider dichotomy should be rejected in favour of a continuum with the two concepts at both ends. Being an Egyptian researcher, a current practitioner at Egyptian universities, and a product of the Egyptian educational system under speculation more than two decades ago, I share many characteristics and experiences with the researched group. On the other hand, I did not know most of the participants prior to the research and was not involved in their concurrent transition process from secondary school to HE. Therefore, I was not a member of their more defined group of students but a member of a larger group that involved all of us. As such, I would be placed somewhere in the middle of the insider/outsider continuum, but closer to the insider end. Being placed in this position created a number of challenges as well as a number of advantages:

- **Familiarity**

Mercer (2007) holds that insiders are likely to have a better understanding of the context due to their familiarity with it. It becomes easier to create rapport, handle cultural nuances and manage power relations. Being a GSEC graduate and an Egyptian academic in the Egyptian context for 15 years made me familiar with the concerns of students of this system. In addition, handling the sensitivities of questions in the low socioeconomic group was a challenge that was made easier by being aware of the culture.

Although a snowballing technique is adopted, some resistance and sensitivity were experienced especially where the subjects sensed that they were selected for their poor socioeconomic conditions. Reluctance to reveal sensitive data pertinent to socioeconomic conditions was expected and indeed experienced in a few cases. Feelings of anger, resentment, or distress which might surface in response to the questionnaires or interview questions, which are meant to dig into personal cases and circumstances, were expected to lead to emotional responses. Hallowell, Lawton and Gregory (2005) highlight the need for researchers to be prepared for unpredictable reactions and to be able to cope with them. Managing those situations started by trying to avoid them. A full explanation of the purpose of the study and its different procedures was provided at the beginning so that the participants can make a conscious decision of joining the study knowing what is expected from them. Confidentiality and anonymity of those responses were also stressed both verbally and in writing. Access to the questionnaires' responses on Google docs and interviews was restricted to the researcher to ensure confidentiality of the participants data and socioeconomic circumstances. The participants were also given the absolute freedom to opt out of the study at any point. In the only one unfortunate case of emotional reaction to interview questions, the participant was granted the understanding of her stressful conditions and was given time to express her feelings and more cautious language was adopted.

- **Distance and researcher-independence**

On the other hand, familiarity might mean that assumptions are made by both researchers and participants about shared views (Mercer, 2007; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Thus, a serious concern in this study had to do with the process of sense-making of the data. Usher (1996) pinpoints the double hermeneutic, or double sense-making, of the data where human action is

given meaning through both the researcher and participants. Approaching the research with considerable prior interest and commitment is likely to lead to the risk of the researcher having pre-conceived conclusions and answers to the research questions. Hence, perception of the researcher is likely to color the report of the participants' perceptions due to their distinctive subjective nature. Eisner (1993) maintains that perception of the world is colored by subjective elements of one's own skills, viewpoints, focus, and language. The researcher might be clouded by his/her own views and separating them from those of the participants' might be challenging. When the research requires an interactive role on the researcher's part (as opposed to acting at a distance), controllability and lack of the researcher-independence of the results, highlighted by Verschuren (2003), become a concern. In harmony with this view, Knight and Saunders (1991) explain that a constructivist approach to interviewing puts reliability at stake.

This study is running the same risk since it depends on a considerable amount of qualitative data where meaning is constructed through interactive human behavior and is allocated to human action by interpretative frameworks. In addition, admittedly and inevitably, the research was approached with prior biases. Despite efforts to distance my views, I was still running the risk of having misleading assumptions. Floyd and Arthur (2012) maintain that this is a danger that is maximized in inside research. Similarly, participants might refrain from explaining the shared experiences and "use phrases like 'you know what it's like' or 'as you well know'" (Floyd and Arthur, 2012, p. 175). Similar phrases were sometimes offered in this research. There were a few instances during the interviews when the interviewees would assume it was not necessary to give detailed explanations of their experiences or pronounce their views because there was an underlying assumption that the experiences are well known to everyone and that I would necessarily agree with their views.

Highlighting the undue influence insider researchers might have on the research process, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) underline the researchers' awareness of their own biases as a step that would potentially reduce such influence. In this research I was aware of the risks and, therefore, to maximize the study's internal validity and minimize the effect of the researcher's personality, a number of procedures were adopted: 1) I would occaisionally remind the participants that I needed them to take their time to give all details, to explicitly express their views and not to make assumptions about my understanding. 2) Both questionnaires were piloted before actual use in the research to minimize ambiguity and ensure user-friendliness. 3) Questions on both questionnaires were primarily closed ended. 4) In the interviews, clarification questions were made possible in both directions: the researcher encouraged the participants to ask clarification questions. Also, a lot of probing questions, asking "why" and "how" and requesting examples, were thrown back at the participants in an attempt to dig deeply enough into the participant's experience and perception and construct meaning. 5) Summaries of the participant's input were also regularly offered during the interview for comprehension check. 6) Challenge and counterargument were other tools used to facilitate reflexivity. In addition, the participants were constantly reminded that agreement was not the goal and that what mattered was their free opinions. Thus, there was an attempt to bring the participants' tacit knowledge to the forefront and to minimize bringing the researcher's subjective elements into the sense-making process. External validity was maintained through emphasizing that the study results are only valid for theoretical propositions and are not generalisable. Following the steps of Knight and Saunders' (1991) this study is using defensibility and recognisability rather than generalisability as tests of the findings.

- **Trust**

Trust and openness were byproducts of lying somewhere on the continuum that leans towards the insider end but not at that far end. That position allowed me to be perceived as a legitimate researcher of the Egyptian matters and at the same time it meant I was not a threat since the participants and I were not part of a small organization and I did not have any direct links that might influence their access process in any way. Floyd and Arthur (2012) contend that when the researcher and participants are members of the same organization, that might be a deterrent to the participants' willingness to share knowledge or even participate in the research project. Therefore, it was safe for the participants to share their data, experience, views and attitudes with me. Most participants required information about who I was and why I needed to conduct this research prior to accepting to join the research project. After developing trust and rapport, many of them expressed appreciation and gratitude for bringing attention to this area of research. That level of trust and openness that Dwyer and Buckle (2009) highlight granted me access into the group because of an assumption of shared understanding and uniqueness. That assumption was absent in the case of Cook (2000), an American researcher who conducted educational research in Egypt in the 1990s, because he was viewed as an outsider. The xenophobia that was increasingly developing in Egypt after the 2011 Revolution made it even more challenging for a non-Egyptian to gain trust and, hence, access to the necessary data with great depth. Being an Egyptian was a source of reassurance to the individual participants.

Facebook and Data Collection

The data collection procedures were not very demanding of the participants; they were required to exert little time and effort. Any given participant was required to join a Facebook

group, and to fill in two online questionnaires with an 8-month interval, in addition to a potential

participation in a face-to-face interview. Although the amount of time and effort required from

each participant is manageable, participation still required commitment on the participants' part,

which created challenges. Baker (2013) holds that longitudinal ethnographic studies with young

adults tend to face challenges such as maintenance of communication and high rates of attrition.

Following is a discussion of the main challenges, concerns and advantages of the data collection

methods in this study:

First, using social media, especially Facebook, in ethnographic research is an under

researched area (Baker, 2013); therefore, it contributes to the originality of this quasi-

ethnographic study. Although using Facebook as a research medium in educational research is a

methodology that is believed to offer solutions to the challenges offered by this kind of research

(Baker, 2013) and despite its popularity among the subjects' generation (Baker, 2013), Facebook

access turned out to be a serious concern in the case of this specific study. Facebook is one of the

most visited websites in the world and is valued for its appropriateness to communicate with

participants and retain them in longitudinal studies (Mychasiuk and Benzies, 2011). However,

since the study is targeting different socioeconomic groups, discrepancy in the suitability of the

research tool for the different groups was evident. While Facebook was a convenient research

tool to access the majority of participants and communicate the Google-doc-based questionnaires

to them and proved to be both time- and space-effective, Facebook access was not easy towards

the low socioeconomic end of the continuum. The same challenge existed with regards to

accessibility to the questionnaires' Google docs. Access to a computer and/or the internet was a

challenge. During the recruitment process, decision was made against recruitment a few times,

by me or the candidate participants, for this reason. Yet, phone calls or face-to-face meeting still

had to be used in lieu of Facebook and/or Google in limited cases as necessary to get the

questionnaires taken.

Yet, access is one thing; willingness to participate is another. Although all participants

agreed to take part in all phases of the study and while Facebook access was not problematic in

the case of the high and middle socioeconomic groups, getting the subjects to take the

questionnaires on time was a challenge. They needed to be reminded to take the questionnaires

numerous times. Some techniques were used to overcome this obstacle and communicate a sense

of urgency and this is where Facebook was efficient. The participants were all tagged in posts of

the questionnaire links on the Facebook group and Facebook inbox messages were sent out to

ask the subjects to participate. Facebook inbox messaging was also used to arrange for

interviews. Where necessary, sometimes even phone calls were made to urge the students to do

the task or to even replace the internet. So, for reasons pertaining to access or willingness to

participate, a few cases did not do the questionnaires online. Out of the 55 participants taking the

first questionnaire, 3 participants took a paper-and-pen version and out of the 48 taking the

second questionnaire, 9 participants took it either via the phone or on paper.

As data collection took place over about 9 months, retention of the participants was

another issue of concern. Agreeing with Baker (2013) that participant attrition is one of the most

challenging aspects of longitudinal studies, Mychasiuk and Benzies (2011) report decreasing it

by 16% through using Facebok. During the recruitment phase, there were a handful of drop-outs

– participants who would repeatedly express their approval to participate, then for inexplicable

reasons disappear and become unreachable. More drop-outs were expected along the journey.

Therefore, one of the main purposes of the Facebook group was to maintain contact with the

participants over the 9-month period in hopes that commitment is ensured. Communication on

Facebook was arranged to be spaced out and discussion questions were posed every now and then. Vignettes were also used to start discussion threads. Imaginative experiences were shared as group posts. The vignettes were created using everyday language and read as lively, genuine, and expressive as possible in an attempt to involve the participants. The subjects were encouraged to share their thoughts about the made-up scenarios and to share any similar experiences. Although no substantial data came out of this practice as most contributions were too brief, it was an effective strategy to maintain contact and give the participants a sense of belonging to the group.

Baker (2013) highlights the potentially problematic nature of communication between the researcher and participants, especially when they are young in age and suggests that online communication could offer a resolution to this challenge. She commends online communication, particularly via Facebook as a means to build rapport and trust and to preserve established relationships over time to overcome distance barriers. Comparing traditional offline communication to constructions that combine online and offline connections, she holds that the latter offer wider potentials. In this research, the intimacy established online created a safe environment for the participants to share their perspectives and open up in the face-to-face interview encounters. Facebook, therefore, is viewed as a tool that increased study validity because it allowed for the involvement of participants that could otherwise have been unreachable because of distance and for maintaining the researcher-participants close relationship necessary for collecting valuable data.

Another social-media-related challenge had to do with the researcher's controllability of the research medium. Baker (2013) discusses the necessity to be familiar with the technology used in online-mediated research. In the case of this research, I was already an active user of

Facebook, so I was familiar with its benefits and limitations. Nonetheless, an unforeseen problem that challenged the research was the inexplicable close of the Facebook group after about a month of its creation. Fortunately, recreating the group was an easy job afterwards because electronic data of all participants were saved in a separate word file.

Furthermore, Baker (2013) suggests that Facebook presents an ethical challenge due to the difficulty of protecting privacy of participants in a heavily networked and dynamic online environment. However, a number of measures were adopted to face this ethical challenge. First, the participants were informed ahead of time of the necesity to join a Facebook group and their consent was granted. Second, no personal data of participants were shared on the Facebook group, which was a closed one, other than the obvious need to share their Facebook usernames, which may or may not reflect their real names. Contributions to online discussions, though encouraged, were optional. Finally, access to questionnaires and interview data was restricted to the researcher only. The value Facebook added to this research is believed to outweigh the risks it offered. However, the risk was still calculated and measures were taken to minimize it.

In conclusion, despite the challenges, Facebook as an effective communication tool contributed significantly to this research through increasing participants' retention through maintaining contact with them during the research, enhancing researcher-participants' rapport, and improving research validity. However, the participants' socioeconomic status was a key factor that controlled the ease with which social media could be used in this research.

Chapter 4 - Sampling and Data Analysis

Focusing on the relationship between HE and social justice in Egypt, the following analysis attempts to examine the socioeconomic conditions affecting HE access opportunities in Egypt from the students' lens through tracing and comparing students' narratives of their access processes in three different socioeconomic settings. The analysis also aims at exposing the ways issues of social justice, such as fairness, distribution of resources and social connections, are incorporated into understanding the process of HE access.

Scrutinizing and coding the data, the following 8 themes were derived. The themes present different identified stops in the participants' academic journeys and are presented in the same order they are traced along the journey. The first 4 themes capture the pre-HE experience and its perceived impact on the students' equal opportunities to join HE; themes 5 and 6 focus on the decision-making process of HE access and the intertwining of a collection of factors in that process; while themes 7 and 8 focus on the students' attitudes towards issues of fairness, and social connections and the impact of these attitudes on their self-confidence. The 8 themes are:

1. Resources and Conditions at School

2. School Experience at GSEC

3. Private Lessons

    3.1. Private lessons as a financial burden

    3.2. Private lessons are not the answer

    3.3. Reasons of private lessons

3.4. Solutions to the private lessons epidemic

4. Test-Driven Education

4.1. Level of satisfaction of the GSEC assessment system

4.2. Cheating

5. Perception on HE Possibilities

5. 1. Financial factors

5.2. Social pressure: Consciousness of class in HE

5.2.1. Social construction of value and worth based on discipline

5.2.2. Social construction of value and worth based on institution type (faculty vs institute)

5.2.3. Social construction of value and worth based on university type (public vs private; low-fee vs high-fee)

5.3. Family pressure

6. Instrumentality of HE and Social Acceptance

7. Perception on Fairness and Equal Opportunity

7.1. Social capital

7.2. Perception on politics

8. Frustration and Lack of Self-Confidence

1. Resources and Conditions at School

The data showed a significant correlation (at the 0.01 level) between the socioeconomic level of the participants and their school type (public vs. private). Whereas 100% of the low socioeconomic group attended public schools, 66.7% of the high socioeconomic group attended private schools (Figure 4.1 & Table 4.1 in the appendix) – a distinction which suggests a different experience as suggested by Richards (1992) and Furlong and Cartmel (2009), who contend that *unequal access* to HE has its roots in differential school experiences based on socioeconomic class.

Unsurprisingly, 78.2% of the sample believed that, in general, private schools offered better education than public schools with no significant variations across the groups (Figure 4.2 & Table 4.2 in the appendix). Participant #32 offers an explanation of this view. He shows that lack of fairness in the GSEC competition has its base in the significantly different levels of quality of education offered in the in pre-GSEC experience. He points out that with the English language being a pre-requisite of joining as well as successfully performing in many HE disciplines and departments, students of the public schools are denied an equal opportunity with their counterparts coming from the private schools. English is the medium of instruction in many HE majors and language education is poorly attended to in public schools in his views. The difference is so obvious that public schools are commonly called 'Arabic schools' while the private ones are called 'Language Schools.' He explains, "An Engineering student (from a public school), for example, studies his core subjects in English and finds difficulty because he always studied these subjects in Arabic. They end up failing." He explains that the discrimination has its implications in job opportunities since language proficiency is a requirement for many well-paid jobs. He gives an example of students of Business: "Job opportunities for graduates of Business,

English section, are better than those of Business, Arabic section. So, there has been

discrimination from the very beginning: public vs. language." He concludes, "So, those who pay

money end up getting better opportunities."
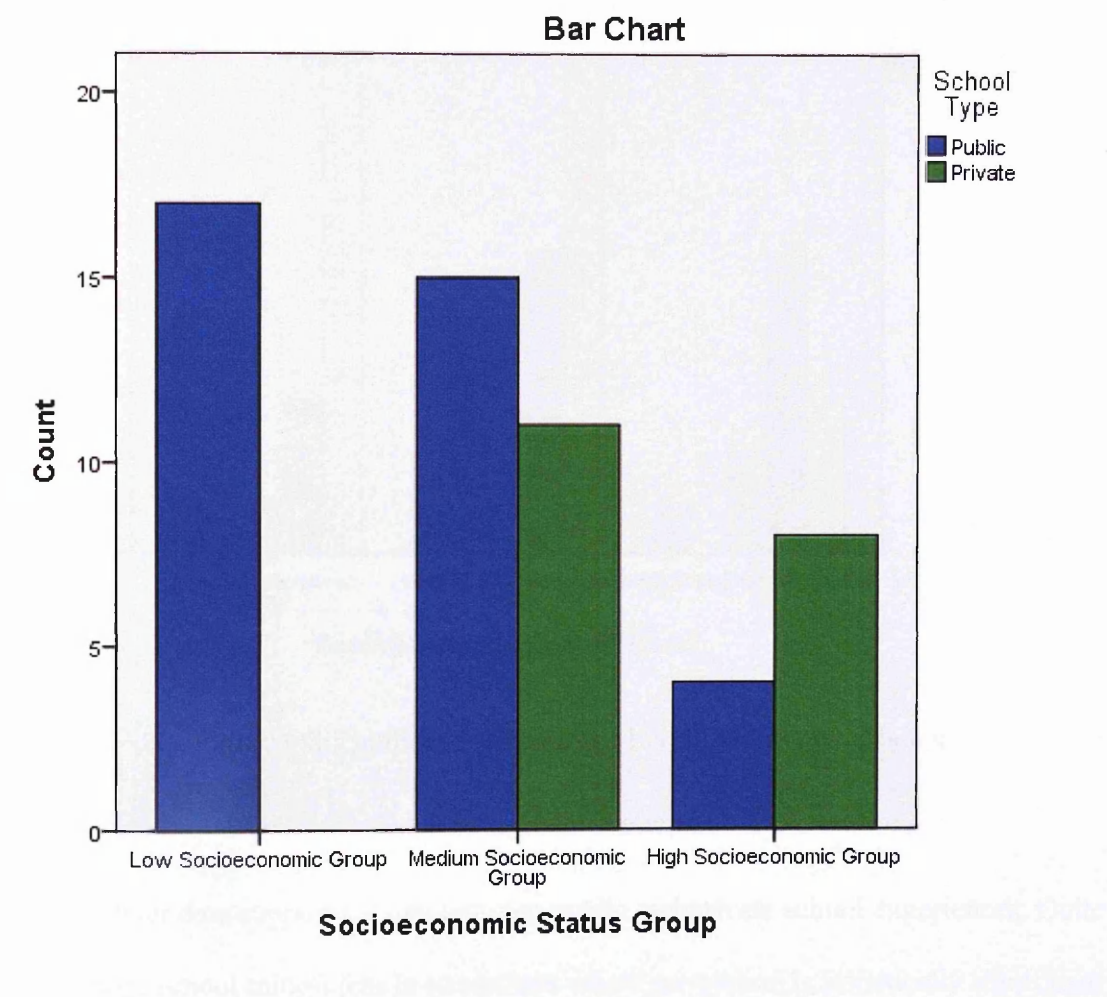
Figure 4.1: School type: Private/public
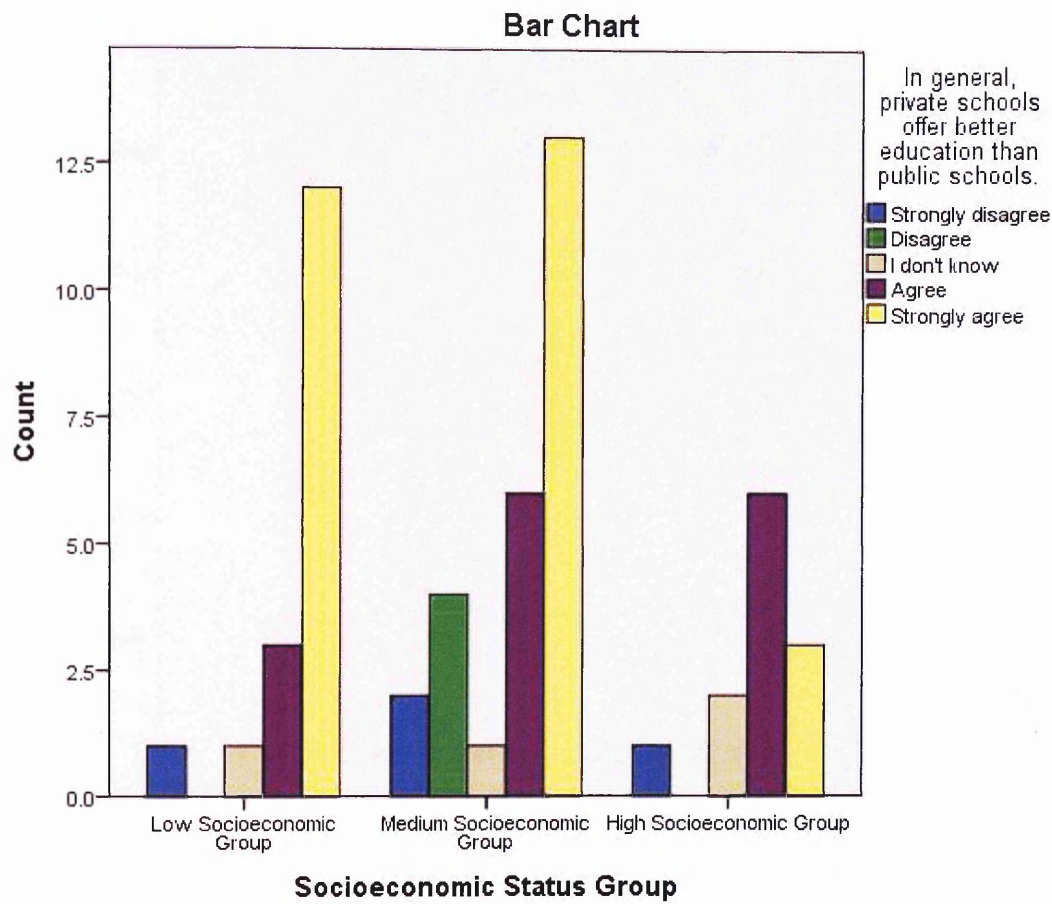
Figure 4.2: Quality of education – Public vs. private schools

Other data support the gap between public and private school experiences. Quite expectedly, school tuition fees is an element where correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The data showed a positive correlation between the participants' socioeconomic status and their school tuition fees (Figure 4.3).
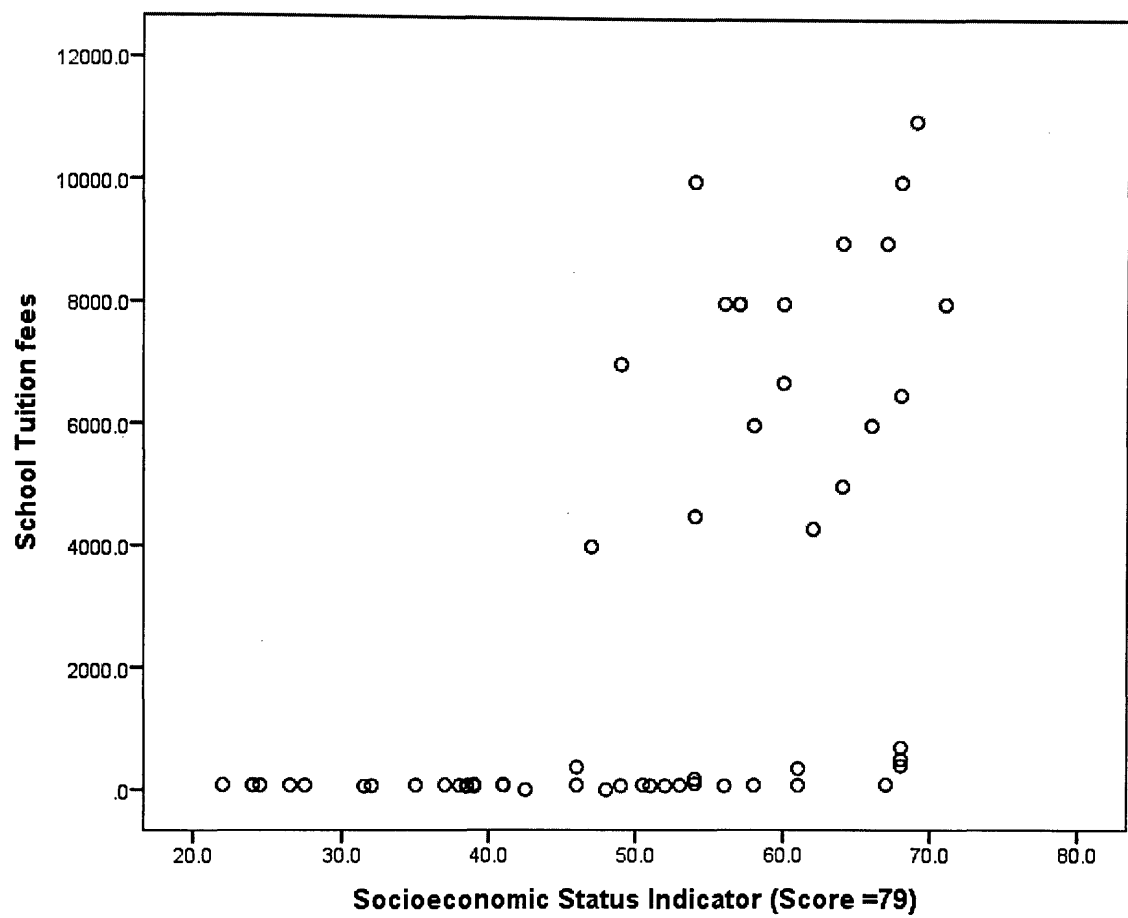
Figure 4.3: The relation between socioeconomic status and their school tuition fees

A significant negative correlation at the 0.01 level was also detected between the

participants' socioeconomic status and the number of students per class at their schools,

suggesting that students of higher socioeconomic classes experience better conditions at school

that are more conducive to learning (Figure 4.4). Even though attendance during the GSEC years

is very low in both types of schools as indicated above, the mere division into public and private

schools and the class density indicated suggest an assumed pre-GSEC differential experience.
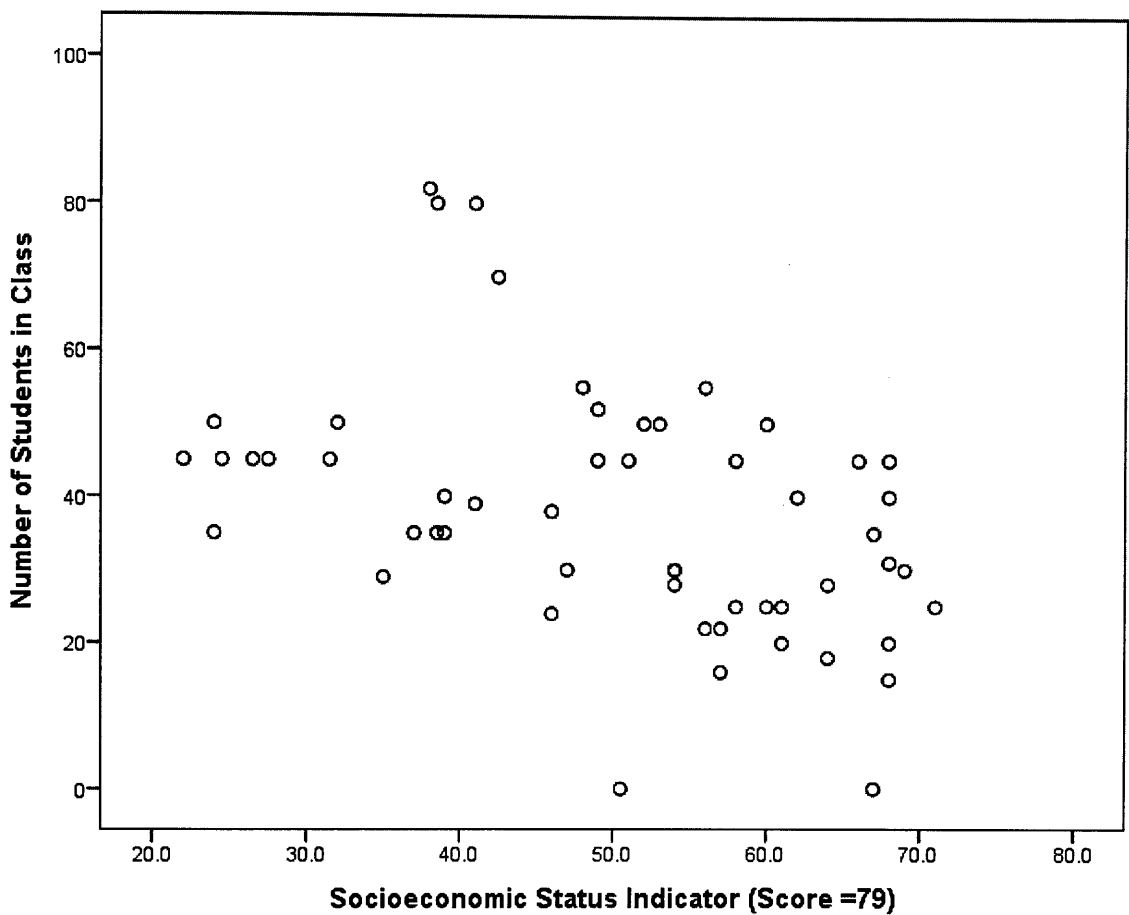
Figure 4.4: The relation between socioeconomic status and class density

Interestingly enough, correlating the three groups with the three sections of the General

Secondary Certificate (Arts, Science, and Maths), the statistical analysis showed a tendency of

the low socioeconomic group to join the Arts section whereas the high socioeconomic group

were heading towards the Maths end. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (Figure 4.5 &

Table 4.3 in the appendix). It is worth mentioning in this respect that a number of interviewees,

such as Participants #5 and #44, noted that the private lessons for the Arts section are cheaper

and less frequent than those for the Science or Maths sections. That was also clear from the

reported figures they were required to pay for private tutoring as shown in the "Private Lessons"

section.

Bar Chart
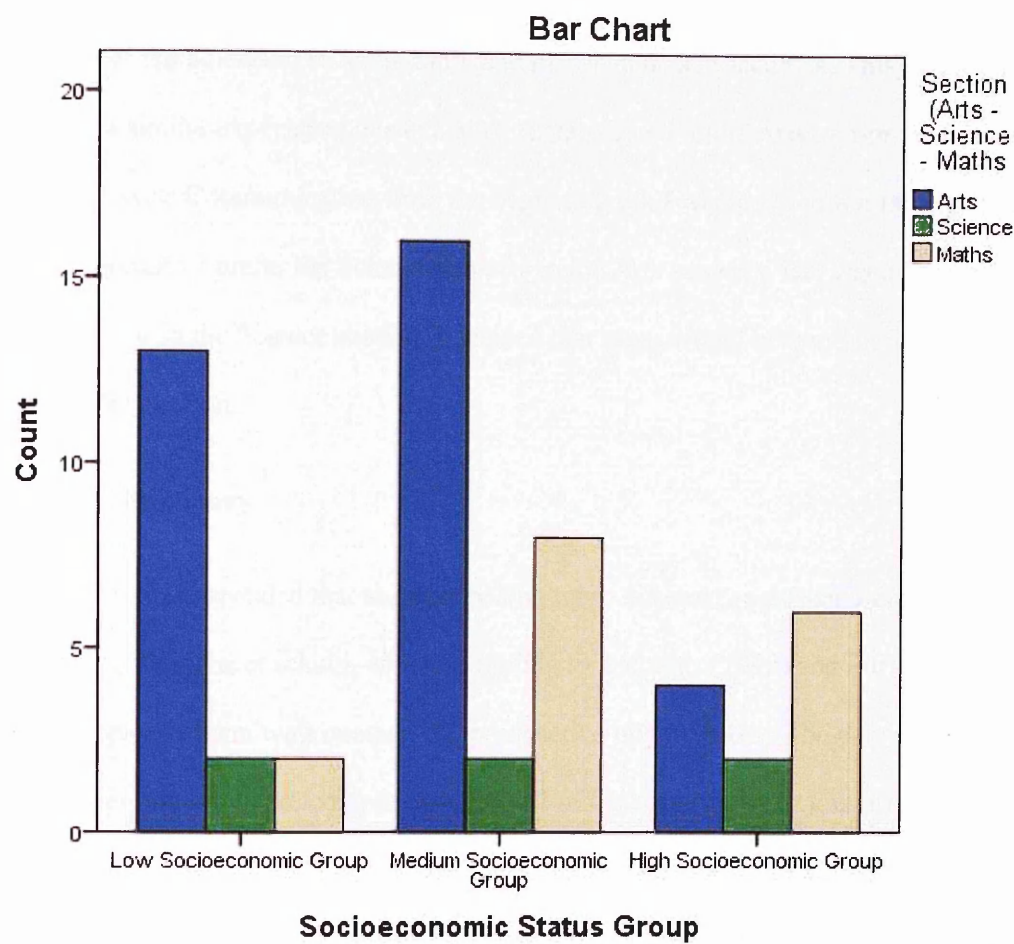
Figure 4.5: Section (Arts - Science – Maths)

Furthermore, 63.2% of the students who joined the Arts section indicated that it was an

easier section and that it depended on memorization. 29.1% of the whole sample indicated they

have changed sections between the first and second years of the GSEC. 87.5% of the changing

students moved to the Arts section. Of the latter group, 78.6% indicated that the reason for

change was their low score in the first year. For example, Participant #12, who moved from the

Science to the Arts section after the first year due to her low score, explains that it was easier to

join the same faculty from the Arts section since a lower score is required. She says: "I need a

lower score in the Arts section to enter the same faculties. Why? This is a problem. It's the same

university. The difference could reach up to 10%. It's unexplainable ... The result is that the students of the Scientific sections can't find places in decent faculties. This is unfair." Participant #38 had a similar experience. He explains, "I transferred to the Arts section because of the score. I wanted Mass Communication from the beginning but I wanted to join it through the Science section because I prefer the Science subjects to the Arts subjects. But when I got a low score in the first year in the Science section, I decided that score would be good in the Arts section, not in the Science section."

- **Summary**

The data revealed that students belonging to different socioeconomic classes experience different conditions at school, which according to Richards (1992) and Furlong and Cartmel (2009), provide them with unequal HE prospective opportunities. The data showed that the low socioeconomic group are completely deprived of the opportunity to join private schools, which, according to a majority of the sample, offer better education, equip the students with a foreign language that facilitates joining and succeeding in HE, and provide them with better resources. While school tuition fees positively correlated with the participants' socioeconomic status, the number of students per class negatively correlated with it (both are significant at the 0.01 level) suggesting that the more a student pays for his school education, the better conditions and educational services s/he receives and the more potentially equipped s/he is for HE. The data also revealed a tendency of the low socioeconomic group to join the Arts section, which was reported to be easier and whose private lessons were said to be cheaper. This finding suggests that a student's financial status have a great impact on determining his/her academic route.

2. School Experience at GSEC

Although the data showed many significant differences in the perceived school experience offered to the different socioeconomic groups and despite their perception of the superiority of private schools over public schools, there were commonalities across the board regarding their critical perception of the quality of education offered at schools during the GSEC. On the question of whether they receive good education at their secondary schools, no significant variations were found across the groups; 67.3% of the sample thought that the education they received at schools was of poor quality (Figure 4.6 & Table 4.4 in the appendix) and 65.5% thought that their school teachers showed no educational interest in them (Figure 4.7 & Table 4.5 in the appendix). So whether a student paid for general secondary education or not, the result was not much different in their view.
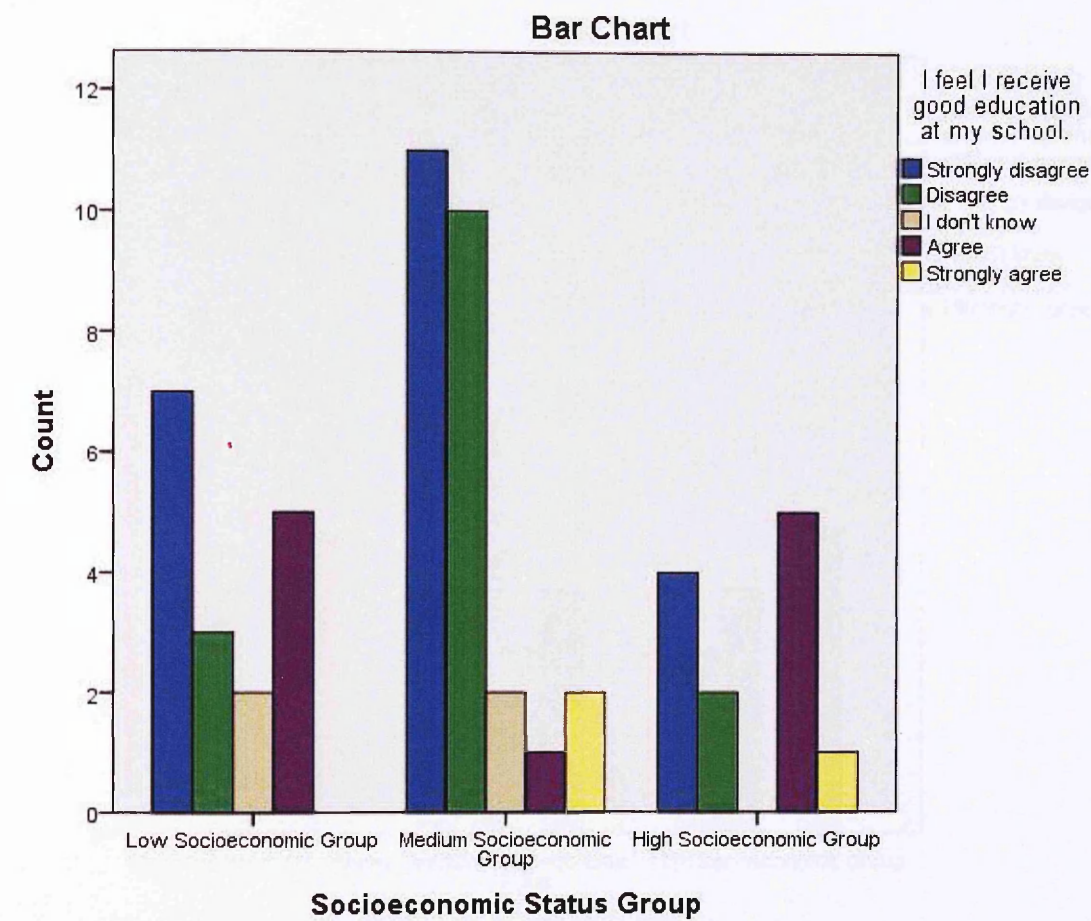
Figure 4.6: I feel I receive good education at my school.
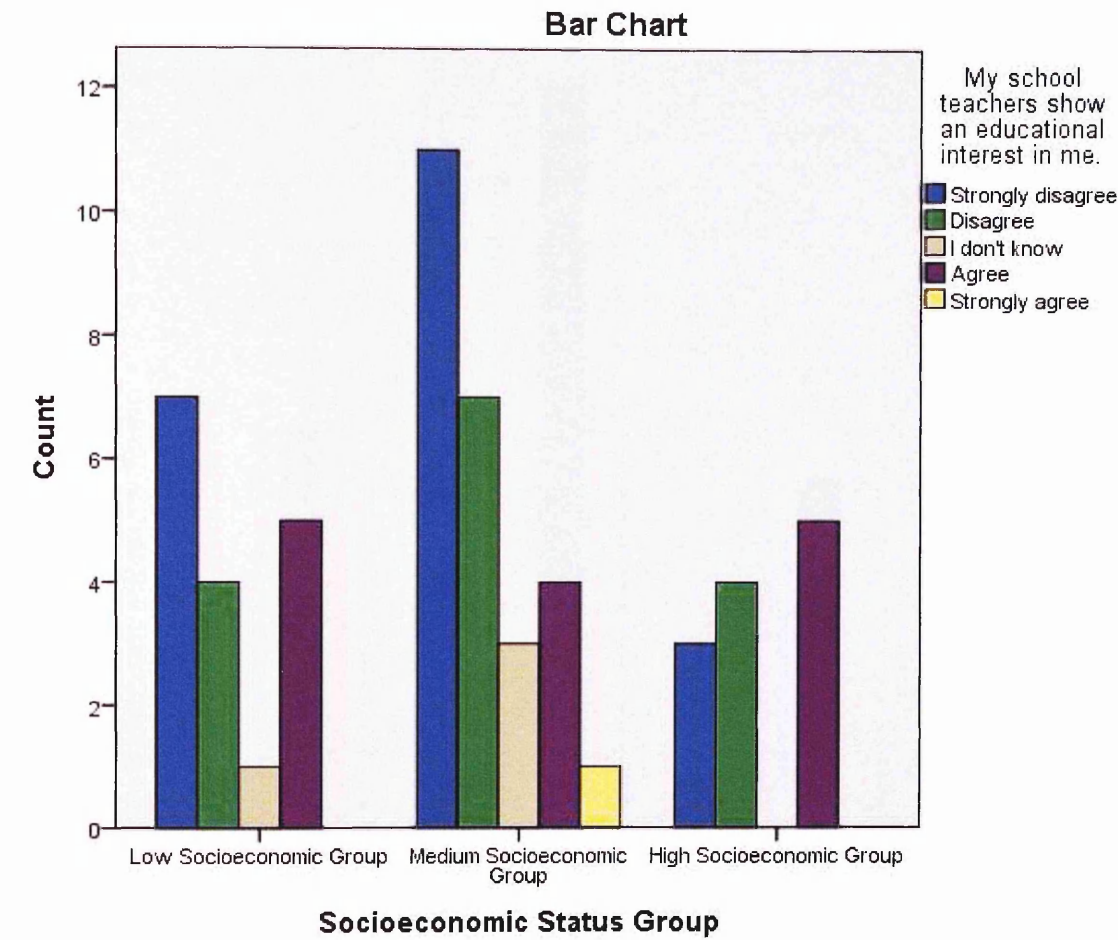
Figure 4.7: My school teachers show an educational interest in me.

On the other hand, 87.2% of the participants decided that the quality of education they received at the private lessons was adequate while no significant variations were found across groups (Figure 4.8 & Table 4.6 in the appendix).
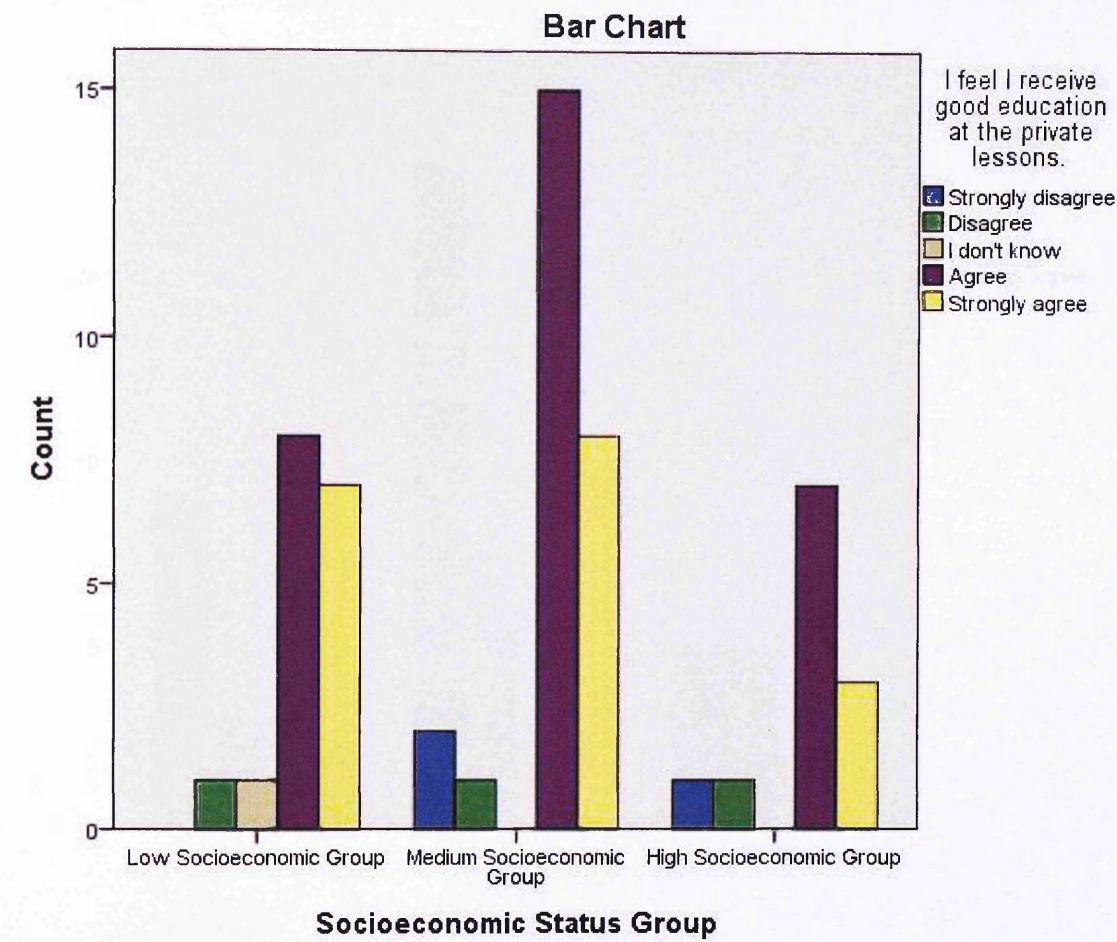
Figure 4.8: I feel I receive good education at the private lessons.

This perception on the students' part could be explained in light of the finding that 83.7% of them reported failure to attend most of their classes at school during their last year of GSEC (Figure 4.9 & Table 4.7 in the appendix). The rate of attendance as reported by the participants was independent of their socioeconomic class and of the school type (public vs. private) as statistical analysis showed no correlation.
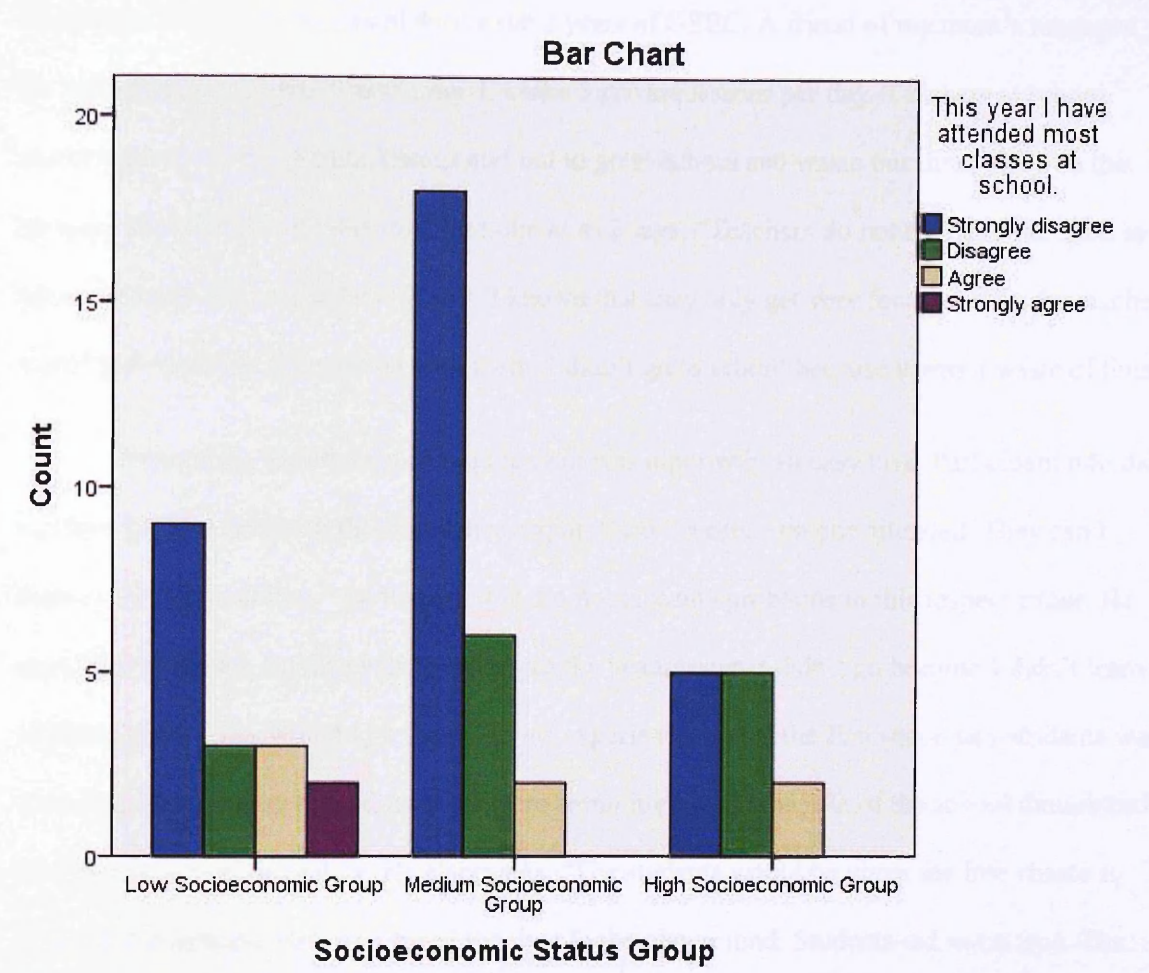
Figure 4.9: This year I have attended most classes at school.

All interviewed participants unanimously agreed that the role of school has diminished in

both years of the GSEC. Participant #2 explained in her interview that it was almost impossible

to follow up the whole curriculum with the school due to lack of organization: "I used to go to

school the first couple of months but then stopped going because it was impractical. It is a waste

of time. Teachers were not getting into classes because students were very few. So they used to

group all attending students in one class and have one teacher teach them ... If one asks them,

they'd respond, but it's not an organized course because they know that students are taking

private lessons. So they would teach bits and pieces. One has to take private lessons." Participant

#4 agreed: "I didn't go to school during the 2 years of GSEC. A friend of my mom's managed my attendance log. I didn't have time. I'd take 3 private lessons per day. Teachers at school encouraged us to take private lessons and not to go to school and waste our time. They do this because they give private lessons." Participant #12 says, "Teachers do not step into the class in the second and third secondary. It's well known that they only get very few students; the teacher would just spend his time joking with them. I didn't go to school because it was a waste of time."

Overcoming the attendance requirement was reportedly an easy task. Participant #40 did not face any problem with the attendance requirement "because no one attended. They can't dismiss the whole cohort." Participant #32 did not face any problems in this respect either. He says, "To be honest, my dad was friends with the headmaster. I didn't go because I didn't learn anything there. Why would I go then?" In his experience, up till the first secondary students were attending school regularly and teachers were committed while the role of the school diminished starting the second secondary. He elaborates, "The students would be given the free choice to either attend or leave class and spend the time in the playground. Students did not attend. The only purpose of going to school turned into the sole aim of fulfilling the attendance requirement. But the school became purposeless. I used to like my school and used to attend every day until the end of 1st secondary. But I didn't attend in the 2nd or 3rd secondary." He attributes this phenomenon to absence of supervision as well as inefficient school schedule, which makes it almost impossible to depend on school. He explains, "First, the time available at school to teach Chemistry, for example, is 45 minutes/week. At the private lesson, it's 6 hours/week. Second, at school a teacher is not obliged to teach. No one holds him responsible." Participant #5 also highlights the time factor and the insufficiency of school classes: "The time allocated for class is a lot less than that in the private lesson, so the nature of teaching is never comparable."

Participant #34 cannot agree more. He too did not attend his private school because "students don't go." He explains, "Teachers wouldn't feel like teaching because they know students take private lessons. It's now known that GSEC means private lessons. No one depends on school anymore." He too reports getting help from his school teachers when help is sought but he finds sporadic help difficult to depend on. He underscores the importance of follow up with the parents as a privilege of private lessons. He says, "My private French tutor was excellent. She was following up and would call my mom to give her reports."

Participant #44's conditions at school could have been perfect for a smooth educational experience. Yet, lack of seriousness and commitment on the teachers' part led to the failure of the educational process. He did not attend school in both years although his was a private school with a fairly small class size. He says, "My class was 17; it would have been like a private lesson." "Had I gone, I'd find someone to teach me," he adds. He also remembers receiving help from his school teachers in the second year when he sometimes asked for it. However, he believes that the follow-up and frequent tests found in the private lessons and missing at school make a whole difference to the educational process.

Similarly, Participant #38 believes that there is no longer education at school. He believes that private lessons outweigh school because of the "time available, organization, class management, … etc." He explains that the attendance requirement at school can easily be manipulated by "attending once in a fortnight or paying a small fine," which he did. In his experience, the role of school is diminishing not only in GSEC years but in earlier years as well. He started taking private lessons in the preparatory school and even reports that his sister, who is in the third preparatory at the time of the interview, "takes private lessons in all subjects because no education is offered to her at school."

Participant#47 did not attend school during the GSEC either and wishes school offered structured education. He reports that he was not taught anything at school and, therefore, his school failed to enforce an attendance policy. According to him, teachers give private lessons because they need to make money and students take private lessons because their family's force them to do so. So, there is an unspoken agreement that there is no need for school. He believes, however, that with classes packed with 60 or 70 students per class, it would be difficult for teachers to teach even if they wanted to. He says, "I wish they had offered us the same system like the private lessons. It would have been a lot better. They're normally the same teachers; only they know students will stop attending after a few days."

Participant #46, the only participant reporting that she was obliged to attend school to fulfill the attendance requirement, confirms that she was wasting her time at school because no education was taking place. She says, "We would spend the time from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm doing nothing. The teacher would step in to chitchat. The English teacher was the only one who taught us. But she was not obliged to do so; she was doing us a favour …Those who depend on the school teaching wouldn't be able to get ¼ of the score they get with the help of private lessons." She reports that she failed to manage her time or the stress she was put under, which eventually affected her final score. She explains, "I'd go to school in the morning and have private lessons in the evening. I'd spend nights either crying or studying, when I'm supposed to sleep. It was a psychological stress. I had started developing depression in the last 3 months. Some subjects were too complicated and demanding. Sometimes, we'd attend 4 lessons per week for the same subject."

Participant #52 reports that she did not attend school in the first year, then attended in the second irregularly because her private school managed to recruit "the popular teachers in private

lesson centres while the class size was smaller than that in the private lessons." She still could

not depend on school alone and took private lessons in all subjects, which created a load on her.

Close follow-up was what she missed at school. She explains, "Private lessons are better because

we have exams every session. At school there were no exams. The teacher would teach but there

was no follow-up. Had I had exams at school, I wouldn't have taken private lessons ... I needed

the follow-up and test-taking training, which are missing at school."

Even Participant #9, who reports that 60% of his education at the GSEC relied on school,

was still complaining of the educational service provided at school forcing him to take private

lessons in most subjects: "There was recklessness at school, especially at the end of the school

year which is the most important time of the year ... Most of the teachers are not committed."

- **Summary**

To sum up, findings showed that while the participants reported that school experiences

differ depending on students' socioeconomic classes, the majority agreed that their school

experience during GSEC was of equally poor quality and that the role of school during these 2

years is next to non-existent. The shocking data of 83.7% of the participants reporting failure to

attend most of their classes at school during their last year of GSEC is an alarming indicator of a

failing system. In fact, the participants' perception of their GSEC experience and of the absent

role of school is particularly significant because it has its implications on their dependence on

private lessons and on the differential financial capabilities that entails, especially that an

overwhelming majority (87.2%) of the sample believed that private lessons offered them

education of adequate quality.

3. Private lessons

A vast majority (81.8%) agreed that private lessons are important to score highly in the

GSEC (Figure 4.10). While 83.7% of the sample reported failure to attend most of their classes

at school during their last year of GSEC (Figure 4.9 & Table 4.7 in the appendix), statistical data

showed that 100% of the sample took private lessons during GSEC (Figure 4.11 & Table 4.8 in

the appendix). When asked about the factors contributing to their decision on the number of

private lessons during the last year of GSEC, there were no significant differences across groups.

In light of the absence of the role of school, the academic factor was the most obvious to the

participants. While 89.1% of the whole group of participants decided it was based on their

academic needs, other factors such as family pressure, peer pressure, and financial reasons were

not perceived as working factors as they totaled 10.9%, 7.3%, and 3.6% respectively. While only

2 students regarded finance as a decisive factor, statistical analysis showed significant correlation

(at the level of 0.05) between the participants' socioeconomic status and the number of private

lessons they took in their final year at school (Figure 4.11 & Table 4.8 in the appendix), which

suggests that regardless of what the students are willing to admit – probably due to the sensitivity

of the question – or are conscious of, the availability of financial resources, or lack thereof, do

affect a student's opportunity to receive academic help. The relation between the participants'

socioeconomic status and the number of private lessons they took could also possibly go

unnoticed by the participants because it could be an indirect one since more LSG participants

were in the Arts section (Fig 4.5 & Table 4.3 in the appendix), which could, in turn, affect their

decision based on their academic needs. Although private lessons for the Arts section were

reportedly cheaper, it was also perceived as an easier section.

Bar Chart
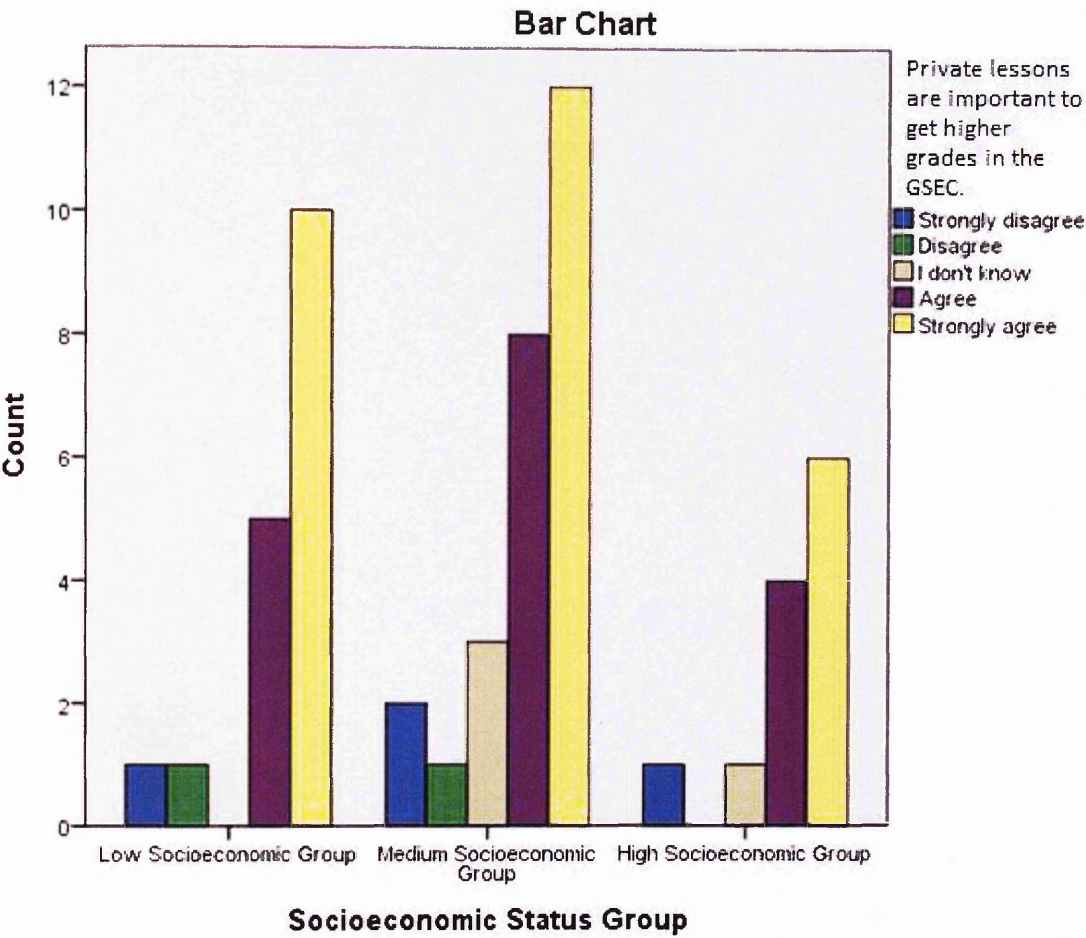
Figure 4.10: Private lessons are important to get higher grades in the GSEC.

Bar Chart
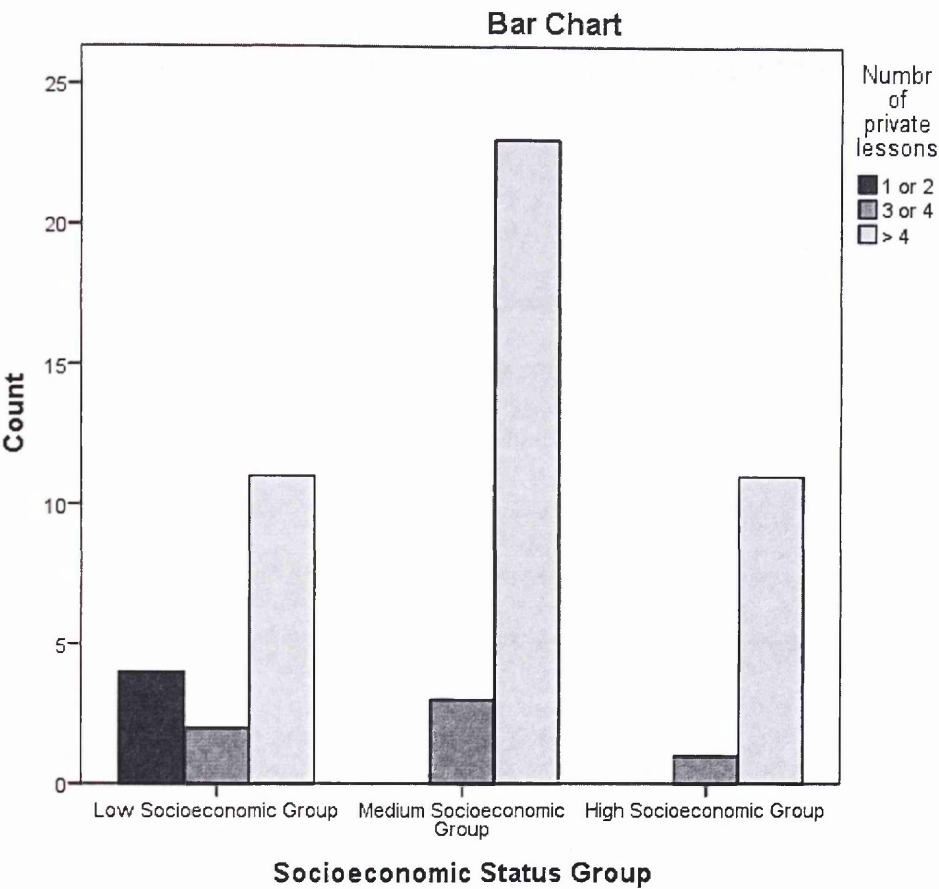
Figure 4.11: Number of private lessons.

3.1. Private lessons as a financial burden

Among those who decided in their questionnaire responses that finance was not a

decisive factor of the number of subjects for which she took private lessons was Participant #2,

who explained in the interview that finance, however, did affect her decision to skip some

private sessions at times. She said, "Private lessons were expensive. Some people were helping.

Sometimes I wouldn't go to the lessons because of lack of money. Some teachers sensed that and

decided to give me the lessons for free ... Concerning the private lessons I couldn't take for

financial reasons, I'd read the lessons on my own and ask a friend to help me with the difficult

parts." She added: "I would pay LE200 – LE250 per month, but that's because many people

wouldn't let me pay. That was a lot. My father's current salary is LE250. My dad has an extra

job at night for LE180 per month."

Participant #17 did not take any private lessons except for a few revision sessions at the

end due to "lack of money and time." He did not attend school either. He has been financially

independent since he was in the second preparatory year (grade 8) and had to work during GSEC

years to provide for himself. He reports that he only studied for two weeks before the exams and

depended heavily on cheating and ended up scoring high. Participant #4 agrees private lessons

were a financial "burden" and sometimes a deterrent: "Sometimes, we had no money." She says

that she was required to pay LE2,000/month for Science section private lessons while her school

fees were LE70/year.

Participant #5, who also thinks private lessons were a financial burden, states that at

times she would skip some lessons for that reason. She reports that her private lessons budget

was around LE500/month because she was in the Arts section whose lessons, according to her,

are cheaper than the other two sections and because she used to receive help from some teachers

in the form of free or discounted lessons.

Participant #12 would pay LE500/month for her private lessons; yet, she had to collect

them from different sources. She puts her financial struggle in words: "I was paying LE500

every month, which is a big amount. Dad was paying LE200, my grandmother LE100, and my

aunts LE100 each. LE500 was too much for dad. His monthly salary is LE1000. Had my dad

given me the whole LE500, he wouldn't have been able to put bread on the table for the rest of

the month." She explains that hers was a common experience, "The same used to happen with

my friends. A friend of mine receives money from her brother abroad." She too had to skip

private lessons at times for financial reasons while giving fabricated excuses to her colleagues to

save face.

Quite expectedly, however, it was noted that the higher the socioeconomic indicator was,

the more likely the participant would report an ability to manage the financial burden. For

example, Participant #38 says, "I'd pay around LE 1,500/month. It was a load, especially that my

sister would take private lessons as well, but we managed." Being a Maths section student,

Participant #25 reports paying LE2,500/month for private lessons. He agrees that private lessons

were a financial burden: "That was a lot for my family. It was a load, but we were able to

manage."

Interestingly enough, Participant #32 changed schools to compensate for the private

lessons expenses. While he stopped attending school during both years of the GSEC and paying

around LE1,800/month for private lessons, he decided to save the LE5,000 tuition fees he paid

yearly for his private school. He says, "I transferred after the 1st secondary to a public school, the

fees for which were LE300 only just to save money, since I wasn't attending school anyway.

That balanced out the financial issues a little bit." He literally exchanged school for private

lessons.

Participant #40 reports "paying a lot of money for private lessons" as well. He too was

paying the full fees of his private school in addition to the expenses of the private lessons.

However, unlike Participant #32, he did not have to change schools to save money. He reports

that the expenses were not a burden for his family. He says, "All this was a lot less than what we

pay at my private university."

Participant #44, who was in the Arts section, reports that private lessons in his section were cheaper and less frequent; thus, he did not find expenses of his private lessons a financial burden. However, he believes that expenses of private lessons affect many students' choice of their GSEC section. He says, "Most people who join the Arts section do not join it because they want it. They are either escaping the Science and Maths sections or are saving the expenses."

Even Participants #46, #47, and #52, who belong to the HSG, believe that private lessons are financially draining. Participant #47 thinks "the money spent on private lessons was a lot" and feels it was spent "in vain." Participant #46 too thinks her private lessons expenses were a burden. She was in the Maths section and reports that "a single session could reach LE100 or LE200 ... It was a lot of money; a whole separate budget." She confirms that her family struggled to finance her private lessons although finance was not a decisive factor of whether or not to attend a lesson. She believes "it's unfair to the poor class because they can't afford the same expensive teachers" and reports that she used to pay around LE3,500 per month and that, in general, the expensive teachers are better. Participant #52 felt that money was wasted on private lessons. She reports paying around LE1,000 per month as private lessons fees in addition to the extra transportation fees they incur. In her opinion, these were extra expenses that were unnecessarily paid. She says, "My dad would think sometimes: why are we paying this money in addition to school fees?"

3.2. Private lessons are not the answer

All interviewees agreed that private lessons are problematic yet inevitable. Private lessons are perceived as a problem because they replaced school and created a parallel educational system. Participant #5 affirms: "Had I been taught at school, I wouldn't have sought

private lessons." Participant #32 agrees, "I wish we could just study at school and wish private lessons did not exist." Participant #34 seconds this view, "I swear had there been proper education at school, I wouldn't have taken private lessons." Participant #52 adds, "I don't want private lessons. I want to be able to attend school."

Private tutoring is perceived as a problem because it destroyed the notions of free education and equal access to school education. Secondary education is no longer available to all; it is only for those who can afford it and thus a great financial burden has been created on families in a nation 70% of whom are on or under the poverty line (CAPMASg). Participant #28 maintains: "Private lessons are a problem because some students cannot pay for the lessons so they don't take them." Participant #40 adds, "Private lessons are definitely a problem because it's unfair. Not all students are able to receive lessons with good, expensive teachers."

Private lessons were also considered problematic because they were wasting time. Participant #47, who took private lessons in response to his family pressure, believes private lessons are a waste of money, time and effort. He had difficulty managing his time and believes this limited his study time. "Final revisions would have been enough in some subjects," he says. Participant #6, who did not attend school, believes that "it would have been difficult to go and attend private lessons at the same time. This wouldn't have given me time to study." Participant #52 stresses that school would have been a better option because it would have saved her time. She explains, "I'd prefer to attend school; at least it's more organized and from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm instead of having to go to different places to get private lessons."

One of the reasons Private lessons were also perceived as a problems was because they allowed for psychological abuse. Participant #17 believes that "teachers scare students," but he

believes that "the whole thing is a lot easier." He also condemns the role of the media in creating

a scary image of the GSEC. He says, "People always scare us from GSEC and we keep hearing

news of people fainting and so on. I realized afterwards that this is nonsense." Similarly,

Participant #46 believes that realizing that students are concerned about their future, teachers

take advantage and put pressure on students to take private lessons. She says that teachers

"terrorize" students. She adds, "They make it seem mandatory to attend their lessons; otherwise

we won't be able to understand … We'd follow them in fear of messing up with our future. That

was financial abuse and a huge mental stress." Reporting that she was close to depression

because she had to attend both school and private lessons, Participant #46 concludes that "private

lessons are a huge problem because they form a financial and psychological burden; but if they

were absent, students would get lost because they are the only source of guidance."

3.3. Reasons of private lessons

The reasons of the problem as expressed by the interviewees were students' reluctance to

go to school, teachers' recklessness and lack of conscience, lack of supervision, packed classes,

poor educational service, and low teacher wages that demotivate them and force them to find

alternative ways to make a living. Teachers' financial need was specifically acknowledged by a

number of participants. For example, Participant #6 explains: "This has happened because of the

financial incentive, then it became a habit … The salaries of teachers are one factor. Some

teachers resort to private lessons although they don't like it only because they need to cover their

expenses. Life is difficult." Participant #17 explains that "students take private lessons because

no attention is given to them at school. Teachers do not exert enough effort at school because if

they did, no one would seek to take private lessons with them. Teachers need to resort to private

lessons because of their low salaries." Participant #25 confirms, "There's no enough financial

incentive at school. They can't live. Their salaries are the lowest in Egypt." He adds that if

teachers are given their financial rights, they would not give private lessons because it's tiring.

He explains, "They work for 12 hours. I know teachers who can't find the time to see their

children, but they need this source of money." Participant #28 agrees that teachers' wages are too

low while Participant #32 exclaims, "Teachers cannot live on their governmental salaries. What

can they do? They have to give private lessons." Participant #40 agrees that the culture has

changed and attributes this change to the absence of financial incentive. He explains, "Students

do not want to listen and teachers do not want to teach. If I ask a teacher something, he would

answer, but he wouldn't teach like a teacher who is paid to give private lessons. This has become

the norm." Participant #44 believes the problem stems from two combined factors: low teacher

salaries coupled up with lack of supervision. He explains, "The teacher makes peanuts from his

job at school, so, naturally, he wants to make money. So he resorts to teaching in private lessons.

Consequently, he wouldn't teach at school. Why bother exert effort with 80 students, especially

that no teacher gets punished for low performance. There's no supervision." Participant #52

believes that if the follow-up provided at private lessons is provided at school, students would go

to school. However, she believes this necessitates planning and provision of better conditions.

She explains, for example, that "private tutors have assistants who help them out" and that

teachers resort to private tutoring because "it is a lot of money."

    Family pressure to take private lessons was pointed out in the interviews. Participant #4

says: "I could have studied the Arabic subject without any lessons, but we take private lessons

just for our families to be reassured ... I didn't need all these private lessons. But I had to take

them so that my mom is reassured." Participant #6 suggests that parental supervision is easier in

private lessons because of easier communication with teachers. She explains, "It's difficult to

convince parents that schools are better because they know they can communicate with teachers

better and follow up with their children in private lessons rather than in schools." Participant #47

confirms that he took private lessons because that was his "family's wish." He says, "If it were to

me, I wouldn't necessarily have taken private lessons at the GSEC. I could have taken fewer

lessons; only once or twice a week. But my family thought it was a must to take private lessons

in all subjects. But I didn't want to do that." He explains that it would have been better to take

private lessons in the subjects where he needed help only, not in all subjects.

Family pressure worked the other way around in the case of Participant #28. He was

denied the opportunity to take private lessons in the first year of the GSEC because his father

"thought they were a waste of time." He did not go to school either and used to study on his own.

He explains, "I didn't go to school because students don't go, so teachers do not step into the

classes. I tried going; we'd play sports and go home. Had I asked a teacher to explain something,

he'd help me, but attending a regular class would not happen. I used to ask teachers to help me in

the four subjects I was focusing on." The result was a decision not to sit for the Chemistry test a

week before the exams because he could see he "was not on top of it," which eventually lead him

to split the second GSEC year into 2 in order to be able to manage six subjects and score high in

all of them. He ended up taking private lessons in his second and third years of GSEC because

his father was now convinced they are a necessity.

Other participants also highlighted the cultural and socially-induced psychological

pressure on students to take private lessons. Participant #6 explains that it has been culturally and

psychologically internalized in the students' minds that "private lessons are the way to

understanding." Participant #46 believes that part of the reason lies in "the *fact* that private

lessons have become a custom … We simply follow suit of our predecessors rather than respond

to our needs." Participant #12 agrees, "it's become a culture." Participant #40 adds, "Everyone has now been accustomed to this." Participant #5 confirms, "I took private lessons in subjects when I didn't need to just because everyone else did." The last few quotes could also draw attention to peer pressure.

Participant #6 underscores the idea that school low attendance levels and private lessons are revolving into a vicious circle. She says that her absence from school during the GSEC years was due to lack of teaching because private lessons became commonplace. At the same time, according to her, students resort to private lessons because of the poor educational service at school. She says: "There's no teaching at school because it's known by all that everyone takes private lessons. The number of students who attend is very small ... If there were good teaching at schools, students would go. So long as there's no good teaching, one has to resort to private lessons. It's common practice."

Participant #25 gives a similar account: "I took private lessons because I didn't go to school because teachers do not step into the class and if they do they don't teach and just tell us to do whatever we want. This is happening because of private lessons. Why would teachers teach at school if they can give private lessons? Everyone takes private lessons." He reports that he was even denied help when asking for it. He explains, "I tried to ask teachers at school to help me. The Maths teacher often sent me away and refused to help. Most teachers would only help if they feel like it; if not, they won't help. It depends on their mood."

3.4. Solutions to the private lessons epidemic

Effectively supervising the educational process at schools, adequately raising the teachers' wages while introducing disciplinary actions for underperforming teachers, obliging

students to attend schools, fixing the curricula and the testing system, banning and penalizing private lessons, and changing the whole GSEC system which is currently perceived as entirely ineffective were among the suggested solutions to manage the private lessons problem. In a nutshell, Participant #12 says, "If I had found teachers to teach me at school, I wouldn't have taken private lessons. Instead of going to different teachers, I'd have them all in one place. It would be easier and more organized."

Participant #46 contends that the solution lies in going back to school through taking a number of measures including closing down the private tutoring centres and increasing teachers' salaries," which she believes will force teachers to work at school. Participant #12, who believes that "teachers are taking advantage of the situation and of their receiving very low wages" agrees that raising the teachers' salaries guarantees they go back to school. "Had they got a good salary, they would teach at school," she explains. Participant #34's father is a private school teacher who still has to depend on private lessons to be able to financially support his family. He, therefore, confirms, "Had my dad been given a salary that guarantees a decent life, he wouldn't have given private lessons. My dad thinks students should go to school, but he has to give private lessons to be able to manage his life." Participant #34 believes that once enough effort is exerted to fix these conditions, private lessons should be banned by law. He adds, "If a student is weak, he should still receive help from school. He shouldn't pay any more money other than what he pays for school. The school is the only place where one should receive education, nowhere else."

Participant #40 as well agrees private lessons should be banned and teachers should receive better treatment and defines that as "teacher education and higher wages." He realizes it is a challenge though. He explains that "it's difficult to convince teachers who would now make over LE60,000 to be content with LE 5,000, which is the best that could be done, compared to

the current LE1,000 or something." He adds, "I'm not sure how to convince them. But it has to

be tried." Participant #28 too points out that the problem has now aggravated since private

lessons has become a very tempting business as the profit could reach rocketing figures, in which

case, reverting to schools would be a difficult choice. Participant #32 thinks that it now got to a

point that "even if salaries are raised, teachers would still want to make more money." In this

respect, Participant #52 explains that tutors are not going to willingly give up their huge income

from private lessons even if their salaries are raised. Therefore, she believes that raising their

salaries should be coupled up with prohibiting private lessons by law.

Participant #38 believes that the secret to overcoming private lessons lies in creating an

atmosphere conducive to learning at schools, which requires strict supervision, relevant

curricula, aroused passion, and modified assessment procedure that moves the whole educational

process away from being test-led. He says,

> I'm not sure of the mechanism of forcing this, but teachers have to teach. There has to be
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> supervision. Students have to attend. They shouldn't be forced, but should be motivated.
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> Having a passion for learning the offered curriculum is essential. So curricula have to be
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> improved. Passion and relevance are absent. The goal has been altered from education to
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> getting a high score by any means. So, eventually, students cheat and pass while they
>
> haven't learnt anything.

From Participant #47's point of view, solving the private lessons problem necessitates

effecting radical changes in the educational system. He believes that in addition to raising

teachers' salaries and introducing an effective supervision system that puts pressure on teachers

to do their job, students should also be given more liberty to make their own choices of subjects.

He believes that passion has a great impact on student motivation and, in turn, on achievement. He adds that reform should also take into account the provision of necessary facilities and space. Participant #34 agrees that more attention needs to be given to the educational process at schools. He says, "Spend money on education and on schools. There should be better human conditions … [Education] should be a top priority."

- **Summary**

Findings of this research suggest that private lessons have practically replaced schools. With 100% of the sample taking private lessons during GSEC, and 80+% of them reporting being absent from school and perceiving private lessons as essential to excel in GSEC, private tutoring has become an essential resource for competing in the GSEC race. It is, therefore, essential to examine the factors affecting accessibility to private tutoring as reported by students as well as their perception of the phenomenon.

In light of the absence of the role of schools, academic need was the number-one factor affecting the students' decision to take private lessons. However, both quantitative and qualitative data reveal that a student's financial status does indeed affect his/her accessibility to private lessons which highlights the absence of equal opportunity offered to students belonging to different socioeconomic classes. According to the data, not only does the financial status influence students' decision to attend private lessons, but it is also a determinant of the quality of chosen teacher.

While perceived as an essential replacement of schools, private tutoring was viewed as a problem because it created an unregulated parallel educational system that destroyed the notions of free education and equal access to school education. It was regarded as a financial burden and

a time waster and was thought to allow for psychological and financial abuse. Private tutoring was also seen as a natural outcome of the deteriorating, unrealistic teacher salaries that forced them to seek an alternative source of income. Other factors such as lack of supervision, packed classes, and test-led education were regarded to have made the shift from schools to private tutoring possible. Engraved into society, private tutoring are constantly reinforced through familial, cultural and psychological pressures.

Suggestions to overcome the private lessons problems stem from realizing that school is the only place where education should be delivered, and hence taking all the necessary measures that ensure that it stays there is the goal. Challenging as it is, effecting radical changes in the educational system is regarded as essential if private lessons were to be addressed. Adequately raising the teachers' salaries, effectively supervising the educational process at schools, introducing disciplinary actions for underperforming teachers, creating an atmosphere conducive to learning, designing relevant and motivating curricula, modifying the assessment system, and banning and penalizing private lessons were all viewed as necessary procedures that are not currently in place.

4. Test-Driven Education

Since the HE access process depends in theory on the GSEC competition, it becomes essential to examine the students' perceptions of the nature of the education the GSEC offers and the type of examination it uses to put the students in order. Since the GSEC scores are used as the basis for a subsequent HE admission process, it is crucial to question the interpretation of these scores as perceived by students and whether they believe the GSEC offers a fair competition for all. Students' perceptions are particularly significant because these perceptions

seem to shape their faith in the system, or lack thereof, and nurture a culture that does not seem to trust the process as the following data suggest.

'Memorization' is a recurrent word in all interviews. All the interviewees across the three socioeconomic groups decided that exam preparation meant heavy dependence on memorization. Most of them expressed their lack of understanding of the objective, applicability or relevance of much of the knowledge they study in the GSEC, which greatly affects their motivation and grasp of this knowledge. They decide that what they experience through the GSEC is test-driven education.

For example, participant #2 states, "Much of the Maths was useless for me ... I have no idea what I'd do with it. I don't know its applications." Participant #4 puts it clear, "95% of the curricula depends on memorization. Education is not supposed to be like that. My biology teacher would instruct me to memorize the book word for word. We are supposed to see experiments instead of reading about them. That would make it more internalized. Even physics was basically based on memorization. It's all about getting grades rather than learning." Participant #5 agrees that "the percentage of memorization is certainly higher than that of understanding; let's say 70%." Because of this heavy dependence on memorization, Participant #6 puts the whole educational process at stake. She says, "I was in the Arts section; 80% of it depends on memorization. I feel I haven't learned much from GSEC. I was just studying for a score."

Participant #12, who moved from the Science to the Arts section between the two years of GSEC, confirms that "both sections depended on memorization ... Even Maths did; teachers would make us memorize answers. There were steps that we had to follow. There's no creativity.

They wouldn't cultivate our minds; they just make us memorize steps ... If one doesn't

memorize, one's understanding is in vain. The grader wants you to answer like the book." She

believes GSEC scores reflect the students' ability to memorize: "It has nothing to do with my

thinking abilities and skills." She too believes that passing the exams is the sole aim of the

GSEC, as compared to learning. She attributes the problem to poor teaching abilities saying,

"Some teachers do not understand the subjects they teach ... I would memorize a lot of things in

chemistry without understanding them. I would ask the teacher but he would give no

explanation." Participant #12 has a very negative perception of her school education. Other than

becoming literate, she does not think she learned anything at all there.

Participant #28, who is doing a third year of GSEC, does not think he is learning either.

He thinks that about 15% of the education he receives is beneficial. He adds, "The rest is useless

and irrelevant. I don't know how I will use this knowledge." Agreeing with his colleagues that

he hasn't learnt "anything" during GSEC, Participant #17 also believes that the curricula are

irrelevant and rely heavily on spoon-feeding. He maintains that his and his colleagues' aim has

always been to pass the test rather than to learn and suggests that the curricula should be

designed around research.

Participant #32, who joined the Maths section in order to escape from the amount of

memorization in the Science section, reports that the Maths section was not much different. He

says, "The GSEC aims at collecting grades. It depends primarily on memorizing, even though I

was in the Maths section." He mentions subjects like Chemistry and Physics and explains that

most questions in their exams would test knowledge rather than application or analysis. Even the

application and analysis questions are typical to questions that students have been trained on

before. According to him, learning is not the purpose anymore and teachers are aware of that. He

says, "The most famous secondary English instructor in Egypt would say: 'You're not here to understand, you're here to get 50/50.' He would give that answer even when he is asked to explain something." Participant #32 explains that he finds memorization a very difficult practice and that he prefers the application side of the scientific subjects, stressing that passion was important for his learning. He confirms, "I learned what I liked. These are the things that I still remember. Things that influenced me like poetry and novels. In science subjects, it was the parts that forced my mind to work as if I went to the gym and had my mind work out." To him, passion and relevance were two conditions to learning.

Participant #9 too makes a clear connection between passion and learning. He explains that the subjects he studied during both years of the GSEC "did not nourish any of [his] skills except for Philosophy and English because [he] had special interest in them." He confirms, "I benefited from the subjects that I liked, and didn't benefit from those that I didn't like." He too affirms that studying subjects in his section (Arts) mainly depended on memorization.

Participant #34 agrees that studying for the GSEC was totally based on memorization in his experience. He explains, "80% of GSEC is based on memorization. I used to memorize things without understanding them. It's all about test-taking training. You would find the same questions." He too says he "used to memorize Maths." He contends that at the GSEC, "the focus is on how to pass the test; then, this is how one's future is determined." He reports failing to relate to many of the subjects that he studied at school.

Participant #38, who believes that "exams measure memorization rather than mental abilities," underlines the importance of a student-centered education that is tailored to satisfy individual needs rather than expects students to fall into fixed patterns. He makes a clear

connection between relevance, passion, and freedom of choice on the one hand and learning on the other. He says,

> Students should be the core of the educational process. In reality, a student is forced to study things he's not interested in and ends up learning nothing. The role of everyone else involved in the process should be to help facilitate learning what the student likes to learn. If that's happening, the student would feel motivated to learn. But now, students feel they are obliged and have no ownership of the process. The current process is purposeless. It's meaningless. Teachers go to school to sign for attendance; students go because their parents force them to go. So, all parties take part in the process while they lack any will to do so.

He reports that most subjects he studied in the GSEC were irrelevant and compares them to his HE subjects which he finds more relevant. He explains, "I don't remember the content of the History subject because it's irrelevant to my current life. It was incoherent. There is no clear message behind the curriculum; only bits and pieces from different eras." He stresses the idea of freedom of choice and contends that for a fairer GSEC system, students should be given more options.

Participant #47 was no different. He too was very unsatisfied with the current GSEC system. He says, "Studying at the GSEC is useless. I haven't benefitted from it at all … It is totally based on memorization." He reports that private lessons are sessions of rote practice so that students can recite answers in exams. He compares the practice to the *kottab* practice of public primary schools in the Egyptian villages at the beginning of last century where teachers would have their students just repeat sentences after him. He too highlights students' lack of

ownership of the educational process and believes they should be given wider choices. He

further underscores the problem of irrelevance of the GSEC curricula. He picks the example of

Maths, "I like Maths because it requires understanding, but I still don't know what to do with it. I

don't know its applications in life. Also, it's irrelevant to what I study at the university." He is

studying business.

Participant #40 believes that the GSEC curricula and exams did not cultivate or measure

his abilities. He too complained from memorization even in Maths and Physics. Therefore, he

believes that "the whole system needs to be totally changed." Participant #44 too has a very

negative view of his school education experience. He says, "The only thing I benefited from my

education was languages, English and French, due to the fact that I was in a language school. But

the national curriculum is really totally unbeneficial." He believes that the curricula are irrelevant

and the objectives are not made clear, which, in turn, affects the motivation to learn. He confirms

that the GSEC "is all based on memorization" and believes that its exams "measure nothing

other than the ability to cheat, and in case the exam invigilators are strict, then it would measure

the ability to memorize. But there are no strict invigilators."

Participant #52 believes that a system that capitalizes on memorization and makes

students compete based on their ability to memorize and cheat rather than understand and apply

is a system that needs to be changed. She says, "I know many students who got very high scores

in GSEC and can't perform well at HE, because their scores did not reflect their effort or their

abilities." Irrelevant, wordy curricula that contain scientific mistakes failed to gain her trust and

satisfaction.

Although Participant #25 believes that education at GSEC was relevant to his life and to his HE and that it was certainly beneficial, he still confirms that there was around 50% dependence on memorization and that scoring required extensive dependence on memorization. He explains, "Those who memorized could do even better than those who understood. They memorized answers to questions and were trained on test-taking."

4.1. Level of satisfaction of the GSEC assessment system

None of the interviewees thought the GSEC system was successful or a fair one. Vocabulary such as "fiasco," "disaster," and "failure" were used to describe the current system. Participant #4 confirms, "The GSEC score reflects the students' effort. But since that effort is required in memorization, then that's the kind of mental ability that's being measured. Exams measure memorization rather than understanding to a large extent." Participant #6 agrees, "The score reflects my ability to memorize more than my ability to understand." Participant #5 too questions the interpretation of the GSEC scores regarding a student's academic abilities and confirms that the current system is inefficient. She explains, "There's lack of fairness in the system of HE admission; 1% difference in the score could make a difference in joining disciplines whereas it does not necessarily mean a difference in abilities."

Furthermore, most interviewees thought it was unfair to make judgments on a student's skills and abilities based on subjects irrelevant to their desired fields of study. The idea of using abilities tests as a fairer procedure for HE admission instead of the current admission system that is purely based on the GSEC test score was recommended by many interviewees. For example, Participant #4 says, "I believe the GSEC system should be destroyed and an abilities system should be adopted. The GSEC exams should only be a matter of pass or fail. The whole process

has become too complicated and catastrophic. Students face psychological instabilities because of it." Participant #25 thinks that "depending on abilities tests would be better to avoid injustice. This would overcome the problem of injustice in grading." Participant #32 agrees, "The whole idea of categorizing people based on their GSEC score is irrelevant. There should be abilities tests for each discipline. The High School certificate should just be a transitional phase. The subjects we do at high school are irrelevant to the different HE disciplines." Therefore, in his views, tests only discriminate "those who know how to study."

Participant #12 believes that adopting an abilities system would have a capacity for the justice and equal opportunity presently missing in the current GSEC system because it would allow judgments based on subjects relevant to anticipated disciplines. Such system, in his views, would encompass passion and talent. Participant #17 reports on a number of cases including a relative of his who missed a place in the Faculty of Engineering due to a 0.1% difference from the required score. He could not afford a private university and ended up in the Faculty of Business. He believes that this 0.1% does not reflect lower Engineering abilities or skills. He contends that "the GSEC score does not reflect one's inclinations, skills, or abilities. This should not be the system. There should be abilities tests."

Participant #40 confirms that the current system "has to be changed. The whole system should be abolished and replaced by an abilities system: One only needs to pass the school exams then do further university tests." He believes judgment should be based on relevant assessment and gives an example of the Arabic subject that cost him 10.5 points over the 2 years of GSEC, which affected his ability to join a Maths-related specialization in a public university "although it's irrelevant to that specialization," according to him.

Participant #46 agrees and thinks it is unfair to use the GSEC test scores to determine the students' future areas of specialization because these scores reflect no more than an ability to memorize as opposed to higher mental abilities and students are judged based on irrelevant areas of study. She wonders, "Why would a student's dream to become a doctor be destroyed based on 1 grade that he could have lost in the Arabic rather than the biology test?" She too recommends an abilities-test system and promotes a school education that helps students to uncover their abilities and areas of interest over the years. She explains,

> If someone wants to study a given major, the question should be: Do you have the abilities that qualify you? No one knows, even the students do not know their strengths and weaknesses. Everyone just memorizes. A student would only study to get a score that qualifies him to join an X faculty, but he could fail in it afterwards because of lack of the relevant abilities. On the other hand, so many people score short of their desired faculty whereas they could have the mind perfect for it. That's the point.

Participant #28 believes that fixing the GSEC system should start at the primary school. He says: "This would eventually lead to a competent employee. Attention should be given to children so that they're useful citizens who can think."

Participant #34 criticizes the GSEC system on the grounds that it measures a student's achievement based on a 3-hour summative test. He says, "I'm not convinced that one's effort throughout the year should be measured in 3 hours." He also finds that relevance of studied subjects to fields of specialization is essential. He explains, "One should study subjects relevant to what they want to do later; why bother with other stuff?" He is all for an abilities-test system.

It is noteworthy, however, that a number of disciplines in Egypt already require passing

abilities tests as an admission condition such as the Military, the Police, Tourism and Hotels, and

Fine Arts. Participant #17 wonders: "Why isn't that applied to all faculties?" However, reported

experiences reveal that corruption stands in the way and that the currently-practiced abilities-test

system is not a fair one either. Few interviewees made remarks and/or reported on their

experiences regarding automatically passing these tests upon paying their required fees

indicating that, in their views, it is business that governs the process rather than academic

standards. Participant #9, who joined the Faculty of Law, was discussing the possibility of

transferring to the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels when he said: "Transferring to Tourism and

Hotel was available to me upon passing its abilities and language tests. I was going to pass the

tests anyway so long as I pay its fees ..." Participant #32, who joined a private Applied Arts

institute that requires abilities tests, had a similar experience. During the application process, he

did his abilities tests at a public university upon finishing a 3-day course. He explains, "They

would only pass those who take the course at the university. Those who take the course

elsewhere wouldn't pass. The course was for fees of course. So, it was all about money." His

private institute was reportedly even lax about the admission requirements. He says, "They said I

could use the ability tests I did in the public university, but also said if I didn't do the tests, I'd

still be accepted so long as I pay the tuition fees." "Money talks," he adds.

4.2. Cheating

Cheating was one of the most interesting areas that stood out in the interviews. All the

interviewees reported that cheating took place in their GSEC exam halls as a matter of course.

Students reported a variety of cheating mechanisms including copying from notes, copying from

one another, moving seats in the exam halls to facilitate copying, exchanging answer papers to

write for one another, already having the exam and its model answer beforehand – sometimes

through private lessons –, and using mobile phones in the exam halls to get model answers using

different platforms – Twitter hashtags and BBM were named. It is worth noting that the

researcher received SMSs and phone calls from 2 different participants during the GSEC English

exam; the researcher did not take the phone calls but the SMSs asked for answers.

The role of the invigilators reportedly varied from being strict to inviting. An average

estimation of 50-70% of invigilators allow cheating. According to the interviewees, the

invigilators would either pretend they do not see cheating, allow it openly, leave the exam halls

altogether, encourage the students, or even urge them to cheat in the name of benevolence and

cooperation. Participant #52 reports on one incident, "In the physics exam, the invigilator let us,

the 4 science students in the hall, sit next to one another contrary to the original plan. He kept

encouraging us to cheat from one another although no one asked for that and he offered to give

us more time. I'm not sure why he did that." Bribery was used to get away with cheating.

Participant #44 says, "I have a friend who socialized with an invigilator and promised to drive

her home in return to allowing him to cheat and it worked" while Participant #4 reports on

female students who "flirt with male invigilators" as a form of bribery.

In extreme cases, violence was reportedly used to force invigilators to allow cheating.

Three interviewees who do not know one another reported on three different incidents where

invigilators were threatened by students using Swiss knives. In one of the incidents, the

invigilator was beaten up outside the school for refusing to give in to the threat. According to the

interviewee, the invigilator was beaten up in front of the Police but the latter did not interfere.

Although all of the interviewees unanimously agreed that cheating on exams was immoral and unfair, 13 out of the 17 interviewees admitted to have cheated in exams and/or allowed others to cheat from them. At least six of the interviewees reflected a confused perception of what cheating entails. They would condemn cheating on a big scale but pardon cheating on a small scale at the pretext that forgetting is human and that needing a reminder would not mean that the student did not study. It was interesting to see some of these six participants demanding that cheating should be controlled but not totally banned. Participant #6 says, "There was cheating under the table, which was annoying. The invigilators were too strict. I wouldn't cheat unless I need just a word or something. Sometimes, one forgets due to stress and just needs some help. This should be OK. It's not wrong in this case. But I'm against copying pages. It's unfair." Participant #47 agrees, "Some people just need a word or two. To me, it's a kind of cooperation. It would be unfair if I give the whole answer, but if my colleague knows the answer but just forgot something, then that's not unfair."

Some of them would also equate the act of cheating with receiving answers not sharing answers. So, they would not think of themselves as guilty when they allow others to cheat from them. Participant #34 states: "I don't like cheating because I believe I'd get whatever (score) is meant to be ... The last time I cheated was in 3rd preparatory. Then I regretted it a great deal. I'm convinced cheating is wrong, but when asked I help others. When friends ask me, I can't deny them the answer, although I'm convinced it's wrong."

Most interviewees expressed lack of trust in the true interpretation of the GSEC scores and believed that they often times reflect the ability to cheat, which, in turn, allows students to secure themselves undeserved places in HE. Participant #32 puts it in a nutshell, "Cheating on tests is essential. It changes one's route 100%." He reports cheating in Economics – a subject

that he wasn't on top of – and getting the full mark in that subject. Similarly, Participant #28

believes that "people get into different faculties based on cheating. So, they don't deserve what

they get." Participant #40 adds, "Cheating should be banned because it does make drastic

changes in people's scores." Believing that GSEC scores reflect students' ability to memorize

and cheat, Participant #52 confirms, "In very few cases, GSEC scores reflect students' efforts.

But most people cheat so I can't trust that these scores reflect their effort … The scores do not

successfully put people in order. They do not reflect whether a student is good or smart. There's

a lot of unfairness in the scores. If a student can cheat, he'd get away with it and be equated with

other students." Participant #17 presents himself as a "living proof that this system is a failure

and a waste of time." He is an example of a student whose academic route has drastically

changed based on cheating only. He reports that he had to work long hours during GSEC to

provide for himself and did not have time to study but ended up scoring high depending on

cheating only. He explains, "I cheated a lot. I believe it's wrong, but I did it to pass. I only

studied for two weeks before the exams. I got 82% + 4% for excelling in sports and ended up in

a top faculty, Foreign Trade."

Different justifications were offered for the act of cheating. From the interviewees' point

of view, cheating takes place primarily because the students experience test-led education.

Participant #38 explains, "Passion and relevance are absent. So the goal is altered from education

to getting a high score by any means. So eventually students cheat and pass while they haven't

learnt anything." Participant #25 further elaborates: "I don't like cheating but I cheat because

when I know I have studied, I hate to miss grades." Students also cheat because they can.

Participant #38 talks of his fear to get caught as a deterrent of cheating. He explains, "I was

scared lest I get caught. That's why I couldn't cheat. I haven't seen anyone getting caught

cheating but I heard it happened in other exam halls." His practice suggests that enforcing academic dishonesty regulations would bear fruit. Participant #46 explains that when rules are lax, cheating is naturally reinforced. She says, "When a student finds that everyone around him/her is cheating and getting away with it, he/she would find it unfair to him/her, which encourages him/her to cheat." Furthermore, having the option to cheat when they can affects the motivation to study. Participant #44 says it out right, "I'm not motivated to study. I know I'll be able to cheat the whole thing. Why study then?"

Cheating is also believed to take place due to an induced sense of pity by colleagues or invigilators. Participant #12 explains, "I don't like cheating because it equates those who studied with those who didn't. But I help others because I pity them." Participant #47 confirms, "I normally help people who can't afford private lessons." Participant #17 adds, "In my examination hall, the students were acting in distress; the invigilators would pity them and allow them to cheat." It could also take place out of support to friends. Participant #9 holds, "I do cheat if I need to and do help when friends ask me because refusing to help could affect my relationship with my friends."

Following is a revealing story shared by Participant #44:

> It was time for the Geology exam when I hadn't studied anything. I had no idea what the curriculum was talking about. So I totally lost hope. I didn't want to have to re-sit the exam. I don't like to cheat. It's a matter of pride. I don't like to ask people for help. But I do cheat. After 2 hours of the 3-hour exam, the examination hall was totally lax. A colleague came to sit next to me and the invigilator said just keep your voices low so that the supervisor won't find out. Within half an hour my colleague's paper was copied in

mine. He even copied some parts in mine. I got 40 out of 50 in this exam. My colleague whom I copied from got 35, which means that the whole process is nonsense. People do not get what they deserve. Some deserve more; some deserve less.

I do cheat but I believe it's wrong. I also believe it's the reason why we are behind, because people take what they don't deserve. I try to stop myself from cheating because I believe the society won't move forward unless we stop cheating. So, this year at the university, I have neither cheated nor let anyone cheat from me.

I have more respect to strict invigilators.

- **Summary**

Findings of this research suggest that students at large have lost faith in the efficiency and fairness of the GSEC competition due to its poor standards, which, in turn, dictates their practices. An educational system that does not present itself to students as one that is concerned with their learning has lost its purpose in their eyes and is perceived as a meaningless competition that is no longer effectively designed to meet the end it is intended for. Irrelevant, wordy curricula and tests that measure memorization at the expense of higher mental abilities such as understanding, application, analysis, synthesis and creativity have led to test-driven education that ignores passion and motivation as the main drives to learning as suggested by many researchers as such Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Knight and Yorke (2003). With an alarming level of dissatisfaction with the current GSEC system, a need for student-centered education that genuinely caters for students' learning and a testing procedure that meaningfully reflects students' abilities has been expressed repeatedly.

While all of the interviewees thought the GSEC system was a failing, unfair one,

adopting an abilities-test system after a pass/fail GSEC was strongly suggested since it was

thought to have a capacity for equitable access to HE. The suggested system would allow

judgments based on subjects more relevant to anticipated disciplines as opposed to the current

admission system that is purely based on the GSEC score that does not only reflect an ability to

memorize and cheat according to the interviewees but is also based on testing in subjects that are

often times remotely relevant to the students' desired fields of study.

Since a test-driven education, irrelevant subjects, and open cheating all contribute to the

GSEC scores used to determine students' future, students find it difficult to trust the process. The

pervasive nature of these experiences is believed to lead to injustice in the access experience and

seems to further reinforce injustice through nurturing students' unwanted practices. This is

particularly clear in the blatant discrepancy between the students' unanimous belief in the

immorality of cheating and the consistent adoption of the practice by most of them. Despite their

unwillingness to cheat, they find it a necessary practice to deal with a corrupt, unfair system that

they are unable to trust. They cannot play a fair game because the game is not fair.

5. Perception on HE Possibilities

Findings of this research suggest that not only do socioeconomic conditions directly

affect students' ability to prepare for GSEC, but they also influence students' aspirations and

perceptions of future HE possibilities. Statistics derived from the first questionnaire showed a

strong positive correlation (significant at the level of 0.01) between the socioeconomic status of

the participants and their perceived ability to afford a private university if they want to (Figure

4.12 & Table 4.9 in the appendix). Similarly, there was a strong positive correlation (significant

at the level of 0.01) between the participants' socioeconomic status and their intention to join a private university in case of failure to join the desired discipline in a public university (Figure 4.13 & Table 4.10 in the appendix).

Bar Chart
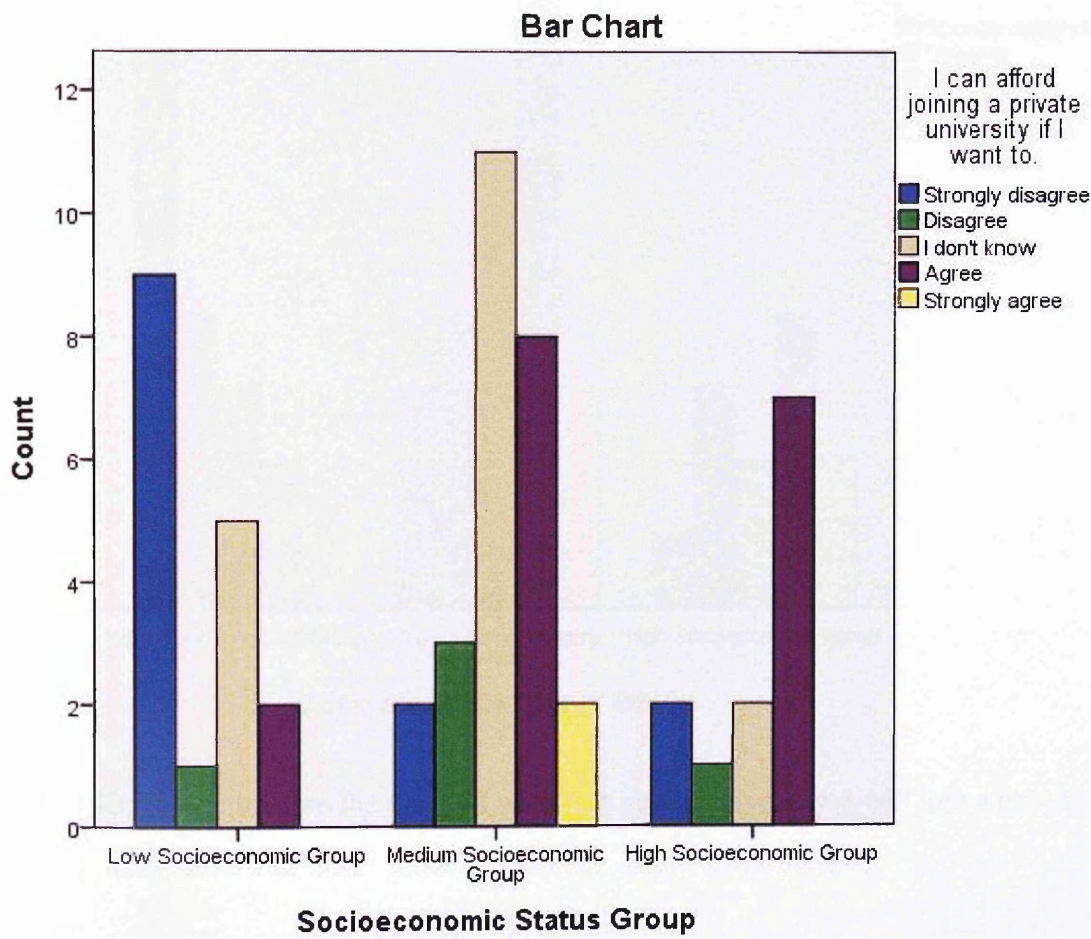
Figure 4.12: I can afford joining a private university if I want to.

Bar Chart
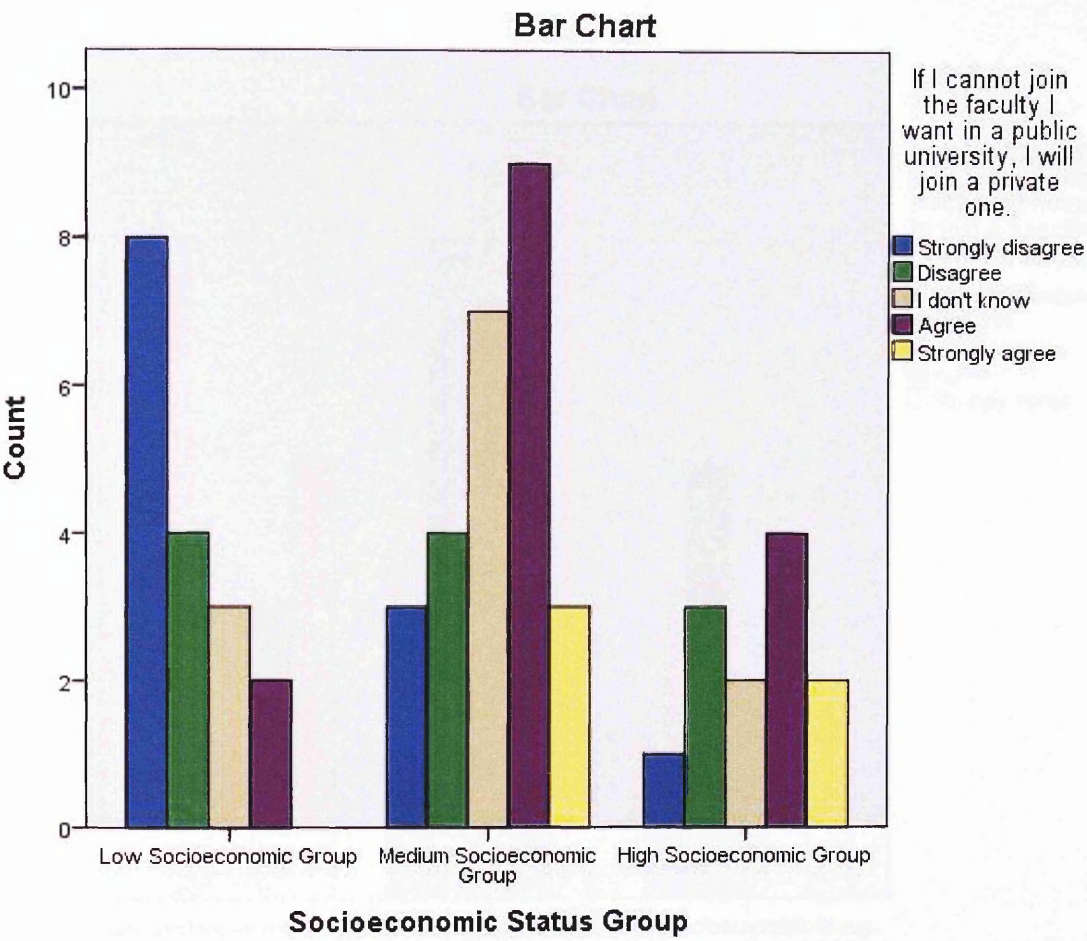
Figure 4.13: If I cannot join the faculty I want in a public university, I will join a private one.

Statistical analysis also showed a strong positive correlation (significant at the 0.01 level) between the participant's socioeconomic status and their perception of their ability to afford the expenses of living away from home to join HE (Figure 4.14). In addition, 76.3% of the whole sample thought that money was important to join a good university (Figure 4.15 & Table 4.11 in the appendix).
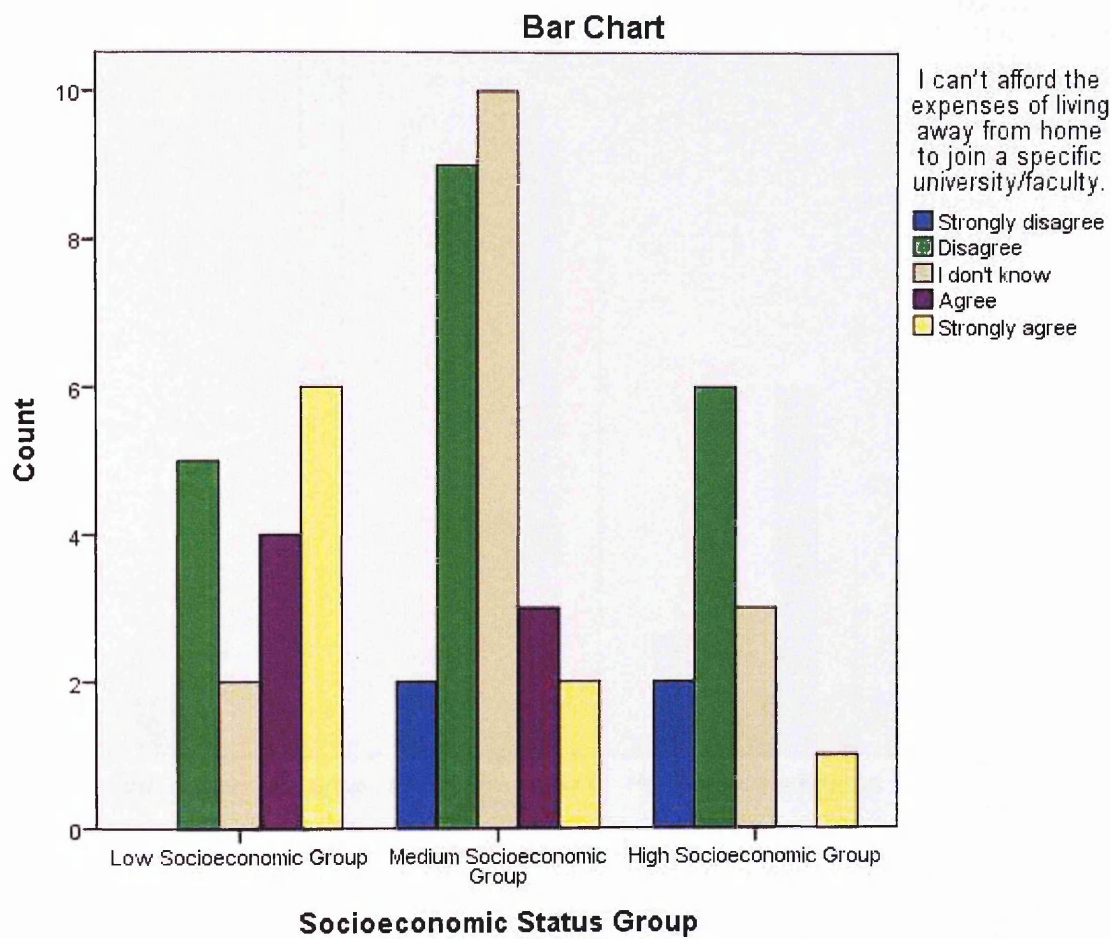
Figure 4.14: Financial ability to live away from home.
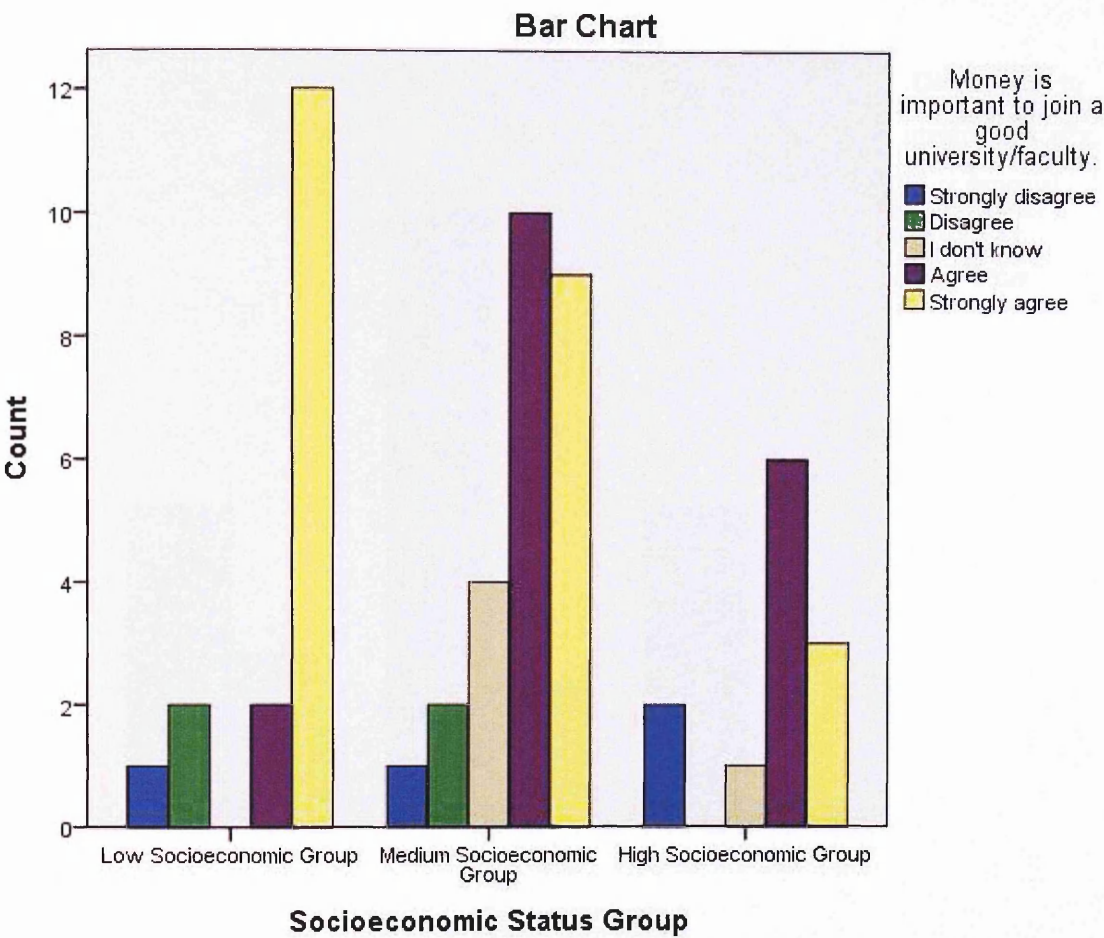
Figure 4.15: Money is important to join a good university/faculty.

When asked in the first questionnaire about their expectations regarding having to adjust

their choice of discipline or university for social or financial reasons, 78.2% of the participants

thought that was not expected. Although the percentage of participants who expected this to

happen was higher in the low socioeconomic group, the differences across groups were not

statistically significant (Figure 4.16 & Table 4.12 in the appendix).

Bar Chart
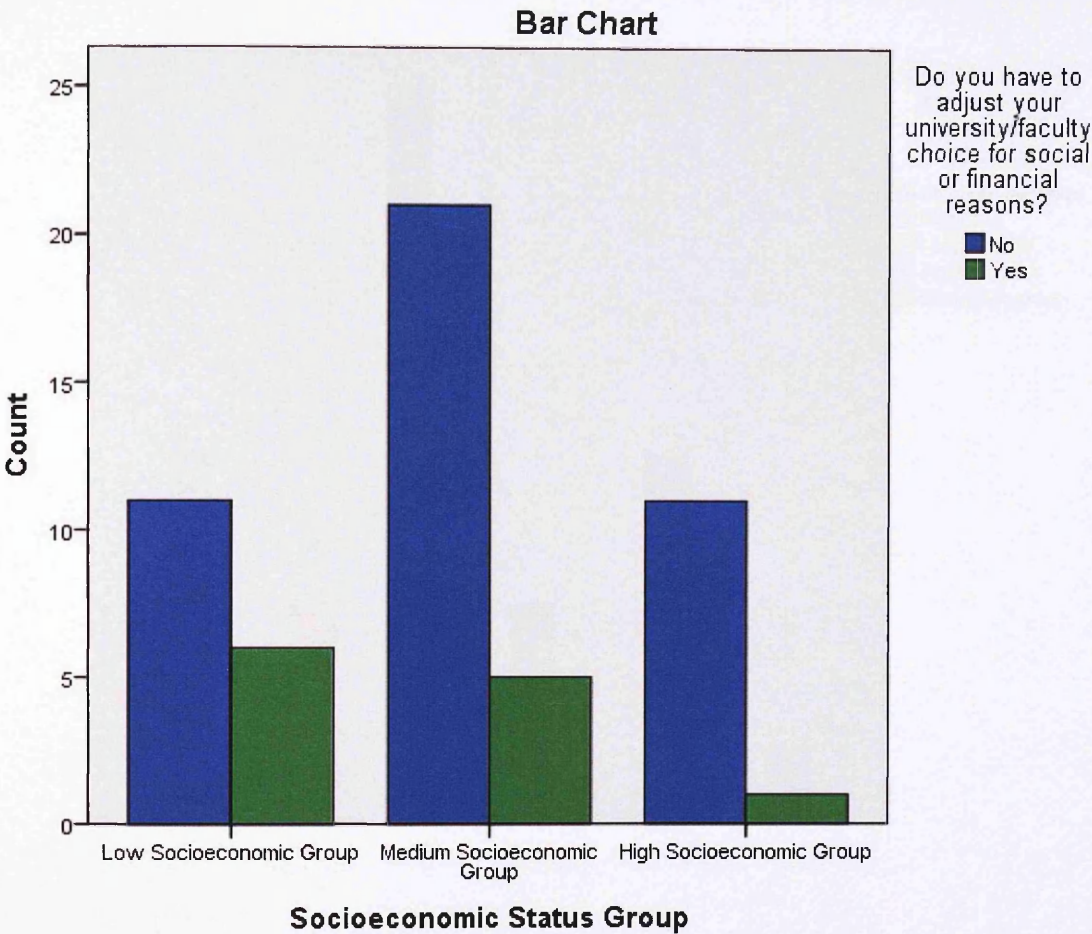
Figure 4.16: Do you have to adjust your university/faculty choice for social or financial reasons?

Their experience, however, was reported to be tougher than expectations. When asked in questionnaire 2 about their perception of their decision-making process, results showed significant negative correlation (at the 0.05 level) between the participants' socioeconomic status and their reported modification of their choices for economic reasons. The higher the socioeconomic status was, the less likely the student was to modify his choice for financial reasons (Figure 4.17 & Table 4.13 in the appendix).

Bar Chart
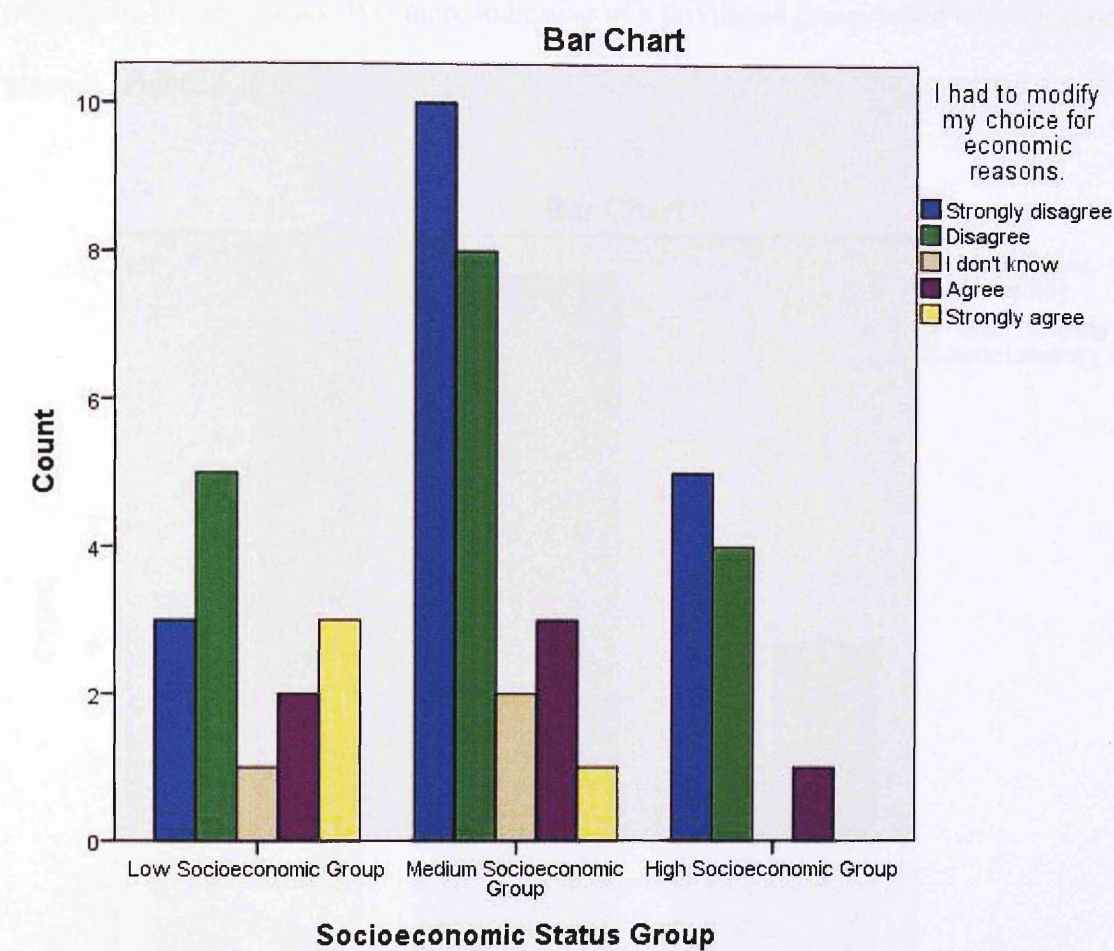
Figure 4.17: I had to modify my choice for economic reasons.

Results from the second questionnaire showed no significant correlation between the

participants' socioeconomic status and the type of university they joined (public vs. private)

(Figure 4.18 & Table 4.14 in the appendix). However, this relation, or absence thereof, is not

indicative of the effect of the participants' socioeconomic conditions on their equal chances to

join HE since many public universities have sections that require comparatively high tuition fees.

The positive correlation between the participants' socioeconomic status and their HE tuition fees

(significant at the 0.01 level) is more indicative of a privileged group based on socioeconomic

grounds (Figure 4.19).
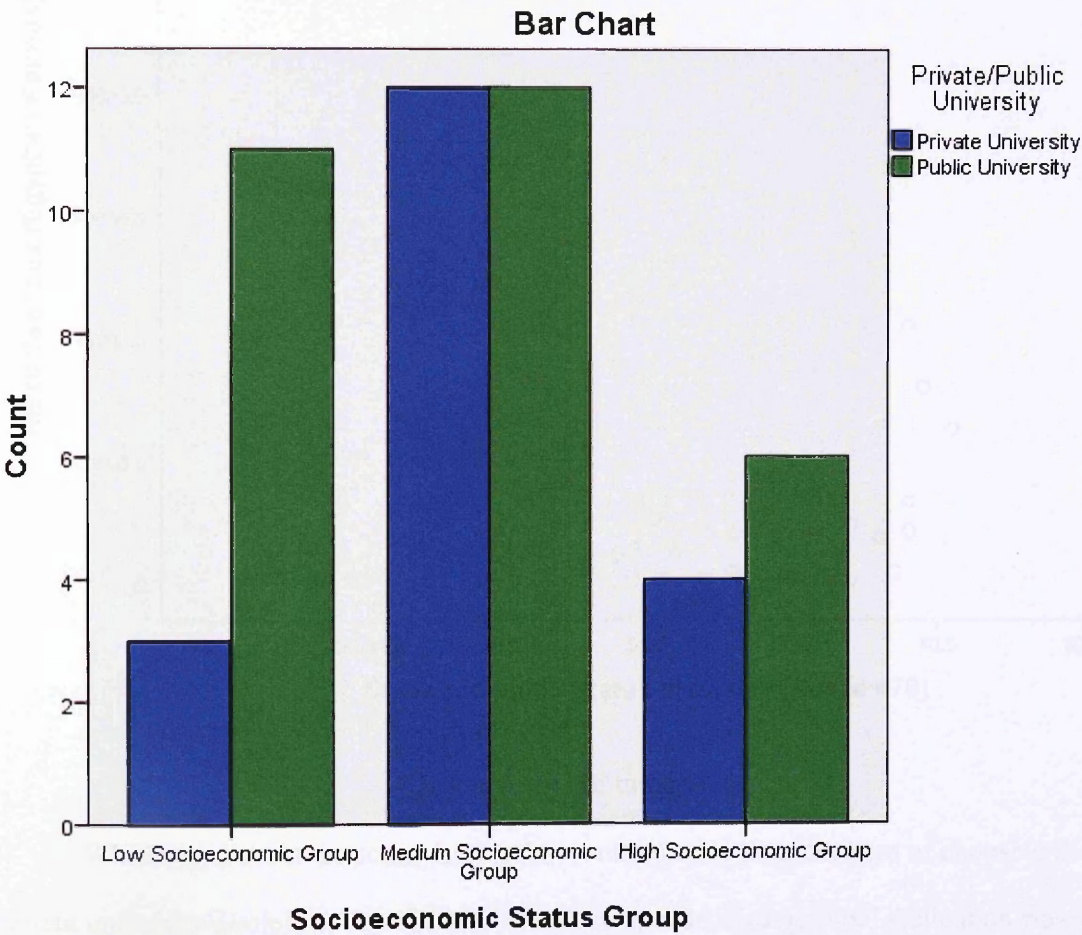
Figure 4.18: University Type: Private/Public.
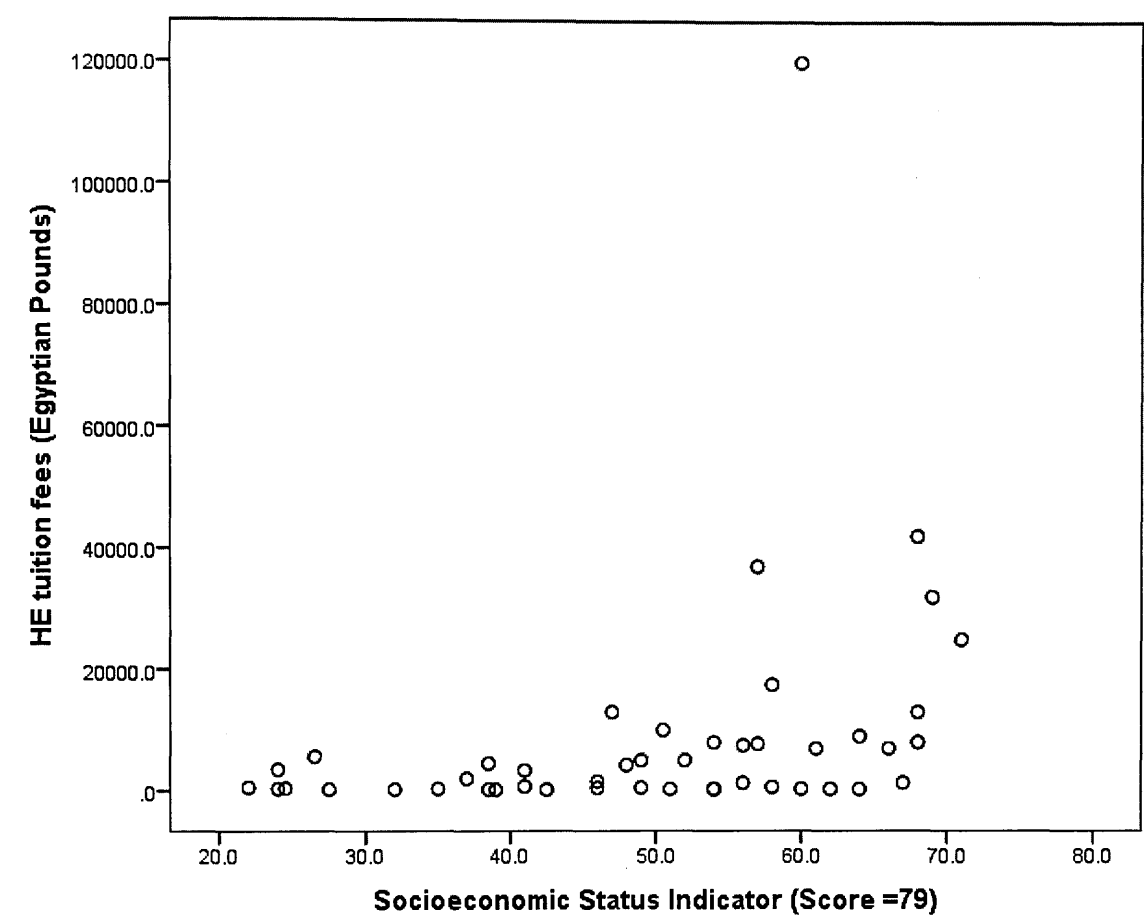
Figure 4.19: HE tuition fees

When asked about the actual factors that contributed to their decision of choosing their current university/discipline, 72.9% of the overall sample decided personal inclination was a decisive factor. Yet, there was a positive correlation (significant at the 0.05 level) between the participants' socioeconomic classes and their choice of the personal inclination as a working factor (Figure 4.20 & Table 4.15 in the appendix). Thus, the data suggests that the higher the socioeconomic status is, the freer the student is to study a desired discipline.
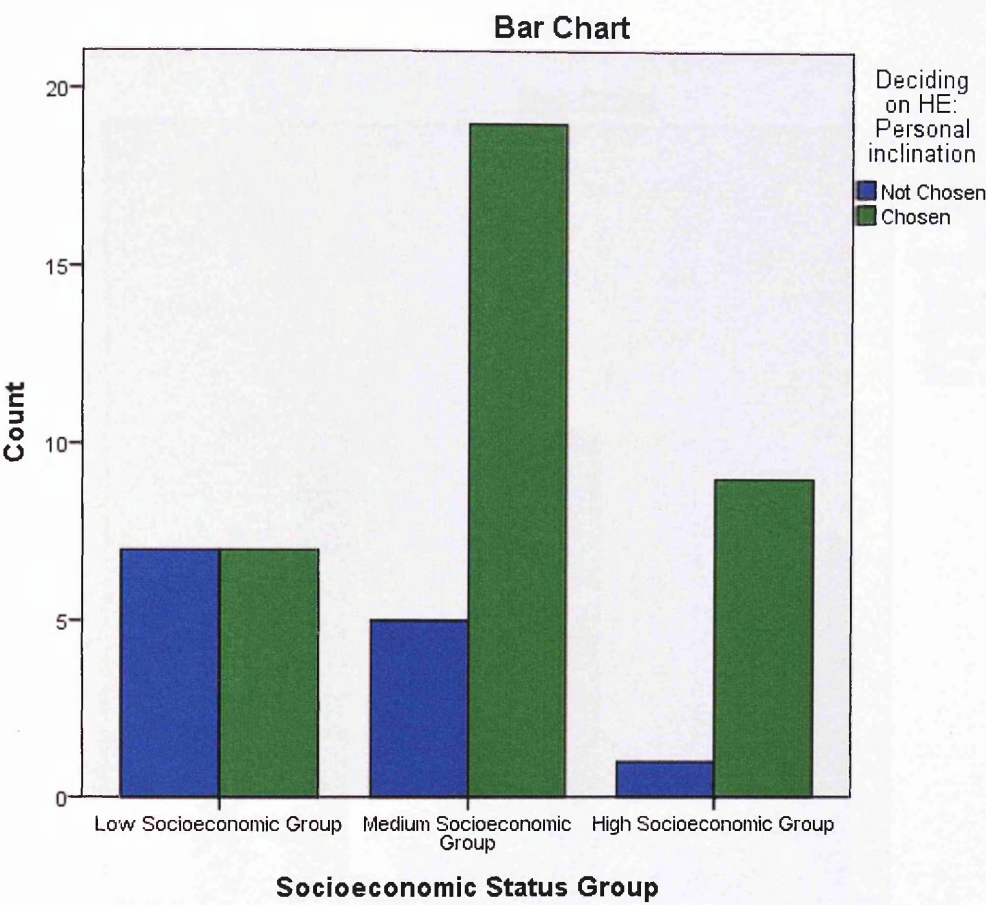
Figure 4.20: Deciding on HE: Personal inclination.

Other answers offered by the questionnaire such as peer pressure, family pressure, social pressure and financial reasons were still perceived by the sample as influential in the decision-making process, although comparatively less influential than their inclinations. They were chosen by fewer student participants (10.4%, 22.9%, 14.6%, 22.9% respectively) with no significant variations across the socioeconomic groups. Yet, responding to other questions on the second questionnaire, 85.5% of the participants believed that the socioeconomic conditions were vital in determining the students' universities/faculties (Figure 4.21), and 63.6% believed that their families' financial statuses did influence their choice of faculty/university (Figure 4.22).

Bar Chart
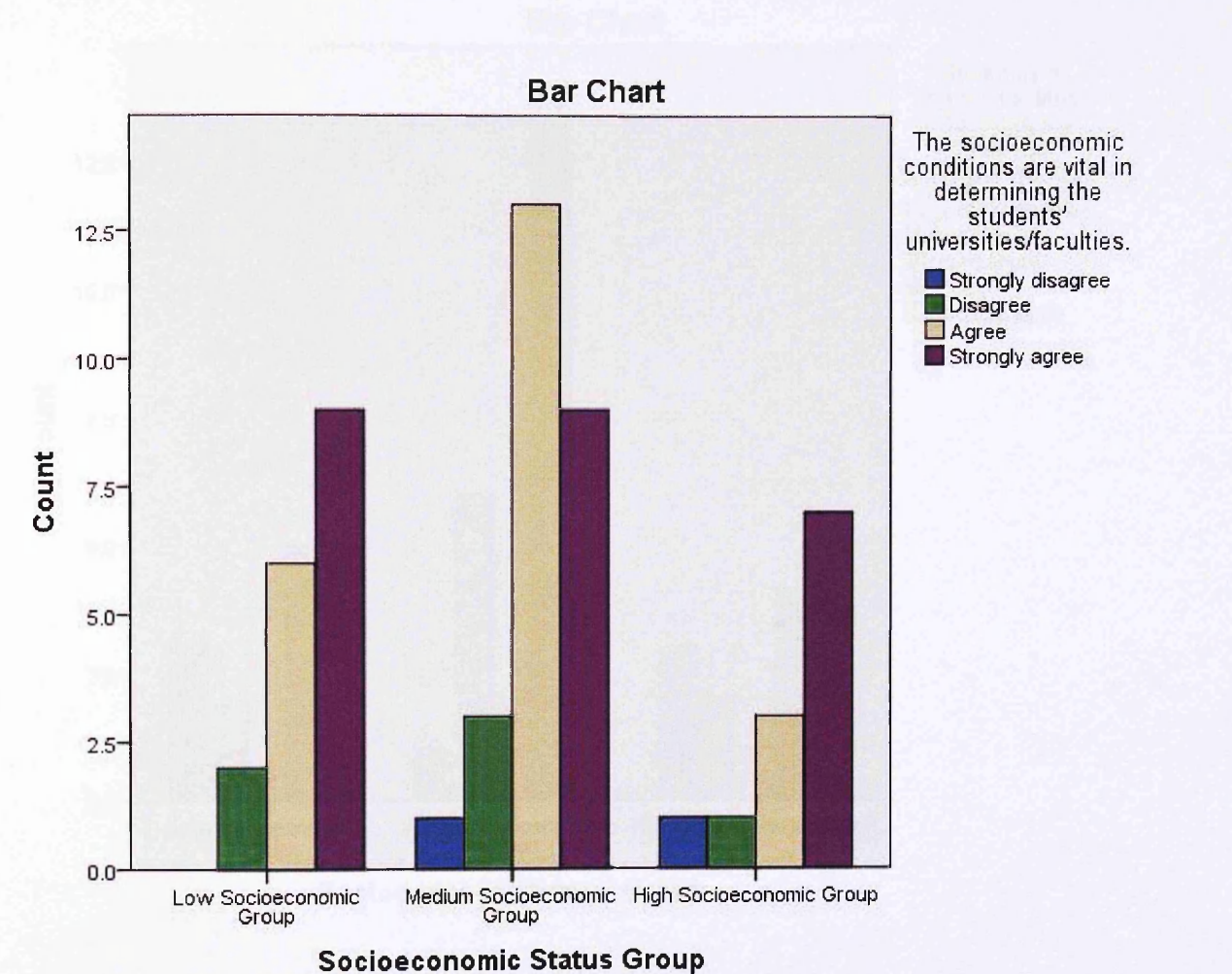
Figure 4.21: The socioeconomic conditions are vital in determining the students HE options.

Bar Chart
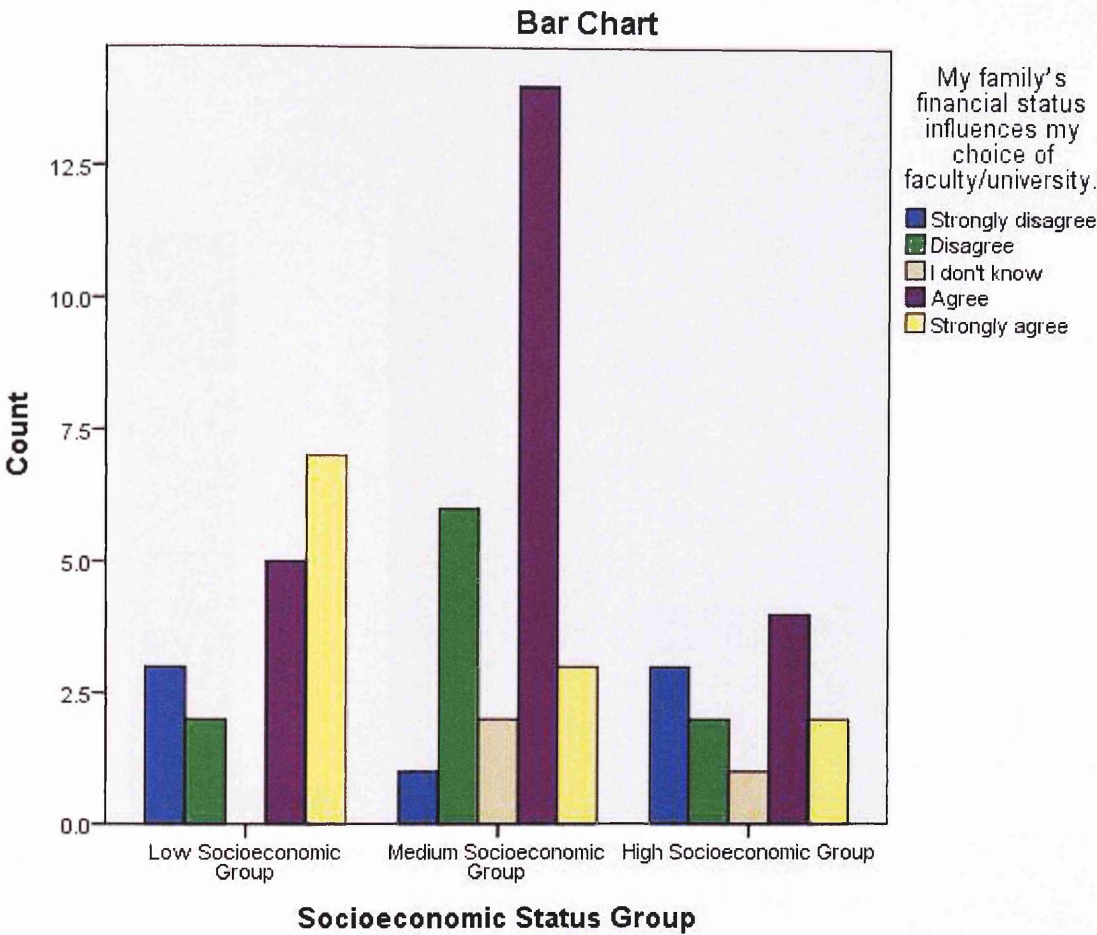
Figure 4.22: My family's financial status influences my HE choice.

Comparing the participants' responses in the first questionnaire regarding their desired disciplines with their responses in the second questionnaire regarding the disciplines they actually joined, the results were revealing. A strong positive correlation (significant at the 0.01 level) was found between the participants' socioeconomic status and their ability to join their desired disciplines. Whereas only 5.9% of the low socioeconomic group could join their desired disciplines, the percentage increases to reach 50% in the high socioeconomic group (Figure 4.23 & Table 4.16 in the appendix). These are striking percentages that alone could make a strong case for the existence of a severe case of social injustice in the HE access process in Egypt.

Bar Chart
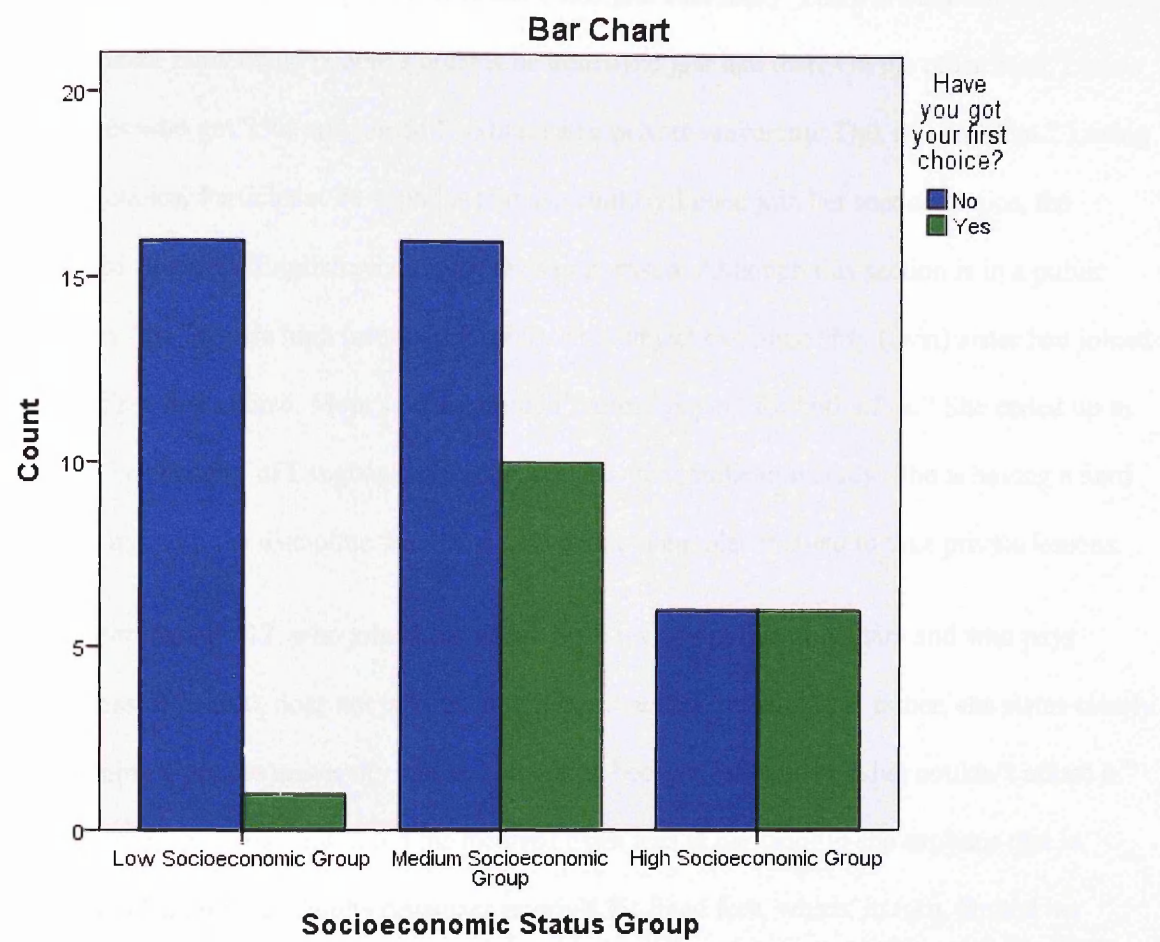
Figure 4.23: Have you got your first choice?

5. 1. Financial factors

Narratives offered by many interviewees clearly indicate that HE tuition fees had a huge

role to play in their HE-access decision-making process. Participant #4 is a significant example

of a student who had to adjust her choice of HE for financial reasons. Whereas she fell 0.5%

short of the score required to join Pharmacy in a public university, she could not afford the same

discipline in a private university. She explains: "I'm not happy because I was dying to join

Pharmacy but I lost it for 0.5%. The cut-off score for Pharmacy was 96%." She does not trust her

score reflects her real abilities and feels she has been denied a right. She says, "I could be

cleverer than a student who got the 96% and could join Pharmacy. There are a lot of people with

similar cases. How could people's dreams be destroyed just like that? On the other hand, I know

colleagues who got 73% and joined Pharmacy in a private university. This is a problem." Losing

her first choice, Participant #4 explains that she could not even join her second choice, the

Faculty of Business, English section, for the same reason. Although this section is in a public

university, the fees are high (around LE8000). The subject explains: "My (twin) sister had joined

it. It was her first choice. Mom said she couldn't afford paying for both of us." She ended up in

the low-fees Faculty of Languages, German section, at a public university. She is having a hard

time coping with the discipline and complains about being blackmailed to take private lessons.

Participant #12, who joined the Faculty of Law at a public university and who pays

tuition fees of LE200, does not talk much of her private HE possibilities; rather, she states clearly

that "joining a private university was not an option because [she] knew [she] couldn't afford it."

Furthermore, she complains about the incurred extra fees at her faculty; she explains that in

addition to lectures, her faculty organizes tutorials for fixed fees, which, in turn, limited her

ability to attend those tutorials. She explains, "We attend the lectures for free but the tutorials are

not. We pay LE100 for each subject … I only attended one subject because I needed it."

Participant #32 is an example of a student who could study his desired discipline just

because he could afford it. His GSEC score did not qualify him to join Applied Arts at a public

university, but he could join it at a private institute. He is even thankful he was not able to join

the public Applied Arts because his private institute provides him with the freedom to join the

graphics department whereas in the public university he would be forced into other departments

based on his scores. Participant #32, whose father pays him LE8,000 annually for his tuition fees

at his current private institute, reports that he could have joined the same discipline in another

university because he believed it offered better education in this field. The tuition fees at the latter university was LE39,000 though, which he refused to let his father pay for him. He explains, "My dad could afford it and agreed to pay for it, but I didn't want him to pay all that. He believes he should support me financially until I graduate. But I didn't want anyone to pay for my choice. So I decided against it just because of money."

Only 6 students (12.5%) out of the overall sample responding to the second questionnaire, reported having been offered some kind of a scholarship, a grant or a financial aid. There is evidence that a scholarship could be a decisive factor in the choice of HE. Participant #5 explains that she was not likely to join her current faculty had it not been for her scholarship. She says: "The tuition fees were an obstacle, but the faculty did something good: They gave 25% discount to students whose fathers are deceased. This helped me a lot. So, at the end I paid LE5,250 this year. This is a lot, but affordable compared to the original amount. Had I been required to pay the full tuition fees, there would have been an 80% chance that I would have decided against joining this faculty."

5.2. Social pressure: Consciousness of class in HE

5.2.1. Social construction of value and worth based on discipline

All interviewees confirmed a societal classist view of the different HE disciplines and a tendency to socially construct value and worth based on these disciplines. Participant #2 who joined the Faculty of Arts, European Culture Department, says: "Some people would tell me that the Faculty of Arts is for losers. It's stigmatized as the faculty for girls who want to get married whereas the Faculty of Law is for the low-class students." Participant #6 confirms the existence of societal classist classification of different disciplines and faculties and reports that she

suffered from it when she joined the Faculty of Law. She says, "What annoyed me when I first joined the Faculty of Law were people's reactions. They'd say it's for losers. I don't care if its cut-off score is low." She attempts to offer an explanation for this classist view of her faculty: "I think they're referring to the social level of the students. Some of them come from less socially-developed districts. So they don't judge the faculty based on the discipline itself; basically, they judge it based on the cut-off score and the social level of students involved." Participant #25, an engineering student, explains that such social classism becomes clear when it comes to marriage. He says, "I don't feel this way towards my friends who are in Business or Law. They are all my friends. But I know the society does classify them."

The participants' attitudes towards social classism in HE seemed to vary from condemnation and rejection, to indifference, to conformity and acceptance. For example, Participant #4 finds discipline classism practiced by the society "illogical and meaningless." She explains that "graduates of the Faculty of Law become judges and prosecutors, who are highly respected." Although she believes that "there's no bad faculty" and that one can succeed in any discipline, she still thinks social views should be taken into account and believes that her friend whose score was 95% and joined the Faculty of Nursing made a bad decision because of how the profession is viewed by the society. She says, "I think she would have been in a better position had she chosen to study languages and joined my faculty for example." Similarly, Participant #12 acknowledges social classism and agrees it is senseless. She says, "I know the society looks down upon the Faculty of Law and believes it accepts anyone. Some people made such remarks to me. They'd tell me, why join law when your score qualifies you for Arts or Business ... They devalue the Faculty of Law, although it has a promising future."

Participant #32 rejects social classism of disciplines as well. He says, "The idea of *top faculties* is wrong." He believes that people should be respected when they are successful regardless of their field because "some engineers and doctors are losers"; yet, he believes that "people care about the social status rather than the actual happiness of their children." He blames the society for instilling such ideas in their children. He explains, "The problem lies in the way people are raised up. Such views are implanted in people and are taken for granted. Children are called doctors or engineers. Have you ever heard a child called an accountant?" Participant #44 too criticizes social classism of disciplines on the same grounds of irrationality. He explains, "Engineers could fail and Law school students could succeed and have great jobs." He further asserts that social classism finds its roots in the classification of Arts vs. Science and Maths students.

Participant #38 too condemns the classist view of disciplines. Studying Mass Communication at a private university, he affirms that he was planning to join the Faculty of Law in case he was not able to study his desired discipline despite his family's negative view of the Faculty of Law. He says, "My family thought I was stupid to think this way. They didn't agree. They believed it was the faculty of losers. But I don't think so. They said my score qualified me for better choices and that I wasn't a loser. But I didn't care much about what they said. Had we been in a better country, the Faculty of Law would have been a top faculty." He believes in the crucial role the Faculty of Law should play in the society and thinks that its current poor status is a natural outcome of a political status where law is not enforced. He believes that Human Rights Lawyers have gained a better social status after the 2011 Revolution, "but this hasn't changed the society's perception of the Faculty of Law yet."

Participant #46 expresses her annoyance with the society's classist stratification of the different disciplines. Studying Business Information Systems, she realizes that the society looks down upon Business faculties and upon her public university. She reports being psychologically affected with this perception at the beginning, but then decided to disregard such views. She says, "I thought, so what? What matters is that I'm happy. I don't have to become a doctor or an engineer to satisfy the society. I should satisfy myself. It's my life." She believes that the society equates success to the two disciplines of medicine and engineering and considers students who join any other disciplines "losers". Participant #47 decides that the social perception that continues to consider medicine and engineering as top disciplines does not make much sense anymore because they no more secure well-paid jobs and because success is irrelevant to the field of study. Participant #52 confirms that graduates of medicine and engineering do not necessarily prove to be the smartest or the cleverest in their society.

Participant #28, who was doing a third year of GSEC at the time of the interview, was indifferent to social perceptions of faculties. He claimed that in case he joins the Faculty of Business, he "wouldn't care much about the society's perception" and that academic and career success is what really matters. So he views his HE choice as a means, not an end.

Participant #5, on the other hand, confirms that the social status of her faculty was "definitely a working factor in decision-making. It's well-received. This is important for my own social status; people would accept me and my views. There's classism. I too think this way." She further explains that this classist view has its roots in the academic level of students joining different majors. She explains, for example, that she would not want to join Business, Arabic section, because students in the English section are of a higher academic level.

Participant #40 not only conformed to social classism of disciplines but also thought it was justified. He explains the social dimension of his choice of the engineering major, "The society's perception of an engineer was a factor. Engineering is different from Business, for example. The society's perception of a doctor is even better. And this is my opinion too." He believes that doctors belong to the highest social class for legitimate reasons. He explains, "A doctor is the one who worked the hardest, and got the best scores ... A doctor's job is important for everyone and he can help people in all emergencies. A doctor deserves the status and respect he's getting."

5.2.2. Social Construction of value and worth based on institution type (faculty vs institute)

Findings revealed that not only are HE disciplines subject to classism, but also HE institutions. A faculty at a university is deemed more socially-acceptable than an institute. Giving in to social classism based on institution type, Participant #6 says, "A faculty is better than an institute. It has a better social status." On another occasion she confirms: "The only faculty that was available for me was that of Law, otherwise I'd join an institute. But an institute is not nice." Participant #25 agrees. Being a student of a private engineering institute, he reports being against the idea of joining an institute at the beginning for social reasons. He eventually made a decision to join it when he learnt from his father that it was accredited from the engineering syndicate and that eventually he would be called an engineer. He reports receiving classist remarks from relatives comparing him to a peer who joined a faculty of engineering. Participant #34 also reports that one of the reasons why his family encouraged him to join the Faculty of Business rather than to follow his passion of writing at the Theatre Arts Institute or the Cinema Institute was that the latter are called *institutes*. His family encouraged him to join

the English section in his faculty "because they said [he] would be in a specific social class." But then their social considerations eventually made sense to him.

Participant #32, on the other hand, did not put such aspect of social classism into consideration. He chose to pay reasonable fees at a private institute rather than pay times 5 tuition fees at a private faculty, although his father could afford it, but he did not want to be a burden just to satisfy social pressures. He says, "I can use the term *academy* or say it in English, *institute*, to leave an impression. But I don't care ... But I did hear comments discouraging me from joining an institute and saying it was better to join a faculty." He adds, "In my field, these details do not matter. What matters is that you achieve what you want. The society only cares about appearances." Giving more weight to his father's opinion than the society's perception because he "wanted to avoid problems with him," Participant #47 reports joining a Business Institute upon his father's wish whereas he wanted to major in Law. He reports, however, that people make negative comments about the place where he ended up and blame him for "not joining the faculty of Law or any other faculty."

5.2.3. Social construction of value and worth based on university type (public vs private; low-fee vs high-fee)

Social construction of value and worth was also reportedly relevant to university type. Social class was assigned using the public/private HE dichotomy. Participant #2, who joined a public university, says, "All national universities are of low social standard. All private universities are of a higher standard ... They have better prestige, but I'm not sure about the level of education." Participant #4 agrees that "if a student pays money for education, s/he's perceived

as coming from a high class family." Participant #6 believes that students at private HE are

perceived as "better" students as regards to their "thinking, ethics, and behavior."

Participant #5 explains that this classist view is even coming straight from within her

public university. She reports on professors who keep instilling classist views. She says, "A

professor keeps telling us that our fees are low and that if we can't afford HE, then we're not

supposed to join it. He keeps telling us that had we been paying a lot of fees, we would have

been keen on studying." She clearly complains from ill-treatment. Participant #32 too points out

that some people join private HE because they "are just seeking good treatment." He explains

that "in the public universities, there's the feeling that you need them, but in the private, I'm a

customer. This is a problem. If I don't have money, I shouldn't be ill-treated."

Participant #28 believes that when it comes to work, "a degree from a public university is

more valued than that from a private one." Therefore, based on his perception of social views,

social classism in favour of private universities does not necessarily reflect appreciation. He

says,

> In general, the society views students of the private universities as losers who happen to
>
> have money. They got in there because their scores did not allow them into a public
>
> university; they are not clever enough and were not studying. But not all the private
>
> universities are viewed the same way. Some private universities are viewed as
>
> universities for good students. So, private universities are not the same.

Similarly, Participant #17 believes that "although students in the private universities are regarded

as coming from the elite families, they are also believed to be there because they did not get the

required score for the public universities." Participant #32 confirms, "Many people find it

embarrassing to be in a private university." Participant #38 explains, "Some people join private universities because they have money and some do so because they are after quality education ... Yet, it's true that those students are perceived as coming from a higher socioeconomic status."

Participant #47 believes that the society perceives private university students as "pampered" students who have it all whereas he reports that some colleagues of his who qualified for their chosen major in both public and private universities opted for the private choice because they were after better education. In this respect, he reports that being in a public institute, he does not attend regularly because he cannot find a place to sit in a lecture hall where about 3,500 students are expected to attend. Obviously, it becomes difficult to give individualized attention to students in such conditions. He puts it simply, "I need someone to teach me."

Participant #44 believes that social classism between the public universities and the reputable private ones is justified on the grounds of the offered service. He believes that the quality of education received at the good private universities produces graduates who deserve a higher social status. He explains, "It's not about money. It's about the product; the level of education. The person will be different. It doesn't matter whether he had originally joined the university on a scholarship or paid its full fees. I'm not talking about the social class. I'm talking about the level of civilization."

5.3. Family pressure

A number of the interviewees reported experiencing family pressure of different degrees in relation to their higher educational choices. That pressure ranged from advice and expression of mere dissatisfaction to forcing the participant to make a specific choice. The participants'

reactions also varied; while some of them refused to surrender to pressure and even resisted

fiercely, some gave in either out of trust in their family's insight or fear of disobedience.

Participant #9, for example, explains that his family are dissatisfied with his choice of the

Faculty of Law: "My family do not have a positive view of my faculty … All of my siblings

thought Law was not important and didn't want me to join it. But I was able to face them all and

join what I wanted. My parents were indifferent to the choice. They don't have enough

awareness regarding education … So I could convince them and they supported my choice

against that of my siblings."

Participant #44, too, refused to surrender to his family pressure which has been somewhat

forceful. His father and uncle, who was a big connection and offered to let him in, tried to talk

him into joining the Military. Participant #44 did not want to become an officer. So he simply

skipped the application deadline. "My father did not talk to me for 2 days," he says.

Similarly, Participant #46 reports being subject to a lot of pressure from her family who

did not approve of her choice, but she was "stubborn from the first moment." She reports

receiving negative comments and being subject to attempts to dissuade her from studying

Business Information Systems and to talk her into studying language at the Faculty of Arts

instead because it is "easier and more suitable for girls." Her explanation for this pressure

coming from her family is their "fear of the unknown". She explains that it is a newly-introduced

major and they were not sure about her job opportunities.

Participant #32 did not give in to family pressure either. He reports that his father wanted,

and kept encouraging, him to become an engineer and specialize in aerospace or petrol

engineering, "but I don't like it," he adds. He reports considering the engineering major "to make

them happy" while pursuing a career in what he wants. He explains, "I decided to join the Maths section, bearing in mind that whatever I join, I will still do the work I want anyway, which is Art." He qualified for both Engineering and Applied Arts in private universities. However, when it was time for HE choices and since he had already started a career in graphic design a few years earlier, he refused to give in to family and social pressure and opted for his passion. He explains, "Why waste 5 years of my life? … I thought to myself I'm paying money anyway, so why not pay it in a place where I can really learn what I want? My dad wanted Engineering just for the sake of social status."

On the other hand, other participants reported giving in to family pressure. Participant #25, who "was against the idea of joining an institute" rather than a faculty, eventually joined an engineering institute "because [his] dad wanted that." He explains that he was not forced to join it as such, but was talked into it by his father. He explains, "I always like to follow my dad's opinion."

Throughout Participant #47's interview, it was clear that he was subject to huge pressure from his parents, especially his father who made all his choices including that relevant to his major. He says right from the beginning, "I joined the Business Institute for my dad's sake." He reports that upon finishing his preparatory school, he wanted to join vocational education. He explains that he had an old passion for IT and that there was a newly-opening IT school which would have even guaranteed him a job. "I would have continued HE in IT," he adds. However, his parents refused because of the social perception of vocational education. Participant #47 explains, "I just wanted to join what I wanted. I didn't care about the society's perception." "My parents now regret not letting me into that computer school," he adds.

Participant #47 reports that upon finishing the GSEC, he was interested in both IT and Law and wanted to study either. His score did not qualify him for the former in a public university. He considered joining it in a private university and says that his father did not mind paying although they both felt the fees were a bit of a burden. However, he reports that his father eventually decided against that choice because of the big distance from home. Qualifing to study Law in a public university and being keen to join it, he says "I wanted Law because I liked the field, and still do." However, his father forced him to join the Business Institute on the grounds that it has a better future. He explains, "Honestly, I didn't join the Faculty of Law just because my dad refused. I wanted to please them ... My dad forced me to modify my application and write my current institution as a first choice. I wasn't convinced and never will be, but I wrote it. I now like it because it gives me ample free time, but I would have preferred to join Law." Participant #47 explains that he plans to pursue his interest in Law through Further Education and extracurricular activities.

In the case of Participant #34, family pressure took the form of advice. Yet, he gave in to that 'pressure' and joined the English section at the Faculty of Business because he wanted to play it safe. His desired field requires talent, but he could not be sure he has this talent. He explains,

> I'm disappointed because I don't like the field. I like writing. I'd like to be a screenwriter. But when I talked with my family, they thought that was not guaranteed. I wanted to join the Theatre Arts Institute or the Cinema Institute. My family thought I'd join a guaranteed faculty and continue working on writing on my own. It's true that a graduate of a Business Faculty can work in anything. I was convinced with their point of view because what if I'm not talented and I'm just imagining things?

His school education did not provide him with the opportunity to uncover his talents. He reports working on his talent on his own, self-learning, and sharing his work for feedback. Despite reporting that his work receives praise and he is given tips to improve, he still lacks confidence in his talent and finds it necessary to finish a HE degree in a "guaranteed" field like business before he pursues his dream field. He confirms, "You don't get it; I have to have a HE degree."

Although Participant #52 states that "there was no pressure" coming from her parents, she talks a lot about their views and how they shaped her HE choice. She talks, for example, about how she originally wanted to join the medical school but her father was discouraging her because he could see how physicians cannot secure well-paid jobs in Egypt. He was also of the view that since she was a girl, then she should choose a shorter route. She says, "He was thinking that since I'm a girl, why should I study for 7 years then do Masters and PhD. What for?" She eventually opted for dentistry and points out later in the interview that one of her criteria of choice was that it was "easier and shorter than medicine." She also talks about how her mother wanted her to join a medical faculty. When she was accepted in the Pharmaceutical Faculty at a reputable private university and was happy with that choice, she found it difficult to convince her mother whose approval was apparently essential. She says, "I tried to convince my mom but she was not convinced because she knows people who graduated from there and couldn't find a job after all the money they spent, and people warned her a lot." She adds, "Also my mom told me to join dentistry better than pharmacy, because graduating from pharmacy I would just be a seller."

- **Summary**

Findings of this research indicate that not only do poor socioeconomic conditions put limitations on students' ability to prepare for GSEC and to access desired HE, but they also set

boundaries on their academic aspirations. Research results reveal that the higher students' socioeconomic class is, the more likely they are to consider private HE options and to have confidence in their ability to finance it. A majority of them believed money was essential to secure a place in a good university.

After going through the HE access process, the students presented a number of indicators that did reveal that their financial level had a significant impact on the range of HE choices a student has and, in turn, on his/her final HE destinations. First, modification of HE choice for financial reasons was more likely to take place as the socioeconomic indicator went down. Second, the higher the participants' socioeconomic status was, the higher their HE tuition fees were. Third, the higher the socioeconomic class was, the more likely personal inclination was reported to affect HE choice. Fourth, and most significantly, there was a strikingly huge gap between the percentage of participants in the LSG and HSG (5.9% & 50% respectively) who managed to join their desired disciplines. This data strongly suggest that there is a lot of economic injustice in the HE access process. In addition, the participants showed full consciousness of the crucial role played by their economic status to define limitations of their HE opportunities.

The data also revealed the students' consciousness of a societal classist view of HE and of social construction of value and worth based on discipline, institution type (faculty vs institute), and university type (public vs private; low-fee vs high-fee). The influence of such consciousness of social classism on HE access decision-making varies greatly; whereas students' reactions at times take the form of condemnation and rejection, students other times conform to it, accept it, and even justify it. In addition, family pressure is also put on a high percentage of

students in an attempt to direct their educational choices. Like social pressure, family pressure takes different forms so do reactions to it.

The participants' views of social construction of value and worth based on university type (public vs private; low-fee vs. high-fee) is rather a complex one. While there is an agreement that students joining private HE are generally viewed as the pampered elite who could not qualify for public education, the pointed out academic excellence of students joining public universities does not seem to influence the social view that gave more value and worth to graduates of private HE. Social classism between the public universities and the reputable private ones is also justified on the grounds of a better service offered in the latter.

6. Instrumentality of HE and Social Acceptance

While there was evidence of choosing HE disciplines based on its instrumentality for future career options, most of the interviewees thought that a HE degree was both a career and social necessity. Participant #6 says it outright, "The degree is important for both attaining a high social status and finding a job." Similarly, Participant #28, who was doing a third year of GSEC at the time of the interview, aspires to join the Military. His criteria for choice are clear: a guaranteed long-term job, a high salary, a high social status, and a potential for post-graduate studies abroad. Participant #12 too is very clear about what she wants and expects from HE. She wants to secure herself a higher social status through a prestigious career. Although she realizes that the Faculty of Law is not socially valued as a top faculty, she is more focused on what the faculty can offer her in the future. She explains, "The Faculty of Law guarantees a higher social status even more than the top disciplines such as medicine and engineering. Their graduates are not treated as well as lawyers are. All the ministers are lawyers. The (ex-)President is a judge, a

graduate of the Faculty of Law. Obama too; the president of the biggest country of the world."

She was very explicit about it, "I was looking for a social status because this is an important

factor in our country. So I thought Law would give me that. I could work in Prosecution. Even a

lawyer has a partial legal immunity." She reports that she decided Law was a better option than

Business, a major her score qualified her for, because a business degree would make her no more

than "one among thousands of the unemployed Business graduates."

Participant #52, who also thought that HE was a condition to securing a job in Egypt, had

in mind her future career and social status as 2 important criteria of choice of her HE. She

originally wanted to study medicine because that was her field of interest, but when her grade did

not qualify her to join medicine in a public university, she started looking for other disciplines

that are not remote in nature and where she can still "be called a doctor" such as Pharmacy and

Dentistry. She did not think that studying pharmacy would secure her a prestigious-enough job,

so she considered Dentistry, which is "easier and shorter than medicine" and would still fulfill

her passion and prestige.

Participant #38 confirms that he "was looking for both quality education and a reputable

degree" that pave the way for his media career. He commutes to his university daily and

contends that he "opted for a far-away university because it offers a stronger degree." He thinks

the content of what he is studying at HE is relevant and important for his career. He believes

both the degree and the knowledge gained at HE are crucial to his career in Egypt.

Participant #38's views of the strong links between HE content and future career were not

shared by many. Interestingly, although a HE degree was regarded as a condition to finding a job

in Egypt, it was not seen as employable by many interviewees. "A HE degree might not

guarantee a job, but if one doesn't have a degree, one surely won't find a job," Participant #12

states. Participant #2 stresses that a HE degree is "essential but not enough" and adds that "many

people work in different disciplines from what they studied." Participant #4 highlights the role of

Further Education in Egypt. She talks of a Communication Engineer that she knows "who had to

do non-degree courses for 2 years after HE to get a job. It was the courses that got him the job

not his HE degree." Participant #25 too underscores the role of Further Education for

professional development. He explains, "I found out that whatever I join; a public university, a

private university or an institute; I will still need to develop myself on my own."

Participant #34, who also believes a HE degree is essential to secure a job and a social

status, still finds Further Education crucial as well. He says, "Here you have to do courses after

the university to work anyway." He also explains that the need for Further Education is a natural

result of poor educational planning. Graduates need to have a competitive edge to overcome the

supply-demand deficiency, which results in many graduates accepting jobs in careers irrelevant

to their fields of specialization. He says, "I know graduates of engineering who had to work as

customer service employees in call centers. They can't find a job in their field. This is normal

because there are a lot of graduates of a small number of disciplines." With better planning,

students would have a wider range of discipline options to choose from in his views. He says,

"People are not well-employed. Attention should be given to other tracks and specializations.

Life is not only about medicine, engineering, and pharmacy. There are other specializations that

are out of the scope of attention."

Participant #46, who studies Business Information Systems, highlights future work as the

sole determinant for her choice of her HE degree. Although she thinks her degree is a condition

to find a job and although she chose this particular major because it can secure her a decent job

in a bank or a multinational company in her preferred field, she does not think HE prepares her

for such a job because it is "remotely relevant." She believes that other selected courses,

practical experience and on-the-job training are what she really needs. The social status incurred

by her HE degree is not a real consideration for Participant #46. She confirms that although a

degree is essential for her social status, she would not have pursued it had her degree not been

essential for a job. She believes she could use the time more efficiently. She says, "I would have

obtained other certificates and studied things that I wanted. Why would I waste 4 years? I'd use

the 4 years gaining work experience and doing communication courses and stuff that would be

useful for me to join a multinational company, but that's not what I'm doing at the university."

Although Participant #47 believes his current Business major should open up future job

opportunities for him, he too does not think HE will provide him with the necessary knowledge

required for such a job. Therefore, he is resorting to Further Education. "For example, I take

English courses that are more relevant to life," he explains. He also believes that one of the

advantages of education in his institute is that it is not demanding, which gives him plenty of

time to work while studying and do Further Education. He believes that a HE degree is important

to secure a job not only in Egypt but everywhere else, but it is especially essential to attain a high

social status in the Egyptian society.

Yet, Eight participants (#4, #5, #6, #17, #28, #34, #38, and #52) stated that they would

not likely have joined HE altogether had they been in a different society that allows them to

professionally succeed and socially accepts them on equal footing. Participant #6 puts it clear,

"So long as there's no classist view and the high school degree would secure me a good job and

salary, then why not?" Although Participant #38 prefers to receive education in whatever field he

chooses to specialize in, he still contends that in case it is not a social necessity, he is likely to

decide that non-degree courses would suffice. Participant #34, who joined the Faculty of

Business although he would like to become a screenwriter, affirms that he definitely would not

have joined HE had the societal perception been different. He exclaims, "Why study something

that I don't like? Why waste 4 years of my life?" Participant #4 juxtaposes those wishes with the

situation in Egypt and explains that it is a different situation, "Even if I got a good job without

the degree, a degree would still be essential for a good social status ... Social perception is clear

in the way people treat me. People started treating me significantly better after I joined HE. In

Egypt, we are suffering from an acute classist perception."

Participant #40, however, believes that had he been in a different society with a different

mindset, he still would have sought to obtain an HE degree. He stresses that both the HE

knowledge and degree are important. However, he stresses the crucial role the degree plays for

his social status: "It makes a difference. People perceive its holder differently. He receives

respect and he is perceived as an educated person."

Participant #44, who also confirms pursuing a HE degree in whichever society he may

be, highlights the importance of the degree for securing a good job. He specifically believes the

knowledge and skills gained are of prime importance to find a job abroad, especially that this is

his plan. He explains that he chose his major, Business Information Systems, because of its

instrumentality for future jobs since it allows him to specialize in both Business and Computer

Science. He explains, "It offers better opportunities because I have the 2 specializations. I can

work in banks, for example, where both specializations are needed." Joining a high-fee faculty in

a public university, Participant #44 also highlights the HE social experience as a major criterion

of his choice. He explains that it is not about the society's acceptance of his choice; rather, it is

about the social aspect of his tertiary experience. Student density, location, and the class of

colleagues were among the factors he mentioned. Participant #44 says, "I believe everyone has

the right to receive education." However, "I do care about the atmosphere and the people around

me. It's not a matter of classism. But I'm looking for the 'cleaner' … Also, the number is so big,

but our section is less than 50," he explains. He thinks he made a good choice joining a public

university, which he perveives as a "more official" choice and appreciates the strictness in public

universities compared to the majority of the private ones, excluding what he called "the good

private universities".

Not caring much about social views, Participant #32, who had already started a career in

graphic design before the GSEC, chose to study the same field to develop his knowledge and

skills. He states that he inquired about the need for a HE degree and found out it was essential for

professional growth. He explains that he would have gone for Further Education and done a few

courses had they been enough, but that was not the case. He confirms that thoughts of poor social

perception and marriage prospects do not worry him. "Birds of a feather flock together," he says.

However, Participant #25, who is studying engineering, believes that although the

knowledge he acquires from HE is important for his work, "the degree is not important for work

in our society." He adds, "In my home town, people work as contractors without a degree and

they are doing very well." He confirms that he wants it for the "social status" it brings about. He

adds that even if big corporates would require a degree, a connection would suffice. In addition,

"people fabricate degrees now," he adds.

Participant #17 agrees. He believes that his expected HE degree in Foreign Trade is not

essential for his work. He elaborates, "I'm just seeking the degree in order not to be in a lower

status than people around me. So it's all about social prestige." He confirms that his HE choices

were driven by social benefits. He says, "I wanted to join the Military to gain a social status and

to get the Military privileges. When I couldn't join the military, I just decided to join the highest-

score faculty that I'm qualified for ... They're all comparable studies and eventually I would

graduate to work in an irrelevant field." He even explains that his HE degree is essential to avoid

frequent harassment by security personnel in checkpoints, who, according to him, are judgmental

based on academic status. He says, "They'd leave me alone once they realize I'm a Foreign

Trade student but would stop the guy next to me just because he's a vocational worker."

Participant #17 also reports that he qualified for the Faculty of Business, English section, whose

rank was higher than his current faculty, but he had to decide against it because he could not

afford its high fees.

- **Summary**

Data coming from the interviews suggest that HE is regarded by the majority of students

as a tool to attain social acceptance as well as an initial gate to securing a job. HE graduates are

not regarded as employable though and there is a general view that more gates of Further

Education need to be crossed before an adequate, relevant job is obtained. It is striking how

about half of the interviewees expressed the high probability of them not joining HE had they

been in a society that can socially accept them and allow them to lead a decent life without an

HE degree. The social and career pressure put on students to obtain a HE degree comes at the

core of a discussion of HE and social justice. If HE is a requirement to attain a higher social

status and to make a living while at the same time HE choices are limited for the lower

socioeconomic classes for financial reasons, then a strong argument can be put forward for a case

of injustice in the HE access process in Egypt on the grounds of social and economic

reproduction.

7. Perception on Fairness and Equal Opportunity

Regardless of the socioeconomic status, data coming from the second questionnaire reveal that 69.1% of the whole sample disagree that students of the GSEC compete on equal footing to join universities/faculties (Figure 4.24). In addition, as pointed out in section 5, 85.5% believe that the socioeconomic conditions are vital in determining the students' universities/faculties (Figure 4.21) and 63.6% believe that their families' financial statuses influence their HE choices (Figure 4.22). It is important to note here, that in the participants' responses to the questionnaires questions, it was noticed that the participants showed mre awareness of the impact of finance on their HE opportunities in the second questionnaire (note perceptions of the financial status as a decisive factor in determining the number of private lessons in the first questionnaire compared to the detected correlations in Figure 4.11; also see Figures 4.21 & 4.22 which are based on data coming from the second questionnaire). In addition, after going through the HE access admission process, a significant majority of the research sample (72.9%) disagreed it was a fair process (Figure 4.25 & Table 4.17 in the appendix). Thus, the data reveal a development in the level of consciousness of the influence of the financial capital across two different settings. They suggest that the financial factor presents itself more powerfully, and transparently, to the students in the admission process when they are blatantly denied HE opportunities for lack of money, whereas the influence could be more subtle in their school and private tutoring experience.

Bar Chart
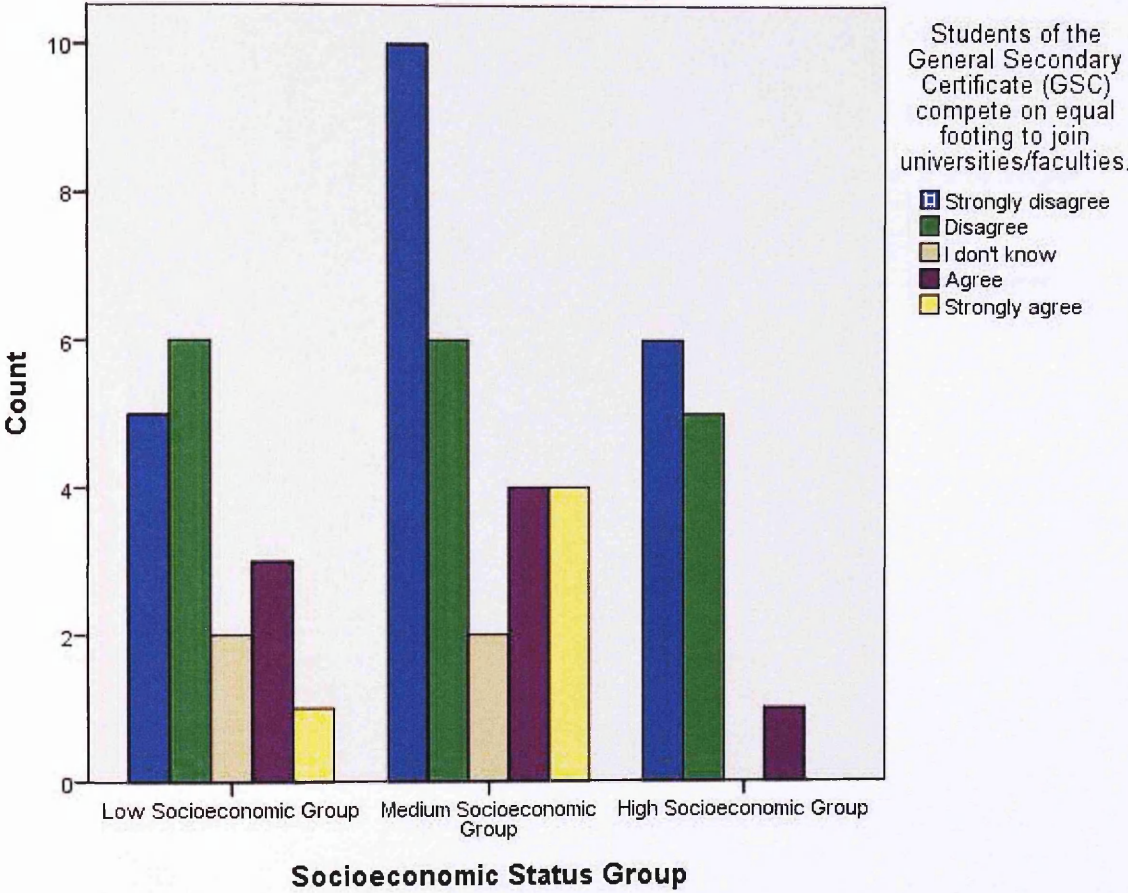
Figure 4.24: GSEC is a fair competition?
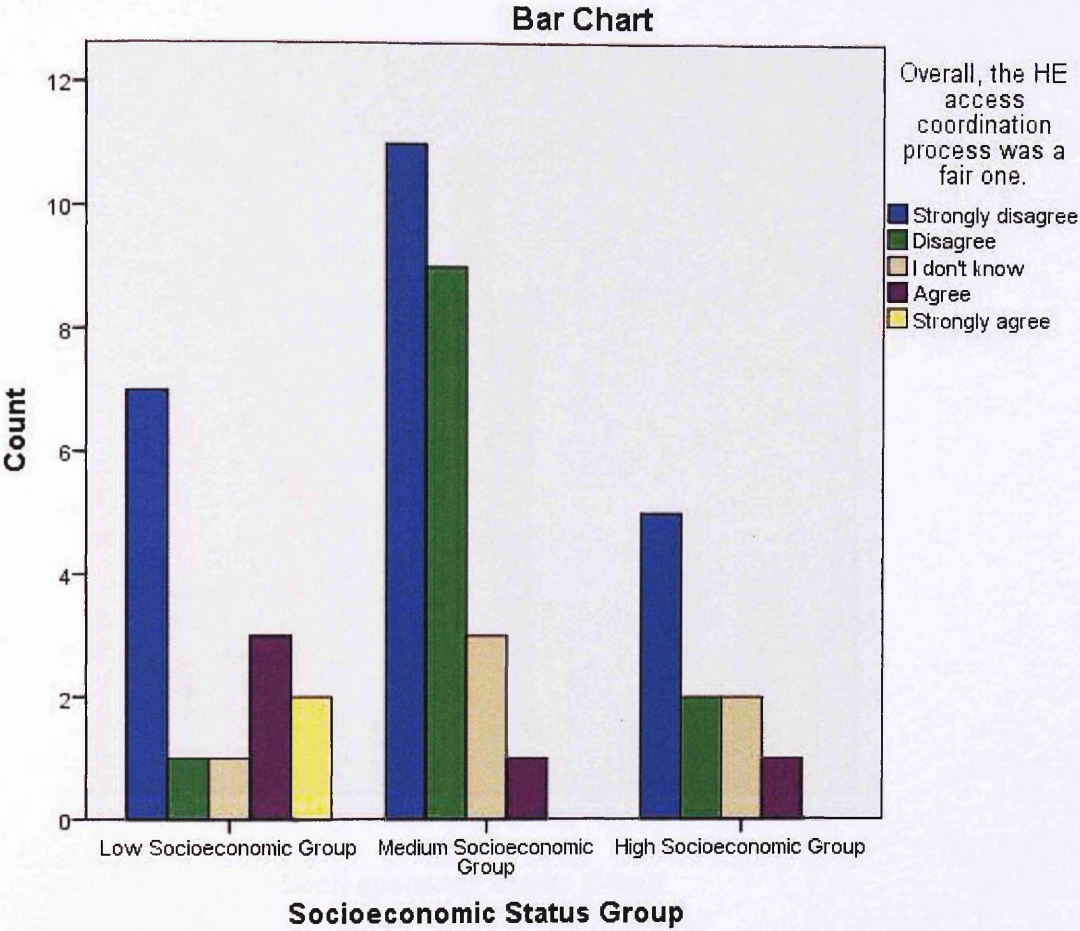
Figure 4.25: Overall, the HE access coordination process was a fair one.

The overwhelming majority (78.2%) that believed that private schools offered better education than public schools (Figure 4.2) disappeared in response to a similar question regarding private vs. public universities. Responses varied greatly and showed a normal distribution across all socioeconomic groups (Figure 4.26 & Table 4.18 in the appendix).
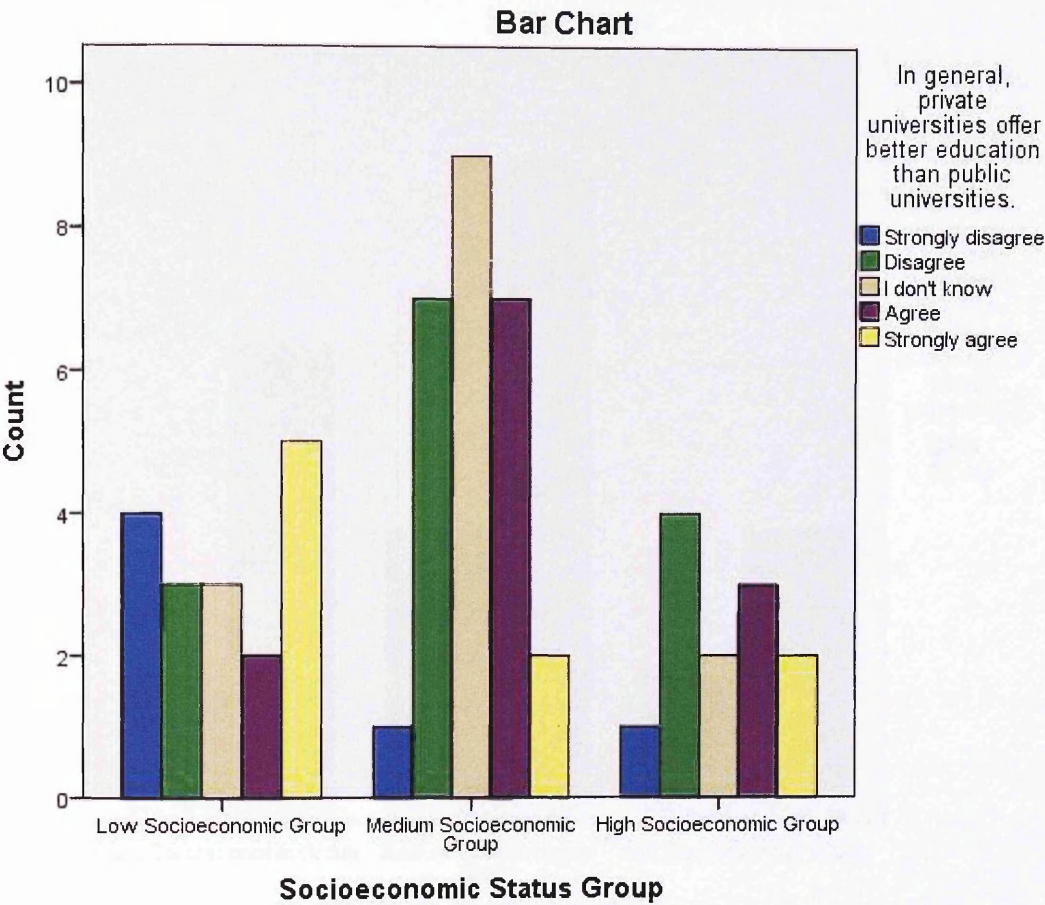
Figure 4.26: In general, private universities offer better education than public universities.

Yet again, 70.9% decided they'd prefer to join a private university to a public university

in case they receive a scholarship that allows them to study their desired discipline for free

(Figure 4.27 & Table 4.19 in the appendix).

Bar Chart
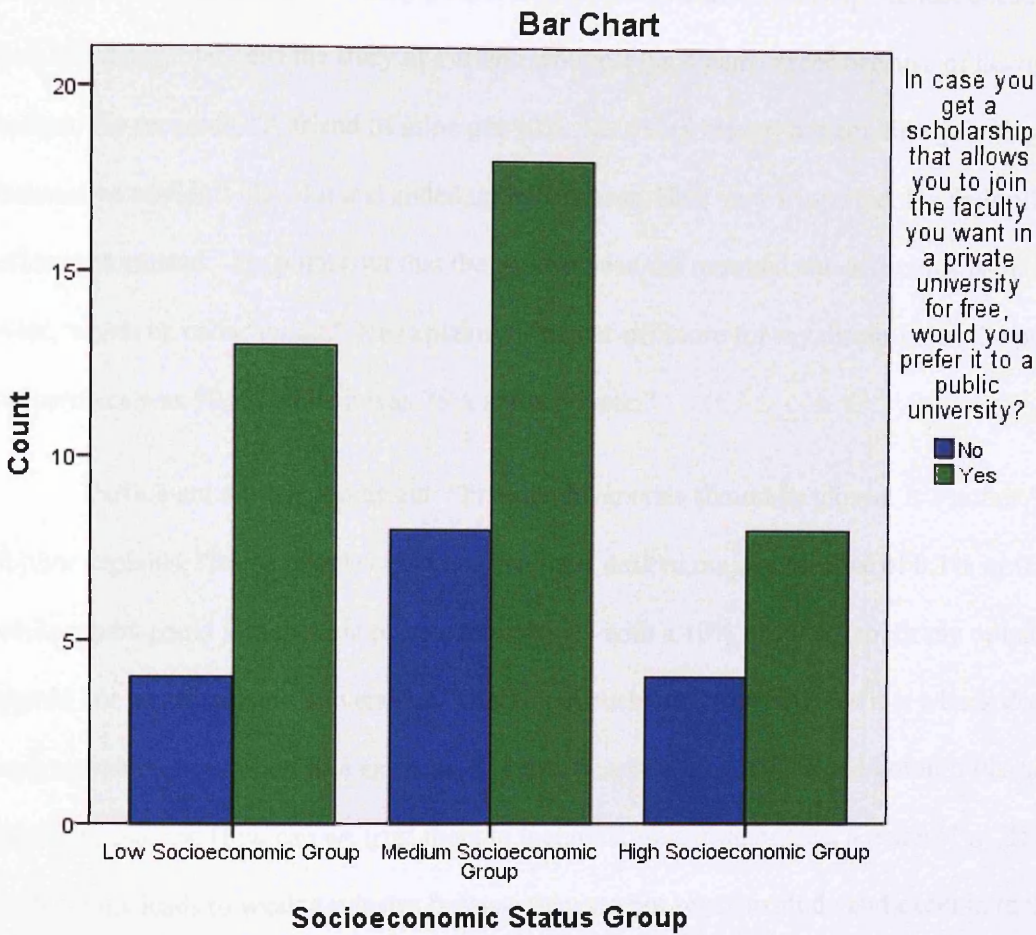
Figure 4.27: In case you get a scholarship that allows you to join the faculty you want in a

private university for free, would you prefer it to a public university?

Fairness was clearly at stake with the private-vs-public (or rather free-vs-for-fees) HE

options as expressed in the Participants' interview responses. "Securing oneself a place at HE

does not depend on a score any more; it depends on whether or not one can afford it," Participant

#32 concludes. Participant #44 agrees that the current situation is unfair and says, "I know

people who are now studying certain disciplines just because they could afford it and others who

were denied the same opportunities for lack of money." Participant #17 too numerates a number

of cases who either joined top faculties such as Pharmacy in private universities "with very low

scores" or "could not afford a private university" with a frictional difference in scores.

Participant #32 believes that "many people fail to join their desired discipline just because of

lack of money." He tells the story of a friend who lost his dream career because of his tight

budget. He recounts, "A friend of mine got 90%. He's very clever, but couldn't join Engineering

because he couldn't afford it and ended up in Business. He's very frustrated. He feels all his

effort was wasted." He points out that the gap between the required cut-off scores is often too

wide, which he calls "unfair." He explains, "The cut-off score for my discipline at the public

universities was 90+% while it was 75% at the private."

Participant #4 says it outright: "Private universities should be closed. It's unfair." She

further explains, "Some people could not join their desired majors because of 0.1% or 0.2%

while others could join them in private universities with a 10% or 20% gap. In my opinion, there

should not be any private universities. This is just business." She believes it is a back door to

undeserved opportunities. She explains, "I know people who got 73% and got into Pharmacy and

Medicine majors. How can we trust them to manufacture a drug or treat a patient? … This is

unfair. This leads to weak graduates because they are not ready to study and excel in those

specializations." She laments the fact that she could not have an equal chance to join Pharmacy

because of her score and further expresses her view that not only does private HE provides an

opportunity to those who can afford it but it also provides a better educational opportunity. She

explains, "There's no justice. I can't afford it. And private HE is becoming better than the public

HE. Labs are available; professors and TAs are accessible. So, you end up learning and

understanding. I've visited the Faculty of Pharmacy in Ain Shams University (a public

university). Labs are not complete. No one is keen on ensuring you understand the experiments."

Participant #5sums her perception of lack of fairness in her statement: "I have a problem

with private universities because they simply mean that if a student's parents have money, then

s/he doesn't have to work hard; in all cases, s/he'd join what s/he wants. Over and above, the social perception of public universities, which people worked hard to join, is lower than that of the private universities. Private universities are in fact better universities where students receive better education and mingle with colleagues of higher social standards. Money talks." Participant #5 holds the state accountable for the perceived injustice. She says, "There should be no private universities; the state should provide more resources to provide more spaces in response to the increasing population. It's the state's responsibility to provide free places for us regardless of the size of population." She also talks of a newly accredited Business, English section at a public university whose tuition fees are going to be more than triple her ordinary Business, English section (i.e. LE22,000). She believes that graduates of this section are expected to work in better-paid jobs. She rejects this kind of privatization of public HE and thinks it is harmful to the society. She explains, "This is unfair. All this reinforces classism."

Participant #46, who pays around LE7,000 for her annual fees at a public university, points out that HE is taking steady steps towards privatization first through private universities and then through the continuous introduction of high-fee sections in the public universities. She believes that it is unfair because "if one can't afford it, one is denied one's desired discipline." She condemns the government for taking advantage of the students and thinks it is some sort of abuse. She is complaining that instead of providing more free places for the students, the public faculties are limiting the free places and raising their qualifying cut-off scores while they keep introducing high-fee sections that accept lower scores and provide more facilities leading to a better service. She explains, "We're taught by the same professors but we get better services: ACs, WiFi, more space for students. But we study the same curricula; only the conditions are

more comfortable. That's the problem. It's just an abuse of the 0.5% grade that the student fell short of."

Participant #34 agrees with his fellow participants that the private/public dichotomy is unfair and that admission to HE should be based on academic excellence rather than financial capability. Although he pays L.E.8,000 annually for his tuition fees at the English section at the Faculty of Business in a public university, he reports failing to join the Faculty of Economics and Political Science at a private university, which he would have preferred, "for financial reasons." He further finds it unfair that the quality of education offered at the private university is better than that at the public. He calls for improvement of the governmental schools and universities so that everyone gets equal educational services. He explains that even in his public university, better HE conditions are provided to those who can afford it. He pays a lot more in his Business, English section, that his colleagues in the Arabic section. In return, "the number of students are less. We are 60 students; in the Arabic section, they are 1,000. Attendance is required in my section, and in general, there's better organization," he says. He adds, however, "but education wise, it's bad." He longs for an education that is based on research and inquiry, which he believes exists in the private universities. He concludes by an exclamation, "Why is every governmental service bad, whether educational, medical, or otherwise? Private services are different. If you pay for a service, you get something back, but citizens who can't afford to pay, don't ever get anything."

Similarly, Participant #38 holds the state responsible for the limited HE places and believes that there is a supply-and-demand mismatch, which contributes to the lack of fairness reflected in the private-vs-public HE division. He explains, "The state should create more places ... Thousands apply whereas only a few tens or hundreds are accepted. The state does not provide

good administration, (enough) places, or quality education in HE." Having said that, Participant

#38 believes that public university degrees have a better reputation although they do not offer

better education. Lack of resources and ineffective management were perceived as the main

obstacles. He says, "I don't know why public universities have a better reputation though they

don't offer better quality education. They don't offer good education because of the big class

sizes, less financial resources, and teaching methodology. They have good professors who do

their best and students who want to learn but there's lack of resources and poor management."

Participant #6, whose choices were limited to the Faculty of Law, agrees with her

colleagues that lack of fairness surpasses absence of equal opportunity across universities to a

gap in the quality of the offered educational system. She says, "My score would have allowed me

to major in Business at a private university. This is unfair, because people are allowed in or

denied opportunities just based on money." She believes that students at the private universities

are offered better education although those of the public universities are the better ones. She

says, "The salaries of the Professors [at private universities] are higher. So there's a financial

incentive to attract them. So the students will learn better. Education in the private universities

and schools is a lot better." She believes, however, that the quality advantage is not well-

deserved. She explains, "If we were to think about it, students at the public universities have

worked harder to get a higher score as compared to their counterparts at the private universities

who could buy the degree. So, yes students at the private universities receive better education,

but the ones in the public universities are smarter and exert more effort."

However, Participant #12, who has a positive view of education at her low-fee faculty at

a public university, contends that graduates of public universities are better qualified and that

they are preferred by employers even if they get lower GPAs "because it's well known that

there's no education at the private universities at all. They are a lot less demanding." She adds, "Students there don't learn; we do." She thinks of this preference at work as a form of restored justice although she thinks that private HE graduates are more likely to have guaranteed jobs in their fathers' businesses or to depend on connections because they are more likely to be able to afford it.

While Participant #28 agrees that a public HE degree is more valued than a private HE one, Participant #38 believes that private universities offer varied experiences. He compares his private university to another one that, in his view, offers better quality education but it regards its students "as a source of money and their prime concern is profit." He criticizes that university for lack of strictness – a characteristic that he appreciates in his university. He says, "I like strictness because it forces students to understand and benefit from what they study. The other university offers very good education but eventually everyone passes. It does not ensure that students learn." Not only do private universities offer varied experiences but also students join them for varied reasons according to Participant #38. Yet, there is often a classist perception of them all. Participant #32 agrees that private universities cannot be categorized in one basket and that they significantly differ in quality. He explains, "It's like the difference between buying from a brand name or another expensive shop. This has its effect on the material introduced to you and the quality and everything."

Participant #28 points out that "not all students at private universities have money; families of some of these students are doing their best to afford these universities because they know their children fell only a couple of grades short of their desired disciplines." His views suggest that the private universities are a financial burden on families who can barely afford them and who choose to help their children realize their dreams. Such views are supported by

Participant #25's whose father can barely afford the tuition fees of his son's private engineering institute. He reports that his father goes on a very tight budget to afford his annual LE10,000 tuition fees. "The fees are a burden, but my dad is doing his best," he says. He explains that his father used to be against private HE as a matter of principle "because he believed it was unfair" but then decided to help his son when he could not study engineering in public HE.

Participant #28, who, by the time of the interview, had not gone through a HE admission process yet, was unable to determine whether private universities provide an unfair opportunity to those who can afford it, yet he agrees it is a financial burden. He dreams of joining the Military; if not, he would like to study engineering, but he knows his score would not qualify him to study the latter in a public university. He says, "I could join a private university. Both my parents want me to join a private university because they want the best for me but I'm against the private option because I don't want to be a burden on my father. Based on my grades so far, I can join Business at a public university."

Participant #44, who pays LE8,000 for his new specialization in a public university, reports that it was a relief to his father compared to another choice of a private university with rocketing fees. He adds, however, "I know my fees are a burden to some of my colleagues." Participant #46, who goes to the same faculty as Participant #44, reports that her fees were not a huge burden because they were comparable to her school fees; however, it was still a point of consideration as a matter of principle. She reports that her parents expected her to receive free education especially that she was going to a public university, but when they compared her fees to other comparable public faculties that still required high (or higher) fees, they decided to accept the status quo.

Participant #52 who ended up paying LE38,000 at a private university to study dentistry explains that despite the classist view of universities, she still would have joined a public university had she qualified for one. She, and her father too, thought that, as a matter of principle, they were not supposed to pay all that for HE. He suggested she chooses another discipline and studies languages at a public university. Even she considered that "as a cheaper option," then she felt she had better follow her passion since she is more interested in medical sciences than in languages. Making a comparison between studying dentistry at her private university to studying it at the best public universities in Egypt, she believes, however, that she is better off where she is because her university offers better education because it is better equipped with labs and other necessary facilities.

Un/acceptance of the current practice of admission into HE and relevant questions of fairness was at times tied to broader concerns of the interpretation of GSEC scores. While Participant #47 agrees that allowing students to join disciplines at private universities when they are not qualified to join them in public universities is unfair, he questions the interpretation of the scores and wonders, "If it's a difference of 0.5%, what does 0.5% mean anyway?" He, therefore, believes that this issue of fairness should be considered in light of a broader educational reform. Participant #40 criticizes the wide gap of the required scores between the two university camps, but he does not mind a small difference. He says, "Honestly, it's not very fair. It shouldn't be that open; someone who got 70% should not be allowed to become an engineer. But if it's only a matter of a couple of grades per cent, it's OK." Similarly, although Participant #25 thinks private HE "is unfair to those who can't afford it," he believes it is a fair back-up to the good students who do their best but are unlucky for unforeseen reasons such as "unfair grading, misleading invigilators, close-enough grades, or even failing cheating."

Participant #52 also finds the situation unfair but she too finds it difficult to interpret the

difference in scores. She explains, "The scores do not put people in order; they reflect the ability

to memorize and cheat. They don't reflect whether a student is good or smart. There's a lot of

unfairness in the scores." She highlights grading as an aspect of assessment that she fails to trust.

She recounts her experience with re-marking. She explains, "I've seen my paper, the graders

would give me a check mark and then don't give the grade, or give a cross mark on a correct

answer." She also talks of how she was offered by an inspector to have her name added to a

basketball winning team without really participating in the sports tournament in order to have

around 4% added to her final score.

7.1. Social capital

Not only was the financial capital perceived as an influential factor leading to inequitable

access to HE in Egypt, but the social capital also had a crucial role to play. Although the GSEC

exam is supposed, in theory, to provide an equal chance to all examinees to join HE, 54.6% of

the research sample believe that students' social capital in the form of connections play a vital

role when joining a desired university or discipline (Figure 4.28 & Table 4.20 in the appendix).

This belief was either reflected in their reported behavior or in narratives of experiences they

have witnessed. Participant #17, for example, was talking about his attempt to join the Military

when he said, "Before the GSEC exams, I went to see many people, because I knew connections

were inevitably needed."

Connections were also mentioned in relation to finding back doors to add on more grades

to the GSEC score. Participant #52 tells her story with her attempt to get extra grades for sports

achievement, which marks a case of corruption. She says,

I play basketball, so I thought I'd join the schools' tournament to get the grade for it. I trained for three months at a very critical time – January to March –, before the exams. I would wake up early every morning to do the training before I go to the different private lessons in hopes I get the grade. The coach kept giving me hope that I was going to be elected, but then 3 days before the matches, I was out. We learned from other parents that choice was based on connections and bribes. Had I known earlier, I wouldn't have wasted my time training. I knew before joining that connections are involved but I never expected it was a decisive factor. The inspector, who pitied me, told my mom that she would just add my name to any winning team just to get the grade, without me playing there at all. This happens for bribes and she told my mom about many cases of students who do the same. Of course we refused to accept that. My friends who got scores for sports got 3.5% and 4%. This would make all the difference.

Bar Chart
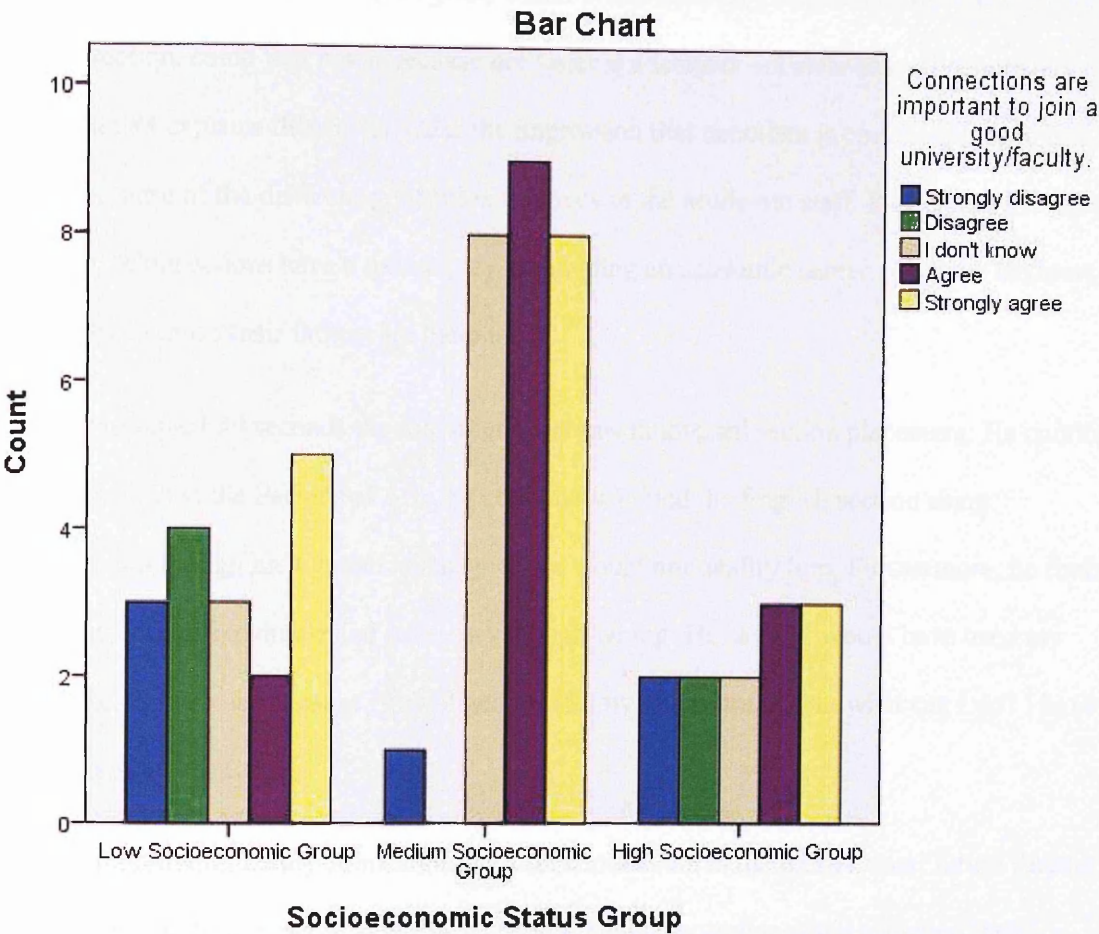
Figure 4.28: Connections are important to join a good university/faculty.

Participant #4 points out that connections had a role to play inside her faculty in the

section placement stage. She tells an interesting story that exemplifies injustice. Joining the

Faculty of Languages, she says that she wished she could do English as a first language and

German as a second language. Whereas she got the required score in her GSEC English subject

(48/50), she was rejected and forced into the German section because her grade in German was

higher (50/50). "So I'm being punished for studying well. Had I got 48 in both, I would have had

the right to join the English section." She says that she tried getting connections to help her move

to the English section but nothing worked. What aggravated the problem is that she learned that a

colleague of hers who got 47.5 in English, which is less than the required cut-off score for the English section, could join it just because her sister is a lecturer – a clear case of nepotism. Participant #4 explains that she is under the impression that nepotism is commonplace in her faculty because of the different-generation relatives in the academic staff. Participant #12 agrees and adds, "Connections have a role to play in pursuing an academic career. We have lecturers at our faculty because their fathers are there too."

Participant #9 seconds the role of connections in internal section placement. He confirms that had he joined the Faculty of Arts, he could have joined the English section using connections although his English language score would not qualify him. Furthermore, he finds using connections inevitable and necessary though wrong. He says, "I would have used my connection in that case because I'm obliged to. I know this is unfair, but what can I do? I have to make use of all chances."

Furthermore, family connections as a rock to lean on in the participants' future careers were reported to be a decisive factor by 62.5% of the whole sample when choosing their disciplines (Figure 4.29 & Table 4.21 in the appendix). In the interviews, some participants were very clear about avoiding certain disciplines because of lack of work connections. Participant #4 states clearly that she and her friends have abandoned Economic and Political Science because they knew they would not be able to find the relevant connections to pursue their careers as politicians. She explains, "The diplomatic path is not for everyone. I have colleagues in the Faculty of Languages who chose not to join Economic and Political Science because they decided the diplomatic path is only for those who have strong connections." Participant #5 relates that when she was younger, she used to dream of becoming an announcer but then she "realized that such career would depend mostly on connections." She too reports that she

dropped Economics and Political Science from her list of choices because, in addition to its high

fees, she believed that "one wouldn't be able to have a career in Politics unless one's father is a

diplomat."
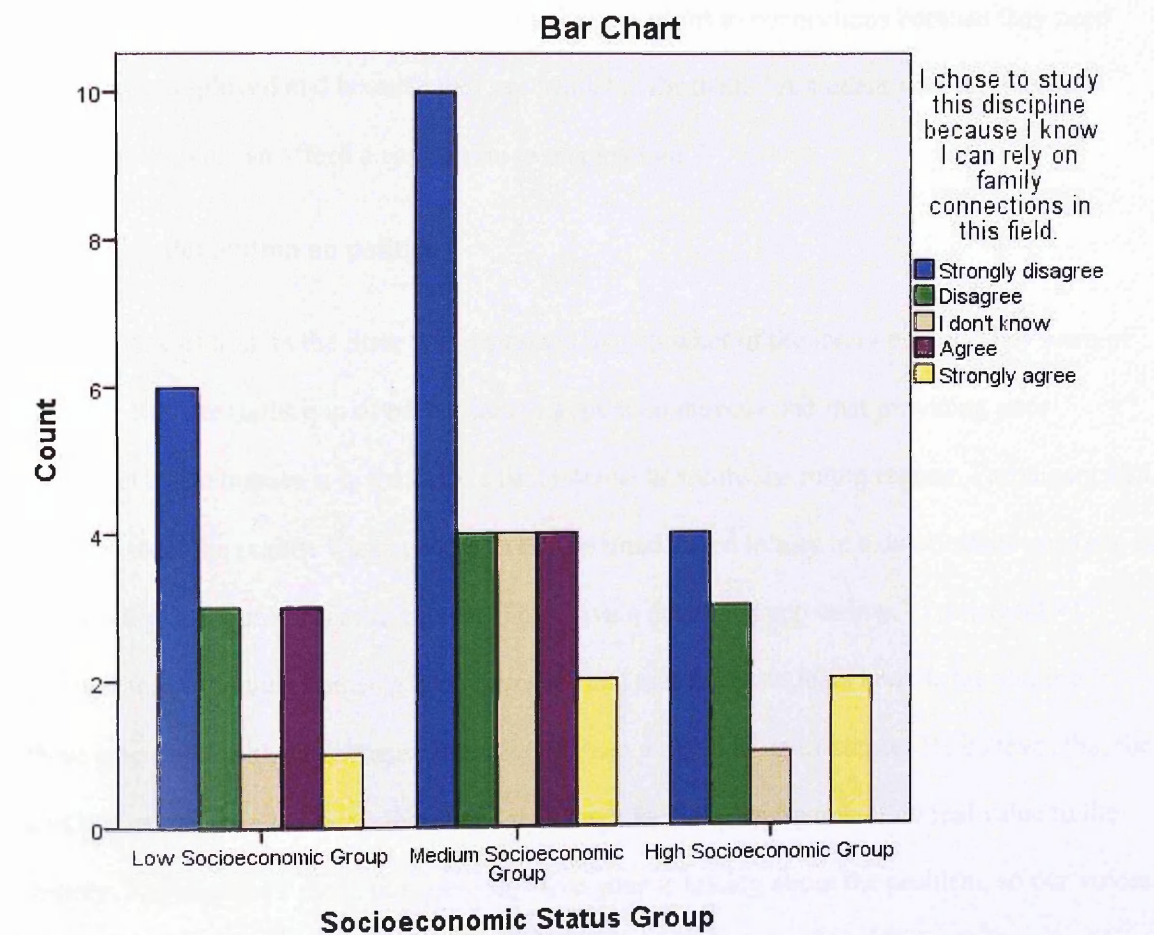
Figure 4.29: I chose to study this discipline because I know I can rely on family connections in

this field.

There was also evidence that students could adopt or avoid certain careers relevant to

their current disciplines based on un/availability of connections. Participant #6 expresses her

wish to work in the administrative prosecution upon graduation from the Faculty of Law if her GPA allows her but doubts her ability to realize her dream because she believes it requires connections.

During the interviews, it was often implicitly hinted, but sometimes explicitly stated, that connections are positively correlated with the socioeconomic class. For example, Participant #12 believes that private HE graduates are more likely to resort to connections because they need them to get employed and because they are available for them. "A student who can pay LE 20,000 or 30,000 can afford a connection to employ him."

7.2. Perception on politics

Lack of trust in the State was expressed by a number of the interviewees. They were of the view that the status quo of education in Egypt is on purpose and that providing poor education to the masses is in the State's best interest to secure the ruling regime. Participant #25 believes that "the regime wants people to remain uneducated to stay in a deteriorated position. If we develop, we would become a threat. They have a desire to keep us low." Participant #17 believes that "allowing cheating is on purpose" and that the State fears knowledge and is after those who think critically because it considers them a threat to its existence. He believes that the media is orchestrated to serve that purpose through focusing on figures of no real value to the society. Participant #2 poses the question, "Everyone is talking about the problem, so our voices must have been heard by the authorities. So, why haven't they fixed it?" Participant #4 attributes the problem of private lessons to political corruption. He says, "This problem can be solved if the State corruption stops and the national income is redistributed."

Participant #32 expresses his lack of trust in the State and his belief in the absence of a political will to reform education. He says, "I never felt there was ever a plan to fix education, although this should come first … I also don't think the authorities care much about the People, whether we get educated or not. They only care about themselves. I'm not sure why this is happening in our country. I don't know." Participant #12 attributes the problem to lack of competence. She says, "I just want to stress that they don't know what they're doing. The study-at-home system in HE was there, abolished, then restored. What is the rationale? They also had 6th primary, abolished it then restored it. What's their rationale? The same thing applies to changing the GSEC from two years to one year back and forth. What's the rationale behind this?"

- **Summary**

Perceptions of lack of fairness in the HE access process are primarily emerging from a general belief that studying a desired field in HE depends more on a student's financial resources than on a student's academic abilities. The government is held responsible for creating a back door to undeserved opportunities and for its dereliction in providing equal opportunities to meet HE demand. The wide gap between public and private score requirements is frustrating and magnifies injustice. Students are also conscious that HE is taking steady steps towards more privatization not only through the creation of more private HE institutions but also through the continuous introduction of high-fee sections in the public universities. While it is believed that the latter do not introduce any different curricula from those of the low-fee sections, they reportedly offer better conditions and more facilities.

A general preference to join private universities was indicated by the research

participants although an agreement on the superior quality of education offered in these

universities was absent. Explanations offered by a number of participants suggest a) that private

and high-fee HE generally provides better conditions regardless of the quality of education; b)

that private and high-fee HE offers students high social status, which is an attracting factor; and

c) that private universities fall into different categories in terms of the quality of education they

offer so that, generally speaking, private HE are not necessarily viewed as better providers of

education than public HE. Presenting an opportunity to study a desired discipline with lower

GSEC scores; providing more facilities, better conditions and sometimes better education;

offering higher social status; and being financially challenging, private and high-fee HE is

regarded as an unfair privilege of the high socioeconomic class.

There was an invitation by a number of participants, however, to view the unfairness

incurred by private and high-fee HE in light of broader concerns regarding the interpretation of

GSEC scores. Test-driven education, assessment at the knowledge level, unfair grading, and

cheating all raise questions regarding the meaning of the scores in terms of students' abilities,

shake the students' confidence in the GSEC competition, and call for the need of a more

comprehensive educational reform. Therefore, research findings reveal that a small gap in the

admission score requirements is sometimes pardoned; wide gaps are not though.

Not only was reliance on students' economic capital perceived as a good enough reason

to claim a case of injustice, but dependence on their social capital was also viewed by over half

of the sample as another source of unfairness in HE access. Depending on nepotism and personal

connections to disregard admission criteria and using bribery to add more grades to GSEC scores

are reported practices with regards to HE access. Furthermore, un/availability of career-related connections was also a decisive factor in HE access as reported by a majority of the sample.

Findings of the research suggest that the perceived status of unfairness in Education in Egypt is attributed to political corruption. Lack of trust in the State's ability or willingness to effect educational reform is commonplace.

8. Frustration and Lack of Self-Confidence

"Frustration" is a recurrent word by Participant #2. She attributes her frustration to her family's poor financial conditions. She explains that in spite of her and her father's ambition for a career in medicine, her "ability to concentrate was declining due to a number of external reasons: living conditions, malnutrition, and a lot of things. So [she] lost hope." She clearly lacks self-confidence. She says, "No resources were provided for me. I used to study at a neighbour's house … So I'm trying to do my best to tell my family that what you're doing is paying off. But sometimes I get frustrated and think I won't be able to continue."

Participant #4 expressed her frustration and dissatisfaction of her field of study repeatedly all through her interview. She was forced to give up her dream of being a pharmacist and ended up studying German because she could not afford studying Pharmacy at a private university. She reports falling 0.5% short of a qualifying grade to study at a public university. Coming from an economically struggling family, she was hoping to make a leap and make her family proud of her, especially after her father passed away. She says, "What got to me was the fact that I lost my dream and my Mom's dream." She repeats the statement "I'm not happy" three times in about 70 minutes and thinks that what happened to her is unfair.

Participant #5, on the other hand, though belonging to the low socioeconomic group, expressed her great satisfaction with her faculty. She could join the faculty that she originally wanted but she states clearly that joining this faculty would not have been possible without the 25% scholarship that she received because otherwise the high tuition fees would not have been affordable. Participant #5 pays high fees for her English section at the Faculty of Business at a public university. It was the financial support that brought satisfaction to this participant and made it possible for her to study her desired discipline.

The source of Participant #9's frustration was his score in the first of the two GSEC years as it meant that it was impossible for him to join the discipline he aspired to study, i.e. engineering, even if he were to score 100% in his final year. Consequently, he transferred from the Maths to the Arts section and dropped the idea of splitting the third year over two years to maximize his chance to score higher as he was originally considering. He ended up joining the Faculty of Law at a public university.

Frustration was also clearly detected in relation to the social capital. The inability to secure the connections necessary to pursue a given career, as discussed in details in section 7.1., has a clear impact on students' confidence in their abilities to realize their academic ambitions. Making HE choices based on one's knowledge of potential future support, or lack thereof, is a clear sign of an unjust system and of students' perception of self-worth.

Frustration was not monopolized by a specific socioeconomic group. Participant #34 was unhappy he was studying Business and not pursuing his passion for writing because his school education did not help him to discover his talents and have faith in them. His lack of self-confidence to pursue his academic ambition is a reflection of an educational system that could

not do its job successfully. Participant #52 expressed her frustration and depression due to a

system that allowed cheating and corruption to determine a student's future rather than his/her

academic excellence. As discussed earlier, all interviewees expressed their mistrust and

dissatisfaction with the current GSEC system.

- **Summary**

It is interesting to see that an unfair system that discriminates based on socioeconomic

class is a frustrating system not only to the unprivileged class but to everyone. Frustration in the

case of low socioeconomic students is easily attributed to tight financial conditions and the

subsequent inability to achieve academic ambition. Limited financial and social capitals make it

easy for students to lose confidence in their ability to challenge their circumstances. Receiving

financial aids clearly makes a difference in students' ability to realize their dreams and, hence, in

influencing their level of satisfaction. Frustration with a failing educational system was a general

phenomenon across all groups because it meant inefficiency and an inability to trust the system.

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusion

Purpose of Research

In a country where poverty is huge and economic disparity is prevailing (CAPMASa; Global Wealth report, 2014), examining the role of education and its impact on social inequality becomes necessary. Since the two-way relationship between education and social justice is evident worldwide in general and in Egypt in particular (McArthur, 2010; Singh, 2011; Buckner, 2013; UNICEFF, 2014), investigating the connection between educational policies and inequalities was the driving force of this research. This research focuses on HE as a gateway to career options. Stratification of HE in spite of its massification sheds light on unequal access to HE (Furlong and Cartmel, 2009). There is a strong evidence established in the literature that such stratification is a result of privatization of education, economic inequalities and HE access policies that, rather than provide equal opportunities on the basis of merit, allow economic, social and cultural factors to favour the privileged over the poor segments of society, which, in turn, promotes economic and social inequalities in a never-ending vicious circle (UNESCO, 2009; World Bank and OECD, 2010; Buckner, 2013). Although admission into HE in Egypt is meritocratic in principle, in practice, financial, social and cultural resources promote not only accessibility to HE but accessibility to better quality HE.

This study, therefore, has sought to examine HE accessibility in Egypt from the students' lens. It has attempted to uncover their perspective on factors and practices contributing to the unjust situation. It also attempts to expose their understanding of the notion of justice as relevant to HE accessibility, their awareness of the role economic, social and cultural factors play in

shaping their future, and the way they consider these factors in their HE access decision-making process.

Research Questions

Given the inequitable access to HE in Egypt, this study attempted to investigate the Egyptian students' perspective on the issue. It sought to dig into their understanding of the way the economic, social and cultural factors shape their HE opportunities and interfere into their HE access decision making. It also aimed at examining the students views on how social justice is, or is not, realized through the current HE access policies. The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do the General Secondary Education Certificate (GSEC) students in Egypt perceive the impact of different socioeconomic resources on their Higher Education (HE) access experience?

2. To what extent are social justice factors apparent in students' estimations of the process of access to HE in Egypt?

The data coming from this study revealed that GSEC students in Egypt are aware of the role their different socioeconomic conditions play in shaping their accessibility to HE. Low socioeconomic classes are believed to be under-privileged and denied equal opportunity due to a number of accumulative factors starting with accessibility to high-fee private schools, which provide better quality education over the years, better language education, and schooling conditions that allow for the provision of a better service. The perceived failure of the school system during GSEC across all socioeconomic segments is quite significant since it allows private lessons to become increasingly important – indeed, it eventually replaced the school

system – and the financial capability to determine the number and quality of private lessons a

student can attend. Since private lessons are considered crucial to excelling in GSEC, the

financial capability becomes a determinant factor of HE accessibility.

Students believe that not only do poor financial conditions limit accessibility to private

lessons during GSEC but they also determine GSEC academic choices. Students belonging to the

lower end of the socioeconomic continuum are reported to opt for the Arts section of the GSEC

certificate, which qualifies them for Humanities and Social Sciences majors, for financial and

social reasons. According to the students, lack of financial resources for more expensive private

lessons and more demanding subjects in the GSEC Science and Maths sections denies them the

opportunity to major in hard sciences in HE. In other words, they believe that their academic

routes are predetermined by their socioeconomic conditions rather than their academic merits.

The data suggest that replacing the school system with private tutoring is an unwelcomed

situation by students despite their conforming to it. A very low teacher income, absence of

efficient supervision, packed classes, and test-driven education have lead to a collapsing free

educational system, which created the financial burden of private lessons and no longer

guaranteed equal opportunity. Addressing the causes of the problem seemed like a logical

solution to ensure the educational process takes place at school.

Among the suggestions was modifying the assessment system which currently focuses on

the knowledge level of learning and allows cheating, which renders the whole process pointless

as perceived by the students. Findings show lack of trust in GSEC as an educational tool and a

fair competition to join HE. Such lack of trust in the system is believed to encourage corrupt

practices such as cheating, which has become an epidemic, reinforcing injustice in the access

experience. Students across the board are conscious of the need for an overall reform of the

GSEC system and educational process. There is a genuine demand for student-centered

education encompassing more meaningful and relevant curricula, fair testing and grading and an

assessment system that tests beyond the knowledge level and fairly measures discipline-related

skills and academic abilities.

With lack of trust in the process comes frustration, which is interestingly common across

the board, but low self-confidence and limited aspirations seem to be common only among the

low socioeconomic strata of the society. Students coming from the lower socioeconomic

segments report not only lacking resources that bring about access to the desired HE

opportunities but also losing hope in their ability to challenge their circumstances and realize

their dreams. Lack of money was clearly perceived as an essential deterrent to making their

desired academic choices.

The result as revealed by the data was that the outcome of the HE access process was

very different in the two ends of the socioeconomic classes of the society. Basically, students

belonging to the high socioeconomic class 1) have a greater opportunity to study the major they

want, 2) are less likely to adjust their HE choice for financial reasons, and 3) pay more for their

HE. Clearly, students as a whole are not playing on a level playing field and the claim of the

provision of equal opportunity on the basis of merit is more an illusion than a lived experience.

Rather, students' narratives suggest that their financial capabilities are crucial determinants in all

aspects of the access process.

It is not surprising then that a classist view of HE is quite apparent in the students' views.

The social construction of value and worth based on university type (public vs private; low-fee

vs high-fee) expressed by the participants which places graduates of the latter types at a higher social status but not necessarily at a higher academic one seems like a natural outcome of a process that systematically favours the financially privileged at the expense of merit. Such classism, which transcends the type of university and degree obtained to the discipline studied, is believed to be so embedded in society that obtaining a HE degree, even if irrelevant to an individual's pursued career, is perceived as a gateway to social acceptance not merely an initial condition to securing a job. This social pressure to obtain a HE degree of specific standards reinforces social injustice since low socioeconomic classes are unable to compete on equal footing. (See section 5 in Chapter 4)

A high level of awareness of the unfortunate situation of injustice is evident. Students realize that their financial resources are a key factor in their HE access process. They understand that the widening gap between low-score high-fee HE opportunities vs. the high-score low-fee ones is a serious challenge to equal opportunity, and the government is blamed for this situation. Although private and high-fee HE are not necessarily believed to offer better education, they were still viewed as a privilege for the social status they provide, the better conditions they offer, the better education they sometimes give, and above all the opportunity to major in a desired field.

But financial resources were not the only source of discrimination that was cited; students believed that social and cultural resources had a major role to play too. Using personal connections, exploiting nepotism and giving bribes were all reported practices that allowed access to HE opportunities that otherwise would not be obtained. Socially discriminating admission criteria in some majors were also pointed out as a practice that uproots equality and

incurs social injustice. Whether economic, social or cultural, resources used to facilitate access to HE are believed to generally favour the high socioeconomic segments of the society, which pushes the society in a vicious circle of classism and social injustice.

Contribution to New Knowledge

- **Implications for theory and research**

These findings may be understood in terms of Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural reproduction. He foregrounds the systematic advantages the privileged classes enjoy in society due to their cultural, economic, and social resources. Bourdieu's theory has been used by many researchers to explain the role of education in social and cultural reproduction (Tabb, 2013; Nash, 1990). This study, however, uses his theory to explain the students' views on the issue. Drawing on his theory to include the students' perceptions is my main contribution to knowledge that this research offers. The study uncovers the way individuals understand the way their economic, cultural and social capitals interact with the structure of their educational fields to determine their positions in the social world. The study explores the students' consciousness of the processes undergoing HE access and captures the students' experience as they narrate it.

Bourdieu explains how structure and agency interact to shape the social world and determine an individual's position in society (Bourdieu, 1986; Tabb, 2011). To Bourdieu, accumulation of cultural, economic, social and symbolic capitals is an individual's means to occupy a better position in society (Hage, 2013). While cash, social relations and recognition are important to Bourdieu, he gives supremacy to an individual's cultural capital, i.e., life experience, knowledge and behavioural know-how (Nash, 1990; Hage, 2013).

Findings of this research, however, suggest that Marx's view that the economic capital is

at the heart of social inequality (Tabb, 2011) should be recentered in social contexts like those of

Egypt. While all other capitals come into play and while one form of capital could turn into

another as Bourdieu suggests (Bourdieu, 1986; Nash, 1990), in a turning point in an individual's

life such as HE access in a context similar to Egypt's, the economic resources seem to be a

crucially influential determinant of a student's academic path, which, in turn, is a valuable

capital that shapes an individual's position in society. The attempt to maximize an individual's

symbolic capital is constantly primarily obstructed by limited economic resources. A possible

interpretation for the acute bias of the findings towards the economic capital as a central player

in the Egyptian context could be that the impact of the economic factor is more transparent to the

students and its direct influence could be easily perceived and traced as opposed to the intricacies

of the cultural capital and the way the latter interacts with education opportunities.

Bourdieu believed that education is overcome by symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977). He

perceived it as an essential cause of social inequality and cultural reproduction due to its

favouring certain cultures and classes through its selection process among other things. Symbolic

violence is also exercised through dominating the culture and structure of the educational field

through equating academic classifications to social classes (Tabb, 2013). This postulation seems

to be supported by the research findings. Students feel the social pressure to obtain an HE

degree, to study specific majors, and to join specific universities, regardless of the career

instrumentality and academic worth of their degree in many cases, because this is what makes

them socially accepted.

Although Bourdieu's claim that cultural capital facilitates educational attainment and career advancement (Tabb, 2013) is quite sensible, his assertion that low self-esteem of the under-privileged and a tendency to conform to tastes and dispositions embedded in their class are the main reason behind HE stratification (Bourdieu, 1990; Tabb, 2013) is challenged by findings of this research. Narratives of participants suggest that it was the economic resources that appeared to be most influential in limiting HE opportunities for the under-privileged classes in the Egyptian context. It was also the students' tight economic resources that seemed to be the most influential determinant in their decision making processes all along their journey: Decisions to join a GSEC Arts or Science section, to attend private lessons, to take up an available high-fee HE opportunity, ... etc. all depended on the availability of financial sources. In fact, social and cultural consideration seemed to work towards attempting to upgrade their social position rather than conforming to their low social classes.

Bourdieu maintains that legitimated inequality could be invisible to individuals resulting in symbolic violence being exercised on individuals with their complicity (Hage, 2013). Although willing, unconscious submission to legitimated inequalities sounds plausible and provides adequate explanations to other social phenomena such as the allocation of gender social roles, for example, findings of this research suggest that inequitable access to HE is not invisible to Egyptian students. Resistance to symbolic violence that Bourdieu discusses (Tabb, 2013) does not seem to be the exception in this context as he suggests. The overwhelming spreading of the illegal practice of cheating could be viewed as a form of resistance. Most interviewed participants admitted cheating and justified it on the basis of lack of trust in the fairness and efficiency of the educational and assessment system. Other corrupt practices such as nepotism

and the use of bribes, though clearly condemned, could also be viewed as a reaction to an unfair situation.

This study is extending the work of Bourdieu to encompass the students' perceptions of social and cultural reproduction as they go through a defining moment in their academic life. The study is also using the research findings to revisit Bourdieu's theory. It suggests that when it comes to provision of educational opportunities as a means of upgrading an individual's position in society, the economic capital could be the most significant as perceived by students. The structure of the educational field could give the economic capital optimum value and allow it to determine an individual's position in the field. The study also suggests that the assumptions that social injustices could be invisible to its under-privileged individuals causing them to contribute to the imposed inequality and that resistance is uncommon are not valid assumptions for the case of inequitable access to HE in Egypt. That deviation from the theory could be explained in terms of the study's adoption of a pragmatist approach that values specificity of the context. The specific circumstances associated with a developing country like Egypt where social and economic injustices are escalating and corruption is commonplace maximize the challenge of accessing HE; hence, resistance. The gap between classes is too wide to be unnoticed. In effect, the contrasts of different forms and strengths of capital 'owned' by prospective students in a country like Egypt are starker. Analysis of the context suggests that the differentiation of advantage is less subtle, and economic rather than cultural differences become more foregrounded.

- **Methodological lessons learnt**

Analysis of Facebook as a research tool in the field of educational research is another angle of novelty in this research. While social media has been widely accepted as a research tool, its use in research has been limited and there has been a partial understanding among researchers of that use (Rowlands, Nicholas, Russell, Canty, & Watkinson, 2011). It is generally an under-researched area (Baker, 2013). This study has shed light on the advantages and challenges of using Facebook as a research tool.

Although social media would be expected to be convenient for maximizing accessibility and for saving time and space, it was not so much so with participants of limited economic resources. This study suggests that social media, and online communication in general, is not a suitable research medium for the low socioeconomic segments of society due to limited accessibility. Yet, this study shows that even with unlimited accessibility, commitment to contribution via social media in longitudinal studies is a challenge that requires taking further measures to encourage participation. Controllability of the research medium is one other serious concern that, based on the research design, could risk the loss of the research data. Researcher technological familiarity of the used social media platform is highly recommended. It is also recommended to periodically back up any collected data saved on the platform to avoid any unpredicted problems.

On the other hand, using Facebook as a research tool in this study had its positive effect on maximizing retention of participants over time through maintaining contact, building rapport and trust, and creating a sense of belonging. All this is believed to have facilitated data collection and contributed to the participants' openness during the qualitative data collection phase. The

study supports Baker's (2013) contention that a combination of online and offline

communication with research participants maximizes research potentials. Despite the limitations

experienced, I argue that advantages of using Facebook as a research tool in this study

outweighed its challenges. Nonetheless, studies researching low socioeconomic class should be

cautious about using online communication.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This study suggests that the current Egyptian educational policies in general and its HE

access policies in particular are not seen as fair by its students and that they are believed to

reproduce social injustice in the Egyptian society. Unbiased policies that do not discriminate on

the basis of economic, social, or cultural status need to be put in place. Based on the research

findings a number of recommendations could be put forward:

- Merit should be the only basis for HE access and the democratization of education should

  be a priority. Students should not be given the chance to buy a HE place. Test grades

  should be the only decisive factor for accessing HE.

- Privatization policies have obviously harmed the Egyptian educational system through

  favouring the privileged minority. Expansion of privatization that the Egyptian

  government continues to adopt is expected to inflict more harm on the Egyptian society.

  It is recommended that the government increase the national expenditure on the

  educational sector to fulfill the criteria of adequacy, efficiency and equity as well as place

  opportunities for public HE institutions to generate money to self-fund so that

  privatization could be gradually eliminated in this sector. Private HE should no longer be

welcome and for-profit HE institutions should not be allowed. Furthermore, the existing private institutions should be forced to find alternative sources of funding.

- A comprehensive reform of the school educational system is an absolute necessity. Test-led education that targets the basic knowledge level of education eradicates the original purpose of education, being human development, and focuses on pointless rote learning. Creating more relevant curricula, providing appropriate schooling facilities, introducing modern teaching methods, designing valid assessment tools, having proper supervision are all required procedures to restore a collapsing educational system that is harming the Egyptian society.

- A combination of a school-based examination, i.e. GSEC, and ability and aptitude tests should be considered for the equal opportunity this approach presents. Being more relevant to the students' desired fields, ability and aptitude tests are expected to measure an important dimension of the students' merits and potentials. In addition, being a comprehensive approach, it takes into consideration students' achievement at school. This approach should be adopted with extreme caution though given the widespread corruption that could make ability and aptitude tests a back door to the socially, economically, and culturally privileged.

- The eradication of private tutoring is not going to happen without the restoration of the school role that it once played and without an overall educational reform; but above all, it is not going to happen without fixing teachers' economic conditions. There is a dire need for a comprehensive teacher support system that ensures proper teacher education and provides teachers with decent salaries that saves them the need to look for alternative jobs to support their families.

Study Limitations

This study was undertaken while taking into consideration a number of limitations:

Using a snowballing technique for participant recruitment was an enforced choice due to the sensitivity of the researched topic, limited resources and the political situation. This choice, in turn, resulted in somewhat limiting the number of recruited participants, although the number was still within an acceptable range for statistical analysis (Cohen, Manion, and Marrion, 2007). Adopting a mixed methods approach, this study was not aiming at representativeness. Rather, it focused on the saturation of the data and the transferability of the study findings, which is an acceptable practice in mixed methods research according to Teddlie and Yu (2007).

Another limitation related to the sensitivities of discussions in the low socioeconomic group was their unwillingness to reveal data. However, I argue that falling more towards the insider end of the insider/outsider researcher continuum was an optimum position for a researcher to discuss sensitive issues. On the one hand, familiarity of the context made it possible to expect sensitivities and tactfully handle them through being careful with the used language, reassuring participants, and protecting their privacy. Additionally, I was not perceived as a threat since I had no influence on their circumstances or their choices whatsoever.

However, a more serious concern in this study that had to do with my position on the insider/outsider continuum and my familiarity with the context was related to distance, the researcher's independence and the process of sense-making of the data. Approaching the research with prior biases and a strong sense of commitment bore the risk of yielding conclusions that are colored by the researcher's views, a risk pointed out by Eisner (1993). In addition, adopting a constructivist approach to interviewing where meaning of a significant

amount of data was assigned through an interactive role maximized that risk as pointed out by

Knight and Saunders (1991) and Verschuren (2003). Assuming shared views could influence the

interpretation of the data and/or discourage participants from giving details or clarifying a

viewpoint.

Awareness of my biases and of the potential risks the research was undergoing was my

tool to face those risks. There was a genuine attempt to dig for the participants' tacit knowledge

through a number of procedures including encouraging the participants to explain and clarify

their viewpoints, asking a lot of probing questions, and throwing back summaries to make sure

the intended meaning is coming across. Reliability of the data collection instruments was

maximized through careful designing and piloting.

With all these possible limitations in mind, it was not possible to aim for generalisability.

In fact, stressing that findings of this study are only valid for theoretical propositions is a major

source of its external validity. In addition, adopting a pragmatist approach to research, this study

makes claims about the specific Egyptian context. Therefore, it relies on defensibility and

recognisability for its validity.

A note on Future Research

This study examined the Egyptian students' perceptions on the effect of their

socioeconomic conditions on the HE access process. It aimed at capturing students'

understanding of issues of social and economic justice and used Bourdieu's theory of social and

cultural reproduction to further understand the Egyptian reality. A similar research that poses the

same questions on a larger, more representative sample is recommended to be able to generalize

conclusions. Research that examines the HE access injustices incurred by the expansion of HE

privatization policies in Egypt and the undergoing decision-making processes is scarce though necessary. So, further research in this area is highly recommended. Research is also needed to propose original and practical solutions to the funding and equity questions. Furthermore, more analysis of the use of social media, especially Facebook, as a research tool will help further understand its advantages and limitations. Technology at large seems to open new potentials to researchers everyday and the researchers' community should seize the opportunity.

My Research Journey

This has been a unique research journey. It has been educational as well as challenging on so many levels. Data collection was the most time-consuming, wearing, yet enjoyable part. Recruiting a considerable number of participants, keeping track of their progress, retaining them, and dealing with their unique circumstances and needs were not easy tasks. Yet, digging into each individual's views, circumstances, ambitions, and limitations was both pleasurable and eye-opening.

As a researcher who had a strong sense of commitment towards my society, I was faced with another challenge as I was doing this research; i.e., maintaining an objective stand. Being an Egyptian citizen undertaking research at a time when Egypt is going through political and social turmoil and being a witness of a lot of injustices incurred by economic and educational inequalities, I was faced with the difficult test of whether I would allow my personal views to colour my conclusions or let the data inform them. I learned that it was better to put my views aside, approach the data from a fair place and look for the real causes of the unfortunate reality Egypt is experiencing.

Time was another challenge. This thesis has taught me not to underestimate the time needed for each step of research: planning, reading, collecting data, analyzing data, and writing. Time management was key to maintaining a balance between my research duties and social life. It was important to maintain that balance to be able to continue being productive. Writing a PhD thesis is an overwhelming project that requires good life management skills and a lot of stamina to have it done. These are indeed transferrable life skills that one needs to work on any big project.

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Appendix

1. Tables

| | | | Gender | | |
			Male	Female	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	9	8	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	52.9%	47.1%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	19	7	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	73.1%	26.9%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	7	5	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	58.3%	41.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	35	20	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	63.6%	36.4%	100.0%

Table 3.1: Gender. Crosstabulation

| | | | School Type | | Total |
			Public	Private	
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	17	0	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	15	11	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	57.7%	42.3%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	4	8	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	36	19	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	65.5%	34.5%	100.0%

Table 4.1: School Type: Private/Public. Crosstabulation

			In general, private schools offer better education than public schools.					
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	1	0	1	3	12	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	5.9%	0.0%	5.9%	17.6%	70.6%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	2	4	1	6	13	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	7.7%	15.4%	3.8%	23.1%	50.0%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	1	0	2	6	3	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	8.3%	0.0%	16.7%	50.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	4	4	4	15	28	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	7.3%	7.3%	7.3%	27.3%	50.9%	100.0%

Table 4.2: In general, private schools offer better education than public schools.

Crosstabulation

| | | | Section (Arts - Science – Maths) | | | |
			Arts	Science	Maths	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	13	2	2	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	76.5%	11.8%	11.8%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	16	2	8	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	61.5%	7.7%	30.8%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	4	2	6	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	33.3%	16.7%	50.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	33	6	16	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	60.0%	10.9%	29.1%	100.0%

Table 4.3: Section (Arts - Science – Maths) Crosstabulation

			I feel I receive good education at my school.					
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	7	3	2	5	0	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	41.2%	17.6%	11.8%	29.4%	0.0%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	11	10	2	1	2	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	42.3%	38.5%	7.7%	3.8%	7.7%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	4	2	0	5	1	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	33.3%	16.7%	0.0%	41.7%	8.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	22	15	4	11	3	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	40.0%	27.3%	7.3%	20.0%	5.5%	100.0%

Table 4.4: I feel I receive good education at my school. Crosstabulation

			My school teachers show an educational interest in me.					
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	7	4	1	5	0	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	41.2%	23.5%	5.9%	29.4%	0.0%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	11	7	3	4	1	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	42.3%	26.9%	11.5%	15.4%	3.8%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	3	4	0	5	0	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	25.0%	33.3%	0.0%	41.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	21	15	4	14	1	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	38.2%	27.3%	7.3%	25.5%	1.8%	100.0%

Table 4.5: My school teachers show an educational interest in me. Crosstabulation

			I feel I receive good education at the private lessons.					
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	0	1	1	8	7	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	0.0%	5.9%	5.9%	47.1%	41.2%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	2	1	0	15	8	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	7.7%	3.8%	0.0%	57.7%	30.8%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	1	1	0	7	3	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	8.3%	8.3%	0.0%	58.3%	25.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	3	3	1	30	18	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	5.5%	5.5%	1.8%	54.5%	32.7%	100.0%

Table 4.6: I feel I receive good education at the private lessons. Crosstabulation

| | | | This year I have attended most classes at school. | | | | |
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	9	3	3	2	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	52.9%	17.6%	17.6%	11.8%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	18	6	2	0	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	69.2%	23.1%	7.7%	0.0%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	5	5	2	0	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	41.7%	41.7%	16.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	32	14	7	2	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	58.2%	25.5%	12.7%	3.6%	100.0%

Table 4.7: This year I have attended most classes at school. Crosstabulation

| | | | Number of private lessons. | | | |
			1 or 2	3 or 4	> 4	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	4	2	11	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	23.5%	11.8%	64.7%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	0	3	23	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	0.0%	11.5%	88.5%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	0	1	11	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	0.0%	8.3%	91.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	4	6	45	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	7.3%	10.9%	81.8%	100.0%

Table 4.8: Number of private lessons. Crosstabulation

			I can afford joining a private university if I want to.					
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	9	1	5	2	0	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	52.9%	5.9%	29.4%	11.8%	0.0%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	2	3	11	8	2	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	7.7%	11.5%	42.3%	30.8%	7.7%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	2	1	2	7	0	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	16.7%	8.3%	16.7%	58.3%	0.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	13	5	18	17	2	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	23.6%	9.1%	32.7%	30.9%	3.6%	100.0%

Table 4.9: I can afford joining a private university if I want to. Crosstabulation

| | | | If I cannot join the faculty I want in a public university, I will join a private one. | | | | | |
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	8	4	3	2	0	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	47.1%	23.5%	17.6%	11.8%	0.0%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	3	4	7	9	3	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	11.5%	15.4%	26.9%	34.6%	11.5%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	1	3	2	4	2	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	8.3%	25.0%	16.7%	33.3%	16.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	12	11	12	15	5	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	21.8%	20.0%	21.8%	27.3%	9.1%	100.0%

Table 4.10: If I cannot join the faculty I want in a public university, I will join a private one.

Crosstabulation

| | | | Money is important to join a good university/faculty. | | | | | |
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	1	2	0	2	12	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	5.9%	11.8%	0.0%	11.8%	70.6%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	1	2	4	10	9	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	3.8%	7.7%	15.4%	38.5%	34.6%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	2	0	1	6	3	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	16.7%	0.0%	8.3%	50.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	4	4	5	18	24	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	7.3%	7.3%	9.1%	32.7%	43.6%	100.0%

Table 4.11: Money is important to join a good university/faculty. Crosstabulation

			Do you have to adjust your university/faculty choice for social or financial reasons?		
			No	Yes	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	11	6	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	64.7%	35.3%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	21	5	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	80.8%	19.2%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	11	1	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	91.7%	8.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	43	12	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	78.2%	21.8%	100.0%

Table 4.12: Do you have to adjust your university/faculty choice for social or financial reasons?

Crosstabulation

			I had to modify my choice for economic reasons.					
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	3	5	1	2	3	14
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	21.4%	35.7%	7.1%	14.3%	21.4%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	10	8	2	3	1	24
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	41.7%	33.3%	8.3%	12.5%	4.2%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	5	4	0	1	0	10
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	50.0%	40.0%	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	18	17	3	6	4	48
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	37.5%	35.4%	6.3%	12.5%	8.3%	100.0%

Table 4.13: I had to modify my choice for economic reasons. Crosstabulation

| | | | University Type | | |
			Private	Public	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	3	11	14
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	21.4%	78.6%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	12	12	24
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	4	6	10
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	19	29	48
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	39.6%	60.4%	100.0%

Table 4.14: University Type: Private/Public. Crosstabulation

			Deciding on HE: Personal inclination.		
			Not Chosen	Chosen	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	7	7	14
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	5	19	24
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	20.8%	79.2%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	1	9	10
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	10.0%	90.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	13	35	48
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	27.1%	72.9%	100.0%

Table 4.15: Deciding on HE: Personal inclination. Crosstabulation

| | | | Have you got your first choice? | | Total |
			No	Yes	
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	16	1	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	94.1%	5.9%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	16	10	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	6	6	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	38	17	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	69.1%	30.9%	100.0%

Table 4.16: Have you got your first choice? Crosstabulation

| | | | Overall, the HE access coordination process was a fair one. | | | | | |
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	7	1	1	3	2	14
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	50.0%	7.1%	7.1%	21.4%	14.3%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	11	9	3	1	0	24
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	45.8%	37.5%	12.5%	4.2%	0.0%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	5	2	2	1	0	10
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	50.0%	20.0%	20.0%	10.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	23	12	6	5	2	48
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	47.9%	25.0%	12.5%	10.4%	4.2%	100.0%

Table 4.17: Overall, the HE access coordination process was a fair one. Crosstabulation

			In general, private universities offer better education than public universities.					
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Value	Count	4	3	3	2	5	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	23.5%	17.6%	17.6%	11.8%	29.4%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Value	Count	1	7	9	7	2	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	3.8%	26.9%	34.6%	26.9%	7.7%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Value	Count	1	4	2	3	2	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	8.3%	33.3%	16.7%	25.0%	16.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	6	14	14	12	9	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	10.9%	25.5%	25.5%	21.8%	16.4%	100.0%

Table 4.18: In general, private universities offer better education than public universities.

Crosstabulation

			In case you get a scholarship that allows you to join the faculty you want in a private university for free, would you prefer it to a public university?		
			No	Yes	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Group	Count	4	13	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	23.5%	76.5%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Group	Count	8	18	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	30.8%	69.2%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Group	Count	4	8	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	16	39	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	29.1%	70.9%	100.0%

Table 4.19: In case you get a scholarship that allows you to join the faculty you want in a private university for free, would you prefer it to a public university? Crosstabulation

			Connections are important to join a good university/faculty.					
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Value	Count	3	4	3	2	5	17
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	17.6%	23.5%	17.6%	11.8%	29.4%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Value	Count	1	0	8	9	8	26
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	3.8%	0.0%	30.8%	34.6%	30.8%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Value	Count	2	2	2	3	3	12
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%	25.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	6	6	13	14	16	55
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	10.9%	10.9%	23.6%	25.5%	29.1%	100.0%

Table 4.20: Connections are important to join a good university/faculty. Crosstabulation

			I chose to study this discipline because I know I can rely on family connections in this field.					
			Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Socioeconomic Status Group	Low Socioeconomic Value	Count	6	3	1	3	1	14
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	42.9%	21.4%	7.1%	21.4%	7.1%	100.0%
	Medium Socioeconomic Value	Count	10	4	4	4	2	24
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	41.7%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%	8.3%	100.0%
	High Socioeconomic Value	Count	4	3	1	0	2	10
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	40.0%	30.0%	10.0%	0.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	20	10	6	7	5	48
		% within Socioeconomic Status Group	41.7%	20.8%	12.5%	14.6%	10.4%	100.0%

Table 4.21: I chose to study this discipline because I know I can rely on family connections in

this field. Crosstabulation

2. Quantitative Data Collection instruments

2.1. Questionnaire 1

Questionnaire on Access to HE in Egypt

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to investigate issues associated with access to HE in Egypt. This understanding should help improve policies in this area. This study contributes to my PhD thesis. All data collected by this questionnaire will be dealt with confidentially and anonymously. Please answer the following questions in full then click on "Submit" at the end.

1. Name _____

2. Gender: Male ____ **Female** ____

3. School: _____ **National** ____ **Private** ____

4. Tuition fees due this year:

_____

5. Number of students/class: _____

6. Section: Arts ____ **Science** ____ **Maths** ____

7. Why did you choose this section?

_____

8. Was this your section last year? Yes ____ **No** ____

If not, why did you change your section?

_____

9. What is your father's highest level of education? (Highlight ONE answer)

- Cannot read or write

- Can read and write

- Primary School

- Preparatory School

- Secondary School (general or technical)

- Intermediate institutes (2 years)

- University graduate

- Postgraduate

10. What is your mother's highest level of education? (Highlight ONE answer)

- Cannot read or write

- Can read and write

- Primary School

- Preparatory School

- Secondary School (general or technical)

- Intermediate institutes (2 years)

- University graduate

- Postgraduate

11. What is your father's occupation? (Highlight ONE answer)
- Not working ... Give reason: _____

- Manual worker ... specify: _____

- Tradesman ... specify: _____

- Businessman ... specify: _____
- Semi-professional/clerk ... specify: _____
- Professional ... specify: _____

12. What is your mother's occupation? (Highlight ONE answer)
- Not working ... Give reason: _____

- Manual worker... specify: _____

- Tradesman ... specify: _____

- Businessman ... specify: _____
- Semi-professional/clerk ... specify: _____

- Professional ... specify: _____

13. How many siblings do you have? _____

14. What's the level of education of each of your siblings? Please give details:

_____

_____

15. Which of the following do you have at home? (Highlight ALL the correct answers)
- Refrigerator

- Radio

- Television

- Washing machine

- Dish washer

- Telephone

- Air Conditioner

- Computer

- Internet

- Pure water supply

- Electricity

- Natural gas

- Seweage system

- Flush latrine

- Municipal collection of solid wastes

16. Which of the following does your family own? (Highlight ALL the correct answers)
- The house/flat where you live

- Another house/flat (other than the one where you live)

- Car

- Agriculture land

- Non-agriculture land

- Shop or animal shed

- Animals/poultry

17. How many people live in your residence? _____
18. How many rooms is your residence? _____
19. Do you have a toilet inside your residence or is it shared with other residences? (Choose)
- Inside my residence   - Shared

20. How many toilets are there at your residence? _____
21. What's the number of the earning family members? _____
22. Do you work while studying?
     No ____   Yes ____ If yes, specify: _____

23. Income from all sources: .... (Highlight ONE answer)
- does not meet routine expenses; we are in debt.

- just meets routine expenses.

- allows us to save/invest money.

24. Average family income/month: (Highlight ONE answer)
- Below EGP 1,000

- Between EGP 1,001 to EGP 2,000

- Between EGP 2,001 to EGP 3,000

- Between EGP 3,001 to EGP 5,000

- Between EGP 5,001 to EGP 7,000

- More than EGP 7,000

25. Does your family pay yearly taxes?   Yes ____   No ____

26. What is your usual source of health care? (Highlight ONE answer)
- Private health facilities

- Health insurance

- Free governmental health service

- More than one of the above sources

- Traditional healer/self-care

27. To what extent do you agree with the following sentences? Choose the box corresponding to your opinion:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	I do not know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. Students of the General Secondary Certificate (GSC) compete on equal footing to join universities/faculties.					
b. The socioeconomic conditions are vital in determining the students' universities/faculties.					
c. Private lessons are important to get higher grades in the GSC.					
d. My family will choose my university/faculty for me.					
e. My family influence my choice of university/faculty.					

f. The social status of the university/faculty influences my choice of it.					
g. My family won't let me live away from home to join a specific university/faculty.					
h. I can't afford the expenses of living away from home to join a specific university/faculty.					
i. My family's financial status influences my choice of faculty/university.					
j. My school is considered to have a good reputation.					
k. I feel I receive good education at my school.					
l. I feel I receive good education at the private lessons.					
m. This year I have attended most classes at school.					
n. My school teachers show an educational interest in me.					
o. My school teachers are diligent.					
p. My school teachers care about my progress.					
q. I was introduced to differences between universities and faculties while at school.					
r. In general, private schools offer better education than public schools.					
s. In general, private universities offer better education than public universities.					
t. If I cannot join the faculty I want in a public university, I will join a private one.					
u. I can afford joining a private university if I want to.					
v. My family give me advice on how to study.					
w. My family encourage me to join the faculty I want.					
x. Money is important to join a good university/faculty.					
y. Connections are important to join a good university/faculty.					

28. How many private lessons are you taking this year? (Highlight ONE answer)
- 0   - 1 or 2   - 3 or 4   - more than 4

29. How did you decide on the number of private lessons?(Highlight ALL the correct answers)
- Depending on my academic needs
- Peer pressure
- Family pressure
- Financial reasons

30. What faculty and university do you aspire to join?

_____

31. Do you have to adjust your university/faculty choice for social or financial reasons?
Yes _____   No _____

If yes, please explain:

_____

_____

_____

32. Does your gender affect your choice of faculty/university?
Yes _____   No _____

If yes, please explain:

_____

_____

_____

33. In case you get a scholarship that allows you to join the faculty you want in a private university for free, would you prefer it to a public university?
Yes _____   No _____

If not, please give reasons:

_____

_____

_____

34. If you have further comments regarding the research topic, please add them here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you very much for your time!

My best wishes for great success!!

2.2. Questionnaire 2

Questionnaire II on Access to HE in Egypt

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please answer the following questions in full then click then click on "Submit" at the end:

1. Name _____
2. High School Section: Arts _____   Science _____   Maths _____
3. High School Score (give a percentage): _____
4. Faculty joined _____
5. University joined _____
   Private _____   Public _____
6. University annual tuition fees that you actually pay: _____
7. Have you got your first choice?
   Yes _____ No_____
   If you answered "Yes" on question 7, do you think you might have scored lower had your economic conditions been worse?
   Yes _____ No_____
   Give reasons:

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   If you answered "No" on question 7, do you think you might have scored higher had your economic conditions been better?
   Yes _____ No_____
   Give reasons:

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

8. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	I do not know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. My family had a major role to play in choosing my faculty/university.					
b. My family's financial status influenced my choice of faculty/university.					

c. I had to modify my choice for economic reasons.			.			
d. The social status of the faculty/university influenced my choice of it.						
e. The academic reputation of the faculty/university influenced my choice of it.						
f. I chose to study this discipline because I know I can rely on family connections in this field.						
g. One of the determinants was the discipline suitability to my gender.						
h. My family encouraged me to join the faculty I wanted.						
i. My family discouraged me to join the faculty I wanted.						
j. I believe my score reflected my effort.						
k. Overall, the HE access coordination process is a fair one.						

9. If you have encountered any problems during the HE access coordination process, please give details here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. How did you decide on your current faculty/university?(Choose ALL correct answers)
- Depending on my personal preference
- Peer pressure
- Family pressure
- Social pressure
- Financial reasons
- Other (explain): _____

11. Did you get a scholarship, a grant, or a financial aid?
     Yes _____   No _____

If yes, please give details (How did you get it? Where from? How much? For how long? ... etc.):

_____

_____

_____

12. If you have further comments regarding how your social or economic background influenced the process of going to the university, please add them here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you very much for your time!

My best wishes for great success!!