

**A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC BARRIERS IN 21ST-
CENTURY EGYPTIAN PUBLIC PRIMARY EDUCATION**

Thesis

By:

**Sondos Elfouly
2323130008**



**TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION FACULTY
LAMPUNG UNIVERSITY
BANDAR LAMPUNG
2026**

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**Master of Social Sciences Study Program
Department of Social Sciences Education
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Lampung**



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ABSTRACT

A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC BARRIERS IN 21ST-CENTURY EGYPTIAN PUBLIC PRIMARY EDUCATION

By

Sondos Elfouly

Economic inequality remains a crucial barrier to achieving educational equity in Egypt's public primary education system. This descriptive quantitative study examines: (1) the prevalence of economic challenges faced by students and teachers in Egyptian public primary schools; and (2) the perceived impact of these challenges on educational access, quality, and equity from both stakeholder perspectives.

The study was conducted at Al-Nasser Public Primary School in Giza with ten teachers and ten students. Data were collected through structured questionnaires focusing on direct and indirect educational costs including learning materials, transportation, and private tutoring as well as institutional constraints such as resource availability and infrastructure. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the distribution and severity of reported economic barriers.

Results indicate that economic pressures significantly hinder the educational process. Students reported substantial difficulties due to family financial strain, which limited access to learning resources, reduced participation in school activities, and diminished academic concentration. Teachers highlighted challenges stemming from inadequate school resources, overcrowded classrooms, and systemic underfunding, which collectively undermine instructional quality and professional motivation. Strong consensus emerged on the insufficiency of existing support mechanisms.

The study concludes that economic barriers are deeply embedded in Egyptian public primary education, necessitating coordinated policy interventions. Recommendations emphasize strengthening financial aid systems for disadvantaged students, increasing investment in school infrastructure and teaching resources, and enhancing educator capacity and motivation. Addressing these economic dimensions is fundamental to realizing a more equitable and effective education system in Egypt.

Keywords: Descriptive analysis, Economic barriers, Educational equity, Egypt, Descriptive analysis, Egypt, Public primary education

ABSTRACT

A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC BARRIERS IN 21ST-CENTURY EGYPTIAN PUBLIC PRIMARY EDUCATION

Oleh

Sondos Elfouly

Ketimpangan ekonomi tetap menjadi hambatan krusial dalam mencapai kesetaraan pendidikan di sistem pendidikan dasar negeri Mesir. Studi kuantitatif deskriptif ini mengkaji: (1) prevalensi tantangan ekonomi yang dihadapi oleh siswa dan guru di sekolah dasar negeri Mesir; dan (2) dampak yang dirasakan dari tantangan tersebut terhadap akses, kualitas, dan kesetaraan pendidikan dari perspektif kedua pemangku kepentingan.

Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di Sekolah Dasar Negeri Al-Nasser di Giza dengan melibatkan sepuluh guru dan sepuluh siswa. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur yang berfokus pada biaya pendidikan langsung dan tidak langsung termasuk bahan ajar, transportasi, dan bimbingan belajar privat, serta kendala kelembagaan seperti ketersediaan sumber daya dan infrastruktur. Statistik deskriptif digunakan untuk menganalisis distribusi dan tingkat keparahan hambatan ekonomi yang dilaporkan.

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tekanan ekonomi secara signifikan menghambat proses pendidikan. Siswa melaporkan kesulitan besar akibat keterbatasan finansial keluarga, yang membatasi akses terhadap sumber belajar, mengurangi partisipasi dalam kegiatan sekolah, dan menurunkan konsentrasi akademik. Para guru menyoroti tantangan yang bersumber dari ketidakcukupan sumber daya sekolah, ruang kelas yang padat, dan kekurangan dana yang sistematis, yang secara kolektif melemahkan kualitas pengajaran dan motivasi profesional. Terdapat konsensus kuat mengenai ketidakcukupan mekanisme dukungan yang ada.

Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa hambatan ekonomi tertanam kuat dalam pendidikan dasar negeri Mesir, sehingga memerlukan intervensi kebijakan yang terkoordinasi. Rekomendasi menekankan pada penguatan sistem bantuan keuangan bagi siswa kurang mampu, peningkatan investasi dalam infrastruktur sekolah dan sumber daya pengajaran, serta peningkatan kapasitas dan motivasi pendidik. Mengatasi dimensi ekonomi ini sangat fundamental untuk mewujudkan sistem pendidikan yang lebih adil dan efektif di Mesir.

Kata Kunci: Analisis deskriptif, Hambatan ekonomi, Kesetaraan pendidikan, Mesir, Pendidikan dasar negeri

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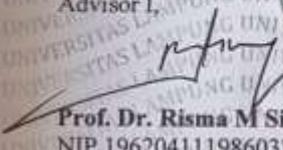
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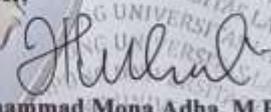
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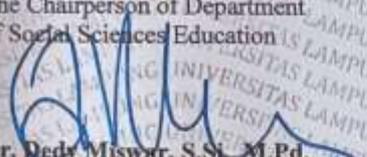
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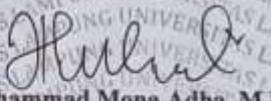

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DECLARATION STATEMENT

I hereby declare that:

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Bandar Lampung, 2026

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FOREWORD

Thanks to Allah SWT, by whose grace this thesis entitled “Toward Educational Equity: Analyzing Economic Barriers in Egyptian Public Primary Education” has been successfully completed. This thesis is prepared as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining a Master’s degree in Social Studies Education at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Lampung.

This study was conducted to examine the economic challenges affecting the quality and equity of public primary education in Egypt. By focusing on the perspectives of both teachers and students, this study aims to provide a descriptive quantitative analysis of how economic disparities influence access to educational resources, teaching effectiveness, and students’ learning experiences. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to academic discourse and serve as a reference for policymakers, educators, and future researchers concerned with educational equity.

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and encouragement of many individuals and institutions. Therefore, the writer would like to express sincere gratitude to all lecturers, supervisors, and academic staff of the Master’s Program in Social Studies Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Lampung, for their valuable guidance and support throughout the study process. Appreciation is also extended to the teachers and students who participated in this study and generously shared their time and experiences.

The writer realizes that this thesis is not free from limitations and imperfections. Constructive suggestions and criticisms are therefore highly welcomed for the improvement of this work in the future. Finally, it is hoped that this thesis will be beneficial not only for the academic community of the University of Lampung but also for a wider audience interested in educational development and social equity.

BIOGRAPHY



My name is Sondos ElFouly, and I was born on February 24, 1993, in Giza, Egypt. I am the second of three children in a loving family. My Father Ali ElFouly, a freelance accountant in the import business, and MY Mother Wafaa Megahed, an administrative manager at the Egyptian Atomic Energy Authority. I grew up in an environment that instilled in me the values of learning, perseverance, and responsibility towards my community and family.

I earned a Bachelor degree in Sociology from Cairo University in 2014, carrying with me a strong family academic heritage. I began my career by volunteering to teach homeless children, then worked in education as a teacher specializing in teaching English. I also worked as a sales manager for a medical assistive equipment company, where I contributed to helping war survivors and people with disabilities a profound experience that taught me the meaning of positive social impact.

I speak Arabic and English fluently and I am currently learning French and Indonesian. I find balance in travel, cooking, and sports. My greatest achievement is being a mother to my son, Malek, my companion who inspires me daily. I aspire to begin my doctoral studies to be a role model mother and a valuable member of my community, holding fast to my dream of leaving a positive legacy worthy of my family name.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to:

1. My beloved Son Malek Saleh.
2. My beloved Family, My Mother Wafaa Megahed , My Father Ali Elfouly and my brothers Dr. Shady Elfouly And Mr. Mohammed Elfouly.
3. My alma mater – Lampung University.
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MOTTO

﴿ وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا ﴾
(سورة طه، الآية 114)

قال رسول الله ﷺ:

«مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَلْتَمِسُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا، سَهَّلَ اللَّهُ لَهُ بِهِ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ»

**The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:
“Whoever pursues a path in search of knowledge, Allah makes for them an
easier path leading to Jannah.”**

“Faith in yourself is where success begins”

“The Journey matters more than destination”

Sondos Elfouly

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Throughout the process of preparing this thesis, the author would like to extend heartfelt appreciation to all individuals who were involved directly or indirectly, including those who provided support, guidance, encouragement, and motivation. Their contributions have played a significant role in enabling the author to successfully complete this academic work.

The author fully realizes that this thesis is not free from limitations and imperfections, whether in terms of writing, discussion, or the content presented. Therefore, the author sincerely welcomes any constructive criticism, suggestions, and recommendations that may contribute to the improvement of future academic works.

On this occasion, the author would like to express sincere gratitude to all parties who supported and strengthened the author throughout the completion of this thesis. With deep love and appreciation, the author would like to thank:

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Finally, I acknowledge that this thesis is not without its shortcomings. Therefore, constructive criticism and suggestions are greatly appreciated for future improvements.

Bandar Lampung, January 2026
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Sondos Elfouly

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Education has long been recognized as a fundamental pillar for social and economic development. In Egypt, education occupies a central position in national development strategies due to its role in human capital formation and social mobility. Despite constitutional commitments to free and compulsory education, the Egyptian education system continues to face persistent economic challenges that negatively affect educational quality, equity, and efficiency.

With a population exceeding 105 million and a significant youth demographic, Egypt's education system must accommodate millions of students in public schools, where resource constraints are most acutely felt (Eloff et al., 2025).

One of the most significant challenges is the limited level of educational financing. Although education receives a substantial share of the national budget, per-student expenditure remains relatively low when compared to international benchmarks (World Bank, 2020).

This funding gap directly impacts school infrastructure, availability of learning materials, technological resources, and the maintenance of school facilities. Consequently, many public schools operate with overcrowded classrooms, insufficient instructional tools, and outdated educational resources, which restrict students' learning opportunities and academic development (Assaad & Krafft, 2015).

In addition to institutional constraints, economic pressures at the household level play a critical role in shaping students' educational experiences. Rising inflation,

increasing transportation costs, and growing expenses related to school uniforms, learning materials, and private tutoring place a heavy financial burden on families. These pressures often limit students' regular attendance, participation in school activities, and access to supplementary educational support. In extreme cases, financial hardship contributes to early school leaving and educational discontinuation (Zahir et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the widespread reliance on private tutoring has become a structural feature of the Egyptian education system. While private tutoring is often perceived as a strategy to compensate for deficiencies in classroom instruction, it exacerbates educational inequality by privileging students from higher-income households (Ikram & Nassar, 2022). Students from economically disadvantaged families are therefore placed at a systemic disadvantage, reinforcing cycles of inequality within the education system.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed existing economic disparities, particularly in access to digital learning resources. School closures revealed significant gaps in internet connectivity, device ownership, and digital literacy among students and teachers, underscoring the urgent need for investment in educational infrastructure and digital transformation (Roudhotus Sa'adah et al., 2024).

Given these conditions, there is a pressing need for empirical study that quantitatively examines the economic challenges faced by students and teachers within public schools. Understanding the scale, patterns, and perceived impact of these challenges is essential for designing effective educational policies and targeted interventions. This study seeks to contribute to this objective by providing a descriptive quantitative analysis of economic barriers in Egyptian public education.

1.2. Research Questions

From the background of this study above, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. Is there any significant difference in students' access to quality education based on their economic background in Egyptian public primary schools?
2. To what extent do economic barriers affect teachers' ability to deliver quality instruction in Egyptian public primary schools?
3. What are the most prevalent economic challenges faced by students and teachers in Egyptian public primary schools?

1.3. Research Objectives

Based on the research questions formulated above, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine whether there is a significant difference in students' access to quality education based on their economic background in Egyptian public primary schools.
2. To measure the extent to which economic barriers affect teachers' ability to deliver quality instruction in Egyptian public primary schools.
3. To identify the most prevalent economic challenges faced by students and teachers in Egyptian public primary schools.
4. To provide descriptive quantitative data that can inform educational policy and intervention strategies aimed at reducing economic barriers in public education.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several theoretical, practical, and social reasons:

1.4.1. Theoretical Significance

- This study contributes to the body of knowledge on educational economics and equity studies in the Egyptian context by employing a descriptive quantitative approach, which remains relatively underrepresented compared

to qualitative or macro-level analyses.

- It provides an empirical framework for measuring economic barriers from the dual perspectives of students and teachers, offering a model for similar studies in other developing educational systems.

1.4.2. Practical and Policy Significance

- The findings will offer evidence-based insights for policymakers, educational administrators, and non-governmental organizations working to reduce economic disparities in education.
- The data can inform the design of targeted interventions, such as need-based financial aid programs, school resource allocation, teacher support schemes, and digital infrastructure development.
- By identifying the most pressing economic challenges, this study may help prioritize resource distribution and enhance the effectiveness of existing educational policies.

1.4.3. Social Significance

- The study gives voice to students and teachers whose daily experiences with economic constraints are often overlooked in top-down policy discussions.
- It raises awareness about the human dimension of educational inequality, fostering greater public and institutional commitment to equitable education.
- By highlighting the link between economic barriers and educational outcomes, this study supports advocacy efforts for inclusive and fair educational opportunities for all students, regardless of socioeconomic background.

1.5. Scope and Limitations of the Study

1.5.1. Scope of The Study

This study is defined by the following boundaries:

- Thematic Scope: The study focuses specifically on economic barriers affecting education, including but not limited to: school fees, learning materials, transportation costs, private tutoring expenses, and digital access.

Other educational challenges (e.g., pedagogical methods, curriculum content) are considered only insofar as they relate to economic factors.

- **Methodological Scope:** The study adopts a descriptive quantitative study design, utilizing survey methods to collect numerical data from participants. Data analysis relies on descriptive statistics to summarize and present findings.
- **Population and Setting Scope:**
 - The study is conducted in public primary schools in Egypt.
 - Participants include students (grades 5–6) and teachers from selected schools in urban areas.
 - The sample is purposive and limited to one geographical region (Giza), representing a case study of economic challenges in urban public education.

1.5.2. Limitations of the Study

1. **Geographical Limitation:** The study is conducted in urban public schools in Giza. Findings may not be fully generalizable to rural areas or other governorates in Egypt.
2. **Sample Size and Selection:** The sample consists of 10 students and 10 teachers, which is adequate for descriptive analysis but does not support statistical generalization to all Egyptian public schools.
3. **Self-Reported Data:** The survey relies on participants' self-reporting, which may be subject to response bias, social desirability bias, or recall inaccuracies.
4. **Cross-Sectional Design:** The study captures data at a single point in time and does not track changes in economic challenges over time or across educational stages.
5. **Focus on Perceptions:** The study measures perceived economic challenges rather than objective economic indicators (e.g., household income levels, government expenditure data).

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable exploratory descriptive data that can inform future large-scale study and policy planning aimed at addressing economic barriers in Egyptian public education.

1.6. Relevance to Social Studies Education

This thesis, while focused on economic barriers in primary education, is fundamentally grounded in and contributes significantly to the field of Social Studies Education. Social Studies, as an integrative discipline, is concerned with the systematic study of human society, social structures, power dynamics, citizenship, and the pursuit of a just and equitable world. This vision is inherently connected to the principles of multicultural education, which, as Sinaga (2019) emphasizes in the Indonesian context, plays a crucial role in strengthening cultural identity and fostering social cohesion within diverse classrooms. The investigation of economic inequality as a core determinant of educational access and quality aligns profoundly with the central thematic pillars of Social Studies, which include social justice, equity, resource distribution, and human rights. By empirically documenting how economic disparities manifest in a concrete public school setting, this study provides localized, real-world content that can transform abstract curricular concepts into tangible, analyzable case studies relevant to students' own national context.

Pedagogically, this study contributes to the methodological ethos of Social Studies Education, which emphasizes critical thinking, inquiry-based learning, and the analysis of primary sources. It demonstrates the application of social science research methods such as survey design, quantitative data analysis, and ethical field work to investigate a pressing societal issue. This serves as an exemplary model for engaging students in authentic social inquiry, illustrating how to collect and interpret data to understand and critique community challenges. Furthermore, the findings advocate for and inform the development of a critical pedagogy. By highlighting the tangible impact of economic stress on learners, it equips educators to design more empathetic, student-centered instructional strategies that acknowledge and address non-academic barriers to learning, thereby fostering a more responsive and inclusive classroom environment.

Ultimately, this study actively supports the foundational civic mission of Social Studies Education: to prepare informed, engaged, and responsible citizens. It underscores the role of public education as a vital institution for social cohesion and

mobility, and by identifying how economic barriers undermine this role, the study provides a strong, evidence-based civic argument for educational equity. It thereby furnishes future citizens and current educators with the knowledge and evidence necessary to advocate for thoughtful policy reform, participate in informed public discourse on resource allocation, and work toward mitigating structural inequalities. In this way, the thesis embodies the transformative potential at the heart of Social Studies moving beyond merely understanding society to inspiring and equipping individuals for thoughtful action aimed at its betterment. In summary, this study transcends a narrow analysis of educational efficiency; it is an applied social science inquiry that delivers valuable content, methodological insight, and a compelling civic imperative for the Social Studies Education community, reinforcing the inextricable link between education and its socioeconomic context.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the theoretical foundation and relevant previous studies related to economic barriers in education, with a focus on the Egyptian context. It begins by examining the concept of economic barriers and their impact on educational access and quality. The chapter then explores the relationship between household economic conditions and student participation, followed by an analysis of how resource limitations affect teaching effectiveness. Additionally, the role of private tutoring as both a coping mechanism and a source of inequality is discussed, along with the emerging challenge of the digital divide in education. Finally, the chapter reviews existing policy responses and identifies study gaps that this study aims to address through descriptive quantitative analysis.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the key theoretical lenses through which this study examines economic barriers in Egyptian public primary education. These theories provide the foundational logic for understanding how financial constraints are not merely incidental costs but rather systemic forces that shape educational processes, outcomes, and equity.

2.1.1. Human Capital Theory

Proposed by economists Gary Becker (1964) and Theodore Schultz (1961), Human Capital Theory posits that education is an investment in human skills and knowledge, which yields future economic returns for both the individual and society. From this perspective, spending on education whether by the state, families, or individuals is an investment that enhances productivity and earning potential. However, when economic barriers prevent this investment, a critical market failure

occurs. This theory directly illuminates the Egyptian context, where the inability of low-income families to cover indirect educational costs such as private tutoring, which has become a de facto prerequisite for success represents a crippling under-investment in their children's human capital (Ikram & Nassar, 2022). This individual shortfall is compounded by state underfunding of public schools, leading to a weakened national human capital base and perpetuating cycles of poverty, thus explaining the long-term developmental cost of current economic barriers (World Bank, 2020).

2.1.2. The Capability Approach

Developed by Amartya Sen (1999), the Capability Approach shifts the focus from mere resource availability to what individuals are truly able to be and do their "capabilities" and "functioning." In education, equity is not just about enrollment but about having the real freedom to learn and achieve. Applied to this study, the approach frames economic barriers as constraints on substantive freedom. A student may nominally have access to school (a capability), but the functioning of learning is constrained by a lack of textbooks, hunger, or the cognitive load of family financial stress conditions repeatedly highlighted in surveys of Egyptian households (Assaad & Krafft, 2015). This theory moves the analysis beyond measuring inputs to understanding how economic constraints shrink the real opportunities of students, offering a profound critique of inequity.

2.1.3. Social Reproduction Theory

Associated with Pierre Bourdieu (1977), Social Reproduction Theory argues that education systems often replicate existing social inequalities. Schools do this by valuing the cultural capital of dominant groups while marginalizing others. In the Egyptian setting, economic barriers are a core mechanism of this reproduction. Under-resourced public schools, attended primarily by the poor, provide a different often inferior educational experience compared to private institutions. This creates a dual system where children from affluent backgrounds acquire the capital needed for success, while poor children are systematically disadvantaged. This study uses this lens to analyze how Egypt's economic stratification is mirrored and reinforced within its public primary schools through resource disparities, effectively ensuring

that education fails as a "great equalizer" and instead perpetuates intergenerational disadvantage (Zahir et al., 2006).

2.1.4. Scarcity Theory

Mullainathan and Shafir (2013) demonstrate that poverty captures cognitive "bandwidth," leaving less mental capacity for attention and decision-making. This psychological theory provides a micro-level explanation for macro-level educational inequality. It is critically relevant to interpreting the student experience in Egypt. The theory helps decode findings such as students reporting "major difficulties in studying and concentrating" not as a lack of motivation, but as a cognitive response to pervasive economic scarcity. It connects the material reality of poverty (e.g., the need for child labor) with its direct psychological consequences in the classroom, explaining how economic barriers undermine the very cognitive processes required for learning.

2.2. Review of Empirical Literature: Economic Barriers in the Egyptian Context

This section reviews existing empirical study, structured according to key themes and explicitly linked to the theoretical foundations above.

2.2.1. Household Economics and Student Access to Education

study consistently confirms that direct and indirect costs are primary drivers of absenteeism and dropout in Egypt (Assaad & Krafft, 2015; Tansel, 2013). The widespread reliance on private tutoring has become a structural feature, exacerbating inequality by privileging students from higher-income households (Ikram & Nassar, 2022). This aligns with Human Capital Theory (constrained household investment) and the Capability Approach (curtailed freedom to achieve). The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these inequalities, as students without digital access were excluded from remote learning, widening the pre-existing divide (Roudhotus Sa'adah et al., 2024). The consequences extend beyond immediate performance, influencing long-term trajectories and reinforcing intergenerational cycles of inequality (World Bank, 2022; Mohieldin et al., 2024).

2.2.2. School Resources, Teacher Effectiveness, and Systemic Underfunding

Teachers in Egyptian public schools face significant challenges: inadequate salaries, scarcity of teaching materials, technological gaps, and severe overcrowding (Assaad & Krafft, 2015; World Bank, 2020). This often compels teachers to seek private tutoring to supplement income, creating conflicts of interest and uneven attention between students (Ikram & Nassar, 2022). This environment is a clear manifestation of Social Reproduction Theory; the state's failure to provide a uniformly resourced system ensures educational quality remains tied to socioeconomic status. These conditions diminish teacher motivation, contribute to burnout, and ultimately compromise instructional quality and institutional stability (World Bank, 2022).

The Impact of Resource Scarcity on Teacher Morale and Practice: The consequences of underfunding extend beyond a lack of physical tools to the professional psyche of the teacher. Studies in the Egyptian context (e.g., Barsoum, 2019; Megahed & Ginsburg, 2020) indicate that working in severely resource-constrained environments with overcrowded classrooms and low real wages fosters profound frustration and professional alienation among teachers. This state not only undermines intrinsic motivation but also pressures educators to adopt 'survival' pedagogies focused on rote memorization and lecture-based methods to manage large numbers without adequate aids. This deprives students of active, inquiry-based learning opportunities. Consequently, resource scarcity becomes a dual-function barrier: it cripples the material resource (the school) and simultaneously disables the human resource (the teacher).

2.2.3. The Digital Divide as an Amplifier of Inequality

The pandemic starkly revealed how economic disparities translate into a digital divide. Students without reliable internet or devices were systematically excluded (Roudhotus Sa'adah et al., 2024). This divide continues to shape equity, as technology integration remains uneven, privileging affluent urban areas (Ikram & Nassar, 2022). This relates directly to the Capability Approach, representing a new frontier where economic barriers limit the "capability" to participate in modern education, and reinforces Social Reproduction by adding a digital layer to the

cultural capital gap.

2.2.4. Policy Interventions and Their Limitations

The Egyptian government has implemented policies like fee-free schooling, school feeding programs, and digital initiatives (World Bank, 2020; Roudhotus Sa'adah et al., 2024). However, their effectiveness is limited by inconsistent implementation, regional disparities, and insufficient investment in core infrastructure and teacher support (Assaad & Krafft, 2015; Ikram & Nassar, 2022). This gap between policy intent and reality suggests interventions are often fragmented and insufficient to counteract deep-rooted structural problems, as explained by Social Reproduction Theory and chronic under-investment in Human Capital.

2.3. Identified Research Gaps and the Position of This Study

A significant research gap remains in the availability of recent, systematic descriptive studies that quantify economic barriers from the dual perspectives of students and teachers in Egyptian public primary schools. Much of the existing literature relies on macroeconomic indicators, national statistics, or qualitative case studies, which, while valuable, do not provide the comprehensive, survey-based quantitative data needed to design finely targeted interventions from the viewpoint of those directly affected (World Bank, 2022).

This study positions itself to address this gap. It employs a descriptive quantitative methodology within a single-school case study to collect firsthand data on the prevalence, distribution, and perceived impact of economic challenges. By systematically centering the voices of both teachers and students within the same institution, it seeks to generate grounded, empirical evidence that can inform more responsive, equitable, and sustainable educational policy in Egypt.

Furthermore, this study moves beyond mere data collection by actively using the integrated theoretical framework developed in Section 2.1 encompassing Human Capital Theory, the Capability Approach, Social Reproduction Theory, and Scarcity Theory as a robust analytical tool. This approach allows the study to interpret the descriptive findings not as isolated facts, but as manifestations of

broader social and economic dynamics, thereby connecting the micro-level experiences within a Giza public school to macro-level theories of inequality, development, and justice.

2.4. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Building on the theoretical and empirical foundations outlined in this chapter, this study is guided by the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1. The framework illustrates how economic barriers operate through two interconnected domains that collectively constrain educational equity in Egyptian public primary schools:

1. **Household-Level Financial Strain:** This domain encompasses direct and indirect costs (e.g., fees, materials, transportation, private tutoring) and opportunity costs (e.g., child labor) that limit students' access to education and tax their cognitive capacity. This aligns with Human Capital Theory (as constrained household investment) and Scarcity Theory (through cognitive bandwidth depletion).
2. **School-Level Systemic Underfunding:** This domain refers to chronic insufficient public investment, manifesting in poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, lack of teaching materials, and inadequate teacher support. This institutional scarcity undermines instructional quality and teacher morale, aligning with Social Reproduction Theory by ensuring public schools replicate rather than mitigate social inequalities.

As shown in Figure 1, these domains interact dynamically: household poverty sends cognitively taxed students to materially impoverished schools, creating a compounded disadvantage. This interaction mediates the relationship between economic barriers and educational outcomes. The ultimate outcome constrained by this system is educational equity, defined through the Capability Approach as the genuine freedom for every student to achieve their full academic potential regardless of economic background.

Therefore, this framework directs the empirical investigation beyond cataloging challenges toward analyzing how financial strain and institutional scarcity connect to restrict learners' capabilities in the specific context of Egyptian public primary

education.

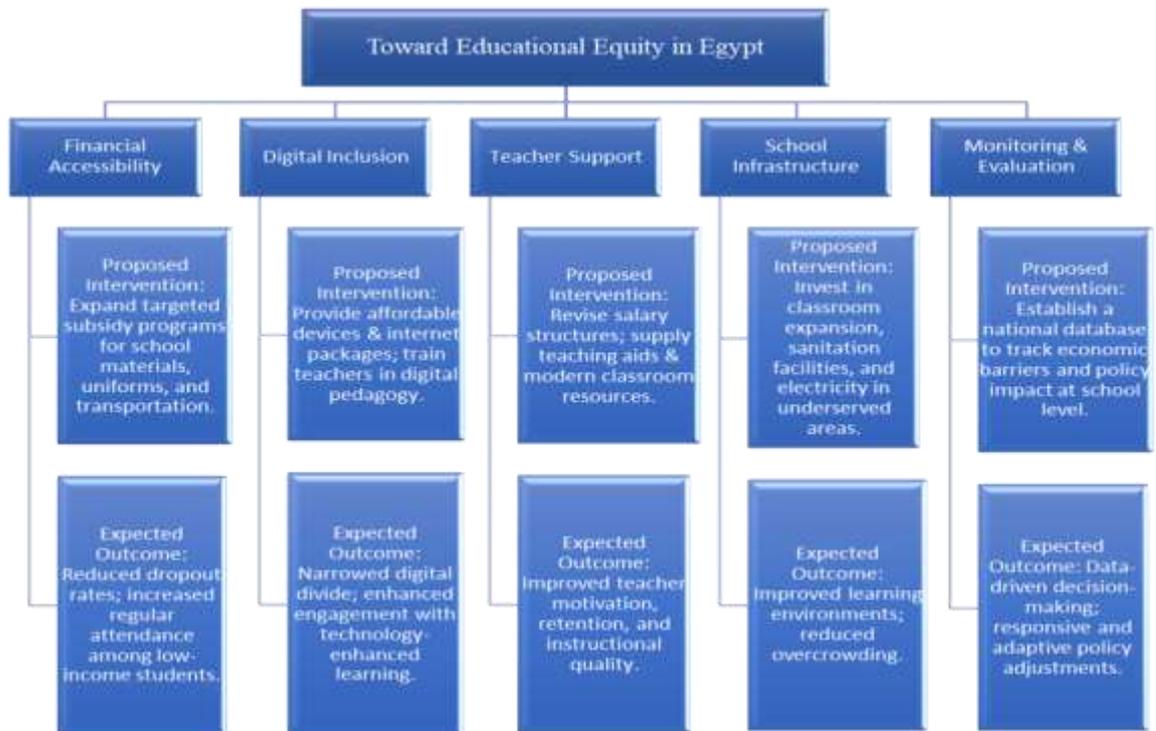


Figure 2. 1 Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework for Addressing Economic Barriers in Egyptian Public Primary Education

2.5. From Theory to Practice: A Policy Intervention Matrix

The diagnostic power of the theoretical framework and literature review must ultimately be channeled toward transformative action. To bridge the gap between academic analysis and on-the-ground change, this section presents a Policy Intervention Matrix (Table 1). This matrix is not merely a list of recommendations but a strategic tool that operationalizes the key theories discussed in this chapter. It translates the abstract understanding of economic barriers as explained by Human Capital Theory, the Capability Approach, Social Reproduction Theory, and Scarcity Theory into concrete, actionable policy levers.

Each row of the matrix addresses a critical focus area identified in the conceptual

framework. For each area, it proposes a specific intervention, outlines its expected measurable outcome, and most importantly provides its Theoretical Justification. This final column explicitly answers the "why" behind each proposal, grounding practical steps in solid theoretical reasoning. For instance, a subsidy program is justified not only by its practical effect but because it aligns with Human Capital Theory's imperative for household investment and the Capability Approach's requirement to remove material constraints on freedom.

By integrating theory, evidence, and practical policy design, this matrix provides Egyptian educational planners and policymakers with a coherent, multi-target roadmap. It acknowledges that no single intervention can break the cycle of disadvantage; instead, simultaneous action across financial, digital, professional, infrastructural, and monitoring domains is required to create a public education system capable of delivering true equity.

Table 2.1. Policy Intervention Matrix for Economic Barriers in Egyptian Public Primary Education

Focus Area	Proposed Intervention	Expected Outcome	Theoretical Justification	Key References
Financial Accessibility	Expand targeted subsidy programs for school materials, uniforms, and transportation.	Reduced dropout rates; increased regular attendance among low-income students.	Human Capital Theory: Enables household investment in education. Capability Approach: Removes a direct constraint on the capability to attend and participate.	(World Bank, 2020; Zahir et al., 2006)
Digital Inclusion	Provide affordable devices & internet packages; train teachers in digital pedagogy.	Narrowed digital divide; enhanced engagement with technology-enhanced learning.	Capability Approach: Expands the capability to learn in a modern, digital context. Prevents new forms of Social Reproduction based on digital capital.	(Roudhotus Sa'adah et al., 2024)

Teacher Support	Revise salary structures; supply teaching aids & modern classroom resources.	Improved teacher motivation, retention, and instructional quality.	Social Reproduction Theory: Addresses systemic inequity in the teaching environment. Empowers teachers as agents of change rather than reproduction of disadvantage.	(Assaad & Krafft, 2015; Mohieldin et al., 2024)
School Infrastructure	Invest in classroom expansion, sanitation facilities, and electricity in underserved areas.	Improved learning environments; reduced overcrowding.	Social Reproduction Theory: Directly challenges the physical manifestation of unequal resource allocation between schools.	(Ikram & Nassar, 2022; World Bank, 2022)
Monitoring & Evaluation	Establish a national database to track economic barriers and policy impact at school level.	Data-driven decision-making; responsive and adaptive policy adjustments.	All Theories: Provides empirical evidence to test theoretical assumptions about impact and effectiveness, enabling evidence-based policy evolution.	(World Bank, 2020; Mohieldin et al., 2024)

2.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter has established a multi-theoretical foundation for analysing economic barriers, introducing four key theories that provide complementary lenses at individual, institutional, and societal levels. The review of empirical literature confirmed the persistence of these barriers in Egypt, highlighting household costs, systemic underfunding, the digital divide, and policy limitations. A gap was identified for targeted, descriptive study capturing the dual perspective of teachers and students. The chapter presented a conceptual framework that integrates these components and concluded with a practical policy matrix that translates theoretical

insights into actionable strategies. The following chapter details the methodological design for collecting and analysing data within this established framework.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study Design

This study employs a descriptive quantitative study design within a single-case study framework. This approach is chosen to systematically examine the economic barriers affecting Egyptian public primary education in the 21st century. The design facilitates the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data pertaining to key variables such as students' economic conditions, school resource availability, and institutional support systems.

The primary objective of this design is to describe and quantify the existing conditions and perceived challenges within a specific, bounded context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It does not seek to establish causal relationships or test hypotheses through experimentation, but rather to provide an objective, data-driven overview of the phenomenon. The findings from this descriptive analysis are intended to form an empirical basis for discussions on educational equity and to inform policy-related recommendations within the Egyptian educational context.

3.2. Study Setting and Participants

3.2.1. Study Setting

This study was conducted within the context of Egyptian public primary schools. These institutions constitute a fundamental pillar of the national education system, catering to students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Characterized by a high dependence on governmental funding, these schools are particularly susceptible to broader economic fluctuations, resource allocation policies, and levels of public investment in education. Common challenges such as limited

financial resources, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate learning facilities make this setting a relevant and critical site for investigating economic barriers to educational equity.

3.2.2. Participants

The participants comprised two key stakeholder groups directly involved in the educational process:

- **Students:** Primary school students were selected as they are the primary recipients of educational services. Their school experience is directly influenced by household economic conditions, which affect their ability to cover essential educational expenses (e.g., uniforms, learning materials).
- **Teachers:** Teachers were included to provide an institutional and professional perspective on how economic constraints manifest in pedagogical practices, student engagement, and the overall school environment.

3.2.3. Sampling Rationale

The inclusion of both students and teachers was deliberate, aiming to capture a dual-perspective on the economic challenges within the same educational setting. This approach enriches the data by triangulating the experiences of those receiving education with those delivering it, thereby enhancing the descriptive validity and comprehensiveness of the findings related to the studied phenomenon.3.3. study Instrument.

3.3. Study Instrument

3.3.1. Instrument Description

The primary data collection instrument for this study was a structured questionnaire designed to gather quantitative data on economic barriers in Egyptian public primary education. The instrument was developed to ensure clarity, relevance, and consistency in measuring respondents' perceptions and experiences related to economic conditions and educational resources.

3.3.2. Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire consisted of several thematic sections addressing key dimensions of economic challenges:

- Students' family economic background.
- Access to essential learning materials.
- Availability and adequacy of school facilities.
- Participation in school activities.
- Perceived impact of economic constraints on teaching and learning processes.

The questions were predominantly close-ended, utilizing fixed-response formats (e.g., Likert scales, multiple-choice) to facilitate systematic numerical analysis and enable comparison across participant groups.

3.3.3. Administration Procedure

Two tailored versions of the questionnaire were administered:

Student Questionnaire: Focused on personal and household educational expenses, material access, and participation barriers.

Teacher Questionnaire: Included additional items addressing classroom conditions, institutional support, and professional challenges stemming from resource limitations.

The use of a structured questionnaire was deemed methodologically appropriate for this descriptive quantitative study, as it allows for efficient, standardized data collection and supports objective statistical analysis of the prevailing economic barriers within the defined educational context.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

3.4.1. Pre-Administration Protocol

Prior to data collection, the purpose and scope of the study were clearly explained to all potential participants (students and teachers). Written informed consent was integrated into the first section of the online questionnaire. For minor students, the consent form was designed to be completed by a parent or guardian before the child

could proceed to the questionnaire items. Administrative permissions were secured from relevant school authorities, and the digital data collection plan was explained and approved.

3.4.2. Questionnaire Administration

The structured questionnaires were administered digitally using Google Forms. A standardized administration protocol was followed:

Link Distribution: A unique, access-controlled link to the Google Form was distributed to participants. For students, the link was shared via school coordinators or teachers in a monitored setting (e.g., computer lab session) to ensure the target group was reached. For teachers, the link was shared via email or professional messaging groups.

Completion Process: Participants accessed and completed the questionnaire electronically using smartphones, tablets, or computers. The digital format included mandatory response fields for key questions to minimize incomplete submissions and provided clear, on-screen instructions for each section.

Supervision & Support: For students, a supervised session was arranged where the researcher or a designated teacher was present to explain the process and answer technical questions, without influencing responses. Teachers completed the form independently at their convenience.

3.4.3. Post-Collection Handling

Data collection was automated and stored securely within the Google Forms platform. The researcher downloaded the raw dataset into spreadsheet format (Microsoft Excel) at the close of the collection period. The dataset underwent a screening process to identify and remove any duplicate entries or responses with inconsistent patterns (e.g., straight-lining). This digital procedure ensured efficient collection, enhanced data accuracy by eliminating manual data entry errors, and facilitated the direct preparation of a clean dataset for quantitative analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis Techniques

3.5.1. Data Preparation and Coding

Following data collection, the raw quantitative dataset from Google Forms was cleaned and prepared for analysis. Responses from the closed-ended questions were systematically coded into numerical values. For instance, Likert-scale items were assigned sequential numbers (e.g., 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). This coding process transformed the qualitative responses into a format suitable for statistical computation.

3.5.2. Analytical Methods

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, which is the appropriate analytical approach for the study's exploratory and descriptive aims. The analysis was conducted using statistical software (e.g., SPSS, Excel) and focused on the following:

Frequency Distribution and Percentages: To summarize and present the distribution of responses for each variable, highlighting the most and least common perceptions among participants.

Cross-tabulation: To explore and describe relationships or patterns between key variables (e.g., comparing student responses by grade level or contrasting teacher and student perspectives on specific issues).

3.5.3. Data Presentation

The findings were organized and presented primarily through summary tables and figures (e.g., bar charts, pie charts). This method of presentation provides a clear, accessible, and concise visual representation of the data patterns, facilitating the interpretation of trends related to economic barriers in education.

3.5.4. Justification for the Analytical Approach

This descriptive analytical approach was deliberately selected because the study's primary objective is to describe, summarize, and illustrate the current state of economic challenges within the defined context, rather than to infer causality or test predictive hypotheses. The techniques employed effectively transform raw data into

a form that allows for a clear, objective overview of the phenomenon, thereby directly addressing the study aim of identifying key areas for potential policy and institutional attention.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

3.6.1. Ethical Approval and Voluntary Participation

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines for academic study. Formal approval was obtained from the relevant academic body or institution prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all participants (or their guardians) were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or consequence.

3.6.2. Informed Consent

Informed consent was secured from all participants. For teachers and parents/guardians of student participants, this involved a clear written explanation of the study's aims, procedures, potential benefits, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Consent was integrated into the introductory section of the online questionnaire (Google Form), requiring explicit agreement before proceeding.

3.6.3. Anonymity and Confidentiality

The study guaranteed the anonymity of participants. No personally identifiable information (e.g., names, specific addresses, contact details) was collected in the questionnaires. Furthermore, confidentiality was maintained throughout the data handling process. All electronic data were stored securely on password-protected devices and cloud accounts, accessible only to the primary researcher. Data were aggregated and reported in a manner that prevents the identification of any individual or institution.

3.6.4. Data Usage and Integrity

The data collected were used exclusively for the academic purposes outlined in this study. The findings are reported with honesty and integrity, without fabrication, falsification, or inappropriate manipulation of data. The researcher-maintained objectivity throughout the analysis and reporting phases.

3.6.5. Minimization of Harm and Debriefing

The questionnaire was designed to minimize any potential psychological discomfort or harm. The language was neutral and respectful. Following the completion of data collection, participants were provided with a debriefing statement, reiterating the study's purpose and offering contact information for the researcher should they have any subsequent questions or concerns.

By rigorously adhering to these ethical principles, the study ensured the protection of participants' rights and welfare, thereby upholding the credibility, trustworthiness, and responsible conduct of the study.

3.7. Study Limitations

This study acknowledges several methodological and contextual limitations, which are important to consider when interpreting the findings and their broader implications.

3.7.1. Contextual and Generalizability Limitation

The study was designed as a single-case study, conducted within one urban public primary school in Egypt. While this approach enabled a focused and in-depth examination of economic barriers within a specific institutional setting, it inherently limits the statistical generalizability of the findings. The socio-economic, administrative, and resource-related conditions observed may not fully represent those in rural public schools or private educational institutions across Egypt.

3.7.2. Sampling Limitation

The study employed a purposive, non-probability sampling technique with a relatively small sample size. This choice was strategic to gain rich, relevant data from key informants directly experiencing the phenomenon. However, it means the sample may not be statistically representative of the entire population of Egyptian primary school students and teachers. Consequently, the findings are best understood as providing exploratory and descriptive insights rather than definitive, population-wide conclusions.

3.7.3. Instrument and Self-Report Limitation

Data were collected exclusively via a self-administered structured questionnaire. Although efficient for quantitative description, this method may not capture the full depth or nuance of participants' experiences. Reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for response biases, such as social desirability bias (where participants respond in a manner they perceive as favorable) or recall inaccuracy. The closed-ended nature of the questions also limited participants' ability to elaborate on their responses in their own words.

By transparently acknowledging these limitations, the study provides a clear framework for interpreting its scope and contributes to an honest scholarly discourse. These limitations also suggest valuable directions for future research, such as employing mixed-methods designs or multi-site case studies to enhance depth, breadth, and generalizability.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter synthesizes the core conclusions derived from the theoretically-driven analysis of data from Al-Nasser School. It then presents targeted recommendations that are explicitly designed to disrupt the specific cycles of disadvantage identified and analyzed through the lenses of Scarcity Theory, Social Reproduction Theory, the Capability Approach, and Human Capital Theory. The recommendations move from immediate actions to systemic reforms, reflecting the integrated understanding that both are urgently required.

5.1. Conclusions

This study concludes that economic barriers in 21st-century Egyptian public primary education constitute a deeply embedded, self-reinforcing system of disadvantage, as empirically documented at Al-Nasser School and theorized through an integrated analytical framework.

1. Poverty functions as a cognitive and psychological barrier, not merely a financial one. Aligned with Scarcity Theory, the data conclusively shows that household economic strain depletes students' mental "bandwidth," leading to severe difficulties in concentration (60% of students) and pushing a significant minority (20%) to the brink of dropout. This cognitive tax fundamentally undermines the learning process at its inception.
2. The public school, due to chronic underfunding, acts as a mechanism of social reproduction rather than an equalizer. In line with Social Reproduction Theory, the institution itself is crippled by insufficient resources and support (100% teacher consensus). This ensures it cannot provide the "cultural capital" (quality infrastructure, materials, supportive environment) needed for success, thereby cementing rather than mitigating the disadvantages associated with low

socioeconomic status.

3. A profound gap exists between student agency and their real freedom to achieve. Through the lens of the Capability Approach, a central paradox is revealed: strong aspirational agency (90% desire higher education) is crippled by a lack of instrumental freedoms (70% receive no support). Economic barriers severely constrain students' "capability set," limiting their real options to be and do what they value in the educational sphere.
4. This represents a dual failure in human capital investment with national ramifications. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, the inability of poor households to invest in education, combined with the state's underinvestment in public schools, represents a catastrophic failure at both micro and macro levels. This stunts individual potential and jeopardizes national economic development by creating a stratified human capital base.
5. These dimensions interact in interlocking cycles (Household Deprivation → Cognitive Impoverishment; Institutional Scarcity → Professional Erosion; Equity Perception → Eroded Legitimacy) that create a "vortex of disadvantage." Effective intervention, therefore, cannot be piecemeal but must be coordinated and multi-targeted to disrupt these cycles simultaneously.

5.2. Recommendations

Derived directly from the theoretical diagnosis above, the following recommendations are structured to provide both immediate relief and foster systemic transformation.

5.2.1. For Egyptian Educational Policymakers and Ministry Officials

- A. To Disrupt Cycle 1 (Household Deprivation → Cognitive Impoverishment):
 - Expand and Streamline Needs-Based Direct Support: Theory Link: (Scarcity Theory, Capability Approach). To alleviate the cognitive tax of poverty and provide instrumental freedoms, implement a robust, transparent, and easily accessible system of direct financial aid. This must cover not only tuition but also the hidden costs of education: learning

materials, uniforms, transportation, and nutrition (e.g., a scalable school feeding program). Action: Pilot and then scale a "Family Education Support Grant" for the poorest quintiles, disbursed through secure digital mechanisms to reduce bureaucracy and leakage.

B. To Disrupt Cycle 2 (Institutional Scarcity → Professional Erosion):

- Launch a "Public School Regeneration" Fund with Transparent Accountability: Theory Link: (Social Reproduction Theory, Human Capital Theory). To challenge the reproduction of inequality and make strategic public investment in human capital, dedicate a substantial, multi-year fund for upgrading the physical and pedagogical infrastructure of the most disadvantaged public primary schools. Action: Prioritize: 1) Reducing class sizes to a maximum of 30 students, 2) Equipping every classroom with basic teaching aids and a digital toolkit, 3) Ensuring all schools have functional libraries, sanitation, and safe drinking water. Allocations and progress must be publicly audited and displayed.
- Invest in Teachers as Agents of Change, Not Reproduction: Theory Link: (Social Reproduction Theory, Human Capital Theory). To break the cycle of professional demoralization and improve instructional quality, reform must center on teachers. Action: 1) Review and adjust salary structures to reflect the cost of living and provide a professional wage. 2) Mandate and fund high-quality, ongoing professional development focused on pedagogy for crowded classrooms and inclusive teaching. 3) Establish a "Teacher Support Unit" in each district to provide pedagogical resources and mental health support.

C. To Disrupt Cycle 3 (Equity Perception → Eroded Legitimacy):

- Integrate "Critical Citizenship, Character Education, and Financial Literacy" into the Social Studies Curriculum: Theory Link: (Social Reproduction Theory, Capability Approach). To empower students with the understanding to critique inequality and manage scarcity, update the curriculum. This aligns with the principles of character education, which, as

Mona (2023) emphasizes, are fundamental at the primary school level for shaping students' values and social responsibility. Action: Develop age-appropriate modules for grades 5-6 that discuss economic inequality, rights and responsibilities in education, basic personal financial management, and values of empathy and social solidarity, turning their lived experience into a subject of critical and moral learning.

- Implement an "Equity and Transparency" Dashboard for Every School: Theory Link: (Capability Approach, Social Reproduction Theory). To rebuild trust and demonstrate commitment to fairness, leverage technology to make equity metrics visible. Action: Develop a simple public dashboard for each school showing key indicators: per-student public funding received, student-teacher ratio, availability of core resources, and uptake rates of financial aid programs. This transparency combats the perception of neglect and fosters community accountability.

5.2.2. For Future Researchers

1. Conduct Longitudinal Mixed-Methods Studies: To deepen the theoretical understanding of Scarcity's long-term effects and Capability development, future research should track a cohort of students from primary school onward, combining surveys with in-depth interviews and cognitive assessments.
2. Apply the "Three Cycles" Model in Comparative Contexts: To test the generalizability of the integrated theoretical model, replicate this study in rural Egyptian settings and in other middle-income countries. This will refine the theory by identifying which aspects of the cycles are universal and which are context-specific.
3. Investigate the Political Economy of Education Funding: To strengthen the Human Capital and Social Reproduction analysis, study should move beyond the school gate to rigorously analyze the political and bureaucratic decision-making processes that lead to the chronic underfunding of schools like Al-Nasser.
4. Design and Evaluate "Integrated Intervention" Pilots: To advance evidence-based policy, researchers should partner with the Ministry to design,

implement, and rigorously evaluate pilot programs that combine elements of the recommendations above (e.g., direct cash transfer + teacher training + infrastructure upgrade in the same school). This will generate crucial evidence on what works to break the interlocking cycles.

This chapter has distilled the study's findings into a clear theoretical conclusion and a set of actionable, theory-grounded recommendations. Addressing economic barriers in Egyptian public education requires abandoning fragmented approaches in favor of a comprehensive strategy that recognizes the interdependence of the student's mind, the school's capacity, and the system's fairness. The task is not merely to increase spending, but to spend smartly and justly across all three fronts, thereby transforming public education from a site of reproduction into a genuine engine of equity and national development.

“Together, we can revive Egypt’s enduring legacy of learning and rebuild an education system that once again leads the nation toward progress and prosperity.”

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