

# Children as active citizens and Egyptian primary schools

Egyptian  
primary  
schools

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to provide an evaluation of the new education system, based on Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE), in Egyptian primary schools. This study analyzes how effective could be the implementation of LSCE in the process of constructing active democratic citizens, in particular, in the case of Egypt, highlighting problems facing the new education approach.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study methodologies are twofold; the content analysis of the primary one new curriculum “Discover”, to assess the curriculum’s strengths and weakness; and the questionnaire to the primary six students, to investigate the relationship among the twelve life skills.

**Findings** – Content analysis of the textbook shows that the learning process based on LSCE is appropriate for the construction of active citizens. The textbook provides Egyptian children with the necessary opportunities to learn and create, through creative participatory methods. The relationship between the social dimension and other dimensions has been proven by means of the chi-square test. The relationship between participation and the two approximately absent skills “resilience and empathy” has been clarified as both are strongly interrelated with participation. The results illuminate a strong relationship between participation and the remaining life skills.

**Research limitations/implications** – More questionnaires are needed to assess the grade of life skills achievement among students in grade one and two, as it is regarded one of the limitations of the present study, owing to the complicated procedures and the limited time.

**Practical implications** – The research suggests the formulation of wider project-based activities to be included in the textbooks of all the primary grades. In this regard, real contribution with NGOs and local governments shall be developed to facilitate the involvement of children in actual projects, in accordance with their ages, and to encourage students to participate, as they notice the efficient results of their contribution.

**Social implications** – The research stresses on the importance of enhancing participation, as it is proven through the chi-square test that it is strongly related to other skills.

**Originality/value** – The scarcity of analytical studies to evaluate the effectiveness of citizenship education programs on children, after the application of the new Egyptian education system.

**Keywords** Democracy, Participation, Children, Citizenship, Primary school

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

By the 21st century, the world has witnessed radical changes, with global circumstances as economic crises, terrorism and new technological advances, in a manner that makes citizens long for a future with more opportunities for democracy to prevail.



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When it comes to establishing a democratic country, democratic institutions are not the sole prerequisites. Citizens who support the democratic functioning of the new established democracy are needed too (Fuchs and Roller, 2018). Viewing democracy as a way of living propels citizens to act in conformity with democratic norms and values, to participate in institutions, to implement strategies and policies and to change persistent authoritarian practices (Audigier, 2000).

After January 25, 2011 and June 30, 2012 revolutions, Egypt has been struggling for democracy. Democracy is a lifelong practice, not only limited to adults, but extends to all age groups (Dewey, 1997), so it necessitates the active contribution of adults, youth and even children to daily social and political practices, by means of their due rights and responsibilities, respectable opinions and ideas, and reasonable decisions (Moss and Petrie, 2005).

Accordingly, active citizenship needs to be taught from early childhood, so that children can comprehend their roles in the development of their societies, through participation in current social and political issues taking place during daily experiences (Smith, 2007).

Consequently, education represents the most suitable medium that enables children to be active citizens and promotes their democratic participation (Freire, 1997). In turn, school has become a chief agent for socialization, as they put more emphasis on preparing students to be active, and on acquainting children with all required skills and experiences, in addition to formal education (Heater, 2004). Furthermore, these newly developed school systems encourage them to participate in problem-solving and in the decision-making processes within their schools, to construct active participatory citizens (Fielding and Moss, 2010).

To make this goal more accessible, Egypt started working on developing new strategies and policies. For starters, Egypt's "2030 Sustainable Development Strategy" [1] emphasizes the critical role of primary education, prioritizes citizenship education and presents new visions regarding children considering them citizens at the present time – not future adult citizens. It also endows them with the ability of practicing that right to have a heard voice (Nishiyama, 2017).

Similarly, Ministry of Education and Technical Education has launched new educational system for primary stages starting in September 2018 with KG1, KG2 and Primary1 to be completed before 2030.

The aim of the present research is to investigate the role of citizenship education in primary schools as a fundamental element in the process of building citizens who are equipped with knowledge, skills and values of democratic citizenship (Osler and Starkey, 2006). The research's results are original, given that citizenship education in Egypt, as a case study, has taken a broader conceptualization based on life skills and formulated in line with Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) targeting MENA region in 2017.

The research answers the following questions: What is meant by citizenship and citizenship education, what is the type of citizen to be built, what are the required skills, how will it be taught, what should the competences of teachers be like and what will the role of schools' administrative bodies be? In addition, the research identifies, through content analysis of the curriculum of Primary1, how relevant the new education system, based on Discover model, is to the LSCE approach. Finally, the research conducts a questionnaire to the primary six students (the end of primary stage), to investigate the relationship among the twelve life skills and citizenship education included in the new curriculum.

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## 2. Conceptualization of citizenship

### 2.1 Active citizenship conceptualization

The perception of citizenship has been gradually changing as time progresses, where it developed from emphasizing passive feelings of belonging and a firm obedience to collective rules to a more active sense of citizenship where citizens are more responsible, aware of their rights and duties and able to exercise it and act on it.

At first, the definition of citizenship came to mean a juridical and political status that regulates relations between citizens and the state, whereby states offer rights and civil liberties to citizens and in return, citizens develop a sense of belonging (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994). Unfortunately, the rights and obligations attached to citizens do not sufficiently equip citizens to exercise those rights adequately.

T.H. Marshall formulated an interpretation of citizenship that puts forward the rights granted to citizens and divides them into three integrated components: civil, social and political; wherein:

Citizenship is a status bestowed on all those who are full members of a community [...] It is a loyalty of free men endowed with rights and protected by a common law. Its growth is stimulated by the struggle to win those rights and their enjoyment when won (Veldhuis, 1997).

This definition does not allow citizens to partake in the political and social life for the purpose of securing a democratic life for the entire society.

According to Bryan Turner, citizenship is a set of judicial, political, economic and cultural practices of a competent member in a society (Turner, 1993). Turner defined the active versus passive model of citizenship as top-down models of citizenship producing passive citizens with limited rights and freedoms, limited power for accountability and limited desire to act and as bottom-up models producing active citizens with a strong sense of social responsibility and social change and active participation (Mouffe, 1992).

In this regard, citizens' active involvement, as a bottom-up process, unifies the society by means of mutual solidarity which is necessary for founding the basis of participation. This participation in the public sphere provides citizens with social and political democratic experiences. Apparently, active citizenship is more concerned with the individual citizen in terms of actions and values, nevertheless, the whole society benefits from the right application of this concept by guaranteeing the application of good governance while maintaining social cohesion, considered as the main necessities in the construction of a whole democratic society (Somers, 1993).

By the 2000s, the active social role has evolved (López and Merry, 2003), as witnessed in the EU policies, where "Citizenship is the active membership and participation of individuals, entitled to rights and responsibilities and who have the capacity to influence politics" (De Coster and Sigalas, 2017). In 2006, the EU clearly defined participatory citizenship as: "Participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterized by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy" (Hoskins and Kerr, 2012). The scope of exercising those activities extends to the regional and international ones and preserves the principles of human rights, rule of law, tolerance and peaceful co-existence [2].

Concurrently, three levels of citizenship activities were set by Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, where there are: responsible citizens who behave and act for the wellbeing of the community and do volunteer work; participant citizens who play an active role in their community and try to persuade others to do the same; and justice-oriented citizens who are fighting for eradicating all forms of injustices they could experience in their life (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004).

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As of late, the model developed by Zalewska and Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz consisting of three dimensions of citizenship activity has described further the meaning of active citizens classifying them into passive, semi-active, active. The model has elaborated and defined under those three dimensions eight types of citizenship, starting with national identity and patriotism; civic virtues and loyalty; and ending with political, social, personal and change-oriented activity (Krzywosz and Zalewska, 2017).

The previous two models of citizenship described active citizens as those who participate in political and social matters in an effective manner and contribute to the development of the whole society. This means that all citizens free of any form of exclusion are entitled, rather required, to play their respective roles as active citizens within their societies. Subsequently, Citizenship activity is not a mere concern of elites, democrats, sociologists or adults but a concern of all society.

### *2.2 Children active citizenship conceptualization*

As regards to children, are they currently considered as citizens or citizens of the future? Are they considered as active agents or as passive recipients?

At the democratic level, children's roles as citizens are considered an important aspect of the democratization process. Inclusion of children is presented as a cornerstone of social justice and an essential component of democratic societies, by building new generations imbued with a sense of belonging, a creative personality and a power to make a change (Thomas, 2007). However, children's rights encompass to be recognized as citizens who have their own rights and responsibilities and as peers to all other groups, such as women, youth, etc. Active children can produce social change through direct involvement in their immediate domains, at school or at home.

Those due rights have been clarified and stipulated by the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which applies to children, from birth to 18 years [3]. The UNCRC recognizes that children's rights need to comply with three main right categories: provision, protection and participation. Nevertheless, children's social and political participation rights are the main concern of the present research.

The convention stipulates children's right to free expression of their views from early childhood. Consequently, all kinds of verbal and non-verbal communication are respected and recognized. Young children who are not able to express themselves clearly can do it through painting, drawing or playing. Adults are required to listen to children's views and to consider their feelings and opinions expressed through all forms of communication. Communication, together with appropriate knowledge, enhances children's capabilities to participate in formulating decisions that affect them. Hence, children are encouraged to participate in social and political life as active citizens.

Moreover, UNCRC stipulated in article 28 that children's participation has to be promoted through education, by providing them with the opportunity to develop their abilities, build responsible personalities, improve life skills and exercise democratic norms and values, to act with confidence and to participate without fear from humiliation.

## **3. Conceptualization of citizenship education**

### *3.1 Active citizenship education conceptualization*

During the 18th and 19th centuries, education played a paramount role in the nation-building process, as schools collaborated with the state in providing students with all common values, traditions and rules of their nation (Gellner and Breuilly, 1983). The purpose was to bridge the gap between individuals and communities, by helping citizens to realize that they are an integral part of their communities, to produce loyal and dutiful citizens, through the

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minimal interpretation of citizenship education; a narrow-formal-knowledge-based education.

Recently, citizenship became more centered on political consciousness and civic activities, co-existence and positive relations between individuals and their communities. So, schools changed their course from being regarded only as pivotal institutions that prepare children for further education, for labor markets and for the development of nationalism to being places that also prepare students to become active citizens (Eidhof *et al.*, 2016). Hence, the role of citizenship education has extended to construct active, well equipped and responsible citizens, through the maximal interpretation; a combination of formal and informal active education, involving all groups of interests.

McLaughlin's views that the maximal conceptions of citizenship education:

[. . .] require a considerable degree of explicit understanding of democratic principles, values and procedures on the part of the citizen, together with capacities required for participation in democratic citizenship generously conceived (McLaughlin, 1992).

Similarly, according to Dewey, education has to function as a small democratic community by creating the sense of sharing and collective acting for the common good, in order to build a democratic society rather than to reproduce society (Dewey, 1997).

The practice of democratic principles in schools changes from consultation experiences as elected representatives at class or students' councils, to students' activities based on participatory democracy. Participatory democracy is directly linked to the student's real practice of democracy during any regular school day through individual experience, effective deliberation and free expression of opinion, in addition to participation in decision-making and problem-solving. (De Coster and Sigalas, 2017).

The research deduces that, currently, the main education focus is to engage children in real projects and to encourage them to interact with others, think critically, cooperate and exercise democratic norms and values through real participation experience. This experience is what constructs a responsible character and a competent personality, based on a set of life skills: it constructs an active citizen.

### *3.2 Active citizenship education methodologies*

Having established that the role of citizenship education is to strongly correlate the construction of knowledge and life skills with a daily democratic practice in an adequate environment, the three methods of teaching citizenship are interrelated: formal, informal and non-formal.

With regard to written curricula (textbooks), the most common way to teach citizenship education is to have it integrated with normal educational courses as in history, social sciences, religion or economics. Accordingly, citizenship education principles are introduced and presented in all subjects as a compulsory cross-curricular educational theme. It may also be incorporated as optional separate stand-alone subjects.

The learning process is of great importance to stimulate the active participation of citizens in the civil society and in political decision-making according to democratic perspective. Learning theories have defined learning methodologies, child's process of acquiring knowledge and teachers' roles. Behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism are the most prominent (Ertmer and Newby, 1993).

According to behaviorism, knowledge is the sum of talents together with sciences and values observed by the child. The school's role is to transfer this knowledge to the child without having him contribute. Learning entails both listening and observing what teachers

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offer their students. Students, naturally passive, wait for incentives and support from their teachers who are the sole active participants in the learning process (Bloom, 1956).

Cognitivism sees that adults help children in problem-solving, based on the development of their personalities and emotions. Through the child's daily interactions with teachers, colleagues and school environment, the realization of social and emotional development occurs without any prior intention, or active contribution (Batra, 2013). *The Life Cycle Completed* by Erik Erikson depicts eight stages of identity development required for the formation of an adequate self-image (Erikson, 1993).

Piaget's theory on constructivism discerns that children construct their own views which coincide with their age's necessities and capabilities enabling them to develop more knowledge, which evolve from the time of birth via self-interpretation of what is being comprehended, seen or experienced (Piaget, 1977). Schools must endow learners the opportunity to discover solutions for problems and encourage them to explain and exchange their own ideas. This kind of learning stimulates children to be active students rather than passive ones (Lorsbach and Tobin, 1992).

The research prefers constructivism as this teaching methodology acts as a useful guide to teachers helping them regulate what they see, think and do (Flynn, 2004). A teacher's role begins by extracting already settled notions from students about the subject being studied, brainstorming alongside students to verify the accuracy of such notions so that they can provide new ways of thinking and attract activities, facilitate cooperation, interpret observations, make analyses, solve problems and deduce results (Fosnot and Perry, 1996). On this regard, knowledge is no longer transmitted, as it is, from teachers to students, but is rather malleable, carrying on different meanings and interpreted differently by each student (Lorsbach and Tobin, 1992).

Discovering Intellectual Strengths and Capabilities while Observing Varied Ethnic Responses "Discover" is one of the most effective curriculum models based on constructivism thinking. Discover provides quality education for all students by combining Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and Sternberg's theory of intelligence, to foster students' capabilities, active participation and creativity (Maker and Lee, 2006).

#### **4. Egypt as a case study**

##### *4.1 Citizenship education before revolution*

Various studies have appointed to the need to change the citizenship education system applied in Egypt before the revolution. From the research "Political education in Egypt with reference to England and the Soviet Union" (Aly and Ahmed, 1986), the present research noted that political education in Egypt, in the 80s, was seen as the political learning which develops the ability of young people to participate in political life, and that recommendations were mainly based on developing the political awareness of young citizens, their ability to participate in democratic life and to make change.

In addition, "The Egyptian citizenship and the future of democracy: new visions in a changeable world, Questionnaire on the perception of youth in schools and universities on the political participation" [4] proved that schools, in Egypt, in 2003 were not fulfilling their role as an agent of democratic socialization, due to the lack of the democratic contents in the curriculum as well as in the related activities at schools.

##### *4.2 New education system after the revolution*

The perception of education in Egypt has been altered following the June 30, 2012 revolution and the promulgation of the 2014 Constitution. Seeing that the aim of the Constitution is to keep on constructing a modern democratic state that adheres to the Universal Declaration of

Human rights, the constitution recognizes that every citizen has the right to education. It stipulates goals for Egyptian education in line with democratic active citizenship as building an Egyptian character, promoting innovation and establishing concepts and values of citizenship and democracy as tolerance and non-discrimination [5].

On the other hand, in 2014, the Sustainable Development Strategy, Egypt’s Vision 2030, has set forth, in its seventh pillar “Education and Training”, that education in Egypt shall contribute to:

[...] the development of a proud, creative, responsible, and competitive citizen, who accepts diversity and differences, and is proud of his country’s history and who is eager to build its future and able to compete with regional and international entities [6].

The “Regional Conference for the Arab States on education after 2015” accentuated the importance of teaching active democratic citizenship among students. These demand the development of elements of active citizenship, advanced teaching methods, integration of digital citizenship, through a whole school environment of democratic citizenship [7].

Accordingly, the entire educational system has to be transformed, not reformed, into a skills-based education system; learning shall be based on practice, not memorizing, through advanced learning methods, such as videos, storytelling, role playing, drawing and coloring. The class work is cooperative, interactive and interesting. Students collaborate to design, formulate and implement little projects and evaluate the performance of themselves and their peers. This means a complete change of the system with newly defined principles and objectives to comply with the constitution’s dimensions of democratic citizenship and Egypt’s vision 2030, as presented in Table 1.

The new system of education was put to work in September 2018, beginning with KG1, KG2 and Primary1, needing 12 years to be accomplished. The system features a multidisciplinary curriculum. It endows teachers with the necessary trainings and guides to apply the advanced teaching and learning approaches of the curriculum [8]. The Minister of Education designed the Discover curriculum of these three years, as a starting point, in collaboration with UNICEF, and in line with the LSCE agenda [9].

The implementation of new multi-dimensional model of learning caused citizenship education to not only focus on the curricula being taught, but also on life skills acquired through daily school activities. Life skills-based education is deeply supported by UNICEF and identified as:

Traditional curriculum	New curriculum
Knowledge-based learning	Skills-based learning
Learning by memorizing	Learning by practice
Traditional learning methods: texts –images	Advanced learning methods: videos-storytelling-role playing-drawing-coloring
Boring	interesting
Superficial and irrelevant to students’ daily life	Deep and closely interrelated with students’ daily life
Simple exercises	Little projects for practice
Exams and tests	evaluation
Individual class work	cooperative class work
Constructing passive citizens	Constructing active citizens
Inappropriate to children’s rights	Appropriate to children’s rights

**Table 1.**  
Traditional  
curriculum and new  
curriculum

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[...] a structured program of needs and outcomes-based participatory learning that aims to increase positive and adaptive behavior by assisting individuals to develop and practice psychosocial skills that minimize risk factors and maximize protective factors [10].

#### *4.3 Problems facing the new system*

The real challenge is to merge this new vision with the stagnating educational system, particularly with Egyptian education ranking so low. In the 2017–2018 Global Competitiveness by the World Bank, Egypt ranked 133rd out of 137 countries in terms of quality of primary education, with more than 12 million students enrolled in primary in 2017 (Schwab, 2017).

It is understandable that education had witnessed, before the revolutions, a serious deterioration of various aspects, such as school climate, formal classroom teaching processes, extracurricular activities, and citizenship education programs.

Concerning school climate, centralization led all the power to become concentrated in the hands of the Ministry of Education without any tangible contribution from parents, or civil society. Henceforth, any decisions regarding formal education, including teaching methods or change of curricula, were taken without accountability.

School climate of previous autocratic regimes was authoritarian with no transparency; schools tended to blindly follow political rules; thereby, students together with teachers were denied of their right to freedom of opinion and expression. The challenge lied in changing this climate needs a very complicated transitional process.

Regarding classroom teaching processes, they were mostly traditional founded on obedience, dependency and full power of teachers. They did not encourage autonomy of citizens and had no room for extra-curricular activities, critical thinking, analysis and evaluation of problems, problem-solving skills, creativity, freedom of expression and deliberation [11]. Memorizing was the dominant way to acquire knowledge widely propagating private tutoring, which started during Al-Sadat's era, prevailed during Mubarak's and still remains. (El-Nagar and Krugly-Smolka, 2009).

Traditional teaching methods focused on teaching the academic material without much attention to the student's rapidly changing environment, further accentuating the sense of passivity and alienation. Education essentially employed textbooks without keeping abreast of new technological advances or ways of teaching; the result was a very boring school life. Moreover, teachers were not trained to promote democratic attitudes and practices to conduct debates with children tackling critical issues.

The state took citizenship education into its own hands not allowing other institutions to be involved. This meant that NGOs and other organizations were not able to provide students with social and political activities that could enhance their capacities (Duerr *et al.*, 2000). Programs dedicated for citizenship education were directed toward teaching what was ideal from the lens of the state; it neglected spreading information about other parts of the world during a time when social media rendered the world borderless. As a result, students are not developing their citizenship skills through school.

The administrative body had limited resources for extra-curricular activities that put into practice formal education, even though they are included in the curriculum. Hence, they viewed it as a burden, and they preferred to avoid it. Consequently, children were not encouraged to participate in public sphere.

In reality, the majority of Egyptian schools does not have internet connection and are not equipped with computers in their laboratories; as such, schools are incapable of providing attractive and constructive learning methods to their students [12]. Additionally, there was no opportunity during the school-day for students to express their own ideas, or discuss

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problems whether they relate to them, or to the society; this further contributed in the decline of social cohesion and the willingness to take part in volunteering activities.

To conclude, there is a wide gap, in Egypt, between what was learned in school and the required skills and values for a job or for participation in the wider social and political spaces. Therefore, the whole process of democratization could be at risk.

#### *4.4 New multidisciplinary curriculum based on life skills*

Actually, the government chooses to count on a multidisciplinary textbook that enable teachers to cope, as much as possible, with the above-mentioned problems, to deliver effective and qualified learning process.

In fact, the process of teaching and learning still depends, in Egypt, on textbooks as an essential learning tool to convey the curriculum's vision, policy and objective to concrete written material and to help and encourage students to acquire the desired knowledge, skills and competences included in the curriculum. Undoubtedly, textbooks determine the classes' courses, as teachers depend on the lesson plans and guidelines described in textbooks. Large part of teachers is not capable of creating, on their own, advanced teaching methods or choosing adequate material.

Accordingly, the contents of textbooks are fundamental to facilitate the application of the curriculum vision and to help teachers prepare activities and produce teaching plans for their classrooms. That being so; students and teachers regard their textbooks as the main, if not only, source of information (Brown, 2000).

Textbooks in Egypt have long followed the traditional approach of behaviorism by presenting required knowledge and information, providing examples and setting up a set of exercises to evaluate the level of learning. This approach correlates with the passive methods of learning.

The new Egyptian curriculum model, "Discover", recognizes the importance of education in promoting active democratic citizenship, based on constructivism, through the dimensions prescribed by the LSCE: "Learning to Know" or the cognitive dimension (creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving), "Learning to Do" or the instrumental dimension (cooperation, negotiation, decision-making), Learning to Be' or the individual dimension (self-management, resilience, communication) and "Learning to Live Together" or the social domain (respect for diversity, empathy and participation).

Grade1 textbooks are regarded as the first step towards dealing with Egyptian children as active citizens. Teachers as well as students experienced, all throughout 2018–2019, new learning methods and materials which conform to the transformative education agenda of the Ministry of Education. The research tries to make a primary evaluation of the experience.

## **5. Research methodologies**

### *5.1 Quantitative content analysis approach*

After the first year of application, it is vital to make a content analysis of the new textbook. On one hand, the research investigates, through the content analysis approach, the extent of its relevance to the curriculum and whether or not it helps teachers provide new knowledge and skills to their students in class. On the other hand, the research investigates how much curriculum activities have proven to be helpful to both teachers and students in the teaching and learning process.

The approach of quantitative content analysis analyzes texts, meanings, themes, images and activities related to the aforementioned 12 life skills. The unit of the content analysis is the entire page. The checklist is used to identify and evaluate if the first and second terms

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had in fact put into application the 12 life skills integrated in the textbook of grade 1. The values are instilled chapter by chapter, as each chapter represents a part of a theme.

The classification is based on the five-point Likert scale to facilitate counting the extent to which LSCE values are evident. This study uses the categories from very low to very high: 1 is very low ranging from (0–4 times), 2 is low ranging from (5–9 times), 3 is moderate ranging from (10–14 times), 4 is high ranging from (15–19 times), 5 is very high ranging from (more than 20 times). The checklist is approved by three educational specialists following the evaluation and discussion of each component, so as to validate the study.

The educational experts are Prof Moheb Kamel Rafeiy, Professor of curriculum and teaching methods, the Ex-minister of Education; Prof Reham Refaat, Professor of environmental education; and Associate Professor Hanan Zidan, Environmental Education and Mass Communication Department, Institute of Environmental Studies and Researches, Ain Shams University.

*5.1.1 Content analysis results and discussion: first semester.* The content analysis of the first semester has been presented through [Table 2](#), revealing that the purpose of chapter 1 is building the child's personality. Children acquire knowledge by untraditional methods which foster critical thinking. Respect for diversity skill helps children co-exist peacefully with their colleagues of disparate religions, colors, traditions, sex and nationalities, and thus lays down the basis for active citizenship fulfilling the social dimension. Self-management is the most suitable skill to be acquired for achieving the two previous objectives, as children must be able to cope with these radical changes. It is a progressive learning process.

Evolution and development of humans and personal growth from childhood to adulthood is largely emphasized in Chapter 2, in addition to the life cycle of plants. Hence, children attribute developing their critical thinking skill to understand the changes occurring in humans and to the growth of plants. As such, respect for diversity gains more significance. Problem-solving and decision-making are starting to be depicted. It is inopportune that the chapter has not emphasized participation, negotiation, empathy and resilience within the family members.

In Chapter 3, there is a focus on problem-solving skill, which is represented as an equivalent to creativity and critical thinking. The textbook relies, in this chapter, on a more advanced learning method than in the two first chapters. Students, through problem-solving, start to transform their creative ideas and opinions constructed by their critical thinking skill, into practical plans to resolve problems. From here, they learn how to think, create new ideas and use it to devise plans and to solve problems. Decision-making has appeared very explicitly to help children make reasonable right decisions when the time comes to apply those plans. This is the cornerstone of active participation.

Social interaction has become a key-factor in helping children participate actively within their community in Chapter 4. Participation is presented consistent with communication and cooperation as its prerequisites. The focus on self-management and respect of diversity are also very noticeable. While creativity and critical-thinking appear more than problem-solving, as the main aim is the interaction within the community. This indicates that the four dimensions of students' active citizenship are interrelated.

To sum up, "who am I" offers to students the opportunity to begin the construction of their own personality, by the mixture of the four dimensions of learning. Each chapter contributes in constructing different life skills in conformity with their age, by identifying themselves, peers, family and living organisms, then by learning how to interact with others and to help them to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. Drawing and coloring aid them to express their views, foster their creativity and practice what they have learned.

Theme	Chapter	Cognitive dimension			Social dimension			Instrumental dimension			Individual Dimension		
		Creativity	Critical thinking	Problem solving	Respect for diversity	empathy	participation	Cooperation	negotiation	Decision making	Self-Management	resilience	Communication
Who am I	All about me	Mod.	High	low	high	Very low	low	Very low	Very low	Very low	high	Very low	low
	Family tree	Mod.	High	low	Mod.	Very low	Very low	low	Very low	low	Mod.	Very low	low
	Who are we	Mod.	Mod.	Mod.	Mod.	Very low	low	Very low	Very low	Mod.	Mod.	Very low	Very low
	Our community	Low	High	low	Low	Very low	Mod.	Mod.	Very low	Very low	high	Very low	Mod.
The word around me	Our environment	High	High	low	Low	Very low	Very low	Very low	Very low	Mod.	low	Very low	Very low
	Moving around our environment	High	Very high	Mod.	Low	Very low	low	Very low	Very low	low	low	Very low	Low
	Growing food in the food around us	High	Very high	Mod.	Low	Very low	low	low	Mod.	Mod.	low	Very low	low
	Celebrating the world around us	High	High	Mod.	Mod.	Very low	Mod.	low	low	Mod.	low	Very low	low
Mode value		High	Mod.	Low	Very low	low	Very low	Very low	Mod.	low	Very low	low	
Mode value		High		low	low		Very low			low			

**Table 2.**  
Content analysis of  
the first semester

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The principal dimension in Theme 2 is the cognitive one, as it enhances the acquirement of knowledge which pertains to the environment, the meaning of living and non-living organisms, characteristics of animals and plants, the importance of water and attributes of a desert and a delta. Having the sufficient and age-relevant knowledge heightens the sense of belonging and responsibility. Decision-making appears to accentuate the idea of preserving the common good, as revealed throughout the lessons that deal with the importance of water and its preservation.

Chapter 1 has stressed further on building creative, responsible and active citizens, emphasizing on self-management that enables children to communicate adequately.

The main objective, in Chapter 2, is to help children to recognize how creatures and objects move around them and how important this movement is, to be ready to communicate with the environment. It is lamentable that respect for diversity and participation, negotiation and cooperation are rarely apparent, though they emphasize the necessity of the social dimension in helping children to live peacefully and actively within their environment.

Creativity and critical thinking continue to be the dominant skills in Chapter 3, as the objective is to know how food is made. There is very little need for brainstorming, since the rich information has been presented in a simplified and interesting manner, enabling children to acquire knowledge. It is regrettable that communication, cooperation and participation appear rarely, though they are needed in classrooms to discuss the different seasons of the year, the needs of plants, the work of farmers and healthy food choices and to encourage them to make decisions which are in line with the discussion's results.

Egyptian traditions are necessary for children citizenship education, by enhancing the sense of belonging. Chapter 3 provides students with comprehensive information concerning Egyptian festivals and historical monuments which reinforce the use of critical thinking. Individual dimension is required to help students respect their traditions and behave in a responsible way. For this purpose, self-management and communication are prerequisites for achieving the chapter's objectives, nevertheless, they rarely appear.

In sum, learning dimensions are present in the first semester, though, they are not distributed equally. Cognitive dimension is the dominant one, while individual and social dimensions appear similarly with lower degree. Instrumental dimension appears slightly through the decision-making skill. Sometimes, needed skills are absent or rare. This inconsistency affects the fulfillment of the curriculum vision. Concerning activities, drawing, coloring and singing are very interesting tools, contributing in building views and ideas and expressing them easily.

### *5.2 Content analysis results and discussion: second semester*

The content analysis of the second semester has been presented through [Table 3](#), revealing that, in Chapter 1, critical thinking is supportive in brain-storming about the meanings of new concepts such as goods, stores, technology, industry and recycling. Individual and instrumental dimensions are intertwined to use what they understood into a practical project, to be sure that they have got the information correctly constructed in their minds.

It is noticeable that information provided in Chapter 2 are extended and spread to various inconsistent sub-themes. So, students are likely to be confused, as the main ideas are not clearly presented.

The four dimensions are necessary for participation and interaction with others; buying, selling and saving. Indeed, Chapter 3 endows children with the opportunity to practice shopping and script-writing and to participate actively in the social arena, using the four dimensions.

Theme	Chapter	Cognitive dimension			Social dimension			Instrumental dimension			Individual dimension		
		Creativity	Critical thinking	Problem solving	Respect for diversity	empathy	participation	Cooperation	negotiation	Decision making	Self-Management	resilience	Communication
How the world works	How goods are made around the world	high	Very high	mod	mod	low	high	mod	low	mod	low	Very low	low
	How business works	high	Very high	mod	mod	Very low	high	mod	low	mod	mod	Very low	high
Communication	Buying, selling, and saving	Mod	High	Mod	Mod	Very low	high	High	low	high	high	Very low	high
	Storytelling	Mod	High	low	high	high	high	High	low	low	low	low	high
	Communicating with numbers	high	Very high	high	Mod	high	high	Mod.	Mod	high	high	mod	very high
	Communicating with art	high	high	low	low	high	Very high	low	low	mod	high	low	Very high
Mode value	high	mod	mod	high	high	mod	low	mod	high	Very low	high		
Mode value	High	mod	high	high	high	mod	mod	mod	high	high	high		

**Table 3.**  
Content analysis of  
the second semester

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## REPS

The theme “communication” focuses on the social dimension. Storytelling is a tool to help children organize their ideas, put them into effect and formulate a whole story that includes a title, beginning, middle and end. Writing skills are interrelated with critical thinking, creativity and self-management. Writing is not considered the sole tool for communication; as such presentation skills as well appear in the chapter. Respect for diversity, empathy, participation and self-management are requisites of any good presentation, as applied in the narrative evaluation activity.

Chapter 2 helps children to comprehend what numbers mean, how they are employed in daily life, how comparisons are inferred from graphs, how their time can be managed efficiently and why time is important. All these issues necessitate critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills and are indispensable to help children deal with numbers properly. Therefore, communication with numbers entails the acquisition of cognitive dimension skills more than the three other dimensions.

As for communication stemming from art in Chapter 3, the social dimension is vital, whereby visits to art-exhibitions require empathy and participation. Additionally, the cognitive dimension is important to perceive the difference between the various forms of art and to know what form of art is their favorite.

### *5.3 Conclusion*

Second semester differs from the first semester in a positive way, by using a whole project to apply lessons. Consequently, the four dimensions are interrelated in a consistent way. Projects in classrooms enable children to practice their citizenship without fear, interact with peers, express their ideas, discuss problems, deliberate and take decisions. Consequently, children are living democratic citizenship and life skills, not only acquiring knowledge concerning them, i.e. the new curriculum succeeds in the first step of constructing active citizens.

### *5.4 Second research methodology: questionnaire*

The research formulates a questionnaire to investigate the current grade of awareness among children by the end of primary, i.e. grade six. The aim is to evaluate to what extent the current traditional education system for primary, has contributed in building active democratic citizens. The questionnaire includes the 4 learning dimensions, with the 12 life skills and citizenship education above mentioned.

Participant students are from a national private school, with 30 students only in grade six. The total number of participants is  $n = 28$ , as two students refused to participate in the questionnaire. Both of them are boys.

Students’ desire to participate has been revealed, practically, when the researcher ask them to express their opinion on the first page, if they want to participate or not, the total percentage of participation is 93%. The first indicator when the researcher compares between boys and girls, as shown in [Table 4](#). The percentage of girls’ participation is 100%, while boys’ percentage of participation is only 85.7%.

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Students’ data	Girls	Boys	Total
Real number in class	16	14	30
Students who accept to participate	16	12	28
Percentage of participation	100%	85.7%	93%

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**Table 4.**  
Students’ data

According to the parents' academic degree, [Table 5](#) reveals that 0% has associate degree, 78.5% of fathers have bachelor's degree, while 67.8% of mothers have bachelor's degree. The most distinguished result is related to mothers' post graduate degree. 32% of them hold post graduate degree in comparison to 21% of fathers. Furthermore, the high relatively percentage of mothers' post graduate education has been reflected in their work as 60% of them do work, as revealed in [Table 6](#). This percentage requires the researcher to investigate the relationship between the education degree of the parents, the work of their mothers' and the grade of life skills acquirement.

The research elaborates a chi-square test for comparison of qualitative variables, to compare the 12 variables and their respective relationship, in light of the questionnaire results. Additionally, the research inspects the relationship among the social dimension and the three other dimensions, to verify that children citizenship skills could not be educated independently, without the acquirement of the nine remaining skills.

First part is elaborated to investigate the social learning dimension practice, learning to live together, including the three following skills: Respect for diversity, empathy and participation, as shown in [Table 7](#). The first part reveals that 82% have the desire to respect for diversity 78.5% of the students have the desire to participate during the school day, in contrast, only 2.8% have the desire to manifest empathy regarding others.

Second part is elaborated to investigate Students' desire to cooperate, interact and create, in conformity with the skills of the instrumental dimension (learning to do), as shown in [Table 8](#). Cooperation and negotiation have been manifested clearly through the students' answers. All the skills of the instrumental dimension have been practiced through the implementation of projects, with 85.7%.

Third part is elaborated to investigate Students' perceptions on citizenship, rights and responsibilities in conformity with the cognitive dimension, learning to know. [Table 9](#)

Parents' academic degree of education	Associate's	Bachelor's	Master's or doctoral	N = 28
Academic Degree of education (father)	0	22	6	28
Percentage		78.5%	21%	
Academic Degree of education (mother)	0	19	9	28
Percentage		67,8%	32%	

**Table 5.**  
Parents' data

Mother's work	Work	Does not work	N = 28
Number	17	11	28
Percentage	60%	39%	28

**Table 6.**  
Mothers' work

Students' social learning dimension practice during the school day	Yes	No	I don't know	N = 28
Question1 participation	22	2	4	78,5%
Question2 respect for diversity	23	0	5	82%
Question3 empathy	8	10	10	2,8%
Question4 all	22	4	2	78,5%

**Table 7.**  
Students' social  
learning dimension  
during the school day

## REPS

reveals that the students' knowledge about children rights is the highest percentage 89%, followed by their knowledge about their responsibilities 64%, in contrast, their knowledge about the meaning of citizenship is the lowest 25%.

Fourth part is elaborated to investigate students' perceptions on how to practice citizenship during their daily life by answering the following question: "Is there a link between the following pictures and citizenship?" and providing a comment. Table 10 reveals that the skills, related to "learning to do" dimension, are the most recognized by the students, 82%, followed by "learning to live together, 78% and "learning to be", 64%. The result emphasizes on the desire of students to participate and their willing to be active participatory citizens.

The chi-square test has proven that there is a strong relation between the three following social dimension skills: participation, empathy and respect for diversity, which represent citizenship education, according to the LSCE initiative. In addition, the test has proven that there is a strong relationship between the social dimension skills and the other life skills included in the remaining three dimensions, as follow:

Table 11 reveals that problem-solving and participation are strongly interrelated as 100% of the children admit the importance and practice of problem solving and participation, high significant,  $p$ -value = 0,008. The result proves that it is necessary to acquire participation skill to be able to solve problem and, vice versa, students cannot participate actively without knowing how to solve problems.

Students' desire to cooperate, interact, and create	3				4	5
	1 None	2 Cooperation	3 Cooperation and Negotiation and Decision-making	4 Don't agree		
Question 1 cooperation methods	4	5	15	4	53,5	
Question 2 negotiation methods	4	16	7	2	25	
Question 3 interactive learning methods	4	5	16	1	57	
Question 4 a teamwork project	2	1	24	1	85,7	

Students' perceptions on citizenship, rights and responsibilities	Percentage N28			
	I don't know	Yes	No	Percentage N28
Question 1 (knowledge about children citizenship )	7	7	14	25
Question 2 (knowledge about children rights)	3	25	0	89
Question 3 ( knowledge about children responsibilities)	4	18	5	64
Question 4 (knowledge about necessary skills for citizenship)	2	17	9	60

Students' perceptions on how to practice citizenship during their daily life "Is there a link between the following pictures and citizenship?"	Percentage N28		
	Yes	No	Percentage N28
Pictures 1 (learning to do)	23	5	82
Pictures 2 (learning to be)	18	10	64
Pictures 3 (learning to live together)	22	6	78
Comments (learning to know)	4	24	14

Table 12 reveals that resilience and participation are strongly interrelated as 52.6% of the children admit the importance and practice of resilience and participation, close to significant,  $p$ -value = 0.061. The result proves that students having acquired the resilience skill are willing more to participate and vice versa, while participating, students have to practice the resilience skill. This means that the two skills of social dimension are interrelated.

Table 13 reveals that respect for diversity and empathy are strongly interrelated as 57.1% of the children admit the importance and practice of respect for diversity and empathy, significant,  $p$ -value = 0.053. The result proves that while the respect of diversity occurred, the skill of empathy has been developed and vice versa. This means that the two skills of social dimension are interrelated.

Table 14 reveals that decision-making and empathy are strongly interrelated as 100% of the children admit the importance and practice of decision-making and empathy, close to significant,  $p$ -value = 0.081. The result proves that empathy is necessary for the formulation of a right decision and vice versa, to implement a decision, empathy is needed.

			Participation	
			YES	NO
Problem Solving	YES	<i>N</i>	19 100.0%	6 66.7%
	NO	<i>N</i>	0 0.0%	3 33.3%
Total			19 100.0%	9 100.0%

**Table 11.**  
Relation between  
problem solving and  
participation

			Participation	
			YES	NO
Resilience	YES	<i>N</i>	10 52.6%	8 88.9%
	NO	<i>N</i>	9 47.4%	1 11.1%
Total			19 100.0%	9 100.0%

**Table 12.**  
Relation between  
resilience and  
participation

			Respect for diversity	
			YES	NO
Empathy	YES	<i>N</i>	4 57.1%	4 19.0%
	NO	<i>N</i>	3 42.9%	17 81.0%
Total			7 100.0%	21 100.0%

**Table 13.**  
Relation between  
empathy and respect  
for diversity

REPS

Table 15 reveals that cooperation and participation are strongly interrelated as 73.7% of the children admit the importance and practice of cooperation and participation, close to significant,  $p$ -value = 0.09. The result proves that cooperation is needed to produce an effective participation among students and vice versa, while participation, more cooperation has been emancipated.

On the other hand, other relationship has been revealed while conducting the chi-square test, as follow.

Table 16 reveals that decision-making skill and sex are strongly interrelated as 93.4% of female admit the importance and practice of the decision-making skill, high significant,  $p$ -value = 0,024. In addition, Table 17 reveals that negotiation and mother’s education stage are strongly interrelated as 94.7% of the children who have bachelor mother’s education stage admit the importance and practice of negotiation, high significant,  $p$ -value = 0.047.

Similarly, Table 18 reveals that participation and mother’s education stage are strongly interrelated as 78.9% of the children who have bachelor mother’s education stage admit the importance and practice of participation, close to significant,  $p$ -value = 0.068. Notably,

**Table 14.**  
Relation between  
decision making and  
empathy

			Empathy	
			YES	NO
Decision-making	YES	N	8 100.0%	14 70.0%
	NO	N	0 0.0%	6 30.0%
Total			8 100.0%	20 100.0%

**Table 15.**  
Relation between  
cooperation and  
participation

			Participation	
			YES	NO
Cooperation	YES	N	14 73.7%	9 100.0%
	NO	N	5 26.3%	0 0.0%
Total			19 100.0%	9 100.0%

**Table 16.**  
Relation between  
decision-making and  
sex

			Sex	
			M	F
Decision Making	YES	N	7 58.3%	15 93.8%
	NO	N	5 41.7%	1 6.3%
Total			12 100.0%	16 100.0%

Table 19 reveals that critical thinking skill and father's education stage are strongly interrelated as 100% of the children who have post-graduate father education stage admit the importance and practice of critical thinking, close to significant,  $p$ -value = 0.081.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendations

Currently, transformation of Egyptian education system is regarded as the cornerstone of the democratic construction of the Egyptian society. The new curriculum is a starting point. Content analysis of the textbook and activities inherited therein shows that the learning process based on life skills and citizenship education is appropriate for the construction of active citizens.

To clarify, the textbook provides Egyptian children with the necessary opportunities to learn and create, through creative participatory methods. Themes are prearranged in conformity with the constructivism approach, to enable children to formulate their own views and opinions. Activities included in the textbook after each lesson, fosters the personal dimension and the social dimension.

			Mother's education	
			BACH	MORE
12. negotiation	YES	N	18 94.7%	6 66.7%
	NO	N	1 5.3%	3 33.3%
Total			19	9

**Table 17.**  
Relation between  
negotiation and  
mother's education

			Mother's education	
			BACH	MORE
Participation	YES	N	15 78.9%	4 44.4%
	NO	N	4 21.1%	5 55.6%
Total		N	19 100.0%	9 100.0%

**Table 18.**  
Relation between  
participation and  
mother's stage of  
education

			Father's education	
			BACH	MORE
9. critical thinking	YES	N	14 63.6%	6 100.0%
	NO	N	8 36.4%	0 0.0%
Total		N	22 100.0%	6 100.0%

**Table 19.**  
Relation between  
critical thinking and  
father's stage of  
education

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## REPS

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Disappointingly, the analysis indicates that activities are relied more on drawing and coloring than on participating with peers in projects. This is as a result of, what the content analysis revealed, the inconsistent way in which life skills are organized, to the extent that, two essential life skills are almost absent: empathy and resilience.

The relationship between the social dimension (learning to live together) and other dimensions has been proven by means of the chi-square test. The relationship between participation and the two approximately absent skills “resilience and empathy” has been clarified as both are strongly interrelated with participation.

This means that to construct active participatory democratic citizens, it is necessary to put into consideration the acquirement of all the 12 life skills and citizenship education, not only the social dimension. Furthermore, the research stresses the importance of enhancing participation, as it is proven through the chi-square test that it is strongly related to other skills.

For this purpose, the research suggests the formulation of wider project-based activities, to be included in the textbooks of all the primary grades. In this regard, real contribution with NGOs and local governments shall be developed to facilitate the involvement of children in actual projects, in accordance with their ages and to encourage students to participate, as they notice the efficient results of their contribution.

Furthermore, the research proposes more training programs to be arranged for teachers to cope with the new teaching methodology; immense awareness programs for parents to be organized to convince them about the importance of these radical changes; and huge budget to be allocated to realize these ambitious objectives.

Finally, it is recommended making more research studies on the relationship between the 12 life skills and how to apply the results through the new curriculum. More questionnaires are needed to assess the grade of life skills achievement among students in grade one and two, as it is regarded one of the limitations of the present study, owing to the complicated procedures and the limited time.

### Notes

1. The Arab Republic of Egypt, Cabinet of Minister: [www.cabinet.gov.eg/Style%20Library/Cabinet/pdf/sds2030\\_summary\\_arabic.pdf](http://www.cabinet.gov.eg/Style%20Library/Cabinet/pdf/sds2030_summary_arabic.pdf)
2. For more information see: [www.edchreturkeyeu.coe.int/Source/Resources/A\\_Europe\\_of\\_Active\\_Citizens\\_conference\\_Summary\\_Report\\_EN.pdf](http://www.edchreturkeyeu.coe.int/Source/Resources/A_Europe_of_Active_Citizens_conference_Summary_Report_EN.pdf)
3. For more information see: [www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/what-is-the-convention](http://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/what-is-the-convention)
4. The Egyptian citizenship and the future of democracy : new visions in a changeable world, questionnaire on the perception of youth in schools and universities on the political participation, the 17th annual conference on political researches, center for political research and studies, December 21-23, 2003
5. For more information see: The State Information Service: [www.sis.gov.eg/Newvr/Dustor-en001.pdf](http://www.sis.gov.eg/Newvr/Dustor-en001.pdf)
6. For more information see: the Arab Development Portal [http://arabdevelopmentportal.com/sites/default/files/publication/sds\\_egypt\\_vision\\_2030.pdf](http://arabdevelopmentportal.com/sites/default/files/publication/sds_egypt_vision_2030.pdf)
7. For more information see: [www.unesco.org/new/ar/beirut/areas-of-action/education/primary](http://www.unesco.org/new/ar/beirut/areas-of-action/education/primary)
8. For more information see: A new learning agenda for the realization of SDG 4 in MENA [www.lsce-mena.org/uploads/updated\\_lsce\\_files/2018-06/180628\\_LSCE\\_Egypt\\_pamphlet\\_4P\\_Web.pdf](http://www.lsce-mena.org/uploads/updated_lsce_files/2018-06/180628_LSCE_Egypt_pamphlet_4P_Web.pdf)
9. For more information see: MENA Generation 2030 Report: [www.unicef.org/mena/media/4141/file/MENA-Gen2030.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/mena/media/4141/file/MENA-Gen2030.pdf)

10. For more information see: [www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index\\_7308.html](http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_7308.html)
11. According to the Arab Development Portal, trained teachers for primary schools were 74% in 2016, while Pupil teacher ratio was 23.4% in 2017.
12. According to the Arab Development Portal, public primary schools with access to internet for pedagogical purposes were 44% in 2016. Public primary schools with access to computers for pedagogical purposes were 76.4% in 2017.

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