English Education in Egypt

Ali Massoud

University of Alabama at Birmingham & The American University in Cairo

Abstract Body

In an increasingly globalized world, learning foreign languages is an essential part of education. This is especially true in much of the developing world where employers will not consider hiring anyone not fluent in English in addition to the native language. Unfortunately, failing public education systems often mean that only those wealthy enough to afford elite private schools can obtain the language skills necessary for success.

The documentary English Education in Egypt examines the differences between language education in public schools and private schools and the subsequent effects on social stratification in Egypt. It features a series of interviews with Deena Boraie, the President of an international organization called Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Kathleen Saville, a senior instructor at the American University in Cairo (AUC), and Ali Massoud, a tutor in the English Literacy Program at AUC. Together, they explore the complex issues surrounding language education in Egypt.

In Egypt, there is a difference between speaking English and speaking English with an Arabic accent. As the documentary explains, for wealthy students in private schools, the instructors are American or British. For poorer students in public schools, the instructors are Egyptian. The different accents with which one learns to speak English can have staggering ramifications. Employers often associate Arabic accents with poverty and ignorance, a mentality that promotes classism. Students from wealthy families procure lucrative careers while students from poorer families are left unemployed, further widening socioeconomic disparities.