Consumer Demand in the Egyptian Market of University Education:
An Empirical Investigation

Amany I. Shahin, Helwan University, Egypt

ABSTRACT

This study explores consumer demands in the Egyptian market of university education. Three aspects discussed are the value of university education in Egyptian culture, consumer perceptions regarding the quality of university education, and consumer preferences regarding the university education service. Results of the empirical investigation indicate that university education is highly regarded in Egyptian culture, however, consumer's perception of its quality is moderate. Consumers prefer university studies in courses taught in the English language, universities in a nearby geographical location, governmental universities, and top class faculties. The study focuses on university education in Egypt and the authors hope to shed light on higher education in countries that share the same cultural characteristics. Many studies investigated higher education in different cultures, yet relatively few have considered it in an emerging nation. The present study addresses this gap.

Keywords: Consumer Demand for University Education, Culture, Education Development in Egypt, Marketing of University Education, Quality of University Education

INTRODUCTION

Egypt is located in a unique geographical location; it is a country bordering Africa, Asia and Europe (Hopwood, 1993). The Nile, which cuts through Egypt, has helped population to settle around the Nile valley and to cultivate its fertile land. This has helped in the rise of the ancient Egyptian civilization, one of the oldest human civilizations. This civilization has laid the foundations for most of the world's current civilizations. It was based on an effective education system. Such a system that has, for example, produced architects who built the famous pyramids, physicians and surgeons who performed delicate medical operations, chemists who mummified bodies of pharaohs in a manner that has preserved these bodies for several thousand years using techniques that still bewilder scientists.

Such an education system has also produced the first known accountants and auditors in history (Woolf, 1912). It has produced astrologists who could place the statue of the Pharaoh Ramses in a certain location where the sun would shine on his face only twice each year,

on his birthday, and on the day he has ascended the throne. Archaeologists are still discovering new secrets of this civilization whose secrets never seem to end.

Egypt has passed in the following years through periods of ups and downs. Evidently the education system was affected by these fluctuations through the years. The eighteenth century has been a period of deterioration and isolation to the extent that the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798 has produced a cultural shock as the Egyptians were faced by mysteries they never heard of, such as the artillery which caused panic as well as other erstwhile modern inventions. The only education system available at the time was mainly religious education and some related studies including language study of only one language. The only university education was "Al-Azhar" University, a university which was founded in the year 972 for religious education (Amar, 2005).

THE FOUNDATIONS OF CURRENT HIGHER EDUCATION IN EGYPT

Mohamed Ali Pasha became ruler of Egypt in 1805. His reign lasted until 1848 and he founded the Egyptian Royal dynasty which lasted until 1953. A man of vision and ambition, he decided to create an advanced modern society and a strong army and this required a modern education system which he started as soon as he had secured his grip on power. His ambitious education programme started in 1813(El-Rafii, 1989). This year represents the first phase in the development of higher education in modern Egypt, which could be divided into four phase as follows:

Phase (1): 1813 to 1908

In 1813 Mohamed Ali decided to send students to Western Countries for education, they were referred to as educational missions i.e. students on governmental grants to study in these countries. The first group consisted of 28 students

who were sent to Italy and Britain in 1813. Later he started sending students to France. The total number of students sent to these countries during the period 1813 to 1847 was 319 students. They studied almost all branches of the then available disciplines (El-Rafii, 1989).

At the same time he started the foundation of high schools. These included a School of Engineering (1816), a School of Medicine (1827), a School of Pharmacology (1829) a School of Minerals (1834), a School of Languages (1836), a School of Accounting (1837), a School of Agriculture (1836); as well as many military schools covering various military specializations. (El-Rafii, 1989).

Later Ismail Pacha, grandson of Muhamed Ali and ruler of Egypt (during the period 1863 to 1879) expanded the education system. Education during his era witnessed expansion and quality led by Aly Pasha Mubarak, minister of Education and a graduate of France as well a famous scholar called Rifaa El-Tahtawy who was sent to France with the students as a religious scholar for guidance to students. He later wrote a famous book entitled "Description of Paris", in which he described all aspects of life in France. Both became leaders in what has become known in Egyptian history as "The Period of Renaissance". They played a crucial role in the development of the education system and the cultural environment. This period witnessed several valuable publications and the rise of some famous scientists and scholars in engineering, medicine, surgery, physics, law and literature (El-Rafii, 1982).

Phase (2):1908 to 1925

The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 has caused another cultural and political shock which halted education development in higher education. However, starting from 1904 political and community leaders started demanding the formation of a "University" on the western style. In 1906 these efforts culminated in the formation of a foundation committee. Many Egyptians subscribed to the committee which was headed by Prince Fouad who became later

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