

## **Voices to the Younger Generation or False Hopes? A Claim for Political Responsibility and Societal Development**

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### **1 Introduction**

Coming from a discourse analytical perspective, the article takes its starting point from the “travelling” knowledge (Czarniawska and Sevón 2005; Khalil 2020b; Khalil 2017) of career guidance (CG) and how the knowledge shifts while moving from a European context into the Middle Eastern context of Egypt.

In a multi-stakeholder based assessment, adopting a transformative evaluation approach through a complex multiperspectivity research design, the study presented focuses on program outcomes of a CG program implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) (Khalil and Weber 2020a). So how can a program to policy transformative evaluation approach give impulses for political responsibility and societal development? Will the voices of the younger generation be heard and taken up by the Egyptian political agenda? What are the outcomes and impacts of the program? Can a CG program link into policy transformation and support bringing about educational and societal transformation?

To answer these questions, impact evaluation (Khalil 2018; Norgbey 2016) is used to explore the rationalities and the changing behaviour and social relations of the stakeholders involved by asking them about the ‘gaze’ to others. By exploring the empirical data of this multi-method and participatory impact evaluation (Khalil 2018; Weber 2009; Weber 2012; Weber 2014 a) we need to deepen our understanding of how the evaluated CG program has strong effects on self-concepts of the stakeholders. The participatory impact evaluation here opens the space for stakeholders’ voices and claims and shifts their ‘inner point of speaking’. The CG knowledge here does not primarily bring about an economical subjectivation (as analysed within the EU context: Jacquin and Juhel 2017; Sampson et al. 2014; Schröder and Karl 2017) but carries collective and societal potentials for democratizing educational, societal and organizational relationships. The policy then is asked to take up this generational claim to make educational and societal innovations happen.

The first chapter of this article offers a brief introduction to the CG program rationale and context, followed by a discussion on impact evaluation as I am interested in program outcomes and what becomes relevant to the stakeholders. Then I will briefly present the methodological framework and research design in order to then listen to the voices of the stakeholders taking part in the research focusing on the policy learning at the local and macro levels. Finally, we will see how policy learning should mean to have systemic approaches to societal development.

## **2 CG Program Rationale and Context**

The Employment Promotion Project (EPP) has been piloting an educational CG program within technical education schools in three pilot regions from 2011 until 2015. The initial phase targeted six technical education schools – three in each region (Rural – Urban) – and represented different technical education systems i.e. regular technical education and dual system education. As discussed elsewhere, the program “is dedicated to support the school-to-work transition and career development of young Technical Secondary School (TSS) students and graduated job seekers. Its main focus is to ease the transition of students into the world of work. The career guidance program aims at empowering youth to better manage the transition phase from school or unemployment to employment by making informed decisions.” (Khalil 2015, p. 7).

The CG program design adopts the Life/Work Planning approach (Bolles 2018). In this approach, Bolles relies on the individual’s strength, on empowerment, on diagnostics which is based on narrations and experience of the self through a lifetime. Life/Work Planning does not rely on an external evaluation of some experts but on empowering the individuals and training them for the future to help them find their strength by looking into their past and the experiences they have and their wishes of life.

The program is oriented towards the inclusion of stakeholders and networking. Involving staff of the ministry of education, youth, parents, private sector representatives, actors of civil society and relevant institutions. The project believes that all have a core “stake” when it comes to the need to transform society and shift the orders in educational systems and this can be considered as a core element of success.

### **Program “Context”**

In brief, the Egyptian society is characterised by being a hierarchical society. Vertical power relation plays a big role in general and can be replicated in different social spheres, one of which is the classrooms where the teacher is in power.

EPP introduced CG a ‘travelling idea’ (Czarniawska and Sevón 2005; Khalil 2020b) which is indigenous (Arulmani et al. 2014) to the community wanting to bring change and empower the students. So how is the program changing this context? With the CG program objective empowering TE graduates by helping them discover who they are and what they can do to be able to manage their careers and make informed decisions, one considers this program in itself a revolution.

The program does change the classroom relationships by creating an enabling context for learning. It creates a knowledge situation and changes the relationship between students, teachers and peers and creates a network of relations within the classroom. The CG program is for growth and empowerment taking into consideration needs and values of the individual and the context the services are provided.

Talking about policy learning there is a need to see how this can happen not only for the two piloting regions but for the nation. And accordingly there is a need for multilevel policy learning out of the program evaluation and program research (Descy and Tessaring 2005). So what is the potential and impact of a program as such? How can the program transfer into policy?

### 3 Impact Evaluation of the Career Guidance Program

It is important to recognize the educational value of the CG program at hand in order to be able to transform the learning experience into resources. According to Gertler et al. (2016) in their report on Impact Evaluation in Practice which was submitted to the World Bank Group, “evidence generated by impact evaluations is increasingly serving as a foundation for greater accountability, innovation, and learning. In a context in which policymakers and civil society are demanding results and accountability from public programs, impact evaluation can provide robust and credible evidence on performance and, crucially, on whether a particular program has achieved or is achieving its desired outcomes” (Gertler et al. 2016:4)

Accordingly, I am interested in impact evaluation (Gertler et al. 2011; Khalil 2018; Norgbey 2016; OECD/DAC 2002) as it supports the process of policy learning and helps to assess the difference an intervention has made in terms of what becomes important and relevant to people and what stays with them in relation to the program outcomes. As well it is of interest to learn about the “Gaze” of the stakeholders as it is imperative to assess their gratification with the CG program intervention and to understand the changes brought about (Kreber, Brook and Policy 2010).

As I am interested in the travelling idea (Czarniawska and Sevón 2005; Khalil 2020b; Sultana 2011) of CG where knowledge is translated into different national contexts and political, cultural, and social eco-systems. Here CG travels to countries where it is indigenous and becomes crucial. I am also interested in the *dispositif* in a Foucauldian sense (Gordon 1980) on how relations change. As discussed in the previous section we see the relationships within the classroom is frontal, so we ask now what does the program change? I am also interested in the rationalities, like education relationships. The empirical data show evidence that change is happening here – so how does this become a policy as policy learning is the question?

From a discourse perspective on the impact we want to ask; how does the ‘gaze’ of students, peers, parents, teachers and program staff change? How do (perceived) social relationships in the eyes of stakeholders change and develop? How does CG knowledge “travel” into the selves (bodies and minds) of stakeholders? How does the ‘gaze’ on others change (impact as rationalities being brought into existence)? However, before presenting the research results I will briefly present the methodological framework and research design adopted.

### 4 Methodological framework & Research Design

The CG program shows complexity in its design, hence, a program evaluation design has to be adequately following the CG program design principles. Evaluation too needs to assist in the improvement of the social systems by helping policymakers deepen their understanding of the program at hand (Cronbach et al. 1980). Generally speaking, evaluation is oriented to what Patton pointed out so clearly: „Things you´d like to know that would make a difference to what you do“ (Patton 1997:32). In this sense, evaluation is value-based, as it evaluates, what works and what doesn´t. Specific values, knowledge sets and results are to be privileged against others based on the difference they make in the world. Following the complex and transformative program design, the evaluation approach should be transformative, too. It fits at the level of core values, goals and strategies towards transformation.

The *transformative evaluation* (Mertens 1999; Mertens 2001; Mertens 2007; Weber 2006; Weber 2012) approach which is understood as an inclusive, bottom-up process that makes change by engaging people actively and respectfully follows a constructivist and learning oriented paradigm, it intends to empower by evaluation for social change.

By adopting a bottom-up approach we wish to listen to the stakeholders involved to articulate multiperspectivity regarding program outcomes. The stakeholders involved in this research are: *Students* as it is important to learn about their personal transformation throughout the program. *Teachers* who are the ones delivering the program and take part in commenting and developing the program designed (co-creators). *Parents* who can validate the transformation of their kids and finally the *project staff*, the ones who oversee the creation, development, institutionalization and quality of the services provided. And due to the heterogeneity of the target groups, I used different transformative evaluation workshops design to address each group separately to gather qualitative data sets.

Within the programme evaluation design, the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach was modified and adapted to the goal of Transformative Evaluation (Weber 2012) to allow the broadest possible contributions by clients – be it positive or even critical and challenging. The methodical design applied in the case of CG in Egypt uses the socio-methodological approach of AI which has been developed as “affirmative social research” (Bruck and Weber 2000; Srivastva and Cooperrider 1999). Focusing on desirable futures, the approach does not work problem-based but based on positive experiences by talking about the important experiences they gained throughout the program going to their Vision and finally conceptualizing the steps to be taken. The most important transformative experiences in the programme ‘Discovery’, the envisioning of the own and significant others’ future ‘Dream’, the path towards this future ‘Destiny’ and the contributions of the self, of others and the programme – and the steps to be taken ‘Design’ are relevant elements of the peer-interview applied.

A creative, visualizing an image-based approach (Weber 2015) allowed integrating intellectual as well as emotional dimensions and allowed being inclusive, as the analysis is not limited to verbal and language-based approaches (Weber 2014a; Weber 2015). The image-based methodology was used to elicit, to help stakeholders easily and spontaneously tell their stories within the program (Bignante 2010; Hurworth and Sweeney 1995).

The analysis followed the *trajectories* of the stakeholders throughout the program looking for visual and verbal metaphors in student’s narrations. The trajectory analysis relates to the different points in time (T1-T6) and is structured in a manner to answer three main questions relating to the ‘now’, the ‘beginning’ and the ‘desired future’. The narrations and images are brought together to find orientational patterns (Bohnsack and Schäffer 2001). With T1 and T2 we used the images and we start from the now (present) as it is clearer and nearer – going back to the past and from T4 to T6 the appreciative inquiry cycle was used to know about the most important experience and to design the future of CG.

## **5 From Program to Policy: Stakeholder’s Perspective**

Elsewhere (Khalil 2019) I have discussed results related to how students perceive their role and responsibility as individuals and the role and responsibility of the societal actors (themselves, peers, parents, teachers, program, firms and policymakers). In order to know how they perceive the steps to be taken to reach the goal of good work and life they were asked who can do what?

I will only briefly introduce the main perspectives of the stakeholders on the local level as in this article I focus on the macro level/macro stakeholders.

## 5.1 Local level

On the level of the 'self', it was obvious that the students are willing to do the effort and they want to be responded to. This is evident in the 'O Tones' of those who answered the question where they agreed that "hard work", "Diligence" and to "have an objective", as well they expressed their wish to be listened to and be understood: "to understand the youth" "involve youth in policymaking".

For peers, the social relations are core and important as a condition for success and social networks. We hear them say "provide advice", "share experience". When parents were addressed they expressed their interest to be part of the program "we need to know more... I suggest that we receive training to be informed and be able to help our kids at home". Not only that but their 'gaze' towards their children changed as they become more caring parents and supporters to their children development "guide them towards a better future", "take care of their children and raise them properly".

It is also evident that teachers established close relationships with the students. The program has an impact on shifting the educational relationships and changing the 'gaze' of teachers towards their students and seeing them as individuals 'persons'. A strong represented group of the sample say "help clients discover their strength", "I feel I can give a helping hand to the youth", "the program changed my relationship with clients to become personal (we tried to understand them)".

In the coming section, I am going to focus on the policy learning, covering the institutional actors. I will start by presenting how stakeholders (students – parents – teachers – staff) perceive the program, followed by the firms and finally the policymakers.

## 5.2 Macro Level

At the macro level, we find that policy is being addressed by the stakeholders in the program and policymakers are the creators of structural conditions at the level of the society. As a matter of fact, this is the main focus of this article as it is about policy learning.

### Stakeholders' Wishes from the Program

Most of the *students* who responded see that the program should support, provide information and encourage and guide them. They see the program is to "teach us how to reach our objectives", "help us transfer to the world of work", "help youth develop their skills as they are the future of the country", "Find our strength and develop them".

Within the group discussions, the *parents* tell us about their perception of the program not only towards their children but also to them: they state that it "was useful for us ourselves we learnt from them". The parents wish that the program stays and develops further: "I hope that this keeps on going ... and that this becomes official ... they can provide jobs for them". Even though the parents did not specify the steps to be taken by the program however it is obvious that they wish for the program to stay and provide support

For the *teachers*, they wish that the program provides technical support and develop and supervise the implementation of the services. Teachers' responses were strongest in the following "O Tones": "To provide regular technical support", "Program together with MoE work on institutionalizing CG and plan for the diffusion", "good training of the facilitators",

“Program has a constant evaluation and follow up systems for clients and facilitators”,  
“Facilitator develop their skills and information”.

Finally, *program staff* see that one of the learning aspects refers to the importance of cooperating with different partners – even if this might take time – but at least partners should be able to meet in on common grounds and “share our vision with other stakeholders to have a joint vision” and “work in harmony”. Program staff agreed, that this is what the program managed to do.

### **Stakeholders’ Wishes from the Firms**

When students told their perception of the role of the firms they said “Provide Decent Jobs” - “Better Treatment” - “Decent work environment and salary”. It is important to highlight here that the students participating are reflecting on their experience in the blue-collar world which is associated historically with lower classes of society and inequality (Winch 2013).

Parents see the firms as an enabler to their children wishing from it “to encourage the youth by giving them hope” and “to care about the children and treat them like their own kids”. Again coming from the blue collar world parents wish that the firms give a chance to their kids.

Teachers’ too wish that the firms would respond to government policy calling for encouraging youth by the provision of training and opening their doors for clients for job tasting “give a chance to the students to try different jobs to be able to choose and have a successful career”.

Finally, the program staff wishes that the firms shall at least “provide updated information on their needs and encourage the kids and expose them to the world of work”. Information is highlighted here as this is considered one of the major problems as it is difficult to find up-to-date data that reflect the needs and expectations of the labour market.

### **Stakeholders’ Wishes from the Policymakers**

Those of the students who respondent to the part related to the policymakers share “provide job opportunities”, “manage the labour market”, “manage the program”, “to be concerned about the youth” “to understand the youth” “involve youth in policymaking” “treat us in a good way” “reform labour law”, “ensure equal opportunities”.

As for the parents, the steps to be taken by the policymakers is expected to be: “develop the technical education in Egypt”, “provision of equipment and resources for training”, “provide financial support and take care of the teacher”, “include the youth in the world of work in a better way and depend on them”, “encourage those who are qualified and support them”, “adopt the ideas of the youth and try to execute them”, “take decisions that will bring change to the technical education and provide opportunities to all the youth and to rise / advance the Technical Education”.

Teachers wish that the policymakers shall take steps to draw a general career guidance policy based on their conviction of the importance of the program to the country economy, and that they need to come and listen to the children of technical education “the government adopts the concept” “to go with the program nation-wide”, “have a university specialization providing career guidance”.

Finally, program staff see the potential of making a bigger change than possible, when still better conditions, more political support, more involvement of more important stakeholders are given “know that they are not the only players, there are other stakeholders”. As they see it, policymakers could make a huge change happen by taking brave decisions and take this concept further into structural solutions and diffusion all over the country “to take courageous decisions and have long-term plan”. The policymakers could develop strategy plans, take activities to involve other partners and could establish institutional structures.

## **6 Career Guidance and Democratization: Potential for Societal Transformation**

Based on the results presented above and elsewhere in (Khalil 2019; Khalil 2018) we see that the program at hand has a potential for educational innovation shifting educational relationships. Accordingly, the CG program should be seen as a dispositive in the Foucauldian sense converting the vertical ‘pyramid’ of teachers’ classroom power into democratization and educational relations shifts.

As Bengtsson (2011) argues, career guidance not only shapes a competitive workforce but a responsible citizen. Coming from a discourse analysis perspective based on Foucault’s power/knowledge (Gordon and Foucault 1980) I argue that the program supports the self-realization of the individuals hence contributing to the societal transformation democratizing knowledge (Weber 2014b). The argument here is against the European debates where the discourse shows an entrepreneurial notion of subjectivation.

## **7 Claiming Policy Responsibility & Avoiding false hopes ... Policy Learning for Societal Development**

Today, Egypt does not have a career guidance policy and the process of policymaking is a complex one as it involves actors at different levels, which calls for the adoption of a systemic approach. A systemic approach requires a broad systems perspective that would provide a holistic view to anticipate the future needs for the societal development and capture systems complexities (Ekvall et al. 2016).

And to claim policy responsibility a systems innovation approach that connects to different social contexts (Khalil and Weber 2020a; Williams and Imam 2007) that enhances community development, firms development and CG and network development needs to be adopted. Accordingly, on the community development level, there is a need to interrelate schools and parents and connect them more to the program. On the level of higher education policy, decision makers shall adopt programs in the field of teachers development/education not only within the school but by introducing the career guidance as a field of study in higher education as part of the basic training of teachers. Finally, on the level of economic policy, there is a need to enhance the human resource management that provides systematic statistics that is updated frequently.

In order to avoid the false hopes and to make this happen, policy learning for societal development need to relate to the following different dimensions. Policy makers need a. To listen to citizens and stakeholders, b. To integrate policy into regional network development, c. To interconnect by having inter-ministry dialogues and joint co-creation, d. To involve stakeholders in open innovation dialogues and e. To envision policy by systematically planning for inclusive and sustainable regional development.

The services provided acknowledge the richness of real life, stressing the importance of the clients to get the real experience of what they want to do. The nature of the program is

dynamic and allows to develop and change based on the needs of the students, teachers and the market. The program was able to bridge the gap between the local needs and local experience not only that but it took measures to work with different opinions and stakeholders; trying to bring both the Ministry of Education and private sector together on the same table, initiating roundtable discussion with the different international organizations to discuss how to work together and sustain career guidance services under one umbrella paying attention to the situation in Egypt with the frequent change of leadership.

Based on the transformative evaluation it is evident that the program is an innovative educational program transforming educational relations, shifting the vertical pyramid and is empowering by helping the individuals voice their needs. Hence CG needs to be safe now as it brings educational and societal transformation.

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