

Chapter Six

YOUTH AND EDUCATION

I. INTRODUCTION

Lebanon has been at a crossroads of civilizations since early times. Canaanite, Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine are only a few of the civilizations that passed by, or settled on, Lebanese soil before the Arab civilization became the dominant culture of the country. In the past 200 years and with the advent of the East-West cultural dichotomy on the world scene, Lebanon became an important bridge between these two cultures. The Lebanese, like their Phoenician ancestors, became world travelers settling in almost every part of the five continents, to the point where, at present, Lebanese expatriates and persons of Lebanese descent number several times the resident population. Lebanese businesses, although relatively small in size, have been often multinational, long before the giant multinational companies of today. At present, Lebanese businesses dominate in West Africa and, are present to a large extent, in the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Republics and are active in most of Europe and the Americas.

In this setting and given the nature of the present age of technology, the Lebanese individual must compete for his living with individuals in more advanced countries. Education, including the knowledge of foreign languages, therefore, is for the Lebanese a prerequisite for survival and for integration in society. This is the reason why Lebanese parents place such a high premium on quality education for their children and are willing to sacrifice a great deal to insure it. An illiterate person, or one with limited education, is often doomed to a marginalized life (even when living in a rural setting).

“Education, which is a main component of human development, is... one of the most important factors in the integration of youth in society, particularly in Lebanon.”

Education, which is a main component of human development, is one of the most important factors for the integration of youth in society, particularly in Lebanon. At the national level, the *coverage* and *relevance* of education are crucial factors in this integration. Coverage is to be considered not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of distribution, particularly geographic and gender. Relevance deals with the pertinence of education to the needs of the economy and with the role of education in promoting good citizenship and cultural values. The coverage and relevance of education are, therefore, the two underlying themes of the analysis in this chapter.

II. GROWTH AND ACCESSIBILITY OF EDUCATION

Total enrollment has grown significantly in the past quarter century or so, in spite of the war that took place during most of this period. Between 1970 and 1996, the total net enrollment rate (in relation to the age group 6-24 years) rose from 37 percent to 43 percent.

As seen from Table 1, the increase came from two main sources. First, there were considerable increases in enrollment at the intermediate, secondary and tertiary levels of education. At the intermediate level, enrollment rates rose from 28 percent in 1974 to 46 percent in 1996. At the secondary and tertiary levels, enrollment grew from 16 percent to 30 percent and from 10 to 18 percent, respectively (Charts 1 and 2). The increase in the net enrollment rate at the primary level was modest, from 82 to 84 percent, because of the originally high primary enrollment rate (for the age group 7 to 9 years, the enrollment rate was virtually 100 percent).

Table 1: Net enrollment rates, 1970 and 1996
(Percent)

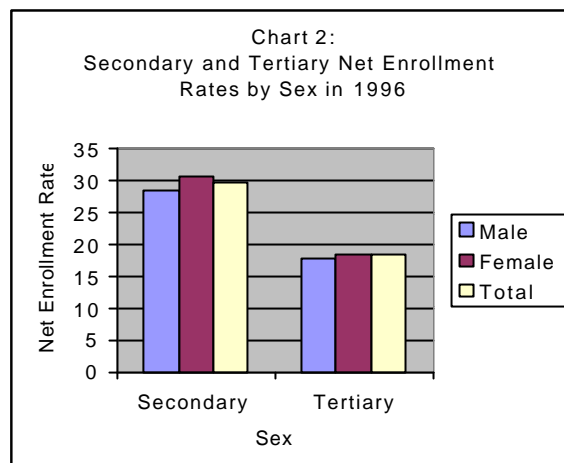
Level	1970			1996		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Primary (6-9 years)	85.1	78.6	81.9	83.7	83.9	83.8
Intermediate (10-14 years)	31.4	25.0	28.3	42.7	48.9	45.7
Secondary (15-19 years)	19.1	12.0	15.6	28.4	30.6	29.5
Tertiary (20-24 years)	15.8	4.3	10.2	17.8	18.5	18.2
Total (6-24 years)	40.9	33.7	37.4	41.4	43.8	42.6

Source: Lebanon: Ministry of Planning (1970); Lebanon: Ministry of Social Affairs and UNFPA (1996).

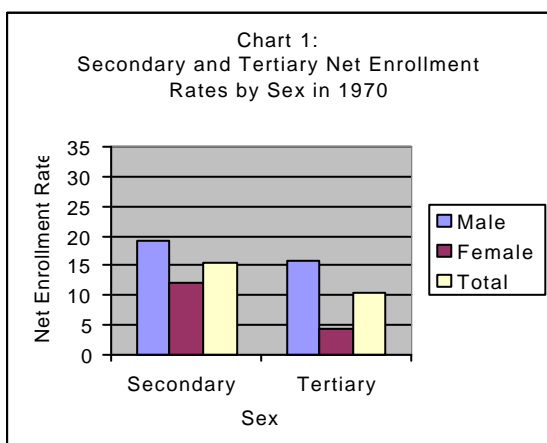
The second source of the increase in net enrollment rates was the considerable increase in female enrollment. At the primary level, the six percentage points gap between the enrollment rates of males and females in 1970 (85 percent for males and 79 percent for females) was eliminated by 1996, rates for both were 84 percent that year.

“...the gender gap in enrollment, quantitatively at least, was not only closed, ... a slight edge in favour of females was targeted, particularly in the youth age group.

The closing of the gender gap was even more impressive at the intermediate, secondary and tertiary levels. At the intermediate level, the 1970 gender gap represented by male and female



enrollment rates of 31 percent and 25 percent, respectively, was reversed in 1996 with enrollment rates of 43 percent for males and 49 percent for females. Similarly, at the secondary level, the 1970 enrollment rates of males and females were 19 percent and 12 percent, respectively - a gap of seven points, while in 1996 the enrollment rate of females (31 percent) surpassed that for the males (28 percent). At the tertiary level, finally, the enrollment rates for males and females rose from 16 percent and 4 percent, respectively, to virtual equality at around 18 percent for both sexes – slightly for young men and in a spectacular manner for young women. In other words, the gender gap in enrollment, quantitatively at least, was not only closed during this period, a slight edge in favour of females was registered, particularly in the youth age group.



The gender differences in enrollment, which were significant in 1970, were virtually eliminated at the level of all Mohafazats. Thus, for the highly urbanized Mohafazat of Beirut, the net enrollment rate for males and females in 1970 was 70 percent and 58 percent, respectively, while females had a

slight edge over males in 1996 with a rate of 76 percent against 74 percent, respectively. For the dominantly rural Mohafazats of the Bekaa and South Lebanon, the gender differences in enrollment rates were fairly large in 1970 (71 percent for males and 53 percent for females in the Bekaa and 75 percent for males and 54 percent for females in the South) while enrollment rates for both genders became equal at around 66 percent in both Mohafazats in 1996.

“...the gender differences in enrollment which were significant in 1970, were virtually eliminated at the level of all Mohafazats.”

It is also to be noted that the gender difference in enrollment in the dominantly rural Mohafazats (South Lebanon and Bekaa) was closed by the increase in the enrollment of girls and a slight decline in the enrollment of boys. In fact, for the country as a whole and for the North Lebanon and South Lebanon Mohafazats, not only was the gender gap closed, enrollment rates of girls now exceed those of boys. This might have been due to the fact that males, being traditionally the potential breadwinners, were pulled out of school earlier in view of the difficult economic conditions and the perception among some parents in rural areas that advanced education is not required for the work available there. It could also have been due to the fact that the more well-to-do were sending their male children to study elsewhere in the country or abroad. Further investigation of this phenomenon needs to be undertaken before a firm determination of its causes is made.

While enrollment rates increased between 1970 and 1996 in both rural and urban areas, this occurred at different rates. As seen from Table 2, the net enrollment rate (6-24 years of age) in 1970 varied from 60 percent in the Mohafazat of North Lebanon to around 64 percent in Beirut and the Mohafazat of South Lebanon. In 1996, the range of net enrollment rate was from 62 percent in the Mohafazat of North Lebanon to 75 percent in the Mohafazat of Beirut. In other words, progress in enrollment during this period was greater in the more urbanized areas. The widening of the rural-urban gap is even more evident when the major urban area of Beirut is compared with the most rural districts, such as Akkar in North Lebanon. In 1996, the net enrollment rate in Beirut was 75 percent and in Akkar it was only 57 percent.

Table 2: Net school enrollment rates (6-24 years) by Mohafazat, 1970-1996
(Percent)

	1970	1996		1970	1996
All Lebanon	62.7	67.6	North Lebanon	60.2	62.1
Male	68.7	66.9	Male	65.4	60.9
Female	56.4	68.4	Female	54.7	63.4

Beirut	64.0	74.8	South Lebanon	64.5	65.7
Male	69.9	73.9	Male	74.6	65.0
Female	58.0	75.8	Female	53.8	66.4
Mount Lebanon	62.5	70.3	Bekaa	62.5	66.3
Male	67.0	69.6	Male	71.4	66.4
Female	58.0	71.2	Female	52.9	66.1

Sources: Lebanon: Ministry of Planning (1970); Lebanon: Ministry of Social Affairs and UNFPA (1996).

“While enrollment rates increased between 1970 and 1996 in both rural and urban areas, the rural-urban gap in enrollment seems to have increased also.... the net enrollment rate (6 to 24 years) was around 75 percent in Beirut and in Akkar it was only 57 percent [in 1996].”

Access to education at the university level is clearly problematic as about 70 percent of enrollment occurs at universities located in the Greater Beirut area and only 30 percent in the rest of the country. All universities of standing are located in the Greater Beirut area, including the American University of Beirut, the main campus of the Lebanese American University, the St. Joseph University and others, as well as the more prestigious First and Second Sections of the Lebanese University that account for some 63 percent of its total enrollment. Not only is the bulk of available university education located in the Greater Beirut area, quality education is largely concentrated there.

“Improving the quality of education in public schools and changing the outlook of parents towards public education will ... reduce considerably the burden of education on families.”

Access to education is also affected by the cost of education. The 1997 survey of living conditions (Lebanon: Central Administration of Statistics, 1998) showed that, on average, families spend close to US\$ 1,800 a year on education or 13 percent of family expenditures. This average figure includes tuition and other related expenses (e.g. books); the cost of education in public schools, which is minimal; the restraining effect of scholarships; and, education abroad. This average hides a good deal of variation, due to differences in cost between private and public schools, the extent of scholarship received and the number of children a family has in school at the same time. Thus, for example, the yearly cost of education at the secondary level (tuition and related expenses) is around US\$ 1,960 in private schools and US\$ 330 in public schools. The yearly cost of education at the university level is around US\$ 5,000 in a private institution and US\$ 567 in the public university. The cost effect on access to education is limited in respect of public schooling, but quite prohibitive in respect of private schooling. Since many parents, even with modest means, insist

on private schools for the education of their children, in the belief that they offer a better guarantee of success in life, the burden of education is generally excessive. Improving the quality of education in public schools and changing the outlook of parents towards public education would reduce considerably the burden of education on families. Public education, particularly at the pre-university level, should be better distributed geographically to cover in particular low-income areas (Lebanon: Central Administration of Statistics, 1998).

III. ILLITERACY

The major increase in enrollment was reflected in the rapid decline in illiteracy. The illiteracy rate of persons 15 years of age and over fell from 36 percent in 1970 to 15 percent in 1996. This fall is most dramatic for the younger age groups. Thus, for the age group 15-19 years, it fell from 15 percent in 1970 to less than 4 percent in 1996, and for the age group 20-24 years, it fell from 20 percent in 1970 to 4.5 percent in 1996. However, for the age group 45 years and over, the fall in illiteracy rates during this period, though still impressive, was less pronounced, namely from 57 percent to 34 percent (Table 3).

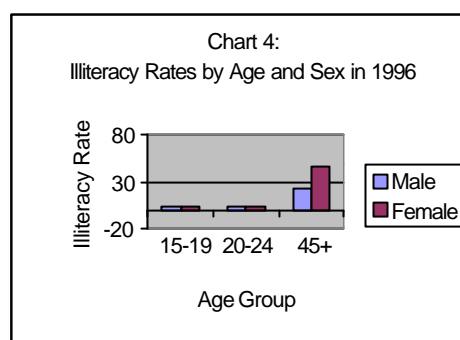
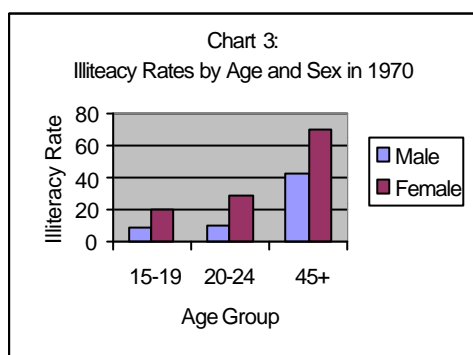
Table 3: Illiteracy rates by age and sex, 1970,1996
(Percent of total)

Age group	1970			1996		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
10-14	6.1	15.3	10.6	2.0	2.2	2.1
15-19	8.6	20.7	14.5	3.6	3.6	3.6
20-24	11.0	28.7	19.7	4.1	4.8	4.5
25-29	15.3	37.7	26.7	4.6	7.0	5.8
30-34	22.2	47.3	35.0	5.5	8.5	7.1
35-39	27.9	55.3	41.5	5.8	11.5	8.9
40-44	31.5	59.3	45.2	6.9	16.8	12.2
45+	42.8	71.1	56.6	22.1	46.0	34.3
15+	25.1	48.0	36.4	10.3	20.0	15.3

Source: Lebanon: Ministry of Planning (1970); Lebanon: Ministry of Social Affairs and UNFPA (1996).

“This major growth in enrollment was inevitably reflected in a rapid decline in illiteracy. ...The decline in illiteracy was even more pronounced for the younger female population.”

The decline in illiteracy was more pronounced for the younger female population. Thus, for the age group 15-19 years, illiteracy rates of females declined from 21 percent in 1970 to 4 percent in 1996 compared to males from 9 percent to 4 percent. For the age group 20-24 years, female illiteracy rates fell from 29 percent to 5 percent during this period compared to 11 percent to 4 percent for males. In other words, the gender gap in illiteracy for the youth age groups was also closed during this period (Charts 3 and 4).



Illiteracy is being eliminated mainly through the spread of education among the younger age groups rather than through adult literacy campaigns, although such campaigns are conducted by non-governmental organizations and the Ministry of Social Affairs, but on a limited scale. As a result, total illiteracy rates have remained inevitably higher than those for the younger age groups and the decline in the illiteracy rate of the total population has been much more gradual than for the younger ages. This process of attrition of the illiterate population is expected to result in a continuing decline in illiteracy in the foreseeable future and the virtual elimination of illiteracy in the country within one or two generations. This is seen from Table 3, which indicates that, in 1996, illiteracy among the age group 10-14 years was around 2 percent and for the age group 45 and over more than 34 percent. Considering that the enrollment ratio for the age group 7-9 years already reached 100 percent, it is to be expected that, if primary education remains universal as it is at present, the total illiteracy rate will become hardly significant in the next 30 to 40 years and virtually nil shortly thereafter.

As expected, the percentage of illiterate population in 1996 was higher in rural areas (16 percent) than in urban areas (10 percent). Significant differences also exist with respect to higher education, where 4 percent of the rural population have a university education compared to 10 percent of the urban population.

As seen from Table 4, a similar situation exists with respect to youth. The percentage of illiterate 20-24 years of age in 1996 was 3.3 in urban areas against 9.4 in rural areas. Similarly, the proportion of urban youth with university education (26 percent) was considerably higher than for rural youth (12 percent). With regard to gender differences, it is to be noted that both, among urban and rural youth, there is a significantly higher number of females with secondary education than males. Moreover, it is to be noted in particular that, in urban areas the proportion of female youth with university education (28 percent) was significantly higher than that of males (23 percent) and in rural areas was slightly lower females (11 percent) than that of males (12.5 percent).

Table 4: Education level among urban and rural youth, 1996
(Percent of total)

Level	15-19			20-24		
	F	M	T	F	M	T
Urban						
Illiterate	2.3	2.7	2.5	3.2	3.4	3.3
Read/Write	3.2	5.9	4.6	4.9	6.0	5.5
Elementary	15.9	21.6	18.8	17.9	24.1	21.1
Intermediate	35.6	32.9	34.3	22.0	23.6	22.8
Secondary	35.6	31.9	33.7	23.6	19.6	21.6
University	7.4	5.1	6.2	28.2	23.4	25.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Rural						
Illiterate	8.4	7.2	7.8	11.6	7.3	9.4
Read/Write	6.8	9.8	8.4	9.0	11.4	10.2
Elementary	22.5	27.0	24.8	27.9	31.4	29.7
Intermediate	38.6	33.8	36.1	23.1	23.5	23.3
Secondary	20.2	20.3	20.2	17.3	13.9	15.6
University	3.6	2.0	2.7	11.1	12.5	11.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Lebanon: Ministry of Social Affairs and UNFPA (1996).

IV. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The achievements in the education sector that resulted in a large increase in enrollment at all levels, a closing of the gender gap in education and the virtual elimination of illiteracy took place notwithstanding the past period of war. They were the result of an undeclared partnership between the public and private sectors of education. The private sector took the lead during the war years

and remains dominant in the overall system, notwithstanding the progress made in the public education sector in recent years.

“...achievements in the education sector... were the result of an undeclared partnership between the public and private sectors of education.”

In 1996, there were 2,876 private and public education institutions in the country. Of these, about half were public and 15 percent subsidized private schools and about 35 percent were fee-paying private. Enrollment at all pre-university levels of education was largely in the private sector (Table 5). At the primary level, enrollment in private education institutions was 71 percent of the total; at the intermediate level, it was 60 percent and at the secondary level, 58 percent .

Table 5: Distribution of pre-university enrollment between private and public institutions, 1995-1996
(Number, percent of total)

Level	Public		Private		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Primary	109,826	29.0	268,360	71.0	378,186	100
Intermediate	84,335	39.7	128,351	60.3	212,686	100
Secondary	31,439	41.6	44,210	58.4	75,649	100
Total	225,600	33.8	440,921	66.2	666,521	100

Source: Lebanon: Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports (1996).

At the university level, the Lebanese University, the only public university, is the dominant institution in terms of enrollment. It accounted for 56 percent of total university enrollment in the academic year 1995-96. However, this is somewhat misleading in terms of the real effect of the university on the education status of the population. A large number of the enrolled students at the Lebanese University do not eventually graduate. As seen from Table 6, only 7 percent of those enrolled at the Lebanese University in 1995-96 graduated compared to 26 percent at the American University of Beirut and 30 percent at the St. Joseph University. Thus, the number graduating from the Lebanese University was less than 33 percent of the total number of graduates for that academic year. Although some of those enrolled in the Lebanese University are beyond the youth age, it is clear nevertheless that a significant proportion of young persons enrolled in universities do not eventually become university graduates.

Table 6: Numbers enrolled and graduating from universities, 1995-96

University	Enrolled	Graduating	Percent of total graduating
Lebanese University	46204	3330	7.2
Beirut Arab University	11472	2298	20.0
Université St. Joseph	5697	1695	29.8
American University of Beirut	4979	1275	25.6
Lebanese American University	4475	518	11.6
Université St. Esprit Kaslik	2642	452	17.1
Notre Dame University	2025	75	3.7
Other	4952	557	11.2
Total	82446	10200	12.4

Source: Lebanon: Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports (1996).

“...the Lebanese University...accounted for 56 percent of total university enrollment in 1995-1996... [but] those graduating from [it] constituted less than 33 percent of the total university graduates for that academic year.”

While all public schools are virtually free, a number of private schools at pre-primary and primary levels are also free, i.e. subsidized by the public or private sectors, representing 21 percent of enrollment (Table 7). At the pre-primary level, 16.5 percent of total enrollment was in subsidized schools and another 17 percent in public schools. In other words, free education covered 34 percent of total enrollment at that level. At the primary level, public enrollment in public amounted to 29 percent of total and total enrollment in free education exceeded 51 percent.

Table 7: Pre-primary and primary enrollment in public, free private and private schools, 1995-96

(Number, percent of total)

Type of School/Level	Pre-primary	Primary	Total
Public	27,885 (17.1)	109,826 (29.0)	137,711 (25.5)
Private Free	26,815 (16.5)	84,045 (22.2)	110,860 (20.5)
Private	108,117 (66.4)	184,315 (48.7)	292,432 (54.1)
Total	162,817 (100.0)	378,186 (100.0)	541,003 (100.0)

Source: Lebanon: Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports (1996).

V. QUALITY OF EDUCATION

One often-used indicator of the quality of education is the student-teacher ratio. This indicator is misleading in Lebanon, at least when used in relation to the education at the pre-university levels. The reason for this is that the public education system at these levels was greatly affected by the war. This was so in terms of the distribution of students in relation to the distribution of the education institutions due to the forced migration of large numbers of the population from their villages and towns. In addition, there was inflation in the number of teachers due to political and non-academic considerations. Thus, the student-teacher ratio for the public schools in 1995-96 was as low as 8 while for the free and paying private schools it reached 22 and 16, respectively, an acceptable ratio compared to education systems elsewhere (Lebanon: Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, 1996).

The inflation of teachers is also apparent at the public university level. However, comparison of student-teacher ratios between the Lebanese University and other universities, such as those following the American system, for example, must take into account the fact that a large proportion of students registered at the Lebanese University does not actually attend classes (at the other universities attendance is compulsory). In spite of this major difference, the student-teacher ratio at the Lebanese University (13.2) falls somewhere in between that of the Lebanese American University (16.0) and the American University of Beirut (9.6).

A better indicator of the quality of public education is the educational attainment of the teaching body. Close to half of the teaching body at the pre-university level does not have a university degree or a degree from a teacher training college. This reflects, to a large extent, the inflation in the body of teachers referred to above. Unfortunately, data are not available to make reliable comparisons with the corresponding situation in the private education sector, but casual observation indicates that the quality of teachers there is superior.

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Another indicator of the quality of education that may serve to compare the public and private systems is the proportion of students passing the exams of the intermediate and secondary education degrees, namely the Brevet and the Baccalaureat. Regarding the intermediate degree, the data for the school year 1996-97 indicate that the proportion of students passing the exams (out of those sitting for it) was distinctly higher in private schools than in public schools: 75 percent as against 50 percent.

At the secondary level, the situation was somewhat different. Overall, that is for all branches of the degree (mathematics, experimental sciences and philosophy), the passing proportions of private and public schools were not too different (66 percent and 64 percent, respectively). However, in the mathematical and sciences branches, the private schools had a clear edge. For the mathematics branch of the degree, the proportion was 67 percent in private schools and 57 percent in public schools, and for the sciences branch it was 57 percent in private schools and 51 percent in public schools. In the philosophy branch, the two systems had very similar results: 76 percent of students of private schools passed the exams against 77 percent of students of public schools (Table 8). The fact that the public system lags behind the private system at the intermediate level degree and in the scientific branches of the secondary level degrees is not surprising. What is more surprising is that the difference in the proportions passing the exams in the two systems is not too distant from each other, at least at the scientific secondary degrees, and are virtually the same for the philosophy degree. The most common reason advanced for this, is that the teachers of the public secondary schools tend to concentrate their efforts almost exclusively on preparing their students for these exams rather than on general education. Moreover, they can do this well, since they constitute the bulk of the teachers called on to correct these exams and are hence familiar with the type of preparation needed for them.

Table 8: Students passing intermediate and secondary level exams from private and public schools, 1996-97
(Percent of total)

School system	Intermediate	Secondary (Baccalaureat)			
	Brevet	Math	Sciences	Philosophy	Total
Public	49.6	56.5	50.9	77.2	64.4
Private	74.5	66.5	56.7	76.0	65.9
Total	64.8	63.3	54.4	76.5	65.2

Source: Lebanon: Ministry of National Education (Unpublished data).

VI. RELEVANCE AND ACCESSIBILITY OF EDUCATION

For youth to be properly integrated in society, an important condition of human development, not only should quality education be widely spread and accessible, it should also be relevant to the job market where most graduates will have to seek employment. In the absence of an overall manpower plan, it is difficult to determine with any reasonable degree of accuracy the demand side of this relationship. But even a cursory look at the education system shows that the needs of the labour market are inadequately met (see Chapter on Youth and Employment). Thus, only 14.3

percent of total enrollment (i.e. general education and vocational and technical education) at the intermediate level and above of 336,000 was in vocational and technical schools in 1995-96.

Furthermore, in relation to need and to the comparable activity in the private sector, public vocational and technical education is weak, perhaps weaker than in the area of general education. The main burden of vocational and technical education remains on the private sector. Of total enrollment in vocational and technical education, less than 22 percent is in public schools and 78 percent in private schools. Private vocational and technical training is probably underestimated since a good deal of it is on the job training or job related that goes unrecorded.

In their own words

Quality education comes with a price tag, and is not cheap in relation to prevailing incomes. Many parents have to choose between private schools that they think are superior and public schools. In Beirut, a mother of three with limited income explains: “we chose the public schools because we could not afford any other form of education for our children. I wanted the boy and the two girls to have an education, I help them out as much as I can at home, to make up for whatever is lacking at school”. Some families have to choose which of their children have priority for an education. These choices are usually made depending on the family’s socio-economic situation. In the remote agricultural area of Hermel, two families had two conflicting opinions about educating their children; Abu Sharif, the father of eight says: “I need the boys to help out with the work, they can’t be at school all day. I let them go to school until they finished elementary; they know how to read and write, that is all they need. Everything else they will learn from working. The girls can stay in school if they want to, they will get married soon enough, and be busy having children.” But Um Hassan, a forty-year old mother of twelve, had an opposite view in this matter. She says: “it is more important to me that the boys get educated, they will need to be responsible for raising families, and nowadays they need an education to get any work. The girls know how to read and write and that is enough, they will have their husbands to take care of them, why waste money on their education, they won’t need it anyway”. When we asked the youths about what they thought, they seemed to echo their parents’ opinions. As fourteen year old Fatima put it: “If we lived in the city it would have been different, but here, we do not need higher education, girls who are highly educated leave for the city, and no one wants to marry them.”

The geographical distribution of vocational and technical training is clearly biased towards Beirut and its suburbs (Table 9). 62 percent of the total enrollment is in vocational and technical institutions located in Beirut and suburbs, although the population of this area accounts only for 27 percent of total. The Beirut suburbs constitute the most urbanized part of the Mohafazat of Mount Lebanon and the remaining part of the Mohafazat is mostly semi-urban or rural. In the latter part, enrollment in vocational and technical schools represented only 8 percent of total enrollment compared to the population constituting 23 percent of total population of the country. The situation is similar in all other Mohafazats. For example, in the Bekaa where less than 6 percent of total vocational and technical enrollment occurs, the population constitutes 13 percent of the total

population. Since most of the unrecorded training, on the job or job related, takes place in Beirut and suburbs, the real bias is likely to be even greater than the one shown by these figures.

“The geographical distribution of vocational and technical training is clearly biased towards Beirut and its suburbs.”

As expected, the private sector is more concentrated in Beirut and suburbs than the public sector. About 66 percent of private sector vocational and technical enrollment took place in Beirut and suburbs and only less than 4 percent in the Bekaa and 9.4 percent in South Lebanon. Nevertheless, the public sector is also concentrated, if to a lesser degree, in the Beirut metropolitan area, where more than 48 percent of the enrollment took place.

Table 9: Enrolled in vocational and technical schools by Mohafazat, 1995-96
(Percent of total)

Region	Public	Private	Total	Percent of Population
Beirut and Suburbs	48.3	65.9	62.0	27.0
Mount Lebanon without Beirut Suburbs	6.8	8.3	8.0	23.0
North Lebanon	15.1	12.8	13.3	21.7
Bekaa	13.8	3.6	5.8	13.0
South Lebanon	16.0	9.4	10.8	15.4
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Lebanon: Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports (1996).

The relevance of education must also be judged in relation to university education. Data on enrollment by specialization are available for the Lebanese University, the major source of university graduates in the country, Table 10. The main field of study is the humanities and arts where more than 40 percent of the students were enrolled. This is followed by law, where 28 percent of the students were enrolled. These two sets of specialties accounted between them for more than two-thirds of total enrollment. Sciences, including medical sciences, accounted for only 21 percent of total enrollment. Technical branches, i.e. engineering and agriculture, accounted for only 4 percent of total enrollment. These proportions are believed to be not too far from the national averages.

The relevance of education also depends greatly on the curricula and materials used in education. The programme of study at the pre-university level has admittedly become outdated, both in terms of the fields of study and the teaching material used. In response to this situation, the government established in 1995 a working group, under the auspices of the Center for Education

Research and Development (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports) to revise the existing curriculum and to produce updated teaching material. The new programme includes important innovations that make it more relevant to good citizenship and to the new requirements of the labour market in general (*see Box*). It will be introduced gradually in the next three years (starting October 1998).

Table 10: Lebanese University enrollment by field of study, 1995-96
(Number, percent)

Field of Study	Number Enrolled	Percent of Total
Humanities and Arts	18,484	40.0
Law and related fields	12,837	27.8
Medical and other Sciences	9,598	20.8
Technical (engineering and agriculture)	1,957	4.2
Other	3,328	7.2
Total	46,204	100

Source: Lebanon: Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports (1996).

The new programme makes pre-university education more relevant to present-day education, economic and social requirements and, hence, is a major step in the right direction. It does not, nor was it supposed to, solve completely the problem of relevance. For one thing, the curriculum of vocational and technical training and the balance between this type of training and formal education is outside the scope of this exercise. Furthermore, there is still no vision of the present and future labour demand that can guide the education system in the direction of greater labour market relevance. Such a vision can only come as a result of a well-conceived manpower plan that remains to be developed.

“[Law, humanities and the arts] accounted ...for more than two -thirds of total enrollment [at the Lebanese University]. ...Technical branches (i.e., engineering and agriculture) accounted for only 4 percent...These proportions are believed to be not too far from the national averages.”

Because of the special situation of Lebanon at a crossroads of civilizations, the knowledge of foreign languages, principally English and French, is a necessary component of a proper education system. In Lebanon, these two foreign languages already form part of the curriculum from the elementary school onward, one as primary foreign language and the other as secondary. At the pre-university level, of a total enrollment (general education) of 829,000 students, 70 percent takes place in schools where French is the primary foreign language and 30 percent in schools where English is the primary foreign language (Lebanon: Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, 1996).

At the university level, education is available in Arabic, French and English. At the Lebanese University, the main language of education is Arabic with some courses given in French or English. However, in the scientific fields, such as medicine, pharmacy, engineering and applied sciences, the main language of education is generally French and, in some cases, English. Enrollment at universities with education exclusively in English or French amounts to 28 percent of total, divided evenly between the two languages. Only less than 3 percent of the enrollment at tertiary level takes place in institutions where the only language of instruction is Arabic.

The New Curriculum for Primary, Complementary and Secondary Education

The new curriculum has two objectives: first, to establish links between formal pre-university education, on the one hand, and technical training, higher education and the labour market, on the other; and, second, to introduce the concept of “basic education”. According to the latter concept, education is considered as a tool for eradicating illiteracy. Therefore, it will be made compulsory to the age of twelve years, to be prolonged to fifteen years at a later stage.

The first objective is pursued through the introduction of subjects related to the technical fields (technology, crafts and handiwork) at an early stage of education, and by allowing two-way transfers between formal and technical education. The link with university level education is established by introducing subjects in the school curriculum at the secondary level that were usually taught only at the university level (economics, sociology and administration). By establishing these two links, school education would prepare students better to choose a career and enter more effectively the labour market.

The second objective makes schooling compulsory for six years, that is up to the age of twelve. This is mainly aimed at those dropping from school after the primary level. UNESCO studies have shown that persons with less than five years of formal schooling have a higher tendency to fall into illiteracy after leaving school.

The new curriculum addresses weaknesses in the old curriculum by diversifying the subjects taught at school and by stressing artistic and manual skills as well as the more conventional linguistic and scientific skills. Moreover, the new curriculum fixes the school year at 36 weeks, up from the 28 weeks designated in the old curriculum.

Source: Lebanon: Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports. 1995. **The Restructuring of the Lebanese Education System**: Beirut, Lebanon (French text).

“...improving regional coverage and accessibility of vocational, secondary and higher education and restructuring the education system so that it could produce more easily employable graduates... are essential elements in the integration of youth in society and the elimination of barriers for the full participation of the population....This participation is one of the principal components of human development and of a sustainable process of economic growth.”

VII. CONCLUSION

The Lebanese education system is one of the most advanced in the Arab world, at least in terms of quality of education and gender coverage. Enrollment rates are relatively high for both sexes. The gender gap in this respect has been closed. At the intermediate and secondary education levels, female net enrollment rates slightly exceed those of males. Women are not only enrolling in schools and universities in greater numbers, they are entering new fields and new specialties. Illiteracy rates have fallen considerably and are presently the lowest in the region. They have become negligible for the younger age groups. The elimination of illiteracy is being undertaken by educating the young rather than through adult literacy campaigns - which explains the fact that illiteracy rates among the older generation are still quite significant. The outdated curriculum has been revised and a new one, for primary and secondary education, with new textbooks and teaching material, is being introduced by the government. All the above accomplishments in enrollment and literacy happened during the past 25 years, in spite of the war that took place in the country during most of that period. The achievements were the result of an undeclared partnership between the public and private education sectors, reinforced by a strong determination of Lebanese parents to educate their children.

A good deal of work still needs to be done, nevertheless, particularly in terms of improving regional coverage and accessibility of vocational, secondary and higher education and in terms of restructuring the education system so that it could produce more easily employable graduates. Quality education is still largely concentrated in urban areas, particularly Beirut. It is still also largely in the domain of private education institutions, particularly in the scientific fields, a fact that prompts many parents to use private education in spite of the heavy burden this choice places on their income and levels of living. Vocational and technical training is still short of the mark considering the immediate and large need for trained manpower, resulting in particular from the ambitious physical reconstruction programme being implemented by the government and the private sector. As was indicated in the previous chapter on Youth and the Labour Force, the lack of relevance of education to the demand in the labour market is one important reason why the unemployment rate of youth is several times that of the rest of the labour force and why the period of job search for first entrants into the labour force is unduly long. Accessibility of education and its relevance to market demand are essential elements in the integration of youth in society and the elimination of barriers for their full participation in the economic, social and public life of the country. This participation is one of the principal components of human development and of a sustainable process of economic growth.