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# IIE STEP Program Overview



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## Introduction

IIE Scholarships and Training for Egyptian Professionals (IIE STEP) launched in 2014 to support Egypt's economic and social development. IIE STEP is designed to improve organizational capacity and performance within Egyptian institutions that advance the Government of Egypt's development objectives. IIE STEP also fosters a stronger workforce through the provision of scholarships, training, and technical assistance. Such support equips Egyptians to earn a living, pursue professional goals, and satisfy labor market needs.

These organizations have been instrumental to IIE STEP:

- **Management:** The Institute of International Education (IIE), a partner of USAID/Egypt for the past 16 years, has managed IIE STEP.
- **Sponsorship:** The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in partnership with the Government of Egypt, has sponsored the program.
- **Scholarships:** The IIE STEP scholarship is one of the five scholarship components under the U.S.-Egypt Higher Education Initiative (HEI).<sup>1</sup>

IIE STEP's first component is the HEI scholarship program that addresses the underrepresentation of women in management and leadership positions. Through this program, Egyptian women move to American university campuses where they build skills and perspectives to henceforth play key roles in Egypt's economic and social progression. Two-year scholarships have enabled women to earn Master of Business Administration (MBA) degrees. Four-year scholarships are supporting younger women in their pursuit of Bachelor's degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields.

Concurrently, through a second component of IIE STEP, thousands of Egyptian professionals, female and male, have received short-term training in fields linked to the USAID Mission's technical sectors of Education and Training, Health, Economic Growth, and Democracy and Governance. This local training is bringing long-term improvements to communities throughout the country.

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<sup>1</sup> HEI is an ambitious undertaking. The HEI STEM and MBA scholarships are just one component. Other HEI components include partnerships between American and Egyptian university faculty, scholarships for Egyptian students to attend public or private universities in their home countries, and Fulbright Scholarships that fund Egyptians' pursuit of degrees in subjects that are crucial to the economic development of Egypt. These other components are run separately from IIE STEP.



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### *IIE STEP's Components*

IIE STEP is engaged in the United States and Egypt:

#### **HEI STEM and MBA Scholarships**

IIE STEP awards scholarships and provides ongoing support for young Egyptian women to receive undergraduate STEM degrees or graduate MBA degrees in the United States.

#### **Professional Development, Training and Technical Assistance**

IIE STEP supports the USAID Mission's technical sectors of Education, Health, Economic Growth, and Democracy and Governance. The main activity under this component is to improve Early Grade Learning in schools across Egypt by designing, producing, and distributing training programs and materials.

Each component has brought new energy and promise to the educational journey. For the women who have received scholarships, the opportunity to travel to the United States, live on American campuses, and earn university degrees has been exciting, inspiring, and empowering. For the teachers and administrators who have received guidance in Egypt, the professional development has brought a refreshing shift from a culture of repetition and memorization to dynamic and interactive forms of teaching and learning, plus a clear understanding of how each student is progressing through the earliest grades of school.

## **Scholarships for Talented Young Women**

The scholarship component of IIE STEP is designed to achieve this objective: To create a cadre of highly trained female leaders, from disadvantaged backgrounds, in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and business. This component formed in 2014, brought women to America beginning in 2015, and will conclude in fall 2020.

These scholarships attracted applicants throughout Egypt who sought the opportunity to study abroad. In just two years, nearly 900 high school students and early college students applied for undergraduate HEI STEM scholarships, while 9,000 women applied for graduate HEI MBA scholarships. IIE STEP supervised a tiered selection process that featured essays, individual and family interviews, English language tests, group activities among prospective students, a review of students' academic performance to date, and an analysis of each student's financial circumstances. These efforts enabled IIE STEP to identify students who had exceptional academic promise and drive, appealing interpersonal skills and character traits, a commitment to social impact, and disadvantaged backgrounds. The team sought to develop cohorts of such students who would represent the diversity of governorates (akin to provinces or states) across the nation.



*Scholar Marwa Ahmed performs laboratory studies in America*

Transition and orientation activities helped each cohort of scholarship recipients prepare for life in America. The scholars completed six- to eight-month “Bridge Year” transitional activities at the American University in Cairo, plus orientation activities in Washington, DC, before moving into campus housing in American universities.

### **Students’ Accomplishments**

For HEI MBA scholars, the next two years featured immersion in business school courses and projects, an internship in the United States during the first summer, graduation with an MBA degree, and an internship in Egypt after graduation. Cohorts entered in fall 2015 and fall 2016, advanced through this program, and graduated in spring 2017 and spring 2018.

For HEI STEM scholars, the experience will ultimately encompass four years of academic study in a STEM field, complemented by research projects during the academic year plus internships during each summer. Cohorts of young women matriculated in fall 2015 and fall 2016, and are on pace to graduate in spring 2019 and spring 2020.

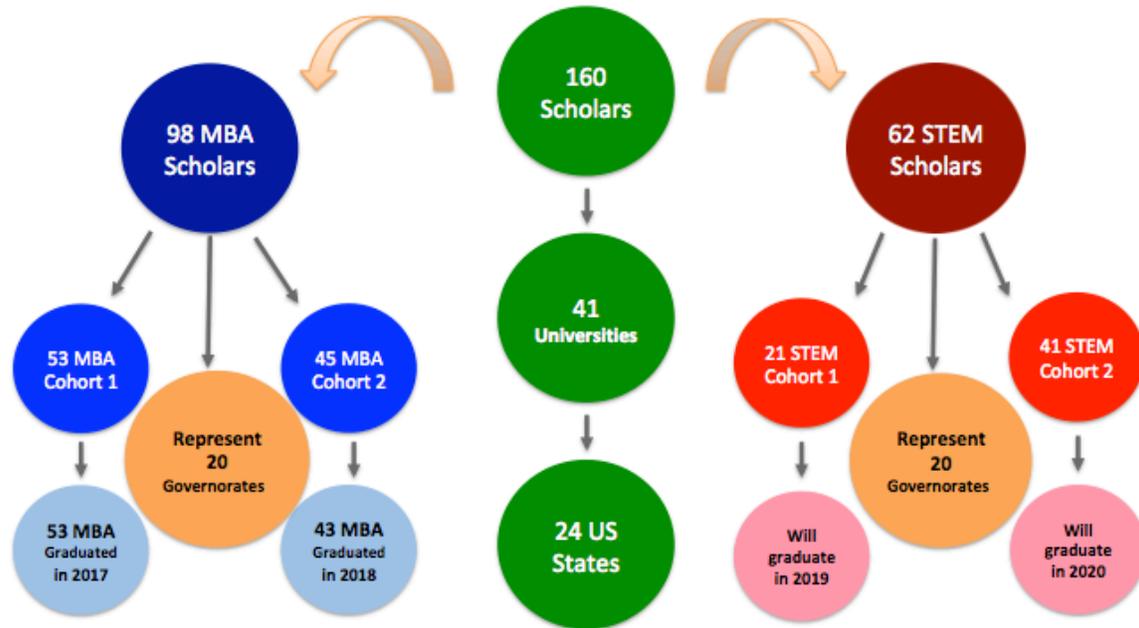
The HEI scholarships have funded a total of 96 MBA students through graduation plus a total of 62 STEM undergraduates who are now in their junior and senior years of college.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> An additional 2 scholars have completed coursework toward their MBA degrees.



These students have collectively taken residence across a large swath of the United States, as their scholarships have brought them to 41 universities spread among 24 states.



*HEI MBA and STEM scholars have been placed in nearly half of America's 50 states*

## Stories of Personal Achievement and Aspirations

The students have used their scholarship years to master academic subjects and related research. Many have attained grade point averages near or at the 4.0 level. They have also pursued research in challenging fields such as biomechanics, laser optics, mechanical engineering, and cancer detection and treatment, to give a few examples. Several have presented their research at national science conferences, won competitive awards in their fields, and obtained research and professional internships at leading hospitals, university laboratories, and other destinations. The MBA graduates are now business entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs, and professionals in Egypt and neighboring African countries.

## For Further Reading

To read more about this program, see IIE's companion document, *Education and Inspiration Across the Atlantic*. That document tells the stories of these young women from the time they first learned about the HEI scholarships, through their colorful lives on campus, and onward to their internship and postgraduate experiences.



## Breakthroughs in Education for Schools Across Egypt

IIE STEP aligned its professional development, training, and technical assistance component with ongoing education reforms across Egypt. This assistance was designed with this objective: To improve the capacity of key government, academic, and private sector organizations through the provision of scholarships, training, study tours, and technical assistance. IIE served as USAID's implementing partner. Keys to Effective Learning ("Keys") became a subcontractor. This component of IIE STEP ran from 2014-2018.

The assistance focused on Early Grade Learning (EGL). This subject was a priority of the Ministry of Education and Technical Education (MOETE), which was determined to build a stronger foundation for children after seeing years of disappointing academic performance across rural and urban communities. Prior education assessments, plus an early activity related to gap analysis by IIE STEP's team, had revealed alarmingly low levels of comprehension in reading, math, and Arabic language.

For IIE STEP, the main grade levels under consideration were kindergarten through grade 3.<sup>3</sup> The core team also addressed remedial learners in higher grades and the accessibility needs of children with learning disabilities.

### Short Term Technical Assistance

Short-Term Technical Assistance was the first form of intervention. The scope was nationwide, as the assistance engaged participants from all 27 governorates. In 2014, IIE STEP conducted these professional development and training activities:

- [Training on mentoring and leadership in schools](#)  
121 EGL educators and 14 MOETE senior representatives attended.
- [Planning sessions for the implementation of new teaching methods and materials for Early Grade Reading and Mathematics](#)  
110+ participants attended each of three planning meetings.
- [Training on ways to monitor and evaluate training, teaching, and learning within a governorate](#)  
150 Early Grade Reading and Early Grade Math supervisors attended.
- [Observation of local teacher training sessions nationwide](#)  
IIE STEP and subcontractor Keys conducted 471 observations in total.
- [Dissemination of digital training materials to teachers across the country](#)  
IIE STEP produced and distributed 17,000 CDs that contained curriculum guidance and educational materials for Early Grade Reading.

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<sup>3</sup> For certain education elements, a party beyond IIE addressed grade 1.



## Large-Scale Early Grade Learning Technical Assistance

A few years after the Short Term Technical Assistance, USAID requested that IIE STEP perform more extensive Early Grade Learning Technical Assistance. In response, during an 18-month period from early 2017 through 2018, IIE STEP conducted an array of activities.

At the start, the core team conducted gap analyses to identify existing strengths and weaknesses in Early Grade Reading and Math. Drawing upon the insights that emerged, the team collaborated with the MOETE, the Education Support Fund (ESF), the Professional Academy of Teachers (PAT), and other Egyptian partners to draft, refine, and enact a thorough EGL Implementation Strategy. The result was a collection of new teaching strategies and fluency strategies to raise students' skills in math, reading, and the Arabic language. These strategies aligned with the MOETE's version 2.0 Education Initiative. Problem solving, high level questioning, conversational exercises, and group activities became integral to each classroom lesson plan.



*Educators learn new approaches to Early Grade Learning*

IIE STEP then activated the new EGL Implementation Strategy nationwide. Using a cascading train-the-trainer model, the core team imparted EGL tools to 84 MOETE trainers. These trainers subsequently returned to their respective communities and conveyed the content to local teachers and administrators. IIE STEP furnished accompanying sets of guidebooks, lesson plans, and related materials in printed and digital formats. Educators in all 27 governorates thereby became equipped to deliver lessons that would boost young children's foundational skills in language fluency, reading comprehension, and math. This large endeavor energized learning for children from kindergarten through grade 3.



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This round of technical assistance also benefited students beyond grade 3 who required remedial assistance. IIE STEP built the capacity of 60 trainers from the MOETE to deliver guidance and materials on remedial reading to educators across all governorates.

The assistance extended to administrators. Principals and teacher supervisors received guidebooks that helped them encourage high-quality teaching within the classrooms, provide constructive criticism to teachers, and manage school resources effectively.

To complete the training and technical assistance component, IIE STEP hosted a full-day debriefing meeting with trainers, classroom monitors, Ministry officials, and other instrumental stakeholders in fall of 2018. This event enabled attendees to share their observations about project successes, lessons, and recommendations for the future.

### **For Further Reading**

To read more about this program, see IIE's companion document, *Elevating Education for the Children of Egypt*. That document provides specifics about the design and rollout of new forms of classroom education for children.



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- Malvina Binjaku – Program Officer, IIE STEP
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