

Women and Education in Lebanon

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A Brief Survey

Women access to education has not been an issue in Lebanon. Literature on the subject indicates that as far back as the end of the nineteenth century, girls have been given the same educational opportunities as boys. According to Toufic Touma, there were 142 schools in the Mutassarifya of Mount Lebanon and the coastal cities - run essentially by missionaries and Lebanese monks - half of which were girls' schools. The same situation pre-

vailed also in the public sector. Ismail Haqqi Beyk, Mutassarif of Mount Lebanon at the time, wrote in his educational report: "In 1916-1917, 104 public schools were established in Mount Lebanon, 52 schools for girls and 52 for boys" (as quoted in Beydoun, 1993 in Arabic).

Following World War Two, the educational public sector went through a lull period and its share in the country's total student enrollment dropped to 14.8% in 1932 (Bashur 1988, in Arabic). It is

worth mentioning here that there was some resistance on the part of the Lebanese to send their children to public schools; their preference went to religious schools whenever they could afford them. It is only at the end of the decade that followed Lebanon's access to independence that the educational public sector picked up again. Its share in total national student enrollment increased to 40% in 1959; out of which only one third were girls; while in the private sector

Table 1 Distribution of Students by Sector and Gender

Sector and Level	1973-1974			1982-1983 *			1993-1994		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Public									
Pre-elementary	15284	12937	28221	8582	8621	17203	11202	11289	22491
Elementary	99110	79612	178722	61744	60661	122405	53478	54230	107708
Intermediate	55811	33765	89576	35873	43032	78905	34270	45785	80055
Secondary	14012	6625	20637	13882	18679	32561	11339	142271	25566
Total	184217	132939	317156	12001	130993	251074	110289	25531	235820
%	58.1	41.9	100.0	47.8	52.2	100.0	46.8	53.2	100.0
Private									
Pre-elementary	57869	50154	108023	47974	43553	91527	65554	60355	125909
Elementary	140613	129200	269813	116649	103070	219719	131985	121165	253150
Intermediate	42506	39258	81764	43877	41218	85095	58955	58387	117342
Secondary	13884	10868	24752	18010	17268	35278	19230	19148	38378
Total	254872	229480	484352	226510	205109	431619	275724	259055	534779
%	52.6	47.4	100.0	52.5	47.5	100.0	51.6	48.4	100.0
Grand Total	439089	362419	801508	346591	336102	682693	386013	384586	770599
%	54.8	45.2	100.0	50.8	49.2	100.0	50.1	49.9	100.0

* The year 1982-1983 was chosen because no statistics are available for 1983-1984

Source: Al-Amin, Adnan, *Education in Lebanon*, (in Arabic), 1994 and Center for Educational Research and Development, Ministry of National Education and Fine Arts.

the number of girls' enrollment was almost equal to that of boys (28.7% and 31.6% respectively) for the same year (Beydoun 1993, in Arabic).

By 1970, girls gained additional grounds both in the private and public educational sectors where they represented 44.9% of the students enrolled in private schools and 43.5% of those in public ones (Al Amin, 1994 in Arabic) This upward trend was maintained and accentuated during the civil war period and the post war years as will be shown in the following facts and figures.

Facts and Figures

The educational sector in Lebanon is quite large and involves one third of the Lebanese population. It is characterized by the predominance of the private sector at all levels of education; a fact that has been accentuated by the civil strife that plagued the country for seventeen years. This is clearly evidenced by Table 1 which presents the distribution of students by sector, level of education and gender at the school level. Students registered in private schools in 1993-1994 represent, in fact, more than two-thirds (69.4%) of total national student enrollment, compared to 58.0% in 1973-1974.

As far as gender distribution is concerned we notice a steady increase in female enrollment in the public sector from 41.9% in 1973-1974 to 53.2% in 1993-1994; while the female share has maintained itself more or less at the same level in the private sector over the same period (47.4% in 1973-1974 and 48.4% in 1993-1994). This could be

Table 2 Student Enrollment in Major Universities by Gender

University	1973-1974			1982-1983 *			1993-1994		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Lebanese University	10756	4070	14826	14312	12835	27147	16918	19585	36503
American University of Beirut	3224	1395	4619	2922	2033	4955	2606	2329	4935
Arab University	20036	4852	24888	22352	6640	28992	10021	5397	15418
Saint Joseph University	1982	994	2976	2485	2686	5171	2282	3281	5563
Lebanese American University **	0	347	347	880	965	1845	2272	1807	4079
Holy Spirit University - Kaslik	247	109	356	1577	1244	2821	1101	1319	2420
Other Universities	1149	836	1985	1299	822	2121	3561	2331	5892
Total	37394	12603	49997	45827	27225	73052	38761	36049	74810
%	74.8	25.2	100.0	62.7	37.3	100.0	51.8	48.2	100.0

* The year 1982-1983 was chosen because no statistics are available for the year 1983-1984.

** The Lebanese American University (formerly Beirut University College) was still at the time a girl's college.
Source: Al-Amin, Adnan, *Education in Lebanon*, 1994 and Center for Educational Research and Development, Ministry of National Education and Fine Arts.

The educational sector in Lebanon is characterized by the predominance of the private sector at all level of education

partly accounted for by the prohibitive rise in costs of education resulting from inflation and

the fact that if parents can afford to pay for the education of one child only in a private school, they

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prefer to send their son rather than their daughter to this school.

At the university level the share of females to the total number of student enrollment has also increased from 25.2% in 1973-1974 to 37.3% in 1982-1993 to 48.2% in 1993-1994 as indicated in Table 2. A closer look at the percentage figures presented in Table 3 clearly shows that the greatest expansion was at the Lebanese University. This is understandable on two counts:

- first, being a state university it charges a minimal registration fee, thus enabling girls from lower income brackets to pursue their university education;
- second, the opening of branches in all the Lebanese regions has made university education more accessible to females by enabling them to stay home and pursue their education, rather than settling in the capital on their own.

This drastic increase in female enrollment at the university level has not led, however, to any change in the disciplines they study (see Table 4). They still cluster essentially in literature and humanities, information and documentation, education and social sciences.

It is worth mentioning, however, that the number of professional women in Lebanon is steadily increasing as is apparent from their enrollment in syndicates which is a

University	Percentage Increase in Female Enrollment in Major Universities		
	1973-1974	1982-1983	1993-1994
Lebanese University	27.4	46.8	53.6
American University of Beirut	30.2	41.0	47.2
Lebanese American University		52.3	44.3
University Saint Joseph	33.4	51.9	59.0

Source: Center for Educational Research and Development, Ministry of National Education and Fine Arts.

Lebanese women have easy access to education. This education has not, however, enabled them to reach decision-making positions

sions in order to acquire a skill and to enter the labor market.

Future Outlook

It is clear from the above that Lebanese women have had an easy access to education.

must if they are to exercise their profession.

As far as technical and vocational training is concerned it does not seem to attract a large number of females. The latest available statistics for the year 1993-1994 show that females represented only 35.8% of the total number of students in this field. They are more inclined to join short-term training ses-

This education has not, however, enabled them to reach decision-making positions, be it in the political, economic or social sphere. In fact, the proper aims of educating women were not clearly defined and when they were they always related to another person i.e. becoming a better mother, a better wife William A. Soltfutz, President of the American Junior College (presently the

Lebanese American University) wrote in his 1938-1939 annual report that "the primary mission of the College is to broaden the intelligence and spiritual outlook of the women who in their homes and society carry the responsibility for the social, cultural, and religious life of the country" (Roberts, 1958)

The drastic changes that have taken place in the Lebanese economy, as a result of the war, have forced women to join the labor market to insure a decent standard of living for them and their families and have helped in focusing on the appropriateness of the education women receive. This appropriateness is of prime importance if we want

Faculty	1982-1983	1993-1994
Literature and Humanities	65.0	68.9
Law, political science		
Public Administration	33.1	33.5
Sciences	40.4	40.8
Business	45.4	52.4
Information and Documentation	74.0	77.9
Education	34.8	87.0
Engineering	11.7	16.3
Social sciences	54.9	60.4
Fine Arts	39.5	39.3
Public Health		88.1
Agriculture		45.2
Medical Sciences		41.8

Source: Center for Educational Research and Development, Ministry of National Education and Fine Arts.

The drastic increase in female enrollment at the university level has not led to any change in the disciplines they study

more Lebanese women to become agents of change and development.

Profession	1972 (in %)	1993 (in %)
Medical doctors	6.8	14.3
Dentists	5.5	17.2
Pharmacists	24.2	26.8
Lawyers	6.4	19.7
Engineers	0.6	6.7

Source: National Commission, *Lebanon's National Report* submitted to the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995.

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