

Monica Naguib  
Professor Kim Fox  
JRMC4460  
Oral History interview 1

Interviewer: Monica Mamdouh Naguib  
Interviewee: Malak Zaalouk

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 0:02

Today we have a very unique guest. She is a very knowledgeable person with a massive background in lifelong learning. Our guest today studied sociology and political science at AUC. Then she did her masters and Ph.D. and continued her journey to be a life long learner in both informal and nonformal ways. For example, she was the first Egyptian elected as the chairperson of UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning. She is also keen on improving education in upper Egypt through the massive experience she gained from many countries around the world. All of that was also reflected in her life and her way of thinking. So, in our interview today we will talk to dr Malak Zaalouk to take more insight on her life as a lifelong learner as she dedicated her life to education and she is a role model for anyone who wants to be a lifelong learner. She is also the director of the graduate school of education at AUC. And yet, her experience is extended way beyond AUC's classrooms. And I'm currently taking a course with her that's is very informative and practical. Welcome Dr Malak to my podcast. So, first we have like survey questions. First question is, what is your age?

Malak Zaalouk 1:31  
69.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 1:32  
And where in Egypt do you live

Malak Zaalouk 1:35  
In heliopolis.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 1:36  
And how long have you lived in Egypt?

Malak Zaalouk 1:42  
All my life, except for a few years when I was living in England doing my graduate studies and a few years and also traveled all through Europe, part of my adult life and also lived a few years in Amman.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 1:58  
And what is your marital status?

Malak Zaalouk 2:01  
Married

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 2:03  
And do you have children?

Malak Zaalouk 2:05  
Adopted children.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 2:06  
Oh, that's nice. What's your highest educational degree?

Malak Zaalouk 2:12  
A Ph.D.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 2:14  
And which countries did you earn this degree from?

Malak Zaalouk 2:17  
UK

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 2:20  
And what's your employment status?

Malak Zaalouk 2:23  
Professor at American University Cairo.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 2:27  
How long has this been your employment status?

Malak Zaalouk 2:31  
This is my ninth year.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 2:35  
How many years have you been employed for?

Malak Zaalouk 2:39

In general? How long have I worked for? That's a good question. Many years, I would say. Since 75, I've had on an assistantship jobs, but full employment since 82, 82 till now.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 3:09

And of this year, how many was spent in Egypt?

Malak Zaalouk 3:14

Most I can't count them, but most yeah.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 3:17

Which sector do you work for?

Malak Zaalouk 3:20

Education

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 3:22

for private sector?

Malak Zaalouk 3:23

No. Oh, you mean, right now the American University in Cairo is private but not for profit. And before that, I was UN

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 3:37

Yeah. Average how many hours do you work per week?

Malak Zaalouk 3:42

A lot. I would say almost 10 hours a day.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 3:51

That's a lot.

Malak Zaalouk 3:52

Yeah.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 3:53

Which social class do you most identify with?

Malak Zaalouk 4:01

Privileged? Of course. I mean, yeah.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 4:06

So how has education revealed or makes life worth living for?

Malak Zaalouk 4:13

In what ways is my education done this for me?

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 4:16

Yeah.

Malak Zaalouk 4:18

I think I've been educated in institutions and in programs have made me a critical thinker. Being a critical thinker and a critical theorist, I'm very concerned with equity and equality, and therefore life is worth living for these courses.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 4:42

How has education helped you to discover your own convictions and to live by them?

Malak Zaalouk 4:50

Very much. So education has allowed me to find the analytical lens that explains the world around me. And by so doing, it's allowed me to find my path in life that when having understood how situations occur once you understand that critically then you understand that you have a role to play and that you can change things.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 5:24

How would the education like improve your capabilities.

Malak Zaalouk 5:40

Okay, how has education, empowered enhanced my capacities? Well, I have had very good education since a child then. Very good education as an adult, which has allowed me to become a lifelong learner and to further my education on the time and to branch out to very many different disciplines, which allows me to have a holistic view.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 6:03

How has education fostered the acceptance of yourself?

Malak Zaalouk 6:08

Very much so it's again, once you acquire a critical analytical perspective, you're always able to understand and once you understand why you are the person you are, then you accept.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 6:28

Would you say that your education helped you discover skills beyond your professional life?

Malak Zaalouk 6:36

Yes, yeah.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 6:37

Like what?

Malak Zaalouk 6:41

Through my education, I was once upon a time engaged in media in filmmaking. So I branched out to many different avenues in life and hope to continue to do so.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 7:02

In what ways would you say your education enriched or added to your life? beyond the classroom?

Malak Zaalouk 7:10

Yeah, the kind of education I acquired, allowed me to be civically engaged and to work for communities and to get very close to people.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 7:27

Did your education affect how you view yourself in relation to the world around you.

Malak Zaalouk 7:33

Yes.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 7:36

Would you say that your education, equipped you with the tools you needed to navigate through life challenges and uncertainties?

Malak Zaalouk 7:46

To a large extent? not totally, of course, but to a large extent. Yeah.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 7:51

Do you feel like your education affected your sense of confidence in your abilities?

Malak Zaalouk 7:56

Absolutely.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 7:57

Would you elaborate more?

Malak Zaalouk 8:01

I think acquiring strong education opening to the world. Understanding yourself in perspective and understanding others gives you a lot of confidence.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 7:27

In what ways would you say your education affected your ability to communicate, to communicate your ideas to others?

Malak Zaalouk 8:18

It does support me quite a bit to be able to, to gain clarity and to have I believe good communication skills to bring to take my messages across as clearly as possible. Like the deal of different talents is very much so and different languages and different mentalities different countries. And I've tested this out. So.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 8:55

So what's your definition of lifelong learning as a lifelong learner?

Malak Zaalouk 9:02

I think my own personal definition is that education is life. I mean, it's it's actual. As long as you breathe, you're learning as long as you exist, you're learning. It's it's the totality of life through which you learn and grow from birth to from the cradle to the grave.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 9:32

When was the first time when you recognized the concept of lifelong learning?

Malak Zaalouk 9:40

Actually, the academic concept was brought to my attention. Not too long ago as an academic concept maybe some 10 years ago, but I have practiced it on my life.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 9:58

So, you you like realized the concept like 10 years ago but you have been lifelong learner for the whole of your life

Malak Zaalouk 10:06

Exactly.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 10:09

What was your family role in that?

Malak Zaalouk 10:12

My family has been wonderfully supportive the family through which I learned a lot, because since a very young age, I grew up in a family that had the library that was interested in reading and and so I gained a lot of culture knowledge through the family as well.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 10:34

So the family was like allowing you to learn in informal ways

Malak Zaalouk 10:39

Absolutely.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 10:43

So who have been your strongest influences in life?

Malak Zaalouk 10:50

My Godmother, my parents, my, my family in a sense, but a lot my friends, and many, many mentors during my during my journey in life, I met some at university some in life, some the job, so I had many mentors also.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 11:17

So would you give me an example of a situation or something that inspired you?

Malak Zaalouk 11:25

I met a lot of very inspiring people during my journey of learning and also read about inspiring people a lot. So for example, as an undergraduate, even here at the American University in Cairo there I had some wonderful instructors who are also my mentors, and they were my role model to very large extent. And I can remember the late Cynthia Nelson who was an amazing and amazing scholar in many ways who stayed in my memory and was an important person who guided me in my journey of learning and many others like that a lot of male and female friends that had an impact on how I learned and my appetite to reading and learning grew through them as well.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 12:23

What are the challenges you face in life as a lifelong learner?

Malak Zaalouk 12:29

Time is the biggest challenge. Yeah.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 12:33

So would you like to elaborate?

Malak Zaalouk 12:36

Time has become a very scarce resource, especially in postmodernity right now. Time flies. So this there's not enough time for all the learning one wants to do. It's not enough time for all the giving one wants to do the time is a limitation. Time and physical energy as well.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 13:04

Yeah. How did you change? How did education and lifelong learning change your life?

Malak Zaalouk 13:10

It gives me a lot of joy to balance of all the challenges in life of course and and as long as one is able to learn, one is able to come to terms even with some of the very hard realities of life.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 13:34

How formally studying sociology and political science. Yeah, how was that related to a being an education professor after that?

Malak Zaalouk 13:45

It gave me so much depth and richness. I started my life with Political Science with economics, also political economy, with social anthropology and also studied education in an institute in France. So, I think education is by nature quite multidisciplinary and branching out to the different disciplines can only give you more richness and can allow you to understand the depth of learning and education in addition to the technical parts of education.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 14:30

What led you to your career?

Malak Zaalouk 14:39

Well, I think learning and and perseverance and learning perseverance, but a lot of luck as well. A lot of who you met when at which point in your life made the difference.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 14:56

So would you would you imagine that you could have been in another career?

Malak Zaalouk 15:04

Right now? No. I mean, for me this is like really the right choice in every possible way. But yes, I could I could. I mean, life is very resourceful and because I'm, by nature, interested in so many other things and so multidisciplinary, and I've had many career tracks, this is not what I've been



doing all my life I had been doing other things before. So. So for example, when I was working with the UN, I was not in academia, I was more in the world of development, which I identify a lot with. So, yes, I've always had one foot in academia and another foot doing development. So in a sense, I had multiple career paths, not just one.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 15:54

How has that affected lifelong learning?

Malak Zaalouk 16:00

It has. It has allowed me to constantly want to learn more. And I could suddenly move into another third career path. I mean, but it's always yearning to learn more and to discover more.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 16:17

And so living inside and outside Egypt. What are the differences in like people mentalities and how do they perceive education?

Malak Zaalouk 16:28

In I can't generalize because there are different people in every part of the world. There are some Egyptians who are very enlightened and very open to lifelong learning, such that such as there are, you know, people living abroad tour totally closed as well. But In general, I would say that Egyptians are, are they open to learning but their life conditions are tough. Their life conditions are very challenging. So it takes a lot more effort to invite them to learn. Whereas abroad, the life conditions are a lot easier. And hence learning has become part of their lives. It's very nicely built into their lives. And that's because of the ease and the facilities and you know, they have in some countries they have a better quality of life.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 17:36

So Egypt is more like Arab world or like less awareness to the concept of lifelong learning.

Malak Zaalouk 16:53

Can you say again

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 1:54

In comparison to the Arab other Arab countries, Egypt, is more like to be like them or like, Less aware of lifelong learning?

Malak Zaalouk 17:54

No, I think Egypt is actually a country that has a lot of potential for lifelong learning and, and is at, you know, relatively relatively advanced in that sense. But as I said, life conditions are so harsh that doesn't allow much opportunity.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 17:32

So what is the country that impressed you the most? Between the countries, you've worked for.

Malak Zaalouk 17:41

In the Arab world?

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 17:42

In or outside.

Malak Zaalouk 18:36

I can't say one single country I mean, there's been this value to each and every country has resided in and visited. The countries I only visited and countries where I lived. And each one has something to offer that was very close to my heart. I enjoyed my study in England. There's a lot I learned while living there. There's a lot I learned in France as well. You know, culturally in every possible way, living in Jordan has also been very rewarding. many good things about how the country is disciplined, then there's a lot of good positive characteristics to the country and then many other countries I visited that left a good impact. I mean, I visited huge number of countries by virtue of my constant travel, and each country had the flavor that was very interesting. Whether it was the country's traditions or their openness to others. So each and every country had different aspects to offer.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 20:06

So would you tell me more about your work with the UNICEF?

Malak Zaalouk 20:12

Not that I could take weeks and weeks and weeks talking about so what I can say in a nutshell, it was one of the institutions really very close to my heart and that allowed me to feel empowered to serve in ways that I really appreciated. I was able to serve communities, I was able to really link up with the the international community. So a lot, a lot of rewarding instances. It's a very rewarding job and also one where you learn every hour of the day.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 20:57

So would you tell me about a project that you feel very highlighted while working in the UNICEF for you I mean?

Malak Zaalouk 21:06

Okay, so that's the project. I will talk to you more in detail in class very soon. But that's I was the initiator of community schools in Egypt for many years and spread this model to many countries all over the world. But it was one of my greatest prides is to create schools in the most

underprivileged societies in Egypt and to offer the the underprivileged, the best quality of learning, and how this was done with all the details of getting facilitators and teachers on board from communities that were totally deprived and hard to reach. And partnering with communities who are spaces to create schools and seeing young people growing from being totally lost into being full fledged professionals and growing into learning, etc. So, this I spent maybe 13 years of my life developing this model, having it grown to become a national mainstream project. And it was one of the projects that was also a global best practice. So yeah, now is one of the best day.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 22:37

So was it related to upper Egypt?

Malak Zaalouk 22:40

Yes.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 22:41

What what time?

Malak Zaalouk 22:44

What was the time frame?

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 22:46

Yeah.

Malak Zaalouk 22:46

92 to 2005.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 22:50

What city?

Malak Zaalouk 22:52

I worked a lot at the beginning phase was in Asiyut, Sohag and Qena. But then it's now spread in all the governor's all the way to Matrouh and everywhere.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 23:04

So what do you think that still about Egyptian and like abilities to learn or how does they seek learning now if they have the resources?

Malak Zaalouk 23:16

That I think Egyptian children are some of the best learners in the world as I said, if only you give them the opportunity if only you open the right doors, if only you give them the kind of emotional support they need to learn and and also give them exciting learning what I would like to call active activity-based learning.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 23:41

So do you think that the education reform that's been applied this year to education in primary schools and secondary schools will be rewarding?

Malak Zaalouk 23:54

I don't think there's been enough assessment. I mean, this actually there's not much information on what's going on in classrooms. The ideas you know of implementing activity-based learning etc are good ideas that they've been there for for the longest time. But then the devil's in the details that we need to see how this is actually being enacted in classrooms, and I don't have the data to to assess.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 24:36

So how did you feel when you were the first Egyptian elected as chairperson of the Institute for lifelong learning?

Malak Zaalouk 24:43

I was quite happy to serve and was in on the board for quite some time, so it was very nice experience. Indeed. It's a course I I'm close to as well, I enjoy being with UNESCO. That's the sister agency of UNICEF. So both are important. advocates for the values I believe, and so yes, I was pleased to be able to help in this way.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 25:16

How do you see education Egypt in informal way? Was it existed in Egypt? Like education, if it existed in informal and the non-formal ways?

Malak Zaalouk 25:28

Yes, of course, it's there, but people are not necessarily aware. And they, as I always mentioned to my students, when you experience something, the only time you become aware of it and it turns into learning and knowledge is if you reflect on it and if you're not aware, if you not reflecting on the experiences that you go through them, you're not learning.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 25:55

So from your experience working in upper Egypt, do you think that girls are less privileged in in, like in education and they are not exposed to education as boys.

Malak Zaalouk 26:09

Yes, there are gendered biases, of course.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 26:12

Yeah, in a way anyway and how could we solve that?

Malak Zaalouk 26:17

It is resolvable, of course, but it needs multiple interventions, you need to work on the cultural, you know, economic and both on the demand side and the supply side. So, you need to make sure there are schools close to homes, you need to make sure that families understand the importance of learning and education for the girls. And you need to make education exciting and interesting. So girls will want to stay in schools.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 26:52

I think the biggest problem is like, parents don't want eaaani they see girls as housewives only and they don't want them to go and learn.

Malak Zaalouk 27:02

Not totally, that's a stereotype we always have. But there are lots of mothers who would do anything in the world to put their daughters in schools.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 27:14

I mean,

Malak Zaalouk 27:15

In in general, there are Yeah, in general, there are biases. And mostly from the males, there are biases, and it's a power struggle.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 27:24

So how do you see your work at AUC?

Malak Zaalouk 27:29

My work at AUC is very working with students, I love being with students and I enjoy a lot. Having interactions with the students and seeing them grow. And so this part I really is very exciting. There are other parts that are less exciting, which have to do with bureaucracy and administration, etc. You know, when there's a lot of bureaucracy, especially that I'm running projects, it's difficult. It makes it difficult.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 28:13

So outside Egypt, do you think Egyptians are becoming more like lifelong learners.

Malak Zaalouk 28:22

I'm sure if we open doors, they would. But we need to initiate and to advocate and To open doors, but I think they have a tendency already. I mean, I see so many young people. Nowadays, Google searching, wanting to know more. There's a lot there is curiosity. Definitely.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 28:49

So what how do you feel about Egypt and the Middle East in regards to education?

Malak Zaalouk 28:58

There's a lot to be done. There's a lot of hard work, of course. And the only way this part of the world would move in the right direction is if we open channels for learning a lot more formal, non-formal, informal, but most importantly, if we respect teachers and are able to look after our teachers, they will be the mentors for the young people.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 29:26

So what advice do you give to young generations to be lifelong learners?

Malak Zaalouk 29:34

I am I always want the young people to aspire to learn, but also to teach. You need to do both.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 29:45

So how do you reflect your experiences with your students?

Malak Zaalouk 29:50

I always try to bring it into the classroom and to bring my own, you know, career experiences, community experiences in the classroom, but I expect to also have students bring their own experiences in the classroom as well.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 30:10

So what are what are the things that you are most proud of doing? Something that you have done before and you're very proud of?

Malak Zaalouk 30:22

Maybe I just mentioned to the community schools that I also like writing quite a bit and you know, some works I am very happy that I was able to publish them. But the most that I feel most proud of is having set up a whole movement for community education.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 30:55

So what would you do differently if you have the chance?

Malak Zaalouk 31:07

Hmm. That's a hard one. I think a lot of the path have gone through is one I relate to quite well and happy. To a large extent, I went through this journey and the way I went through it but I think I one thing that I want to learn to do better is to again kind of become more moderate about how much I work.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 31:53

So you want to work more or less?

Malak Zaalouk 31:55

Less obviously, yeah, I need to have time for other interests in life.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 32:03

So how do you see non-formal education in your life? How's that working with you?

Malak Zaalouk 32:10

I need to make more time for it. Because right now fully engaged to the prep in teaching, programs researching so I do need to make more space for reflection and more space for the non-formal side of my life. A lot more into culture.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 32:35

So do you think students are able to do the same or they will be like dragged in other stuff?

Malak Zaalouk 32:42

That they will also be in their careers and all that I would strongly advise students to lead a more balanced life. It's very important to keep a balanced life between your cultural needs, your learning needs, and the job

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 32:56

And your social life.

Malak Zaalouk 32:57

And the social life of course, definitely.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 33:01

So would you like to add anything?

Malak Zaalouk 33:03

No. Thank you so much.

Monica Mamdouh Naguib 33:05

Thank you. Thank you.

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