

Chapter 8

Financial Deficit in Lebanese Catholic Schools: Lack of Confidence and Declining Purchasing Power

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ABSTRACT

Several Catholic schools have been shut down for good and several others are struggling to survive but they might just not, because they are facing a severe financial deficit and a strong decline in their revenues. This financial crisis facing Catholic schools in Lebanon is considered in this chapter in light of declining purchasing power of the Lebanese families over the last decade and the lack of parental confidence in Catholic school's primary mission. The first approach is quantitative: a questionnaire among school administrators and families to understand the tuition and purchasing power variation in the last decade. The second one is qualitative: four focus groups formed of several Lebanese families to try to assess their trust (or lack of trust) in Catholic schools. This new way to understand the reality of the declining profit of Catholic schools will benefit Catholic schools in general in Lebanon. It may enlighten the importance of their primary mission toward Lebanon.

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PRIVATE SCHOOLING

A considerable number of Catholic schools have been closed for good in Lebanon in the last ten years. Some of them were transformed into rest homes for elderly, others into parking lots, etc. The apparent reasons behind this closing are financial and numeric: On one hand, a notable financial deficit was accumulated through the years, which made quasi impossible that these schools continue to exist. On the other hand, this financial deficit appeared to be accompanied by a real drop in enrollment numbers of pupils in these schools, especially Christian pupils. That led Catholic schools' directions to decide that it was either irrational or impossible to stay "in business". It was irrational because the majority of their pupils were no longer Christians, which contradicts the main reasons of the establishment of Catholic schools in Lebanon: religious and human formation of the people (Nakad, 2011). In addition, it was impossible because the financial deficit reached a level where the schools needed "a miracle" to stay open. Being non-profit organizations, Catholic schools don't generally aim to gain, but they don't have to lose money, or else they won't be able to sustain their educational mission.

Hence, this study aims to investigate the real reason behind this financial deficit of Catholic schools in Lebanon. This paper will try to focus on two principal reasons that might be causing the described financial problem. We shall first study the effect of declining household purchasing power of Lebanese families. Then, this work will be focusing on the parental confidence in Catholic schools' educational system and in its primary mission.

Historical Perspective

Since 1834, Lebanon witnesses the operation of the catholic schools on its land: *Collège Saint Joseph – Antoura* was the first (Nakad, 2011) of a chorus of hundreds of catholic schools planted all over the Lebanese towns and villages. In the musical world, a group of singers starts to obtain the "chorus" title when they start to sing together at the same rhythm. Even though they are different, when they sing, they serve the same purpose: the song rhythm. When they first existed, the catholic schools were like a chorus: different in their founders' origins but united in serving the same objective. According to Nakad (2011), when the Lazarist Fathers first came to Lebanon, they found the Lebanese sinking in illiteracy and poverty. Thus, they decided to open a school with two main purposes: religious and human formation of the people (Nakad, 2011). These two purposes represented and still represent

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