The Impact of USAID Program Suspension on Stakeholders: The Case of Egypt

Ghada Al-Akhdar
October 6 University

Laila ElSerty
American University in Cairo

Aliaa N. Hamad
American University in Cairo

Joseph Robertshaw
University of Alabama in Huntsville

Abstract

This study attempts to explore the impact of the suspension of USAID funds on three Egyptian education stakeholder groups: students, staff and administrators, and faculty. The lived experiences of stakeholders, narrated in retrospection, were analyzed from a lens of phenomenology and in terms of Paul Ricoeur's narrative identity theory. The theoretical framework reveals the process of engagement with the story and how it impacts readers' identities as academics and as humans. Our aim is to foreground the stories and their context in order to explore the suspension impact from a cultural and ethical viewpoint. Multiple interviews were conducted to collect data for analysis. Results comprise themes of loss of educational opportunities, uncertainty about the future, inequalities and exclusion, psychological and emotional toll, standing in solidarity and navigating program cancellation challenges, institutional/policy responses, and recommendations.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.37514/ALR-J.2025.9.1.07

Ghada Al-Akhdar is an Associate Professor in cultural studies, English Language and Literature Department Chair at October 6 University. Her research covers the commemoration of cultures, literature, social media, TEFL and women studies. She has volunteered at the NileTESOL of the American University in Egypt to support English Language Teachers nation-wide. Coordinator of the Research SIG and executive coach. An optimist and a humanitarian.

Laila ElSerty is an Instructor at the Department of Rhetoric and Composition and the Managing Editor of *the Undergraduate Research Journal* at the American University in Cairo (AUC). ElSerty holds a BA in English Literature and an MA in TEFL and is currently working on a PhD in linguistics. For

over 20 years, ElSerty has taught linguistics, TEFL, English for academic purposes, business writing, and research writing courses. She served as the Co-Chair of NileTESOL - AUC's Virtual Conference in 2022 and continues to contribute to professional development initiatives in language education. Her academic interests include Rhetoric and Composition Pedagogy, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, Global Education, Experiential Learning, Technology-Assisted Learning, and Social Justice in Higher Education.

Aliaa N. Hamad is a Senior Instructor, Theme Leader, Chair of the Writing Minor Advising and Futurize Your Course Committees at the American University in Cairo's (AUC) Department of Rhetoric and Composition, and Co-Chair of the 2026 NileTESOL Conference. Dr. Hamad holds a BA in English Literature, an MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), an MA in Migration and Refugee Studies, and a PhD in Linguistics. She also has Graduate Diplomas in Gender and Women's Studies and International Human Rights Law as well as a Career Certificate in Legal Translation. Her research interests include teacher education, learner motivation, teaching methodology, language assessment, curriculum design, rhetoric and composition, creative writing, gender and migration and refugee studies, and rhetoric in international human rights laws.

Joseph Robertshaw is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Dr. Robertshaw teaches Rhetoric, Writing, and Composition including Technical Writing and Editing and New Media. His research is mainly in the areas of writing pedagogy, embodied rhetoric and TechRhet to include the impacts of AI on writing instruction.

"At that time, I felt shocked, disappointed, and even betrayed. I couldn't understand why such an important program that helped so many young people was suddenly halted. It felt like the dreams of students who worked hard for this opportunity were no longer valid. There was sadness, but also confusion, about the reasons behind such a sudden decision" (USAID student, 2025).

The suspension of USAID funds had an impact on three Egyptian education stakeholder groups: Students, Staff and Administrators, and Faculty. The effects on the stakeholders we interviewed were mirrored, to varying degrees, in our own lives as events unfolded and many of those effects are difficult to bear. We wanted to see if others were also experiencing the phenomenon of a major funding and support service being abruptly cut off in ways similar to our experiences, and we wondered if equitable mitigations were found, not only for ourselves but also for our students, colleagues, and institutions.

We decided that this shared experience of many students would be worthy of investigation as a phenomenon that impacts students' prospects, as well as those of teachers and academics who were involved (van Manen). The stories of USAID termination bring about an intellectual opportunity for investigation. They are also shared, contextualized, and processed/mediated both in interviews and in research in an attempt for agency and ethical identity formation.

Our team met in an online section of the Thomas R. Watson Conference in 2024. We have been meeting frequently ever since, and, during one of our meetings, the topic of USAID suspension was raised, which piqued our interest in understanding the impact of suspension of USAID funds and the instability recently created in the world since the US election of the 47th president and his appointment of an independent financial consultant. Since this had never

happened before, outside of the business world, we were wondering how best to study such a phenomenon and the impact it was having on the lives of those it touched. After some debate, we settled on the framework of hermeneutical phenomenology. In phenomenological research, the primary concern is with how individuals experience and interpret events in their everyday lives, and with the meanings that these experiences hold for them (Smith). We wondered what the effects would be on the lived experiences of faculty, staff and administrators, and students as this instability rippled outward.

Before scrutinizing the phenomenon at hand, it is important to understand the role USAID plays—or to be specific, has played—in reforming education in Egypt. While the main purpose of the organization that would become USAID was originally to deter communism, it was quickly found that offering assistance to nations that needed it was a very effective purveyor of soft power, realigning international cooperation. "The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 was signed by President Kennedy on Labor Day, and Congress required the merger of the preexisting assistance agencies into the new agency within 60 days" (Norris). In the late 1970s, after the Egyptian-Israeli war and around the time of the leadup to the Camp David Accords, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) program emerged as a long-term development partnership and a sign of the restored Egyptian-American diplomatic relations in many areas of development (Brown, 5). Aid projects in Egypt began in 1975 (Farouk). The education projects that we focus on came into existence in 2004 with the Education Reform Program (AIR).

The American Institutes for Research (AIR), through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), helps Egypt facilitate reform efforts through the Egypt Education Reform Program (ERP). The ERP is designed to serve and strengthen the quality of formal and non-formal education programs in Egypt. The core premise of the ERP is to establish an effective and efficient decentralized education model. AIR is the lead partner in the ERP, providing highly qualified staff to manage the various project implementation sites and programs. Other partners include EDC and World Education (Tofig).

When the 47th president issued an executive order that indiscriminately cut off aid, it left them no time to adapt to a different geopolitical landscape. While courts and congress in the USA decide the legality of the orders, the halt in funding "included $35 million for the Egyptian-American Higher Education Initiative" (Fouad). The USAID Egyptian Pioneers program, "which was established in November 2022, for which USAID has awarded the American University in Cairo $86 million" (Jerkins, par.3), was also cut a full five years short of its nine-year commitment.

The students, who are recipients of USAID grants, include 877 students who are studying at public, private, and national universities, as well as 200 students at the American University in Cairo (Tag). "The Higher Education Ministry has since stepped in to make sure those students are able to continue the semester" (Enterprise Ventures LLC). The power vacuum the executive orders created is significant, and it is largely unknown who might step into that void and what agendas they may bring with them.

Without this public good that USAID provided and encouraged, the way opens for the corporatization of education that may not produce results aligned with the goals of Egypt, nor

those of the Academy at large. We can see that some businesses have already moved to fill this void by negotiating agreements with the Egyptian government (U.S. Embassy Cairo).

Frameworks and Theory

Why do we study stories about the USAID? Is it relevant to our identity as academics and as humans? We are a group of academics and humanitarians who were deeply moved by the USAID study program's termination. We decided to apply a phenomenological framework to study the lived experiences of those involved in the programs, especially students, and share their perspectives.

Phenomenological frameworks focus on first-person perspectives/first-hand accounts, highlighting intentionality and consciousness. This approach draws on Paul Ricoeur's narrative identity theory to offer a frame of interpretation for these first-person perspectives. Therefore, it is not just enlisting stories on top of each other, but the study engages with their viewpoints to explore boundaries of agency and ethics via the dynamic interaction between the text (story), its reader (researcher), and its implications on the construction of user identity.

Phenomenology focuses on structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view, intentionality, and *qualia* by which the individuality of the experience, even in its sharedness, becomes as important as its context/conditions of the experience. Our ability as humans to practice phenomenology is based on our agency for experiencing and doing, how we perform, and the intentionality and context of our performance. In this regard, phenomenology takes place after the experience (as a sort of reflection) and not during the experience itself. Our interviews served as that space of reflection and storytelling for our participants.

Through reflection, common or shared experiences become points of interest rather than fleeting experiences. Stories of the USAID study program's termination are shared, contextualized, narrated (in interviews) and mediated (in research) in an attempt to explore our chances for agency and ethical identity formation.

Following the path cleared by classical phenomenologists, we attempt to understand experiences as stories of self-narrative, opening up a dynamicity between self, context, language, perspective and intentionality/ethicality in the construction of our academic/human identities.

Narrative Identity Theory

According to Ricoeur, self-identity is an in-between position, dynamic and constantly restructured through the mediation and interpretation of its surrounding narratives. The self is narrative, organized in relation to the past and its contexts as well as its interpretation. Rather than centering the being in an objective reality, he refers to the self as always anchored or situated in its context and linguistic and sensory details (Reagan 28). This is why his work is well-suited to the analysis of interviews. For Ricoeur, experience generates text and text structures both experience and its meaning. Textuality for him refers to narrating the story, language, plot, voice, and action, but unlike post-structuralists, language for him is only second-order, and the experience itself comes to the forefront. In *Time and Narrative*, the self is constructed via stories or narratives at different points in time. Then in *Oneself as Another*,

the subject is defined by both the bios and logos. Bios refers to the biological frame or body. Logos, on the other hand, refers to our dreams and imaginative experiences. Metaphor, and not reality, reveals how the collective social memory becomes significant.

Agency comes in with the construction of experiences as narratives. It is the interaction between the *ipse* (self as unique) and *idem* (self as same) that unfolds potency for the construction of meaning. Experiences as stories of the USAID program termination speedily capture Ricoeur's three-folded narration process: prefiguration, configuration and refiguration.

Prefiguration is the known and identified context, cultural cues and presuppositions of the experience. Configuration refers to actions where agent, tense, time and voice interact to create a *discordant concordant*. Ricoeur's idea of conflict is that it touches the world of the reader. In other words, the world of the story dismantles, and the reader rediscovers and rethinks realities within the story world (Time and Narrative, 158-163). Empathy, or what Ricoeur calls *benevolent spontaneity,* relates the self and the other in an ethical perspective (Oneself as Another, 190). The future, thus, is present as a set of potential narratives in which the reader might take part. According to Ricoeur, there is a pre-understanding given through a *semantics of action*, that is, a sense of possible choices, actions and their consequences that integrate into our broader structures of meaning (Ricoeur, "Oneself as Another" 198). This is why a parallel scenario of suggestions and implications will be addressed in this research. Refiguration, the third part of the narration process, is the stepping back phase through a mediation that transforms *seeing as* to *being as* allowing the experience to be a reflection on one's own world. Hence, agency starts with the individual identifying with a narrative in order to constitute a sense of (illusory) self (Alakhdar 29). In his "On Interpretation", Ricoeur posits that "to interpret is to explicate a sort of being-in-the world" (19).

Narrative identity theory shows that narration involves ethics via intention and interpretation. Ricoeur emphasizes the *evaluations, estimations and value judgments* entailed in narration and how this becomes foundational for *ethics proper* (qtd in Mazloum 268). Mazloum, in her "The Power of Narrative", insists that an involvement of the self and the other in interaction necessarily contributes to ethical development for the reader (268). The notion that narration constructs identity as well as enables meaningful and liberating selves to develop foregrounds the role of intention, cultural context, and temporal coherence that lead to thematic coherence, and thus, the construction of identity via narration (McAdams 110-3).

Methods

For the purpose of the current study, we obtained human subject research approval from the Review Board of one of our institutions before interviewing stakeholders. We interviewed students, faculty, and administrative staff for this project. We use the term *administrators* to refer to faculty members who have administrative and leadership roles as well as teaching and research responsibilities, while we use *staff* to refer to those with no teaching responsibilities and whose roles are restricted to assistance and coordination, and in most cases, do not belong to higher management. It should be noted that many of our respondents were reluctant to speak with us for various reasons. Some were willing to speak with us, but they asked us to refrain from using their names or mentioning their university affiliations.

We hoped that through narration of past events, interviews might help us understand the lived experience that our participants had with the phenomenon. In search of those individuals who had experienced such an impact from the phenomenon in question, we considered several groups but ultimately settled on people involved in the aftermath of one executive order in particular. Executive Order #14169—"Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid" (The White House) led to, among other things, the abrupt cessation of the funding provided through USAID to students and universities in Egypt.

Having found a group that was accessible to our team, as three of us live and work in Egypt, we then set about drafting questions based on our own experiences in academia. We determined that this insider perspective would be an asset. While we agreed that objectivity has to be maintained, managed, and respected, we also agreed that "being inside can bring huge benefits in terms of the ability to uncover meaning" (Dibley et al. 73). We shared our questions with one another and normalized them to reflect some cultural sensitivity, academic usefulness, and satisfaction of our own interests. We also agreed that these interview questions might need to be delivered in a paraphrased way to best honor the experiences and reflections of the participants. The interviews were conducted in English and/or in Arabic by speakers of English and Arabic with participants who were also speakers of both Arabic and English. The interviewees were permitted to switch languages (mainly English and Arabic) for the purposes of question clarification.

With some participants willing to relate their experiences but unwilling to be recorded, the interviews were conducted face-to-face and via video conferences. Transcripts were created for the recorded interviews, and field notes were taken for those interviews where the participants did not wish to be recorded. Understanding the importance of dwelling with our data even in a shorter timeline for drafting and revising the findings, we continued to dwell with the collected data through our drafting and revision process right up to the final revision due date. We understand that dwelling with the data means "pondering, wondering, and asking questions of meaning that resonate with us with each story" (Dibley et al.125). It was important to us to reason deeper than merely cataloging the similarities and differences in the responses to our questions, so we resisted the urge to quantify the responses and instead looked for the shared components of the experiences of the participants in breadth of complication, common language in the story of the participants' experience, and depth of emotion in their responses both then and now in hindsight.

We interviewed 23 participants. We interviewed seven Faculty members, five Staff and Administrators, and eleven Students. All were directly affected by the abrupt cessation of funding, and all lived, worked, or attended classes at various universities and colleges in Egypt. We divided the labor of writing the results section among the team by participant group and then read each other's work to normalize our assessments and interpretations of responses.

We reviewed the transcripts of the interviews, sorting them into general topical categories based on our own experiences in academic labor, and then shared our interpretations and categorizations of the transcripts in an online group setting. We did not intend to quantify this data and so did not perform categorical hit counts nor sought interrater reliability as we interpreted the data and normalized it in conversations and by consensus. The following

Results sections represent the interview responses organized by the prevalent themes we saw emerge in the responses from all three stakeholder groups.

Results

The stories shared with us develop a narrative that constructs meaning and shapes the identities of those involved in the story. That narrative also constructs their world for their readers. The phenomenon of experiencing such a moment as this in a very particular way shapes that collective story and narrative identity theory highlights the following themes in our investigation. The data derived from the three groups of stakeholders yielded these common themes, experienced individually as they experienced the phenomenon collectively. The results will be presented under the following themes:

- Loss of opportunities and uncertainty about the future
- Inequalities and exclusion
- Emotional and psychological toll
- Standing in solidarity
- Institutional and policy responses

Loss of Opportunities and Uncertainty about the Future

Plans were disrupted for all stakeholders. Faculty and staff and administrators lost job opportunities. Some students lost access to dorms and stipend payments. Others lost professional development opportunities, such as leadership and entrepreneurship camps and study-abroad opportunities. For some, the situation was even worse as they were denied the opportunity to enroll in another good-quality program. They all expressed a deep sense of uncertainty about what the future now holds for them.

On January 26, many of the interviewed students were attending a USAID-sponsored camp when, unexpectedly, their instructors interrupted the day's activity and asked everyone to stop what they were doing for an emergency meeting. Whether attending the camp, doing other activities, or simply staying at the dorms or homes on that day, they were informed of the U.S. President's order to suspend the USAID programs for three months, which was then followed by another order of full termination.

When we asked participants to describe their experience from the day the USAID was blocked by executive orders*, s*tudents shared similar experiences. Recalling what happened and reporting their experience, students have expressed a sense of "*fear," "anxiety,*" and "*uncertainty*." They are anxious that their academic plans have been disrupted in one way or another. Some of them do not know what is yet to come, and whether or not they will be able to finish their studies after the sudden loss of USAID funding. Moreover, for some groups of students, the suspension of the USAID has denied them access to different educational and professional development opportunities, such as leadership and entrepreneurship camps, internships in international companies, and partial study-abroad opportunities, as they relied entirely on the scholarships offered by the USAID and had no alternative means to pay tuition and living expenses. This, in turn, will not only affect their education but also threaten their

aspiration and professional growth. What's more, the experience of some of the students was even worse. Some USAID students were not officially enrolled in the respective educational institutions at the time the executive orders were announced. They had only received their scholarship acceptance letters and had started different preparation programs, including the study of academic English and liberal arts in preparation for the initiation of their academic journeys. For that group of students, the suspension has abruptly and entirely cut off their access to higher education to the extent that many of them had to have a gap year. A visually impaired student reported that she had to spend the 2025 academic year at home after she was promised a prominent educational opportunity with living and medical support due to the suspension of the USAID program that had initially offered her a scholarship and all types of support she could ever need.

"*A deep sense of uncertainty*" about what the future holds was another experience that many students have reported. Those students had gone through a rigorous selection process and were recognized as top-notch amongst their peers to receive scholarships in reputable national and international institutions. Now, they do not know what will happen next and whether or not they will be able to finish their studies. They are already enrolled in some of the best educational programs, which, unfortunately, they cannot fund on their own. These students range from freshmen to graduating seniors, but they all still do not know who will cover their study fees till they graduate; in other words, they do not know what the future holds for them, and their world is full of uncertainty.

The situation was no different in this regard for faculty members. Their stories were quite similar among the participants in the faculty grouping. They all generally describe receiving a phone call in the middle of class from an administrative person that informed them of the U.S. President's executive order that sought to stop USAID funds—these funds were already allocated in a previous budget by Congress—and that they must stop classes and send their students to an assembly where they would be told what was happening together. Some were told not to discuss the event with students, just to send them away.

One representative story showed some of the trust issues and emotional distress that were collectively experienced when they said, "*it was so unfair for me and my students. Um, you know, to stop… at least allow us some time to wrap up, or…You know, give us some explanations for that*." The suddenness of the event seemed to be noteworthy across participant responses, but it did not end with simply sending the students away. One faculty member reported humiliation at having to add to the students' stress when they asked if they could leave their things behind while they went to the impromptu student assembly, where they would be told they had to leave campus. It caused distress for the faculty member to reply that the students must take all of their things with them. Another faculty member reports how the care work they did extended well beyond the classroom when they told us, "*The main problem for me was not…well, not only Um, what happened by ending classes and all that, but also taking the students out of the dorms. And uh… and telling them to go back to their, uh… to their towns, this was very debilitating, and it was very humiliating*."

The faculty's dedication to students was also apparent in the following reply when asked how the situation could have been handled differently: "*Maybe they could have told us. You can go along with this thing, you're not gonna be rewarded for it and it's your choice. I think*

this would have been something that most of us would have agreed to, we would have gone along and finished."

There were even some faculty who had repeat students with whom they were still engaged in leftover communication apps or media from previous classes. These students reached out and contacted their teachers after the assembly to request help and support, with logistics and getting back home, as they were not going to be allowed to stay in their accommodations that were contracted through USAID. This added to the psychological toll the faculty endured during that time.

The toll was not only psychological but also financial. There was a matter of uncompensated labor, as one faculty member reported, "*They called us, and they told us that we have to finish all the paperwork. Till… till maximum noon. I mean, this was… I remember, as I recall, it was at 8:30, maybe 9? Then we have to finish everything before noon.*" Even in the face of such an unusual circumstance, higher intensity labor was extracted from the faculty before the money ran out.

When it comes to staff and administrators, "*Sadness,*" *"shock,"* and *"frustration"* were some of the recurrent words they used to describe their experience the day the USAID was suspended. Some were in the middle of a winter camp; others had started the first day of classes when they received the news that they needed "*to stop immediately*" and notify the students that the program had been suspended for three months pending review. The frustration did not just stem from the fact that they had worked so hard to design the curriculum, putting in as many as four to five hours a day between meetings and material development, but also because they were there to witness the dreams of their students shatter. They reported that the students who join the USAID programs are handpicked for their competence and drive; some of them study at Egyptian universities; others are enrolled in private universities, and the administrative faculty emphasized that they were some of the brightest students in Egypt. They had worked so hard to get where they were to have that dream snatched away from them. What made it worse was the uncertainty of the whole situation. No one was telling them anything; no one was sure what was happening and whether the suspension was temporary. The staff and many administrators were not sure how to reassure the students, some of whom had already received the email about the suspension of the program before their respective programs had a chance to relay the news to them and started asking questions, to which the administration still had no answer.

One administrator sadly recalls how, as they were getting ready to assemble the students in one place and have the USAID team gently break the news to them and explain what was happening, the students had already read the emails about the suspension of their scholarships and all the activities related to them. She reported that she and other administrators were able to notice how the decision immediately divided the students into groups: those who still kept the faith that this would be temporary and that the programs would be up and running again in three months, and those who believed that this was permanent, a fear that was confirmed when they were asked to pack up and leave their respective dorms within the next couple of days.

Another administrator shared how the suspension of the program put things in perspective. She realized how "*privileged*" she was compared to other administrators and staff members. Although she was no longer sure she would be able to afford the PhD program in Europe she

had been saving for, she felt lucky she still had her own business to fall back on. What happened prompted her to think it was time to focus on her brand, and that she was lucky she did not have a family to provide for, like her coworkers. She has still not given up hope and is waiting for a "*miracle to happen*" yet cannot help but feel it is "*liberating not to be fully dependent on USAID*". If USAID remains contingent upon "Egypt's stance on the Palestinian situation", then she believes that it is time for Egypt to become independent.

When asked about what they wished the response could have looked like, most stakeholders firmly believed that the situation could have been handled differently. Students wished the situation were handled with "*more transparency.*" For example, some students have indicated that their universities did not issue any official statements nor sent any emails to explain the situation after the suspension of USAID. They wish there were clear and timely communications from both the government, mainly the Ministry of Higher Education, academic institutions, and the USAID office, with immediate guidance and an alternative plan for the affected students. Some were also hoping for psychological support to help them cope with the stress and uncertainty caused by such a plight.

The responses of faculty members were slightly different. On the one hand, some faculty members reported that the situation should have been handled in a "*more diplomatic*" and "*more humanized*" manner, elaborating that institutions, especially those that had programs already running "*could have waited till the end of the day*" or "*in the break between the sessions*" to break the bad news, instead of asking faculty to "*immediately*" suspend all activities and leave their classrooms. Some even expressed their willingness to continue to teach had they been given the choice, even if they were *"not gonna be rewarded for it*". Others believed that more time was needed to "*prepare the students emotionally"* to deal with this news. On the other hand, others believed that academic institutions "*might not have been able to respond … differently*" although they wish students were given the chance to finish what they had started.

Although they did not always know exactly what the response could have looked like, the staff and administrators interviewed shared unanimously that it could have been handled differently; they believed the stakeholders could have come together to come up with alternatives and "*should have tried to think of ways to support the affected students and communicate the news in a more appropriate manner, just to mitigate the negative impact on the students. If they really care about their well-being."* One wished the program had been more selective when it came to the cohort whose scholarships were terminated. She further elaborated that she could understand that, not being enrolled in a university yet, the gap-year students might be denied the opportunity to stay in the program, a different fate should have awaited the twelve gap-year students who were only one step away from admission to their universities; however, they could have at least been given the chance to complete the program.

Transparency would have also helped mitigate the impact of the orders. One confided that despite being promised a three-month paid leave until further notice, which was honored by some institutions, they were later notified over the weekend that they would only receive their basic salary.

When asked how they felt about the executive orders back then, all stakeholders shared similar feelings. "Shocked," "overwhelmed," "upset," "heartbroken," "traumatized," "lost,"

and even "betrayed," were some of the feelings the affected students had in response to the USAID suspension. Many of the students felt deep despair seeing all their dreams of having a good education and traveling to new countries suddenly slip away, which also heightened a lot of negative emotions such as frustration, "depression," "fear," "deep disappointment," "insecurity," and "uncertainty." These intense emotional responses were intensified by their uncertainty about their future, which in turn heightened their anxiety and "stress."

"*Sad,*" "*angry,*" "*upset,*" "*disappointed,*" "*frustration,*" and "*anxiety*" captured the sentiments shared by the faculty interviewed back when the news was first delivered to them. These programs sponsored students who were motivated, hardworking, and eager to learn to make something of themselves; they were simply "*a breath of fresh air*". So, they felt it was "*unjustified*" to be "*destroying their future.*" One faculty member thought it was reminiscent of "*corporate*"-like layoffs in private enterprises.

"*Shocking," "disappointing," "confusing,*" and "*heartbreaking*" were but some of the words the staff and administrators used to describe how they felt about the executive orders back in January 2025. Although they came as no surprise to a few who had earlier heard that the USAID activities were being looked into, they *"never imagined it would be retroactive, or that it would affect funding that was already committed".* Not only were the staff and administrators worried about their own employment prospects, but they also mostly felt sorry for the students who had to deal with what they could only describe as a "*crisis*" that denied them an opportunity they had been working toward for years.

The stakeholders' views on what happened back then, how they wished it could have been handled differently, and how they felt during that difficult time articulate the loss of different opportunities and their uncertainty about the future.

Inequalities and Exclusion

The different USAID programs in Egypt selected students with educational excellence who came from low-income backgrounds and/or who needed extra support due to specific disabilities and disadvantages. The programs offered accessible and inclusive educational opportunities that they would not have experienced on their own. With the suspension of these programs, those students have been denied access to good quality education, which exacerbates the existing inequalities they already endured. For staff, administrators, and faculty, inequality took on a whole new meaning in the way some were compensated and paid their basic salary while others received nothing at all.

The USAID programs were perceived by many as an amendment of socio-economic inequality. When asked about how the executive orders impacted their lives, many students used a dream metaphor to share their experience. "*All my dreams are taken away*"– indicating how *"one order" "by one man"* has shattered all their dreams for a better future. Some of them reported that they had to give up other educational opportunities and scholarships which, as they said, was "*a tough choice*," in order to accept the USAID scholarship as they believed that USAID would provide a vast array of educational and professional development opportunities, not just a degree. Now they "*have lost everything*." However, they have also expressed that such an experience has taught them a valuable lesson on the importance of independence and self-growth. Many of them said they have started searching for jobs to be

able to cover their university fees and living expenses. The learned self-reliance, however, cannot, at present, repair the damage to their socio-economic position in society, nor can it repair the self-image they had been crafting for themselves as fortunate and high-achieving students. The pulling back of these hard-won funds has introduced a possibility for distrust and a self-image of victimhood.

The faculty had a somewhat different experience. For some, there was job loss. For all of them, there were lost wages as the jobs they had secured evaporated with a pen stroke. There are other, less-obvious effects as well. While the mental and emotional distress is quite prominent in the faculty responses, less obvious are the experiences of betrayal and lingering distrust they learned during the phenomena. Since actions and their effects often imprint on those affected in such a way that they will view the identity of the one that disappointed them differently–sometimes permanently, and sometimes until trust is reestablished–we cannot yet know the full extent of the damage to the reputation of USAID as an organization or even to the projected image of the United States as a nation.

Another hidden cost one faculty member mentioned involved reserving the time to teach the course and refrained from going on a vacation. This state of commitment to the job and then having that commitment canceled seems to leave a sense of vulnerability and abandonment for the faculty on the receiving end. On the surface, this may seem like a minor inconvenience, but our experience as academic laborers tells us that contracting with an institution, for any length of time, can often be an all-consuming commitment. We dedicate our time, attention, presence, intellect, and organizational skill to that context. Having that dedication rewarded with a rescinded offer after the commitment was made seems like a betrayal that echoes like a slamming door.

In addition to their felt losses, the thread of concern for others was common among faculty respondents. One particular faculty member stated that she was concerned most about the students and employees "*who have been working with the aid for, I think, since the seventies or eighties, or something like that [...] these people who have children at schools, who have homes to run. This is terrible.*"

The life of the staff and administrators was also impacted by the executive orders. For those who had lost their jobs as a result, the financial impact was undeniable, especially when they had held their positions for over 20 years. As full-timers, their jobs were their livelihoods, and they were not all fortunate enough to find employment elsewhere post USAID suspension. Only one reported that they were happy they managed to go back to teaching in an institution whose support she could count on. It especially took an emotional toll on those who were no longer able to support their families.

One faculty member made an analogy of the program as life-giving water in response to our question, by saying it was *"a cup of water in the middle of the desert"* to the otherwise marginalized students that USAID-funded scholarships empowered. The scholarships were life-changing for students in developing countries in the sense that they prepared them for the competitive job market, which is why she felt *"confused"* and *"let down"* when they were suspended, and such a wellspring dried up.

The words "*disappointed*" and "*frustrated*" used by faculty and students alike were reiterated by the interviewed staff and administrators, who lamented the uncertainty of the

future of the program. Questions arose about the timing of the executive orders as well; although they could be persuaded to understand that the program would no longer be running or admitting a new cohort, they failed to understand why students who were already enrolled in their respective USAID-funded programs would be affected. Only one participant found a silver lining; although he had been job hunting since the suspension of the program, he decided to also use this time to reflect, regroup, and reassess his personal and professional goals.

Emotional and Psychological Toll

The three stakeholder groups involved in this study expressed common feelings of distress and disappointment. However, the intensity of the emotional toll was highest for students since they were the ones most critically affected. Emotional and psychological discomfort and trauma seemed to grow from their deep sense of despair and uncertainty about their future, which was also reported by some of the faculty, staff, and administrators. Emotional contagion was a finding the researchers did not anticipate. The emotional and psychological toll the various stakeholders communicated during the interviews was passed on to the interviewers and researchers in this current study. Listening to students' experiences was painful and emotionally draining. Each story carried a weight that lingered long after the interview ended, which made us realize how challenging it is to bear witness to such hardships.

When we asked students about their feelings in response to the USAID suspension, they reported terms such as "*shocked,*" "*overwhelmed,*" "*upset,*" "*heartbroken,*" "*traumatized,*" "*lost,*" and even "*betrayed*." Many of the students felt deep despair seeing all their dreams of having a good education and traveling to new countries suddenly slip away, which also heightened a lot of negative emotions such as frustration, "*depression*", "*fear*", and "*deep disappointment.*" Faculty members voiced emotions such as "*sad,*" "*angry,*" "*upset,*" "*disappointed*," "*frustration,*" and "*anxiety*." The faculty felt deeply for their students who were being affected by the situation. These programs sponsored students who were motivated, hard-working, and eager to learn to make something of themselves; they were simply "*a breath of fresh air.*" For the staff and administrators, who cited terms like "*shocking,* "*disappointing,*" "*confusing,*" and "*heartbreaking,*" the feelings were similar. Although the news came as no surprise to a few who had earlier heard that the USAID activities were being looked into, they "*never imagined it would be retroactive, or that it would affect funding that was already committed.*"

Looking back on the ordeal months later, some students reported that their feelings have not changed much, while others indicated that the situation has made them "*stronger*" and more "*resilient*". They indicated that this plight changed their perspectives and taught them a valuable lesson, which is to expect the unexpected. They were learning resilience. With that in mind, now they feel prepared to face anything. As for the students who expressed a change in their feelings, they indicated that "*time*" played an important role in alleviating their pain. Other students cited the "*support*" they received from their "*institutions*" and "*peers*" as the cause for change and admitted that they might be luckier than some of their peers, whose status as a new cohort, not fully admitted to a specific academic institution, has denied them a similar experience. It must be noted, however, that our selection of participants was limited by the

very phenomenon we were investigating, as the executive orders themselves sent many of the potential participants away.

The faculty also reported, in retrospect, that they still held the same feelings that they felt initially when they had heard the news about the suspension of the USAID program; however, the views of staff and administrators diverged within that participant group. Some administrators did not experience any change of heart about the executive orders, but others, after a few months had elapsed, managed to gain new perspectives, and came to believe that this may have been a blessing in disguise. These administrators attributed their change of heart to the political turmoil the world was in. In one case, this led a participant to believe that it "*might be better for our country, […] from a political perspective"* since, as she said: "*any aids are political, and they give an upper hand to the US*" and "*they don't have control over us anymore. Financial control, I mean.*" In another case, it was thanks to newfound spirituality that led the participant to believe in the power of signs as their reason for change. If anything, this was a sign for her to slow down and realize how blessed she was to be able to support herself and not have as many financial obligations as her coworkers. It was time for her to embrace change, do some soul searching, reprioritize her goals, and practice self-care.

When asked about what concerns they had now that they did not have before the executive orders, some students expressed their concern about "*how political decisions can unexpectedly affect the lives of students*", especially those from low-income backgrounds, and had once thought of the AID as a dream come true. Some even came to the realization that "*political changes*" in one place in the world may have negative effects on individuals in another. The U.S. presidential decision to suspend the USAID, for example, has impacted the lives of millions of individuals across different countries. These new political orders have raised the affected students' concerns about the future, especially regarding the funding of their education. Even if all institutions have announced their coverage of the fees for the current academic year (2025), nothing has been announced in regards to the upcoming academic years.

Faculty member responses enfolded two general themes that were echoed across the stakeholder group: concern for students and peers and concern for job security/financial stability. Several also expressed concern for repeated instances of this sort of discontinuation of programs.

In addition to their socio-economic standing, one major concern for staff and administrators was the uncertainty about the "*continuity*" and "*stability*" of any program or international partnership they might be affiliated with, which happened to be a sentiment shared by many of the students in the program as well. They admitted that the discontinuation of the program gave them a perpetual sense of life's precarity; nothing was to be taken for granted, and no entity was to be trusted. It served as a constant reminder that they were never "*safe*" from the unexpected twists of fate. Some students went so far as to warn their followers on social media against letting their guard down, reminding them that even if they were "*accepted to a scholarship, please don't be happy. This doesn't mean anything, because at any time you could be expelled.*" This reaction reflects the stresses brought about by the experience of dealing with sustained instability.

When asked about memorable experiences or common stories stakeholders heard about from this event, our respondents offered several examples, some of which seemed to be

experienced in similar ways. A poignant memory that many students recall is the dismissal of a group of students affiliated to a specific USAID program from the dorms of one of the educational institutions. The sight of expelled students carrying their luggage and chanting sad songs lamenting their tough situation was heartrending for many of the interviewees. It seemed analogous to many of the forced relocations that the world has witnessed, but on a smaller, localized scale, which made it emotionally evocative for the respondents.

For Faculty, some of the lingering memories the respondents recalled in the interviews were about the moment the news was delivered to the students. One respondent "*can still visualize how students were walking in huge numbers to the auditorium*" where they were told that the scholarship was suspended. This respondent recalled that she could not hold back the tears, especially when she heard them asking each other, "*What are we gonna do?"* This is when she really felt "*humiliated*" because the Egyptian students in these programs were top-notch students; they were "*eager to learn*" and had "*left their homes and their families to come here and stay on their own, to learn.*"

She was not alone here; etched in the memory of many are the reactions of the students as they were relayed the news that the program was suspended pending further notice. Their vacant expressions said it all. This was life-changing, and not in the positive sense of the word. It was catastrophic. It was not just about the bootcamps or courses they were enrolled in. This was about their whole lives; "*it had a major impact on everything.*" Their whole lives revolved around their respective scholarships, as evident in the online reels posted by the students. These students had special potential and invested in themselves, and now, in recounting that memory, some of the faculty felt a sense of sadness for them, with a hint of helplessness.

The messages some respondents later received from students after they learned that the program had been officially terminated made it all the more "*depressing*". It was "*heartbreaking*" to hear them crying when they "*did not know what to do for them. Um… I… I mean, there isn't any time in my whole life I felt so helpless.*"

The faculty emphasized that it was not only students who were impacted by the executive orders; faculty, staff, and administrators suffered their fair share of hardship as well. A faculty recalled an email from a program manager a few days later in which she was "*bidding us farewell because she no longer had a job and she was going out in search of something to do for her life.*" This respondent saw this as a "*very direct effect on non-students,*" mainly staff and administrators in the different USAID programs.

One of the most heartbreaking images that one administrator is still unable to shake off, is that of the students who were suddenly out on the streets after being asked by their respective institutions to immediately vacate their dorm rooms because "*you're not belonging here anymore. The university is not paying for your, like, the dorms.*" Among them was a disabled student whose accommodation and medical expenses—including a companion nurse—had been covered by the USAID program. She suddenly found herself returning to her rural hometown because her university could only afford to cover her tuition but not the accommodation or medical expenses.

There was also another visually impaired student who masked his frustration by reassuring his teachers that the program students were all resilient enough to bounce back from this. The administrator was proud that her university was one of the few in Egypt which not only

admitted but also empowered students with special needs. However, the dismissal of special needs students for financial reasons beyond their own control is distressing enough. The fact that some of them were among the top students in the program made these dismissals even more distressing.

Standing in Solidarity and Navigating Program Cancellation Challenges

The support that students provided for each other played a crucial role in navigating the challenges posed by the termination of the USAID program, and the support they received from faculty, staff, administrators, and academic institutions gave them hope that someone would always have their back. The sense of solidarity was also manifested in the staff's sharing job opportunities with each other and the faculty's willingness to continue working with the students even without compensation.

The interviews showed how the affected students managed to stand in solidarity with one another, checking on each other, and offering help to those in need. After the USAID program was terminated, the students continued to support each other by "staying connected, sharing any useful updates or opportunities … and simply listening to one another". They also created WhatsApp groups to share information and job opportunities.

For faculty members, who continued to listen and validate each other's feelings, and offer words of encouragement about the future, it was moral and emotional support that they had to offer one another. Some staff, especially those outside higher management, took this support a step further by sharing employment and networking opportunities with each other.

It was these acts of solidarity that the participants highlighted as the positive outcome of this experience. Indeed, students reported that they received support from both their instructors and peers. They praised how some of their fellow students shared stories on social media and tried to contact USAID personnel, while others tried to contact the Egyptian authorities. Some of them also reported that one USAID student reached out to a famous Egyptian TV show host and appeared on her show to make sure the voices of those affected by the presidential orders were heard on the national level, and many of our interviewees believed that the publication of this paper could do the same, only on an international level, which is why many of them chose to participate in this study. The most important lesson for some students, however, was that the instability helped them to realize that opportunities might come and go, while strength will always come from within.

The interviews of staff, administrators, and faculty again offered a different perspective. While one faculty member failed to recall anything positive about this experience, many others celebrated the fact that the students' respective institutions covered their tuition fees at least for another semester. They were also happy to see many faculty members willing to teach their students (post-suspension) without compensation. And most importantly, it was refreshing to see friendships between faculty and students blossom. Indeed, faculty continued to mentor and emotionally support their students even months after the termination of the program. One faculty member, in particular, was praised for raising awareness about the abandoned students when she read "*negative comments from people who didn't understand what they are going through, and they were like, oh, don't bore us with your situation. It's not the end of the world. And some people were saying, like, Why are you studying in America?*" Upon seeing such viral

posts openly disparaging the impacted students and shaming them for choosing to be affiliated with US-funded programs (and later crying over the elusive opportunity), said faculty took to social media to tell their side of the story and document what had happened to the students and their families, explaining why they deserved empathy, not contempt.

Other faculty were also acknowledged for lending an ear to students who needed to vent; they were happy to comfort the students as they poured out their frustration for hours on end. They "*were receiving calls from students who were crying and who … just wanted to talk to someone, and we were always open to answer and to respond to their calls, and just to tell them that who knows? Maybe this is the best for them.*" The empathy they showed for their students was natural in our estimation, in part, because of the suffering the faculty also shared in that moment.

Still, for others, this phenomenon was seen as a learning moment, a time of reflection and gratitude. Although the termination of the program had spelled the end of her dream to pursue a PhD abroad, one respondent believed that there were moments when we just had to "*respect God's timing*" and realize that no matter how much time we spend planning our future, something unexpected might come along and derail our plans--the way COVID did. So, she learned to just sit back, relax, and appreciate the smaller things in life. Still, other reflective responses characterized the moment as a time to learn how to think strategically, manage crises, allocate resources, and support students, staff, administrators, and faculty. It served as a persistent reminder that we need to "*expect the unexpected*" as long as we live in a world where anything that happens–be it natural or political–will impact us.

Some reflection turned to insight, which was made evident when we asked respondents to share their current status and outlook since the executive orders were levied. Some participants, including faculty, staff, administrators, and students, indicated that now is the time to break free from the USAID trap. Advocacy and supporting others in similar situations have become an essential part of responding to the USAID suspension phenomenon. Another point that was discussed by many of the interviewees was the legality of the presidential order. Funding offered by USAID has always been regarded as a generous contribution by the American people and government to the international community; however, many saw this commitment as a binding act that should not have been rescinded retroactively. Even if the President of the U.S. sees that the cancellation of USAID serves the interests of his country, it would have been more appropriate to implement such a decision proactively rather than retroactively.

Institutional and Policy Responses

Institutions responded differently from one another. While some students felt supported, others were completely abandoned. The commonality was that no immediate action was taken to address the suspension announcement. Governmental interference was a driving force for institutions to take an action that served the interests of some, and not all, affected students. Some faculty, staff, and administrators were also not compensated.

Some students reported that their institutions showed "empathy and concern." Still, no immediate action was taken to address the suspension announcement. Only later, specifically after a call for a meeting with the Egyptian Minister of Higher Education and upon his Excellency's recommendations, did many institutions decide to fund the education of the

USAID scholarship students who were already enrolled in their academic programs. However, many students did not receive similar support simply because they were only accepted but not yet enrolled in their academic institutions.

The faculty reported that the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, in the days after the executive order announcement, came together and made arrangements to support the universities so that the following semester could be completed by students who had scholarships that were affected by the executive order. Faculty at some institutions also reported that they were asked not to speak outside of the university about what had happened. Even many of those who anonymously participated in this study were still not permitted to name their institutions or offer identifying information.

The administrators suspected that their respective institutions might have known neither how to handle the situation nor what to relay to the students, which resulted in minimal communication with said students, if at all. Some reported that the only communication was via a "*very professional, very official"* email that was sent to document the status quo— a condition of which the administrators (in our study, faculty with extra administrative positions) were already well aware. Still, they considered themselves lucky, since they were given a paid three-month leave until further notice, while the students were not as fortunate. The gap-year students—who were not officially enrolled in the university yet—were let go and informed that they were "*not part of the university anymore. Do whatever you want to do with your lives.*" The students who *were* enrolled in the university, on the other hand, were given one semester to find a sponsor—all expenses covered by the university—but that was "*after much pressure from other universities"* and the Ministry of Education. One could not help but notice the dilatoriness of some universities in making decisions and addressing the needs and concerns of the students and staff. It "*took more than double the time*" that it took other universities to decide what they would do with the enrolled and gap-year students and afflicted staff and administrators.

Recommendations

The participants offered recommendations, and we constructed other recommendations from among their responses, as they reflected on their experiences and refigured their approaches based on their experiences.

When asked about what can be done to ameliorate the impact of the USAID suspension, students' first recommendation was to have a contingency plan, especially after realizing how "*vulnerable*" such AID programs could be. Locating *"alternative funding options*" was another proposed solution by students, some of whom suggested that the Ministry of Higher Education should have an "*emergency fund*" to provide support during any unexpected hardships, while others called for the support of Egyptian businessmen to step in and fill the void left by the withdrawn USAID funding. Students also recommended the provision of *"emotional support*" should a similar situation arise. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of maintaining clearer and quicker communications between stakeholders and institutions, to avoid "*fear*" and "*misinformation,*" and a unified nationwide response, arguing that all educational institutions should address such a crisis in a consistent manner to ensure equality and the inclusion of all affected students.

The recommendations from faculty were quite similar. The need for autonomy and a more efficient switch to crisis management mode, including a contingency plan, were the two main recommendations made by the faculty interviewed. They regretted that the response to the executive orders was retroactive when we should have had our own AID-like programs that sponsor distinguished students—and in some cases, Arab and African students as well—in our private and national universities. If this crisis has taught them something, it is that USAID is not "*reliable.*" Faculty members called for the instant provision of businessmen-funded national scholarship programs so that host universities are able to "*transfer all these students to this scholarship*." Another faculty member also noted that all affected deserve to know the fate that awaits them without having to wait 90 more days.

The administrators interviewed also had the following recommendations to make: On the governmental level, foreign funds—be they American, European, German, or Chinese—must be understood to come with their own agenda and conditions. Therefore, funding models and sponsor policies should be revisited to ensure less reliance on said funds. On the institutional level, the staff/administrative faculty interviewed acknowledged the need "*to be agile enough to continue to grow and develop*" in the face of adversity. In the unpredictable times we live in, they believed all stakeholders alike needed to "*always be ready for unexpected change*" in policy or funding. Mental health services for the affected students to help them navigate through these uncertain times and build resilience were also called for. Networking opportunities for full-time staff/administrative faculty who had lost their full-time jobs were proposed as well.

One salient recommendation made by the administrative staff was "*fundraising,*" and not just on the institutional level, so that all groups of students—graduate and gap-year included—get to keep their scholarships. Just like the students and faculty members, nationwide fundraisers as a contingency plan, preferably before the interest in the cause fades, were proposed by administrative staff who believed in the power of nationalist businessmen to rise to the occasion.

Discussion

Interviewing the participants made an experience of phenomenology possible for it created space for stepping back and reflection. According to narrative identity theory, agency was maintained through the phases of preconfiguration, configuration, and reconfiguration.

The collective mediation and then interpretation of their experiences gave all stakeholders agency in highlighting lessons to be considered. First, the narratives in their collective led to "benevolent spontaneity" which Ricoeur (1984) calls "empathy." Agency to reflect showed them that they wish to avoid similar situations in the future. "*A contingency plan*," for them, as reported in the data, meant businessmen creating a buffer fund, or government intervention, or even institutional policy to maintain the service. Sharing the individual experiences of stakeholders created a narrative web of individual perspectives from shared experiences, which then collapsed to offer similar suggestions to avoid future pain. The disruption that the executive orders created for academics and researchers revealed a lack of clear and timely communication between stakeholders and institutions, with implications of loss of agency and transparency.

Narrative identity theory reveals that the process of reading these experiences becomes an ethical reflection. It highlights the lack of emotional support, through and after the crisis, creating an ethical choice for readers to suggest emotional support as one of the leading lessons in this experience, because it cuts through the noise of "*fear*" and "*misinformation.*"

An interesting narrative detail is the act of questioning the legality of USAID cessation. The emotional damage it inflicted calls for an equally intense answer of support from all nations for "*a unified response.*" The individual experiences yielded, through narration, a common call for "*equality and inclusion,*" which are, ironically, traditionally American ideals.

Coupling phenomenology with narrative identity theory allowed for deeper consideration of the phases of meaning-creation through narrating individual experiences during interviews and showing collective concerns, meaning, and agency.

Call for Support and Advocacy

Most interviewed stakeholders commented on the financial fragility of academic/research institutions in developing countries and the suspension of scholarships, indicating that what happened is a wake-up call to break free from the *AID trap* and the hegemony of the Capitalist West and find alternative funding options.

Advocacy and supporting others, in similar situations, has become an essential part of responding to the USAID suspension phenomenon. The USAID programs provided underprivileged students and marginalized/underrepresented groups— such as girls and students with disabilities—access to good quality education, which promoted equity, social mobility, and inclusivity. Now is the time for societies and governments to help promote these principles without depending on any external aid. Many of the interviewees questioned the legality of the presidential order and suggested that it would have been more appropriate to implement such a decision proactively rather than retroactively. To answer the questions of legality and to implement better strategies in the face of adversities, international assistance and cooperation may be necessary.

On a personal level, sharing the stories and experiences from the USAID program funding termination opened the door for the investigation of the narrative, both individually and collectively, for commonalities worthy of phenomenological study and invited us, as researchers and academics, to reflect on the experience and interpret its implications.

Conclusion

It is clear in these interviews that the faculty and the administrative staff derive much of their professional identities from the relationships they have with the students they teach. Their own pain and suffering was often phrased in terms of sadness for their students, or being worried *about* their students. They experienced guilt and shame in holding information back from their students on the day of the event. They even acted on their students' behalf in many cases to exercise care and emotional support and in some cases to arrange and provide for students physical, security, communication, and informational needs after the fact.

The USAID was clearly a *Public Good*. The US Higher Education system originally founded Public universities and colleges as a Public Good so that education would not be a privilege of only the wealthy but accessible to all. USAID, in part extended this idea

internationally invoking its status as a public good. Corporate America hated this extension and saw it only as a negative on the budget balance sheet not accounting for the humanity those funds touched. Egyptian Higher Ed seems to be in a position, with regard to funding, similar to the position that American Higher Ed was in about 20-30 years ago when the slow slashing of funding began and it continued until this day. American Public Higher Ed could metaphorically be seen as the frog in the pot that is slowly raised to a boil, whereas the USAID cut off just threw the "Egyptian-education-funding-frog" directly into an already boiling pot. The change is much more perceptible and will likely cause pain and suffering to that frog as it leaps out of its predicament. But what of the slow death of the first frog? It may be that this instance could spur a push both in the U.S. and internationally to argue for education as a common good that cannot be used as a political bargaining chip nor be monetized for profit, at least in the public sector. Private universities are needed, of course, but the reason for the creation of public universities was to raise up excellent citizens in a middle class that would be more equipped to meet the challenges of a new age. As we enter another new age, perhaps it is time to demand a different funding model that supports those excellent goals now in this time of new challenges. We can all learn from the suggestions that our participants made after reflecting on their own experiences. We can also learn things about ourselves by comparing their experiences and perspectives to our own. One might even argue that it takes a shocking example like this one to call these larger questions to the foreground. One question that is certainly implied here is whether these reflections and experiences are shared in isolation or if they are indeed a small part of a larger narrative.

Works Cited

AIR News. "Egypt Education Reform Program: USAID and AIR Help Improve Education along the Nile ." *AIR News* 9 September 2004. <https://www.air.org/news/press-release/egypt-education-reform-program-usaid-and-air-help-improve-education-along-nile>.

Alakhdar, Ghada. "Agency in Search of a Narrative: Reconstructing Egyptian Identity via Facebook." *Wadi Elnil Journal*. 2019.

Brown, Nathan J. Rethinking U.S. Economic Aid to Egypt. Project on Middle East Democracy, 2016. https://mideastdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Rethinking_US_Economic_Aid_Egypt.pdf

Dibley, Lesley, et al. *Doing hermeneutic phenomenological research: A practical guide*. London: SAGE, 2020.

Enterprise Ventures LLC. "USAID's pullback from Egypt puts employees and programs at risk." *Enterprise: Egyptian Edition* 8 February 2025. <https://enterprise.news/egypt/en/news/story/3030a7c3-78be-4347-a32c-88d210abf916/usaid%E2%80%99s-pullback-from-egypt-puts-employees-and-programs-at-risk>.

Farouk, Mahmoud. "What USAID Should Know of Its History." *Fikra Forum* 13 September 2017. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/what-usaid-should-know-its-history>.

Fouad, Fatema. "USAID Aid Freeze Disrupts Egypt's Higher Education Sector. Here's How." *Buisiness monthly: The Journal of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt.* 2025. <https://businessmonthlyeg.com/usaid-aid-freeze-disrupts-egypts-higher-education-sector-heres-how/>.

Jerkins, Tristen. *USAID Programs in Egypt*. 10 February 2024. 2025 29 May . <https://borgenproject.org/usaid-programs-in-egypt/>.

Mazloum, Sherine. “The Power of Narrative in Selected Short Stories by Three Nigerian Women Writers”. *Cairo Studies in English*. Cairo: Cairo University Press, 2016.

McAdams, Dan. “Narrative Identity” Eds. S. J. Schwartz et al. Handbook of Identity Theory and Research, Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2011:99-116. DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9_5

Norris, John. "USAID at 60: An Enduring Purpose, a Complex Legacy." *The Foreign Service Journal*. 2021. <https://afsa.org/usaid-60-enduring-purpose-complex-legacy>.

Reagan, Charles. “Personal Identity.” *Ricoeur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity*, edited by Richard A. Cohen and James L. Marsh, State University of New York Press, 2002: 3-32.

"Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid." The White House, 20 Jan. 2025, www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/reevaluating-and-realigning-united-states-foreign-aid/

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, Vol. I, II & III. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985 and 1988.

---, *Oneself as Another*. Trans: Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992.

---, “On Interpretation.” *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991:1-20.

Smith, David Woodruff, "Phenomenology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>.

Tag, Nadine. "Egypt to Cover Tuition Costs for 1,077 Students After Suspension of USAID Scholarship Programs." *Egyptian Streets* 29 January 2025. <https://egyptianstreets.com/2025/01/29/egypt-to-cover-tuition-costs-for-1077-students-after-suspension-of-usaid-scholarship-programs/>.

Tofig, Dana. "American Institutes for Research to Lead Federal Program to Help States Generate and Use Data." American Institutes for Research, 13 Jan. 2022, www.air.org/news/press-release/american-institutes-research-lead-federal-program-help-states-generate-and-use.

U.S. Embassy Cairo. *SAT TESTING RESUMES IN EGYPT*. 14 May 2025. <https://eg.usembassy.gov/sat-testing-resumes-in-egypt/>.

van Manen, M. Doing phenomenology involves two types of inquiry activities: empirical and reflective methods. 2024. Retrieved 2017 5-5 from Phenomenology Online: https://phenomenologyonline.com/passage/lived-experience/