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Review

Reformative changes in educational leadership in post-revolutionary Egypt: A critical appraisal

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This research attempts to comprehend the traits and behaviours of educational leaders of pre-tertiary educational institutions in post-revolutionary Egypt in conceiving of and planning for curriculum reform. Egypt's educational revolution since the first revolution of 1952 is examined with reference to a major debate over the quality of education triggered by a series of inconsistent, politicised attempts in early 1986 up till before the downfall of Mubarak's reign. A close examination of these reformatory attempts draws attention to serious shortcomings in the quality of teachers, teaching, and the learning process. criticisms by holding an extended debate, strengthening testing standards (with some unfortunate results), promoting improvements in teacher quality, creating new elite schools, and revising curricula, amongst other measures. Outside observers, however, do not necessarily share Egypt's self-evaluation, for other educational problems exist, as do alternative perspectives on the quality of education issue, which can be seen as a permanent rather than a merely passing educational controversy in Egypt. Implications and suggestions for reform have been forwarded at the end.

Key words: Educational reform, educational administration, revolution, comparative education, Egypt

INTRODUCTION

Egypt has historically played an important role as an educational leader in the Middle East, its institutions of pre-tertiary and higher learning having influenced the development of education in many Arabic and Islamic countries. Some authors and critics of education have considered Egypt as "the oldest continuously organized and unified country in the world, and its civilization dominated ancient life for more than 3,000 years" (Toronto, 1992: 1). They still claim that the pursuit of knowledge and mastery of skills in fields such as writing, geometry, engineering, accounting, and administration is an old Egyptian tradition handed down history, producing some of the most magnificent and enduring achievements in history. Down history, there have been numerous attempts at reforming education in Egypt, but mostly, these have been scarce and sporadic (Hijji, 1996). Pharaonic traditions of formal schooling are unsurpassed. In succeeding Ptolemaic Egypt (304-30 BC), Alexandria became a world-prominent centre for the preservation and dissemination of Greek learning and Hellenic culture, and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina has become an exemplar scholarly library, also unsurpassed in history. Later with the spread of Islamic civilization throughout the Middle East and North Africa beginning in the seventh century A.D., Egypt again became an unsurpassed centre for educational activity. In 970 A.D. the new Fatimid rulers founded Al-Azhar University to promote the study of the Qur'an and the Islamic sciences related to it, which after more than a millennium, this university has the distinction of being the oldest university in the world and the international centre of Islamic learning for generations of Muslim students and leaders from many nations (Muir, 1908; Ilbert and Volait, 1984; Marsot, 1985; Anzar, 2003). In the nineteenth century, under the guidance of Muhammad Ali (Pasha), Egypt took the lead among Islamic nations in implementing educational reforms designed to modernize schools and curriculum in order to compete with the economic and military power of European countries (Marsot, 1985; Toronto, 1992).

In modern Egypt, education is the foundation stone in the reform of both nation and individuals. Therefore, it has received great attention since the early years of the constructive revolution in 1952 (Hijji, 1996; Sorour, 1997). The case being thus, the revolution regime, and consequent regimes, adopted the principle of equality of educational opportunity and free education for all Egyptians (El-Shikhaby, 1983).

Education, even in this present turbulent time, is an issue that is being debated with reference to reform in almost all the fora of Egyptian social life, TV programmes, newspapers, magazines and informal social conversation are abounded by this deliberation, more so because of Egypt's role as a beacon light in education in the entire region. One of the basic motives that insinuated the January 25th revolution has been the deteriorating standards of health and education at all levels. No doubt that political revolutions can impact as equally be influenced, by the status of education a country; for example, Germany offers an excellent opportunity for the study of educational changes produced by two political revolutions in less than two decades. The ideological Revolution in Soviet Russia sets another illustrious example in which education influenced the whole process of moving from a religious orthodoxy to an economic orthodoxy, and the political autocracy of the Czar has been supplanted by the autocracy of the Party, with both examples culminating in recognition and admission of failure and the need for total reform, primarily starting with education.

The purpose of this study is to document and explain this important period in Egypt's educational development by analyzing the reform effort in terms of the political, socio-religious, and organizational context, the major issues involved, and the prospects for the future of education in Egypt. This study is also set to detect and scrutinise Egypt's educational development over the post-revolutionary period largely from the perspective afforded by a major educational debate conducted within the country during an interval between two revolutionary - a military one and a civil one, and how these two revolutions have inspired the current state and future of education, both in the past and nowadays. However, this self-evaluation should not be accepted at face-value, nor should it be allowed to fix the boundaries of critical discourse; consequently, the Egyptian version of events, very inspiring to other countries in the Middle East, will be held up against the views and judgements of several outside observers.

Egypt's educational development is assessed on three obvious but interconnected approaches since 1952. The first is the historical approach which focuses on the contrasts between the situation in Egypt before and after the end of Mohammad Ali dynasty. It focuses on the stagnation, inequality of access, inadequacy of provision, corruption, and elitism of Egypt's part-state, part-private educational system in the monarchical period before the 1952 revolution on the one hand with the rapid change, massive expansion, reorientation, experiment, and overt politicisation which marked the post-revolutionary period on the other. This approach is often exaggerated and marks little continuity in this complex phenomenon of educational reality.

Furthermore, this insistence on the sharp contrast between 'then' and 'now' in the official rhetoric is aimed mainly at the young who have no personal knowledge of the bad old days before the Revolution.

The second is the historical comparative approach. With the help of this approach, researchers have tried to compare educational change and progress of Egypt with the same in the Arabian Gulf countries or with African Arab countries. This approach is again fraught with exaggerations as also problems concerning the comparability of cross-national data. Nevertheless, Egypt did enjoy a relatively high position in the league table of the region's educational system in the last thirty years (World Bank, 2008).

The third is the goal-fulfilment approach. This approach focuses on post-1952 period and views the realisation of aims, objectives and promises of post-revolutionary educational policy in actual practice. Since revolutionary educational goals are hard to measure using straight forward quantitative measures, so the evaluation of pros and cons can be highly problematic. For example, advancement towards the goal of 'education for all' can be estimated by such criteria as school-age enrolments, number of schools, average level of schooling, and literacy rates.

On this account, Egypt's post-revolutionary advancement is remarkable. On the contrary it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of Egypt's educational programmes for relating education more closely to the economic development needs of the country and also Egypt's advance towards creating the 'new man'.

In the following discussion, we purport to utilise the first and third approach to evaluate Egypt's educational system. The point of departure, however, will be provided by the second approach.

A Brief Outline of Egypt's Modern Educational System

Despite the fact that rigorous attempts at reforming education really started under Mohamed Ali Pasha's regime by establishing the Council of Schools (Diwan Al-Madares), and then by more rigorous attempts during the French campaign and under the colonisation of the British, still education was an elite system for the middle class. It was thus deemed and created to serve the shaping of economic reforms required an expansion of Western education that made it possible for more native Egyptians to work in the government bureaucracy and to have access to greater wealth, social status, and political influence (Khafaji, 1963; Hourani, 1984; Abdulkareem, 1938).

This has, subsequently, been conducive to the accretion of nationalist sentiments and association between education and public work in society. In contrast to British colonisation, Egyptian governments in early 20th century attempted to provide education on a wide-scale basis as the means of national political integration, and the

number of foreign schools in Egypt admitting Egyptian students grew rapidly (Al-Kabbani, 1958). The effect of this was, however, unfavourable to that expected. Despite the government's intentions to render modem schooling the feature of their reforms, most of the funds and educated people were used elsewhere, and the outcome was little actual growth in educational opportunity available for the needy.

Under the regime of Khedive Abbas (1848-1854), the educational renaissance started by Mohamed Ali was ceased, ad did weaken everything else, such as the military and navy power, the economy of Egypt in that era. This last variable of a weakened economy was the most effective in the deterioration of education to such an extent that so many schools opened before had then been closed. Abbas even sent to exile in the Sudan the scholars and the educated elite of Egypt (Al-Rafiai, 1948). This deterioration continued to occur even in the era of Said Pasha (1854-1863); the Council of Schools established by the founding father Mohamed Ali supervised the only two schools remaining, namely the School of Medicine and the School of Engineering. In 1854, the Council of Schools was annulled, and in two months, these two remaining schools were also closed (Abdulkareem, 1938).This is the darkest epoch of educational deterioration in the early history of modern Egypt due to the bad administration of the country by a bad ruler. However, under Ismail (1863-18-79), there was a rebirth of the new educational renaissance started by the founding grandfather. Educational renaissance was rebuilt for achieving acculturation and educating the public, and not for getting a job. Dissemination of education for that ultimate purpose was a nationalistic goal and duty. The Council of Education (Diwan Al-maarif) was established, and small religious parochial schools mushroomed, schools and boarding schools were massively established, and schooling fees were obtained from the rich while the poor were provided free education (Ahmed, 1979).

Economo-political circumstances of the time as well as the type of political and educational administration in the country had had a great effect on the advancement of schooling in the country.

In fact, the driving force to acquire Western education and technology encouraged the secularist trend in the then Egyptian society, thus weakening the influence of the religious schools, estranging the religious establishment, and escalating the intellectual gap between traditional and modem segments of the population (Milner, 1904). In brief, the peaceful cultural invasion of Western ideas and institutions that began after 1841 led to forced British control of Egypt's political, economic, and educational development beginning in 1882 (Mansfield,1971; Al-Gayyar, 1977; Nuir and Abbas, 1987).

Despite the fact that education during the British occupation was faced with a pandemonium of political, social and economic ills in Egypt (Reid, 1977; Milner, 1904; Tignor, 1966; Mansfield, 1971; Nuir and Abbas, 1987), there was a staunch belief among Egyptian thinkers of the time that education was a vital issue during this time of political and social ferment and a catalyst for change (Marsot, 1985).

In 1925, the first compulsory Elementary Education Act was passed in an effort to eradicate illiteracy, but lack of funds to build buildings and hire teachers made progress slow. Yet, growth accrued, and by leaps and bounds, it started to accrue, too, in secondary and university education as well as the first state university, Cairo University, was established in 1925, and the number of college graduates began to increase dramatically with an annual average of 21 percent between 1928 and 1933 (Al-Gayyar, 1977; Toronto, 1992).

These growing lines of educated, dissatisfied young people who were unable to obtain government employment because of the economic depression and passed over by foreign firms who preferred graduates of the foreign language schools, comprised and constituted a potent political force agitating for reform: according to Marsot (1985):

The unemployment of the white-collar worker and of the intelligentsia was another symptom of the changing face of Egyptian society, and another tear in the old social fabric. New ideas arose, and some of these were to burgeon into the revolution of 1952 (p. 203).

The dichotomy of national identity fostered by the modern religious split in the school system also contributed heavily to the disunity and ineffectiveness of nationalist forces who were struggling to gain control of government. The Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936 allowed greater political autonomy and expansion in the Egyptian army, and the resultant need for officers obliged the Military Academy to admit more students from the poorer classes of society. Among the young candidates who enrolled for officer training were Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat, and six other leaders of the 1952 revolution (Marsot, 1985; Hijji, 1996).

Elementary education was haphazard, with developments and advancement attempts only feasible at intervals, until in 1935, the educational act No 25 of 1935 was issued to organise basic education and introduce improved curriculum and enhanced educational leadership, including the introudction for the first time of an exit examination by completing the elementary school. It can be deduced from this review that thse endeavours of developing education in the era before the 1952 revolution had been arbitrary and perhaps futile in promoting a rigorous national educatiuonal system, execpt for those parochial schools (Kuttabs) which helped greatly in literacy development and Qur'an learning. The reasons have been the deteriorated socio-economo-political status of the country at that time. It was

a time which had made Egypt apt to the whims of the ruling elite who failed to take over their responsibility in improving education. The bad administration of the country also helped to produce a duality in educational provisioning; the higher class had access to a supreme quality of education in special schools esoteric to the rich and ramshackle schools for the middle and lower classes (Farag, 1979).

The Free Officers Movement and Education

The 1952 military revolution of the Free Officers had ushered in a new era of mass education, under which the educational system spawned an incipient nationalist leadership, a growing mass of disaffected college graduates, and a sharper cleavage between secular and religious groups in society, all fuelling the fires of opposition to political control by aliens, whether Turco-Albanian or British. While Muhammad Ali had introduced Egypt into the modem era of technology and science 150 years previously, Gamal Abdel Nasser ushered his country into a new epoch of social, economic, and political reform in which the educational system played a catalytic role. The 1952 revolution brought a similar revolution in education whose aim had been the social emancipation of the masses that, in fact, the present system of education in Egypt is the result of such revolution (Arabsheibani, 1990).

The Free Officers' movement envisioned this radical departure and articulated this in the Six Principles of the Revolution, which were later included in the 1956 constitution. But the implementation of these principles was difficult due to the daunting array of domestic ills: i.e., high illiteracy and unemployment, rising population, poverty, lack of democratic institutions and experience, deep social and political divisions, and rural-urban migration" (Toronto, 1992: 48).

According to Toronto, Nasser's regime viewed education as the vehicle for national integration and for preparing the masses for responsible citizenship in the new socialist democratic state. Most educated Egyptians felt that their nation's backwardness was directly attributable to the failure of previous foreign governments to provide adequate public education (p. 49).

No doubt then that the restructuring of the educational system after the first revolution had been one of the central components of national renewal; according to Williamson (1987);

Reform of education was very high among the priorities of the Free Officers. In this sense they were the heirs of the tradition of Egyptian nationalism which had criticised the British for denying education to Egyptians. The educational system became a key instrument for the dissemination of the regime's basic ideology (p. 118).

A number of innovations were adopted to transform the educational status quo including rapid expansion in the number of schools and teachers; emphasis on schooling for girls; centralized planning and control of education, including the foreign schools; free education at all levels; declaring Egyptian universities open to all Egyptians, Arabs, and Muslims; and curricula designed to indoctrinate students with Nasserist ideals of Islamic socialism and pan-Arabism. The most prominent success of Nasser's reforms was greater access to education at the primary level: enrolment increased from 1.5 million in 1952 to 3.6 million in 1969-1970. Due to this remarkable growth in social demand for education and the new liberal policy on admission to universities and technical institutes, the number of graduates with higher degrees entering the work force each year soared beyond 100,000.

The cataclysm which Nasser brought modern Egyptian educational policies in had its seeds in his instituting an association between going to school and getting a government job. He established an official policy of guaranteed employment for all college graduates, and since the dwindling private sector could absorb only a small percentage of new employees annually, the government bureaucracy became the nation's chief employer. From the early years of the revolution the regime planned to bolster the size and influence of the civil service to provide broader administrative control throughout the country, and so hiring surplus graduates presented no serious problem at first. But the flood of new graduates into the bureaucracy continued unabated while the actual need for them levelled off, and the effect on public life in Egypt, as Waterbury (1981) points out, has been catastrophic:

The results [of the guaranteed employment policy], while perhaps laudable from the viewpoint of social equity, have been close to disastrous in terms of administrative performance. The civil service has swollen to over two million, and public sector enterprises employ well over one million. If the armed forces, police and school teachers are included, nearly half of the active work force probably is on the public payroll. Thus the Egyptian state apparatus has become a monolith, laden with unneeded personnel (labour redundancy in the public sector is estimated at about 30 percent of the total workforce) and bogged down in paper and complicated routines (p. 51).

During Nasser's time, two developments had lasting effects in shaping the present educational context. First was the rise of army to the pinnacle of political power with resulting militarization of government and society (Abdel, 1963). This overt presence of military in public life including education was not new to Egyptian history (Heyworth-Dunne, 1968: 380). But Nasser raised it to the level of ideology: he believed that...

In countries like Egypt, the army is a force of education"

and that it was the only "truly national and classless force" which could lead Egypt to success in both the political and social revolution (Stephens, 1971: 41).

With distrust towards civilian politicians and frustrations at the slow pace of reform, Nasser's regime resorted to filling key government position with loyal military officers. This resulted in the perpetuation of the earlier oligarchic method of governance that further alienated the educated class that had earlier expected to have a greater say in national decision making. This sidelining of the educational elite fostered an attitude of public apathy to which Faksh refers to as the 'politics of withdrawal' and notes that...

The absence of opportunity to participate renders the government a relatively distant, cold object no matter how much the leaders appear psychologically fami1iar and warm (Faksh, 1980: 49).

The influence of this authoritarian style of leadership and the resulting detachment of political leaders from their constituents is clearly evident in the current educational system, given these legacies of a then socialist Egypt. To elucidate, the curriculum and administrative procedures are still rigid and require strict uniformity nationwide, and officials in the Ministry of Education often evince a minimalist response to high-level decrees.

However, the modern style of administration and curriculum developments spawning from the Nasserist movement in point of fact had left a legacy of social and political innovations that grew out of Muhammad Ali's nineteenth-century reforms and that transformed Egyptian life. This first revolution had, in fact, accomplished great successes in the socio-economic life of Egyptians, but also planted seeds that bore bitter fruit as time passed. Education has both benefitted and suffered from these changes. Defects and demerits include a setback to autocratic, centralized rule which smothered democratic participation and personal initiative and creativeness. Furthermore, guarantees of government employment produced a bloated public sector with a rigid bureaucratic gridlock. What is more perilous is that subordination of religious education to secular purposes served to intensify the conflict between modem and traditional forces.

However, in the aftermath of Nasser's death Egypt stood at a historic crossroads, and the political and economic course pursued by Sadat following the 1973 war was in many ways' a dramatic reversal of his predecessor's revolutionary ideology which impacted the sector of education as well.

This shift in political policy was accompanied by a transformation of Egypt's economic policy calculated to attract foreign investment, create jobs, and reduce the burden of external debt. In April 1974 Sadat announced his new plan for revitalizing the economy-what he called the 'Open Door' policy, or *infitah*, that was formally adopted that year as Public Law No 43. This policy was in practice opening up to the USA and Israel with a hope to produce a peace dividend in the form of a higher standard of living. The aim was to obtain western capital through (1) creating incentives for investment in the private sector by liberalizing tax laws, allowing foreign ownership of land and real estate, and reducing red tape for foreign investors; and (2) seeking an influx of direct economic and technical assistance from foreign governments.

Consequently, Egypt has become the second largest recipient of U.S. aid next to Israel, and Egypt and Israel together receive more than one-third of all U.S. economic aid (Amin, 1990). In FY2010, Egypt was the fifth-largest aid recipient behind Afghanistan, Israel, Pakistan, and Haiti, respectively. In the past decade, overall U.S. assistance to Egypt has declined from $2.1 billion in FY1998 to $1.55 billion in FY2010 owing to a gradual reduction in economic aid (Sharp, 2011). However, such financial assistance not only has failed to produce the 'peace dividend' of prosperity that the Egyptian government had promised its citizens but has exacerbated Egypt's economic problems (Handoussa, 1990; Prosterman, 1989). According to an audit issued by the USAID's Inspector General in October 2009, found out that ...

The impact of USAID/Egypt's democracy and governance activities has been limited based on the programs reviewed. In published reports, independent nongovernmental organizations ranked Egypt unfavourably in indexes of media freedom, corruption, civil liberties, political rights, and democracy. Egypt's ranking remained unchanged or declined for the past 2 years, and the impact of USAID/Egypt's democracy and governance programs was unnoticeable in indexes (sic) describing the country's democratic environment …. The Government of Egypt signed a bilateral agreement to support democracy and governance activities, but it has shown reluctance to support many of USAID's democracy and governance programs and has impeded implementers' activities. Despite the spirit with which the U.S. Congress espoused the civil society direct grants program, the Government of Egypt's lack of cooperation hindered implementers' efforts to begin projects and activities through delays and cancellations (USAID, Audit Report No. 6-263-10-001-P, 2009).

Despite obvious improvements in infrastructure and expansion in educational output, especially university graduates, between the 1970's and 1980's, "Egypt's economy is once again suffering all the symptoms of structural imbalance and indebtedness as severe (if not more so) as those of the early 1970s" (Handoussa, 1990, p. 109).Incrementally, unemployment has become higher than ever (12 percent in general, and 25 percent among college graduates), inflation is spiraling (20 percent),

economic growth has stagnated, and external debt has increased sevenfold to $45.7 billion, or 150 percent of GDP (Amin, 1990).

More billions were spent on social programmes for ameliorating the standards of living of the poor in such sectors as education, health care, family planning and local government development. The USAID assistance to Egypt through programs supporting economic development and regional stability has totaled $28.6 billion since 1975. Current programs focus on economic growth; education; healthier, planned families; and democracy and governance. But still, improvements are not tantamount to what has been spent in this vein.

Opponents to American aid maintain that these financial contributions have not created stable economic and social conditions for Egypt. According to this view the paradox of Egypt's worsening economic plight can be explained in terms of poor management and planning on the part of the Egyptian government (Amin, 1990; Sharp, 2011).

Planning Changes in Egyptian Educational System

Observing educational reform endeavours during the 1980s suggests that these efforts have been politically driven reactions to external actions - either requests of foreign aid agencies or political propaganda. The educational leadership system lacked in the spirit of initiative. Therefore, it lagged behind by leaps and bounds at the back of modern nations. Official educational reform efforts lacked efficacy and was stamped by subornment and corruption. These blemishes stamping reformatory attempts continued through the 1990s and the 2000s, too (Habaka, 1999). Despite these endeavours, reform efforts bore out very flimsy changes and improvements as humble as sedatives for relieving carcinoma pain, thus failing to cure the disease outright. As scandalised by the media, public education in Egypt has been depicted as a very depressed sick man (Sorour, 1997).

In early 1991, the Ministry of Education claimed that it introduced a new developmental strategy for reforming education, coinciding with the ex-President Mubarak's Declaration of Education for All Initiative. However, reform was still formal and superficial; reform initiatives were not used as a method of changing education in practice, and it failed to be a changing factor through the 2000s up to the end of the decade, and perhaps until the present time. The National Council for Scientific and Technological Research has diagnosed the maladies of Egyptian education as follows:

The problems that hinder the enhancement of education in Egypt include: 1) difficulty funding a comprehensive and radical reform of the educational system; 2) difficulty providing school buildings for full in-take of students at the compulsory education levels and reducing high-density and multi-shift schools; 3) absence of optimal schooling to the advantage of theoretical education and the disadvantage of vocational and professional schooling; 4) absence of a national strategy to promote technology-based education; 5) restricted funding in the field of information and communication and the inability to build the information community; 6) efforts exerted and endeavours were characteristically individual and lacked a strong volition at the different leadership levels; and 7) vocational education is afar from the reality of the labour market, its curriculum are old-fashioned and fail to achieve highly skilled workmen as well as fail to achieve the requirements of modern development (Specialised National Councils, 1993: 52).

In the mid-1990s, the country has embarked on a series of educational changes and developments as part and parcel of an overall socio-economic developmental plan. These plans were started under the ministry of Fathi Sorour, the Minister of Education at the time. However, plans and policies for developing education were top-down. It is axiomatic to think that the greater the degree of involvement in the planning process by those who will carry out the plan, the greater the chances are that the plan's goals and objectives can be achieved (assuming that implementers support reforms and do not seek to sabotage them). But, many planners and policy makers fail to incorporate this axiom into their reform strategies with the result that the workers in the bureaucratic trenches, those who must actually carry out the new policies, are left out of the planning process. In development programs where this is the case, one can hypothesize that the level of commitment on the part of implementers will be low and will hinder reform efforts; on the other hand, in situations where planners have solicited the participation of key officials and implementers, the prospects for achieving desired results improve significantly.

Over the past three decades, thinkers and intelligentsia concurred that what is actually needed is a comprehensive reform of the educational system including curricula and methods of teaching. Most of those thinkers and intellectuals in the different walks of life urged participants to be pragmatic and deal with the realities in the educational system: problems of curriculum, teacher preparation, school buildings, examinations, and textbooks. They also, in their journalistic and academic writings, stressed the theme that the ultimate objective of the educational process is the building of citizens capable of shaping the future according to Egyptian ideals and values. Therefore, influential thinkers went against Sorour’s plans of action and reformatory endeavours which have been merely remedial and formal – ones that did not address the real maladies of education in Egypt.

In fact, reformatory endeavours by Fathy Sorour and succeeding ministers of education were chaotic and confused, involving formal changes in school curricula, years of study in the elementary stage to the extent that these changes were labelled catastrophic. The position of those reform thinkers was that the terrible overcrowding in the schools would require the construction of 47,000 new classrooms just to reduce the class load to 45 students (one of the reform's objectives), and not one of the classrooms had yet been built. Moreover, they argued, since many schools operate under multiple shifts and are thus limited to only three or four hours of class time per day, how could a reduction in the number of years in school possibly be justified? Overwhelmingly, many Ministry of Education and educational policy researchers have identified overcrowded classrooms as Egypt's number one educational problem. While acknowledging the existence of other pressing issues, such as poor teaching, inadequate curriculum, and a lack of instructional materials, the vast majority of these officials and researchers believed that all such problems are directly attributable to the rapid growth in the number of students during the past two decades and the lack of adequate physical space to accommodate them. The refrain heard over and over again was that the quality of educational services has declined over the past two decades because of the system's inability to deal with increasingly crowded conditions. The solution to problems of quality, therefore, is to reduce the pressure in the classroom by building more schools. However, as long as senior officials were convinced that building classrooms was the panacea for the ills of the school system, information and resources needed to support other crucial tasks, such as improving curriculum and instruction, had remained a secondary priority. Inevitably, this fact actually worked against efforts to address a broader range of issues concerning educational quality.

The education dilemma in Egypt is, as such, a very intricate one; reality observations suggest that public education is not capable of providing quality education are hardly any education with this observed shortage in facilities, lack of trained educators and inflation as well as the widening gap between the rich and the poor under the different governments that Mubarak employed. Even reform cannot best be achieved optimally in private schools; for example, private education, including International schools, is still incapable of reform for the lack of interest, shortage in trained educators, defective curriculum, commercialization of education and finally a customized accreditation system that involves the irrevocable licensure of International schools based on the initial efficiency of the school in providing educational services, e.g., the school status as a legal education provider.

The issue of under-developing educational sector has attracted the attention of civil community interests. Therefore, there had been some endeavours that bore out positive impact and reform fruits from the civil community in Egypt but those efforts remained very limited on their impact on the educational process as they were accomplished by very limited civil society organisations interested in the enhancement of education.

Planning Curriculum Development

Pre-university level

Development of curriculum in the MOE is broadly divided into two areas. First, the curriculum revision, under the jurisdiction of curriculum subject experts in each educational level looks into regular, habitually timed updates and improvement of facts, dates and similar issues in currently implemented curricula. Second, curriculum reform involves significant modification with a view to improve the scope, sequence and content of curricula at each different level and was officially assigned to the National Centre for Educational Research (NCER) in 1974 which is still in charge of this process up to the present day at the pre-tertiary education level. The main aim of the NCER is the supervision of the national curriculum at pre-university levels. To achieve this aim, it works in collaboration with curriculum committees comprised of representatives from university faculties of education and other academic colleges, a consultant or inspector from the MOE department, a teacher, and a subject expert.

However, effective development and implementation of curricula in the school system is hindered by many factors. The first is the compartmentalized structure of the MOE discernable through the oft-visible divide between the NCER and the curriculum leaders in the MOE departments. Educational research critics felt that one could access relevant field reports only if one had friendly contacts with one of the MOE subjects' consultants. Moreover they sensed a lack of communication between the MOE subject consultants and the NCER subject experts, who are supposed to be the 'brains' of each subject. This highlights a serious flaw in the system, thereby meaning that that the actual process of curriculum development in the MOE lacked the effective evaluative function of the research and expertise that the NCER can bring to bear upon it, and that any curriculum work carried out in the NCER will remain primarily an academic exercise, unresponsive to real curriculum needs and problems in the educational system. As a result, books produced by the MOE are generally of poor quality, that too delivered late to the schools each year, leading to the increased use of 'external books' in schools. Despite being expensive compared to free MOE books, these books are sold briskly because of their superior quality of content and physical appearance and ready availability.

Parents who can afford these books willingly pay higher prices despite clear instructions of the MOE's against the purchase and use of these books. Parents assume these to provide an added value to their children in mastering the subject matter and achieving better grades on examinations.

Standards-based education in Egypt

An aspect of Egypt's educational reform programme funded by the USAID and coordinated by both the Ministry of Education and Egyptian universities has been the introduction of standards-based education in public schools. Standards-based education is a process for planning, delivering, monitoring and improving academic programs in which clearly defined academic content standards provide the basis for content in instruction and assessment.

Standards help ensure students learn what is important, rather than allowing textbooks to dictate classroom practice.
Student learning is the focus - aiming for a high and deep level of student understanding that goes beyond traditional textbook-based or lesson-based instruction.

Egypt's MOE has opted for the adoption of standards-based education as commitment to the rights-based approach to education movement, manifested in the National Standards for Education in Egypt and the recently articulated Ministry of Education Vision. These documents provide the key entry point for mainstreaming rights-based education. Rights-based education is based on three principles:

Access to free and compulsory education
Equality, inclusion, and non-discrimination
The right to quality education, content, and process (Tomasevski, 2004).

The Education Reform Program (ERP) represents the USAID's response to the Government of Egypt's effort to reform the education system to support effective schools and improved learning outcomes. It is an is an integrated program working to strengthen community participation, professional development, decentralization, standards based performance, and monitoring and evaluation in order to increase the quality of educational outcomes. It works to establish the systems and capacity to sustain educational quality outcomes on both the national and local level. According to the ERP, a standards-based system of education:

Measures its success based on student learning (the achievement of standards) rather than compliance with rules and regulations.
Aligns policies, initiatives, curriculum, instruction, and assessments with clearly defined academic standards.
Consistently communicates and uses standards to focus on ways to ensure success for all students.
Uses assessment to inform instruction.

The ultimate purpose of standards-based education and the entire programme of education reform endeavours have been set to reforms place the school at the centre of a community-wide effort to enhance the quality of education. Guided by the Egyptian national learning standards, ERP is helping every student in each targeted school to achieve improved learning outcomes. ERP is helping the MOE to design and implement formative assessment activities, and strengthening the knowledge and skills of teachers to assess student achievement throughout the school year. Education managers are being trained to maximize their budgets and improve their planning and decision-making skills, ensuring schools operate more effectively. More than 8,000 teachers and managers will be trained by the end of 2009, in over 250 schools.

Tertiary education

Higher education constitutes a very important institution in the Third World context, not only because it trains elites and provide the basis for a technological society, but because it is the intellectual institution with the most widespread impact on culture, politics and ideology (Altbach, 1987).

However, as the present content and form of current university education practices in Egypt are not commensurate with the world standards, the postulates of political independence, the dominant features of an essentially technological age, or the imperatives of balanced economic development involving rapid industrialisation, university education has retraced back by leaps and bounds. For instance, Cairo University which was ranked as one of the best 500 world class universities, though, is now out of this category, given a retracting educational and research standard of the university, let alone other Egyptian universities which have proliferated just like derelict slums.

In fact, the curriculum heritage of the colonial era, certain key features of the pre- and post-Independence 'period of transformation' influenced the direction of university education curriculum; the irrational proliferation in free public education, the disrespect that the public have for vocational education, and the lack of public desire to work in menial jobs across the post independence in 1952 up till now has caused these anomalies in university education. Youssef (2011: 2) has outlined this educational predicament in the following lines:

Before the 1952 revolution that led to Egypt's

independence, it had been ruled by the Persians, Greeks, Romans, Turks, Arabs, French, and British for centuries. Each former political regime left its mark on the countries it ruled in many ways, rendering most Middle Eastern countries a unique blend of governance, infrastructure and educational systems; professional practices such as medicine, engineering, law, and agriculture; as well as multilingual proficiency and international relations. While virtually all Middle Eastern countries are now politically independent, the influence of this historical progression continues to prevail. For example, outdated British and French curricula are common in the public education system of several Middle Eastern countries.

Furthermore, official policy statements and reports, the rapid quantitative expansion of the secondary school system, policies of a mass university education, the growth of a local secondary education – all such factors have provided a conflicting environment that diminished development in university curriculum policies and created an agitated controversy over the present and future of education in Egypt. The criticisms and the public concern over the quality of education formed the basis for a debate which unfolded during the early 1986, and continued to be frantically hot up till the present day. In the meantime, the educational debate came to be largely subsumed within a broader 'rectification process' which got underway. In fact, both the Egyptian people of all social strata and the intellectual elite have become progressively more alarmed at the spread of various 'errors and negative tendencies' in Egyptian life, such as indiscipline, irresponsibility, corruption, laziness and illegality. Thus, perceiving a distinct decline in morality, the spread of many pernicious trends such as the rise of a new class of avaricious, greedy businessmen, lax application of work norms, and the abuse of material incentives so that salaries became inflated, and the growth of individualist values and the virtual collapse of the voluntary spirit all have contributed to the accretion of corruption in all fields of life, especially in/and because of education.

One can extrapolate the reasons as being deeply rooted in the public educational orientations; there is more focus on teaching humanities more than core sciences; even in science, there is no room allowed for nurturing students' intelligence, powers of observation and creative imagination to develop freely and help them to find their bearings in the world. The reason I posit is that university education authorities lag behind world standards in revising and reforming the content of education in the areas of the curricula, textbooks, and methods so as to take account of Egyptian environment, students' development, cultural heritage and the demands of technological progress and economic development, especially industrialisation.

Although most of the analytic reform has been in the context of the industrial nations, Third World nations have also been involved with academic change and reform. Further, since universities in many countries have been under intense pressure to expand, alter curricula and otherwise adjust to new demands, university reform has been an issue of controversy.

At the most tertiary education level institutions, especially the university, curriculum development is left to the specific trends in universities and their academic counsels. Sometimes, academic departments and individual faculty members revise a college's curriculum on a semester or even annual basis.

Quality assurance and accreditation in higher education

In this trend, commensurate with standards-based reform endeavours, Egyptian higher education quality reform policies have been developed to assure the production of graduates conforming to internationally recognized standards. Implementation of these policies will increase the skills of graduates and enhance their competitive capacity in the national and regional labour market. For these reasons, the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Project (QAAP) was included in the 25 projects agreed upon by the National Higher Education Conference in 2000. The (QAAP) has also been chosen as one of the six higher education (HE) development projects implemented by the end of the year 2002. The academic programmes are considered to be the core of the educational system. It is, therefore, essential that all programmes are specified according to international standards and on the basis of intended learning outcomes (ILOs). It is also essential to demonstrate, by means of an annual report, that the operation of the programmes has resulted in the specified quality and standards being achieved. This must be done with reference to the standards and benchmarks that are carefully chosen by the HE institution in accordance with its mission. These guidelines have been prepared through the (QAAP) aiming at satisfying certain performance standards. They also aim at standardising the concepts among faculty members when compiling the course specifications and reports covered by these guidelines.

CHANGES WITHIN THE EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION

These issues about the quality of education started to evolve soon after the 1952 revolution. Their presence and prominence on the educational agenda in early 1986, when Minister Sorour started his reformatory initiatives and plans of action, suggest that important changes within Egypt's educational revolution had occurred. So in present day's Egypt problems in the educational sector said to centre on the issue of quality, especially the

quality of teachers, teaching, and the learning process, and first and foremost, the curriculum development process had not been anticipated originally.

The point is that concerns over educational quality in Egypt span back to many decades, even before the 1952 revolution. Critics opine that that the quality degenerated due to complex and intertwining factors like rapid expansion, bad planning, poor administration, teacher shortage, and 'an emphasis on enthusiasm and spirit sometimes at the cost of emphasis on standards'. This and the billions of dollars taken as grants from the USAID or as loans from the World Bank , they believed could have been saved by better planning and stricter implementations of such policies.

Consequently, Egyptian authorities were led to implement an overhaul of the educational system that had persisted in the 1990s and 2000s but unfortunately again it was very much similar to what happened under Minister Sorour in terms of reducing elementary schooling duration and modifying school textbooks in desperate attempts at reforming the form. The focus on examinations, grades and promotion rates has produced an anaesthetizing effect on teaching and learning, eventually conducing to the temptation to cheat, given the pressures to succeed. Recent coverage in the Egyptian press highlights an alarming trend in the increasing incidence of cheating, bribery, fraud, and misrepresentations. A related aspect of the emphasis on testing is the increased provision of private tutoring to the students in order to prepare them for the competitive examinations for entrance into pure sciences high schools or universities. As an outsider can observe that this shift of focus of education towards achieving better 'results' has actually caused a decay and distortion in the educational process. Rather than 'educating' the Egyptian youth in the real sense, it has lead to encouraging its limited and narrow view.

Despite the staunch efforts, though ostensibly formal and esoteric to superficial modifications in partially in intricate cover designs or slightly in content, the advantages expected are far less than the world-class standards. This has been clear in international studies that measure and compare students' achievement in mathematics and science (TIMSS). For example, according to results of the TIMSS in 1995, 2003, 2007, and 2011, the achievement levels of Egyptian high school students were even lower than their peers in Syria, Indonesia, Iran, Bahrain, Tunisia, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, etc., and even less lower than European countries or the USA, with Egypt, and most participating African countries in the TIMSS performing significantly lower than the international country mean (Anamuah-Mensah and Mereku, 2011).

The 25th January Revolution: Insinuators for Health and Education Reforms

By this account, one might imagine that the first revolution and its men were broadly indulged in Egypt's educational performance and prospects. However, successive attempts at reform aimed at improving the quantity of educational output rather than the quality of education proffered to the masses, which subjected Egypt's schooling system to tantrums of the most hard-hitting attacks for several years. These criticisms, which were to have many repercussions during 1990s and the 2000s, would be incomprehensible without reference to the goal-fulfilment approach mentioned earlier at the introduction of this paper. Egyptians began to worry and be dubious about the goals of the educational revolution, especially insofar as they are affected by the quality of education, falling in considerable danger. Protestors at Tahrir Square were gravely worried about Egypt's decaying public education and health systems, declared in so many slogans raised at the time of protests. Protesters were primarily dissatisfied with health and educational services, claiming that reforms in these sectors over the past three decades were formal and inattentive to the real needs of the society. The result was a sick and uneducated population, but a population that is sick and uneducated cannot be economically productive. Improving the average productivity of the Egyptian worker must be an immediate priority of a new government and a new president of the country.

According to some authors (Abdel Meguid, 2005; Bishry, 2006; Amin, 2009), Egypt's malaises are deeply sophisticated and intricately intertwined. While those critics and connoisseurs who are specialised in analysing Egypt's predicaments have used different approaches and concepts, they all end up pointing to the same core causes and symptoms. All those authors have identified the absence of a national project, the rise of special interests over national interests, and the unprecedented level of corruption and monopoly of both power and wealth as the major explanatory factors for the deterioration of the now Egypt.

Implications for Reform in Pedagogy and Curriculum Development

The analysis so far has focussed largely upon the terms in which Egypt has been practicing its educational projects and the way it has been indulged in conducting its own self-assessment. However, perhaps the most important feature of the educational debate has remained unstated in our discussion, namely, the fundamental character, success and legitimacy of the educational revolution are not in dispute, the lack or distortion therein caused an agitated controversy over the future of a decadent state. Numerous and critically perilous deficiencies and problems are acknowledged to be the main barriers to educational development; however, it must also be acknowledged that the whole evaluative exercise over the past five years amid two revolutions has aimed at improving the existing system, but it was

short of inaugurating a radical reform or a dramatic new departure, leaving the main problems to gnaw at the bone of the educational system and thence the bones of the entire society. Two observations may help to advance our analysis at this point, one retrospective, the other prospective in character.

The first observation has to do with the debate in the Press and in academia which appears to contain no critical evaluation or re-evaluation of past educational strategies and priorities which presumably contributed to the qualitative problems facing the educational system today in Egypt.

The pursuit of educational democratisation, whereby the expansion of basic provision and the widening of access gave rise to mass education in Third World countries, Egypt prominently included, is not being questioned as far as one can tell. On repeated occasions in the past, given a choice between expansion at the price of quality and quality at the expense of quantity, Egyptian leaders since the first revolution all along to the second revolution have regularly chosen the former (usually claiming, moreover, that no loss of quality would occur in any event) – that is, expanding education in quantity at the cost of quality. One solution to the accumulating problems of education is to strike a balance between quality and quantity. In other words, public expenditure on education must be increased now that public expenditure on education can potentially generate a 'double dividend' vis-a-vis economic development (Bornschier et al., 2005). In other words, "the expansion of the educational system (financed by increasing public expenditure) creates economically useful human capital, which has a direct positive effect on growth" (Bornschier et al., 2005: 507). The other advantage is that creating an open, well spent on educational system can also legitimise social inequality. Bornschier et al. (2005) explain this theory, arguing that "This legitimization of hierarchical positions and unequal incomes reduces the potential for social conflict – an effect that again fosters economic growth in an indirect way" (p. 507).

Other considerations, of course, may have been involved too, such as calculations regarding regime or leadership popularity, or requirements for mass mobilisation, or the prospect of some economic benefit from higher rates of literacy and schooling, at least in the long term. However, the strong commitment to education as a basic right on the part of the revolutionary leadership is unquestionable. It is noteworthy that, while some official as well as unofficial academic alarm over quality was voiced in the Press and in published research over the past four or five decades, it was not until this decade that the most sustained campaign for educational quality has been waged. Any explanation of this phenomenon has to refer to the effective provision and guarantee of a sixth versus fifth grade education for all Egyptian elementary school children as well as the effective provision of efficient literacy programmes for all adult illiterate Egyptians.

The second observation concerns the prospective implications of pushing for educational quality in a way which may confuse 'harder' for 'better'. The raising of standards for examinations and promotions, for example, may provoke a backlash from students and parents, especially if a significant increase in drop-out and repetition problems occurs in coming years. Changing the ideology of the society which has grown accustomed to ever-expanding educational opportunities in order to adapt to a system which may appear to increase the possibilities of educational failure or restricted career choice is a must. Compulsory to is the inculcation that education should not be associated with employment.

The distress over the stricter examinations of the general secondary education certificate may suggest that, in a country in which academic grades, examination success and formal qualifications are vital for gaining access to many occupations, educational leaders will have a hard time persuading young people and their parents that raising standards is in their best interests, however important it may be for economic development and the country's future. The growth of the spirit of individualism in recent years may be more difficult to overcome than those leaders would like, certainly in the short term.

The reform agenda in education is not the same as the reform agenda in many of the other areas of society. In lieu of seeking makeshift reformatory strategies, and temporary solutions of the symptoms rather than the disease, educational leaders should be pre-occupied with reforming philosophy. At this stage of the transition, it is not clear whether the local agenda for education reform had the right priority. There is no evidence that efficiency reforms are more important than pedagogical reforms or that management reforms should precede reforms of curriculum, textbook content and teacher training. In this way, as in many of the developing world countries, the main item on the education reform agenda should be is to rationalize the inherited system. The education research community as well as the larger civil community must have a critical role to play. First they both must accept that the challenge is both legitimate and different from prior development experiences in the aftermath of the first revolution. In addition, they must understand that attention to the problems of the post-revolutionary Egypt in the educational sector in no way reduces the importance of other areas and circumstances that warrant urgent development and upgrading. Experience in one, may well inform the other, but the immediate needs have to do with the educational sector which badly needs to be overhaled. There are few precedents in history when the framing of the future was so clearly in the balance and few times when education was so clearly the critical ingredient to study.

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