

Digitalizing, Deskillling, and Edu 2.0: The Politics of the New Education Reform in Egypt

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Acknowledgements

This Political Economy Country Brief was produced by a team at Communications Development Incorporated, led by Bruce Ross-Larson and including Joe Caponio and Mike Crumplar. The [original research paper](#) was authored by Hania Sobhy under the direction of Alec Gershberg, the RISE Political Economy Team—Adoption (PET-A) research lead.

About this brief

The RISE Programme is a seven-year research effort that seeks to understand what features make education systems coherent and effective in their context and how the complex dynamics within a system allow policies to be successful. RISE had research teams in seven countries: Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Tanzania, and Vietnam. It also commissioned research by education specialists in Chile, Egypt, Kenya, Peru, and South Africa.

Those researchers tested ideas about how the determinants of learning lie more in the realm of politics and particularly in the interests of elites. They focused on how the political conditions have (or have not) put learning at the center of education systems while understanding the challenges of doing so.

Each country team produced a detailed study pursuing answers to two central research questions:

- Did the country prioritise learning over access, and if so, during what periods?
- What role did politics play in the key decisions and how?

The full studies detail their analytical frameworks, their data, and sources (generally interviews, government internal documents and reports, and other local and international publications), and the power of their assessments, given their caveats and limitations. Country briefs extract from the full studies how leadership, governance, teaching, and societal engagement are pertinent to student outcomes.

Introduction

Most countries in the world have declared a commitment to improving educational quality and learning, but few have adopted and implemented the required reforms. Poor learning and poor literacy have become endemic in developing countries, including the Arab region. Egypt in particular has suffered from this assessment. Despite being a regional center for learning throughout most of the 20th century, the quality of education in Egypt has been in continuous decline over the previous decades. Various indicators of learning and equity have been declining even as the system grew steadily to accommodate more than 24 million students. These failures have culminated in Egypt's ranking as the second to last country in the world in student reading abilities in the international PIRLS assessment in 2016. Since then, Egypt has embarked once more on a comprehensive reform program, Edu 2.0, that aims to reverse this decline and raise the quality of learning. In particular, the new reforms attempt to address the problems of rote learning in outdated curricula and obsolete assessment methods in general secondary.

The key reform measures relate to the curriculum, teacher career paths, digital learning, and assessment. Apart from the absence of robust channels for influencing policy, disproportionate attention to the concerns of private school students (10 percent of students) and exams affecting the privileged academic track of general secondary (8 percent of all students) has shaped the conceptualization and implementation of reforms. Key parameters such as international policy adoption, pervasive informality, and poor human resource management have all contributed to the learning crisis and the policies adopted to address it. Curricular reforms that seem promising in advancing learning, at least for the most privileged students, are deemed unlikely to change learning in the system as they do not address the fundamental challenges identified by experts and the literature, in terms of poor resources and very high teacher and classroom shortages. Assessment reforms in the early grades, whose basic orientation is welcomed by experts, also face significant resource limitations.

Deskilling and digitalization-based reforms promoted as surpassing resource limitations and dependence on teachers are doing little to overcome the fundamental resource availability and distribution issues driving the learning crisis. Deskilling is the process of distancing teachers from decisionmaking about daily practices in the classroom and reducing them to using teaching materials and tools prepared centrally—while putting pressure on them to take on more administrative duties and extracurricular activities.¹ Extensive institutional and resource management reforms are essential to the success of recent or future reforms launched by the Egyptian Ministry of Education.

Political settlements and education policy

After independence from the British in the 1950s, the Nasser regime (1952–70) understood state schools to be central to establishing and maintaining the new post-independence political order. It consolidated the role of schools both through massively expanding access to education as well as attaching considerable importance to school curricula as primary means of disseminating the values, symbols, and goals of the July 1952 Revolution in terms of state socialism and Arab nationalism. Education was viewed as a means to transform the social order along more equitable lines and to lead the country and region to a position of economic and political strength.² Relying on the support of the poor and growing middle classes in the Nasser era

entailed a social policy investment and direction focused on the expansion of free public services. The state-socialist and developmental ideologies of the 1950s and 1960s dictated public investment in decent quality social services.

The Sadat era (1970–81) brought about three key developments in Egyptian educational discourse: the focus on “science and faith” as the basis of Egypt’s progress and desired identity, the beginning of the involvement of international agencies in educational policymaking, and the initiation of privatization measures. Educational goals in the Sadat era also began to emphasize adjustment to the market liberalization and the expansion of technical education to absorb 60 percent of secondary students. USAID and the World Bank, along with several other international organizations, began to support the Egyptian government financially.³ By 1980, Egypt became one of the primary beneficiaries of U.S. development aid programs, and, more generally, the donor community and aid agencies started to play an important role in Egyptian policymaking, including in the education sector.

Hosni Mubarak (1981–2011) initiated structural adjustment and economic liberalization policies that had their roots in Sadat’s policies of the 1970s. Social expenditure lagged far behind rapid population growth, declining from 34 percent of GDP in 1982 to an average of 17 percent in the 2000s.⁴ From 2002 onward, under the leadership of Mubarak’s son Gamal, official papers of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) began to claim that the state’s provision of basic services had led to deterioration in their quality, and that the solution was to open education and health to private investment. The so-called New Thought of the party involved finding ways to divest the state from its “burdens” on those fronts.

A new wave of pro-business liberalization and privatization began around 2003 with the appointment of the Nazif government—which was removed by the January 2011 uprising. At this stage, with the removal of long-serving minister Hussein Kamel Bahaa EIDin, the Ministry of Education (MOE) also lost its old guard, ending the influence of figures linked to the secular left on key cultural spheres like education. The relationship with the forces of political Islam is at the core of political settlement and the dynamics in the education sector. Mubarak’s relationship with Islamist forces changed over his rule, and the movement between selective repression and selective toleration and promotion was mirrored in education.⁵ According to a key MOE advisor in the Mubarak era, Ministers in the late Mubarak era were requested to reinstate teachers who had been transferred from their posts due to the promotion of Islamist ideas. Islamist teachers were problematic not only because of propagating an alternative religious ideology among students, but also because of the adoption of approaches that went against the foundations of the curricula. As the advisor put it, “they used to close the science book and talk about the power of the Creator and that iron expands with God’s will.” Overall, there was a retreat from the purging Islamist teachers of the 1990s.

The 2011 uprising is a watershed event in contemporary Egyptian history. The ‘25 January Revolution’, as it is known in Egypt, denotes the peaceful mass demonstrations and the 18-day sit-in in Tahrir Square that led to the removal of Mubarak. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, formally assumed power from the removal of Mubarak in February 2011 until June 2012, when the Muslim Brotherhood candidate was elected as President, who was removed by the military one year later following mass protests against his rule. Freedom of expression and

association witnessed a clear blossoming after the uprising, and significant concessions were made with regard to selected socioeconomic demands, including two waves of salary increases for teachers. However, the neoliberal direction of austerity, subsidy reduction, and privatization has only been strengthened and is seen as the only way to access international credit and prevent bankruptcy. Many of the positive changes in the socioeconomic sphere after the Revolution were either reversed or their effects were undermined by subsequent changes, especially the inflation unleashed by the currency devaluation of 2016 and the subsequent reductions of subsidies on key goods and services.

Despite decades of support from the international community and the increasing influence of global educational discourses, Egypt's educational reforms have met little, if any, success. And they have left the Egyptian education system with its current shortcomings: poor inequitable learning, traditional methods of teaching, rigid centralization, and high-stakes exams.⁶ Reforms championed by international agencies—like decentralization, community schools, public-private partnerships, and school-based management—remained central to education reform in Egypt over the period 1990–2016.⁷ The training and investment in MOE cadres was significantly depleted by the drain of highly qualified personnel into the donor agencies themselves, where salaries and working conditions are better; and highly trained staff were also reshuffled within the ministry, especially with the rapid change of ministers in the post-uprising era.

Drivers of the learning crisis

Education was declared by Mubarak as Egypt's national project and repeatedly expressed as a reform priority, especially from the 1990s onwards. But reduced social spending had devastating consequences for quality and equity, especially considering the steady expansion of the system. It led to both increasing inequality as well as diminished returns to education.⁸ Paradoxically, as measured by the Human Opportunity Index, access to basic services, although unequal, had improved in the decade before the uprisings.⁹ However, the nominal increase in access was accompanied by deterioration of quality and informal privatization. Egypt has clearly achieved higher enrollment in basic education as well as greater access to university education.¹⁰ Enrollment in pre-primary education remains accessible to only one quarter of children, while about one third of youth attend university.

The nominal expansion in access is offset by the decline in quality and equity. In the 2007 TIMSS international ranking, 53 percent of Egyptian 8th grade students did not satisfy the low international benchmark in mathematics¹¹ and 45 percent were also below the lower benchmark in science.¹² This was already lower than Egypt's 2003 rank.¹³ According to the results of national standardized assessment released in 2010, average scores were less than 50 percent in Arabic, science, and mathematics.¹⁴ Egyptian students scored second to last in the world in the 2016 PIRLS international reading assessment.¹⁵ High and unequal levels of household expenditures in private tutoring and tracking into vocational and general secondary schools that depend on high-stakes examinations substantially contribute to unequal learning outcomes.¹⁶ Official achievement data in Egypt show the polarization based on social class/financial ability.¹⁷ Furthermore, inequities in learning opportunities among Egyptian youth are high compared with other countries in absolute levels, and learning gaps appear at early grades.¹⁸

Based on the learning poverty indicator, about 70 percent of children age 10 in Egypt cannot read

a short age-appropriate text with comprehension, which is 14.5 percentage points worse than the average for lower middle-income countries.¹⁹ The crisis of literacy in the system is widely referenced as the biggest manifestation of poor quality.

The learning crisis does not impact students equally across the highly stratified system. Disaggregated data on literacy show how poor reading and writing are more pronounced in rural and disadvantaged schools. In one assessment, 41 percent of rural students could not answer any reading comprehension question correctly (zero scores), while 27 percent of urban students had zero scores.²⁰ A remedial program (*al-Qira'iyya*) was introduced to tackle literacy but was abandoned by the ministry in the latest reform effort. Experts had different views on this program. According to one expert, the program had produced results and had received positive evaluations, but was discontinued because it no longer provided revenue for key entities. An MOE expert noted, however, that elements of the program inform the new curricula introduced under Edu 2.0. Others rejected the basic premise of using remedial programs to solve structural problems. As an ex-MOE advisor put it, “for such institutional failures, the solution is strong teachers, good principles, and greater discipline, not a new phonetics curriculum for teaching Arabic.” The focus on structural change was voiced by various respondents. As one scholar put it, you cannot talk about learning when you have 70 students in class. Another leading scholar linked the poverty of learning to the poverty of Egyptian teachers, the facts that 350,000 classrooms are left without teachers and that public spending is less than half of its constitutionally mandated level.

Public spending is low, inequitably distributed, and skewed toward tertiary education

The deteriorating quality and inefficiency of the system is mainly a result of a long-term shortage of financial resources in the education system.²¹ Real budgetary allocations (in constant prices) witnessed a steady decline between 1981 and 1990, and this entailed a decrease in real public spending per student during the same period.²² Public spending on education in Egypt is low by international and regional standards and has been declining since 2000.²³ Average spending represented only 2.6 percent of GDP from 2009 to 2014, about half the average OECD rate.²⁴ In 2019, Egypt spent 2.3 percent of its GDP on government education, which is lower than both the regional average (4.4 percent) and the average for its income group (4.5 percent).²⁵

The numbers look worse when taking into account spending on pre-university (non/tertiary) education alone, which accounts for only 1.7 percent of GDP, whereas the OECD average is 3.5 percent. Most spending on pre-university education is allocated to salaries—94 percent—and approximately 5 percent goes to purchases of goods and services.²⁶ However, much of this salary expenditure does not go to teachers, especially those working in classrooms. The non-teaching staff rates have been historically high (0.78:1, compared with 0.58: 1 in OECD countries); and overstaffing increased over the 1990s.²⁷ In 2020, practicing teachers accounted for about two-thirds of teachers and less than one third of school staff.²⁸

Public investment in education is not only low—it is also distributed in a way that disadvantages the lower grades, which are critical for developing a learning base, and the poor, especially outside urban centers. Comparing the governorates' shares of pupils enrolled in education to governorates' shares of current educational expenditures indicates that the most disadvantaged governorates are in Upper-Egypt (Fayoum, Minya, Assiut, Sohag), as well as rural Lower Egypt

governorates, while the most favored governorates are metropolitan governorates.²⁹ Since the 2000s, studies have noted that low education spending in the less-favored governorates reduces quality of education and thus earnings in the workplace.³⁰ The absence of equity considerations in educational spending across governorates and the large disparities in teacher wages have been documented in more recent studies.³¹ Spending is also skewed toward university education at the expense of primary and basic education and very poorly targeted at quality improvement.³²

The condition of schools has suffered greatly from this low spending. In the 2000s, the quantitative and qualitative shortage of schools was the most acute problem of the Egyptian educational system.³³ Two decades later, the situation of schools has only become more alarming. Recent official estimates point to the need to construct more than 250,000 new classrooms.³⁴ Egyptian schools suffer from deficiencies that affect student learning, attendance, health, and dignity, including massive shortages leading to high densities, overcrowding and multiple shift schools, very poor maintenance, and a mismatch between needs and actual construction projects.³⁵

Egypt's average classroom density of 44 students/classroom in the primary stage is higher than the average in populous countries like India and China; more than 75 percent of Egyptian students are in classrooms that have over 40 students and 12.7 million children (of whom 7 million are in the primary stage) are enrolled in shift schools that have over-capacity classrooms and a smaller time window for learning—and are deprived of supposedly 'less essential' classes, like arts, music and physical education.³⁶ Especially in the primary stage, such conditions have had a very negative impact on learning, as evidenced by the poor performance of Egyptian children in national and international assessments. The problem of densities is intimately related to teacher hiring. Part of the problem can be solved only by addressing issues around regulations and land allocation.³⁷ However, in parallel to building more schools, large classrooms must be served by two or more teachers in the early grades.

Teacher pay is very low, and teacher shortages very high

Accurately assessing teacher salaries in Egypt, as well as their evolution over time, is very difficult in the absence of official data. As with other government employees, teachers' salaries have fallen substantially in real terms since the 1980s.³⁸ In 2010, the average monthly salary of teachers was EGP 1500.³⁹ This average was equivalent to USD 270 and, when adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP) for better international comparison, amounted to 1,022 \$PPP.⁴⁰ Salaries increased considerably in 2012 and 2014, but these changes were depleted in real terms by waves of inflation, especially following the currency devaluation of 2016. By 2021, the average monthly salary could be estimated at around EGP 3500.⁴¹ This corresponds to about USD 220 and 820 \$PPP; suggesting a significant decline in real salaries relative to 2010. Average salaries in this range are also very low in comparison to other middle- and low-income countries. A monthly salary of 820 \$PPP represents one-fifth of average OECD salaries and one-third to three-quarters of salaries in countries like Turkey, Mexico, and Brazil.⁴²

On another metric, this average salary represents a strikingly low 75 percent of GDP per capita.⁴³ In most middle- and low-income countries, teacher salaries represent 200–700 percent of GDP per capita.⁴⁴ Furthermore, there is little updated information about variations across governorates, as salaries in a handful of governorates, including the capital, can amount to more

than double the national average.⁴⁵ Updated official detailed and disaggregated data are needed to better understand teacher salaries, disparities between teachers, and the implications for shortages and student learning.

A freeze on hiring for the previous decades has led to an accumulation of teacher shortages, so that by October 2019 the Ministry of Education admitted to a massive shortage of 300,000 teachers. It is not clear whether such shortage estimates refer only to existing shortages or include the additional numbers of teachers that should be hired to cover overcrowded preprimary and primary classrooms that are managed by only one teacher and to adequately implement the new reformed curricula. More disaggregated and detailed data are also needed to understand the distribution of shortages across regions and educational stages and their intersections with learning and inequality.

The freeze on hiring is also leading to an aging of the teacher profession. It is compounded by serious problems of poor distribution of qualified teachers, in ways that especially disadvantage the lower grades.⁴⁶ In 2021, the MOE announced initiatives like inviting citizens to work voluntarily or for meager sums like EGP 20 /class (USD\$1.25) without any contractual rights. In the beginning of 2022, a new hiring initiative of 30,000 teachers/year for the following five years had been announced, which would replace a proportion of the teachers expected to retire every year, without addressing much of the existing shortages. There are few data on teacher absenteeism, whether it may be formal or informal (teachers coming to school and signing attendance sheets, but not entering classrooms). Qualitative research has found that as many as half of classes in some schools end up without teachers, in addition to widespread forms of shirking when teachers do enter classrooms.⁴⁷ The widely discussed but undocumented phenomenon of shirking (teachers entering classes but not really teaching the material) is driven by the prevalence of tutoring, as well as poor school resources and teacher motivation. The mix of teacher shortages, absenteeism, and shirking has an arguably devastating impact on learning, especially in disadvantaged schools and early grades. These realities shed light on the forms of institutional collapse, especially when seen in relation with pervasive informal privatization and the forms of shirking and coercion that accompany it.

Privatization has been pervasive and informal

To compensate for low wages, teachers have resorted over the previous decades to supplementing their income through private tutoring, which has amounted to a de-facto privatization of education, especially at the secondary level.⁴⁸ Although tutoring is more prevalent in urban centers like Cairo, the nationwide prevalence of tutoring has been increasing over time across all levels.⁴⁹ Tutoring enrollment has been estimated in 2012 at 43 percent in the primary stage, 61 percent in the preparatory stage, 73 percent in general secondary, 33 percent in technical secondary, and 22 percent in university.⁵⁰ In 2016, an official study found that 69 percent of Egyptian students in public schools have attended private tutoring or official in-school group tutoring.⁵¹ Tutoring here refers not to a few revision lessons or support in specific subjects but to a parallel system that replaces school instruction.

Students who enroll in tutoring do so in four to five subjects in the preparatory and secondary stages,⁵² while 70 percent of those who enroll in tutoring do so over the entire school year.⁵³ Furthermore, a recent nationwide survey has shown that almost 70 percent of students enroll in

private tutoring with their classroom teachers.⁵⁴ This points to the explicit and implicit forms of coercion that students endure to enroll in tutoring with their own schoolteachers who shirk their duties in the classroom.⁵⁵ Private tutoring skews student exposure to only those subjects that warrant tutoring and leads to a devaluation of subjects (and teachers of subjects) like art, music, sports, and civics.

Privatization in education in Egypt thus has to be understood by looking at private tutoring in addition to enrollment in private schools. Private schooling has been growing in its own right since the 1980s. Between 2001 and 2006 alone, the proportions of private classrooms at primary level increased by 31 percent.⁵⁶ And by 2020, private schools still only enrolled 10 percent of students, while more privileged private schools that provide instruction in foreign languages enrolled about 4 percent of students.⁵⁷

Tutoring has therefore created a system that is both very inequitable and very expensive, a fact long realized by international organizations.⁵⁸ Private tutoring perpetuates and exacerbates social stratification,⁵⁹ and the marketization of education worsens learning disparities.⁶⁰ In a survey of primary and preparatory stage teachers, 1 percent stated that they make EGP 10,000 to 15,000 per month from tutoring income, 3.7 percent stated EGP 5,000 to 10,000, and 96.2 percent make less than EGP 5,000.⁶¹

Such figures undermine the commonly voiced argument that any realistic increase in official wages would not compensate teachers for their incomes from tutoring.⁶² It is true that an adequate pay raise would not compensate the highest echelons of tutors (like those catering to private school students in affluent neighborhoods) for the profits they make on the informal (and largely untaxed) market. This does not however apply to the majority of teachers. Nor can tutoring be said to have improved learning. The reliance on formal and informal privatization to compensate for the disinvestment in education has not prevented the steep decline in quality over the past decades. Public disinvestment and privatization have been accompanied only by poor learning.

Memorization, assessment, and higher order skills

The deterioration of learning in Egyptian education has been linked to an exam-driven system that does a poor job at skills development. As reflected in numerous reports, teaching in Egyptian schools is characterized by teacher-centered instruction, rote memorization, little or no emphasis on the development of critical thinking skills, a tendency to overemphasize esoteric details and unimportant distinctions and to pay insufficient attention to core concepts and ideas, and too little connection of learning to real life and contemporary circumstances.⁶³

The focus on memorization and exam performance is not however merely a pedagogical choice that can and should be reformed by educational authorities. It is critically reinforced by poor resources, the accumulation of poor learning in earlier grades, weak teacher preparation, and low trust in the system. Qualitative research inside schools shows how issues around memorization, assessment, privatization, and poor resources interact, and how differently they interact in the less privileged bulk of the system and the more privileged tracks.⁶⁴ For a great proportion of rural and marginalized schools—where teachers are not trained to teach a certain subject, and where students have hardly been able to learn the basics of the subject—

memorization is the only way to pass students from one stage to another. Memorization also functions in parallel to various forms of cheating and automatic transition, which explain the phenomenon of preparatory school students passing from one grade to the next without being able to read.

Where workshops in technical schools have no functioning equipment, the only option might be to memorize a few points for the exam. In turn, exam questions and exam preparation guides are geared to these skills and reward memorization, not higher order participation or communication skills. Rote learning is what happens in the best of classes when the teacher actually enters the classroom and teaches the material. This is not the case in many schools in the disadvantaged bulk of the system. And when the class teacher organizes private tutoring that guarantees their own students good grades, investment in learning could be reduced to the extent of providing only enough instruction to pass the exam. The disinvestment and informal privatization of education in Egypt feed various forms of cheating and inequitable outcomes and cannot be argued to have improved learning for all.

In the privileged sectors of the system, issues of assessment take a different shape and are not linked in the same way to poor literacy, systematic cheating, and lack of equipment. The school leaving exam for the general secondary track has received particular attention in terms of flawed assessment. The general secondary/ *thanawiya amma* exam is used to decide the academic and productive lives of millions of Egyptians despite its flaws, and it has had a markedly negative influence on the educational system as a whole, leading it in the direction of increasingly arbitrary university admissions and placement policies, and magnifying an already existing culture of teaching and tutoring to the exam.⁶⁵

Curriculum reforms from 2007 to Edu 2.0

This deteriorating state of education led to the development of a major reform plan in 2006 that promised a paradigm shift to tackle the key issues in the system.⁶⁶ Another major reform was launched in 2018 with the promise of a new and completely overhauled education system to respond to the marked deterioration of quality and the poor results in international exams. The 2018 reforms, officially referred to as Education 2.0 or Edu. 2.0, are not codified in their own document. Their elements are reflected in the 2014 Strategic Plan⁶⁷ and the Egypt 2030 vision, as well as in the relevant World Bank loan agreement.⁶⁸ Its long-term effects, beyond the significant disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, will become clear only in the coming years. Tracked over the major reform plans of 2007 and 2018, there are clear continuities in the drive to reform curricula and instruction towards student-centered approaches, enhancing the use of ICT, and introducing assessment reform especially for general secondary students, with the dual aims of promoting higher order skills and reducing the reliance on private tutoring.

Between 2007 and 2014, the MOE reiterated its belief that the curriculum it offered was weak and focused on lower order skills. In 2007, the challenges in the area of curriculum were summarized as follows:

- i The focus of the curriculum, and therefore learning, is currently on a narrow definition of knowledge and memorization only, with little or no assessment of high-level cognitive skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

- i There is a lack of participation of teachers in critical discussions about the curriculum and skills needed.
- ii There is an over-emphasis on test-taking skills at the expense of learning how to apply knowledge.⁶⁹

The 2007 reforms included 12 goals, on top of which were “Comprehensive Curriculum and Instructional Technology Reform” detailed along six comprehensive objectives: developing a new curriculum framework, integrating ICT, encouraging critical thinking in partnership with private sector, and restructuring the Curriculum Center for Instructional Materials Development.⁷⁰ The concern with memorization has therefore been voiced for decades by experts and ministry reports without notable progress and continues to be voiced in the latest reform. Another concern that has been consistently voiced by experts and parents is the volume of material in Egyptian curricula relative to a very short school year.

In Edu 2.0, curriculum change was deemed crucial, especially as required by a changing global economy. According to the 2014 National Strategic Plan, “The response to this transition to a knowledge-based economy requires the Egyptian education system to be a source of high skills, which are needed for the workforce, in addition to strengthening the principle of lifelong learning, through a high-quality education and training systems based on ICT. It also requires revisiting the various educational materials and areas of study as well as reviewing the curriculum to instill problem-solving skills, developing technical education, and achieving a better match between the outputs of educational institutions and the requirements of the labor market at all levels.”⁷¹

Education 2.0 reforms clearly go further in instituting announced plans. Curriculum, assessment, and digitalization reforms are under way. New curricula adapted from the International Baccalaureate model have been introduced from KG 1 to grade 3 with the aim of enhancing critical thinking and life-long learning through a student-centered approach. And the use of technology has been further enhanced through the creation of the Egyptian Knowledge Bank and the distribution of tablet computers to general secondary/Thanawiya Amma students, to study their material and take their exams. Education 2.0 will cancel all summative tests until grade 3 and transform the high stakes tests of Thanawiya Amma into the aggregate of grades 10 to 12 through the calculation of a grade point average. However, most experts say that the reforms do not directly tackle the learning crisis.

So...

Beyond serious implementation issues, introducing technology and new curricula to solve problems that are driven by teacher recruitment, compensation, and basic infrastructure is not a new trend. Especially for those with longer involvement in the sector, respondents noted the continuity of trends in the reform agenda, where earlier reforms were not supported with sustained investment or consistent implementation. Over the reform periods, the merit of technology-related reforms has been far more contested than curriculum change, but both are seen as ill-suited for solving the key problems in the system.

The key problems identified in the literature and by the experts interviewed for this report revolve around very low and poorly distributed material and human resources. Ambitious and

modernized learning programs welcomed by most experts remain starved of the resources that can make them succeed. In sum, and in contrast to directions toward deskilling, austerity, and privatization, most respondents believed that reforms should involve investment in strong teachers and expansion in teacher hiring, especially in the primary and preprimary stages. In this particular setting, the views and trajectories of education leaders were not driving the adoption of the learning agenda focused on ICT and new curricula. Rather, the adoption of reforms was shaped by attitudes toward privatization and equity, the constraints of austerity, and the adoption of an international reform agenda.

The study points to the complex relationship between the policies adopted and the views of key stakeholders. On the one hand, the reforms cater to stakeholder preferences for modern and progressive curricula. On the other, there is a vast gulf between how stakeholders see the priorities and prerequisites of reform.

In explaining the development and implementation of the new education policies, most respondents highlighted the absence of equity considerations and limited attention to the conditions of more disadvantaged schools at the core of the learning crisis. In this regard, they questioned the focus on ICT and emphasized the need to prioritize teacher shortages, skills, and school infrastructure as prerequisites for the success of the reforms. Even if many were not familiar with its details, one particular aspect of the reforms—the introduction of new integrated curricula—generated enthusiasm among a number of experts. While curriculum reform was considered a positive step, its expected impact on quality and equity were questioned in light of the poor conditions of the majority of schools. And in contrast with sporadic remote digital training on the new curricula, most respondents stressed the need for extended immersed in-person coaching to enable teachers to deliver the new curricula. The need for hiring teachers to meet the massive shortages was consistently referenced as a prerequisite for success. Most respondents also highlighted the need for improving teacher pay and professional development, in contrast to the deskilling implied in the reliance on ICT for lesson delivery.

In a (unusually) heated parliamentary debate in December 2021, one member of parliament charged that the MOE's reform plans must be referring to another society, not Egypt's, criticizing the vast gap between curriculum reform and the state of the education system with classrooms reaching 120 students and the shortages of chairs, schools, and teachers. Other parliamentarians referenced the massive shortages of teachers, cleaning staff and schools and the waste of state resources implied in investing in ICT, with serious implementation hurdles and no tangible impact on the educational process. Not all views on the new reforms are negative, however. One member of parliament interviewed for this report explained that the MoE is doing its best, that this is a state-sponsored project, not just an MOE project, that it is too soon to evaluate it, and that large investments are needed for schools and teachers. With such recognition of the massive resources needed to make any changes in the system, there might be hope for addressing Egypt's learning crisis.

Annex 1 Indicators of learning for RISE countries

A country's learning adjusted years of school combines the quantity and quality of schooling into a single indicator by multiplying the estimated years of schooling by the ratio of the country's score on the most recent test scores harmonized to 625 (World Bank data for latest year of assessment).

Learning poverty, a combined measure of schooling and learning, is the proportion of children unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10 (World Bank data for 2019).

The Human Capital Index is the amount of human capital that children born today can expect to acquire by the age of 18 given the prevailing risks of poor health and poor education. It combines the likelihood of surviving to school age, the amount of school they will complete and the learning they'll acquire, and whether they leave school ready for further learning and work. For example, a score of 0.5 means that they will be only 50 percent as productive as they might be with complete education and full health—and that their future earning potentials will be 50 percent below what they might have been.⁷²

	Learning adjusted years of school	Learning poverty (%)	Human Capital Index (0–1)
Chile	9.4	27.2	0.7
Egypt	6.5	69.6	0.5
Ethiopia	4.3	90.4	0.4
India	7.1	56.1	0.5
Indonesia	7.5	52.8	0.5
Kenya	8.5	—	0.5
Nigeria	5	—	0.4
Pakistan	5.1	77	0.4
Peru	8.6	44.4	0.6
South Africa	5.6	78.9	0.4
Tanzania	4.5	—	0.4
Vietnam	10.7	18.1	0.7

Note: — = not available.

¹ Gur 2014.

² Ibrahim 2010.

³ Ibrahim 2010.

⁴ El-Meehy 2009.

⁵ Sobhy 2022.

⁶ Ibrahim 2010.

⁷ Allam 2021.

⁸ Education has been substantially devalued in the face of a rapidly increasing supply of educated individuals and limited expansion of demand for educated labor (Salehi-Isfahani, Tunali, and Assaad 2009). As Assaad and Krafft (2014) show, the struggle of youth with a secondary education or higher to make a successful modern transition is a relatively new phenomenon in Egypt.

⁹ Ersado and Aran 2014.

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- ¹⁰ UIS Online.
- ¹¹ Mullis et al. 2007.
- ¹² UNICEF 2015, 39.
- ¹³ MOE 2007, 2014
- ¹⁴ MOE 2010, 2014.
- ¹⁵ Mullis et al. 2017.
- ¹⁶ Ersado and Gignoux 2014, World Bank 2012.
- ¹⁷ UNDP 2010.
- ¹⁸ Ersado and Gignoux 2014.
- ¹⁹ World Bank 2019.
- ²⁰ Egypt, USAID EdData II.
- ²¹ El-Baradei and El-Baradei 2004.
- ²² El-Baradei and El-Baradei 2004.
- ²³ UNESCO 2009, OECD 2015.
- ²⁴ OECD 2015.
- ²⁵ World Bank 2020.
- ²⁶ World Bank 2018.
- ²⁷ El-Baradei and El-Baradei 2004.
- ²⁸ In 2020, the overall ratio of practicing to nonpracticing teachers for public schools was 1.93.
- ²⁹ El-Baradei 2004.
- ³⁰ El-Baradei 2004.
- ³¹ MOE 2010; OECD 2015.
- ³² Assaad 2010, MOE 2007, 2014; OECD 2015.
- ³³ El-Baradei and El-Baradei 2004.
- ³⁴ Abdelbaset 2018.
- ³⁵ Sobhy 2019.
- ³⁶ Sobhy 2019.
- ³⁷ Sobhy 2019.
- ³⁸ Low wages are at the core of Egypt's economic, and social problems and public sector wages have been declining in real terms for decades (Abdelhamid and Baradei 2010).
- ³⁹ MOE 2010.
- ⁴⁰ Sobhy 2022.
- ⁴¹ The Minister of Education declared in a statement to the press in December 2021 that every 36,000 teachers cost the ministry one billion pounds (Minister of Education 2021). This suggests a monthly salary of EGP 2300/ USD 150 or 550 \$PPP. Assuming that the reference is to starting salaries for hiring new teachers to meet shortages and that the average salary towards the middle of the pay scale has been around 1.5 times the starting salary historically, this leads to the rough estimate of EGP 3,500/month. This estimate is consistent with reported teacher salaries circulating in the media in 2020, again in the absence of detailed official figures.
- ⁴² Salaries in \$PPP are obtained from OECD 2018 and 2020.
- ⁴³ GDP per capita LCU for 2020 compared with the estimated annual average salary.
- ⁴⁴ Sandefur 2018.
- ⁴⁵ MOE 2010; OECD 2015.
- ⁴⁶ MOE 2014.
- ⁴⁷ Sobhy 2022.
- ⁴⁸ Sobhy 2012.
- ⁴⁹ Elbadawy 2014.
- ⁵⁰ Elbadawy 2014. It is not clear whether there are gender differences in tutoring expenditures. Interestingly, Ersado and Gignoux (2014) found that families spent almost double the amount on tutoring for girls than for boys. A study published around the same time, however, found no gender differences in spending on tutoring (Sayed and Langsten 2014).
- ⁵¹ Kabadaya 2020.
- ⁵² Sieverding, Krafft, and Elbadawy 2019.

⁵³ Elbadawy 2014. According to one survey, 35 percent of preparatory students and 68 percent of general secondary students reported taking private lessons at the national level at some point, but in Cairo 59 percent and 77 percent did so respectively (Sieverding, Krafft, and Elbadawy 2019).

⁵⁴ Assad and Krafft 2013.

⁵⁵ Sobhy 2012, 2022.

⁵⁶ MOE 2007.

⁵⁷ Private schools remain a small part of the system, but their importance lies in schooling the intellectual, economic, and political elite, especially in language schools and international schools, and the influence of the concerns of the country's more affluent classes on educational policymaking.

⁵⁸ World Bank 1996.

⁵⁹ Bray 2006, Akkari 2010.

⁶⁰ Alcott and Rose 2016.

⁶¹ CAPMAS 2014.

⁶² World Bank 1996.

⁶³ OECD 2015.

⁶⁴ Sobhy 2022.

⁶⁵ OECD 2015, 164.

⁶⁶ MOE 2007.

⁶⁷ MOE 2014.

⁶⁸ World Bank 2018.

⁶⁹ MOE 2007.

⁷⁰ MOE 2007, 99–100.

⁷¹ MOE 2014, 6–7.

⁷² World Bank Human Capital Index for September 2020.

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