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Educational Reform Movement in Egypt towards 2030 Vision: Learning from History to Incorporate New Education

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ABSTRACT : Teaching as a career in Egypt has not been very inviting for many because of its low status as brought by socio-economic factors like low salaries, limited resources for professional development, overpopulated classrooms, among others. Such realities led to the spread of unqualified teachers. As a result, there was a deterioration of the quality of education as a whole. For decades, the teacher has been the center of the educational process in the classroom. The teacher acts as the sole source of knowledge; teachers provide information for students to absorb and memorize. In this one-way method approach of learning, students' roles were limited to receiving information to do well in tests. It is common for students to forget the 'learning' after the test. This system lacks a sense of productivity, critical thinking and information literacy which are crucial components of the next century skills. In order to reconstruct the current situation and aim for a better future, Egypt has developed a new Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS): Egypt Vision 2030. This strategic reform focuses on developing three main national dimensions; one of which is the "Social Dimension" that comprises education, health and justice sectors. The education sector has realized the need to address the problems of the old transmission of knowledge style of teaching. Egypt Vision 2030 embraces the transactional approach in education which promotes knowledge-creation, creativity and critical thinking. Hence, Egypt has started its transformation journey towards a new system of education called "Education 2.0" from the academic year 2018-2019, where students are the center of the learning process, and the learning content will be linked to the needs of the society.

Crucial to the reform of the Egyptian educational system is the establishment of 'Egypt-Japan Schools' (EJS). These pioneer schools adhere to the new Egyptian national curriculum while incorporating the Japanese method of whole-school and whole-child learning known as "Tokkatsu". In relation to this, the Egypt-Japan Education Partnership (EJEP) has been established between Egypt and Japan in 2016 to address the lack of teacher preparation for the new approach, especially with tokkatsu. Through this partnership of over a period of four years, Egyptian teachers will attend a four-week professional development training program at the University of Fukui, Department of Professional Development of Teachers. This training program aims at raising the capacity of teachers needed to develop new teaching methods, and to become reflective practitioners. The first two batches of the training were held from January to February of 2019, and the third batch was in June through to July 2019.

This qualitative reflective research focuses on two critical things: the historical dimension on the background of Egyptian Education System that led to 'Education 2.0 towards 2030 Vision', and the new direction of teacher professional development and student learning to realize the direction of Egypt aiming at educating children capable of building their future and adapting to changing society.

KEYWORDS

Education2.0
Tokkatsu
EJEP
EJS
Professional Learning

1. Introduction on the Background of Education over the Past Decades

1.1. History of the Start of Education

Education in Egypt has not been always in its worst shape. The history of the start of education in Egypt goes back to thousands of years ago to the age of the Pharos when ancient Egyptians prospered in many fields; for example, medicine, engineering, science, astronomy, etc. Writing and documentation was initiated in Egypt when the Pharos decided to document everything on the walls of the temples in Egypt and the papyrus. During the era between 1805-1848, the system of education had witnessed major reforms where schools like current schools were established. Egyptian scientists were dispatched to Europe to convey modern sciences to the west. However, during the 20th century, Egypt underwent rapid changes in the field of Education as a result of many domestic and international wars.

Education has always been free over ages. However, in the 20th century before the Egyptian revolution in 1952, only few of the elites were eligible for free education, leaving the majority of the people to pay a large amount of money to learn. As a result, only those who could afford would join schools for education. In 1962, late president 'Gamal Abdel Nasser' announced the change of the constitution, and declared that education became free from Elementary stage to University stage.

1.2. Deterioration of the Quality of Education

Till the early 70's, free education was considered one of the revolution's major accomplishments. Women started to receive a great deal of education, after a long time of men-centered education. Although the quality of education and its effectiveness were not given great attention at the time, education was still linked to the needs of the society. By late 70's, education at public schools started to fall behind as a result of several internal factors, opening space for private lessons and cram schools to take part in the process of education. The government's attention was spotted onto the private sector and investing in it, which has led to the start of private schools. In this atmosphere, quality of education and development of public schools were neglected, or even "Forgotten".

The past 40 years have witnessed the worst era in the history of education in Egypt. Since the 1980's, the quality of education started to decline rapidly. Free education became pro forma on the outside with no concrete essence on the inside. This situation created a fertile atmosphere for private lessons and cram schools to evolve more. Moreover, the teacher's salary was considered very low compared to other occupations, which soon became a crucial issue. By the early 90's, private and international schools spread all over the country, attracting both teachers and students by offering better education, more advanced facilities and higher salaries for teachers. As a result, over 58% of students relied on private lessons and cram schools. Absence from schools increased, and students would only study to pass the tests (Almasry Alyoum electronic journal, 2017).

2. Investigating Reasons behind Deterioration of Education

For decades, development of public education in schools in Egypt has been neglected. Big class sizes, and lack of teacher's professional learning and development (PLD) programs have been major factors behind the deterioration of public schools which led private schools and international schools to prevail. The teacher has been the center of the education process, cramming the information into the student's mind through transmission mode, where students became mere receivers of information in the classroom. This kind of mentality lacks a sense of productivity and critical thinking; the 21st-century skills which

are key factors for children to be able to adapt to the changing society they live in.

2.1. Low Social Status of Teachers in Egypt

Teaching as a profession in Egypt has not been very tempting, recently. Several factors and reasons are behind this.

A) The grades needed to join the faculty of education are lower than other faculties, e.g. medicine, engineering, pharmacy, dentistry, foreign languages, economics and political sciences, etc. (see table 1) (Alyoum Alsabe' electronic journal, 2017).

Table 1. The required grades to enter university courses

Faculty	Medicine	Engineering	Pharmacy	Dentistry	Foreign Languages	Economics and Political Sciences	Education
Total (410)	403	388	398	399	391	395.5	Below 374

In Egypt, the grades one achieves in high school decide the university, and moreover, the faculty they can join. Therefore, more than learning itself, memorizing for the test became the ultimate goal for everybody to do better in the exams. Challenges became very high and the third year of high school became a nightmare for students and parents as well. Parents have to enroll their children in cram schools and pay a vast amount of money for private lessons for children to be able to join the high-ranked universities and faculties. These high-ranked universities and faculties surpassed others in their high reputation, and this produced a fearful outcome on the society. In a society where people are judged by grades and faculties not by qualifications and skills, students tend to join high-ranked faculties just for the sake of reputation and not because this is what they want to learn. As a result, the faculties shown in table 1 became highly competitive, and in high demand. It has been taken for granted that those who join such faculties are those who are smarter and more intelligent and are expected to have a bright future with a decent and stable profession. On the other hand, those who join low-ranked faculties, such as Education and Law, are known to have achieved less in their exams, regardless of their interest, skills and intelligence. However, it is not always necessary that those who join such faculties have gained lower grades in high school tests, but it has become a prejudice in the society.

B) Lack of professional learning development and necessary training for teachers. Professor Mahmoud Alnaqa, professor of curriculum and pedagogy at Ain Shams University, Egypt says that education field in Egypt is not supported by the necessary professional development training; as number of graduates are increasing on one side, but schools and instructors are not well qualified to carry out this mission on the other side. As a specialized profession like doctors and lawyers, graduates of faculty of Education would receive an educational training after graduation to practice teaching and acquire the necessary skills as teachers (Alahram electronic journal, 2016). However, in 1998, this educational training was cancelled which has led unqualified people to sneak unprofessionally into that field. It became possible for anyone to become a teacher regardless of his/her major. As a result, education lost professionalism, and quality of education deteriorated to its worst (Alwafd electronic journal, 2019).

C) Low salary which does not guarantee a decent life for teachers. A teacher salary in public school is

considered very low compared to other professions. As a result, teachers would look for a second job or reply on private lessons and cram schools to support the needs of their families. This had severe consequences on the performance of teachers and consequently on students in schools. It had limited teachers' opportunities for professional development and personal capacity building. Hence, leading to poor practice and declined performance in public schools.

2.2. High Capacity of Students in Classes

After Egypt's revolution in 1952, late president 'Gamal Abdel Nasser' made changes to the constitution and proclaimed education free for everyone in 1962. By this, it became possible for everyone to receive education for free in public schools. By the increase in population in the 1980's and 1990's, the demand for education increased, too, but the situation had changed. Schools' capacities became limited compared to the number of students admitted. Furthermore, due to internal and external factors, development of education and public schools was given the least attention, hence the problem started to inflate. Teachers faced a large number of students in a very compact space without humane facilities nor proper professional development training. Students sit on the floor at the door side or stand at the back because the classroom does not fit all of them, the teacher explains and transmits the information, and students write in their notebooks behind the teacher. In an atmosphere where both students and teachers suffered, an atmosphere that hindered the development of any communication between students and students, and students and teachers, education became a hard mission and teachers lost interest in any kind of development of their own practice. With this deterioration in the quality of education, the government promoted the establishment of private and international schools as part of the domain political and economic situation at the time. Private schools offered more advanced school facilities, higher salaries for teachers and better quality of education which gave them priority over public schools. Moreover, qualified teachers were accepted in private schools, leaving public schools with nothing but poor quality of education and less qualified teachers. Education became a burden on both sides. Parents whose children go to private school pay a large amount of school fees, while parents who cannot afford private schools had to engage their children in private lessons to compensate for the poor quality of education they receive in public schools. All these factors led to the deterioration of the quality of education over the years.



3. Consequences of Lack of Educational Development and Its Impact on Egypt's International Ranking in Education

As a result of the above-mentioned reasons, Egypt came in the least rank in most of the international educational ranking standards. According to Egypt's Ministry of Education, in 2014-2015, Egypt was ranked 141 out of 140 (out of the ranking) **in the quality of elementary education** ("Alyoum Alsabe' journal", 2017). Moreover, based on the reports and statistics from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, the rate of illiteracy was 25%, the rate of dropout was 7.4%, and the rate of those who do not go to schools was 26.8%. Same reports stated that over 55% of the dropouts are due to social reasons, for example, poverty etc. ("Masry Alyom", 2018). On the other hand, studies showed that graduates are not able to read and write properly (Alahram electronic journal, 2016). As a result, based on TIMMS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) 2015 and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) 2016 results, Egypt ranked at the bottom of the participating countries. More than half of the students did not meet the low benchmark in international learning assessment (UNICEF Egypt). The results showed that Egyptian students came in 49 out of 50 (grade 4 reading), 38 out of 39 (grade 8 science), 34 out of 39 (grade 8 mathematics).

The above data shows where Egypt belongs within international ranking. Egypt came out of ranking in elementary education due to the lack of professional development training for teachers over decades, and the neglect of curriculum development. Elementary education is the base where children learn how to think, communicate and interact with each other. Children should be able to think on their own and learn how to solve any problem they face either by themselves or by collaborating with their friends. It is the role of the teacher to create a learning atmosphere for children and to promote children's active participation in the classroom. However, as mentioned above, without the necessary professional development training that enhances a teacher's capacity and ability to create new methodologies of teaching and to support the self-learning of students, quality of education will continue to decline.

4. Egypt's Vision 2030 Towards Educational Reform

Realizing how critical the situation is, and aiming for a better future for all, a concrete transformation in the fundamental organization of education was needed in order to overcome the uninviting atmosphere of teaching and to create possibilities for a better quality of education.

4.1. Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS): Egypt Vision 2030

In order to reconstruct the current situation and improve the quality of lives and welfare in a more prosperous life, Egypt has planned and developed a sustainable development strategy (SDS): Egypt Vision 2030 since 2014. SDS focuses on three main national integrated pillars. The **Social Dimension** that comprises Social Justice, Health, Education and Training, and Culture; the **Environmental Dimension** that comprises Environment, and Urban Development; and the **Economic Dimension** that comprises Economic Development, Energy, Knowledge, Innovation and Scientific Research, and Transparency and Efficiency of Governmental Institutions.

In this dimension, Egypt has developed a long-term plan that aims at improving the whole organization of education from elementary stage to university stage. In this long-term plan, the government guarantees a high quality of education and training system for all without discrimination within an efficient, sustainable and flexible institutional framework. Moreover, the curriculum has been

developed in a way that promotes cultivating skills and competencies of students and trainees, and empowering them with the recent technology. This will help create a learning atmosphere that enhances creativity and self-learning of students. The new curriculum focuses on developing a proud, creative, responsible and competitive citizen who accepts diversity and differences (SDS: Egypt Vision 2030).

This innovative strategy is expected to renovate the fossilized old-fashioned learning methods that have been followed for tens (10s) of years. The curriculum has been transformed from content-based into competency-based where the concept of continuous learning, not memorizing, is the goal. Teachers will be provided with the necessary professional development training to enhance their capacities in order to be able to deliver the new curriculum using new methodologies. As well, the new curriculum will contribute to creating a new learning atmosphere for students to think creatively and learn to work independently.

4.2. New Education System “Education 2.0”

Egypt Vision 2030 embraces the transactional approach in education which promotes knowledge-creation, creativity and critical thinking. In order to achieve the above targeted goals, the education sector has realized the need to address the problems of the old transmission of knowledge style of teaching. Therefore, Egypt has started its transformation journey towards a new system of education called “Education 2.0 (EDU 2.0)” where students are the center of the learning process, and the learning content will be linked to the needs of the society. EDU 2.0 has been developed to transform the public education system that had been neglected for tens of years in order to raise children capable of building the society. EDU 2.0 has been put into practice since the academic year 2018-2019 on Kindergarten 1, Kindergarten 2 and grade 1 primary students and will continue till 2030. It has been developed to deliver a new curriculum that is relevant to the challenges of the 21st century, and that will bring back learning to the classroom.

The new EDU 2.0 carries some distinctive features that distinguish it from the old system of education. The following table (table 2) summarizes the new modifications that have been applied to the new EDU 2.0.

Table 2. Comparison between old and new systems

Old System	New System “Education 2.0”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher-centered teaching 	Student-centered teaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content-based 	Competency-based
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning for exams 	Learning for life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject-based learning 	Multi-disciplinary learning

The curriculum of the new education system “EDU 2.0” focuses on the student and the new learning methodologies that make the student the center of the learning process instead of being a mere receiver of information. The teacher will facilitate the learning process of the student and provide support when needed. This will bring back the learning atmosphere to the classroom, raise student’s curiosity and inquiry spirit, and develop their learning skills. Moreover, the old system was based on delivering certain contents to the students regardless of their level of understanding. As a result, the majority would memorize for the test and forget everything when the exam is finished. The new EDU 2.0 is designed to

cultivate students' skills and competency by promoting project-based learning and problem-solving activities that enhance student's abilities to search and inquire independently and collaboratively with their peers. Students will engage in active learning to be able to become effective members in the society, and not only to pass the exams. The project-based learning will promote multi-disciplinary learning that will integrate different subjects in a more comprehensive fashion.

4.3. Expectations by 2030 After Implementing the New Education 2.0

As previously mentioned, Egypt came out of ranking in the quality of elementary education in 2014-2015. After implementing the new education system EDU 2.0 that has already been applied from the academic year 2018-2019, Egypt will be expected to regain its power and position in education, and rank within the first 30 countries in the world by 2030. Illiteracy rate (15-35 years old) will be expected to decrease from 28% (current) to 7% (2030). School dropouts for the age 18 and under will decline from 6% (current) to 1% (2030), and the number of accredited pre-university educational institutions will increase from 4.60% (current) to 60% (2030).

5. Educational Reform Movement and Professional Development Training of Teachers

5.1. Conclusion of Egypt-Japan Education Partnership "EJEP"

As mentioned in 2.1, students in Egypt choose the university and the faculty they will join based on their achievement in high school third grade. As a result, schools from early stages have become a challenging place and studying became the ultimate goal for students. Such an atmosphere puts students, teachers and parents as well under great pressure, and limit or even more demolish opportunities to nourish social skills like sociality, cooperation and harmony, and discipline in students. These skills are needed for students to interact with each other and survive in a changing society.

After his visit to Japan in 2016, Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi expressed his admiration towards Japan's education system. As a result, President El-Sisi and Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, concluded their joint partnership on education: Egypt-Japan Education Partnership "EJEP" in Feb. 2016. The two leaders placed a high priority on the cooperation in the area of education including early childhood, basic, technical and higher education as well as scientific research technology and innovation. Both parties aim to nurture human resources by cultivating capacities of teachers in the field of education in order to be able to address and deliver the new education system EDU 2.0 by using new techniques and methods. The new system converts schools from studying places to learning places where students engage in activities that will develop their learning skills as well as their social skills.

5.2. Establishment of Egypt Japan Schools (EJS)

During his visit to Japan, Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi visited different Japanese schools and observed the daily school life of students. He was impressed by the Japanese system of education that focuses not only on learning but also on morals and human aspects. Japan's schools create a suitable environment for students to interact and collaborate with each other on a daily basis. The Japanese curriculum includes a variety of activities in different forms all with the same goal; which is raising student's capacities through independent and collaborative work. President El-Sisi was inspired by the whole system of education in Japan that involves students not only in the learning process but also in many aspects of life within school life, for example, cleaning and lunch preparation.

As a concrete step towards realizing a substantial reform in the field of education, Egypt, supported

by JICA, established Egypt Japan Schools (EJS) in 2017 for Early Childhood and Basic Education. These schools deliver the new Egyptian national curriculum Education 2.0 while incorporating the Japanese concept of whole-school and whole-child learning through special activities, which are known in Japan as “Tokkatsu”. The implementation of tokkatsu contributes to the development of the social, mental, physical and academic skills of Egyptian children in order to be effective members in the society and be able to build their own future.

The government of Egypt established the first 35 schools of EJS in the academic year 2018-2019, and distributed them in different cities and prefectures around Egypt. In the academic year 2019-2020, the number of newly opened EJS reached 41 schools in 24 prefectures, and 2 more schools were expected to open by 2020-2021 to become a total of 43 schools. The government of Egypt announced at the beginning of this project that the goal is to establish 200 ESJ around Egypt in the next few years.

5.3. EJEP as a Professional Development Training Platform

As previously mentioned in 5.1, and in order to realize a fundamental reform in the system of education, the Egypt-Japan Education Partnership (EJEP) was established between Egypt and Japan in 2016. It is a partnership that aims to cultivate and nurture human resources by providing the essential professional development training for teachers and administrators to build their capacities and enhance their skills to be able to deliver the new education system and cope with the new challenges. Through this partnership of over a period of four years, 680 Egyptian teachers and principals will attend a four-week professional development training program at the University of Fukui, Department of Professional Development of Teachers. This training program aims at raising the capacity of teachers to develop new teaching methods, and to become reflective practitioners with focus on tokkatsu and Reflective Lesson Study. In this training program, trainees visit many schools in two or three prefectures including Fukui prefecture and observe different subject classes as well as tokkatsu classes, for example students’ union (Gakkyu Kai or Jidou Kai) and students’ guidance (Gakkyu Shidou). Their main focus is on tokkatsu which is the domain tool for raising independent, responsible and respectful students; and how it is implemented in all subjects and in the daily school life of students. The first batch of the training was held from January to February 2019, the second batch was in June through to July 2019, and the third batch was held from January to February 2020¹.

6. Challenges Teachers Face in EJS While Implementing Tokkatsu

As mentioned before, EJS are schools that deliver the new national curriculum Education 2.0 while implementing the Japanese tokkatsu in education and school life. The idea of establishing Japanese schools was widely accepted by the majority of Egyptian parents; as Japan has always been admired by all Egyptians. However, the concept of tokkatsu was very vague and very unknown to parents and this has led to misunderstanding and conflicts between EJS administrations and parents. Moreover, teachers faced many challenges and problems while implementing tokkatsu in subject classes. As a part of the training program, University of Fukui asks prospective trainees to write a report covering their current practice and situation in their respective schools in order to share the situation and prepare for the training based on their needs. Below are some of the challenges raised by teachers and principals of the first two batches in the reports they submitted to the University of Fukui prior to the training.

Comments from Teachers Reports:

1. The majority of the parents are uncooperative and do not want to play a role in school life.
2. Many parents strongly reject the idea of their children cleaning the school.
3. Parents expect too much from school and do not support their children in the learning process. In other words, learning is the school's sole responsibility.
4. Some teachers are still strained by the principals' decisions, which give them a very limited space to develop new approaches.
5. Curriculum is condensed, and this leads to more focus on teaching than activities.
6. Limited resources and lack of financial aid.
7. There is still a gap between the aimed tokkatsu in Egypt, and the tokkatsu implemented in Japan.

From the teachers' comments, we understand that parents did not enroll their children in EJS based on full understanding of tokkatsu and acceptance of its concept. Parents were only attracted by the idea of enrolling their children in Japanese schools without comprehending the whole new concept of tokkatsu and its implementation on themselves and their children. Most houses and schools are cleaned by maids, hence, the idea of having children clean the school was faced by rejection and complaints. In Japan, parents voluntarily play a big role in school life. For example, watching over children when they commute to school, participating in school events, participating in cleaning the school, etc. On the other hand, parents in Egypt do not play any role in schools, not because they do not want to, but because this is the culture in Egypt and this is how the Egyptians were all raised. Therefore, most of the new ideas either in learning or in school life were faced by complaints from parents.

Such problems were very common mostly within teachers and principals of the first batch; since EJS had just started before the training program started. Teachers and principals were also unaware of the concept and goal of tokkatsu and how it is implemented in school life. They were introduced to very few activities before receiving the training in Japan, therefore, they could not cope with the challenges they faced. However, after attending the training program in Japan, experiencing tokkatsu in different schools, and sharing their experiences and practices with each other and with Japanese staff members, the meaning of tokkatsu became clearer for them and they were able to handle some of the problems they faced before coming to Japan. During the follow-up visit by University of Fukui, they shared their new approaches and practices, and discussed how they dealt with some challenges. For example, some of them started by educating the parents and explaining to them the concept of tokkatsu to eliminate misunderstanding and to earn parents' cooperation in school life. Some started new projects inspired by what they saw in Japan and applied it within what the Egyptian context permits.

7. Prospects for Future Research

This paper discussed the history of education in Egypt and the social circumstances behind the initiation of the reform of education, and the start of a new era in the development of education and educators. EJEP and EJS are considered a part of an essential movement towards realizing Egypt Vision 2030. The author is a member of the executive team of the EJEP professional development training program in Fukui University, and this paper is the start of an ongoing research on creating a sustainable professional development training and establishing communities of practice in EJS.

Notes:

1. The fourth batch was scheduled in June-July 2020, however, due to the novel Corona virus it has been postponed.

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