

The Right to Education amid the Pandemic



Policy Paper

Research and Studies Unit

**The Forum for Development and
Human Rights Dialogue**

July, 2021

DR



Introduction

Egypt has a huge complex education system, in addition to the weakness of the internet infrastructure in many schools. The pandemic has increased the vulnerability of the Egyptian education system and has as well revealed the need for a new system that cope with the future and face its challenges, including disasters and crises.

Among the most prominent variables imposed by the pandemic is its impact on bridging the digital gaps between individuals, state's increased interests in the right to education and right to digital transformation. It has become necessary for countries and organizations to cooperate in order to ensure that the right to education remains a primary right, in light of the current global crises.

The Corona crisis has revealed a flaw in the Egyptian education system, which is the inability of teachers to deal with the situation, altering their positions from creative teachers to basic instructors. Despite the teachers and parents awareness about the importance of education, they were not able to meet the crisis with an adequate and rapid response. The repercussions of Covid-19 on education were visible to the middle and high school students across Egypt, particularly for students in the countryside.

Objectives:

There is no doubt that virtual learning has become necessary, especially in times of crises and epidemics that require social distancing.

This paper is based on the efforts made to confront the pandemic and reduce its repercussions on the educational learning process. The paper also supports the efforts



of the Ministry of Education in developing online learning. Furthermore, the study seeks to reveal the challenges that await education after the health crisis. The paper also attempts to provide recommendations on how to avoid the existing obstacles in the implementation of e-learning in the upcoming school year 2021/2022, in light of the continuity of the pandemic.

The study utilizes a descriptive analytical approach to examine the various aspects related to the crisis, determine on ground facts, analyze the collected data to reveal the findings of the study, and find solutions that help deal with the pandemic.

From the preceding introduction, the study attempts to answer the following questions.

What is the impact of the pandemic on the right to education?

What are the main challenges facing education in light of Covid-19?

What are the proposed solutions that can be used to preserve the right to education in light of the crisis?

The right to education between the United Nations and the Egyptian constitution

The right to education is among the fundamental human rights, and is considered to be a main tool that helps people to get out of poverty and have the opportunity to fully participate in various activities in the society.



Education is among the UN main sustainable development goals. For example, in 2015 the UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, UNFPA, UNDP, UN Women and UNHCR have together organized the World Education Forum 2015 in Incheon, Republic of Korea. It has resulted in the adoption of the Incheon Declaration, which is a vision for education for the next 15 years¹.

The United Nations seeks to protect and promote the right to education as a basic human right. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration stipulates that “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages”. In addition, article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights illustrates the necessity of providing people with the right to receive education.

Moreover, the 2014 Egyptian Constitution, as well, emphasizes on the importance of the right to education. Article 19 stipulates that “Every citizen has the right to education with the aim of building the Egyptian character, maintaining national identity, planting the roots of scientific thinking, developing talents, promoting innovation and establishing civilizational and spiritual values and the concepts of citizenship, tolerance and non- discrimination. The state commits to uphold its aims in education curricula and methods, and to provide education in accordance with global quality criteria. Education is obligatory until the end of the secondary stage or its equivalent. The state grants free education in different stages in state educational institutions as per the law. The state

¹ The “Incheon Declaration” was issued in South Korea in 2015, World Education Forum, where the participating countries have pledged to implement the “Education until 2030” agenda, and stipulated the human right to education and the need to leave no one without education, and recommended that education occupy a leading position at the level national, and that governments bear the primary responsibility for ensuring the success of the implementation, follow-up and evaluation processes.



commits to allocating a percentage of government spending that is no less than 4% of the GDP for education. It will gradually increase this until it reaches global rates”.

The Egyptian Family and Education Spending in light of Covid-19

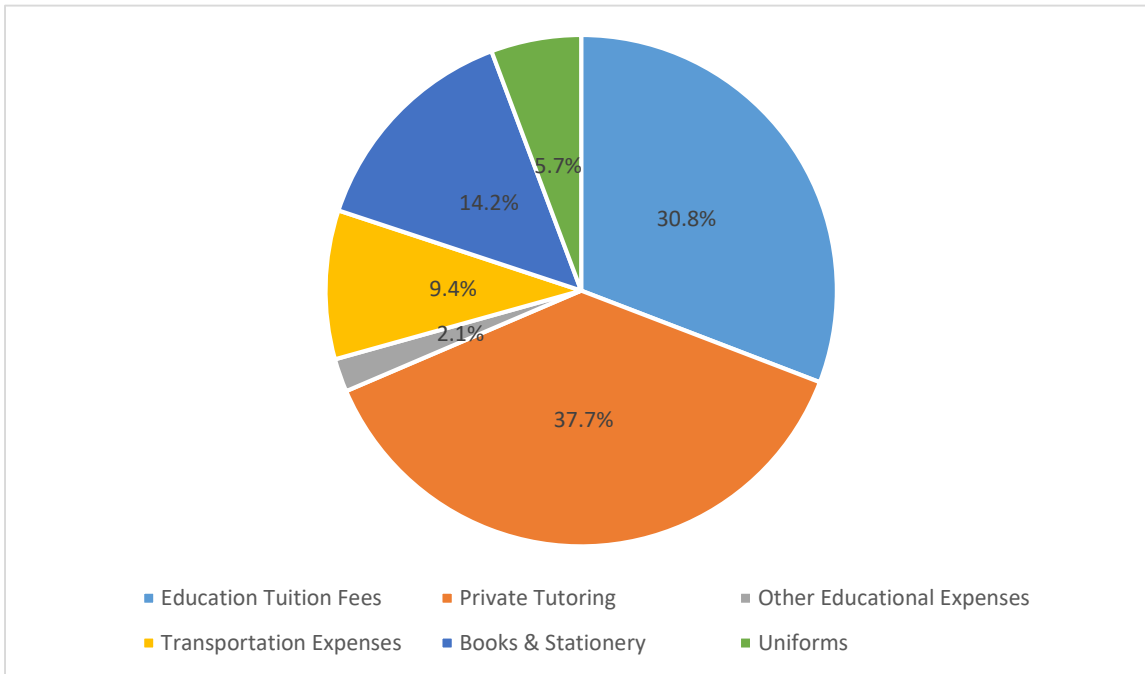
Egypt is considered to have the largest education system in the Middle East. Egypt has made progress in providing Egyptians with international opportunities in order to ensure their right to education. In 2018/2019 the enrollment rates have increased, and almost approached the global enrollment rates.

The allocations for education reached 256 billion EGP for all stages, as education spending is 21% of the 2020/2021 public budget, which is equivalent to 6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Moreover, rural families spend half of what urban families spend on education because of private lessons and tuition fees².

The Corona crisis has added more burdens to the Egyptian family. Families became responsible to supervise their children during their online sessions. The pandemic has also revealed the minimal educational benefit from distance learning, where students resort to private tutoring, and mothers’ lack time to follow up with their children, in addition to the disparity in financial capabilities, where people do not have the same access to technology.

According to the 2020 Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics report, the majority of household spending on education and private lessons have accounted for 37.7%. The tuition fees represented 30.8%. Families spent 14.2% on books and stationary, 9.4% on transportation expenses, and 5.7% on uniforms.

²The Egyptian Center for Economic Studies: The Crisis of Pre-University Education Issue 5, March 2020.



The crisis progressed Egypt towards a new form of education. The pandemic showed the need to set standards to ensure the quality of teaching and educational platforms, which will be a condition for e-learning implementation in times of crisis. The pandemic made it clear that technological interventions in the field of education will continue to play a major role in providing education for future generations.

In light of the pandemic and following the declaration of the Prime Minister's decision 717 of 2020 to suspend all educational institutions in March 2020, the state necessitated its acceleration towards digital education. The education sector with all its stages has benefited from the presence of digital infrastructure and its vitality in the current moment to protect the lives of citizens.



The Ministry of Education launched a number of platforms to ensure that students complete their curricula. The platforms have contributed to the completion of the academic year, although it was not conducted with the hoped-for efficiency, due to the lack of equal access to Internet among families, the limited knowledge of teachers, the limited use of technological and digital tools in education, the misuse of the technology by some students, the poor health conditions in schools and the weakness of the education system.

The Egyptian government, through its digital transformation policy, has resulted in a radical change in the education system and has provided many training programs for teachers in order to enhance their capabilities in using digital platforms. The online platforms created by the Ministry of Educations seeks to facilitate communication between teachers and students. However, the lack of supervision by the Ministry on teachers' performance and the alternation to e-learning have paved the way for students to take private lessons.

The pandemic has become a catalyst for the use of electronic devices and e-learning, as alternative solutions to traditional education. Therefore, e-learning market is expected to increase, with pressures to find solutions to the high cost of internet subscription' fees in light of the global economic decline. For example, the daily wage workers were unable to bear the financial burdens required by e-learning.

Distance learning provides students with many advantages such as, easy access to educational content, breaking the barriers of distance, time saving, and reduces students' classroom density. However, there are also many disadvantages, for example, poor ICT infrastructure, high cost of internet services, lack of interaction between the



teacher and the student, lack of realistic aspects of education, lack of students' commitment to keep up with distance learning and the restriction of the academic content to the theoretical part, which is not accepted by students due to the lack of an interactive environment, and the containment of the teacher's role to educational matters only.

The government's endeavor to develop education is undeniable, as the state has put great efforts to use the digital transformation policy as a mean to develop education and improve learning outcomes. However, on real grounds, the policy included a number of imbalances which requires state intervention to eliminate before it creates an educational catastrophe.

The Right to Education during the Pandemic

The right to education in post-covid19 world requires reformulation in order to include individuals' rights to digital transformation, and to overcome the challenges that impede digital transformation, which can be summarized as follows:

Unequal access to the internet: Despite that digital tools and solutions were the most practical way to mitigate the pandemic repercussions, these tools carry the risks of widening the gap in in education equality, where not all students will have the same access to e-learning. Thus, the increase of digital gap will exacerbates educational inequality and poverty.

Digital gap: Digital gap is related to the ability of students and their parents to interact online and comprehend online content; however, students' of low socio-economic backgrounds interaction could be less oriented toward educational matters.



Digital divide in schools: This relates to the capabilities of each school to provide individual or adjustable and sequential digital learning to suit all students, to promote and monitor participation with these materials, and to provide feedback that helps maximize learning outcomes.

Stagnation of education systems: Developing countries which focus more on certificates than skills, in addition to the increased inequality between students in light of the variation of access to the speed of the internet, have aggravated the digital gap, which in turn affects the quality of distance learning.

Covid-19 Impact on Education Systems on an International Level:

- Inequality in equally benefiting from e-learning platforms, as unstable internet connection is an obstacle to education, especially for students from poor families.
- The unwillingness of parents to help their children learn, especially for families with poor education and limited resources.
- The increase of educational cost due to declining incomes and school closures.

Recommendations

- Modernize technological infrastructure in poor villages, countryside and rural areas, and train teachers in these areas to use modern technology.



- Issue a free and simple educational application to be used by the Ministry for all educational stages to help parents follow up with their children and the school specialist will train parents to use the application easily.
- Activating the role of the monitoring and evaluation department in the Ministry of Education, to train employees on the usage of Internet and digital platforms, in order to monitor teachers' virtual performance.
- Request civil society organizations interested in education issues, in coordination with the School Board of Trustees, to assist parents by providing technological literacy training courses.
- Increase financial resources to develop educational programs and curricula for the upcoming academic year 2021/2022, and use international expertise and international programs to support education programs.
- Increase investments in the villages and governorates of Upper Egypt to modernize the digital infrastructure in light of the state's initiative for distance learning to confront Corona in the future.
- Provide support for educational programs on television channels for students in poor and disadvantaged areas to ensure their inclusion in the distance learning process.
- Use the parallel learning system to officially support the educational process, and broadcast lessons on educational channels in exchange for specified income.
- Benefit from international grants and international organizations (UNICEF and the World Bank), which help to carry out the reforms concerned with the siege and control of the virus.



- Take advantage of international grants and international organizations (UNICEF and the World Bank) that help to carry out reforms to contain and combat the virus.