

School Based Management: An Approach to Improve Learning Outcomes in Egypt

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About the author

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In a nutshell

- Egypt has the worst basic education system worldwide.
- Egypt's decentralization reforms were more rhetoric since the early 1990s.
- There are three institutional features that are crucial for bettering students' performance, which are: Choice and Competition, Decentralization and Autonomy of Schools, and Accountability.
- Today, Egypt needs to implement an integrated and long term strategy for improving learning outcomes, characterized by the adoption of school-based management accompanied with capacity-building in schools, teachers and communities, and taking into account accountability for outcomes.

The achievement of high net enrolment rates in primary education (90.6%) and preparatory education (80.9%) has not been accompanied with improvements in the quality of basic education. Despite the government of Egypt having exerted efforts towards achieving 'Education for All' and the Millennium Development Goals, especially in expanding access to education; Egypt has the worst primary education in the world in terms of quality according to the 2015-2016 Global Competitiveness Report.

Moreover, in reference to the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, Egypt scores in Math declined considerably by about 15 points, from 406 in 2003 to 391 points in 2007, on average. At the same time, science test scores decreased significantly from 421 in 2003 to 408 in 2007 on average. Egypt ranks in the lowest performing countries below the international average in TIMSS, which consequently reflects the low quality of education in eighth grade.

Basic education is the backbone of an economy either in a developed or developing country for poverty reduction and economic growth promotion.

For instance, human capital research highlighted that “one standard deviation difference in [TIMSS] performance equates to two percent per year in average annual growth of GDP per capita.”

In light of the aforementioned, the goal of the current policy brief is to encourage policymakers to adopt school-based management in basic education accompanied with capacity building of schools to reinforce quality improvements in learning outcomes. The school based management system is a decentralization strategy of authority and responsibility delegated to the school-site for shared decision-making at the local level within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, standards and accountabilities.

School-based management and quality of education

The economic literature on determinants of international differences in educational achievement has concluded empirically that schools matter for higher learning outcomes not in terms of conventional inputs. However, the schools’ impact stems from both the teacher quality and institutional structures that accordingly induce incentives. School systems with higher achievement levels enclosed school autonomy accompanied with accountability measures like external exit exams (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2012).

Caldwell (2008) stated that school-based management system aims at offering schools more autonomy and empowering the teachers and parents to make decisions at the local level for bettering students’ achievements. School-based management systems will drive the schools to be more responsive to their local community institutions’ needs and their disadvantaged groups.

The school-based management policy is already in place in most of the developed and some developing countries. In the UK, the primary objective of adopting school-based management was to raise the educational standards through greater parental choice and transfer of control over resources from local education

authorities to the schools themselves, and to help parents make right decisions when it comes to their children’s schools, which probably will stimulate competition between schools. Moreover, in the Philippines the introduction of school-based management had a significant positive effect on average school-level test scores in 23 school districts.

The school is considered the main primary locus and unit of decision-making. Higher participation in school management will lead to greater incentives for education providers to offer more efficient services, as decisions are more taken by closer planners, rather than remote planners, whom are quite familiar with the learners’ obstacles and their educational needs. School-based management systems also solve equity problems, as no more communities are marginalized and they have their effective voice in school management committees and in local community institutions, allowing them to frame priorities and hold school providers to account (Elmelegy, 2015).

School-based management and decision-making

The main focus of school based management has been the decentralization of power. This advances the questions of who at the school site is power given to, and what functions are delegated. Power is shifted most often from the central administration to a council at the school site. Councils may be composed of administrators, teachers, parents, community members and sometimes students.

In this way, school based management empowers groups who typically have not had much power in managing schools. The functions transferred to schools are broadly different from one country to another, and include the following: personnel management, setting teaching methods and some curriculum and textbooks, maintenance and infrastructure, and budget oversight and allocation. The level of autonomy provided to schools differs among and within countries. Schools are granted autonomy based upon

their weakness and strengths driven by the accountability measures set.

Requirements for achieving high-quality decision making through school based management

De Grauwe (2005) ensured that schools should have minimally infrastructure and competent prepared teachers in order to ensure that school based management improves quality. In fact, the introduction of school based management entails some requirements in order to achieve quality of decision making on the school level. This requires, first, developing a holistic integrated policy at the central level to encourage the delegation of authority-shared decision making and professional learning. The requirements should include the following (Elmelegy, 2015; De Grauwe, 2005):

- Devolving authority and resources from central and local educational institutions to school sites and support the delivered authority.
- Empowering local initiatives that aim at making effective and sustainable changes to instruction; however, it should be accompanied with a Monitoring and Evaluation plan.
- Encouraging and enhancing the participation of all stakeholders in the decision-making process through the school council.
- Developing school councils to stipulate and apply the strategies for improvement.
- Promoting the professional development of school principals, head teachers and teachers in order to gain the skills and experience needed for school reform.
- Developing and enhancing the accountability systems in order to reinforce the participation of all stakeholders in decision-making and the success of decentralization.

The support provided should be regular and consistent in order to ensure significance and sustainable

capacities. An essential point the government has to bear in mind while introducing school based management is that teachers and schools will not only need a capacity-building environment but also positive working conditions that include incentives and the creation of motivational posts. Egypt's government should necessarily develop a flexible grant for the adoption of school based management, offering schools autonomy based on their students' scores. Higher performing schools will earn the privilege of local autonomy, while lower-performing schools will receive lower levels of autonomy until they can build the needed capacities to promote quality improvements.

Finally, the current transition period of the country entails the urgent need for remedying the education system so that it is aligned with Egypt's national development plan. However, this won't take place without a strong political will and rigid accountability system when it comes to education to foster efficiency and the quality of the system. Admittedly, El Baradei (2012) highlighted that weak political will, poor monitoring agencies, input-based evaluations and absence of accountability systems have severe influences on internal and external efficiency in Egypt's education system.

Further reading

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