

Reform of Higher Education Institutes in Egypt

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Higher Education in Egypt

Higher education in Egypt leading to a bachelor's degree is accessible through the high number and variety of higher education establishments in the country. This variety of institutions includes 23 public universities (established and run by the government), 22 private universities (established and run by private consortiums sometimes in collaboration with foreign higher education colleges or universities, e.g., the British or German or Russian universities), and 150 private higher education institutes (established and run by non-governmental organizations). Students also have the choice to obtain degrees from the Workers University Al-Azhar University (in which enrollment is limited to graduates of the Al-Azhar school system) and the Egyptian E-Learning University. Alternatively, students can join the open learning programs offered by a number of public universities (e.g., Cairo university has many open learning programs in the liberal arts).

All institutions of higher education in Egypt operate under the umbrella of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). The Ministry grants operating licenses and recognizes degrees offered. Many new institutes were recently established delivering large numbers of graduates annually. Employers and syndicates expressed disappointment about the knowledge and skills of institutes' graduates. This was attributed to the lack of control by the Ministry over the teaching and learning processes taking place in the higher education institutes. This article discusses the new systems being introduced to the private higher education institutes in order to monitor, develop, and enhance the teaching and learning processes.

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Background on Private Higher Education Institutions

The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) issues operating licenses to new institutions after submitting all necessary paperwork and conducting a site inspection by a team of experienced professors. Up until 1989 there were only four private higher education institutions; however the number of institutes continued to increase in yearly bases. At the turn of the century, there was a surge in the number of licenses issued to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) wishing to establish higher education institutes. These institutions were viewed as a good alternative to public universities, as they appeared to provide a solution toward reducing demand pressures on them.

Graduates of these institutions are awarded degrees that are recognized by the Supreme Council of Universities; hence, they can become members of professional syndicates and join the work force. The number of private higher education students by type of major offered as of March 2014, is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONS

Specialization	Number of Enrolled Students
Business	175,693
Engineering	67,560
Hotel and Tourism	14,981
Social Work	79,143
Liberal Arts	3,638
Mass Communication	3,757
Applied Arts	1,902
Agriculture	8,073
Nursing	86

The distribution of institutes across the Egyptian governorates shows that 70 percent of these institutes operate in four cities which include the three cities of Greater Cairo Metropolitan (Cairo, Giza and Qalyubia), and Alexandria, the second largest city in Egypt. Very few institutes were founded in governorates with high poverty rates even when there are high population rates such as in the locations of Minya, Asyut, and Qena. This may be due to the lack of any student loans and financial aid, which deter needy students from enrolling in any higher education institutes especially private institutes. Student numbers suggest that students do not enroll in degrees that are in demand for the job market.

The Status of Higher Education Institutes Prior to 2013

Prior to 2013, the Ministry of Higher Education did not specify where the higher education institutions would be located or what degree programs needed to be offered by the new academic establishments. The decisions pertaining to these two critical issues were usually in the hands of the trustees of the founding NGO. In addition, the Ministry did not have any sort of monitoring system of the educational process in the institutes. All institutes lacked internal quality assurance systems. Accreditation was rather foreign to these institutes as none of them had sought accreditation. There were also problems in the number of students admitted, as observations revealed that most of these institutions were accepting more students than their actual capacity. This practice resulted in the general deterioration of the quality of higher education.

The quality of new graduates has been a concern that was raised by professionals in the field. The professional syndicates were increasingly becoming unsatisfied with the academic standards of the new institutes' graduates. For example, the Engineering Syndicate was considering denying graduates the right to membership.

Reform Initiatives

Strategic planning for higher education institutions is one of the reform initiatives introduced in an attempt

to address the issue of quality in education in the country. These strategic plans were drawn to identify specialties needed and geographic locations for new campuses. Student admissions for 2013-2014 were based on the number of faculty members and the surface area of educational facilities within each institute (Decree by Council of Higher Education Institutes at 29-1-2013 meeting). The Council of Higher Education agreed upon a plan to increase the faculty/student ratio for each educational specialty as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
APPROVED PLAN FOR FACULTY/STUDENT RATIO FOR
EDUCATIONAL SPECIALTIES AND FUTURE ACADEMIC YEARS

Educational Specialty	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Applied arts, engineering, agriculture and nursing	1: 75	1: 60	1: 50
Mass communication, liberal arts	1: 100	1: 80	1: 60
Social work, hotel and tourism and business	1: 150	1: 120	1: 100

In addition to the above decree to reform admission to private higher education institutions, there were other decrees issued during the year 2013 that aimed to improve the quality of education in these institutions as follows:

- Ministerial Decree No. 446 dated 19-2-2013 declared the need to establish a strict system for monitoring and control of the education process in all higher education institutes.
- Ministerial Decree No. 1945, dated 31-7-2013, made it obligatory for institutes to qualify for institutional and program accreditation. This was followed by Ministerial Decree 4445 dated 23-11-2013 which instructed institutes to seek technical support from the Projects Management Unit in the Ministry of Higher Education, in order to qualify for accreditation.

Monitoring and Control System

According to the Law No. 52 issued in 1970, the Ministry has the right to control and supervise all the affairs of institutions, such as educational matters, financial procedures, organizational functions and the like. However, the Ministry did not exercise this right until 2013. This monitoring system was set up and operated by the Ministerial Decree No. 446 dated February 19, 2013. It involves carrying out systematic visits to the institutes by reviewers appointed by the Ministry. It is worth noting that the reviewers are appointed as "Ministry Representatives" in the board of each institution they review. The details of the visits are as follows:

- One visit is to occur before the semester starts to evaluate the completeness of the course schedule, qualifications of part-time teaching staff, adequacy of teaching and learning facilities, and to ensure the institute is complying with health and safety measures.
- Up to three subsequent visits are to occur during the semester to check the compliance of the institutes with all procedures and educational standards including adherence to the scheduled courses and practicums, student's course work, student attendance, student complaints, and academic staff commitment. The reviewers visit the institute without prior notice during the semester.
- One visit is to occur during the final exams to check exam committees, behavior in the exam halls, cheating and chaos prevention measures, in addition to observing how exam papers are handled and processed. This visit takes place without prior arrangement.
- A last visit is to occur after the test results are released to ensure fair and ethical student evaluations.

The reviewers complete a standard check list, record their comments and sometimes also write a short report after each visit. Follow up letters are sent from the "Monitoring Department" at the Ministry to the institutes after each visit to inform them of the correc-

tive measures needed, if any. Reviewers make sure that any corrective measures are put into action during subsequent visits. The cycle is repeated every semester to ensure continuous development and improvement.

Today, there are 66 reviewers applying this monitoring system, which covers all institutions across Egypt. All of the reviewers are "faculty members" with long teaching experience in public universities. Most of them are full professors, some of them are former or current heads of departments, vice deans or deans at their public universities. It also happens that a vice chancellor is appointed as reviewer, which is usually seen as a great honor to the monitoring and control system. Each reviewer is assigned up to four institutions; however a committee of two to five members may be assigned to large institutions.

Applying Quality Assurance Measures and Seeking Accreditation in Higher Education Institutes

Projects Management Unit (PMU) was established in 2002 after the National Conference for Education Development with the aim of reforming higher education in Egypt and addressing the 21st century challenges as announced in the Bologna process principles (1999) and in Prague (2001). It is a special unit operating within the Ministry of Higher Education in Egypt reporting directly to the Minister of Higher Education. One of the key projects that PMU has worked on was "Continuous Improvement and Qualifying for Accreditation CIQAP." The aim of this project was to provide technical support, monitor and evaluate the implementation of operational plans, which would lead to accreditation. PMU has, until November 2013, only worked with "Government Universities." However, since 2013 all higher education institutions were given the chance to seek support from PMU (Ministerial Decree 4445, dated November 23, 2013). A new project was launched: Competitive Excellence Project of Higher Education Institutions (CEPHEI). This project aims to increase the competitiveness of the Egyptian institutions of higher education in the international and regional job markets by:

- Promoting excellence and innovative practices in the fields of education, scientific research and society services.
- Facilitating sustainable development of the financial resources of higher education institutions.
- Creating and activating the channels of communication with civil society organizations, and national, and international higher education providers.

A series of meetings to cultivate awareness took place in December 2013 to introduce the technical support scheme. Representatives from all institutes attended those PMU meetings. Most institutes have now established a "Quality Assurance Unit" and are beginning to apply the accreditation requirements.

Concluding Remarks and Vision for the Future

The monitoring system has identified many problems and irregularities in the teaching and learning process. Change is being resisted by institutes, but the Ministry is determined to make progress by implementing the reviewers' recommendations. The review check lists, used by reviewers during the visits, are evaluated following each semester to refine the review system and make it more efficient and thorough. Requiring institutes to seek accreditation is another way to improve the academic standard of graduates. The concept of higher education accreditation is a recent development in the practices of education being introduced in Egypt. The institutes are likely to gradually employ these monitoring measures as the number of institutions that obtain accreditation represent institutions of higher quality based on the status of being a recognized accredited higher education institution. In addition, all Egyptians need to realize that unless quality education is offered and valued in this society, development plans will be hindered. It is the Ministry's vision that, in the future, private higher education institutions should serve national and international societies by offering distinguished education in co-operation with international education bodies.

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