Evaluating Educational Leadership within the Egyptian Pre-university Education Sector: International Organizations' Perspectives

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Abstract
This article aims at evaluating and realizing a better understanding of the educational leadership at the Egyptian pre-university education sector from the perspectives of international organizations' officials. Building on qualitative data gathered from interviewing twelve international organizations' officials, it discusses how educational leaders are selected; how they perform; and what challenges prevent them from contributing to the sector in a more effective way. The article suggests that the education sector may invest more in building its leadership capacity, utilize its human resources in more effective and efficient ways, develop an effective and updated database that provides accurate data on all employees. It concludes with a set of recommendations that may be considered by the government of Egypt and the Ministry of Education to enhance educational leadership and its performance.

Keywords: *Leadership, International organizations, Pre-university education sector, Egypt.*

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Introduction

This article aims at evaluating and realizing a better understanding of the educational leadership at the Egyptian pre-university education sector from the perspectives of international organizations' officials. It discusses how educational leaders are selected and how they perform; and what challenges prevent them from contributing to the sector in a more effective way.

Leadership can be crucial for setting and maintaining clear ground rules, building trust, facilitating dialogue, and exploring mutual gains. It is a critical factor in bringing different parties to the table and steering them through the rough patches of the collaborative process (Ansell & Gash, 2007). Many authors in education think that leadership is required at all levels of the sector and cannot be limited to one level or another (Webber, Bosetti & Johnson, 1993).

Leaders can enhance the performance of their organizations in many ways. Sergiovanni (1999) explains that leaders develop visions of what is desirable for their organizations and focus on missions related to their present work. Being involved in and accountable for organizational activities, leaders bring an intensity of desire, commitment, and enthusiasm that make them different from other employees. They bring a freshness of thought, a set of new ideas, and a belief in a creative change.

Leadership is an essential requirement for the success of any organization. Developing effective institutional leadership requires professional evaluations that assess methods of selection, recruitment, training, ethics and cooperative conduct in addition to technical expertise and managerial competence. Two negative political factors affect and conflict with developing effective leadership capacity of competence and integrity. The first is favoritism and nepotism in the appointments of

senior positions. The second is political leaders' obsession with loyalty, leading to the maintenance of a strong hold on all powers of decision-making (Jreisat, 2012).

According to the author's knowledge, literature on educational leadership in the Egyptian pre-university education is very weak. That may be understood in the light of the lack of effective databases related to educational leaders; their section; and performance; the sensitivity of this issue that may include the criticism of educational leaders and their performance.

This article is presented according to the following sections: Method, Findings, Discussion, and Recommendations.

Method

This article adopts a qualitative method and builds on data gathered originally for my thesis that aimed at reaching strategies for enhancing governance of the Egyptian pre-university education sector that adopted a conceptual framework based on the definition of governance introduced by Pierre (2000) that suggests governance is the process of "sustaining coordination and coherence among a wide variety of actors with different purposes and objectives such as political actors and institutions, corporate interests, civil society and transnational organizations" (pp. 3-4). The thesis reviewed the contributions of *key participators in pre-university education in Egypt* while focusing on three areas of intervention: Leadership; Partnership and Participation.

The primary goal of qualitative methods is to reach valid information regarding a certain phenomenon through exploring, identifying, engaging and observing individuals who are involved with, influenced by, or familiar with the investigated phenomenon (Moore & Flowers, 2002; O'Brien, S. 2008).

Picciano (2004) suggests that: "Qualitative research relies on meanings, concepts, context, descriptions and settings" (p. 32). Qualitative research does not have a precise meaning and it represents a wide umbrella covering a broad set of

interpretative approaches that aim at investigating in depth different phenomena in social sciences (Van, 1983).

Participants

Twelve officials working for international organizations on education sector in Egypt were interviewed, three from the United Nations (UN) organizations and nine from international donor agencies; ten with an Egyptian background, one European and one Asian; seven women and five men.

They all received educational credentials of high quality with at least a master's degree; 50% of the interviewees had completed their doctoral degrees at western universities; and four of them held the rank of a university professor. Names of the interviewees were changed in a systematic way without any reference to their real names, identifying information or their organizations.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews, transcripts were then sent back to participants to check for validity and verification. They were informed that it was completely up to them to add, delete, change or edit the transcript with the aim of improving and focusing their contributions. A final version of the transcripts was reached in the light of the received feedback. Data were then presented according to the following main themes: Leadership, Partnership, Participation, Governance diagnosis and Governance dynamics. More sub-themes were identified later. This article focuses on the area of educational leadership.

Study Questions

The questions of the semi-structured interviews of the original study focused on governance and management of the pre-university education in Egypt. Those questions were reviewed and enhanced based on the comments and feedback received from UNESCO IIEP and OISE professors. A final version of the semi-

structured interview questions consisted of twelve questions distributed among four main categories.

The first category's title is Demographic Data and focuses on collecting data of the participants related to their organizations, positions, highest level of education, number of years of professional experiences, number of years working for international organizations, number of years working in the current organization, number of years working in education sector, and number of years working in Egypt.

The title of the second category is Organization and Governance and it is concerned with participants' roles in their organizations; areas of their organizations' cooperation with the Ministry of Education (MOE); and their organizations' contributions to education governance reforms in Egypt and internationally.

The third category is focused on Perspectives on Egyptian Education Governance and Management and covers the themes of 1) leadership, political and educational; 2) partnership, covering international organizations and the private sector and; 3) participation, focusing on local communities, the BOTs and NGOs. It also addresses governance strengths and weaknesses and seeks to identify the priorities of the Government of Egypt and the MOE to enhance education governance and management.

The title of the fourth category is Final Questions and is composed of a couple of concluding questions that seek final thoughts or concluding comments from participants. This section also requested the nomination of other potential candidates to participate in the study.

The sequence of interview questions was not always the same in each interview. In many cases participants jumped to cover certain areas even before they were asked, probably for moving to other themes they felt more comfortable talking about or for avoiding discussing certain issues in more details. This meant I skipped over later questions that were related to areas already covered by interviewees.

Questions related to the area of educational leadership included: How do you assess the pre-university education sector regarding its educational leadership; its selection and performance? What are the strengths of governance and management of the Egyptian pre-university education sector? What are the weaknesses of governance and management of the pre-university education sector? What should be the top priorities of the MOE to enhance governance and management of the pre-university education sector? Are there any particular strategies that can be adopted by the Egyptian Government to enhance education governance and management?

Findings

Findings of this article are presented according to the following themes: Educational Leadership Selection, Educational Leadership Performance and Educational Leadership Challenges. More sub-themes were realized.

Educational Leadership Selection

Educational Leadership Selection is presented according to the following sub-themes: Supply; Seniority; and Corruption and Lack of Clear Selection Criteria.

Supply

Though the MOE's staff hold higher education degrees, they are not necessarily in the areas that may qualify them to operate professionally. Moreover, training opportunities available for those outside the central Ministry are even more limited except when donor projects require specific training (The World Bank, 2007).

Working in the education sector is not attractive to a lot of candidates, this is especially true for those who possess high quality education and strong professional qualifications. Indeed, such qualifications mean candidates can work for other organizations that can offer better employment conditions. The education sector is well known for its weak revenues compared to other governmental sectors such as finance, oil, and tourism. Additionally, education leaders find themselves under continuous waves of attacks and criticism from the media and press.

Adam (an interviewee) explains that recruiting high caliber leaders and staff is not an easy task for the Government of Egypt or the MOE. He states:

> Recruiting leaders for the Government is not an easy task. The supply is diminishing. I understand that the Government tries to approach different high caliber people to be Ministers and they refuse given the socio-economic political environment and at the same time as a result of the implementation of the maximum wage in the government. This is one of the challenges the Government is facing: How to make public services in general or making political position more appealing to good caliber. It is not related only to the Ministry of Education, but it is applicable to all Ministries.

Even the highest post within the sector, the Minister of Education, is no longer attractive for a lot of candidates. According to Education in Egypt (2016), President El-Sisi stated in one of his addresses that there are experts and specialists in the Presidency, probably referring to the members of the Presidential Council on Education and Scientific Research, who possess clear visions, strong experiences and respectable plans to develop education, however, when asked to take the responsibility of the MOE, they refuse.

Suzanne (an interviewee) talks about several problems related to senior posts like Minister's advisors and deputies. According to her, on many occasions, they are often externally hired from universities and research centers whose background and expertise are primarily focused on and related to academia. She notes:

> Sometimes, they are well-qualified. Sometimes they are not. As I understand and as I see, they come from recommendations. Some of them manage to understand their tasks. But at the time they start working, they are released from their jobs because the Ministry changed. What I see, they come mainly from higher education. This is the norm that I can see with my eyes and I do not know what their qualifications

are. My problem with higher education, they come as professors. There is a big difference between managing your class and managing an education system. Education system people are those who studied education and have been working in the development of education. They are exposed to its different aspects.

Adam puts forward arguments that justify why building the capacity of the MOE and other management levels should be given more attention. Adam especially suggests that if there is any improvement or development, it will come from inside the sector. For this reason, he recommends that the MOE should invest more generously in selecting and developing its capacity instead of composing external committees who do not have adequate knowledge of the sector or the commitment that those within the MOE have. He states:

I think the change will come from the Ministry of Education itself. If we have leadership, good management, at the Ministry of Education, that will have better results. Because education is one of the areas and sectors in Egypt that receives a lot of attention over time specially from international donors. As a result, we can talk about a series of diagnostic analysis of all aspects of the pre-university education in Egypt. This is why most people working in the Ministry of Education do understand exactly what is going on and they understand what main reforms that should be taken. The issue here is to implement, to have a commitment and work on the expected resistance for this kind of change. I think the investment in the Ministry itself is better than creating steering or supreme committees working on the pre-university education specially if there is a strategy.

Adam suggests that the Egyptian Government has to exert more efforts to attract a higher caliber staff indicating that it is a profitable investment. He explains:

The Government needs to think how to attract a higher caliber because we are talking about a sector with positive externalities. It is now a very established relationship. Spending more in pre-university education, increasing education level, lead to economic growth and less poverty and so on. So, I think investment in the caliber and investment in management is an issue the Government and the Ministry of Education need to work on.

From my personal experience, I saw it takes a lot of time and effort from the externally appointed leaders to understand what is going on around them, and when they start to understand, it is the time for a new change. On many occasions, those externally hired senior staff request to leave after spending short periods of time in the MOE for different reasons including their inability to cope with the rigidness and bureaucracy within the sector; the resistance they face from the MOE's internal staff who probably feel they are in a better position and possess more related and intensive experience to take those senior posts; and the huge workload they have to tackle due to the size of the sector

Seniority

While trust and connections represent the most important factors in recruiting external senior educational leaders, seniority is probably the most crucial factor in promoting internal staff to leadership posts. Seniority becomes a real concern and challenge in the promotion of internal employees; especially when they do not necessarily have the required experiences and adequate qualifications to manage their departments in a satisfactory way.

The late promotion of internal employees within the sector is another challenge as they are frequently promoted to leadership positions too late, probably just one or two years before their retirement at the age of sixty. Having spent the majority of their careers away from decision-making and leadership responsibilities, they cannot be effective, innovative, or visionary leaders. They experience a lack of confidence

and power to make a real change. Thus, effectively managing their departments is a very tough and serious challenge to them and the sector.

Sarah (an interviewee) indicates that seniority is the basic principle employed in the selection educational leaders. The risk of relying mainly on seniority as a criterion for selecting educational leaders may lead to a situation where the least effective candidates are promoted to the highest senior leadership positions; and this often occurs at the expense of others who are more qualified but with fewer number of years in service.

Sarah explains:

> [Leaders] are selected mainly by seniority. That is a fact. Only using seniority means you do not necessarily get the best people in leadership positions. You need to be more selective and invest more in developing those leaders. I think the Government needs to invest more in better selecting and developing those leaders. You do not wake up in the morning and find leaders. You have to prepare them since they join the system. Your selection is very important. You pick those that have the caliber to become leaders, you invest in building their capacity, train them and then give them the chance to apply for leadership positions.

While Sarah suggests that leaders should be prepared, and their making is a continuous process that starts with selecting the best candidates and continuously investing in them, Jack (an interviewee) indicates that using seniority as the base for the promotion to leadership positions within the education sector cannot be avoided. Indeed, he states that governmental administrative system is based on seniority when he says:

> I think the Ministry works under certain way or a hierarchy. But, I know the administrative system within the Government or within the country is basically relying on seniority of people. So, this is something that is not

easy to veer from. I know that is something maybe the Ministry likes to change but law may not allow to make different changes.

However, the governmental administrative systems can be reviewed, revised and changed with the aim of realizing national development goals and enhancing the performance of different public sectors including education. Sarah, for example, presents a similar point of view and stresses the necessity to review legal and regulatory frameworks. For Sarah: "Laws related to recruitment and promotions should be revisited to be performance-based not seniority-based".

Seniority maybe considered as preference criterion between two candidates where they possess equal or similar academic qualifications and professional experiences. In such a case, seniority may be accepted as a criterion for selecting leaders provided that it is not the only criterion of selection. Other criteria such as candidates' academic qualifications, professional development programs, actual experiences and major achievements should be considered as well.

There are a number of leadership programs that are occasionally implemented in collaboration with national and international partners to build leadership capacities within the education sector at central and local levels. However, those programs are normally scattered initiatives that lack vision, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. One example is the Middle Management Training Abroad (MMTA) that was supported by the European Union and implemented in two main stages. The first stage was implemented in two months in Ain Shams University in Cairo and the second stage lasted other two months and was implemented in several British universities. However, trainees returned to their regular jobs and were not given the chance to practise what they gained from that program.

The lack of effectiveness and efficiency of such programs may be due to the fact that there are no accurate and effective databases to enable decision-makers to utilize the available human resources; including those who participated in advanced professional development programs. Those who attend such programs are not

necessarily given leadership posts in which they can implement their knowledge and skills. In this way, many professional development programs can just be seen as a waste of the sector's resources.

Corruption and Lack of Clear Selection Criteria

Conventional government corruption was one of the main reasons for the revolution on January 25th, 2011. Government corruption in this context can be defined as the abuse of public office for private gain (Yingling & Arafa, 2013). Corruption also includes giving a post to someone with lower qualifications than other candidates with higher qualifications simply because of being supported by those with authority and power.

Ramzy (an interviewee) states there is an absence of clear criteria for recruiting educational leaders. This situation opens the door for relying on favouritism and personal relationships and giving the posts to those who do not really deserve them. He shares:

> I did not see any kind of criteria. The Minister convened committees interviewing people to be promoted. However, the output of such committees does not look to be taken into account. Two years ago, the Minister convened a committee to interview people for a certain position, people of the committee did not seem relevant to the task. At the end of the day, people are selected mostly based on favouritism and personal relationships. That is one of the drawbacks of the leadership at the Ministry.

Ramzy further suggests that:

> People in the Ministry now, at the different levels, they feel: "If I am good to somebody, that is going to give me a chance". So, that is the culture now. On some occasions, some people are having very good

training programs but when it comes to selection, they are not included. I think there is a need to apply transparent criteria in selecting leaders.

One of the challenges of the education sector is the loyalty of educational leaders to those who appointed them rather than to the sector. Cochran (2008) illuminates:

> The leader has the power, makes all the decisions, and gets educational changes through his private network of political and personal relationships… His loyalty is to the political leaders who appoint him …When he leaves, all his accomplishments are replaced by the new agenda of the next authoritarian administrator…This political administrative model and its consequences reduce the consistency and excellence of Egyptian education (p. 183).

Adam states that connections, which may also be seen as a sign and form of corruption, are a factor in the recruitment of newly hired staff within the education sector. He explains: "Sometimes connections: personal connections, political connections, family connections play a role in recruitment, but I do not think this is the issue at the highest level. This is an issue with newly recruited people".

The appointment of education leaders, especially externals hired at the central level, cannot always be understood and justified in the light of their academic qualifications and professional experiences. Frequently, they are supported by connections who possess power and influence. "Vacancies are commonly filled by those with connections to power and privilege, often at the expense of more qualified but less well-connected individuals" (Chatham House, 2012, p. 2).

Based on my personal experience and observations, the issue of connections is much more serious than what Adam suggests. It is not only related to newly recruited employees but actually it affects clearly the selection of the highest level of educational leaders. Normally every new Minister comes with an external team of senior advisors and deputies based on the principle of trust with a lot of decision-

making authority and benefits while relying on the MOE's staff to accomplish the required tasks. They are often affiliated to the same university or organization where the Minster used to work. Almost 100 percent of those external senior advisors leave when the Minister who appointed them does. If they do not leave with the Minister voluntarily, they are later pushed to do so by subsequent Ministers.

Sarah criticizes the current practices regarding the selection of education leaders and staff. She suggests making a real change in their selection that should start very early with the applicants to faculties of education, adopting and implementing better selection procedures and enhancing pre-service and in-service professional development programs.

According to Sarah:

> You need to start by selecting people who are really into teaching and learning, who like the job, not just those who got the score in high school and go to the faculty of education. You need a better selection than that at that stage. You need better pre-service training that really prepares students to the workplace. You need better in-service training and ensure that the transfer of knowledge and skills acquired through training to the workplace is ensured through giving motivation, giving proper supervision, giving proper feedback, doing better coaching. Why people are not performing? There are many reasons.

In this regard, Suzanne states that:

> I think the curriculums of the faculties of education have to be reformed and assessed. You will find a lot of gaps based supposedly on good standards. These gaps should be covered by training in the faculties of education. Then give them good salaries.

The whole education sector suffers from the consequences of not investing enough for building leadership capacity. The consequences include the heavy reliance on

externals; who typically come from academia and need time and effort to build their own understanding of the sector.

Educational Leadership Performance

The performance of educational leaders is criticized by most participants in this study, as they argue that the sector suffers from the lack of true leadership. Frequently participants mention there is a management rather than leadership system within the education sector. There is a lack of true leaders who possess the ambitious vision, knowledge and authority that would enable them to work towards reaching their vision.

Educational leadership performance is presented by expanding on a set of sub-themes: Weak Performance and Lack of Courage; Dominance of Top Management and Variance in Capabilities; Management not Leadership; Accumulative Professional Experiences; and Limited Motivated Capacity.

Weak Performance and Lack of Courage

Sarah describes the performance of educational leaders as weak for very different reasons. She says:

> Performance is not up to the standards regarding what we want to achieve. That is for a lot of reasons. A lot of those people are not motivated to do their jobs. Many of them do not really know or understand what is expected from them; what they are supposed to be doing. Many of them do not get the required training. Many of them do not even see their job description. There is a lot that is required. I always believe in the power of human resources, but they have to be managed well. I think it is the power of human resources that makes the change not any other type of resources. Of course, all types of resources are very important. I am not undermining the importance of having an adequate budget and so on so forth, but I believe very much in the power of human resources when they are managed right.

Typically, educational leaders try to avoid making decisions, especially those related to finance. Sarah stresses the fact that educational leaders are not confident enough and resistant making required decisions. That resistance can be understood in light of their selection processes which may not adequately assess their capacity and qualifications. She states that:

> The weak capacity makes them a bit skeptical and make them afraid of taking responsibility and that of course creates problems. You need somebody who takes responsibility at the end of the day. For example, as an international organization, I need a signature to start; from a governmental official in the country. That is because people do not fully understand what is expected from them, what their responsibilities are and what the sequences of mistakes are. Sometimes the sequences of mistakes are really difficult.

Education employees are paid according to salary tables that are based essentially on seniority regardless of the nature of their workload and their responsibilities. There is a lack of an effective incentive system that can really and fairly reward employees with high performance. These factors affect negatively the performance and motivating of education employees.

That lack of decision-making ability is not always the fault of the employees within the sector. It is also related to the way in which the sector functions and its inherited practices. Decisions are normally proposed to the higher management level to escape taking any responsibility and/or risks. It is an escape mechanism through which responsibilities and decisions are always pushed to the higher level. At the same time, this negative practice is frequently encouraged by senior officials as a mechanism of firmly controlling their supervised departments, units and staff. It is a very long and slow process that makes the sector less effective and efficient.

At the end of the day, being a high or low performer within the education sector will not probably make a big difference or have a strong impact on employees' careers and/or incomes.

Dominance of Top Management and Variance in Capabilities

Peter (an interviewee) identifies the issue of the dominance of the top management level over all other levels. This dominance leads to the tendency for those at the top to control everything and keep all possible authority in their hands, which absolutely hinders the performance of the sector. Peter says:

> There is sometimes a very strong difference in the capabilities between top management and middle management. Staff in top management may be different in their capabilities if compared to the rest of the management. On the other hand, they face challenges to delegate work to their colleagues. Hence, they hyper concentrate decision-making and also underline that they are the only ones who know what they are doing. I believe this is not a conducive type of leadership.

It is very true that senior leaders at the central MOE tend to control everything. While there are always calls for moving towards more education decentralization, what happens on the ground is totally different. Top educational leaders tend to resist giving up some of their authority as they fully understand if they start to delegate their authorities, different forms of advantages and benefits they gain will be reduced (Rizk, 2012).

Though Jack finds the selection of educational leaders to be acceptable if we take into consideration the whole surrounding context and conditions, he implies that their performance and capabilities vary widely. Indeed, he suggests that international organizations request the MOE to identify certain staff to work with:

> I think the selection of leaders at the Ministry is good according to the circumstances that are available. But then again in working with

international donors, international donors appeal to the Ministry of Education to avail certain individuals to work with them. Most of the cases, these individuals are actually very cooperative, and they do avail the opportunity to donors to cooperate and provide their technical assistance whether that might be at the central or the local level.

Management not Leadership

Leading an organization is much more than managing. Leaders should develop a shared vision and possess good interpersonal and teambuilding skills, be creative and innovative in leading staff members towards the accomplishment of organizational goals. They should pay sufficient attention to the organizational culture, behaviour and how those factors affect their organization, management and staff (Gamage, 2006).

Adam states that what exists in the education sector is managerial or day-to-day management rather than leadership. The sector suffers from the lack of leadership with a vision that can lead and realize a real reform. For Adam:

> We have to make a distinction between the day to day operations in the Ministry of Education and the vision for reform. These are two different issues. If we are talking about day to day operations, how policies are implemented, how teaching is done, and how educational services are provided, how money is spent, it is their business and they are qualified. The system in Egypt is based on seniority and those people actually accumulated a lot of experiences over time whether we are talking about the central level or the local level. So, they are experienced.

Mary (an interviewee) adopts a similar point of view describing educational leadership in the education sector as a managerial system where people are normally promoted in the light of one main criterion: seniority. She indicates that different Ministers have been advised to adopt performance-based management systems.

However, the Labor Law and legal frameworks do not support that direction as she explains:

> Throughout the system promotion is still based on seniority. We often advised several Ministers to adopt a performance-based management system, but it never happened. The cadre law heavily focused on professional development but it does not really give much value to performance. I can not even describe it as leadership. I can describe it as a managerial system.

Accumulative Professional Experiences

Professional experiences within the pre-university education sector are identified among governance strengths by several participants. Professional experiences are gained through working within the sector for prolonged periods and that enables the education personnel to develop and possess accumulative knowledge, skills and practices. Adam, for example, confirms that the sector possesses a variety of experiences at all management levels from the central MOE down to the school level.

Adam clarifies:

> The caliber in the Ministry, governorate, district and schools, they have the experience of day-to-day operations. The evidence is that the education sector continued working without any political leadership during the revolution and even without a Minister. This reflects that the Ministry has a caliber.

Adam's understanding is that employees within the sector are successful in performing day-to-day operations even during the times of political instability. This day-to-day competence can be understood considering the capacity amassed from working within the sector for long times where most employees serve for their whole

careers. Thus, employees gain rich accumulative experiences that enable them to do their jobs in a satisfactory way.

Jack brings a similar point of view regarding long-term employees. He, however, was the only participant who thinks that the huge numbers of teachers and administrators employed by the sector represent a strength. Jack maintains this position even though the large numbers of employees contribute dramatically to the sector's inefficiency; even though those employees are paid less compared to their counterparts working in other public sectors.

Jack explains:

> Some look at the availability of the personnel as a weakness. The Ministry employs large numbers of teachers and administrators. You have outreach with numbers of personnel; whether they are administrative or technical; teachers or principals; at the local and central levels. If the capacity is built for all those individuals at different levels, this is a strength that is not comparable to any other Ministry within the Government.

Adam states that employees within the sector possess good experiences suggesting that the participation of the MOE's staff in developing two strategies has positively affected staffs' way of thinking. Adam says: "The Ministry experienced before the strategic management and prepared two strategies before. This, in a way or another, changed the mentality of some of the staff in the Ministry".

Peter also refers to the professional capacity within the sector as a strength that can be built on. However, he seems less optimistic compared to other participants regarding competence of employees; describing it as basic when he shares: "People have some base of competence which is something that can be built on. There are other countries where these bases do not exist at all".

Limited Motivated Capacity

Despite the state of dissatisfaction and the lack of motivation that prevails in the education sector and negatively affects its employees and their performance, Peter finds that there is a limited segment of the employees who are highly motivated and willing to contribute faithfully to the sector. He states that: "We see that some people are motivated, and they have capacities, but they are not many. There is also an institutional base that allows them to work".

Considering the demotivating professional and socio-economic conditions surrounding education employees, Peter expresses his astonishment that a limited segment of those employees is very motivated:

> I am always astonished finding that there are staff members who are very motivated and who are willing to serve their country. This is a strength. There are people who want to work and serve their country, but these people need to be empowered and need to be rewarded for their motivation and for their eagerness to serve instead of being put aside and somebody else being promoted by seniority or based on a good relationship with someone. I feel that administrative structures within the Ministry of Education specially related to the integration of performance-based assessment would be a huge contribution and bring a lot of potential to improve education as a whole.

However, as Peter suggests, motivated capacity constitutes a limited segment of the employees within the sector. In that way, it cannot be considered as a real strength within the sector.

Motivation of that limited segment of employees may be understood in the light of their personal and professional ambition as well as their seniors' support and encouragement. Some managers can motivate and raise the performance of their supervisees using different strategies including, for example, verbal appreciation and praise. People normally tend to perform better when they are appreciated.

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Educational Leadership Challenges

In Egypt, educational leadership and its performance represent serious challenges that negatively affect the performance of the whole education sector. Without effective educational leadership, the desired results cannot be reached. In the light of the participants' responses, educational leadership challenges are presented according to the following sub-themes: Lack of Transformational Leadership, Instability, and Demotivating Environment.

Lack of Transformational Leadership

Adam explains that the sector does not possess transformational leadership that can develop a vision and work consistently towards its realization. He suggests that the quality of leaders within the central MOE is not the same as it used to be. This reality can be understood in the light of the demotivating environment within the MOE and the pre-university education sector. Besides, different recruiters including international organizations continue to absorb the MOE's capacity; particularly those with strong academic and professional qualifications. Adam suggests:

> What is needed is the transformational leadership; a leadership that has a vision and this vision should be reflected in policies and after that in management. I think the Ministry misses this kind of vision and this kind of leadership that can generate this kind of vision. The Ministry used to have a number of experts working with the Minister to provide technical points of views, ideas, and approaches. I think the current experts in the Ministry are not equal to the caliber that used to work in this Ministry before. So, I think there is a kind of lack of senior advisors and experts.

Mary states that the education sector lacks real transformational leaders who can develop ambitious visions to advance their departments or units and enhance their performance. True leaders are very rare within the sector and normally when they exist, they face clashes and conflicts if they call for or support a change. She argues

that, within the sector, there are managers but not leaders and the sector does not actually support real educational leaders. As Mary states:

> Very rarely you come across a manager who is really a true leader and when that happens they are obstructed by the system because if you stick your neck out, you get hurt. So, if you adopt a change, you need a change, so you are punishable.

Instability

Ramzy indicates there is a lack of stability within the education sector; especially at the top-management level stating that:

> Leadership of the sector at the Ministry of Education is suffering from big problems. There is no stability of the system. The leadership suffers a sort of instability since 2011, top management, Minister and his team, changed like six times which casts shadows on the polices and strategies of the sector. So, the lack of stability will affect the future of the whole sector. The managerial style is mostly permissive autocrat where mangers make decisions unilaterally but gives subordinates latitude in carrying out their work.

Ramzy suggests that the change of the Minister of Education leads to a change in the strategy of the whole sector, which contributes to deepening its instability and inefficiency. He explains:

> At the Ministry of Education, it is supposed that the Minister changes, but the strategy is there; but, unfortunately, the Minister changes and the strategy as well. That is happening within the sector. There is a sort of personal interest that every Minister wants to produce his own plan and says that is my document or this is my plan and so on. The result is that is the worst case of inefficiency and that is why we are all the time starting from the very beginning.

Sarah has a similar point of view and focuses on the high turnover of the senior MOE staff, especially those responsible for international cooperation and coordination with international organizations; which negatively influences partnership between the MOE and its international partners. She shares: "The high turnover of our focal points is a problem. By the time your focal point understands and gets along and starts, changes happen. Then you have to start all over again".

Adam stresses the importance of realizing stability within the education sector and considers it as a priority because of its positive impacts on the sector and its performance. He clarifies:

> Over the last years, a lot of changes happened in the Ministry of Education. We are talking about instability in the sector. I think stability is very important and should be one of the priorities because education reform is long-term and cannot be realized in short-term. This needs in a way or another some stability. These two factors I think are related to each other. When you have a strategy, and this strategy is not associated with one person. It is associated with the institution itself with a large level of participation. I think this creates a kind of stability. So, even if the Minister got changed for a reason or another, there will be a kind of stability in policies of education.

In this regard, Ramzy refers to the issue of sudden unexpected changes within the sector when he recounts how:

> There are some sudden changes, mainly somebody committed a mistake, so the Minister, or somebody else, does not like such a behaviour. So, in a second, you make a decision to move him from one department to another. There are a lot of examples for this.

Peter suggests that the lack of continuity represents a serious challenge to the education sector; indicating it is not always the fault of leaders themselves.

Peter suggests:

> The lack of continuity of course; which is not the fault of the leaders themselves; at least not at this level. Because if we have to deal with a new Minister every year, it is extremely difficult. This have been the situation here in Egypt since 2011.

Demotivating Environment

Employees across the sector experience a general state of demotivation and dissatisfaction, from the central down to the school levels. Education employees are normally paid less compared to other public sectors; such as tourism, electricity and oil. In her paper, Louisa Loveluck (2012) refers to the problem of low pay within the education sector while discussing teachers' social and economic status. She states that: "The teaching profession tends to be associated with a low social and economic status. This notion is reinforced by the meagre salaries" (p. 6). The Ministry of International Cooperation (2006) suggests that: "The incentive systems should be improved dramatically as the existing system pushes skilled teachers away from their careers to administrative positions as a requirement for promotion and salary increase" (p. 7).

Working within the pre-university education sector may be demotivating for many reasons. First, the low payment within the sector even when compared to other public sectors. Second, the sector lacks an effective incentive system that can reward employees with high performance and take serious procedures against others whose performance or behaviour is not up to the required standard. Third, there is no effective, supportive professional development programs that are tailored to address the employees' needs and enhance their performance.

Egyptian education staff are the least well paid in the region. The low payment has led to deterioration in the quality of teachers and teaching. Teaching jobs are associated with low social and economic status. Because of low status and low wage, teaching jobs fail to attract better candidates (The World Bank, 2007).

Mary states that generally civil servants in Egypt are not motivated. The situation within the education sector in particular is much worse due to the low payment for administrators and teachers. Mary says: "Civil servants get hired and they stayed there for life and they do not work. All those are disincentives. If you work or if you do not work, you get the same thing. One other reason for this problem is the encumbered civil servant system".

Though she focuses on teachers, Suzanne, considers increasing salaries as a priority that should be considered by the Government. She explains: "Definitely an issue that should be considered is the salary of teachers. If teachers get better salaries, you can attract better calibers and then you can reform education. This is a priority".

Galal (2008) states that: "Teachers' salaries are very low. This creates a strong incentive to make more income through private tutoring, which can earn them on average ten times their governmental salary" (p. 190).

Peter suggests that the environment within the education sector is demotivating; especially for employees with high performance as promotions are based mainly on seniority not performance when he shares:

> There is a lack of transparency regarding the system of the career progression within the Ministry. So, we have feeling it is heavily based on seniority and not based on performance which is very demotivating for highly performing personnel. We have also observed that there were some staff members that had been very cooperative, and we were extremely pleasant to deal with in the sense that they were very reliable, and the quality of their work was very high. They were, however, not rewarded with the career progression they had expected. There is an additional issue in terms of the staffing of national institutions which may not be related to governance system of education itself in Egypt but to the presence of international development organizations. Sometimes the most capable and motivated staff members are absorbed by international

development organizations, leaving only the less motivated within the Ministry.

Based on my personal experience, even the highest senior level in the MOE face a lot of difficulties to plan and implement successful reform initiatives for different reasons. For instance, because of the high level of centralization within the sector those officials (including the Minister) are extremely busy, from the very early morning until late at night. They are tasked with signing of notes, reports, and appeals, attending a lot of meetings with national and international delegations, and citizens. They meet with Parliament Members who are looking for solutions to problems of their districts and citizens they represent.

Frequently, I met citizens who traveled hundreds of kilometers to Cairo to transfer their children from one school to another within the same district. They did not receive help to solve their problems at the school, district or governorate levels, so they sought to get that help from the central level. Overtime, people lost trust in the local level and its ability to solve their problems and address their complaints. Accordingly, senior officials at the MOE, without any exaggerations, have to sign hundreds of complaints and appeals every single day which puts a lot of burden and pressure on the central level and its staff.

Mary argues that the labour law and legal frameworks do not reward those who do their jobs in ways that meet the standards indicating that very little can be done against employees with low performance. So, the sector lacks clear criteria for rewarding and encouraging employees whose performance is high and effective punishment measurements for those with weak performance. As Mary says:

> People get promoted on seniority. You have a labour law that makes it almost impossible for someone to get fired. Have you ever heard in your life of someone getting fired? You do not get promoted on the bases of your performance. And you do not get fired on the bases of your performance.

Mary criticizes the professional development programs offered within the sector at all levels describing them as a kind of routine and does not have any real impact on the employees nor their performance.

Mary expands:

> In-service training, what kind of in-service training. Have you seen any in-service training? If we talk about administrators, they have two or three days a management workshop or course, siting there, signing everyday in and out, and getting a certificate that means nothing. Absolutely zero. Then, going back to their departments and getting promoted. So, there is no training. I can give you like ten more reasons, but I think these are enough.

Peter states that education employees over-concentrate on their own tasks, probably limited in scope, with a tendency to neglect what is going on within that huge sector beyond their jobs and responsibilities. This prevents them from developing a comprehensive complementary understanding of the whole sector and how it really functions. He explains:

> I believe there is the spirit of micro-managing things of creating task-packages which are so small that people are really not able to look at their larger horizon and get a systematic understanding or systematic thinking which will enable to solve the problems within the Ministry. So, this is one of the issues related to leadership we have observed.

One crucial factor that affects this issue is the feeling of employees within the education sector, especially at the local and school levels, that they have only to implement different sorts of decisions that travel, top-down from the MOE. Those at lower levels are not consulted or urged to understand the rationale, reasons, logic or justification behind those decisions. Local and school levels and representatives are not given the chance to take part in decision-making processes even when they affect

them in a direct way. Consequently, resistance to educational reforms emerge frequently from the sector itself.

Thus, education employees at governorate, district and school levels frequently represent apparent and hidden resistance to the central MOE, its plans and initiatives.

Discussion

The Egyptian pre-university education sector suffers from a lack of well-selected, highly qualified, effectively trained, and adequately motivated leaders who can contribute to making a real change within the sector which can be observed at the central MOE, governorate, district, and school levels. In the absence of creative transformational leadership with clear vision, the sector will continue to poorly function. It is crucial that the education sector may invest more in building its leadership capacity, utilize its human resources in more effective and efficient ways, develop an effective and updated database that provides accurate data on all employees including their professional development programs, and put an end to the leakage of its well-qualified capacity.

If the MOE does not lead, others will do. It is the time that the MOE should move towards taking actions rather than adopting reactions. Without strong capacity, the MOE will continue to face serious challenges towards imposing leadership and establishing successful effective partnerships. The MOE should explore different possibilities and exert more efforts to keep its strong capacity if it really wants to take leadership in negotiations, agreements, arrangements, and realize more successful partnerships with its national and international partners.

Strong, well-qualified, highly trained capacity is essential for enabling the MOE to take leadership. Fortunately, capacity building is one of the top priorities of international organizations in Egypt. However, the central MOE always gets the lion's share of those opportunities, especially the advanced professional development programs.

Throughout my own work experience within the sector, I noticed that managerial leaders tend to avoid taking risks, especially those who have not previously been appointed in leadership positions. Such managers feel more comfortable moving their proposed decisions and initiatives up across the hierarchy. They follow that approach even when they do not have to in order to get the approval of their senior staff. Actually, leaders often want their supervisees to report almost every single detail as a way to strongly realize a firm control over their units, departments, sectors or/and staff.

Unfortunately, because of low salaries, the demotivating professional environment within the sector and the lack of an effective incentive system, there is a continuous leakage of capacity among those who are qualified to move to other better professional opportunities.

Recommendations

Recommendations to enhance educational leadership at the pre-university education sector and improve its performance are presented in the following two categories: 1) the Government of Egypt and 2) the Ministry of Education:

The Government of Egypt

1. **Restructuring the MOE** to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of the education sector, avoid duplication of efforts and overcoming fragmentation. Restructuring the MOE should be accomplished in collaboration with other national organizations and authorities including the MOF; the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform; and the Ministry of Local Development.

2. **Reconsidering and revising laws and legal frameworks that regulate hiring and promotion** to provide better chances for employees with high performance, advanced academic qualifications and strong professional experiences to move to leadership posts.

3. **Seniority should not be the main required criterion for promoting internal employees**. Developing more effective processes and comprehensive systems for selecting and promoting leaders is a necessity within a framework of transparency.

4. **Investing more in attracting, hiring and maintain better caliber staff for the pre-university education sector**. Unfortunately, there is a continuous leakage of the sector's highly-qualified and well-trained staff that are absorbed by other recruiters, including international organizations.

5. **Developing an effective incentive system and increasing salaries within the sector.** These reforms can positively impact education employees' motivation, professional satisfaction and professional performance at the different levels.

6. **Reconsidering and reviewing the composition, representation, roles, responsibilities and impact of the Presidential Specialized Council on Education and Scientific Research.**

7. **Reforming faculties of education and enhancing pre-service programs.** These reforms should be a priority for the Egyptian Government, the MOHE and the MOE. This can contribute to enhancing the quality of graduates who will join the education sector later in teaching and administrative positions.

8. **Developing, adopting and implementing procedures that aim at enhancing transparency and accountability** which can foster the sector's governance, enhance its effectiveness and efficiency and reduce corruption.

The Ministry of Education

1. **Reaching a widely accepted vision with a consensus from different stakeholders**. This vision can draw a clear future path for the education sector, mobilize efforts towards specific goals, improve contributions of different stakeholder and reduce resistance of certain actors against suggested reforms.

2. **Developing and adopting ambitious but realistic strategic plan.** The plan must set clear achievable goals and objectives for the education sector. It should be based on intensive consultations with different stakeholders while considering the reasons that led to the incompletion or failure of the previous strategic plans.

3. **Concentrating on continuity and focusing on accomplishing incomplete strategies.** If the MOE cannot complete a certain strategy, it does not mean to totally give it up.

4. **Developing a comprehensive plan for enhancing governance and management of the education sector.** This would be in opposition to the current scattered initiatives that address different governance issues.

5. **Achieving and maintaining more stability within the education sector, especially at the leadership level.** Increased stability could reflect positively on the performance of the sector and the implementation of educational plans.

6. **Avoiding unnecessary and sudden changes in educational leaders**. The consistent changes in leadership add more confusion to the education sector, its governance, management, and performance.

7. **Focusing on strategies rather than on Ministers**. When the Minister changes, everything starts from scratch which adds more to the complexities, inefficiency and instability of the sector. Concentrating on strategies can be an effective remedy for this challenge.

8. **Relying on available capacity within the education sector.** The reliance on existing capacity would entail avoiding hiring externals in senior posts whenever possible.

9. **Relying mainly on national and local capacity in developing and implementing educational reforms**. At the end of the day, it is the responsibility of the MOE to take the lead and ensure the sustainability of educational reforms. However, the MOE should benefit wisely and efficiently from various forms of support offered by different stakeholders.

10. **Developing, adopting and implementing clear and transparent criteria for selecting and recruiting educational leaders** who can make a real change within the education sector.

11. **Building and maintaining capacity of the education sector at the central, governorate, local and school levels**.

12. **Enhancing the quality of professional development programs** that should be tailored according to the employees' needs, roles and responsibilities.

13. **Developing, adopting and implementing effective monitoring and evaluation systems** that cover all aspects of the education sector.

14. **Updating, activating and implementing national educational standards.** Clear standards should be developed for enhancing the quality of different aspects of the education sector.

15. **Developing and implementing results-oriented plans to enable the education sector and its decision-makers to assess and evaluate their impacts.**

16. **Eliminating duplication, fragmentation, overlapping and conflict** among different departments within the education sector to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness.

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