CENTRAL PERSPECTIVES OF THE
SCHOOL-BASED REFORM PROGRAM IN EGYPT:
AN EVALUATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This study focused on evaluating the School-based Reform (SBR) program, introduced by the Egyptian ministry of education in its national strategic plan 2007/2008-2011/2012, by exploring the perspectives of policy-officials at the central ministry. The study adopted an evaluative qualitative analysis approach with the aim of evaluating and reviewing the SBR program, identifying its strengths and weaknesses, and realizing some strategies that can be considered by policy-makers and key-players to enhance the future implementation of the SBR program in Egypt. It was built mainly on data gathered using semi-structured interviews with five policy-officials at the central level who are aware of the major current and future initiatives of the ministry, particularly those aimed at empowering schools and enhancing their autonomy. The study targeted the Egyptian pre-university education system, which is the largest in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) and among the largest in the world. This study addresses the issue of decentralization, described as one of the most important recent phenomena in education, under the SBR program.

INTRODUCTION

Education in Egypt is supervised by the state, with the aim of providing the minimum shared amount of culture and social upbringing, as well as securing a homogenous social texture. The Ministry of Education (MOE) supervises pre-university education, whereas the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) supervises higher education and universities while taking university independence into consideration (NCERD, 2001). Pre-university education in Egypt is the largest in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region and among the largest educational systems in the world (The World Bank, 2002). In 2014-2015, the system reported an enrolment of more than 19 million students, roughly 17.5 million in public schools and 1.8 in private schools, attending to more than 52,000 schools; more than 1 million students at the pre-school level, over 10 million at the primary level, more than 4.5 million at the preparatory level (lower secondary), and approximately 2.6 million at the secondary level (Egyptian Ministry of Education, 2015). The system recruits approximately one million teachers and approximately 800,000 administrators.

In the last decade, the Egyptian government adopted and implemented a number of initiatives aimed at improving pre-university education. Those initiatives included the adoption of National Educational Standards in 2003, mainstreaming Boards of Trustees (BOTs) in 2005 at school, district, governorate and national levels, and the establishment of the Policy and Strategic Planning Unit (PSPU) in 2006. In 2007, the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) was established along with the Professional Academy for Teachers (PAT), and the first national educational strategic plan (2007-08 through 2011-12) for reforming pre-university education was produced.

To face the challenges of pre-university education while considering the proper framework for enhancing decentralization in public sectors, the Egyptian government has adopted a number of policies and procedures that aim to realize a more decentralized education system. In the education sector, administrative and financial decisions are increasingly delegated to the governorate, district, and school levels. Though the efforts realized in education decentralization have been described as not enough, the movement towards empowerment at the school level can be viewed as the most important part of the process. Schools, at the different levels, are the most basic and important unit of education management, reform, improvement and development. The ultimate goal of any educational reform effort is to enhance students' learning outcomes. This effort relates to the school level more than any other educational level, since schools are where learning/teaching processes take place.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In 2003, the MOE published the *National Educational Standards* that covered five domains: 1) Effective School, 2) Teacher, 3) Excellent Management, 4) Community Participation, and 5) Curriculum and Learning Outcomes. Effective School standards represented the pillar upon which the SBR program in the national educational strategic plan 2007/2008 - 2011/2012 was based. The SBR program was supported by different stakeholders at the national level in collaboration with international organizations and donor agencies.

In 2005, a ministerial decree, No. 258 of 2005 (Egyptian Ministry of Education, 2005) was issued to mainstream the BOTs to all Egyptian schools and give schools more authority beyond what was normally possible at the school level, with the aim of increasing the

involvement of different educational stakeholders, and enhancing school monitoring processes and activities, which represented a significant shift towards empowering schools and enhancing their decision-making authorities.

According to the SBR program of the strategic plan 2007/2008-2011-2012 (Egyptian Ministry of Education, 2007):

> Schools will be empowered to develop their own development plan, implement monitoring and self-evaluation processes as tools to further improvement, develop a school budget, manage materials and educational resources, manage human resources including punishment and reward, identify professional development needs, evaluate staff performance, coordinate technical supervision with the Idarras, identify teaching approaches, manage school financial resources, and organize and manage social, educational, cultural, and sports activities. Schools also will be empowered to increase partnership with the civil society, support the efforts of boards of trustees and parents towards the improvement of education, and benefit from the available resources at the local level. (p. 158)

However, that strategic plan was criticized severely for not being realistic enough in assessing the required resources for its implementation and frequently described as being too ambitious to be realized; consequently its implementation was not successful.

The purpose of the current study is to evaluate the SBR program in the light of implementing the national strategic plan 2007/2008-2011/2012 from the perspectives of policy officials at the MOE headquarters, while focusing on the importance of that movement; identifying what decision-making authorities Egyptian schools currently have, along with other authorities that they should be given for improving their performance; identifying strengths and weaknesses of SBR; and offering strategies that can contribute to maximizing the positive impact of SBR as an entry for improving the whole pre-university education system, which faces chronic challenges that could not be overcome through the top-down reform initiatives imposed by the central MOE.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Educational management, in general, has four hierarchical levels including: the central or Ministry level; regional or provincial level; local or district level; and finally, the school level. Authorities normally are delegated or devolved from the higher to the lower levels. Granting schools more authority and enhancing their autonomy is the most effective form of educational decentralization. Empowering schools can be defined under a number of slogans, including: school-based reform, school-based management, school-based improvement, school-based development and site-based management. Where those initiatives may refer to different forms of reforms in different contexts, they all share one common goal, which is the enhancement of school autonomy and independence.

The current study was guided by the following key question: *How is the SBR program in Egyptian pre-university education evaluated from the perspectives of the MOE's policy officials?* It aimed to evaluate the SBR program in Egyptian pre-university education from the perspective of policy-officials at the central level who contribute to the processes of policy-making and initiatives adopted by the MOE at the school-levl, and participated intensively in the wide consultation processes with schools all over the country. It identified a number of the strengths

and weaknesses of the SBR program in pre-university education in Egypt. Based on exploring and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the SBR experience, the study suggested a number of strategies that may be considered by policy-makers in Egypt to improve the implementation and impact of SBR.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is particularly important in its focus on pre-university education in Egypt. Egypt is a country that projects cultural, social, economic and political influences far beyond its borders (CIDA, 2001). SBR in Egyptian pre-university education is still a recent initiative and has not yet received adequate attention from researchers. SBR is an important movement that holds the potential to be an effective solution for a number of challenges that face the Egyptian education system. It entails a process where schools gain autonomy and independence in their decision-making authorities and local stakeholders can more effectively contribute to and support education and schools. Evaluating SBR in the realm of pre-university education can assist in enhancing its implementation in the future. SBR also comes under the umbrella of education decentralization, one of the most prominent global phenomena in education for decades and a theme of continuous debate in Egypt that increasingly draws the attention of politicians, policy-makers, and other stakeholders.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

International Studies

Many countries across the globe have adopted certain forms of educational decentralization that aim to empower schools and give them more authorities under different titles for many purposes. Heck and Brandon (1995) investigated how school reforms of decision-making responsibilities influence teachers' participation and leadership in selecting critical needs to be addressed during the school improvement process. It concluded that involvement in the process of setting up decision-making and selecting the content of school needs have an impact on teachers' agreement with selected needs. Expertise and leadership opportunities were found to affect teachers' participation in school decision-making. Shields and Knapp (1997) suggested that focusing on schools is a successful strategy that is supported by research as teachers, school administrators, and families are the bes sourcest to determine strategies that fulfil the needs of their students. Decades of research stressed the limitations of the top-down reform approach.

Abu-Duhou (1999) suggested that decentralized school management cannot guarantee school improvement, since it is a process that goes beyond creating school boards, gives schools more decision-making authorities, and allows them to control their budgets. Schools must be given organizational conditions that are used for improving the dimensions of schooling that directly affect curricula and instruction as well as student achievement.

Astiz, Wiseman, and Baker (2002) explored how globalization influenced the spread of reforms for decentralizing school governance and the consequences these reforms have had on models of curricular administration and implementation of curricula in classrooms across nations. They argued that globalization produces important changes throughout education systems that affect teachers and students' daily experiences in classrooms.

Majhanovich (2003) used the case of Ontario to argue that the comparativist lens clarifies the complexity of educational governance as well as degrees of both centralization and decentralization. Stressing the fact that comparative education research represents a means to understand such phenomena within their global context, she indicated that English-speaking countries such as the United States, England and Canada implemented policies that aimed to reduce funding and imposed a business model that focused on efficiency, productivity and accountability while underestimating child-centered curricula.

Winkler and Cohen (2005) indicated that South Africa devolved basic education to provincial governments; Indonesia devolved basic education from central to district level; Pakistan devolved basic education from the provincial to the district level; Armenia and New Zealand delegated most management responsibilities to school councils; El Salvador delegated also most management responsibilities to its rural schools in remote areas. Nicaragua granted schools rights to manage themselves. Brazil devolved primary education from state to municipal level; Chile, Bulgaria, and Poland devolved primary and secondary education to municipal levels. Numerous functions have been delegated to schools including school-maintenance, school-building renovation, and the purchase of textbooks. Galiani (2001) empirically evaluated decentralization's effects on education quality in secondary schools in Argentina. The study concluded that decentralization led to the improvement of test scores of public-school students.

Huber (2010) found that the international experiences to improve schools suggested that neither top-down strategies alone nor the use of bottom-up approaches exclusively realized the desired effects. However, a combination and systematic synchronisation of both approaches have been found most effective. Moreover, improvement is viewed as a continuous process with different phases, which follow their individual rules.

Studies on Egyptian Context

As for the Egyptian context, there is no research conducted on SBR as the initiative is still a new one. However, a number of studies concluded that the pre-university education system is highly centralized and badly needs significant changes to overcome the management challenges. The United Nations (2001) diagnosed a number of challenges facing the MOE including fragmented units and departments, and the overstaffing of administrators, which has led to lack of efficiency. The World Bank (2002) and Boex (2011) indicated that Egyptian pre-university education is permanently described as being highly centralized. The system suffers from different management challenges including the absence of democracy and participation. Most committees of policy-making and/or decision-making are characterized by the bureaucratic style and their members are usually appointed, rather than elected (El-Baradei and El-Baradei, 2004). Generally, the most effective and powerful committees are all formed at the central level. Cochran (2008, P. 183) stressed the complications and challenges resulted from this situation indicating that the system:

> Follows the authoritarian/ patriarchal model. The leader has the power, makes all 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).

UNESCO (2008) recommended the urgent need for a change in organizational and management culture indicating that it is a major challenge for the MOE to move away from traditional management practices to new ways of doing things and describing the adoption of SBR in the pre-university education as one of its priorities. While a number of international and national studies and reports focused on education decentralization and management challenges facing the pre-university education in Egypt, there is a study that tried to estimate quantitatively the effect of educational decentralization on student outcomes in the light of education decentralization at Egyptian schools. The study of Nasser-Ghodsi (2006) that built on quantitative analysis explored the effect of decentralization on student outcomes that were measured by gross attendance rates, net attendance rates, and repetition rates. It concluded that educational decentralization had an ambiguous and statistically insignificant effect on student outcomes. Those findings, though agreed with literature on El Salvador, contradicted with the results of similar studies conducted in Argentina, Nicaragua, and the Philippines that found decentralization had a positive effect on student outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an evaluative qualitative analysis approach, with the aim of exploring and reviewing the SBR, identifying its strengths and weaknesses, and producing specific strategies that can contribute to the enhancement of future SBR implementation in Egypt. The study was built mainly on data gathered through semi-structured interviews with five policy-officials at the central level who work very closely to the highest levels of policy-making circles and are aware of the major current and future initiatives of the MOE, particularly those aiming to empower schools while enhancing their autonomy. All interviewees earned post-graduate degrees in education and attended strong professional development programs at the national and international levels. Participants worked within the education system for more than fifteen years. One of the essential criteria for selecting interview candidates was the completion of previous Egyptian school teaching for a minimum of five years. These experiences were thought to contribute and add to their authentic knowledge and understanding of Egyptian school environments.

Fourteen questions were used in the interviews with additional follow-up questions aimed at confirming certain responses and/or seeking evidence and additional details. The questions were intended to gather data regarding the interviewees' perceptions of SBR, the motivations for Egyptian pre-university education to move towards SBR, how it was implemented in the Egyptian context, current authorities that Egyptian schools possess in the framework of SBR, future trends of the ministry of education regarding the implementation of SBR, authorities given to Egyptian schools, advantages and disadvantages of adopting SBR, main strengths and challenges of SBR in Egypt, evidence and/or the belief as to whether SBR in Egypt has led to positive impacts, suggested recommendations or strategies that can be adopted to enhance SBR, expected outcomes of adopting those suggested strategies on pre-university education in Egypt and any other observations or reflections regarding Egyptian SBR.

FINDINGS

Understanding the Current status of SBR

SBR focuses on schools and constitutes an entry to reform and an attempt to improve the whole education system; a bottom-up reform approach. Nadia, one of the interviewees, defined SBR as: *"The reform that focuses on schools through empowering them, supporting their capacities and leading to reform the whole education system."* Another participant, Akram, saw SBR as: *"An approach that enables schools to make the best use of their available resources while focusing on students consistently*.*"*Schools in Egypt vary very widely in terms of their resources, which means schools cannot be asked to reach the same level of quality or performance. However, minimum standards should be adopted while encouraging schools to make the best use of their resources to realize their self-improvement plans.

According to the interviewees, SBR aims at providing schools with more authorities and autonomy in implementing their own initiatives and enables them to be more responsive to the needs of their students. All participants agreed that SBR is the heart of educational reform in Egypt, as schools represent the institutions where the educational inputs meet, including: students, teachers, curricula, management, facilities and learning/ teaching processes. However, all interviewees agreed that schools' authorities still generally express their dissatisfaction regarding the implementation of the SBR program in Egypt. Waseem indicated that: *"On a scale of 10, the implementation of SBR program can be assessed at 3 or 4"*.

That can be understood in the light of a number of reasons that include: the lack of political and social commitment; novelty of the reform; the absence of accurate scientific methods to measure and evaluate the SBR impact; the lack of highly trained professionals, principals, teachers and administrators, qualified to take SBR's new responsibilities; and the lack of principals' real authorities to reward or punish teachers.

Motives for SBR

The Egyptian education system is still described frequently as being highly centralized in spite of the initiatives that aim to enhance education decentralization. Adopting SBR can contribute to enhancing community participation, encouraging stakeholders to take part in education responsibilities, and empowering schools and giving them more administrative and financial authorities. So, SBR can be seen as a reaction to ease the negative effects of the highly centralized system and a movement towards realizing a more decentralized education system. It is well-known that decisions are more reliable when they are made closer to where they are implemented. Therefore, giving schools more authorities in making their decisions, especially those related to learning/teaching processes, will lead to a direct impact on their students' learning outcomes.

The movement towards adopting SBR in the Egyptian pre-university education emerged from its ability to improve the status of schools and enable them to overcome their own challenges. Akram stressed the importance of SBR in its contributions to managing the education system more effectively, by indicating that: "*A huge system like the Egyptian one cannot be managed effectively from the central ministry through top-down instructions that normally take a long time to reach schools. The reform should start at schools not at the ministry"*.

One of the participants, Gamal, indicated that schools should be the starting point for any educational reform, saying: *"Schools are the basic units of any education system and they are where all educational inputs interact and that is why they should be the major axes of any educational development or reform"*.

School Leadership

The quality of leadership and the effectiveness of schools have been important topics for many decades (Dinham et. al, 2011). According to Southworth and Du Quesnay (2005), school effectiveness and improvement research shows that leadership plays a key role in ensuring the vitality and growth of schools. Teachers expect their leaders to lead by example, adopt a strong and consistent interest in what teachers do, and talk and engage with them about their teaching practices and student learning.

All participants stressed the critical role of school principals who can make vital changes and significant successes at their schools. The preparation system of school principals should be reconsidered as it currently cannot qualify them to lead effectively and cannot guarantee their success. It has been noted by some of the interviewees that principals should be prepared to develop new resources to support their schools' initiatives and plans and use the available resources wisely and efficiently. Some interviewees suggested that school principals should be given more authorities that enable them to be more effective in managing their schools. Particularly, they should be given more authorities regarding their teachers with poor performance, such as the authority to impose professional development programs to enhance their professional performance.

The selection of officials and leaders, not only in the education sector, but also in other public sectors, cannot be always understood in the light of their qualifications and experiences. Commonly, they are supported by connections with those who enjoy some sort of power and influence. Chatham House (2012, 2) stressed that: *"Vacancies are commonly filled by those with connections to power and privilege, often at the expense of more qualified but less well-connected individuals."*

School principals generally lack the necessary knowledge, professional capacities, required skills and positive attitudes that enable them to take the initiatives they should, due to the shortage in their preparation, selection and in-service training. Normally they are selected based on the number of years served, not according to their effectiveness, so the older ones are more likely to be promoted than the younger ones. On other occasions, they are selected because they are supported or have connections with those who have the power.

Yosef identified management as one of the major challenges Egypt faces, confirming that: *"Our problem in Egypt is one of management, we are currently in the process of considering how to select school principals, we badly need principals who are highly effective, and to realize that aim, we have to review all relevant regulations."*

Partnership

SBR does not mean that the state gives up its responsibilities for education to schools. Rather, it means schools should be supported consistently and continuously by all stakeholders, including higher levels in the management hierarchy, school district, governorate and MOE, to succeed and maximize their benefits of SBR. Schools should be able to get advice and technical assistance when needed. They should not only maximize the use of their available resources, but

also be able to increase their resources from their local environments, which should always be triggered by school leadership initiatives and local community social responsibility, towards their schools in particular, and education in general.

Schools and their leadership should have the ability to establish, enhance, and expand strong partnerships and develop fruitful cooperation with communities, universities, Civil Society Organizations, private sector organizations, and other stakeholders. Creating such partnerships varies widely, depending on the leadership effectiveness of the school and its local environment. Communities, in a lot of cases across governorates, support their schools with funding efforts. They contribute to providing equipment and furniture, maintenance, painting and the improvement of school buildings and facilities.

One story about the communities' contributions to improving their schools was told by Yosef: *"A strong example came from Ismailia governorate when one school was given 9000 pounds from the government; and because the community realized that the government tried to support the school though it was not enough, they funded it with 70 thousand pounds as they felt they were responsible for their schools. Gaining the trust of society is an extremely important factor."*

Developing and enhancing partnerships with different stakeholders depends mainly on school leadership. Odhiambo and Hii (2012) argued that although it is important for schools to have quality teachers and resources, commitment and the involvement of key stakeholders and systematic collaboration between them and the school leaders are the true measures of school effectiveness. It is the school principal who is responsible for leading and guaranteeing schools' success.

There is a successful experience of getting different stakeholders to contribute to the improvement of schools in the Alexandria governorate, through Alexandria's education reform movement in 2001, where contributions were provided by parents, community members, businessmen, NGOs, *Alexandria University* and other stakeholders, who made the difference in enhancing the quality of the school environment through: supporting schools financially; providing equipment and maintenance; and contributing to the training of teachers, principals and school boards of trustees as well as other forms of school support. It is a model that can be replicated across the country, while keeping in mind that Alexandria is the second biggest governorate in Egypt with a lot of various resources. However, opening the door in front of different stakeholders and encouraging them to get involved in education and support local schools at the different governorates will contribute to their improvement; probably with different impacts, due to the variety of resources available to each governorate and each school. Akram said: *"We cannot work alone. Education is the responsibility of all and should be supported by all."*

Strengths of SBR

There are a number of strengths that support the implementation of SBR in Egypt. These include:

1. Despite different challenges facing Egyptian pre-university education, it still possesses a strong infrastructure that can support and contribute to the success of any educational initiative or reform, with more than 52 thousand schools with their facilities, laboratories, and equipment.

2. Huge professional development facilities exist that can be utilized to enhance the knowledge, skills, attitudes and performance of thousands of staff, including the *Education City* that can contribute to training about 2000 trainees and providing them with accommodations at its hotel. There is also the V*ideo-conference Network* that can connect the different governorates and the ministry's headquarters, and is normally used for training, introducing and discussing new or current initiatives.

3. Rich and various human resources that include more than one million teachers and eight hundred thousand administrators; thousands got their PhD or Master degrees in education and other disciplines. Besides, there are thousands of the MOE staff, teachers and administrators, who got high quality training programs implemented by American and European universities as well as international organizations, in country and overseas.

4. SBR should be seen as an opportunity that enables schools to gain more authorities, increase their resources, enhance their self-development capacity, determine their priorities, and improve continuously their educational processes.

5. It serves as a catalyst for development and improvement, as the impacts and results of efforts exerted at the school level are seen quickly by beneficiaries and those who are involved in the decision-making activities.

6. It enhances ownership of those initiatives or plans taken at the school level, as they have been formulated and developed by schools and their decision-making teams who are aware of the schools' needs, priorities and resources, which will have a more positive impact than implementing plans and decisions that are imposed on them by a higher level at the educational hierarchy.

7. It enables each school to have its unique story of success; plan and develop their own initiatives; give them more space for innovation; improve their educational processes; and use and increase their resources efficiently.

Challenges facing SBR

There are a number of challenges that face the sound implementation of the SBR program in Egypt that should be addressed by the different stakeholders to empower schools and enhance their autonomy. They include:

1. Lack of well-qualified and highly-trained principals, teachers and administrators who are able to take the new responsibilities they should take under the implementation of SBR.

2. Lack of available financial resources especially in poor governorates, to support schools' improvement initiatives and self-development plans.

3. Wide disparities among Egyptian schools in terms of their leadership, staff, financial resources, facilities, educational resources and different forms of support they get from their local communities.

4. Corruption and lack of transparency, which can be seen as common challenges associated with decentralization reform.

5. A lack of an efficient accountability system, which makes it difficult to hold responsibilities against staff involved, principals, teachers and administrators or to assess any improvements realized.

6. Demotivation and dissatisfaction of principals and teachers in the absence of an effective incentive system.

7. Resistance to change and new reforms at schools, as they have to take new responsibilities expected to increase over time.

8. The majority of principals and teachers are already under heavy workloads, leaving almost no time for them to develop and implement initiatives to improve their schools.

9. Private-tutoring, the main source of income for thousands of teachers all over the country, which turns school improvement initiatives into a secondary focus.

Impact of SBR

The movement towards SBR is recent and evolving, and it is too early to accurately determine its impact(s), since measurement has yet to take place. Moreover, it is still in its early stages, without enough authorities delegated to schools, according to all interviewees. There are no available studies on assessing or evaluating the impacts of SBR in Egypt. Interviewees shared the idea that SBR has led to improving schools at least slightly, particularly when it comes to school infrastructure, maintenance, educational equipment, and aids. They agreed that the evidence of those improvements has been realized from interviews and meetings they attended with stakeholders, including parents, supervisors and educational leaders at the local level who confirmed school improvements. However, there is no evidence that the movement towards adopting SBR in pre-university education has led to any academic improvement or the enhancement of students' learning outcomes.

Future Trends

The MOE tries to enhance the benefits and maximize the positive impacts of adopting SBR through a number of procedures that are still under exploration. According to *Akram* who predicted significant improvements with the implementation of the next strategic plan 2014/2015-2029/2030: *"We are working currently on enhancing the financial and administrative authorities of schools, developing the roles and responsibilities of the Boards of Trustees, developing the evaluation system not only at school level but also at the national one."*

All participants suggested that schools' lack real, effective authorities and should be given more financial and administrative decision-making authorities. Nadia said: *"All authorities, when possible, related to educational processes should be delegated to schools, except for planning, curriculums, evaluation and examinations."*

That comes in accordance with the argument that is adopted widely among policy-makers and scholars in Egypt, which stresses the necessity of designing curricula at the central level and considers this to be a national security issue and a guarantee to prepare good citizens. However, curricula should address students' various needs and local environments. As for examinations, primary education exams, grade six, are administered at the district level; preparatory education exams, grade nine, are administered at the governorate levels; and general and technical secondary education exams, grade twelve, are administered at the national level. In the light of the lack of trust across the system, examinations cannot be delegated to the school level.

Suggested Strategies for Enhancing SBR

1. SBR should be strongly supported by the highest political level in Egypt as political will and commitment are crucial and essential for the successful implementation of almost any educational reform.

2. Empowering schools by providing and enhancing their human and financial resources that enable them to plan, implement their improvement plans, and realize their objectives.

3. Teachers should be encouraged and motivated to concentrate on their work inside schools, not on private-tutoring (the shadow system). Akram said: *"Teachers' loyalty to schools, not to private-tutoring, should be regained"*.

4. SBR should be given more support and contributions from local communities, civil society organizations, universities and faculties of education in particular, as well as other stakeholders to maximize the benefits and positive impacts of SBR.

5. An effective accountability system should be developed and adopted to assess and evaluate the impact of SBR in the Egyptian context.

6. An effective comprehensive evaluation system that targets all components, processes, and aspects of the education system should be developed. According to one of the participants: *"Concentration on evaluation in the light of SBR will have a direct effect on improving the whole educational processs."*

7. More scientific approaches to school management should be adopted, which implies schools should have specific realistic improvement-plans and measurable objectives that can be realized through available school resources.

8. Professional development programs should be designed to enhance the knowledge, attitudes and skills of school-principals, teachers, administrators and BOTs regarding the effective implementation of SBR.

9. Social marketing and raising awareness should take place, not only among those involved in SBR at the school level, but also among other stakeholders, with the aim of decreasing resistance and mobilizing efforts.

10. Developing an *Implementation Guide* of SBR to assist those who are involved in the process, particularly principals, teachers and BOTs, to be aware of their new roles and responsibilities in light of SBR.

CONCLUSION

SBR represents a new window for reforming the Egyptian education system that chronically adopted central reform initiatives, without real success. SBR is also seen as an opportunity for schools to increase their resources by enhancing community participation and encouraging stakeholders to be more involved in the education sector. It is not only about enhancing financial resources, which does represent one of the greatest challenges to the Egyptian government, as approximately 85% of the budget is allocated to salaries, leaving limited resources for making improvements or implementing real reform initiatives. Schools, through work and cooperation with local partners, can increase and enhance their human, academic, and material resources.

The implementation of SBR varies widely among Egyptian schools, which witness extreme disparities in their leadership, teachers, BOTs, partnerships, and stakeholders in their local environments. Schools in big cities and in high socio-economic districts normally attract principals and teachers who are highly qualified and well-trained. The composition of the BOTs varies greatly among schools all over the country. In one school, for example, it may be composed of professors, governmental senior officials, and other professionals of high socio-economic status, who possess power and knowledge and can secure more resources for their schools. In another school, the BOT membership may lack power and knowledge, and therefore, are unable to support the school in substantial ways; typically this occurs in low socio-economic districts and in remote areas. However, it is still the responsibility of the MOE to ensure that BOTs in different schools receive the necessary training programs that qualify them to take on their roles and successfully maximize their contributions in guiding and monitoring school performance. Therefore, it is better to define minimum standards for schools, which should be reached or preferably exceeded, depending on every school's unique situation, rather than imposing universal standards that should be reached by all schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

More studies on SBR in Egyptian pre-university education should be conducted to measure the quantitative impact of implementing SBR in particular, and education decentralization in general, which will provide concrete evidence as to whether real change happens, and to what extent, as a result of implementing such reforms. Besides, conducting such quantitative studies will make it possible to compare the performances among different governorates, districts, and even among individual schools. Those studies should be re-conducted over time as SBR initiatives continue, since it is still a recent movement and its impacts will emerge more clearly. As more authorities are given to schools, it is expected that better understandings and awareness of SBR will be realized by different stakeholders, including principals and teachers. Hopefully, as time progresses, SBR receives stronger political commitment and will, which can make the difference in this and any other education reform.

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