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Vision of the Egyptian Political System for Education

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Vision of the Egyptian Political System for Education

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The policies that governed the education process in Egypt after July 1952 has led to deterioration of the education project as a choice for building the renaissance and progress of the Egyptian State.

Although education flourished during the reign of Gamal Abdel Nasser due to its association with the concepts of liberation from colonialism, modernization, and the need to build a progressive socialist society – where the Egyptian people hastened to abandon the profession of agriculture and enroll their children in government-owned schools that used to offer education services for free – however, the education project was only aimed at completing the structure of the bureaucratic State and providing an army of civil servants, where laws allowed appointment of anyone who obtained a school certificate in government bodies, even if it was a basic education (primary school) certificate.

After hiring millions of civil servants, the State have become unable to recruit more employees. Therefore, in the early 1980s, the government abolished the compulsory appointment of graduates in government bodies and turned to appointments through favoritism and sometimes through cash bribes to senior statesmen and members of parliament. Education thus has lost much of its attraction and significance.

First: Key transformations in education

This reality has led to the emergence of a number of transformations and problems related to the path of the Egyptian educational system, including:

1- Education has become a societal phenomenon

The people continued to embrace the education project after the State lifted its hand; thus, the education shifted from a State project to a society project, and the number of university graduates and holders of master's and doctoral degrees increased, but they were deprived of the right to be hired in State bodies, as this privilege was restricted to the ruling class.

When the Ministry of Education declared a competition to hire 50,000 teachers for only three months with a monthly pay of LE 1,000, the number of applicants reached 428 thousand, of which 136,327

were holders of postgraduate studies, 3,900 holders of master's degree, and 82 holders of [Ph.D.](#) degree.

Despite this frustration, the Egyptian community continued to invest in education and bear the burden of private tuition for their children and the high cost of the entire educational process. The society was largely open to all kinds private schools and did not remain indifferent towards government policies that marginalized education and excluded it from the priorities of spending and development.

2- The regime consecrates illiteracy in society

In his testimony on the Mubarak era, Ali Gomaa, the former Grand Mufti of the Mubarak regime, said that when he spoke to a high-ranking official in the Mubarak regime about the high illiteracy rate (ranging from 36% to 50%), which destroys all development plans and indicates that the State had failed to fight illiteracy, the senior official told him that the State deliberately spread illiteracy and ignorance to make it easier for the government to control [society](#).

In an article published in Al-Shorouk, an Egyptian newspaper, Dr. Galal Amin stressed that the failure to organize priorities of government spending and ignoring achievement of a high level of education is not due to ignorance, but to betrayal of trust; not due to lack of knowledge but to lack of [ethics](#).

Ahmed Fathi Sorour, who served as Minister of Education and Speaker of the People's Assembly (parliament) under Mubarak, also attacked the education system in Egypt, saying: "I will surprise you if I say that my children and grandchildren, as well as many elites in Egypt, went to foreign education, not in love of this kind of education, but to escape Egypt's substandard [education system](#)."

The ruling elite took advantage of the illiteracy of the Egyptian people and considered it ineligible for democracy, as stated by former Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif and former Vice President Omar Suleiman during the January Revolution, asserting that the Egyptian people are not qualified for [democracy](#).

In the same context, General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi said during a press conference following his meeting with the French President in France in October 2017 in response to a question about human rights in Egypt: "... Egypt is not like Europe in its intellectual, cultural, civilizational and humanitarian progress; we are in [another region](#)." – which highlights the same meaning.

3- Declining scientific research

Scientific research in Egypt suffers from many problems, most notably funding, as the budget of scientific research in Egypt does not exceed 0.04%, more than 80% of which is spent on wages, construction and administrative work. According to Dr. Rushdi Rashad, in light of the desire for research and progress since the reign of Mohammed Ali Pasha and Gamal Abdel Nasser, the trend has been focus on applied sciences and not on basic or theoretical sciences, which prompted the Egyptian renaissance (based on the concept of modernization) to be just a carrier of sciences, while unable to enter into the research race.

According to Dr. Rushdi Rashad, the Egyptian political system - under Mubarak's regime – did not have a national project and did not adopt policies that encourage the creation of a scientific environment, which prompted scientists either to migrate outside Egypt in search of a scientific incubator or to stay in Egypt and become mere 'employees', in the bureaucratic sense of the word. He added that Egypt does not have institutions concerned with development of [scientific research](#).

Second: Problems of the educational process

The main problems related to the educational process include:

1- Education and democracy

Dr. Hamed Ammar believes that there is a direct relationship between the spread of the democratic culture and the success of the educational system, taking into consideration that democracy guarantees the values of participation, dialogue and interaction; which ensures sustainable development, including achievement of human development. On the other hand, the successive autocratic regimes have been an obstacle to the development of the education system [in Egypt](#).

In fact, education can also grow even under authoritarian regimes, taking into account the success of education during the former Soviet Union and later under its heir, the Russian Federation. The education system also succeeded in authoritarian countries such as China and Iran. In addition, the rise of modern Egypt in the field of education was linked to the repressive authoritarian State founded by Mohammed Ali Pasha, and the educational experience flourished in Egypt during the authoritarian military regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Although the educational system is more successful and sustainable in democracies, the authoritarian countries that adopt a civilized project, seek self-determination or target imposition of a regional or a global control – as in the case of the former Soviet Union – also seek to ensure the quality of education and remove all obstacles in the way of citizens to select the best minds to benefit from in favor of their national project.

As for the Egyptian case, the biggest dilemma is not only in its authoritarian regime, but it is also in the existence of a regime that lacks legitimacy and adopts no national or liberation project. For ensuring survival in power the regime does not mind dependency on the United States, Saudi Arabia and the UAE with regard to the country's foreign policy.

The current regime in Egypt believes that its first enemy is raising the level of awareness and education of the Egyptian people. In fact, it has deliberately exploited the ignorance and illiteracy of a large segment of the people to promote old colonial approaches and policies – that Egyptians are incapable of governing themselves, unable to choose, and lack any democratic culture; and therefore any likely democratic process will ultimately produce an extremist Islamist government. In this way, the regime deprives the Egyptian people of the most important element of national liberation and popular sovereignty, i.e. their right to self-determination.

In this context, the regime allowed access to military and police academies for students who only achieve 50% in high school exams, allowed graduates of the Faculty of Law who only get 'pass' to apply for a job in judiciary. In order to apply for a job at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, you are only required to obtain any university degree in addition to proficiency in a foreign language.

2- Education and social justice

One of the important problems associated with the success of the education system is its connection with the concept of social justice. Despite existence of different views on such relationship, there is a strong connection between the success of education and the provision of educational opportunities commensurate with the indicators of social justice.

Undoubtedly, the regime's distancing from manipulation of the work of the Universities Coordination Office has given citizens great confidence in the educational system and provided opportunities for a wide range of the middle and lower classes to study at university.

But the frustration resulting from the low wages, the widespread unemployment and the state's abstention from the employment policy have left broad segments of those classes reluctant to seek acquisition of a good education.

3- Democracy of education

It is important to note that there is a difference between the democracy of the political system and the democratic nature of education. The relation of any state, whether democratic or authoritarian, with the education system is determined by recognizing its (education system's) democratic nature, and that a good education system is based on the idea of providing opportunities for all students for the selection of the best minds in all scientific disciplines to manage the research, academic and technological sites in a way that contributes to the progress and development of the national project adopted by the state.

From the above argument, it is clear that the Egyptian regime lacks all the elements of success of the educational system. It is an authoritarian regime that adopts no national project, building its foreign policies on dependency and borrowing from abroad.

The current regime believes that education of the people represents a burden on the state budget, poses a threat to its own future, and gives priority to only occupations that are related to its security and stability.

In this context, Ali Abdel-Aal, the current speaker of the House of Representatives (parliament) said that the 'commodity' of security is the most expensive commodity in the world, claiming that Egypt is superior to [European countries](#) in this regard!!