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Timetable and student distribution set for the academic year



Authorities at the Ministry of Education and Technical Education said that the schools have finished distributing students over two/ three periods over the course of the school day. Lists of students were prepared for different periods and announced in visible bulletins in schools, as well as electronically by publishing them on school groups on the Facebook social media platform, to inform parents and students of daily attendance times.

[Link to the News Story](#)

Our Views

- There is no doubt that the Ministry of Education and Technical Education exerts clear and tangible effort in developing the sector. But with the presence of more than 24 million school students, of whom about 22 million are in public schools,¹ the quality of education remains a serious challenge. In many cases, graduate students do not sufficiently acquire basic skills for several reasons, most notably is the overcrowding of students in schools and classrooms, which prevents them from adequately understanding their subjects.
- The Corona pandemic has revealed the extent of the vulnerabilities of the education sector in Egypt. Here, we ask an important question regarding the above-mentioned news: Is the Ministry's decision to divide study periods over two/ three periods during the school day to maintain social distancing between students during the Corona pandemic period an effective solution to the problems facing the educational system's chronic issues in terms of student overcrowding and low quality of educational service provided?
- Public pre-university education has suffered from high student density in classes during the last five years; which increased by 11.5% during the period 2015/2016-2019/2020.² The density of classrooms in public education averages about 50 students per classroom, compared to about 33 students in the private sector for the year

¹ Ministry of Education and Technical Education, Pre-University Education Statistics 2020/2021.

² Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, Pre-University Education System, Views on Crisis Series, Issue No. 5, March 2020.

2019/2020.³ In urban areas, this figure reached 119 students per classroom, and rises to 162 students per classroom in rural areas. This is because the increase in the number of classrooms is much less than the increase in the number of students. In addition, the classroom density of primary education in Egypt (47.5 students per classroom) is higher than that of many other developing and densely populated countries such as India (24 students per classroom), Indonesia (27 students), and China (37 students).⁴

- Prior to the recent decision to redistribute study periods, there were already about 66% of government primary school students attending schools that operate for more than one period per day, according to the Ministry's statistics. This experiment did not achieve the desired success. The dropout rates increased—about 35% of which were recorded in schools with multiple shifts.⁵
- Therefore, the decision to increase study periods represents only a greater burden on the teacher, who has to teach the same subject three times during the same day. This is in addition to reducing the duration of the class in order to be able to accommodate three periods, which negatively affects the comprehension of students of curricula that are not already commensurate with the duration of the academic year. This may even exacerbate the demand for private lessons even further.
- In addition to what was mentioned in the news, the Ministry decided to authorise volunteer teachers for 20 pounds per

³ Ministry of Education and Technical Education, Pre-University Education Statistics 2020/2021.

⁴ American University in Cairo, Alternative Policy Solutions, Expensive Schools and Poor Education: Necessary Reforms for Egypt's School Building System, November 2019.

⁵ IBID.

class, in an attempt to overcome the large and chronic deficit in the number of teachers, which exceeds 200,000 teachers according to the minister's statements, provided that the voluntary classes are a maximum of 24 classes per week, with a monthly income of less than two thousand pounds. This decision has many risks, as it may cause a further decline in the educational level due to the probability of teachers not being sufficiently qualified to carry out their responsibilities in the educational process. It also provides an opportunity for non-compliance, as there is nothing obliging the volunteer teacher to comply. Also, this does not guarantee the sustainability of the educational process, as the teacher may quit in the middle of the school year if a better job opportunity arises.

- Looking at the procedures referred to above, we note the absence of a comprehensive vision to deal with the problems of the education sector in Egypt, with only a number of temporary, partial, and unreliable measures suggested instead. Therefore, there is a need for urgent and sustainable structural policies and procedures that stem from a more comprehensive vision to improve the current status of the system. Most importantly, for example:
 - Allocating more government spending to education⁶ to meet the needs required to face the impact of the pandemic and advance the education system in general, provided that it is allocated to all relevant items, most importantly:
 - Investing in building schools as Egypt, for example, needs about 250 thousand new classrooms at an estimated cost of

⁶ For more details on government spending on education, you can view the study recently conducted by ECES on “Sound Budgeting as a Driver of Change: A Detailed Comparative Analysis in Light of Best International Standards and Practices. (Working Paper No. 219).

EGP 130 billion,⁷ taking into account when establishing schools the difference in student density, demographic, and economic conditions from one geographical area to another, especially between urban and rural areas. This is in addition to re-examining previous proposals by the private sector in terms of building schools if the state allocates land, which leads to quickly bridging the gap in the schools and classrooms needed.

- Employing more permanent and qualified teachers with decent wages to fill the huge shortage of teachers in the various schools, with priority given to this item so as not to repeat what happened with the 136 thousand teachers who were selected according to a competition held in 2019; after the start of their work, there was a deficit in budget resources to honor their contracts. It is also necessary to abandon the idea of volunteer teachers because it is not sustainable, and if the experiment fails or falters, the student alone will pay the price.
- Increasing allocations for other related items such as maintenance of schools and their facilities, scientific material, infrastructure, training...etc.
- Reducing centralization in the selection, purchase, and construction of lands needed to build schools, to be directed through local councils instead of giving all management and implementation powers for the process of building public schools to the Public Authority for Educational Buildings alone.

⁷ American University in Cairo, Alternative Policy Solutions, Quality Education Begins with School Infrastructure, September 2020.

- The shift towards expanding “distance education,” which has already begun in context of the crisis, and is an opportunity to make a rapid and major transformation in the educational system, in which distance learning becomes an essential part in dealing with the problem of student overcrowding. This should be accompanied by taking necessary measures, the most important of which is strengthening the electronic infrastructure.
- Paying special attention to the Faculty of Education; as it is the entity that graduates teachers and hence an essential part of the development of the system is the proper preparation of the teacher.
- As an overview, it is necessary to reconsider: 1) the strategy for developing education in general so that appropriate solutions can be found for the various regions of the country, and 2) establishing a higher education council that includes experts capable of developing a strategy for the education sector and that assists the Ministry in its implementation.

Finally, the adoption of decentralization is an essential measure in the successful implementation of any education strategy.

Worthy of Note:

- Circular No. 32 dated 10/12/2021, issued by the Ministry of Education and Technical Education regarding the regulations for organizing work in schools for all stages in the academic year 2021/2022 provides that:

The head of the directorate is responsible for finding appropriate solutions to reduce student density, especially in schools that operate based on a double-shift system, and a third period can be added if necessary. As for the schools that have been operating based on a single-shift system, the head of the directorate has the right to approve a double-shift system, without compromising the number of approved school days.

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