

Updates from Egypt about the students learning during the time of COVID-19 pandemic

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MOETE measures:

- Mar.15th Ministry of Education and Technical Education of Egypt (MOETE) decided a temporary closure of all schools for two weeks
- Beginning of Apr. MOETE requested all grades from G3- G9 to register in Edmodo platform (<https://edmodo.org>), then later to submit research project in 4 specific topics (Health, Tourism, Water, or Energy) either individually or in group maximum 5 students in the same schools.
- May.13th announcement that all schools will be reopened in mid-September 2020 when the new school year begins. It means that this will be the longest summer vacation ever which lasts for more than 6 months from Mar.15th until mid-September.
- May 18th was the deadline for projects to be submitted on Edmodo platform.

- In Egypt there are different kinds of education, such as national curriculum, foreign curriculum, and international curriculum, offered in different kinds of instructional language, such as Arabic and foreign languages, at different kinds of schools, such as public schools, private schools, and international schools, etc. The quality of education, such as school facility, teaching staff, varies according to the types of school, meeting the different needs of students, parents and stakeholder.

- After the sudden closure of all schools, each type of school and its community reacted to the above MOETE-proposed measure in different ways.

1- National public schools:

Basic information:

- The national public schools are generally with high student density, and low school fees. Most of the teachers lack advanced teaching skills. Most of the School facilities are poor. And majority of the students are from low socioeconomic class. School management usually focuses on following general instructions from local educational administration and overall quality of education is relatively low in these schools.
- Despite of MOETE's efforts in education reforms such as opening new schools, innovating the infrastructure of old schools, introducing ICT based evaluation system for secondary schools, launching online free platforms such as Egyptian Knowledge Bank (EKB) and introducing new curriculum "EDU. 2.0" to kindergarten and some grades of primary school, still the infrastructures of most of national school, teachers and students need more and more efforts to be ready for this type of learning
- Most of the teachers and students in these schools are not familiar with ICT in education even though some schools have, for example, smart screen, but teachers generally never touch it as they don't have the skills to deal with it.

- Most of the students of these schools don't have Internet access and the devices that allow them to access the online learning or the MOETE's platforms same as their teachers.
- The relationship between school and home is not that favourable either, since the number of teachers for students is very low and most of the parents are not allowed to enter the schools freely.
- There are good relationships between some parents and some teachers in the school who come to the children's houses to give them private classes with certain amount of fees.

After the closure of the schools:

- The schools did not ask teachers much due to lack of resources and budget. Accordingly, teachers did not ask their students for anything.
- The management of these schools followed the instruction of the MOETE which said that no extra classes were to be given and students should learn online, of which the 2nd part was not observed.
- Majority of the teachers cared rather the students who received private lessons from the teacher than the entire class at the school. This is because their basic salaries are secured by the government, but the private teacher fees are not.
- Some teachers started preparing online learning materials and offered through WhatsApp, videos and Voice Notes to keep in touch mainly with their students of private lessons.
- Later these teachers started helping these students on preparing the research projects.
- The students themselves initially considered the temporary closure of the school as the start of summer vacation, so no need to learn or study anything. They were shocked when the MOETE announced evaluating the research projects in 4 topics.
- Some of the students and parents of these group had no clue about how to do this research project so they asked researchers or others to do it on behalf of them. Some of them said they did not have computers to prepare it, so MOETE announced that they can do it with handwriting and submit it to schools in person.
- The learning of the students in this group depends on their parents and the environment they have at home, like number of kids in the same family, available tools, keenness of the parents, and their socio-economic status, etc.
- The majority of the students doesn't have much learning opportunities during the stay at home period. Main source of learning for them is Mass media (TV) as well as parents, relatives, and peers. They usually come out to play in front of their houses just for spending the time but not benefiting from this situation so much.

2- National Private language schools:

Basic information:

- The National Private language schools are the ones offering national curriculum in foreign language such as English or French.
- They are the schools with normal student density, relatively high school fees (moderate but not extremely expensive). Most of the teachers have average teaching skills. School facility is good, clean and spacious in most of the schools. Majority of the students are from middle class. School management follows general instructions from local educational administration but introduces many other policies. And overall quality of education situates between good and very good in these schools.

- The Policies of these schools include high-level language curriculum and other extra activities, such as events related to health and hygiene, safety, etc., which are the reasons for the relatively high school fees
- Most of the teachers and students in these schools use smart screens in the classrooms. The schools have own mobile applications (mainly for organizational matters like following schools' fees payment and exam schedule not for learning purpose).
- Schools have web sites and distribute user IDs among parents but not active in most of the school.
- Schools also have a Facebook pages and use it mainly for communication with parents.
- Teachers neither use online assessment nor communicate with parents digitally.
- Schools want to prevent the private teaching, so parents are allowed to communicate with teachers only through subject supervisor or in his or her presence.
- ICT infrastructures of these school are good but not very active in most of the schools.
- The relationship between school and home is good and a meeting is usually arranged once per semester, where parents are called to visit the school in day off (Saturday) to speak with each subject teacher in one room in the presence of the supervisor about the students' academic and behavioural progress.
- The number of teachers for students is sufficient, where each class of around 20-25 student (G1-G4) has usually two or 3 teachers in addition to area coordinator teachers.

After the closure of the schools:

- These kinds of school take school fees and bus fees, so the first question come to the parents why they must pay for the entire second semester even though their kids went only for 1 month.
- Schools started to create some awareness videos about washing hands and prevents going out, etc.
- At the beginning school started to share worksheets and learning materials through the FB group for each lesson, so that students can print it and solve it by themselves at home.
- School started to train Teachers to use online platforms such as Zoom, MOETE web sites, etc.
- Teachers tried their best, otherwise they may lose their jobs in private sector if they do not perform well.
- Later schools started to prepare schedules for Zoom meetings with their teachers from 11:00 till 14:00 (3 sessions a day). This practice lasted for around 1 month (from the beginning of Apr. until the 1st week of May).
- The schools created sub FB groups for each grade, then share the Zoom links, ID and passwords, and sessions schedule, all the necessary information for this online communication.
- The sessions were mainly revision for previous classes as MOETE announced now no new lessons are to be taught.
- These sessions were good, and teachers tried from time to time to involve students by asking them questions while encouraging them and greet them all.
- Teachers keep talking most of the session allowing only the students they choose to speak.
- The weak point of this practice seems that students were inactive in most of the session and gradually got bored of it .

- Also, students wanted to speak more with their colleagues whom they missed very much during the stay home. They saw them on the session, but they were not allowed to communicate with each other as only teachers were in the session.
- Students felt strange from this situation which brought the school community to their homes and made impacts on their daily routine that they had been doing for almost one month.
- Schools started this practice at higher grades (G6-G9) then gradually went for lower grades, until they reach KG under the support of their mothers.
- Lower grades KG1 students liked interacting with their teachers, but didn't like waiting for long time in the same place in front of the screen.
- The research project attracted the attention of the students G3-G9 somehow, but they didn't have any previous experiences on how to write a research report, choose the topic, search for the various information online and on their textbooks, as well as how to cooperate with their colleagues.
- Also, students faced some technical problems such as not knowing how to type their research report on a word file, editing and organizing the research report, changing the word file into PDF for submitting on the MOETE platform.
- But still this research project is considered as a starting point for these generation to shift their mind set from studying for the exam to studying for integrating different subjects to form new knowledge.
- Away from the official efforts, most of the kids, during the stay home period, started to try different activities to spend the time. Such as video games, watching YouTube, watch movies / cartoons on the TV, communicate with their colleagues at the sporting club or at school, (sometimes play with them online).
- They started changing the setup of their house / rooms by moving furniture and create their own private spots, collecting their stuff and create their own world.
- Parents were putting so much time and efforts in this process, they acted as co-teacher, doctors, social worker, entertainers, private coach for sports and exercise activity, personal assistant for their kids to help them to keep school schedules and give them any required support 24/7.
- Some parents did exercises, bought indoor games or sports gear such as dart, baby foot, board games, drawing and colouring tools, musical instruments, etc.
- Parents shared most of the day with their kids and did some art contests, played mini sports, performed exercises with them. Also, some kids entered their kitchen and helped their mothers for cooking as well as dividing the tasks of cleaning among family members.
- As time passed most of the fun activity became boring, so kids returned to Video games and YouTube.

3- International school:

Basic information:

- These kinds of school offer foreign curriculum.
- The International schools are with low classroom density, very high school fees, most of the teachers possess advanced teaching skills, School facility is very luxury, and majority of the students are from high socio-economic class. School management follows general

instructions from certified educational programs and overall quality of education is from high to very high in these schools.

- International schools are familiar with online learning through using email assessments and different platforms or through using active websites where schools provide users' access for everyone (students, teachers and parents)
- The relationship between school and home is very good and parents make comment on school performance and enter the schools freely.

After the closure of the schools:

- The international schools suffered less than national schools during the stay at home period as they have the infrastructure and the capabilities of teachers and students to deal with this technology.
- International schools continued to finish their lessons and curriculum normally as they shifted all their learning into online. The students at these schools are from relatively wealthier families, so they have a high speed Internet access, the required devices for accessing the various platforms through the Internet. Moreover, they are familiar with the technology and have the needed skills to deal with it like their teachers.
- Student of these schools are more free to learn and less affected by the pandemic since they know how to get information, how to reproduce it, and how to communicate with their colleagues and teachers online. Furthermore, they have not only the tools and financial resources in case if new tools are necessary for their learning, but also spacious places in their homes to do it.