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Higher education in Egypt since World War II: development and challenges

*Mahmoud Emira**

Abstract: This article aims to analyse the policy shifts in higher education (HE) in Egypt since World War II in terms of the key policies, ideologies, competing policies and consequences of these policies over four policy eras: (1944-1952), (1952- 1970), (1970-1981) and (1981-present). The analytical policy framework used in this article is adapted from the work of Hodgson and Spours (2006). The policy documents referred to in the analysis, where appropriate, are Acts of parliament, influential reports and strategic decisions driven by political and international agendas. Despite the policy shifts in these policy eras, i.e. from 'education of the elite', 'education for all' to 'privatisation of education', the analysis seems to suggest that none of these shifts has been a complete success. This might be the result of the underlying challenges for HE, which the article attempts to unpack. It concludes with a number of suggestions to develop HE in Egypt.

Keywords: higher education, policy, Egypt, World War II

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Introduction

Higher Education (HE) in Egypt refers to all types of academic, professional and technical education, which are offered at institutions like universities, colleges and institutes provided students enrolled have completed their secondary education and are 18 years old (Mina, 2001). In the current education system, there are 17 public universities, 51 public non-university institutions, 16 private universities and 89 private higher institutions. Of the 51 non-university institutions, 47 are Middle Technical Institutes offering two-year courses and four are Higher Technical Institutes offering four-five year courses (British Council, 2013). HE has a long history in Egypt. One of the oldest universities in the world is arguably 'Oan University', which translates into 'Sun/Heliopolis' in ancient Egypt (Mina, 2001). It is believed that worship of the sun flourished during that phase. Education continued at that university for about 30 centuries and some of its graduates were Amenhotep and Akhenaten, two of the most famous pharaohs of ancient Egypt. During the Islamic Era Al-Azhar university was established in Cairo, which became an Islamic university for the Muslim world. In 1917 the first state university in modern Egypt was built and in 1923 an independent university, which was founded at the beginning of the century (Hatem, 1980), and the first state university were joined and called the 'Egyptian University'. In 1923 the Egyptian university was attached to the Ministry of Public Knowledge. This public university then became the first official university according to the Royal Decree in 1925 (Sekran, 2001) and since then HE in Egypt went through a number of 'policy eras', which are discussed below.

The term 'political era' (Hodgson & Spours, 2006, p. 686) refers to a period of politics and policy-making framed by four major factors: a) underlying key policies b) ideology c) competing policies, which challenge the dominant ideology and d) the consequences of the key policies. The analytical policy framework is adapted from the work of Hodgson and Spours (2006). It takes into account the historical and contextual dimensions as well as the underlying ideological basis for political decision-making in each 'policy era' (Taylor *et al.*, 1997 cited in Hodgson & Spours, 2006) to examine the extent of policy interference in the highly centralised HE system (See conceptual framework below). The policy documents referred to in the analysis, where appropriate, are Acts of

parliament, influential reports and strategic decisions driven by political and international agendas.

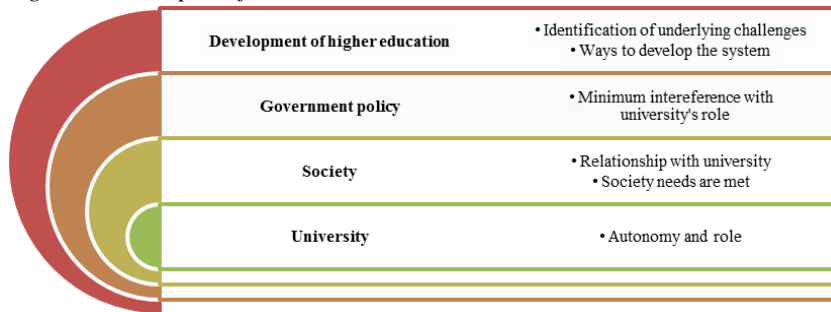
The research questions

Linked to the above four factors, the article aims to answer the following research questions:

- What *key policies*, and agents shaped the distinctive eras of Egypt's HE development from 1944 to the present?
- What were the *competing policies* to these policy eras, and why were they unsuccessful?
- What were the underpinning *ideologies* that shaped these policy eras?
- What were the *consequences* of the HE policies in each policy era and what were the relationships between these consequences and the past and following policy eras?

The conceptual framework in this article acknowledges: a) autonomy and role of the university b) the university's relationship with society to ensure their needs are met c) government policy, i.e. that minimises interference with university's role d) the identification of underlying challenges and the need to find ways to develop the HE system. This framework is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework



The development of HE in Egypt went through a number of policy eras (Sekran, 2001) after World War II. These four eras reflect the country's

socio-political context (Hatem, 1980).

Policy era one: 1944-1952

Egypt was a constitutional monarchy from 1922-1952 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013a). Britain occupied Egypt in 1882 and in 1914 Egypt became a British protectorate before gaining independence in 1922¹ (Almanach de Saxe Gotha, 2013). During this policy era with the exception to the education of Al-Azhar (mainstream religious education) and small study circles in local mosques for teaching Arabic language and Holy Quran, education was called the 'education of the elite' because it had high fees, which not everyone could afford (MoHE, 1963). The majority of families at the time would hope their children gained an intermediate qualification to enable them to get a job to support them financially and be able to start their own family afterwards.

During the early days of the Egyptian university HE was funded by the public, which did not last long. Eventually funding was sought reluctantly through the government; it was believed this would impact on the University's autonomy (Sekran, 2001). The number of universities in this policy era was limited, but this started to grow later on to increase access to HE (OECD, 2010). In addition to one private university (the American University in Cairo), there were five public universities in Egypt at that time and were located in the capital Cairo and two of the biggest cities, Alexandria in the north and Assuit in the South (OECD, 2010). Also, student admission was not regulated centrally (MoHE, 1963) so students had the freedom to choose which university to go to. Each university had the autonomy to determine the number of students who could be offered a place (Hatem, 1980), regardless of the needs of society.

Universities operated through three hierarchical levels/councils: departmental, faculty and university, which are chaired by the most senior academic staff, dean of the faculty and vice chancellor respectively. Academic research was mainly individual and again there was no long-term

¹ British forces finally withdrew from Egypt in 1954 (BBC, 2013a). However, Britain remained controlling Egypt after 1922, particularly the Suez Canal, along with France. This was the case until 1956 when Egypt decided to regain its control over the canal (National Archives, 2013).

plan/strategy for research in these universities, which was also publicly funded (Sekran, 2001). Universities were autonomous but distant from society and no links were established with society to respond to their needs, which contradicts the conceptual framework.

Key policy

‘Education of the elite’ had been in place during this policy era. Each university had its own regulations and full academic and financial autonomy and there was no national body or organisation responsible for development of HE or coordination between the universities. This was the case until 1950 when the Supreme Council of Universities (SCU) was founded following the royal Decree 496 (Hatem, 1980) to coordinate between universities.

Competing policy

The SCU was established as part of the Ministry of Education, which was responsible for education at all levels including HE. It was headed by the Minister of Education and comprised the deans and associate deans of all universities at the time (Hatem, 1980). Although the SCU took the responsibility for planning and development in HE, coordinating between universities, making effective use of the available resources and providing consultancy to the government (Hatem, 1980), the key actor was the government who had the final decision. This might have marked the beginning of policy interference in HE, which continued in the subsequent policy eras.

Ideology

The British occupation drove the policy of ‘Education of the elite’. Prior to this policy era and under the British occupation investment in education was reduced radically and “it has been suggested that this downscaling was partly designed to refashion graduates as *administrators* in the colonial bureaucracy and even to reduce the risk that potentially disruptive, educated, nationalist leaders might emerge to challenge the occupation” (Loveluck, 2012, p. 4, italics added). The British controlled Egypt and they educated their own and were not concerned with educating Egyptians, although the more affluent Egyptians were able to educate their children (Bush, 1990). Building universities is likely to emancipate society (Sekran,

2001) by spreading knowledge and creating generation of graduates who might start to question the status quo and rebel to gain their freedom. Therefore, education was not a 'priority' for the British coloniser (Tageldin, 2011, p. 155).

As mentioned above, there was no comprehensive plan about HE to guide universities about the number of students they could accept (Hatem, 1980) and whether or not they were meeting the needs of the labour market, which might have been the political ideology for establishing the SCU.

Consequences

During this policy era the tuition fee students paid to study subjects like social sciences was LE52 Egyptian Pounds=£5.2, which was less than the fees of science subjects such as medicine LE148=£14.8 (Cairo University, 2010). These fees may seem very low but when this is compared to the estimated minimum monthly budget of a family of six members for food and clothes at that time, which was LE0.44=£0.04, it shows that HE was an unaffordable option for the disadvantaged families (Cairo University, 2010). Universities might have had more autonomy during this period, prior to the establishment of the SCU, in comparison with the subsequent policy eras, but they didn't seem to have succeeded (i.e. being distant from society) in making better use of this privilege. However, policy began, i.e. through the SCU, (and would continue) to interfere in HE to support the new policy shift towards 'education for all' in the next policy era.

Policy era two: 1952- 1970

The beginning of this policy era witnessed a revolution, which involved General Muhammad Najib, Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser and Colonel Anwar Sadat who led a coup of the so-called Free Officers (FO) that brought to an end to the rule of the former King Farouk and his son Fu'ad II (BBC, 2013b) and turned Egypt into a republic. The presidency of Najib (BBC, 2013a) did not last long enough (1952-54) to make radical changes in the educational system. Therefore, the focus in this policy era will be on the policy of his successor, Nasser. The FOs, led by Nasser, formed the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), which dictated policy to the civilian cabinet (Chapin Metz, 1990) and was in charge from 1954-56.

Nasser then became the President from 1956 until 1970 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013b) and initiated a socialist programme that established 'mass education'/'education for all'. Everyone was to receive an education free from first grade through to University, if they met certain standards, i.e. successfully passed secondary exit exam (thanawiya amma) (Buckner, 2012). Kamal Udeen Hussein, with support from Nasser, started to implement Nasser's vision by changing the name of the Ministry of General Education (wazaret alma'aref al-omoomyiah) to the Ministry of Education. He believed that Egypt was suffering from illiteracy, which was the main tool that the British occupation used to achieve their aims, i.e. to maintain their power and control over their colony. On the other hand, Kamal Udeen Hussein was a strong believer in a motto of Taha Hussein, one of the most famous scholars at the time who was described as the dean of Arabic Literature, that education is like the air we breathe and the water we drink (State Information Service, 2013c). Therefore, everyone would have the right to be educated.

Key policy

Entitlement to free 'education for all' was stated in the Egyptian constitution of 1954: social rights which are comprised in chapter two of this constitution include citizens' right to free education (State Information Service, 2013b). Therefore, there was a need to build more universities to support the infrastructure and respond to the needs of the labour market in fields like engineering, medicine, science, agriculture, pharmacology and dentistry (MoHE, 1963), and not just create a generation of administrators as was the case in the previous policy era. On the one hand, to facilitate this process and the policy shift towards 'education for all', it might have been necessary to rely on the SCU. On the other hand, universities lost their autonomy and no longer had individual regulations eventually, which had been replaced by *national* regulations for their academic, administrative and financial matters following the 508 Act in September 1954 (Hatem, 1980). This was the first Act to regulate universities' practice that had been applied to all universities at that time. It was based on Ali Maher's report in 1953, which was a milestone in the history of Egyptian HE. This report stressed the importance of the university's role in the nation's development including the training of a skilled workforce, academic research and its right for intellectual autonomy. These recommendations in Maher's report

were reflected in the 1956 Act about regulating universities' practice, the Covenant of National Work in 1960s and the public roles of the university in the 1972 Act. According to this Act, a university a) has the *sole* responsibility for HE and academic research, which serves its *community*. Its autonomy is *protected* by the government to ensure its ability to respond to the needs of society and labour market b) contributes to the advancement of knowledge and strengthens relations between academic groups and organisations nationally and abroad and c) provides the nation with suitably qualified specialists, technicians and experts in all fields, equipping them with a knowledge base and research skills. The conceptual framework supports much of this Act.

Competing policy

Academic autonomy was supposed to be 'protected' by the above Act, but in reality it was undermined significantly. According to Lulat (2005, p. 132):

Egypt moved to exert political control over internal administrative and day to day operations of institutions by means of various legal decrees (e.g. Law no. 504 of 1954) where university autonomy was virtually obliterated...the university (and the higher education sector as a whole) was given a taste of the flavour of Nasser's understanding of the concept of university autonomy on September 21, 1954, when he forced the dismissal from the university of a motley group (in terms of political sympathies) of some sixty to seventy faculty – ranging from full professors to graduate teaching assistants- without any explanation. Even the curriculum was not out of bounds: Nasser insisted that all universities include in their curricula a national curriculum with mandatory courses in Arab socialism and allied subjects.

During this policy era the SCU was chaired by the most senior vice chancellor instead of the minister of education as was the case in the previously policy era (Hatem, 1980). Although this might suggest that the SCU was beginning to play an active role in developing HE in Egypt, they seemed to have very limited responsibility for long-term strategic planning and coordinating academic practice across Egyptian universities (Hatem, 1980). The minister of education in Nasser's government stressed that nationalism and education go hand in hand. They both teach independence and education creates an upward progress for the masses whilst at the same time being controlled with students who challenged in a democratic way

being arrested and manipulated (See the ideology section below). New HE policy (Education for all) was implemented that promoted free education to develop citizens for a modern Egypt, whilst at the same time controlling everything students learned. Students were supposed to be free to develop critical minds and to develop civic engagement, whilst being arrested for such civic engagement. Also, despite the essence of the 1952 revolution and purpose of HE were to increase access to university, which is “meritocratic, as admission is granted to only most academically gifted students, regardless of the family’s ability to pay...[this may] have opposite implications for equality of access” (Buckner, 2012, p. 3). This might have contributed to replicate human capital but not to genuinely increase equality of access, which might suggest this admission strategy was not entirely successful in this regard.

Ideology

Egypt signed on the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, thus agreeing on all the human rights it encompasses”, including education (NCERD, 2001, p. 7). This might have contributed to the rationale for adopting this ‘mass education’ policy. In line with the Human Rights agreement, the main aims of the revolution were to achieve social justice, equality and free access to education (MoHE, 1963). Officials expected these policies to increase inclusiveness as enrolments grew (Cupito & Langsten, 2011). In addition, ‘education for all’ might be “derived from the theory of human capital...where education was viewed as an investment item and not as a consumption item in national budgets” (Lulat, 2005, p. 134). The promotion of this policy might be a step towards “keeping with projections of human capital needs” (Lulat, 2005, p. 131).

There might be two reasons for the regulation of universities’ practice. The first reason, as mentioned above, was perhaps to ensure equality and access to education in terms of student admission and coordinate between the increasing numbers of universities. Nasser realised that building modern Egypt relied on establishing an up to date strong education system similar to other systems in the world after the end of World War II and hence the need to build more universities to increase access to HE (OECD, 2010) and meet the needs of society. However, for Nasser, this was perhaps more than increasing inclusiveness in education. Therefore, the second reason might be to strengthen his ‘control’ over universities, which

continued to operate through the same three levels referred to above. To understand what might be regarded as Nasser's political ideology for doing so, there is a need to see the bigger picture of his rule.

At the beginning of this policy era in 1953 he established a political organisation called 'Liberation Body' described as the 'first mass political party' (Danielson, 2007, p. 30), which marked the end of multiparty in Egypt (Al-Ahram Newspaper, 2002). This act seemed to suggest two things. First, Nasser might have wanted to 'control' the political life in Egypt by resolving all the existing political parties (State Information Service, 2013a), although Article 30 of the 1954 constitution states that Egyptians have the right to form parties without notification or permission as long as the means and ends are peaceful and are based on the democratic principles of the constitution (State Information Service, 2013b). This might imply that university students, just like politicians, would be deprived of their right to take part in political activities such as joining/forming a political party while at university. The small number of universities in the previous policy era might mean that students from other parts of Egypt might be able to meet in Cairo and Alexandria and therefore any political event/activity against Nasser's government in these universities were likely to spread out in Egypt. As such any demonstration or uprising might escalate to students' home cities and towns. For this reason it might have been necessary to strengthen his grip over HE. Second, Nasser might have wanted to 'protect' the political life by ensuring the avoidance of political parties like the 'Free Democratic Party' and the elite party of the 'Nation' (Ummah), which existed before 1919 and were loyal to the British occupation (State Information Service, 2013b).

His control over universities might be reflected further in the shift in financing HE. In other words, HE in the previous policy era was independent and funded by the public whereas in this policy era it was controlled, regulated and funded by the government (Sekran, 2001). Despite the establishment of the SCU, which had very limited responsibilities as mentioned above, HE was the responsibility of Nasser himself because he knew the start of any revolution or demonstration would take place in Egyptian universities, which were "hotbeds of political activity and ideological contestation" (Cook, 2012, p. 84).

The student political movement was not something new in Egypt. Nasser and the FOs were "well aware of recent Egyptian history.

University and secondary students had been politically active from the 1919 nationalist revolution [i.e. against the British occupation] through the parliamentary period [i.e. from 1923-1952] and remained so” (Cook, 2008, p. 81). Not only did university students protest against the British occupation, but they also “staged demonstrations against military rule” of the FOs (Qalb-i-Abid, 2009, p. 17). The student political movement consisted of Muslim Brotherhood, Young Egypt and the Communist movement who “were the main challenges faced by [Nasser’s] regime. It was also these groupings which supplied the student movement with its active core” (Abdalla, 2008, p. 21). Therefore, part of Nasser’s ideology was to control students especially in HE through a few ‘manipulation’ strategies. First, the “depoliticalisation of students was conducted through the creation of campus organisations dedicated to supporting the regime and a conscious effort to draw young people into activities that were geared more toward youth welfare and sports instead of politics” (Cook, 2012, p. 83). Second, there were “repressive measures [e.g. University Guard] to keep student opposition activists under constant surveillance and threat” (Cook, 2012, p. 83). Despite all the restrictions imposed on political activities, following the defeat in the Tripartite Aggression or Suez War in 1956 through 1966 (BBC, 2013a), students’ rebellion began to emerge (Cook, 2012) and their “prospective political significance became clear” (Abdalla, 2008, p. 21).

Consequences

The essence of the 1952 revolution started to emerge clearly and to be reflected in the education sector during Nasser’s presidency both academically and politically.

Academically, there was an increasing number of university students and graduates following Nasser’s policy of free ‘education for all’, which was one of the main principles of the revolution. The number of registered doctors increased by almost 70% (Danielson, 2007). This was facilitated by the significant reduction and then elimination of university fees (MoHE, 1963). In 1954 the numbers of students who were studying social sciences and science were 35946 and 18143 respectively with a ratio of nearly 2:1 (Hatem, 1980). To ensure equal opportunities for all applicants, this was one of the goals of the revolution; applications were assessed against transparent criteria and approved nationally before a decision was made

about choice of which degree and university for students. However, the suitability of this admission strategy was questioned above, i.e. despite the shift towards increasing student's access to higher education, this might not have been achieved fully due to the meritocratic admission strategy.

Academic research was still individual but there were attempts to do more applied research to serve the local community (Hatem, 1980). However, it might be argued these attempts were 'embryonic' due to the lack of long-term strategic planning between universities. Further to the severe lack of autonomy mentioned above, restrictions were imposed on international scholarships to certain countries such as France, Britain and the United States for two reasons. First, there were tense relationships between Egypt and these countries. Second, there was a growing harmony between Nasser and the Eastern bloc led by the Soviet Union (Barari, 2009). Therefore, academics were more likely to get scholarships in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries, which might raise questions about the success of democratisation of education, as one of the principles of the 1952 revolution, in relation to what and where students could learn.

Politically, in addition to controlling the political life and HE in Egypt, Nasser wanted to extend his grip in these two areas in other Arabic countries too. In 1955 a campus of the University of Cairo was built in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. Similarly, following the union between Egypt and Syria in 1958 university regulations in both countries were adjusted to facilitate the coordination between universities (Potter, 1962; Hatem, 1980) and reflect Nasser's political agenda of pan-Arabism. Nasser "wanted Egypt to lead the Arab world against what was widely believed to be the West's ill-intended designs on the Middle East" (Cook, 2012, p. 75). In February 1958, Syria, under the leadership of the Ba'ath Party of which Nasser was president, gave up its sovereignty to become the Northern Province of the United Arab Republic, (i.e. Egypt and Syria), for the following three and a half years (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013c).

Whilst the above policies of Nasser in this policy era might have succeeded in attempting to increase access to HE, the number of graduates and meeting the needs of society, his policy until his death in 1970 (BBC, 2013a) of controlling academia and the curriculum, minimising their academic autonomy and depoliticising the universities might have counteracted these positive outcomes.

Policy era three: 1970- 1981

This policy era was marked by another military regime of Anwar Sadat, who was one of the original members of the FOs and became the president of Egypt (1970-1981). University education continued to expand in the 1970s through to the mid 1980s, despite the deterioration in the economy (discussed in more detail in the next policy era) and public spending on education for two reasons. First, the continuing “Arab-Israeli confrontation forced Egypt to spend approximately forty percent of its 1975 budget on arms” (McLaughlin, 1978, p. 886). The second reason was the external debts (Fan, Al-Riffai, El-Said, Yu, & Kamaly, 2007). Unlike the Socialist programme of Nasser’s regime in the previous policy era, the foundations of liberalisation of the economy were laid in 1974 “to open up the economy to foreign investment and protect investments against nationalisation and confiscation” (Licari, 1997, p. 13). To assist the economic crisis Egypt had to ask in January 1977 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for financial support, which was agreed on a condition that Egypt would raise taxes and reduce subsidies, which led to riots in the same month by “the unhappy working masses and the students” (Feiler, 2003, p. 193). Although these planned reforms were cancelled, the government had to resort to a bigger budget deficit to avoid political instability (Feiler, 2003).

Key policy

Despite initiating the policy shift towards the ‘privatisation’/liberalisation of the economy, the “core elements of higher education policy.... did not and has not marked a major change; rather the policies adopted during Nasser’s time have for the most part continued, most especially in terms of access” (Lulat, 2005, p. 134). The policies of meritocracy were still in place, as stated in the 1954 constitution, which might not be entirely fair in terms of access as mentioned above. Changes during this era resulted from the 49 Act in 1972, which had its roots in the 2nd policy era when the academic practice in all Egyptian universities were regulated (Hatem, 1980) by Sadat to that of his predecessor, which would interfere in HE, continued during this era. For example, discussions in lectures were monitored, faculty appointments and academic research were inspected, and government authorities and their appointees controlled faculty participation in outside activities (Mills, 2008).

Competing policy

Despite the economic crisis, performance-related pay was introduced (Hatem, 1980) in relation to the number of teaching hours, which might be an example of the misallocation of resources. The performance-related pay was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it might have supported universities to cope with the increasing number of undergraduates as well as improving the financial status of academics. University enrolment “increased nearly 3.5 times between 1971 and 1984 with most of the growth occurring in the 1970s” (Richards, 1992, p. 110). On the other hand, engagement of academic staff in research, postgraduate studies and academic writing started to diminish (Hatem, 1980). The lack of academic autonomy, even though it should have been ‘protected’ by the 1972 Act, might have also contributed to the weakening of academic research. It may not be surprising to know that student enrolment in postgraduate studies dropped from 16% to 10% of the total number of undergraduates (Hatem, 1980). Paying more attention to undergraduate studies is likely to replicate human capital probably quicker, and this might explain the causes of the drop in postgraduate studies, the economic crisis and funding and lack of academic freedom to conduct research.

Ideology

During this policy era in Egypt, Sadat, who had to cope with a severe economic crisis after Nasser’s death in 1970, started to open the Egyptian economy to foreign investment with his “Open Door Policy” (infatih)” (Hartmann, 2008, p. 17). In fact, there was a “worldwide tendency towards economic privatisation [which] gained momentum in the 1970s” (Hartmann, 2008, p. 17). Therefore, Sadat adopted this ‘open door’ policy through which Egypt “would reorient away from the former Soviet Union” and become “a client state” of the United States (Lulat, 2005, p. 134). Also, borrowing money from the World Bank might be another reason for this close relationship with the United States.

Consequences

The increasing cooperation between Egypt and the United States started to impact on “the academic culture (textbooks, U.S.-inspired research agendas, scholarly exchanges, student culture, etc.)” of Egyptian universities (Lulat, 2005, p. 135). This might have led to more interest in

applied research and forming closer links with the rest of society (Hatem, 1980). Although doing academic research that 'serves' the university's community is stated in the 1972 Act, this might have been enhanced as a result of Egypt's close relationship with its new ally. There was expansion in sending academic staff for research scholarships abroad. Unlike Nasser, students and professionals were sent "*mainly* to the US, England and France to receive training" (Feiler, 2003, p. 59, italics added). In relation to changes in student culture, students were represented in conferences and actively involved in planning their social and sport activities and started to revive their political role which led to "a new kind of student political activism.... the rise of Islamism in Egypt" (Lulat, 2005, p. 135).

According to Hatem (1980), one of the changes in terms of planning in HE and coordination between Egyptian universities was the establishment of the National Council for Education, Academic Research and Technology. The Ministries of Education and Higher Education were combined in one ministry, which was called the Ministry of Education. Also, perhaps to counteract the 'diminishing' role of research, which was mentioned above: a) two councils were established in every university- one for undergraduates and another for postgraduates and research and b) that universities should have two associate deans instead of one: one for research and postgraduate studies and another for undergraduate studies (Hatem, 1980). Another change was related to university's hierarchical structure. They started to operate through four levels: departmental, faculty, undergraduate and postgraduate councils led by associate deans, and university levels. Although it might be useful to operate through different levels when planning (e.g. to ensure gradual and well-thought planning), this could lead to a more bureaucratic structure (Hatem, 1980) in a system where policy interferes with academic practice. There might have been some progress in this policy era, as a result of the relationship with the US and its impact on academic practice. However, the majority of Nasser's policy remained intact during Sadat's presidency and therefore the latter's policy might not be considered successful as it continued to undermine the autonomy of HE.

Policy era four: 1981-present

In this policy era, Egypt was under another military regime of Hosni Mubarak for 30 years until he was ousted on 12th February 2011 following a peaceful revolution on 25th January in the same year (BBC, 2011). Although it has been two years since then, there has been political instability and frequent strikes. According to a report by the Egyptian Centre for Social and Economic Rights (ECESR) in 2012, Egypt witnessed 1,969 protests by workers in the government, public and private sectors, which is one of the highest levels of social struggle worldwide (Al-Ahram Newspaper, 2013). This makes it difficult to analyse in much detail the development of HE between 2011-2013. Therefore the majority of the analysis of the policy during this final era will focus on the period of Mubarak's presidency, i.e. 1981-2011. To start with, the "tightly-controlled administrative system and rigid government regulations under which all higher education institutions operate" have been maintained (OECD, 2010, p. 39). In terms of the gravity of undermining academic autonomy, the next quote from a 2005 report from Human Rights Watch, the non-governmental organisation states: "The assault on academic freedom is more subtle, but more extensive than the headline cases indicate. Repression by government authorities and private groups has affected every major component of university life, including the classroom, research, student activities, and campus protests" (Human Right Watch, 2005, p. 2). Moreover, according to the Socialist studies centre in Egypt (1998), education policies, from the mid 1980s, did not seem to be in favour of students from low socio-economic background.

Key policy

The 'privatisation of education' was well established in this policy era; in the mid-1980s Egypt faced an economic crisis "caused essentially by a decline in oil prices" (Diana, 2009, p. 1). This led Mubarak to "adopt economic reform policies in line with the macroeconomic stabilisation programs and structural adjustment demands of the World Bank it might be useful to link the role of the World Bank with the developing relationship between Egypt and US and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which might be linked to the developing relationship between Egypt and US. These reforms included the reduction of subsidies, the partial abrogation of

price and import controls and the privatisation of some state-owned companies (Kienle, 2000 cited in Hartmann, 2008, p. 17). Following this economic crisis and during the Gulf War of 1991, nearly “a million workers fled back to the country, serving the final blow to the Egyptian economic crisis and pushing the country to the brink of bankruptcy. The United States and its allies were in urgent need for Arab countries’ support because of the Gulf War, so they promised to waive half of the 50-billion-dollar foreign debt by Egypt. Egypt had to accept this plan, hand over its political capital in exchange for Western economic aid, and to reform its economic system in accordance with Western willingness, which involved bringing its state-owned economy to full privatization, opening up its financial and monetary markets, compressing its administrative expenses..... cutting back its social security, and reducing its investment in *education* and health care” (Xiaoqi, 2012, pp. 67-68).

Competing policy

Although the five-point plan for reforming education in Egypt was put forward by Fat’hi Serour, who was the Minister of Education in the 1990s, aimed to continue democratisation of education by maintaining access to free education and providing quality education (Bush, 1990), these were counteracted by a few factors. First, free ‘education for all’ contradicts the policy shift towards the ‘privatisation of education’ in this policy era, which was initiated by Sadat. Also, in terms of equality and access to ‘free’ education, studies have indicated in high status/elite faculties such as medicine and engineering “most students attended prestigious *private* secondary schools. This is likely to have implications for human capital and the equality of access for students from low socio-economic background. Graduates of such prestigious schools generally do very well on their final secondary school examinations, which ensures them access to what are considered as elite faculties” (Farak, 2000 cited in ICHEFAP, 2009, p. 5, italics added). This might be a reflection of the policy shift towards the privatisation of education.

Furthermore, in this period public spending on pre-university education was less than that on university education, which might suggest that disadvantaged students would get less financial support in elementary and secondary education, making it difficult to access HE and gain a university degree, in spite of the growing spending on HE. In the previous policy era

'education of the elite' education was for those who are able to pay and in the following policy era 'education for all' students perhaps had more financial support and they were more likely to have access to higher education including 'elite' faculties. However, this financial support started to change in this era of the 'privatisation of education'. Indeed, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed an increase in public spending on education, i.e. 6.57% per annum from 1980-1998 (Fan et al., 2007), but decreased over recent years since 2002 (OECD, 2010). Yet, HE public expenditure was not enough, perhaps due to conditions set by the US and its allies (Xiaoqi, 2012), to cope with the significant increasing number of university students, which started in the 1970s (Richards, 1992). Enrolment in public universities rose nearly from 1.49 million to 1.93 between 2001 and 2009 (Buckner, 2012) who paid if public spending was not enough? which might have been partly covered by loans from the World Bank and IMF and university fees.

While Egypt "allocates equivalent resources as a percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to higher education as Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as other lower middle income countries, and even more in terms of percent of public spending on education, expenditure per student is very low" (Fahim, 2009, p. 7). This "misallocation of public funds may imply that higher education institutions are not receiving adequate maintenance and updating of infrastructure leading to the high ratio of students per teacher" (Fahim, 2009, p. 9). Student-teacher ratio in HE in 1990 was 21.3 and in 2002 became 29.7, which is "larger than any of the other major North African and Middle Eastern countries" (OECD, 2010, p. 262). However, student staff ratios in fields like medicine in Egyptian universities are "on par with leading institutions of the developed world" (OECD, 2010, p. 32). Also, part of this misallocation, whether intentional or not, is that "available funds are diverted to fields of humanities and social sciences instead of science and engineering or practical fields which cost more" (Fahim, 2009, p. 20). This may explain the lasting over supply of graduates in the former fields (OECD, 2010).

In terms of academic freedom, "Egypt has arbitrarily arrested students, illegally detained them without charge, and tortured them, all acts prohibited under international law treaties to which Egypt is a party"

(Human Rights Watch, 2005, p. 61). These competing policies were likely to contribute to “poor quality of higher education” (Fahim, 2009, p. 9).

Ideology

There was a gradual abandoning of the government’s social commitment to support disadvantaged students, which continued in this policy era and coincided with the move towards capitalism. This is a significant shift to neo-liberal market forces, although its foundation was established in the previous policy era. This shift was recommended by the United States and the West to allow “the establishment of private- therefore fee-paying universities as one way of dealing with overcrowding in the public institutions” in Egypt (Lulat, 2005, p. 135). In 1992, “Act 101 opened the door for more private universities in addition to the long-established American University in Cairo” (EACEA, 2010, p. 3). In fact, further “privatisation of education on all levels has taken place during the rule of Mubarak since 1981. Especially in the 1990s, neoliberal economic policies encouraged private enterprise, in the education sector as in other branches of the economy” (Farag, 2006 cited in Hartmann, 2008, p. 22).

Consequences

Unlike the previous two policy eras when the government used to provide *all* funding needed to education system, the “state’s share of higher education finance for universities was reduced to 85 percent in 1994-1995, leaving the universities to generate the remaining 15 percent through various revenue diversification strategies. The number of applicants in most degree programs in public universities exceeds available spaces, a phenomenon which gives space for universities to charge tuition” (ICHEFAP, 2009, p. 6). On the one hand, this might be a step for universities to regain some of the (financial) autonomy, which they lost over the previous policy eras. On the other hand, this partial withdrawal from the provision of services such as education would require private education providers to come in to fill the gap (Kienle, 2000 cited in Hartmann, 2008). Since 1996, private universities increased from 1 to 16 in 2006/07” (Fahim, 2009, p. 21). Also, students from a wealthy background maintained a better chance than their disadvantaged counterparts to enrol in HE (Cupito & Langsten, 2011). For example, in 2005, individuals from the highest quintile still occupied more than 40 percent of spaces in Egyptian

universities, while those from the lowest wealth quintile represent less than 10 percent” (Cupito & Langsten, 2011 cited in Buckner, 2012, p. 1). However, research does suggest that “once a saturation point has been reached among the upper classes at a given level of education, continued expansion of that level will increase access for traditionally excluded youth” (Buckner, 2012, pp. 3-4). Until this takes place, the situation is likely to remain challenging for disadvantaged students in terms of access. Further, lecture halls are still overcrowded making it difficult for lecturers to communicate effectively with their students due to the high student-staff ratio (OECD, 2010).

Although there is “absence of data” in terms of the “labour market requirements in quantitative respect”, Egypt’s economy can absorb only modest annual additions to professional occupations in fields.... such as in health, education and social services” (OECD, 2010, p. 183). It should be noted that students who go to university in Egypt represent only 17-19% of the total population in that age group, and yet there are calls by opponents to free education to reduce the number of students who should go to university (Mina, 2001) as a way to address the poor quality of HE (Fahim, 2009). While it is important to improve the quality of HE provision, which might not have been achieved due to the above ‘interfering’ policies in most of these policy eras, it might be a misleading argument to believe that reducing the number of students per se would necessarily bring about improvement in the sector. What might be needed perhaps is to address the underlying challenges facing HE in Egypt, as suggested in the conceptual framework.

The challenges that face HE in Egypt

According to Sekran (2001), there are challenges, which face modern Egyptian universities. Based on the analysis of the four policy eras, one of the main challenges is a) *political interference* in HE, which may influence and undermine their autonomy. Therefore, it may be justifiable for this point to be addressed in the conceptual framework. Political interference in HE might reflect b) *policy-makers’ perspective on university’s role*, i.e. maintain status quo and political stability. The traditional perspective on HE (Sekran, 2001) refers to the university as community of the elite, as was

the case in the 1st policy era, which is distinctive and secluded from the wider community. This traditional perspective builds on the university's tradition and history, which influences university's roles. In addition to being considered as a community of the elite, other features of the traditional perspective, which are evident to some extent in Egyptian HE, include the idealistic view of learning for the sake of gaining knowledge without thought to the application of knowledge and that the university should be distant from politics. Government strategy during the 2nd, 3rd and 4th policy eras was to minimise the political role of the university as mentioned above. Another feature of the traditional perspective could also be seen in the last two policy eras through the persistent over-supply of graduates in certain fields, which does not reflect the needs of today's society (OECD, 2010). This might be evident in the fact there is absence of data in terms of the labour market needs. A social perspective, on the other hand, considers the university as any other social institution in society (Sekran, 2001). Therefore, the university might benefit from not being isolated from its society and should ensure it supports and meets the needs of that society. This was a common view after World War II in the 2nd policy era, which impacted on the Egyptian university to some extent. However, none of these two perspectives on their own seems to have achieved the desired outcomes.

As discussed above, political interference has been the case since the 2nd half of the 1st policy era, despite the policy shifts from elitism, socialism to capitalism and neo-liberalisation of the economy. It might not be surprising that universities seem to have a c) *limited responsibility* for long-term planning, which might have contributed to the d) *oversupply* of certain graduates. The lack of academic autonomy might have been complicated further by the e) *hierarchical management* structures, which was seen in every policy era. University infrastructure is very centralised, with no room for making changes including courses taught which is a very bureaucratic process undermining the university's autonomy (Mina, 2001). It is interesting to note that despite *politicians'* interference in academic practice, the politicisation of university culture and lack of freedom of speech have been consistent features since the 2nd policy era. However, there was a revival of student political role during Sadat's presidency probably as a result of the convergence with the US.

Another challenge that might be related to the lack of academic

autonomy is that before World War II there were fewer students in HE compared to those who joined university since then, which led to f) *overcrowding*. However, what made this challenging especially in the last two policy eras might be the lack of and/or g) *misallocation* of resources, h) *deterioration* of the economy, i) *increasing debts* and sometimes j) *conditions set by international creditors*, which might not always be in favour of disadvantaged students.

The analysis of the policy eras seems to suggest that this lack of academic autonomy and political interference might have also k) *impacted on research* in HE. Although “until the 1950s Egypt was able to maintain international standards in higher education and *research*” (OECD, 2010, pp. 64-65, italics added), this has been challenging in the subsequent policy eras. This can be seen in a number of ways. For example, in the 2nd policy era there was an imbalance between equity and access and the expansion of university education on the one hand and research on the other hand. The ‘open door’ policy and the economic crises in the 3rd policy era also contributed to the inadequate attention paid to research. The government’s strategic view about academic research had been unstable during Mubarak’s regime. Sometimes it was completely independent, i.e., had its own ministry (Ministry of Scientific Research), in other times it was controlled either by the Ministry of Higher Education or the Presidency (Academy of Scientific Research). The weak research system reflected in the marginalisation of its role and insufficient funding led several researchers to look for better opportunities abroad (OECD, 2010). There was also a decline in the number of scholarships for Egyptian academics from 251 in 2000 to 74 in 2004 (OECD, 2010). It is worth noting that 70% of the funding allocated to HE by the government is spent on salaries and wages of university staff and the remaining 30% spent on university infrastructure leaving very little for university research (EACEA, 2010). However, in the 4th policy era there have been attempts to have a “sector-wide reform of scientific research and innovation management and funding in 2006” (EACEA, 2010, p. 8).

Ways for improving HE in Egypt

Students and employers are discontented with the current quality of HE

in Egypt (OECD, 2010). In light of the above challenges a few suggestions could be made to improve its quality. First, there might be a need to minimise political interference, which confirms the conceptual framework, so that universities a) *regain their autonomy* (both academic and financial). Increasing access to HE (Mass education) might not be done at the expense of academic autonomy. Instead of adopting a policy-maker's perspective on university's role, perhaps what might be needed is a b) *mixed viewpoint* that tries to combine elements of traditional and social perspectives. A perspective that acknowledges the importance of protecting academic autonomy and the university's norms and tradition without overlooking the necessity to respond to the needs of its society. It might be important to advance knowledge underpinned by high quality research for the economic and cultural benefit of a nation state. In the first two policy eras it was important when planning strategically in HE to have accessible information about the needs of the labour market (MoHE, 1963). However, a few decades later this might not have been addressed fully; the government still announces it is a priority to create a balance between the number of graduates, existing resources and the needs of the labour market (OECD, 2000). Giving universities c) *wider strategic planning responsibilities* are likely to d) *reduce the "chronic over-supply of university graduates, especially in the humanities and social sciences"* (OECD, 2010, p. 21). To facilitate university autonomous practice it might be necessary to move towards e) *decentralised education system* with less hierarchical structure. To overcome the issue of overcrowding, there seems to be a need to f) *build more universities* to cope with the increasing number of students and address the high student-staff ratio. However, this is not an easy option especially with the limited available resources. To address this point, it might be advisable for policymakers to g) *seek national support* and engage with independent organisations, the private sector and the wider society in financing HE. Reliance on the government as having sole responsibility for HE might have been an appropriate approach in the 2nd policy era, but this was not feasible in the last two policy eras with the growing number of students and financial constraints (including debts), which required the private sector to become an active player in this process. Perhaps if universities (in the short-term) and Egypt (in the long-term) had enjoyed more financial autonomy, the former might have been able to cope with the increasing number of students and h) *ensure effective use* of their

resources. Loans from the international community, which might dictate conditions against HE, i) might be better *avoided if possible*. On the other hand, it might be wise to strengthen relations with countries, which might impact positively on HE. More attention might be required for the development of academic research (Mina, 2001) and one way of doing this might be to j) “*strengthen university research capacity and its links to innovation*” (OECD, 2010, p. 17, italics added). In order to make research a ‘priority’ in the current economic climate this might require further reliance on independent organisations, the private sector and the wider society to ensure its feasibility.

Conclusion

HE in Egypt experienced key shifts since World War II in terms of the policies, ideologies, competing policies and consequences of these policies over four policy eras: (1944-1952), (1952- 1970), (1970-1981) and (1981-present). Despite these policy shifts from ‘education of the elite’, ‘education for all’ to ‘privatisation of education’, the analysis seems to suggest that none of these shifts has been a complete success due to the underlying challenges for HE. One of the main challenges that have been facing Egyptian universities since the second half of the first policy era is political interference in HE. Therefore, the analysis suggests, among other things, there might be a need to minimise this political interference so that universities regain their academic and financial autonomy.

In the first policy era, ‘education of the elite’ education was available for only those who were able to pay fees. Access to education increased during the ‘education for all’ era, although students might have been disadvantaged by the meritocratic admission strategy. Access to university might have become more difficult in the era of ‘privatisation of education’ as a result of the reduction in financial support for students from low socio-economic background.

Universities had more academic autonomy in the first policy era, but political interference in the subsequent policy eras minimised their autonomy and has continued to do so until now. Despite having this autonomy during the ‘education of the elite’ era, universities were perhaps secluded from society. This started to change in the ‘education for all’ era

where there was a focus on human capital, which was facilitated by increasing access to higher education.

During the early days of higher education in Egypt university education was funded by the public. However, increasing access to higher education and political interference in academia were coincided with education being funded by the government. The economic crisis and deterioration of the economy after the second policy era coupled with the policy shift in the following policy eras towards 'privatisation of education' implied there is a need for different funding streams.

In a nutshell, the above analysis seems to suggest there were some weaknesses in each policy era. In order to address these weaknesses, a number of suggestions have been made which are likely to develop HE in Egypt.

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