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De-facto privatization of education in Egypt

ABSTRACT

In 1981, Hosni Mubarak took office as the fourth president of Egypt. One of his most internationally acclaimed achievements in the global community was his expanding access to education. Hundreds of school buildings were built, literacy rates improved tremendously, especially for girls, enrollment rates for public schools climbed, and Egypt even seemed to be on track to make the UN Millennium Development Goal for universal access to primary education. However, looking into these successes closely reveals less impressive results. While state numbers reported basic literacy growth, there still existed an extremely high level of illiteracy among rural women and functional illiteracy among those whom the government deems officially literate. While enrollment in primary school was nearly 100% in many governorates, there were serious issues with student absenteeism and even more serious issues with teachers not teaching during the school day. While mass education was supposed to be a social equalizer, both the education gap and the income gap between the rich and the poor grew during the Mubarak regime. Egyptian leaders publicly recognize that the education system is flawed, yet in the past 30 years, little has changed. To the contrary, over the course of Mubarak's tenure the state saw a large transition to a private education model — faulty public schooling creates a de-facto transition to privatization where those with the economic means hire private tutors to supplement public education or replace it altogether. This de-facto privatization, however, has broader implications for overall access to quality education and resulting social and economic mobility for lower-income Egyptians. This research seeks to identify the social, political, and economic implications of the de-facto privatization of education in Egypt.