



# Adaptations of International Standards on Educational Leadership Preparation in Egypt

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## **Abstract**

This paper is a case study of one leadership preparation program, utilizing US school leadership standards and practices, offered in Egypt. This case study illuminates how cultural and policy distinctions impact differing necessities of educational leadership, and how those necessities conflict or concur with the international standards and assumed best practices. In particular, it serves as an exploration of policy borrowing, considering that leadership preparation in developed countries has been, on some levels, an issue of occupational field professionalization.

## **Introduction**

The preparation of educational leaders has become, in some regard, a standardized practice throughout the world, based on professional knowledge of best practice, empirical evidence, and organizational leadership theory. In large part, PISA and national exams have encouraged a consistent set of views about what constitutes instructional leadership. Standards, particularly from English-speaking countries, such as the US and the UK, have provided relatively common understandings on school leadership throughout the world. And naturally, preparation programs have followed suit, often instituting courses that look remarkably similar. This is a noteworthy feat for the professionalization of the occupation of school leadership, as it has instituted common boundaries of practice that span national borders. In some sense—furthering the professionalization of the field—it makes a case for the de-contextualization of school leadership practice.

Yet leadership practices and needs within schools vary tremendously, not just between countries, but within countries, as well. What follows is a case study of one leadership preparation program, utilizing US school leadership standards and practices, offered in Egypt. This case study helps us to better understand how cultural and policy distinctions impact differing necessities of educational leadership, and how those necessities conflict or concur with the international standards and assumed best practices.

In particular, it serves as an exploration of policy borrowing, considering that leadership preparation in developed countries has been, on some levels, an issue of occupational field professionalization.

### **Professionalization of School Leadership**

The field of school leadership has achieved many markers of professional status in the past few decades, particularly in developed countries. In Europe and North America, a post-graduate degree or certification is typically required to work as a school administrator. And increasingly a professional doctorate is either expected or encouraged. Various standards for practice have been developed, disseminated, and governmentally adopted. Though countries utilize differing standards, and in the US even, some states have adopted their own distinctive standards, in developed countries, the general tenor of the standards is exceptionally similar. For instance, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration in the US lists this item in its 2015 *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders*:

Standard 1 – Mission, Vision, & Core Values point “G”:  
Model and pursue the school’s mission, vision, and core values in all aspects of leadership.

The General Teaching Council for Scotland lists this item in its 2012 *Standards for leadership and management*:

Standard 2 – Strategic Vision, Professional Knowledge and Understanding and Interpersonal Skills and Abilities, point 2.1, second paragraph: Leaders steer the creation and the sharing of the strategic vision, ethos and aims for the establishment, which inspire and motivate learners, staff and all members of the learning community and its partners and sets high expectations for every learner.

Worded differently, yes, but it is the same concept. And if we were to provide further examples within these two sets of standards, or on this particular item with standards from additional countries and states, we would see that the field of educational leadership has largely consolidated on the tasks, responsibilities, core values, and behavioral codes that it sees as its professional identity.

These two features—governmentally mandated certification for practice and common codes of practice orientation—are attributes of professional status. They indicate that in exchange for consistent practice adhering to the common codes—delineating practice that yields desired outcomes for the public—regulatory controls are instituted, allowing those who have certification to practice, and preventing those who do not have certification from practicing (Purinton 2011).

Yet there is more to professionalization. Most essentially, a profession shares a common approach to examining and solving a particular problem, and it does so by utilizing a common body of knowledge gained from intensive study and guided practice (Abbott 1988). In studies of professionalization, the subject—the application of this body of knowledge on a problem—is usually discussed more than the object, the problem itself. In most professions, the problem seems self-evident: in medicine, it is human health; in law,

it is a case; in engineering, it is a commission. In teaching, which has been labeled a semi-profession (Krejsler 2005), it is student learning. In educational leadership, what is the problem to be solved?

The answer to this question depends on many factors. On the one hand, how a school relates to its community, students, their families, and the government varies not just between countries and states, but also between individual schools. Indeed, the various standards have attempted to bring closure to this issue. On the other hand, given the variation alone between the role of parents of American and many European schools, it is clear that there is no single way to lead a school across cultures. Largely, there is for medicine and engineering, and to some extent for law (within common or civil law variants) and academia. Indeed, there is no common set of expectations across countries for the work of teaching (Givvin et al. 2005), though that, too, could change rapidly in the years ahead with increasingly standardized expectations and exams (Meyer and Benavot 2013). Furthermore, when contrasting teaching to school leadership, teaching seems to welcome the hallmarks of professionalism more so than school leadership (Purinton 2012), particularly because school leadership is often portrayed in political or bureaucratic terms.

Regardless, as has been noted, school leadership practice has been increasingly defined by the various standards, and as such, these remarkably similar standards are shaping a global emergence of professional expectations for school leadership. Perhaps what makes teaching more of a candidate for professionalization than school leadership is that one significant marker of professionalism is autonomy, and the accompanying professional control over the terms of practice (Krauss 1996). By virtue of the inherent isolation of teaching (Lortie 1975), its work is done more frequently without the interference of management. In school leadership, similar to other managerial positions that have had great debate over the extent to which they could be professionalized, autonomy over terms of the work is not present.

In other words, school leadership is very much susceptible to context. And nowhere is that more clear than in the location of this case: Cairo, Egypt. Though based at an “American” university, offering a liberal arts education, with a high percentage of American faculty, and an even higher percentage of faculty having earned doctoral degrees in the US, its Graduate School of Education is a case in point of the difficulties of adapting one country’s system of education in another. With a variety of degree programs, the Graduate School of Education has attempted to replicate the progress and the structures of American colleges of education, particularly as they have increased their focus on professionalization over the past couple decades. As such, standards of practice, and their corresponding bases of knowledge, are very important. With the adoption of Professional Standards for Educational Leaders to guide the content of the school’s Professional Educator Diploma program in Educational Leadership, the school made a very deliberate choice on the professional qualities it would expect to see in its graduates. However, context matters a great deal,

and when examining the distinctions between educational systems in the US and Egypt, one finds very quickly that these standards may, in fact, complicate the learning and practice of educational leadership in Egypt.

### **Overview of Education in Egypt**

Egypt's public educational system is the largest in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region—estimated at more than 20 million students (Oxford Business Group 2016). The education system in Egypt is a K-12 structure that starts at the primary level at the age of 6 years. Both the primary and preparatory (grades 7, 8, & 9) stages form the basic education stage, which is compulsory for all children in Egypt. Upon the completion of grade 9, students receive the Basic Education Certificate, which specifies where students will be placed in the secondary stage. High scoring students qualify for general secondary education and later can qualify for higher education. If scores received at the Basic Education Certificate are low, students are obliged to join technical secondary schools (e.g. commercial, agricultural, and industrial) for three to five years.

Parallel to the national public educational system, Al Azhar schools, which are religious and associated with El Azhar, the well-regarded Sunni university, offers the same levels and types of education offered at the public system with a comprehensive addition of religious studies and subjects. Al Azhar pre-university education represents 10% of the total population of pre-university education.

While Egypt's new constitution mandates that public spending on education be no less than 4% of GDP (Oxford Business Group 2016), the system as structured does not adequately prepare students to meet the job market needs. Although enrollment in secondary and higher education has increased for both genders, it does not reflect higher levels of employment or pay. The educational system is still geared toward producing public servants to be hired at the public sector and has, for the most part, continued to teach obsolete knowledge (Fahimi, et al. 2011).

The public educational system in Egypt faces numerous challenges, including highly populated classrooms, multiple-shift schools, limited facilities, and outdated technological aids (Salah 2015). These obstacles have weakened not only the system but the students' ability to understand, retain knowledge, ask questions, discuss and research, and critically think about academic and life issues. Teaching has remained focused on rote memorization. Therefore, a need to broaden the pool of resources and shift education from being the mere responsibility of the state to expanding partnership with other stakeholders, especially the private sector, has evolved. To reduce the financial burden from the public budget and address new educational needs, the private sector was welcomed in 1995 to invest and participate in educational services.

Private education is considered the third component of Egypt's education system. Private education now represents 8% of the students' population in the primary and secondary stages. The Ministry of Education has an authoritative and

regulatory oversight over all types of public and private schools in Egypt. Private school types include private Arabic schools applying national curriculum, private language schools applying national curriculum, and international schools. The last category provides American, British, French, Canadian, and German curricula. International schools typically seek international accreditation to ensure best practices and societal credibility. Although this type of quality education is preferred by many parents, it is characterized as highly expensive and competitive for average Egyptian students.

Private schools are formally categorized as profit-making organizations. There is no tax category that accommodates not-for-profit schools in the general educational marketplace. The implication for this can be seen in the competition between private schools, especially in Cairo and Alexandria. The prices go higher and higher, and parents—afraid that their children will be left behind without an education as elite as possible—expend more of their increasingly scarce resources to pay the tuition. Meanwhile, it is now commonly understood that owning schools is a sure pathway to wealth in Egypt.

### **Case Description**

In 2007, the American University in Cairo, which previously had no unit related to teacher education, embarked on a plan to provide teacher professional development for public and private school teachers, and eventually to create a school of education to sit alongside its schools in Humanities & Social Sciences, Global Affairs & Public Policy, Sciences & Engineering, Business, and Continuing Education. As a liberal arts institution with less than 6,000 total students at the time (with around 1,100 of them being full-time or part-time graduate students), a school of education was a significant commitment on the part of the university to address issues of quality education across the country.

To provide the greatest level of outreach possible in its foundational stage, the university began with a Post-Graduate Professional Educator Diploma (PED) program, which does not provide university degree credit but is priced much lower than AUC's regular tuition, which is very high for Egyptian standards. The PED program, which is now accredited by Egypt's Supreme Council of Universities as an equivalent program to that offered at many of the public university Faculties of Education across the country, has been offered in English. The equivalent programs at the public universities are all offered in Arabic; thus, the Supreme Council of Universities did not see the PED program as being directly in competition with the equivalent programs at the public universities. Offering the PED program in English was not problematic for most private school teachers; though an English exam is required for admissions, most private school teachers in Egypt use English for their work, and thus, AUC was offering a program that teachers and schools perceived to be a distinct value added: affordable tuition, instruction in English, and a curriculum created by AUC to reflect a Western view of teaching and learning. In fact, most private school teachers would not consider attending any such programs at the public

universities (or in Arabic), so AUC's program represented a radical shift in teacher professional development within the country.

Despite the low tuition, Egypt's public school teachers, who are paid very little by comparison to private school teachers, cannot afford the tuition. A variety of donors have contributed to scholarships for public school teachers, and thus, the Graduate School of Education has utilized contacts within the Ministry of Education to recruit teachers to take the programs. The trouble has been the lack of English proficiency among public school teachers. Thus, the Graduate School of Education has generally promoted its programs among teachers in "experimental" schools, which are generally not experimental, but rather are taught in English. Even then, in 2016, the school is having a difficult time finding enough public school teachers, even at the experimental schools, who can pass the English entrance exam. Thus it is now offering its programs in Arabic, but without the equivalency status guaranteed by the Supreme Council of Universities (as an Arabic-medium program would be considered competition to the national university programs).

In 2007, the PED program offered two concentrations: early childhood education and educational leadership. In 2008, a new concentration in teaching adolescent learners was offered. The curricula and development process for these programs varied. The curriculum for early childhood education was developed by experts who were mindful of US standards for teacher education and for early childhood education, in particular the standards for the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

The program in educational leadership began under the direction of a business specialist at the university and was shaped according to business standards. This early development in some sense should be seen not as a usurpation of educational issues by the business community but rather a very elementary view of the academic conventions of educator preparation in the West. Very quickly the curriculum was modified according to US standards for educational leader preparation by a new faculty member who had been working in educational leadership in the US for many decades. The 2008 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards provided the foundation for the revision of the curriculum.

Also in 2008 the PED program added a concentration on teaching adolescent learners. This indeed was a distinct demarcation from Western approaches to teacher education given that most teacher preparation for the secondary level is subject-specific. And especially at a time when increasing research and application on pedagogical content knowledge has influenced teacher education (e.g., Hill, Ball, and Schilling 2008), it may have seemed slightly strange for the Graduate School of Education to move in this direction. Yet the justification for it is important: for a program that is not required in Egypt (no certification is required for private school teachers, and only an undergraduate degree

in education from a public university is required for public school teachers): with few opportunities to reach teachers, particularly given that the program required only six courses, the faculty felt that the fundamentals of human development and learning theory, as well as the basics of pedagogical and assessment practice, were far more critical for Egyptian teachers than singling out subject areas for which the university did not have capacity for in terms of content-specific pedagogical research.

In later years, three additional concentrations were added: technology in education, STEAM (STEM + the arts) education, and inclusive instruction for diverse learners. All three also were developed with relevant US standards, as well.

In 2010, the Graduate School of Education was formally founded, and the PED programs were placed under it. At the same time, the school began delivering a master's degree in comparative and international education, and then later, a master's degree in educational leadership with concentrations in school leadership and higher education leadership. The PED programs are still operating and have high enrollments for both private and public school teachers. The public school teachers are still dependent upon donors for scholarship funds, but since the 2011 Arab Spring, donors have increasingly seen education as a critical area for philanthropy.

Given that the PED program is not a certification program (though it is officially recognized for salary credit by the Ministry of Education for public school teachers and by private schools as a differentiator of teacher qualifications), the program approximates as best as possible a principal certification program in the US. Though principal certification requirements vary tremendously between states in the US, most states require a series of courses built into either a stand-alone post-graduate university-based certification program or a master's degree that incorporates requirements for certification.

In the case of curricula for principal preparation programs in the US, analogous to the similarities for standards across countries, many of the courses and requirements between states in the US and universities within states look remarkably similar. As a brief illustration, the University of Virginia's preliminary principal preparation program—the M.Ed. in Administration and Supervision, which offers the state certification for the principalship—requires courses such as School Finance, School Law, Introduction to Supervision & Instruction, and Leadership for Low Performing Schools. On the other side of the country, UCLA's Principal Leadership Institute, which offers a masters degree along with state principal certification, has courses that may sound slightly different but fit within roughly the same categories: Law & Educational Practice; Democracy, Democratic Leadership, & Public Accountability; Learning & Leadership Amidst Inequality; and Leadership of Core Practices: Supervision & Instruction. On the other side of the Atlantic, the Institute of Education in London offers a masters degree in Applied Educational Leadership & Management. In it, students take modules on subjects such as Finance & Resource Management; Learning & Managing Educational Change & Improvement; and Leadership for the Learning Community.

These similarities are further indication of the professionalization of the field as discussed in the first section of this paper. Thus, naturally, one would expect to see similar content in the PED Educational Leadership program. Six courses are required: Foundations of Educational Leadership (which focuses on school vision, organizational culture, and leadership theory); Educational Leadership & School Management, Instructional Leadership & Assessment; Technology for Educational Leaders; and two courses for an internship, which is usually done at the student's own place of employment.

Next we turn to an analysis of the application of US standards for educational leadership preparation on Egyptian educators. As a developing country, there are few policy-level structural supports to ensure the highest degree of principal preparation, and thus there are considerable differences in practice between the program in Egypt and programs throughout the US.

### **Application of US Standards for School Leadership Training in Egypt**

In applying US standards for school leadership preparation in Egypt, the issue of "fit" has become paramount. However, these standards are utilized for a variety of reasons: first, there is no comparable set of principal preparation standards to address many of the issues that exist in schools and school systems in developing countries. Second, as an American university, our peers are often perceived internally and externally to be universities in the US. With general university accreditation in the US (Middle States Commission on Higher Education), and with many programs at the university obtaining and maintaining specialized accreditations from US agencies (e.g., ABET for engineering and the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation for the university's English Language Institute), it would seem natural to adopt a system that is familiar to our colleagues in the US. Third, many of the faculty members are either American or received their PhD degrees in the US, so these standards are familiar to the faculty.

Reflection of the implementation of the program in Egypt yields a clear signal of lack of fit between the leadership contexts in Egypt and the NPBEA standards. The most common explanation for the lack of congruity between policy and practice or implementation in educational institutions comes from early organizational theory: educational institutions are decoupled from the political systems that govern them, particularly as the instruments to influence change are blunt ones for the technologies most often utilized in schools and universities (Weick 1976). While bureaucracy shelters operations from political whims, bureaucrats adapt political directives to meet "street level" incentives (Lipsky 1980). As a result, the work within educational institutions is often isolated from the politics and economics of education taking place outside the institutions. The emergence of the concept of instructional leadership, to some degree, sought to address the problem of a bottleneck that kept educators unable to adapt, and conversely, that kept policymakers and

critics unaware of the realities within the institutions and the professions (Hallinger and Heck 1996).

The loosely coupled nature of schools posed a classic case of mismatch between bureaucratic policy implementation (in the traditional Weberian sense, whereby a governmental bureaucracy carries out the day-to-day operations and insulates them from quickly changing political views) with increasingly knowledge-intensive work that usually requires less bureaucratic reporting and oversight (Perrow 1967). As the teaching occupation became increasingly endorsed as "knowledge" work, researchers and reformers recognized that the role of the principal could not easily be conceptualized in terms of management. With large spans of control, the professional nature of teaching demanded that the principal's role be re-conceptualized as a leader who could influence behavior and practice. Thus, the principal must build rapport, develop trust, induce collective vision, and so forth. These are all characteristics that do not fit well on the traditional scales of market and bureaucracy (Adler, Kwon, and Heckscher 2008; Coase 1937; Williamson 1973). On the bureaucratic side, policies and procedures guide action, supported by reporting lines, timelines, and deliverables. On the market side, it is sales that provide feedback to sellers about price, quality, and demand. Professional work, however, is judged on an entirely different plane: due to the nature of the knowledge required of professionals, the work cannot be judged by mere sales or benchmarks. Not submitting a report on time can be easily assessed in a bureaucratic organization; not meeting sales targets can be easily assessed in a market-oriented organization. Not using a commonly believed "best practice" in the classroom? The effects of this are not likely to be as immediately clear.

School leaders are conceptualized in the US and other developed countries as instructional leaders, working to influence the practice of people for whom tight control and immediate feedback will not work. The narrative of the school principal as instructional leader is an increasingly powerful one, particularly given that it is a profoundly realistic portrayal of how change in organizations (especially those with fairly undefined goals) occurs. Furthermore, it provides strong credibility to the idea that the professional knowledge of individual teachers is paramount: this knowledge is possessed by each teacher and is structured in a way that depends perhaps more on how learning challenges are interpreted than on how lessons are delivered (Purinton 2011). As such, direct oversight or price signaling cannot be applied as work-related feedback mechanisms.

In Egypt, however, this view cannot work. Private schools are legally structured as profit generating, and indeed, their behavior reflects this. Competition for students, especially in the main cities of Cairo and Alexandria, is fierce, particularly as investors have realized that private school profits can potentially exceed 20% of revenue. In a professionally oriented organization, though immediate feedback from price signals or managerial oversight is not tenable, a market function still exists: professionals have an interest in maintaining the market brand of their professional body.

When the public sees that the professional body fails to provide overall the outcomes it claims, the public turns to other professions or solutions (Abbott 1988). In some sense, this is why the principal as instructional leader can permit slight degrees of unhappiness among parents, for instance, about school actions or teacher behaviors: the leader is incentivized to ensure that the organization as a whole is regarded highly. In a market-oriented system, individual satisfaction is more important, and adaptations to meet market demand are expected. A discount or a customization for one customer will not necessarily degrade the supply for another. In a market-oriented school, despite the necessity of maintaining enough public recognition of the honesty of the organization, small actions to maintain the faithfulness of one student have the ability to degrade the quality measures and the fairness for other students. For those private schools that work hard to ensure honesty, the principal is still likely going to be put in a position at times to make complicated judgments that diminish the power of the professional jurisdiction of the teacher. In the American sense of the instructional leader, defense of the purposes of education and the role that educators play is central: the leader is the individual that transforms the bottleneck of the loosely coupled systems into the communicator. The instructional leader communicates to the educators what is expected from politicians, employers, reformers, and so forth; conversely, the leader communicates to politicians, employers, and reformers the realities of educational practice.

In Egyptian public schools, which are highly centralized, there is very little possibility for internal adaptation to meet external demands. This leads us to the next major distinction: the cultural views of learning, teaching, and knowledge. The NPBEA standards emphasize in various ways the dynamic nature of knowledge and skill development; the standards remind educators that traditional conceptions of knowledge transfer are not robust enough to accommodate what we know of how children and youth learn—and, in fact, what constitutes knowledge and how it can be assessed. With caution that this characterization does not account for all teaching and learning in Egyptian public schools, it is generally regarded across the country that students are expected to memorize curriculum devised by the Ministry of Education, relayed to them by teachers who, in many cases, teach only parts of the curriculum in order to incentivize private lessons paid for directly by the students after school. The assessments are nationally standardized and for the most part reward rote memorization. One can clearly see that the NPBEA standards reflect awareness of the imperative to move away from traditional conceptions of teaching, but in the US, many other institutional forces contribute to this effort, such as standards for teachers of various subjects, standards for students, textbooks, cultural narratives prioritizing innovation and creativity, and so forth.

Finally, much of the development of standards for teachers and leaders has been shaped around the same political intents of standards for students: equity of opportunity. The school principal as agent of social justice is reflected

throughout the 2015 *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders*. These four items illustrate just a small portion of the document that is dedicated to the role that principals play in influencing equitable educational access:

Standard 2d: Safeguard and promote the values of democracy, individual freedom and responsibility, equity, social justice, community, and diversity.

Standard 2e: Lead with interpersonal and communication skill, social-emotional insight, and understanding of all students' and staff members' backgrounds and cultures.

Standard 3b: Recognize, respect, and employ each student's strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning.

Standard 3c: Ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success.

In a country marked by significant class differences and the presumption that children will have few opportunities to transcend economic classes, education is often perceived to be most fundamentally a mechanism of signaling. Even those families who can barely afford much will attempt to scrape together enough money to send their children to low-cost private schools that are marginally better than public schools. At the other end of the education market, the elite schools (staffed by teachers who are not mandated to have certification and often have very little training) are justified in continually raising their prices, as parents who have the means will pay whatever they can. Both in terms of organizational construct and cultural imperative, the school leader is not incented to encourage access and equity among students.

### **Policy Borrowing and Field Professionalization**

The traditional view of implementation of one country's educational practices or policies in other is often called policy borrowing. Particularly in development contexts, whereby one (developed) country offers the support of another (developing) country with the implementation of successful ideas used in the developed one, the term that gets applied is policy lending. Among analysts of borrowing and lending, it is assumed that the lent policy will only work if it is in the interest of the wider social, economic, and political contexts and goals of the borrowing country. We have shown that school leadership standards from the US may not be effectively implemented in Egypt as a result of significantly different social, economic, and political contexts. And while this poses a challenge to the preparation and professional development of educational leaders in Egypt, it is a challenge that faculty members in the Graduate School of Education at AUC welcome, given that it offers opportunities to explore global dynamics of educational change, adaptations to professional standards, and social contexts of educational reform—all areas that require significant scholarly attention.

Yet on a broader scale, the disparity between plausible implementation in developing countries of what is effectively

a professional body of practice for developed countries and the standards of expected practice in developed countries is massive. Just because there may be fewer resources to support modern medicine in a poor country does not mean that the profession of medicine must adapt its body of knowledge to practice in the poor country. Professional bodies of medicine simply proclaim that without the resources they cannot do the work that they are expected to do.

As the field of education is further affected by globalization, and as the internationalization of educational attainment, practice, and research further develops, these are questions that must be addressed so as to ensure that bodies of professional knowledge utilized by educators (and certified through usually post-graduate degrees) do not become misappropriated, degraded, and exploited. The very question of educator professionalization, in fact, has persisted because of misappropriations of knowledge not based on evidence or utilized for personal gain (Purinton 2011). There is a growing need for institutions such as AUC to disseminate knowledge from developed countries in contexts which are rooted in the developing countries, themselves.



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