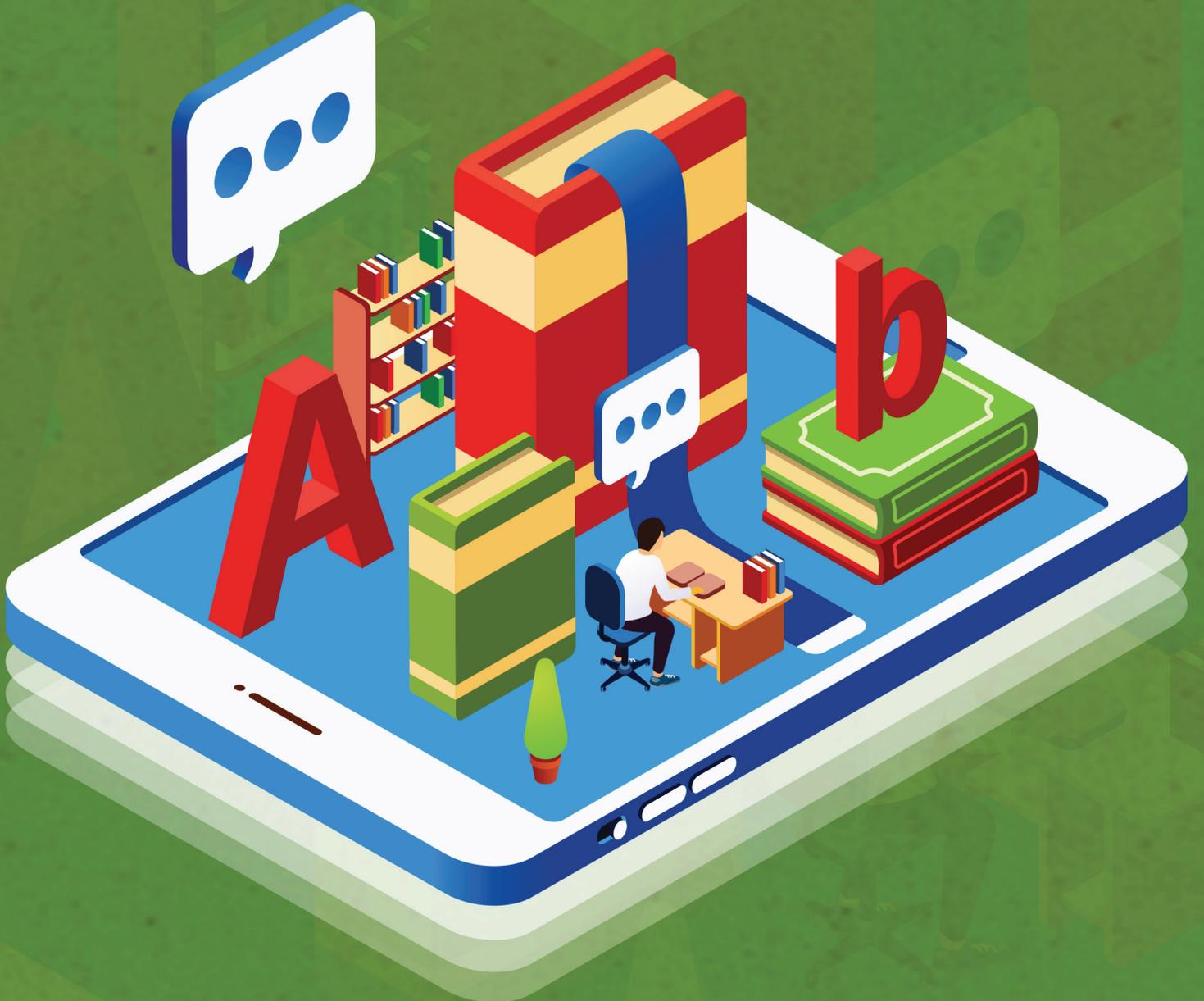


Tablets and Education!



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Tablets and Education!

The school year for both kindergarten and primary stages begins within a few days, while the other stages will begin three weeks later. Coincidentally, the Ministry of Education launches its new educational system; firstly, on the kindergarten stage and primary one, and then the system will be applied on the first grade of secondary school, after they receive tablets.

In light of these changes, we gave attention to observe the most important past experiences by MOE to apply the system of tablets in schools. While many schools in Egypt suffer from high student density, and other areas completely lack schools, in addition to teachers' low salaries, the lower-quality curricula, and the poor education allocation in the budget due to the state's lack of commitment to increase the proportions allotted to education in the Egyptian Constitution, MOE has recently focused on providing "technical" solutions that reflect its perception that the delayed incorporation of technology into education is one of the reason for the educational process deterioration.

This way, the current Minister of Education limited the education problems to technology; thus, the ministry selected "tablets" as part of the problem solution. In its new educational system, it focuses on the technology experiment that has failed before, without analyzing the causes of previous failure. Perhaps, the main cause is misinterpreting the main problem, which will not be solved by technology.

Possibly, among the reasons of misinterpretation is disregarding the discussion of the plan widely in the People's Assembly, or the discussion of the most important past experiences, weaknesses, strengths and the expecting return, instead of presenting this technology again. This is to maintain the public money at least. However, the ministry has not learned from its past experiences or even built on them. It relied on foreign experts from the World Bank and others, and also the minister referred to the participation of the Curriculum Development Center only among the many other institutions affiliated to MOE[1].

Unquestionably, incorporating technology into education is necessary, particularly with the current global openness. However, how this incorporation can be applied under the weak capacities to provide the basic needs of the educational process, including what is related to technology support in schools such as the Internet. The **2018** National Report on Sustainable Development has monitored the state of Egypt's schools infrastructure in terms of technology support. The report showed that **99.2%** of schools have access to electricity; **32.4%** of schools have computers for education in **2017**, while the schools with access to the Internet reached **19.6%** only in **2016**[2]. For example, computer was one of the main subjects that students had been studying for many years, and it was being counted among the student's final grade. Nonetheless, that was changed by Tareq Shawqi, Minister of Education, and became a mere success and failure subject. This is because of the unrealistic teaching method of the subject-theoretically, without practical application. This is owing to the deterioration of the infrastructure, including high densities in classrooms, and the lack of technological possibilities in schools.

On the other hand, there are many problems apart from technology, such as, the provision of basic educational services, decent salaries to teachers so that they could ensure their dignity and standard of living in light of the deteriorating social and economic conditions, the increase of classrooms number to reduce density, the cancellation of school periods system, and the construction of schools in education-deprived areas. How can the student benefit from the "tablet" under the lack of these basic services?

[1] Badawi, Yasmine, Bodies to which "MOE" Resorted to Develop General Framework for the New System's Curricula, Sada Al-Balad, 112018/5/

[2] (CAPMAS), National Statistical Report on SDGs Follow-up 2030, in the Arab Republic of Egypt 2018 <https://goo.gl/75xd9w>

History of "Tablets are the Solution"



-The incorporation of tablets into schools idea came up in **2012\2013**, during the tenure of "Ibrahim Ghoneim", former Minister of Education, who announced the interactive learning project[3] that intended to replace the schoolbooks with tablets.

- Following the ministerial reshuffle in **2013\2014**, Mahmoud Abu Al-Nasr was appointed as the Minister of Education, who applied the system on the first and second secondary school students in 13 governorates. They are: North Sinai, South Sinai, Red Sea, Marsa Matrouh, Aswan, New Valley, Suez, Ismailia, Port Said, Damietta, Suhag, Qena and Luxor. According to the minister, applying the system on these 13 governorates only was due to the low density in their classrooms. As reported by the MOE, the project cost reached **EGP 400** million, with average cost of **EGP 1429**[4] per tablet. There were no criteria for evaluating the first experience results.

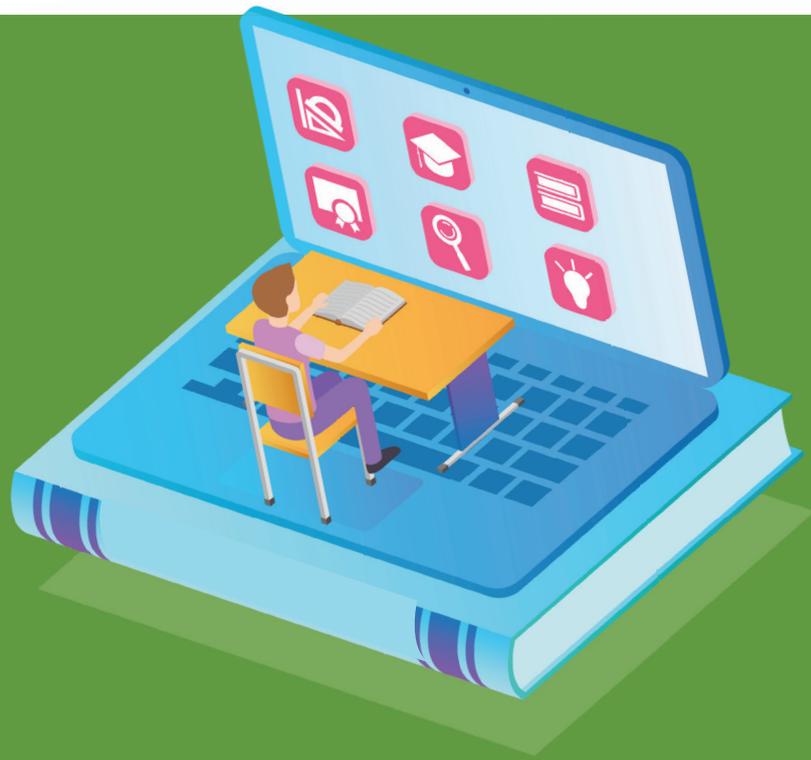
- With the project implementation, the ministry stated that it would give out **250,000 tablets** to students and teachers, and train **12,000 teachers** on using them. The ministry had set its goals of the experience, whereas the tablet would replace the schoolbook, and the student uses it to follow up the curricula, school assignments and tests, in addition to creating a state of interaction between teachers, curricula and students[5].

[3] MOE Launches "Tawasl" Initiative for Interactive Learning, in cooperation with Al-Araby Group, Al-Ahram Al-Massai, <https://goo.gl/CwMBWVX>.

[4] Hussein, Mahmud Taha, MOE Source to "Youm 7": Applying Tablets System in 13 Governorates with a total of 250000 devices costing EGP 400 m.. Training 12000 Teachers on "e-Learning'.. Allocating EGP 1 b for schoolbooks printing tender', Youm 7, 312015/5/. <http://cutt.us/FbGSL>

[5] Ibid.

Are tablets a solution



- The experiment has not lasted long owing to the infrastructure problems in schools over and above the students' lack of experience with regard to repairing tablets, as there were no tablets repair services available, the weak internet connection in schools and power outage, in addition to the difficulty of downloading curricula on tablets under the lack of trained teachers. Ultimately, both teachers and students called for the return of schoolbooks[6].
- After the experiment was ended, and "Mahmoud Abu Al-Nasr" left office, he was accused before the Administrative Prosecution, of squandering public money. Eventually, the case was discontinued[7].
- During the tenure of the Minister of Education "Al-Helali Al-Sherbini" (September 2015- February 2017), the reintroduction of the experiment was discussed again, but it was rejected by parents, particularly after its failure at the first time, and under the lack of a clear vision of how to apply it again in a way that avoids the previous mistakes. It was not clear who will bear the experience cost again: the government or parents?[8] Then, the calls for focusing on resolving the basic problems of education mounted.

[6] Badran, Abdel-Khaleq, "Tablets" Threatens to Put Minister of Education & Students Behind Bars', Al-Nabaa, 292017/9/, <https://goo.gl/nc7GQ1>.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Zayed, Amany, "Tablets' Replace Schoolbooks, Al-Wafd, 22017/1/, <https://goo.gl/ps3jMA>.



Tablets or Imprisonment

Students Threatened with Imprisonment Because of the Tablets

- Al-Helali declared that the ministry intends to restore tablets from students; otherwise, the students pay their cost, if they could not give them back[9]. Accordingly, this matter caused a serious crisis- the first of its kind, as 15 students in Damietta governorate were sentenced to 2 months in prison, and were fined EGP 200, after a school board filed a report against 209 students, including 135 girls, who were accused of not returning the tablets. The ministry also refused to receive the tablets, in case they were scratched or broken. Such a matter aroused the parents' anger who were wondering how the school board files reports against the students, or demands them to give the tablets back in their first condition following three years use, especially that there were no repair services available[10].

Tablets Return Again

- After applying the system of incorporating tablets into education repeatedly, and instead of providing the basic needs of education, such as raising teachers' salaries or building schools in the school-deprived areas, the idea of incorporating tablets came up again as one of the main solutions of education's problems in Egypt.

- Despite the low education spending, as the state does not commit to its constitutional duty with regard to spending 4% of GDP on education, the idea of incorporating tablets into education returns again by the current president "Tareq Shawki", who declared the application of the system on the secondary school students, as of the academic year 2018\2019. Also, he emphasized that the state will cover the cost of

[9] Badawi, Yasmine, Minister of Education: MOE Restores "Tablets" from Students after High Schools Exams, Sada Al-Balad, 312016/8/. <http://www.elbalad.news/2386501>

[10] Al-Shazli, Emad, Tablet Crisis Renews in Damietta: Education Threatens to Send 135 Girls to Prison, Al-Masry Al-Youm, 202018/3/. <https://goo.gl/gbMEAy>



tablets, and gives them out to the students gratis. Besides, the schoolbooks will be printed[11]. Meanwhile, the situation continues as it is in the areas deprived of the basic services of education, such as constructing school buildings and classrooms, distributing student density reasonably in classrooms, or providing a standard of living and professional training necessary to teachers.

- This has led to raising many questions again about the failure of past experiences and the lessons learnt. So far, the Ministry of Education has not declared how ready are the teachers or schools to deal with the new technological system, or how they would apply it among the high student densities, or in the schools-deprived areas. It has not answered questions about the level of equal service between urban and rural areas.

- Regarding the past experience of tablets, the current Minister of Education explained that its problem was that the introduction of technology was a goal in itself, while the current one is working on enabling the students to use sources of knowledge, and to build a link between the curriculum, student and teacher. This will lead to the return of students and teachers to schools, as well as the regularity of the educational process in them[12]. Even so, he has not broached how to solve the lack of resources problem, including weak salaries given to the teachers in charge of the educational process, forcing them to find other jobs besides teaching in public schools.

- The minister has lately announced that 700 out of 2530 schools have been equipped with fiber-based internal networks, so that students can access the academic content on tablets. He also elaborated that the students do not need the Internet inside schools. The rest of the schools will be finished by the start of the new academic year within a few weeks[13].

[11] Al-Saeedi, Ahmed, Minister of Education: Distributing "Tablets" to "First Grade" Secondary Students Gratis, Masrawi, 152018/4/. <https://goo.gl/pAKKtJ>

[12] Hafez, Ahmed, Have Tariq Shawqi read the failure of the 2013 "Tablet" experience before its implementation in 2018?! Ahram Gate, 212018/4/. <https://goo.gl/MGZui>

[13] Agencies, Learn about the new education system (full details), Al-Masry Al-Youm, 282018/7/. <https://goo.gl/KP8ZqD>

A Classroom without Tablets or Tablets without Classrooms

What is the best utilization of financial resources in education? Is investing those resources in improving the wages of those involved in the educational process to ensure better quality? Or wasting these resources in an experience that has already failed, and did not lead to what can be built on it in future experiences, knowing that the circumstances that led to the failure of the first experience still exist?

23% of Egypt's Villages are Deprived of Basic Education

In addition to the high student density and the increasing number of periods-based schools, there is a greater problem in the infrastructure of education; it is the schools-deprived areas. How would the student learn, whether through the schoolbook or tablet, without a school? There are 9734 out of 24370 towns that are deprived of basic education, while there are 488, (32.1%), local administration units without secondary schools. Even so, it is planned that the tablets will be given out to the students of the first year of secondary schools[14]. There are also 65, 18.6%, local administration units without any technical secondary schools[15].

Here, we have to raise once again an important question: How would students receive tablets, which are expected to help them learn, without a school? With regard to the periods-based schools, which operate more than one period per day, they deprive students of activities and reduce the number of studying hours per day. These schools represent 18.33% of public schools, with two or three periods per day[16]. Is the tablet also the solution for these students?

[14] Al-Saeedi, Ahmed, Minister of Education: Distributing "Tablets" to "First Grade" Secondary Students Gratis, Masrawi, 152018/4/. <https://goo.gl/pAKkTj>

[15] Main Problems and Needs Report issued by the General Authority for Educational Buildings

[16] Ibid.