



# Tertiary Education Admission Policies

## The Crisis & The Solution

# **Tertiary Education admission policies The Crisis and The Solution**

Policy Brief on admissions policies in higher education in  
Egypt

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Published by:

**Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms**

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## Introduction

Egyptian tertiary education system includes 23 public universities, 20 private universities besides Al- Azhar University, The American University in Cairo (AUC), The Egyptian Japanese University for Science and Technology besides a variety of academies and higher education institutions. According to the attest census conducted by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), 2,337,193 student are enrolled in the tertiary education system in 2015<sup>1</sup>. The Egyptian tertiary education system is mass system where 35% of youth between 18 and 22 years old are enrolled in the higher education<sup>2</sup>. Admission policy to tertiary education relies on a unified examination system, Thanaweya Amma. Most of the tertiary education institutions in Egypt follow this policy; however, there are few exceptions to the rule as some institutions require personal abilities test besides the standardized examination results.

This system suffers from many deficiencies, most importantly the poor quality of tertiary education provided in these institutions<sup>3</sup>, which resulted in graduating large number of students with low acquired skills mismatching with labor market demands negatively affecting the national economy. In spite of the massive number of students enrolled in these institutions, the national spending on education tends to be low making each student share of the assigned budget to be 7,735.6 LE<sup>4</sup>. As result, the higher education system reform should start with implementing new admission policies to avoid the current influx of un-qualified students resulting from the currently implemented policies.

As one of the major deficiencies regarding the currently implemented policies is that it does not guarantee access to the discipline in which students are interested, or qualified, Adopting admission policy that helps students to study the academic discipline they want and qualified for will reflect on their academic performance and ability to finish their higher education. This new strategy would save expenditures spent on grade retention, as well as improve the expected outcomes.

From this standpoint, this paper sheds the light on current admission policy problems to tertiary education institutions in Egypt, as well as reviewing the proposed alternative policies discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each one, providing recommendations in the end of the paper based on this analysis.

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1 The Annual Report (enrolled students and faculty members in tertiary education in academic year s

2 Reviews of National Policies for Education, Higher Education in Egypt, OECD and World Bank, 2010, pp. 136

3 Road to Tertiary Education, Mohamed Mustafa, ECRF, 2016, pp. 15

4 The Annual Report (enrolled students and faculty members in tertiary education in academic year 2013/2014, Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, October 2015, pp. 369

## Problem:

Tertiary education admission policies in Egypt depend on a unified examination (Thanaweya Amma) examination system, which assesses students' ability to receive tertiary education. Admission to most Egyptian universities depends on total score students achieve within that unified examination system<sup>5</sup>. After passing the exams, students submit their scores to a range of universities depending on their preferences through the Central Placement Office, which is responsible for distributing students on a wide range of educational institutions following a certain criteria, which depends on the following<sup>6</sup>:

- The maximum number of students required by each institution for the academic year.
- Candidate's preferences ranking
- Required scores for each educational programs and the candidate's rank depending on this criteria

Each year, the Supreme Council of Universities decides on the number of available palaces in each institution and academic course, while the Central Placement Office is responsible for allocating students in universities.

Students submit their preferences of universities and academic courses through the Central Placement Office website, then the Coordination Office works on allocating students in universities and academic courses based on student's scores, preferences, and the minimum admission score requirements of each university and academic discipline. However, faculties are obligated to accept all students allocated in them by the Central Placement Office regardless whether their capacity can accommodate this number of students or not. Accordingly, the surplus of students gets allocated in special programs by faculty administration, which leaves students incapable of choosing their preferred discipline of study<sup>7</sup>.

The followed strategy to allocate students to empty seats in tertiary education institutions does not solely depend on students' preferences and qualifications since it merely depends on students' score in the standardized examination system of Thanaweya Amma. For example, in the academic year 2010/2011, 44,811 students<sup>8</sup> graduated from faculty of law, however, the number of lawyers registered in the lawyers syndicate in the same year was 11,028<sup>9</sup>. The difference in numbers shows that there are 44,811 law-graduates who did not join the lawyers syndicate and did not practice law. Moreover, according to a study published by the National Higher Education Statistics Portal in 2010, only 35% of the university graduates work in the field of their studies<sup>10</sup>. In spite of the

5 Only few tertiary education institutions rely on their admission test besides the single school-examination results.

6 Reviews of National Policies for Education, Higher Education in Egypt, OECD and World Bank, 2010, pp. 145

7 Higher Education in Egypt, Does Free Education Guarantee Equal Opportunities?, Asmaa El-Badawy, International Population Council, 2012, pp. 52

8 Statistics of Universities Graduates (public and private), Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, 2011, pp 47

9 The Secondary Report of Social Services Statistics, Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, 2012, pp 50

10 The relative distribution of universities graduates who works with their educa-



alleged equality the standardized examination system creates, it discriminates between students through the different cultural backgrounds for those who formulate exam questions as these differences might create a barrier for students coming from different geographical and cultural backgrounds. The exams results also reflect many other factors affecting the educational system, such as, social status and quality of schools. Another deficiency affecting the system is that over the last four years, the standardized exam was leaked on social media. It did not stop there, as the situation became worse when model answers were also leaked, and Egyptian authorities could not control these leaks<sup>11</sup>.

On other hand, the Ministry of Higher Education assigned a special Thanawaya Amaa examination committee at El-Gehad school in Assuit for sons of judges, police officer, and parliamentary members<sup>12</sup>. The chief of this committee officially resigned from supervising the committee as he was not able to control it and for being forced to allow students to cheat<sup>13</sup>. These kinds of incidences allow discrimination among students taking in regard that it is the only chance students get to access tertiary education.

## Proposed Alternatives:

The suggested alternatives to the current admission policies try to shed the light on more effective solutions to the problem taking into consideration the cost of these alternatives.

- 1- **Keep relying on a single school-based examination as admission tool to the tertiary education institutions with developing specialization system in secondary school, which offers a variety of programs instead of the currently followed two divisions (science and literature).**

### Advantages:

The variety of secondary education disciplines will enrich students' knowledge during, besides having the advantage of selecting between several academic courses of their preference, which allows them to continue their tertiary education.

This policy will not add an extra cost, so it will not affect the government expenditure on education. This policy will increase the standardized examination test transparency.

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tional specialization, the National Higher Education Statistics Portal, 2010, available on [http://higheducation.idsc.gov.eg/Front/ar/Indicators\\_details.aspx?indicator\\_id=211](http://higheducation.idsc.gov.eg/Front/ar/Indicators_details.aspx?indicator_id=211)

11 Showmig leaks the answers of English Thanawya Amaa exams, Wafaa Yahia, El-Masry El-Youm, 7 June 2016, available at <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/960740>

12 Transferring 120 sons of judges, police officer, and parliamentary members in Assuit to examination committee at El-Gehad school, reported by Younis Darwish to El-Shrouq newspaper, 4 June, available on <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=04062016&id=5e183a5a-cdfb-47c9-8639-51a78025507f>

13 Younis Darwish The chief of the examination committee at El-Gehad school in Assuit resigns for not able to control collective cheating, El-Shrouq newspaper, 7 June, available on <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=07062016&id=d2c1cfc1-ec37-4c4d-91e4-8c618b89ebe5>

**Disadvantages:**

- 2- Depending only on the standardized secondary school examination, as main tertiary education admission procedure, limits available opportunities for students. As the examination, results may not reflect some implicit factors such as family circumstances, school quality and access to private tutoring<sup>14</sup>. This policy also does not fully assess students' ability to enroll in their preferred academic discipline even with adding more specializations in the secondary education system.

**2- Relying on generic abilities and aptitude tests run by tertiary education institutions**

**Advantages:**

Depending on admission policies based on institutional discretion enables institutions to take a more insightful look at individuals that may not be reflected in their school exam results. It also provides prospective students with the opportunity to indicate their talents and motivations at interview or audition<sup>15</sup>. The policy also gives the tertiary education institutions the chance to prepare the suitable admission examinations that allow the students to enroll in academic courses and also show to what extent students will be able to continue their tertiary education without any obstacles.

**Disadvantages:**

The main disadvantages of this admission policy are the potential lack of transparency in the decision-making process, the risk of partiality and corruption and the high cost associated with resource-intensive case-by-case considerations<sup>16</sup>, while many institutions may not have the capacity to organize those admission examinations. This policy may also not receive the public approval, as people will try to maintain policy that guarantees social justice, which in this case the single school-examination regardless its deficiency. In 2010, a study conducted by the World Bank proved that beneficiaries of the tertiary education in Egypt see that the current admission policy is transparent and allows equal opportunities to students regardless their social class, even with knowing that it is not the most efficient tertiary education admission policy<sup>17</sup>.

**3- A hybrid admissions policy (reliance on signal school-examination as a threshold indicator combined with generic abilities and aptitude tests run by the tertiary education institution)**

**Advantages:**

14 Reviews of National Policies for Education, Higher Education in Egypt, OECD and World Bank, 2010, pp. 140

15 Ibid pp.140

16 Ibid pp.141

17 Ibid pp.145

The advantage of this policy lies in making best use of all information provided about the student. As depending on school-based examination results as a threshold indicator, supplemented by other generic abilities and aptitude tests gives a better assessment about students' abilities. This policy also enjoys same level of transparency as the single school-examination.

**Disadvantages:**

A hybrid admission policy requires a high cost to execute the single school-examination and the tertiary education institution admission tests. There is also a probability of bias and corruption risk in the admission process, but it is lower than the risk in the generic abilities and aptitude tests run by the educational institutions.

**Recommendations:**

- 1- The admission policy of tertiary education institutions in Egypt must change to be more transparent and capable of meeting students' preferences. The new policy must allow students to exercise choice over where and what they study, and institutions can exercise autonomy in the admission of students, reflecting their missions and capacities<sup>18</sup>.
  
- 2- The admission policy of tertiary education institutions must rely on both the single school-examination and the generic abilities and aptitude tests, as this will help in allocating students to different disciplines they are qualified for better than only using the single school-examination. It will also give students multiple chances to access tertiary education through working on:
  - a. Improving the capacity of undertaking admission tests and preparing efficient examination to assess students' abilities.
  
  - b. Setting and implementing control measures to organize the single school-examination to ensure equality and justice.
  
  - c. Working on improving abilities, skills, and aptitude needed for tertiary education courses.
  
  - d. Setting a control system for admission process run by the tertiary education institutions, as this process must enjoy high level of transparency. The results of the examination must be shared with the beneficiaries to gain the public trust in the transparency of the new admission policy.
  
- 3- The tertiary education must enjoy the following principles<sup>19</sup>:
  - a. Merit: access should be based on demonstrated capacity to benefit, as indicated by performance in appropriate tests of preparedness, competence and aptitude, rather than on ability to pay or influence.

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18 Ibid pp.155

19 Ibid pp.140



- b. Fairness: decisions regarding access should be impartial and free from bias, dishonesty or injustice.
  
- c. Equity (horizontal): Opportunity should be available to all, and particular students should not be systematically discriminated against on the basis of their social circumstances, personal characteristics, affiliations or location.

## **Conclusion**

The current admission of tertiary education presented in the single school-examination does not any longer achieve the social justice that used to provide, besides it does not allow students to enroll in the academic courses they prefer. Keeping the current policy without any changes will maintain the inefficiency of the tertiary education system in Egypt and its inability to meet labor market demands, which will reflect on the national economy. Moreover, it wastes public spending on students who will not make use of their education, as mentioned earlier in the paper, around 75% of Faculty of Law graduates didn't register in the Lawyers Syndicate in 2010. That means that government spent on the education of these students without putting their education in utility. Furthermore, only 35% of university graduates work in their fields of specialization.

The admission policy adopted by the tertiary education institutions must change with other more effective policies, which allow students to enroll in the academic discipline they are qualified for. The suggested policy will combine the advantages of both the standardized examination and the generic abilities tests. As it will makes use of school-based examination results as a threshold indicator, in addition to other abilities tests made by the tertiary education institutions. That also gives better assessment of students' abilities to enroll in their chosen academic course.

The current admission policy also affects the national economy regardless graduating massive numbers of young people who are not willing to work using the degrees they earned. Accordingly, unemployment rate increases besides having the burden of affording extra expenses to acquire further skills demanded in labor market. Consequently, the higher education does not meet its objective of equipping young people with the needed skills and competencies demanded in the labor market, which also wastes public spending and increases budget deficit. Therefore, changing this policy with more efficient one will help in improving the national economy on the long term through graduating students specializing in their areas of studies. Moreover, it will help with better allocation of resources, which would have positive effects on the long term.