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**A Profile of School Reform in the Arab World:
Characteristics & Challenges**

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A Profile of School Reform in the Arab World: Characteristics & Challenges

Introduction

Many decades of failed attempts at educational reform have left the Arab region with what some called “growth on paper” and lacking “serious development” (Chomsky, 2010). Despite its intensity, the current reform movement has been reported to be ineffective in helping those countries catch up and respond to the pressing demands of the 21st century. In fact, the UNDP’s Arab Human Development Report (2002), the Arab Knowledge Report (2009), as well as the recent World Bank Middle East and North Africa (MENA) development report (2008) alarmingly point out that the quality of education in the Arab region is falling behind and remains far from achieving its desired ends of inducing social, political and economic advancements in the Arab countries. The MENA development report (World Bank, 2008) attributed that observation to the weaknesses and shortcomings of the dominant approach of these reform attempts and posited that the region is in dire need for a new paradigm of educational reform.

Although the MENA report (2008) and other regional documents (the Arab Knowledge Report, 2009; UNDP’s 2002 Arab Human Development Report) were seminal in pointing the shortcomings of the past decades, they did not offer critical reflections on the reform processes and strategies that identify their inadequacies in achieving the intended goals. Acknowledging the political and economic challenges facing this part of the world, an in depth examination of reform, not in term of its content and impact but rather in term of the processes it follows and the assumptions in which it is grounded, is critical for identifying root causes of this failure and setting new directions towards effective and sustainable educational development.

This paper overviews the state of educational reform in Arab countries. It focuses on the characteristics of current attempts at reform and then examines these characteristics from the standpoint of the international literature on effective school reform and educational change. The main goal of the paper is to pinpoint the key shortcomings of the current reform practices and the challenges they present, and to offer suggestions for those who want to improve those efforts in order to achieve effective school reform in the region.

Specifically, the paper aims at answering the following questions:

- a) What are the shortcomings of the current approach to educational reform in the Arab world in light of the lessons learned from the International literature on designing effective school reform?
- b) What changes, both in the underlying assumptions and practices, can be introduced to address the challenges facing the current educational reform in the Arab world?

An Overview of Educational Reform Initiatives in the Arab World

The 1970s can be seen as the beginning of a new era in the Arab world, especially when it comes to educational reform. Being the period when those countries became independent and took their modern forms of nation states, educational reform gained center stage as a vehicle for modernization and a catalyst for social advancement, political solidarity and economic development (El Amine, 2005, p. 335; Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization [ALECSO], 2008). All attempts at reform came in the form of regional strategic grand plans (Strategy report, 1979; ALECSO, 2008) or declarations that target educational reform in all Arab countries, issued from conferences for Arab education ministers (Sanaa Summit (1972), the Algiers Summit (2005), the Khartoum summit (2006), the Riyadh Summit (2007), the Tunis Summit (2008)). These regional plans and declarations were intended to trigger country level national reform plans that mirror the format and the

goals advocated by the regional plans, thus setting the direction of reform in each of these countries. These national plans were typically followed by a flurry of activity to seek locally and internationally sponsored initiatives that can help achieve the set goals (Bashshur, 1982; Arab Knowledge Report, 2009, p. 128). The basic assumption behind this approach is that engaging in strategic planning at the regional level can foster unity and solidarity among Arab societies: by ensuring that their educational systems promote the Arabic language, maintain the core national, religious and humanitarian values these societies share, and build capacity for the much needed economic and social advancement.

This approach continued well into the 21st century. In the early 2000s, after a series of educational summits led by the Arab League, a comprehensive report on the development of education in the Arab countries was approved and a 10 years strategic plan, known as the Plan, was adopted during the Tunis Summit (ALECSO, 2008). The Plan contains a description of the state of education and its challenges in the Arab countries and sets goals for its improvement. It calls for ensuring the right to education for all, enhancing the quality of education on all levels and subjects, and linking educational development with the needs of sustainable development and with the requirements of a rapidly changing world. It also offers two main recommendations pertaining to how to achieve these goals: 1) Future reform plans “must emanate from dialogue between the Arab countries themselves in the context of joint Arab action and not be imposed or proposed from the outside” (ALECSO, 2008, p.14); 2) Arab educational decision-makers need to make use of the existing “large reservoir of experiences and innovations... by adopting other countries’ successful experiences, provided that these experiences are adapted to, and made to comply with the specificities of the Arab countries” (p.14). Though addressing key issues, the Plan still misses the mark when it comes to challenging the dominant paradigm. First, the reform it suggests is still marked by a top-down strategy mainly developed by officials at the high level of the ministers of education

and country political leaders. Second, the Plan consists mainly of broad goals that neglect the particularities of the local contexts and each country's specific needs and challenges and assumes that they all can be solved using a singular formula. Third, though the Plan urges the Arab States to design reforms that are not "imposed" from "outside", the current realities strongly suggest that this is still a farfetched goal for these countries. Examination of some of the national plans that sprang out of the regional strategy shows that these plans are designed as large scale interventions targeting at once many aspects of their educational systems and attempting at inducing change in as many schools as possible. These large scale interventions require substantial resources, often beyond what ministries of education can afford (Karami-Akkary and Rizk, 2011). As a result, international donor organizations not only frame reform goals but also largely influence – and at times impose – their priorities and the strategies to be used for achieving them. (Al Sidawi, 2005; Karami-Akkary and Rizk, 2011). Finally, the call for responsiveness to the particularities of Arab society was largely undermined by the top-down strategies that imposed goals and interventions that fail to connect to the particularities of each national and local context and to respond to the specific challenges encountered by practitioners at the school level (Bashshur, 2005).

Methodology

This paper discusses the results of a study that examined the current educational reform trends in a representative group of Arab Countries (See also Karami-Akkary and Rizk, 2011). It followed a qualitative design (Merriam, 2009) and adopted the grounded theory methods for its data collection and analysis procedures (Charmaz, 2005; Glaser 1992). Data was obtained from three sources: 1) documents outlining 18 official reform plans and their intended interventions (goals and objectives, scope and sequence, key players and donors, and reported achievements), 2) documents outlining regional and national reports on the state

of Arab education from international and regional organizations (UNDP, world bank, ALECSO, UNESCO) as well as from local educational professional organizations (LAES), and 3) journal notes and personal correspondence of the researchers from their involvement in educational reform consultation in the region.

The procedures of the constant comparative method as outlined by Charmaz (2005; 2010) were used to collect and analyze data. Accordingly, the authors selected a representative sample of five Arab countries and collected formal documents reporting strategic plans from each (a total of 17 documents). The authors then did a content analysis of these documents in an effort to learn what they addressed and what they did not address, compared and contrasted one document to another, both within a given country and across time frames, and compared content from country-to-country. The authors finally codified the data, developed categories and identified patterns, then compared these to the available literature on effective reform (Charmaz, 2010).

Relevant literature was consulted at two main junctures during the study. First and prior to the field work, the literature on educational reform in the Arab world was reviewed to understand the historical context. This understanding helped in selecting the countries and identifying the reform documents to be analyzed. Second, western and international literature on effective school reform was examined at the conclusion of the field work and the authors compared their identified patterns to their observations from the theoretical and empirical literature on reform, noting what practices in Arab countries are the same or different from the practices reported in this literature in order to build the theoretical argument on the quality of reform in Arab countries, discuss their shortcomings and propose an alternative direction.

Five Arab countries were selected for the purpose of this study: Morocco, Egypt, Qatar, Lebanon and Jordan. The selection of these countries was meant to capture the

diversity and variability in the Arab World across several important dimensions. Indeed, those five countries together are very representative of the region as they vary along a continuum in terms of their geographical locations, extending from the Gulf (Qatar) through the Middle East (Lebanon and Jordan) and through North Africa (Egypt and Morocco). They also represent a range of variability in terms of their size, population and GDP expenditures (see Appendix 1). Importantly, the selected countries are also diverse in terms of the socio-politico-economic conditions, challenges, and ambitions. In Lebanon, the challenge is to reform an educational system in which the private sector plays a major role in a country under ongoing political unrest. In Qatar, with its current economy booming, its recent comprehensive education reform initiatives have rendered it a pioneering country in the region in terms of the focus and expenditure on social and economic developments. Egypt, the most populated Arab country, is struggling with its limited resources to move a stagnant struggling economy. In Jordan, a new government put Education as highest in priority on its agenda, viewing it as the vehicle toward participation and competition in the new information age and in the global economy. It also used its good diplomatic relations with the West to seek funding from international agencies and western countries. Finally, Morocco strives to forge its national identity after a relatively recent independence, and is perceived as taking exemplary measures in terms of building a world class educational system while at the same time preserving their cultural integrity.

Last but not least, it is important to note that these selected countries also represent variability in terms of the nature and level of connections that they have with the West. Lebanon educational system was and is still influenced by the European model, while Qatar and Jordan, with their close political and economic ties to the US, are importing many educational practices that are popular in the US (Bashshur, 2010).

Lessons Learned from Western Literature on Effective School Reform

The challenge of educational reform is not unique to the Arab Region. US scholars noted major difficulties facing educational reformers, especially in translating large scale reform initiatives into effective new practices that impact the classroom (Berman and Mclaughlin 1974; 1978; Mclaughlin 1990; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Cuban, 1988; Seashore Louis, Toole, and Hargreaves, 1999; Fullan, 2007). However, decades of educational reform in the West have left a rich array of literature on policy making and research and best practices, resulting in a substantial knowledge base of what works and what does not in the area of school improvement (Seashore Louis, et. al., 1999). Compared to their Arab counterparts, Western researchers, reformers and practitioners have a wealth of documented experiences to tap into, despite their continuous concern that their existing knowledge base is still “not sufficient to keep pace with current demands” (Seashore Louis et.al., 1999).

In the 1970s the Western knowledge base on organizational change and school improvement was deeply influenced by the result of the RAND Change Agent study of federally sponsored programs in the United States. Insights from this study constituted a significant shift in the dominant understanding of large scale planned educational change and brought to the forefront what became known as the “implementation problem” (McLaughlin, 1987). After examining 293 reform projects, the RAND study found that the majority of these projects did not go past the adoption phase, with few reaching implementation and much fewer achieving incorporation and continuity. Stressing the complexity of the change process, the study pointed that the source of the ineffectiveness lies in organizational barriers that were faced during the implementation process and that transformed innovative interventions into “new ways of doing the same thing”, thus generating little improvement in educational practices and students outcomes (Berman and Mclaughlin, 1974, 1978). The study concluded

that effective change is characterized by “a process of mutual adaptation rather than uniform implementation and that local factors (rather than federal program guidelines or project methods) dominated project outcomes” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 11). These conclusions shaped the subsequent wave of reform movement in the US, the Comprehensive School Reform Movement (CSR) that reflects the current paradigm of school reform in the Western world (Murphy and Datnow, 2003).

Decades later, Seashore Louis et al. (1999) pointed out that the process of change is much complex than simple adoption of innovative practices, and that it includes implementation, impact on students’ learning, institutionalization, maintenance, and replication (p. 254). Moving away from a rationalistic, linear conception of the change process, the current Western paradigm of educational change is based on constructivist traditions where multiple perspectives are embraced as a way to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its complex and perplexing nature (Seashore Louis et al., 1999). Moreover the new paradigm emphasizes implementation and advocates a view of change as evolutionary and not revolutionary (McLaughlin, 1990; Wilson and Daviss, 1994; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002). “Decisions” in implementation are “mundane and incremental and often in response to continuing problems coped with daily by many individuals” (McLaughlin 1990, p. 13). As such, reform has to attend to both the planned and unplanned aspects, channeling them toward achieving its improvement goals. The new paradigm also espouses a systemic view that considers the interconnectedness of the conditions that influence organizational development and student learning, and calls for keeping the focus on improvements that impact the classroom level (McKinsey report, 2010; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002).

According to Western scholars, effective educational change requires the following:

1. Establishing a vision for education that builds on successful practice and responds to current demands. This vision has to include not only the kind of students we want to graduate but also a vision of the processes that can lead us there, namely how to teach, lead and organize our educational system (Wilson and Daviss, 1994; Mckinsey report, 2010; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Mclaughlin, 1990). This vision also needs to be translated into a sense of purpose that is explicit and shared, yet flexible, as it constantly adapts to changing circumstances and acts as a compass to offer a sense of direction without giving any specifics about the final destination. (Seashore Louis et.al, 1999).
2. Adopting a transformative view of change that encourages shifting paradigms and makes re-culturing schools its central goal (Sarason, 1996; Cuban 1988; Wilson and Daviss, 1994). This view calls on reformers to address not just the symptoms but rather look for root causes to problems through examining “conflict filled” situations as potential trigger for improvement and learning (Cuban, 1992). Familiar patterns and habits need to be surfaced, examined, and deconstructed in order to achieve transformative change (Argyris, 2001; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Sarason, 1996). In fact, Mackenzie study (2010) found that any system can improve with success, and can start their improvement journey from wherever they are (Mckenszie, 2010).
3. Adopting a system view and building supportive political conditions. A system view of change avoids depending on limited narrow innovations as quick fixes addressing piece meal practices. Rather, it calls on including simultaneous well-coordinated interventions both in the context and at the school and classroom level. This necessitates building mechanisms to coordinate among policy makers, researchers and practitioners at the school level in order to integrate the macro-perspective of policy makers with the micro perspective of practitioners (Mclaughlin, 1987, 1990). Though there is widespread agreement that the school is a critical unit for reform, the reform activities need to be

supported by a stable political environment (Seashore Louis, 1999). Scholars believe it is crucial that policy makers adopt flexible structures, embracing and facilitating constant restructuring, in order to support the purposes and processes of improvement towards achieving transformative change (engage in second order change where there are fundamental changes in roles, goals) (Cuban, 1988). Moreover, a balanced approach whereby policy makers exert both pressure and support is viewed as effective to trigger improvement and maintain its effects. Pressure can provide legitimacy for certain aspects of the change, overcoming natural resistance to it, hence building the necessary internal and external political support for change through formal and informal channels (Seashore Louis et.al, 1999). Mehta (2010) even suggests readjusting the relationship between policy, research and practice. He argues that for reform to be sustainable, the existing relationship/chain between research policy and practice need to be “fundamentally changed”. Instead of going only in the direction of research informs policy and policy mandates practice (the R&D model that dominated reform in the West in the 20th century), he proposes “inverting that pyramid” suggesting that “practice needs to drive the process, the research will take place in schools, the role of policy would be to provide the needed support.” (Mehta, 2010, p.8).

4. Establishing an implementation process using an evolving design model refined through continuous examination. There is a difference between “adopting” interventions, directives for reform, or a new program and implementing them in a way that ensures integration/institutionalization into the culture of the school, taking into consideration the specific cultural elements of the school where change is to be embedded and giving a central role to all stakeholders to co-construct the design (Wilson and Daviss, 1994; Mclaughlin, 1998; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Murphy and Datnow, 2003).

According to Western scholars, the complexity of the process suggests the need for an “initial plan” that develops and changes in accordance with the organizational realities and in response to the emerging conditions during its implementation (Berman and McLaughlin, 1974; McLaughlin 1990; Wilson and Daviss, 1994; Seashore Louis et.al., 1999). Wilson and Davis (1994) suggest a redesign process for strategic progressive change grounded in research data, old and new. According to this model, research becomes closely connected to the process of planning and implementing educational reform. Researchers work closely with practitioners monitoring their emerging needs and bringing those to shape the design of reform and determine the unfolding of its implementation process. Similarly, Seashore Louis & et.al. (1999) propose a process that involves both “backward” and “forward mapping” while setting goals for reform and designing its strategies. Backward mapping begins at the school level with determining what practitioners want to do and are capable of doing followed by forward mapping where a tentative plan is built. Yet, “all plans must be subject to continuous scrutiny...and are adjusted not only to the preferred destination but also to the immediate strength and developing capacities of the school.” (Seashore, et. al., 1999, p. 271).

5. Building capacity for change at the individual and institutional level to guarantee commitment, quality/effectiveness and sustainability. Scholars agree that teachers lie at the heart of successful efforts to enhance classroom practices, and that the professional networks that engage teachers are promising vehicles for effective change (Seashore Louis et.al., 1999; Smylie and Hart, 1999; McLaughlin, 1990, 1998; Fullan, 2008). This view shifts the focus toward building teachers’ individual and collective capacity as a basis for organizational development and emphasizes their critical role as informants and guides to the reform process (McLaughlin, 1990). Scholars agree that implementing

and sustaining school improvement need professional teachers who are highly skilled in their craft (Darling-Hammond 1994; Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos, 2009; Lambert, 2003) and capable of working together (Smylie & Hart, 1999). Building human and social capacity among teachers includes training teachers on inquiry (Greenwood and Levin, 2007), problem solving and reflective practice (Schon and Argyris, 2001), innovativeness and creativity (Wilson & Daviss, 1994), decision making and leadership (Lambert, 2003), interpersonal and collaborative skills (Lambert, 2003; McKinsey report, 2010; Seashore Louis, 1999; Smylie and Hart, 1999). With these skills, teachers are expected to acquire new roles, both as change agents and as “generators of professional knowledge” (Seashore Louis, et al., 1999 p.264), and be willing to continuously reflect on their practice, examine as a collective their deeply held assumptions and mental models on education, and question their validity dealing with failures as opportunities for learning and growth.

6. (Argyris, 2001). At the institutional level, building capacity includes: 1) making collaboration “the main mechanism both for improving teaching practice and making teachers accountable to each other” (McKinsey report, 2010); 2) flattening the pyramid, “placing the power to change and making decisions during implementation in the hands of those in the front lines” (Wilson and Daviss, 1994, p.46); 3) Strengthening a “technical culture” within the teaching profession, one that builds on expertise and specialization and rooted in research and experimentation, and has well established processes to convert learning into practice (Wilson and Daviss, 1999; Seashore Louis et.al., 1999); 4) Putting emphasis on personal transformation and meaning, and on preserving idealism within the teaching profession as a way to enhance individual motivation and “unleash positive emotions and inner resources” among those closely involved in reform (Seashore Louis, et.al.,1999, p. 265). As Berman and Mclaughlin

(1978) explain, organizations don't innovate or implement change, individuals do, and that for change to be effective it needs highly motivated and committed teachers. Consequently, effective school reform requires leadership that is transformational (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000, Hallinger 2003), developmental (Glickman, 2010; Graeff, 1997; Day, Harris, and Hadfield, 2001), distributed (Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond, 2001; Lambert, 2003) and inter-relational (Smylie and Hart, 1999). Such leadership is capable of cultivating supportive cultures, enabling structures and rich human resources through mentoring, coaching, and "unleashing intelligence, creativity, insight and self-initiated activity throughout their organization (Seashore Louis, et al., 1999, p.267). Moreover, ensuring leadership continuity is found to be key to successful school reform (McKinsey report; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002).

Shortcomings of the Current Trends of School Reform in Arab Countries

Educational Reform in the Arab region is still dominated by what McLaughlin and Berman (1974) and McLaughlin (1990) call the adoption perspective on planned change, whereas reformers hold a rationalistic view of organizational behavior grounded in the assumption that people in organizations are constantly eager "to seek better practices, have reliable means to identify superior behavior and are eager and able to adopt proven innovations" (Berman and McLaughlin, 1974, p. 7). Historically, educational reform in the Arab region had been mostly advanced in the form of top down grand plans mandated through policies at the national level of school governance. Mandated initiatives in these plans, when available, never addressed instructional methods, approaches to management, or any other procedural issues at the micro level of the school and the practitioner (Bashur, 1982, 2005). Ministries of education in Arab states rarely invest in funding or supporting individuals or institutions to conduct policy research that investigates local educational

problems. Moreover, there is no evidence that these grand reform plans followed a specific design that is purposefully planned or is grounded in any form of evaluation data collected from needs assessment, by monitoring of progress during implementation, or by summative evaluation of impact.

The following section discusses key issues that are deemed to generate critical barriers to reform attempts in the region. These issues are centered on the process and strategies of reform, rather than on the goals of the reform agenda, and are: 1) Highly politicized nature of educational reform process in the region where school and university educators play a limited role in initiating, planning and monitoring the implementation of reform; 2) the absence of research as a tool for generating knowledge, developing policies and guiding actions within the scope of Arab educational reform; 3) the uncritical adaptation of Western practices and ideas without attention to their cultural relevance; 4) the neglect of adopting a clear design plan to guide the implementation, and of including evaluation as an integral function of the reform process; 5) Building human capacity in Arab reform plans is limited to skill building for implementing limited interventions mandated by reform plan rather than towards professional development for effective and sustainable improvement. The following discussion will elaborate on these issues and argue for their salience while using relevant Western literature on effective reform as a frame of reference (Cuban 1988; Fullan, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Little, 1982, 1993; Hargreaves, 2007; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Mehta, 2010; McKinsey report, 2010; Wilson and Daviss; 1994; Seashore-Louis et. al, 1999; Smylie and Hart, 1999; Murphy and Datnow, 2003).

Educational reform in the Arab countries is highly politicized

School and university level educators play a limited role in initiating and planning the reform. Reform is seen as the sole responsibility of governments and ministries of education

and not that of schools. As such, reform is a job left to the nations' politicians, their government bureaucrats and few appointed educational consultants. In most Arab countries, reform is triggered by political agendas. Reform vision, goals, objectives, scope and sequence are set by political appointees, and their bureaucratic personnel at ministries of education. For example, in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, recent education reforms started in the early 1990s with King Abdallah II's and were driven by his vision to transform Jordan from an agrarian economy to a predominantly industrialized nation and a regional hub for information technology (IT) with an active role in the global economy (Jordan Education Initiative, 2009). As a new leader of the country, the king gave special attention to education and initiated all major educational reform plans. Indeed, the documents 'Jordan Vision 2020' and '2002 Vision Forum for the Future of Education' are considered royal mandates that govern and shape all educational reform initiatives taking place in the country (USAID Jordan). Also, in Egypt, around 35 key education policy statements enacted through Presidential and Ministerial decrees were issued between the year 1991 and the year 2006, mandating much of the reforms related to 'quality improvement', 'improving access', and 'improving efficiency' (World Bank, 1999).

In both cases, there was no evidence that university-level and school-level educational practitioners played an active role in planning and designing these reform initiatives. None of the reforms documented included guidelines of the role expected from universities and their academic staff in planning and implementing the reform. In fact, none of the reviewed reforms was initiated by a university and none was housed in or supported by one. In most cases, Ministries of Education [MOE] personnel managing reform projects hire academics in their individual capacity as consultants, rather than as members of their institution, and assign limited tasks rather than a comprehensive role as experts to frame the reform plan and select its implementation strategies. The contribution of academics from local universities is often

limited to offering training workshops and delivering services mandated by the strategic plans. Western scholars have highlighted the crucial roles that universities can have in school reform as they are strategically situated to intervene and impact reform measures substantially (Somekh and Zeichner, 2009; Murphy, 2008; Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, Lapointe, and Orr, 2010; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002). Through their research, educators at the university level can develop a unique understanding of the nature of problems school practitioners face in their practice, and hence can determine the competencies and conditions they need for school improvements to succeed. This potential can be lost unless educational reform incorporates by design an active role for local university educators in conceiving, designing, and implementing improvement initiatives.

In addition, local universities in the Arab countries are often marginalized and their role overshadowed by the proliferation of international organizations (which governments prefer to seek) that provide governments with “experts” to oversee the planning as well as the implementation of reform initiatives. In Qatar for example, the ministry of Education coordinates with RAND (Research & Development) to carry out educational research and needs assessment and to suggest reform plans and recommendations. In Lebanon, the ministry of Education resorted to experts from the World Bank, who played a major role in designing one of the key reform plans, determining its allocated budget, and shaping its implementation strategies (e.g. EDP [Educational Development Project]). In Jordan, the American Institute for Research (AIR) was brought in to conduct research and monitor the work of the Academy for Educational Development (AED) on planning and implementing the country’s two major reform initiatives: Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy I & II (ERfKE I and II). As a result, the priorities, goals and strategies of the reform plans mirror the dominant trends in the Western countries, without any attention given to their cultural relevance or applicability to the Arab schools and their realities. Moreover, Western

experts are approached by those government officials, as “turn-around” “universal” experts capable of transforming the ailing educational systems through short term limited interventions. Their short time appointments as consultants fall short on the time needed by these consultants to understand the peculiarities of the social and cultural context, and to provide schools and practitioners with the needed long term assistance that “transformative change” necessitates.

On the other hand, current plans for educational reform are conceived, planned and implemented with practitioners at the school level completely marginalized from the whole process. While university experts are sometimes called upon for consultation, there is no evidence in the reviewed documents that the role of school practitioners goes beyond that of being the “passive workers” expected to just execute the top-down directives. This reinforces Bashshur’s (1982) observation that the politicization and bureaucratization of education, added to the paternalistic culture in Arab countries, led practitioners to treat reform as the sole “property” and responsibility of their politicians and government. Because of the way teachers are socialized into their profession and the limited conception of their role they develop as a result, they act as mere executors of those top-down directives and have rarely a sense of urgency when it comes to contributing to the school reform process. As such they rarely voice their suggestions and never ensure that their complaints concerning the shortcoming and/or inadequacies of those reforms are heard by policy makers (Akkary and Greenfield, 1998). Consequently, Arab school practitioners are disengaged from the whole reform process, without interest to make any attempt at adapting their practices to the demands of its mandates (Bashshur, 1982; El Amine, 2005).

In contrast to this picture, there is wide agreement among western scholars of the importance of the active role teachers should play in inducing change in the classroom and the school as a whole. Western scholars agree that teachers participation in the decision

making process, when it comes to school improvement, is critical to the success of reform. They also view that the accumulated experiences of those teachers and their knowledge of the conditions prevailing in those classrooms is an asset in guiding school-based, and country-level improvement efforts. (e.g. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995; Harris and Young, 2000; Little, 1993; Louis, Kruse and Raywid, 1996; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009). In fact, incorporating the views and expertise of the various stakeholders to attend to the peculiarities of the contexts wherein reform initiatives are being introduced is found to be central to the western scholars' views of effective school reform. As Berman and McLaughlin (1978) and McLaughlin (1990) explain, because "policy deals at a high degree of abstraction", it rarely addresses the "protracted process by which [the mandated] changes work their way into the daily lives of administrators and practitioners" (p.61). Therefore, depriving school practitioners from participating in the decision-making process and from discretion to develop custom-made practical solutions while implementing reforms not only shatters chances of sustainability and success, but also disables decision-makers' potential to generate policies that "accommodate diversity and variability" across the differing schools (Berman and McLaughlin, 1978, p. 62). From this standpoint, because educators at both the school and university levels are not actively engaged in the decision making process, attempts at reform in the Arab countries have often failed to respond to the peculiarities and needs of the schools and hence failed to achieve their desired goals.

To add to the above complexity, the absence of coordination channels between policy makers, universities and schools created a steep divide and constituted a major impediment to school reform attempts in the Arab world. Indeed, not only did policy makers in the Arab educational system constrain themselves with strictly top-down reform initiatives, but they also neglected the importance of creating mechanisms of participation and coordination as integral part of the design of their reform plans in order to promote generative

communication across the various educational stakeholders. The creation of communication protocols and networking channels is premised on the assumption that all contributors to the educational enterprise must center their work on the ultimate goal of schooling – that is, student learning (Wilson and Daviss, 1994; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Fullan, 2007; Mclaughlin 1987; 1990). The literature on effective educational reform highlights several benefits from the establishment of coordination networks both within the schools and across the whole educational system. As Korostoff, Beck, and Gibb (1998) explained, “the establishment of networking opportunities and the like [...] build a support system that would center on what schools’ perceived needs are” (p.16). In one recent school-university collaborative project for school-based teacher development in China, Xu (2010) reported that, through the guidance of university researchers, teachers reflected on aspects they never considered before in their own practices and identified changes they would like their schools to take. In yet other studies that focused on including participatory mechanisms within the schools, Goodman, Baron and Myers (2001) asserted that “only after a school community is able to develop such communicative patterns of interaction can pedagogical talk become transformed into actual changes in what children learn, the way in which they learn, and the climate in which they learn” (p.80).

Educational reform in the Arab world neglects research as a tool to generate knowledge and guide policy and practice

Arab reforms pay little attention to including research as a tool for generating theoretical knowledge and empirical evidence to guide policy and practice. Research on educational reform is scarce in the Arab world and a culturally grounded theoretical and empirical knowledge base which could inform reform policies and actions is absent. As stated in the Arab knowledge report (2009), “the available data on knowledge in the Arab region is characterized by being widely scattered, difficult to obtain, and unavailable in aggregated

form at the regional level or at that of groups of Arab countries” (p.253). Although many regional educational reports (e.g. ALECSO, UNESCO, UNDP) stressed the importance of research in generating knowledge to guide educational reforms, the Arab world still suffers a major problem in this area and lacks a well-rounded repertoire of documented best practices that captures the learning and insights generated from previous attempts at reform. The prevailing culture in the Arab countries still does not see the value of research and its potential positive contribution to improve the quality of policy and practice. Expenditure on scientific research is at the bottom of funding priorities and adequate funding for research is nearly non-existent (el Baz, 2007; Arab Knowledge Report, 2009). This neglect of the research component is manifest at various levels as practitioners and academicians alike are not equipped with the necessary skills to do it, nor with the systemic support to fund and support research work. The scarcity of research and documentation of reform practices has been pointed out by several scholars. Bashshur (1982) raised the concern that there is a major lack of empirical studies that thoroughly examine where things are at in schools, and even questioned the accuracy of the available documented measures of educational performance in the Arab countries. El Amine (2008) inquired about the nature of educational research undertaken in Arab universities and found that only few universities required their faculty members to conduct research. He also found that for that minority group of researchers, the drive is to get their research published in international journals instead of focusing on other salient issues in their countries and region. According to him, “reform problems are strongly linked to the meager knowledge about them and to the [absence of] human resources that secure the transition from research to policies and practices, and back again to research, in a dynamic framework” El Amine, 2005, p.43).

Content analysis of the reform plans in the five selected countries provides additional evidence of these observations. These reform plans consist of a complex array of

disconnected goals compiled as long to do lists that follow no clear design that connects the listed interventions to the intended goals. Most of these goals and recommendations for improvement are speculative, lacking both theoretical and empirical grounding, and far from purposefully targeting the improvement of teaching and learning practices at the school level. When available, data mentioned in the reform documents are restricted to statistics pointing at symptoms of the problems, such as low literacy levels, number of schools, number of teachers training institutes, without any data pertaining to the root causes behind problems the reform is attempting to address. The opposite condition prevails in developed countries, where both private and public sector allocates major funds to research (Berman and Mclaughlin, 1974, 1978; Wilson and Daviss, 1994). The literature concerned with educational reform places the research component as the basis for policy and practice and organizational development, and advocates for its use as a means for knowledge production as well as for improving the quality of practice (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005; Wilson and Daviss, 1994, Fullan, 2007).

The neglect of the research component in the Arab world has visible manifestations on three major fronts: 1) absence of culturally-grounded theoretical and empirical knowledge base, 2) disconnect between policy-making, culturally-based empirical and/or theoretical knowledge and practice, and (3) absence of the practice of evidence-based decision making at the school level. All these seem to result in the absence of research based home-grown interventions and reform designs that are grounded in the contextual realities of Arab schools and are more likely to resolve the issues and problems that are faced by those closely engaged in the teaching and learning process. In fact, many Western researchers stressed that any effort to improve schools must be grounded in the social realities of the classroom as experienced by teachers (Lieberman and Miller,1986; Fullan, 2006, 2007; Hargreaves, 2007; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1994).

Lastly, the connection between policy making and implementation should come to the fore front during the planning and the actual execution of those plans. As McLaughlin and Yee (1988) pointed out, lessons learned from earlier reforms show that policymakers need to provide ample opportunities in their planned activities to “accommodate, adjust, and adapt administration and practice to policy” and to “charge practitioners with the development of solutions rather than mandating imaginary systems that take long periods of time to adjust to reality” (p.61).

Arab educational reform adapts Western originated best practices without critical examination of their cultural relevance

Western ideas on effective approaches to educational reform and best practices strongly shape reform agenda, design, and implementation strategies in the Arab World. This influence is infiltrated through the donor agencies agendas and through the uncritical adaptation of Western ideas and practices by Arab reformers. In Lebanon and Jordan, the estimated budget for their national reform plan is 265 million and 318 million US dollars respectively, leaving these ministries scrambling for donations from international donor organizations (Lebanese National Education Strategy (2010-2015; (ERfKE I & II), Jordan – 2003 to 2015). As a result, international donor organizations not only frame reform goals but also largely influence – and at times impose – the strategies to be used for achieving the reform goals. For instance, the proliferation of introducing ICT services in the educational field in reform plans in the region (Jordan, Lebanon) appear to be driven by a “commercial consumer spirit” rather than an agenda for reform that responds to the priorities and needs of practitioners at the school level (Al Sidawi, 2005, p.33).

Moreover, the selection of reform interventions, [i. e. technology in Jordan; independent schools in Qatar; professionalization of educators in Lebanon] seem to follow

blindly dominant trends in the Western World without awareness of their underlying assumptions or any attempt at seeking empirical evidence to their applicability in the Arab cultural context. The Independent schools model mandated on Qatari schools and educators is nothing but a clone of the charter school movement in the United States. This model pre-assumes a society that holds to democratic principles, embraces diversity, welcomes individual initiatives and has the human and social capacity needed for this model, features that are lacking in the autocratic, paternalistic culture of the Qatari society. Successful adaptation of this model requires major work on building capacity among school practitioners to help them develop new conceptions and competencies to succeed in their new roles as active participants in the decision making process. Something that the top down policies and the imposed timeline to implement them did not seem to allow for. This leaves the effectiveness of the Charter school model in improving Qatari schools under question. In a study examining reform in Egypt and pinpointing the challenges that faced it, Al Sayyed (2005) noted a similar concern pointing that the current reform plans in his country mandated radical structural, institutional and cultural changes which were incompatible with the functions and culture of Egypt's educational institutions.

According to Bashshur (1982; 2010), Arab reform initiatives are plagued by a desire to imitate international educational trends perceived as the panacea to catch up with modernization. While Arab countries are invited to use the research literature from the more developed western countries, they are still failing to do that with a critical eye to the applicability of the imported practices to their local circumstances. Bashshur (2011) uses "parachuting" to describe how Arab educational reformers have blindly implemented policies, strategies, and theories, and transplanted Western models in their own contexts without attention to the peculiarities of their culture or foreseeing challenges that would emerge from the interaction of these innovations with local contextual factors. So far, all

evaluative reports in the Arab world indicate that Arab educational policy-makers have not been very successful in reversing this trend. According to the Arab knowledge report (2009), “for the most part, knowledge data in the Arab countries is prepared in a fashion similar to that in non-Arab countries without any attempt to draw up definitions, methodologies, and measurements that conform to the reality of knowledge in the Arab region” (p.253). Because the cultural differences that exist between the West and the Arab region, it is doubtful that ideas ‘imported’ from the Western literature and models of change and reform can be ‘blindly’ implemented in the Arab context. What is needed is a close examination of how these ideas can be adapted –if possible– to match the needs and solve problems in the new cultural context in which they are being used. As Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) pointed out, one should “question the salience of Western theories of [...] schooling to the role of [practitioners] operating in very different cultural circumstances,... and explore the empirical basis for the application of theoretical knowledge, craft knowledge and school/system policies” (p. 111).

Arab educational reform neglects to adopt a clear design plan that includes evaluation as an integral function of the reform process

Another major shortcoming of the current reform paradigm in the Arab world is the absence of adequate evaluation practices and complete neglect of using the information that can be generated prior (needs assessment), during (monitoring) and after (evaluation for impact) in designing planning and implementing the change process. Indeed, evaluation as a formative approach is not a common practice in the region’s cultural context and educators are often uncomfortable with what it involves in terms of analyzing practices, passing judgment and criticism, and modifying these practices accordingly (Karami-Akkary, 2011). In the rare instances when evaluation is practiced, it is one directional, intended mostly for

“inspection” purposes- checking for conformity with the mandates of the reform- or limited to “reporting” sporadic achievements rather than critically and systematically evaluating their impact based on pre-specified standards or criteria of goodness, and often completely neglecting examining the effectiveness of these directives in impacting practice at the school and classroom level. In fact, an examination of the available evaluative reports reveals that they are mostly written and prepared in response to the requirements of international grant donors’ organizations, and are mostly focused on “reporting” reform activities that were completed. Namely, they describe the outcomes of reforms in terms of the quantitative expansion in the number of schools, the introduction of particular equipment, the amount and coverage of training carried out for practitioners, and in some cases, sporadic test scores measuring student learning outcomes. Nonetheless, even when reporting on those “achievements”, there is neither clarity about their connection to the reform interventions, nor clarity about the quality criteria based on which of those achievements can be “measured” to judge the impact of the reform (Need a reference to the documents here-see plan so and so...). Moreover, evaluation reports often neglect examining qualitative indicators of improvement which include beliefs, mindsets, the changes at the level of the norms and practices within the schools and the habits of mind, all completely nonexistent (Al Sayyed, 2005).

What is striking in all of the reforms reviewed is an absence of a plan for evaluation to generate information, to guide the design of the reform process, to monitor its progress, and to assess its effectiveness. As such, evaluation activities do not follow a systematic process to assess the needs of the practitioners at the school level, connect the result of this assessment with the choice of the intervention and the design of the reform, and then to re-examine practice and assess the impact of these interventions. Moreover, critical evaluation

of the design and strategies adopted in the reforms and the feedback mechanisms to monitor the progress and challenges faced during the implementation is practically non-existent.

Consequently, the meager work done around evaluating reform in the Arab world reflects a reform paradigm that does not value collecting evidence as a base for decision making during planning and implementing reform. As such, many of the insights and challenges that emerge through the implementation go unnoticed, and conclusions reached are mostly based in non-empirical knowledge and conceptual convictions rather than on systematic analysis of practice. Equally important, the evaluation paradigm does not concur with the fundamental assumptions of sustainable development, whereas, sustainability requires involvement in continuous reflection and inquiry to learn from past experiences and build on the accumulated wisdom of practice or from past mistakes (Wilson and Daviss, 1994; Guba and Lincoln, 1989). The approach to evaluation depicted in the Arab reform plans lacks the mechanisms needed for reformers to make use of ongoing evaluation, to re-examine their educational goals and norms, to develop and reshape the structure of the educational system, and to use the evaluation reports to generate recommendations that feed back into the reforms plans for action.

The neglect of evaluation practices and their disconnection from the decision making process resulted in reform policies that did not reflect the urgent priorities and challenges of practitioners at the school level. Indeed, there is a major gap between what goes on in schools, the challenges of their teachers and administrators, and the vision, plans and mandates that the national level reform policies are mandating on those school practitioners. In the context of educational reform, evaluation is a key to promoting the success and sustainability of any initiative. Evaluation should be integrated as an ongoing activity throughout any reform/change process.

Arab educational reform neglects building human capacity for sustainable improvement

Building human capacity in Arab reform plans is limited to skill building for implementing limited interventions, mandated by reform plan rather than towards professional development for effective and sustainable improvement. An examination of reform documents reveals that building teachers' capacity is not teacher-centered; rather it is reform-centered. The training mandated by the reforms is not based on an evaluation of the current teachers' skills or needs, but is rather made in congruence with the reforms' human capital requirements with no attention to the teachers' readiness, needs and priorities. For example, the professional development components of the plans reviewed were restricted to intensive "one stop" training sessions on: 1) teaching methodologies and strategies that enhance information literacy and critical thinking using IT as a tool (Jordan Education Initiative, 2009; Education Enhancement Project in Egypt, 1996; USAID/LEAD Program in Lebanon, 2010), 2) interactive tools that promote student centered learning (Jordan Education Initiative, 2009; LearnLink, modernizing Moroccan Education, 1999), and 3) deploying new curricula (The Secondary Education Enhancement Project in Egypt, 1999; The General Education Development Project in Lebanon, 2000). There is an eerie absence of training targeted at equipping teachers with the agencies of change, pro-activeness and leadership, despite the importance of such training in preparing teachers with the skills necessary to tailor new approaches and innovative tools to promote ongoing improvement. On the other hand, there were no strategies in the examined plans for follow-up to assist those practitioners while incorporating their learning within the complexities of their work context and conditions. For example, in Lebanon, the National Educational Strategy (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2010) suggested providing school administrative staff with both educational and administrative qualifications. Nonetheless, the training provided in response to that aspect of the plan entailed a six month intensive training of 6,000 principals, which was designed with

no prior evaluation of their needs or evidence based understanding of the problems they were facing in their practice. What the examined plans suggest is that educational policy-makers solely focus on specific skills required to implement a particular intervention, and use it as a basis for deciding on training activities. The result is that teacher professional development becomes equivalent to subjecting them to a myriad of training sessions that are disconnected from their actual professional development needs, as well as the needs of their schools.

Last but not least, the plans reveal that the concept of capacity building is limited to school practitioners. No training for university, ministry and/or other educational professional personnel was documented. Although several Arab scholars have pointed out weaknesses in the preparedness across several educational stakeholders (Al Sayyed, 2005; El Amine, 2005), none of the reform plans we examined paid attention to providing training to the ministry or university personnel.

Recommendations:

The Road to travel Towards Effective Educational Reform in the Arab Region

Looking at educational reform in the Arab countries through a comparative lens exposes its shortcomings and leaves educational reformers, policy makers, and scholars in the region with extremely challenging tasks: 1) how to determine future directions that avoid repeating failed attempts, and 2) how to benefit from the wealth of knowledge that has been accumulated, both on the international and local fronts. For the former, a rich documented theoretical and empirical literature exists on effective reform and best educational practices, and is easily accessible across borders in this technological age. For the second, a myriad of accumulated wisdom among Arab school practitioners who have been working against all odds to teach and impact their student learning is available to researchers and policy makers willing to listen to their perspectives and capture their acquired wisdom of practice.

The shortcomings highlighted in this study suggest that Arab educational reformers need to admit the failure of their traditional approach to reform and move towards attempting a re-conceptualization of how reform is done, and re-visioning the kind of education they want to offer future generations of Arab children. This necessitates changes in both the organization of the educational system as well as in the assumptions underlying the vision and goals supporting the reform endeavors. In 2005, and at the culmination of a long career as an Arab scholar studying reform in the area, Bashshur concluded:

“What is required is a bold and complete change of focus and shift of attention from relying on big dreams, big goals and big words to stressing on where the actual educational act takes place: the classroom and the school, the learners and the teachers, and all what they need to succeed in their mission. Said differently, what we need in the Arab countries is a deep paradigm shift, and a change in the work processes which entails change from the traditional way of setting plans, designs, programs and reform policies which others have to follow and abide by to adopt a new approach focused on building the capacity of teachers and school workers and empowering them to actually do the reform by themselves” (p. 293).

The view that dramatic changes are needed in the Arab reform paradigm gained momentum with the latest World Bank report on the MENA Region (2008) titled “The road not traveled.” The report concluded that in order for the region to bridge the gap with the rest of the world, educational reform should be based on new assumptions, and should focus on neglected dimensions. The report pointed at “new roads yet to be travelled” and called for a comprehensive approach to reform where a balance between engineering (building underlying human and physical capitals and structures), incentives (inclusion of all key

voices of stakeholders at all levels) and accountability measures is maintained. However, nothing has been done beyond these visionary “realizations” in terms of exploring how educational reform should be framed, designed, and implemented. The remaining section takes the previously mentioned recommendations a step further in setting new directions for educational reformers and policy makers interested in building this new paradigm, and in designing and implementing successful reforms in the Arab world. In this section, the authors suggest preliminary steps toward this goal, elaborating on the shifts that are needed in the underlying assumptions and then discussing their implications for policy-makers, researchers, and school practitioners.

1. The discussion is anchored in a belief that the first step towards effective reform is a re-conceptualization of the change process as “transformative” and based in re-culturing the educational system at all levels (Sarason, 1996; Cuban, 1988). This means going beyond “repairing” towards “discerning a new vision of what it means to educate and be educated” (Wilson and Daviss, 1994, p.8). It involves raising awareness of where things are at, surfacing familiar patterns and habits, examining them critically, deconstructing them in order to build new models, visions, and approaches (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Sarason, 1996). This process of re-culturing examines not only the kind of students we want to graduate but also a vision of the processes that can lead us there: how to teach, lead, organize our educational system, and how to reform it. This re-culturing process needs to integrate local successful experiences, and also lessons learned from other countries, while maintaining a strong commitment to excellence and effectiveness.

Abandon the search for a “one size fits all” “universal” model of educational reform. One of the key assumptions underlying the reform movement in the Arab world is the universality of ideas and practices manifested in continuously seeking the “one size fits all

model”, and that neglects the peculiarities of the context where the reform will be implemented. This is reflected in the continuous attempts at designing a unified regional strategy for educational reform, and in the uncritical adoption of ideas and practices from more developed countries [mostly Western countries]. Awareness of the salience of cultural and contextual factors in shaping the understanding of the change process and impacting its implementation is very well established among scholars (Berman and McLaughlin, 1974, 1978; Sarason, 1990, 1996; Mclaughlin, 1990; Hallinger and Murphy, 1987; Murphy and Datnow, 2003). These scholars contend that successful implementation and adaptation requires an understanding of the social and cultural setting in which these ideas and plans need to take root and become “weaved into the dense cultural fabrics” (Wislon and Daviss, 1994, p. 113; Hallinger and Murphy, 1987; Bajunid, 1996), thus making sure that the selected interventions are congruent with the needs and nature of challenges a particular system is facing. For that, educational reform in the Arab countries should avoid pre-packaged prescriptive models and follow ones that provide guiding principles, participatory organizational and management processes, and give primacy to local development efforts. Moreover, Arab reformers at all levels [schools, universities, MOE] need to engage in cross cultural comparative studies to examine the applicability of the imported ideas, and conduct thorough need assessments to gain a broader understanding of the prevailing conditions, problems, and assets of the schools they are trying to change. As such, the focus of the regional educational summits needs to shift from developing a unified plan to offering a forum for scholars, practitioners, and policy makers to engage in a dialogue to facilitate exchanging expertise, sharing resources and critically examining locally generated proposals for improvement.

2. Focus on the processes of change and adopt a dynamic approach in designing and implementing reform plans. Planning for reform in the Arab countries has consisted of

setting broad goals, selecting interventions, and mandating those interventions through top-down policy directives for practitioners at the school level to implement. There is no evidence that these attempts follow any specific design that is grounded in theoretical or empirical knowledge of organizational change. Moreover, there has been no attention given to the implementation process, nor to the emerging needs the implementation process triggers at all levels of the educational system. In contrast, effective and sustainable reform is associated with giving attention to processes while setting the targets of the reform and designing its strategies (McKinsey report, 2010). Namely, reformers should address how teachers teach, how leaders lead, how researchers do research, and how policy makers make policies, and how reformers design their innovative interventions and implement them. This requires thorough attention to what takes place in the implementation process, with those responsible for making the change playing an active role in integrating new interventions into existing practices (McLaughlin, 1990; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Wilson and Daviss, 1994). Consequently, a new direction for developing reform plans requires the following: 1) understanding of where things are at, both in terms of identifying the problems faced as well as the assets and success stories. This will help establish the connection between new interventions and current practices and increase the chances for successful integration of these new interventions; 2) Development of an initial design that lays down the intended activities/interventions of the change process, with clear goals and strategies including built in procedures to monitor the progress of the implementation and to evaluate its impact. The design needs to be held provisionally and improved in light of the emerging insights during the implementation process; 3) identification of the structural changes needed to achieve re-culturing, and to minimize resistance and conflict and avoid turmoil in the system. Intentional purposeful re-culturing is manifested in attending to how the

local practitioners are making sense of and embedding the new practices. This can be achieved through monitoring the implementation process closely (Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Sarason, 1990, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1994). Consequently, the reigning paradigm of evaluation – namely the view of the evaluation process as one of inspection for conformity and assessment of success or failure- should be replaced by a new paradigm where evaluation is seen as formative feedback that is an integral component of the change implementation process.

3. Moving towards a participatory systemic approach to reform that joins policy makers at the ministries of education, university scholars and practitioners at the school level in a concerted effort toward sustainable improvement. Like their Western counterparts, Arab educators are facing the challenge of bridging the broad divide between the macro world of policy makers and the micro realities of the practitioners at the school level (Berman and McLaughlin, 1978). Adopting a systemic view of reform should encompass all stakeholders of the educational system. Consequently, reform should be designed to target its three key components: ministries of education, universities, and schools, and to ensure connecting them through building channels for an on-going conversation, where a “continuous circuit of information through which researchers, policy makers, and school practitioners constantly communicate about their needs, strategies and goals. (Wilson and Daviss, 1994, p.24). McLaughlin (1990) points at the vexing challenge of bringing together two different communities of discourse: the policy makers and the educators at the school level. The former advocates for reform models that stress regularities of process and organizational structures and see them as sources of stability for the system. On the other hand, educators see the “problematic” of every day functioning and demand organizational action that is responsive to the peculiarities of their context, and that welcomes unpredictable, autonomous initiatives by individual practitioners. Awareness

of the nature of this divide should lead toward drafting reform models that involve engaging all three groups in collaborative actions in all aspects of the reform process: identifying problems, researching solutions, and making decisions and designing plans for actions. Fullan (2007) suggestion that reform follows a model where top down policy making is congruent with and supports school based bottom up initiatives for change is a promising direction for Arab educators to adopt. This requires redefining the traditional roles of educational policy makers, researchers, and school level practitioners, and moving toward a participatory approach that ensures that each actively contributes throughout the improvement process, and especially shapes the goal setting and decision making processes, this way including the voice of the practitioners and academicians and acknowledging their expertise and professional input. Concurrently, local policies need to be created to manage and reinforce active participation of all stakeholders, build collaborative channels and coordination mechanisms to overcome the current isolation across the hierarchical, bureaucratic structures. The introduction of communication channels should help loosen the bureaucratic rigidity and autocracy by relaxing rules so as to accommodate variability across schools and to incorporate the needs, norms and practical contexts of practitioners.

4. Building capacity for self-renewal and sustainable improvement should be directed at all levels and should encompass human, social and institutional aspects. The dominant understanding of “capacity building” in the Arab world restricts its activities to teachers, and limits its scope to providing scattered skills through intensive one stop workshop format. This falls very short of what the literature recommends for effective school change. Namely, successful school improvement is associated with comprehensive multifaceted view of building capacity that targets the individual, the social and the institutional level to guarantee commitment, quality, effectiveness and sustainability

(Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009; Smylie and Hart, 1999; Seashore Louis et.al, 1999).

Hence, capacity building for sustainable change in the Arab world should include building human capital [professionalizing teaching], and social capital [attending to interrelationship and informal aspects of organizational life], as the venue towards building institutional capacity [setting supportive and enabling structures that enhances learning and professional development] (Smylie and Hart, 1999).

At the individual level, building human capital for change includes preparing teachers with high level of expertise and specialization who are professionals capable of converting their knowledge and learning into practice (Wilson and Daviss, 1994). Hence, teacher training should focus on higher order skills like knowing how to learn, inquiry, problem solving, creativity, decision making and interpersonal skills. As such, professional development is reframed as problem-based (Bridges and Hallinger, 1995), experiential, on-going, connected to emerging needs, and aimed at preparing independent professionals and not dependent workers (Glickman, 2010).

At the social level, building “social capital” is critical to achieving and sustaining school improvement (Smylie and Hart, 1999; Leana, 2011). Social capital resides in the relationships among teachers. It is manifested in interpersonal relationships that are built on trust, shared visions, norms and expectations, and in openness to exchange information about one’s practice and willingness to be subjected to others’ scrutiny. At the institutional level, there is growing evidence in the literature (e.g. Fullan, 2001; Sarason, 1990; Smylie and Hart, 1999; Harris, 2001) suggesting that improvement attempts at the school level are bound to fail if the school doesn’t create conditions that foster the development of human and social capital as a way to build the school capacity for sustainable improvement. Hence, educational reform in the Arab countries should focus on rethinking the school culture. This involves transforming the school culture into “communities of practice” (Sergiovanni, 2000) through structural and

institutional arrangements that promote on-going teacher learning (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995) and establish shared professional norms and values among them (Louis, Marks and Kruse, 1996; Smylie and Hart, 1999). In these communities of practice, collaboration becomes “the main mechanism both for improving teaching and making teachers accountable to each other” (Mckinsey report, 2010). Sergiovanni (2000) contends that developing these communities of practice includes finding channels to engage teachers in collaborative inquiry, reflective dialogue and open sharing of their challenges and successes. This implies the need to make on-going professional development an integral part of schools (Hargreaves, 2007; Darling–Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995; Little, 1982). Promoting collaboration and professional collegiality constitutes a major challenge in the context of Arab schools, where the existing bureaucratic structural arrangements serve to keep teachers separate, and where teachers’ inherent beliefs about the profession and its practices remain primarily isolated and individualistic. Consequently, it becomes necessary to adopt a distributive leadership model, away from the lone hero at the top of the organizational hierarchy who is solely responsible for change initiatives and mandating their implementation. A more distributive approach can break the current cycle of dependency among teachers, and will ensure that responsibility for improvement is shared, with all professionals contributing to the process based on their expertise and their strategic location in the formal structure. As a result, authority for decision making that directly impacts the teaching and learning process is placed in the hands of those in the front lines. Moreover, a sense of activism needs to be nurtured by channeling the feelings of discontent with the status quo towards identifying the prevailing conditions that are constraining improvement attempts. “Leading by outrage” Sergiovanni (2001) and nurturing “pro-activism” at all levels of the educational system are crucial to reverse the stagnation that has plagued the field of education in the Arab region. Lastly, teachers and schools should not be the sole target of

capacity building. Universities and ministries of education and their personnel in the Arab world have to critically examine their world views, evaluate their readiness to contribute to the change process, and seek professional development accordingly in order to build their individual and institutional capacity to achieve sustainable school improvement.

6. Building a knowledge base grounded in the cultural realities, and using it as a basis for policy making and action. The absence of a culturally-grounded theoretical and empirical knowledge base, and the consequences this has on the decision-making processes, both at the school and country levels, is one major impediment to the success of educational reform in the Arab world. Consequently, research needs to be brought to the center of any reform attempt in the area, as the process per excellence, to generate culturally grounded actionable theory, evidence based decisions, and policies that are responsive to realities and challenges faced at the school level. The literature from the West concerning successful educational reform offers much evidence on the centrality of research in promoting sustainable improvement in schools. Recently, action research has gained widespread support amongst the educational community as a powerful tool to support educational stakeholders at all levels while they engage in meaningful and collective inquiry to promote sustainable improvement. Action research is broadly defined as a process of systematic inquiry which involves practitioners (teachers and other stakeholders) and university academicians in studying and reflecting on their own practices in order to produce positive change (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2005; Cano, 2004; Gillies, 2009; Mitchell, Reilly and Logue; 2008; Savoie-Zajc and Descamps-Bednarz, 2007). The essence of action research is that practitioners-researchers choose issues to investigate which pertain to their everyday teaching and learning, are within their sphere of influence, and about which they care deeply. Moreover, practitioners-researchers are involved in every step of the research (Sagor, 1997).

Moreover, action research gained its reputation based on the promises it offers in terms of being a medium for promoting evidence-based decision making and in terms of its powers to create communication channels among the various educational stakeholders. Indeed, action research is believed to promote democracy and equity in education, and collaboration in the educational community (Gall, et al., 2005; Sagor, 1997). Accordingly, action research is conceived as action for social change, shifting the goal from an individual to a collaborative one, intentionally aiming at organizational development and deep structural change (Brydon-Miller and Maguire, 2008; Tuck, 2009).

In the domain of systemic educational reform, approaches to action research that promote investigations involving several stakeholders (teachers, administrators...) in the service of school reform are even more well known. These approaches are most commonly referred to in the literature as participatory action research (PAR), collaborative action research (CAR), cooperative inquiry, or action learning. The rationale behind such approaches is that people who hold the same goals, beliefs and visions constructed from the “ground up” work more efficiently and harmoniously towards achieving improved performance. Hence action research is viewed as a phenomenon which is strongly mediated by the culture of the school (Clausen, Aquino and Wideman, 2008; Sagor, 1997). The aim behind those approaches is building learning community and solidarity for school improvement efforts, as well as contributing to the theory and producing a knowledge base that would be useful to other practitioners and educators (Gall, et al., 2005).

As such, collaborative action research, if adopted, can present a handy tool for collaborative reform endeavors involving educational reformers as they work on solving problems at any level of the educational system. Moreover, it can serve as a much needed tool to develop a culturally grounded knowledge base pertinent to school improvement through reinforcing a systematic documentation of the experiences, lessons learned and

insights that educators are undergoing during the reform process. Through using action research in its various forms (on action, in action and for action) (Calhoun, 2002; Sagor, 1997) and documenting the process, Arab educators can generate empirically grounded needs assessment reports, progress reports, and evaluative reports that can become the basis for future research, policy making and initiatives for improvement. Last but not least, expanding research skills and activities to educational practitioners will help accelerate the accumulation of an empirical knowledge base that can assist both researchers and policy makers as they make decisions on cross cultural adaptation of ideas and practices.

Concluding Note: A Fresh Start, A New Path

Looking at the current state of educational reform in the Arab world in light of what is currently known on effective educational reform invites Arab reformers to re-consider their old approach. A paradigm shift in educational reform in the Arab world means breaking free from the old established patterns of the previous attempts by bringing inquiry at the center of the process to question their effectiveness, building on the lesson learned from their shortcomings and successes, exploring the international literature for promising models, and most importantly keeping the focus on resolving the challenges faced at the school level by embracing “conflict filled” situations as potential triggers for improvement and learning (Cuban, 1992). While the literature on school reform in the US informs us that there are more than 1000 designs for school reform being followed that are informed by a rich knowledge base on school change (Murphy and Datnow, 2003, Seashore Louis et.al, 1999), scholars in the Arab world cannot identify a single one. As such, a key first step towards the paradigm shift is for Arab scholars, policy makers, and school practitioners to work collaboratively on designing reform models that are grounded in the cultural context of their societies. Focused efforts should be directed at designing evidence based prototypes of successful reform that

can be later adapted on a broader scale. To achieve that goal, these three key contributors to education reform need to gain deep understanding of the nature and root causes of the problems faced at the school level, critically explore the available international literature for ideas, and along the way document their experiences, lessons learned, and new insights as a way to build the foundation of a culturally grounded knowledge base. Through this process, they can gradually move from uncritical followers/ knowledge consumers to knowledge producers capable of critical cross cultural adaptation of knowledge in this global information age.

Much remains to be done, yet a lot can be learned. Reflecting on the lessons learned from the international literature, each improvement activity should include the following: understanding where we are, where we want to be, and building a “design intent” with strategies to get us from where we are to where we want to be and a process to monitor and evaluate it all. Basic building capacity should include: working collaboratively, inquiry, leadership skills, and a predisposition towards continuous critical reflection, learning from mistakes and accountability through collective responsibility. Reformers at all levels [policy making, academia, schools] should be actively involved in the process and ready to modify their organizational structures and practices to build organizational cultures that are capable of enabling these changes. Reflection in and on practice should become rituals for everyone engaged in reform. As Kruse (2000) explains, when teachers engage in authentic discourses about knowledge with their peers, they create new interpretations of best practice and they begin to generate new knowledge. As such, they are engaged in organizational learning, and are strengthening the foundations of a professional community through engaging in reflective practice and through examining their own experiences as teachers (p.371).

Moreover and despite the sense of urgency to turn around the failing educational system and improve educational outcomes, Arab reformers need to be patient as they go through this transformational shift. They need to allow time for the process and accept failures as opportunities to learn, remembering that it is a process that does not develop without normal growing pain [failures, wasted resources], and takes time to show results (Wilson and Daviss, 1994 p. 128; Fullan, 2006; Murphy and Datnow; 2003).

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Appendix 1:

Country name	Geographical size	Population size	Total GDP expenditure (2010 Estimate)	
Lebanon	10,452 km ²	4,224,000	Total	\$58.576 billion
			Per capita	\$14,988
Morocco	710,850 km ²	32,993,000	Total	\$193.15 billion
			Per capita	\$4,745.20
Jordan	92,300 km ²	6,407,085	Total	\$35.3 billion
			Per capita	\$5,759
				http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Per capita
Qatar	11,437 km ²	1,696,563	Total	\$102.147 billion
			Per capita	\$83,840
Egypt	1,002,450 km ²	79,089,650	Total	\$496.604 billion
				http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt - cite note-imf2-2
			Per capita	\$6,347

Appendix 2:

1. ERfKE I Jordan
2. ERfKE II (Jordan)
3. Jordan Education Initiative
4. The National Education Emergency Program, 2009-2012 (Morocco)
5. Morocco Advancing Learning and Employability for a Better Future (ALEF)
6. ‘LearnLink’, Modernizing Moroccan Education
7. K-12 Education Reform in Qatar’s Schools, ‘Education for a New Era’
8. AED Support for ‘Qatar Changing its Educational Landscape’
9. The National Plan for Education for All, 2002-2015 (Egypt)
10. Egypt Education Initiative (EEI)
11. The UNESCO National Education Support Strategy (Egypt)
12. AED, Approaches and Methods for Advancing Learning Projects (AMAL) (Egypt)
13. The National Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education Reform in Egypt
14. Egypt Education Enhancement Program and Egypt Secondary Education Enhancement
15. The National Education Strategy, 2010-2015 (Lebanon)
16. The General Education Development Project, 2000-2009 (Lebanon)
17. European Training Foundation (ETF) Intervention Strategy, 2009-2011 (Lebanon)
18. USAID/Lebanon LEAD Program

Appendix 3:

Project Name	Scope of coverage & Budget
Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy I & II (ERfKE I & II), Jordan – 2003 to 2015	The ERfKE Projects target education policy and strategy, curriculum and teacher upgrading, infrastructure and physical upgrading, and Early Childhood Education. The budget is estimated to be around 318 millions USD. Beneficiaries included: 10,600 kindergarten children, 1,000 ECE professionals, 65,000 students, 16 to 18 years old, studying in the MI stream, 2,000 youth participating in the School-to-Careers (STC) pilot program for grade 9 to 11, 1000+ teachers receiving training through YTC, 1200 teachers receiving training through Shorouq, and 28,000 students benefiting from Shorouq improvements to schools
The National Education Emergency Program, Morocco 2009 – 2012	The Project targets: 1) Reform of the education and training system so that it can meet development needs, 2) Compulsory school enrollment for all children aged 6 to 15 years, 3) Promotion of initiative and excellence in qualifying secondary and higher education, 4) Development of research, and 5) Rational management of resources and introduction of a culture of results-based management. The budget is estimated to be around 3,068 million Euros.

K-12 Education Reform in Qatar's Schools, 'Education for a New Era' – 2001	46 Independent Schools were operating alongside approximately 164 Ministry schools and 292 private schools. The number of continued schools has continued to grow, with 19 more opening in 2007-2008 and 15 more opening in 2008-2009. By 2010, all public schools in Qatar are expected to be Independent Schools. The budget is estimated to be around US \$137,313 for each school.
The National Plan for Education for All, Egypt, 2002 – 2015	The Project targets: 1) Continuing to provide all target groups (children and adults) with equal educational opportunities without any discrimination, and ensuring their enrollment and continuation, while taking into account the increase in numbers due to population growth; and b) Achieving quality of education in all stages according to international standards in order to ensure competitiveness of Egyptian pupils in the era of globalization. The National Plan for Education for All includes 23 programs addressed to the four sectors as follows: 1) Early Childhood Education and Pre-school; 2) Formal Basic Education; 3) Children and Young People outside Schools, and 4) Adult Literacy and Continuing Education. The budget is estimated to be around 20.7 Billion USD
The National Education Strategy, Lebanon, 2010 – 2015	The National Education Strategy covers five major foundations: A) Education Available on the Basis of Equal Opportunity; B) Quality Education that Contributes to Building a Knowledge Society; C) Education that Contributes to Social Integration; D) Education that Contributes to Economic Development, and E) Governance of Education. The budget is estimated to be around 262 Millions USD.

Appendix 4:

Jordan		
Project Name: Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy I (ERfKE I) – 2003 to 2009		
Funders / Key players	Goals / Objectives	Implementation / Evaluation
Funders: European, Canadian, Arab and Asian funders USAID and The World Bank, Key players: USAID, MOE, The Academy for Educational Development (AED), local NGOs, American Institutes for Research (AIR)	The goals target (1) Restructuring the educational system, (2) ensuring responsiveness of the educational system to the economy, (3) accessing and utilizing information and communication technology to support effective learning and system management and (4) ensuring quality learning experiences and environments	The implementation's scope and sequence was not documented. The evaluation is summative in nature and consists of reporting some achievements of which are (1) development of a National Education Strategy (2) introduction of new governance and management mechanisms (3) introduction of new curricula and teaching methods (4) increasing the numbers of primary and secondary students having access to safe and

		environmentally efficient school buildings
Project Name: Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy II (ERfKE II) – 2009 to 2015		
Funders: Government of Jordan, The World Bank, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), Other Arab and International Sources (not available yet)	Students enrolled in all streams of pre-tertiary education in Jordan will have increased levels of skills necessary for participation in the Knowledge Economy. ERfKE II focuses on (1) teachers (e.g., teacher policy, in-service training, and teachers as an agent for change), (2) promotion of field directorate-level, capacity building, and (3) school-level innovation as part of the promotion of decentralization.	The implementation and evaluation scope and sequence were not documented.
Project Name: Jordan Education Initiative (JEI) – 2003		
The government of Jordan, the international private sector, local private sector, NGOs and donors under the auspices of the World Economic Forum’s Global Education Initiative (GEI) Supported by 45 organizations including local and international companies such as CISCO, Computer Associates, Microsoft, Intel and HP, Jordanian government departments, global government donors and NGOs.	Accelerate education reform through innovative research, development, and implementation, and further add value to students, teachers, and the education system, and effectively contribute in building a knowledge economy and society. Improve the development and delivery of education. Build capacity for the development of innovative learning solutions through the effective use of ICT in partnership with world class firms, and creating economic value that will lead to mutually beneficial business opportunities. Leverage an environment of national commitment and corporate citizenship to build a model of reform and replicate it in other countries in the region. Expand innovation and research to accelerate and support education reform and develop economic and business models.	The implementation’s scope and sequence was not documented. The evaluation is summative in nature and consists of reporting some achievements of which are (1) completion of the deployment of Technology Infrastructure in all 100 Discovery Schools, (2) establishment of a systematic mechanism for reviewing and approving e-content prior to deployment in those schools, (3) providing teachers with different training programs to enhance the use of ICT in education and the use of different teaching strategies, (4) Harvard TfU Case Study that focused on the impact of the Teaching to Standards with New Technologies 1 and 2 courses (TSNT1 & 2) on the teaching strategies and student outcomes and (5) coordination with the National Centre for

		Human Resources Development (NCHRD) on developing a comprehensive evaluation of the JEI impact on the Discovery Schools' community.
Project Name: Association of Queen Rania Al Abdullah Award for Excellence in Education – 2005		
Partnerships with MOE, a number of local universities, the educational forum for private schools, media institutions which provide coverage of the Association's activities, public and private sector institutions including the Greater Amman Municipality.	<p>Creating an educational environment that fosters excellence, creativity and knowledge creation, and rewarding and honoring distinguished and innovative educators</p> <p>Bolstering society's appreciation for the role of teachers to encourage more enthusiasm for the profession and uplifting the spirits of teachers</p> <p>Contributing to the development of education in order to graduate productive and intellectual students devoted to their community</p> <p>Offering researchers an extensive information database that serves as an official reference for researchers, students and post graduates.</p>	The implementation and evaluation scope and sequence were not documented.
Morocco		
Project Name: The National Education Emergency Program, 2009 – 2012		
Funders / Key players	Goals / Objectives	Implementation / Evaluation
<p>Designed by the Moroccan Government with the support of its development partners, including the African Development Bank (ADB).</p> <p>Financed by the Government, the African Development Bank (ADB), the European Union (EU), the World Bank (WB), the French Development Agency (AFD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB).</p>	<p>Accelerate the implementation of reform resulting from the National Education and Training Charter (CNEF) by consolidating gains and making the necessary readjustments</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reform of the education and training system so that it can meet development needs. 2. Compulsory school enrollment for all children aged 6 to 15 years. 3. Promotion of initiative and excellence in qualifying secondary and higher education. 4. Development of research concerning the resolution of cross-cutting problems inherent in the education system. 5. Rational management of resources and introduction of a culture of results-based management. 	<p>The implementation of the National Education Emergency Program, which uses a project-based management method, constitutes an innovation which breaks with past projects and program management approaches.</p> <p>Evaluation is carried out according to predetermined criteria for success that target the multiple components of the reform. The criteria are considered to be the major expected outcomes as related to target</p>

		groups, performance indicators, and indicative deadlines and targets.
Project Name: Morocco Advancing Learning and Employability for a Better Future (ALEF) 2004 – 2009		
USAID/Morocco	<p>Help the education and vocational training sectors prepare graduates better to meet Morocco’s current and future workforce needs.</p> <p>ALEF worked with and within existing structures from the two sectors to emphasize the relevance of curricula and the ability of instructors and schools to deliver this content effectively. Key strategies for girls’ success in education included the use of technology to improve learning, and the active and strategic involvement of the business community and broader civil society</p>	<p>ALEF worked with four Moroccan ministries to support adoption of its key education strategies in more than 475 primary and junior secondary schools and four agricultural training centers, reaching over 300,000 students in four of Morocco’s sixteen regions.</p> <p>The project has generated tremendous enthusiasm in all areas of activity. Teachers, trainers, directors and officials across ALEF’s partners have taken seriously their central role in improving education and training in Morocco. More concretely, multiple public and private institutions have chosen to adopt the ALEF methods piloted and refined by AED and its partners to their programs nationwide. During its final year, ALEF has worked with the government to spread its activities to an additional five regions, reaching more than 50% of Morocco's schools.</p>
Project Name: ‘LearnLink’, Modernizing Moroccan Education 1999 – 2005		
USAID Funded by USAID and operated by the Academy for Educational Development (AED).	<p>Improve educational quality by incorporating technology into teacher training, increasing educator access to ICTs, and promoting ICT use in education Providing the ‘Centre de Formation des Instituteurs (CFIs), with</p>	<p>The implementation and evaluation scope and sequence were not documented.</p>

	<p>learning technologies and appropriate pre-service and in-service training in their use.</p> <p>Developing communications networks which facilitate the work of the teacher trainees, teacher trainers and inspectors, as well as collaboration and information sharing among peers.</p> <p>Building local education technology capacity through the development of frameworks for “Master Information Teachers” trained to sustain local development of learning technologies.</p> <p>Contribute to national policy discussions on the use of learning technologies in education.</p>	
Qatar		
Project Name: K-12 Education Reform in Qatar’s Schools, ‘ <i>Education for a New Era</i> ’ – 2001		
Funders / Key players	Goals / Objectives	Implementation / Evaluation
<p>State of Qatar asked the RAND to propose a strategy for reform. After reviewing options by RAND, the Qatari leadership selected a system-wide structural reform plan that encouraged qualified persons with innovative ideas (including non-educators) to apply to run new government-funded schools, the Independent Schools, under contracts with the government.</p> <p>The reform was driven by 3 new founded institutions: The Supreme Education Council (SEC), having oversight responsibility. The Education Institute, who develops curriculum</p>	<p>The goal for the new system was to improve education in Qatar by generating a variety of schooling alternatives – with different missions, curricula, pedagogy, and resource allocation models – and then to hold schools accountable for student performance through the provision of information about schools, through parent choice, and through minimal government oversight.</p> <p>The general design principles were expected to generate five major changes in the Qatari school system:</p> <p><i>Students would be introduced to modern curricula benchmarked to curricula in countries with high student performance.</i></p> <p><i>Teachers would have more freedom in the classroom to design or select their own curricula, adapt their teaching strategies and techniques to the standards, and meet the needs of individual students.</i></p> <p><i>Parents would be more informed about schools and their performance through school report cards that provided the results of standardized student assessments aligned to the curriculum</i></p>	<p>This reform design embodied 3 primary levers for change:</p> <p><i>Independent Schools were established in the form of charter schools that were operated independently from the existing Ministry of Education.</i></p> <p><i>The development of new curriculum standards for Independent Schools.</i></p> <p>These were developed with the assistance of outside contractors and were benchmarked to international standards. <i>Standardized national assessments were developed and administered</i> in the same four subjects to students in publicly funded schools to determine how well they met the new standards.</p> <p>From November 2005 through May 2007, RAND conducted a case-</p>

<p>standards, charters and oversees the Independent Schools, and supports school improvement.</p> <p>The Evaluation Institute, who develops assessments, collects data, and uses those data to motivate the central reform of improved student performance</p>	<p>standards</p> <p><i>Independent school operators would have much more autonomy than the Ministry of Education’s school principals had.</i></p> <p><i>Policymakers would have more data and information about the performance of schools and of the system as a whole, which they would use to monitor the reform and inform strategic decision making.</i></p>	<p>study analysis of 12 Independent Schools and 4 Ministry schools to monitor, evaluate, and report on the implementation of the reform. Data were drawn from (1) extensive classroom observations, (2) interviews with principals and administrators, and (3) focus groups with teachers, students and parents. RAND assessment recommendations were intended to more firmly establish the reform on a positive course for the future:</p> <p><i>Limit the frequency of policy changes and carefully considering, in advance of their implementation, how they are likely to affect current practice and system performance.</i></p> <p><i>Increase support for schools and teachers.</i></p> <p><i>Review and improve policies related to student assessment.</i></p> <p><i>Adopt approaches that encourage parents to support high-quality education for their children.</i></p>
<p>Project Name: AED Support for ‘Qatar Changing its Educational Landscape’</p>		
<p>AED is overseeing a team of 21 International master educators who provide the training</p> <p>The project is overseen by the AED Center for Gender Equity and the AED U.S. education &</p>	<p>Professional development in Qatar to improve teacher quality.</p>	<p>This includes creating classrooms that revolve around student participation, de-emphasizing rote memorization, and training teachers on how to identify the learning needs of each individual student. School principals</p>

workforce development group.		are also being trained in strategic planning, effective decision making, supervision, and continuous staff development.
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Project Name: Qatar School Support Organization Project (SSO) 2005 – 2009

Funder: Supreme Education Council of Qatar The Academy for Education Development Center for Gender Education (CGE) and the U.S. Education and Workforce Development (USEWD) group worked in partnership with the Supreme Education Council (SEC)	The project supports the school in achieving the SEC’s vision of creating a high-quality, high-performing, and self-sustaining education system.	The project used content specialists in the areas of Math, Science, and English, who advised the teachers in 22 independent schools on professional development, the new curriculum standards, classroom methodologies and assessments. In addition, the project ensured a School Management Advisor at each school that oversees the daily operations of the school to ensure that the school is well managed and provided coaching and support to the school administration. CGE and USEWD have observed significant improvements in teaching, classroom management, and school management.
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Egypt

Project Name: The National Plan for Education for All 2002 - 2015

Funders / Key players	Goals / Objectives	Implementation / Evaluation
Ministry of Education	Provide all target groups (children & adults) with equal educational opportunities without any discrimination, and ensuring their enrollment and continuation, Achieving quality of education in all stages according to international standards so as to ensure competitiveness of Egyptian pupils in the era of globalization Providing out-of-school children and	Implementation: The National Plan for Education for All includes 23 programs addressed to the four aspects: 1. Early Childhood Education and Pre-school 2. Formal Basic Education (6-15

	<p>adults with the opportunity to re-enroll in schools Eliminate 50% of adult illiteracy while giving priority to younger girls and women from rural and poor areas Resuming continued development of all the curricula Developing the educational evaluation system to include the assessment of all components of the educational process including inputs, processes and outputs. Upgrading the efficiency of school management. Ensuring sustained enhancement of the teachers' professional skills. Improving the components of the learning environment. Increasing educational funds and diversifying their sources while rationalizing expenditures. Activating decentralization in local planning, management and follow-up of education. Enhancing the participation of civil society in planning, financing, administering and following up on the educational process.</p>	<p>years old) 3. Children and Young People outside Schools (8-14 years old) 4. Adult Literacy and Continuing Education The implementation and evaluation scope and sequence were not documented</p>
<p>Project Name: The National Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education Reform in Egypt 2007 – 2012</p>		
<p>Ministry of Education</p>	<p>Higher quality of education Enhanced system efficiency, institutionalized decentralization, and community participation Equitable access to education</p>	<p>The National Education Strategic Plan identified 12 Priority Programs and formulated precise targets for 5 years. The Programs are classified into 3 groups and performance indicators for each group is documented; the 3 groups are: Quality Programs (School based reform; Curriculum Reform; Human Resource Development) System Support & Management Programs, which provide technical support for system reform (School Construction;</p>

		<p>Institutionalization of Decentralization; ICT for Management; Modernization of Monitoring and Evaluation System) Level Based Programs, which are centered on levels of schooling: (Early Childhood Education; Basic Education; Modernization of Secondary Education; Education for Girls and Out-of-School Children; Children with Special Needs)</p>
<p>Project Name: Egypt Education Initiative (EEI) – 2006</p>		
<p>Partnership at the public level between 3 ministries, M. of Communications and IT, the MOE, & the M. of Higher Education, and a partnership with the World Economic Forum, along the partnership with the global IT industry companies and local IT private companies. Major international partners: Microsoft, Cisco Systems, Intel, HP, IBM, Siemens, and Oracle</p>	<p>Increase competitiveness and job opportunities for citizens by investing in human resources development. Create a future generation armed with knowledge and 21st century skills. Develop a new model for learning that inspires continuous improvement through lifelong learning so as to reach end beneficiaries.</p> <p>Promote and market the concept of e-Learning technologies as a pillar in the educational process. Promote appropriate uses of technologies to support and improve teaching, learning and administration.</p> <p>Increase the capacity of education leaders to plan, monitor and implement policy-level decisions, as well as projects and programs.</p> <p>Develop the capacity of teachers, by combining ICT skills with emergent views in pedagogy, curriculum, and school organization contributing to a higher quality education system.</p> <p>Develop a culture of innovation and collaboration by creating mechanisms for effective sharing of ideas, best practices</p>	<p>The monitoring and evaluation strategy for EEI interventions goes beyond monitoring the implementation of the work plans and completion of targeted outputs. It aims at measuring the effect of the designated interventions in changing individual and institutional performance in the use of ICT for educational purposes. The scope and processes of the implementation and evaluation are not documented.</p> <p>The EEI has completed more than 70% of the planned infrastructure objectives</p>

	<p>and peer-learning through digital communities of teachers.</p> <p>Participate in developing standards for the educational uses of technology that facilitate school improvement in Egypt.</p>	
Project Name: The UNESCO National Education Support Strategy		
UNESCO	<p>Build capacities in Educational Planning, Policy, Management, Monitoring and Evaluation (EPPMME) introduce the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCE)</p> <p>Professional Development of Educators: Capacity-building of teachers at all levels of education.</p> <p>Implement the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE)</p> <p>Capacity-Building of national experts on strategic planning and on standards and indicators.</p> <p>Manage available resources & enhance Extra-budgetary (EXB) support</p> <p>Enhance capacities of trainers in the area of teachers training and qualification.</p> <p>Enhance the role of NGOs in LIFE initiative.</p> <p>Develop tools for improving gender parity in literacy.</p>	The implementation and evaluation scope and sequence were not documented.
Lebanon		
Project Name: The National Education Strategy 2010 – 2015		
Funders / Key players	Goals / Objectives	Implementation / Evaluation
International Donors Government of Lebanon	The goals are (1) to direct the child towards the comprehensive development of the individual, (2) the reinforcement of respect for human beings and their basic freedom, (3) the development of the ability to actively participate in a free society, (4) the development of a sense of responsibility in a spirit of understanding, peace, and friendship, and (5) the commitment of wide social partnership among those concerned with education in order to ensure meeting the human need for education and for building a knowledge society.	<p>Implementation: The National Education Strategy covers five major foundations:</p> <p>A. Education available on the basis of equal opportunity</p> <p>B. Quality education that contributes to building a knowledge society</p> <p>C. Education that contributes to social integration</p>

	<p>The strategy derives its basic foundation from the educational realities in Lebanon with its particular traditions. It also resides in Lebanon's efforts to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reform public and higher education, 2. Enhance the closer partnership between public and private sectors in providing educational services, 3. Developing vocational and technical education to meet the country's needs, and 4. Revising and developing curricula to reinforce national identity, integration and spiritual and cultural openness. 	<p>D. Education that contributes to economic development</p> <p>E. Governance of education</p> <p>The implementation and evaluation scope and sequence were not documented.</p>
Project Name: The General Education Development Project 2000 – 2009		
<p>Government of Lebanon French Cooperation World Bank</p>	<p>Enhance the capacity of the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sport (MNEYS) in an effort to manage education effectively (this was the ministry of education before dividing it into two separate entities: the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Youth and Sport). Restore credibility in the public education system, by improving the quality of, and access to education. The project, aiming to assist the government in developing a national education strategy, had two main components:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Management and Institutional Development</i> <i>Quality Enhancement</i></p>	<p>Some achievements:</p> <p>The National Education Strategy was finalized and approved by the ministers.</p> <p>The development of the Education Management Information System is largely completed and functional testing is taking place.</p> <p>40 school principals were designated to become Master Trainers; 450 school principals completed a leadership development program.</p> <p>The evaluation tools for teachers' continuous development program with accompanying systems and software have been developed and adopted.</p> <p>The Exam Management System (EMS) has been completed with training delivered to administrators,</p>

		invigilators, and correctors.
Project Name: European Training Foundation (ETF) Intervention Strategy 2009 – 2011		
EU External Relations Council Lebanese government	<p>Improving the quality of education and training to tackle the high unemployment rate among young people and activating the role of the private sector both in supply of education and training and linking with the labor market.</p> <p>The ETF's strategy focuses on four core interventions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contributing to awareness-raising about the principles of a National Qualification Framework (NQF) that integrates the different initiatives currently being undertaken by the key institutions. 2. Upgrading the existing education strategy to include entrepreneurship as a key competence with regards to curriculum, teacher training and school management 3. Enhancing Lebanese involvement in ETF projects. 4. Supporting the European Commission in its interventions in the reform of education 	<p>ETF has ensured a follow up in 2009 by supporting the Guidance and Counseling Directorate to develop entrepreneurship as a primary pillar of career guidance.</p> <p>The ETF has extended the training for career guidance counselors on entrepreneurship (the 15 existing counselors and others to be recruited), updating the training programs and organizing workshops on good practice, methodologies and new instruments for career guidance. This activity has paved the way for the introduction of entrepreneurship as a key competence in all levels and forms of the education system in a lifelong learning perspective.</p> <p>In 2010, the ETF envisages, using the newly established education strategy – the National Education Strategy - to include entrepreneurship as a key competence with reference to curricula, teacher training and school management</p> <p>A pilot implementation scheme in selected levels of general education will be developed through the revision of curricula, teacher training and school management</p>
Project Name: The Lebanon Education Assistance for Development (LEAD) Program		
USAID	Provide assistance to public schools to	To February 2010, 283

<p>The program is being carried out by the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and the Cooperative Housing Foundation (CHF)</p>	<p>improve their learning environments through physical repair works, provision of equipment and educational extra-curricular activities.</p>	<p>public schools located in all Lebanese districts have received assistance under the program. The LEAD program will provide assistance to 30 additional schools including renovation works and the provision of science and computer laboratories. The Ministry will also receive support in the systemization of their after-school activities program by building the capacity of school staff, in particular headmasters, to run after-school programs. Recent activities supported through this program included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical repair works Provision of school equipment (computer and science laboratories, science materials and LCD projectors) Implementing community service projects at schools.
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Project Name	Funders / Key players
<p>Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy I (ERfKE I), Jordan – 2003 to 2009</p>	<p>Funders: European, Canadian, Arab and Asian funders, USAID and The World Bank, Key players: USAID, MOE, The Academy for Educational Development (AED), local NGOs, American Institutes for Research (AIR)</p>
<p>Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy II (ERfKE II), Jordan – 2009 to 2015</p>	<p>Funders: Government of Jordan, The World Bank, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), Other Arab and International Sources (not available yet)</p>
<p>Jordan Education Initiative (JEI) – 2003</p>	<p>The government of Jordan, the international private sector, local private sector, NGOs and donors under the auspices of the World Economic Forum’s Global Education Initiative (GEI) Supported by 45 organizations including local and international companies such as CISCO, Computer Associates, Microsoft,</p>

	Intel and HP, Jordanian government departments, global government donors and NGOs.
The National Education Emergency Program, Morocco 2009 – 2012	Designed by the Moroccan Government with the support of its development partners, including the African Development Bank (ADB). Financed by the Government, the African Development Bank (ADB), the European Union (EU), the World Bank (WB), the French Development Agency (AFD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB).
K-12 Education Reform in Qatar’s Schools, ‘ <i>Education for a New Era</i> ’ – 2001	State of Qatar asked the RAND to propose a strategy for reform. After reviewing options by RAND, the Qatari leadership selected a system-wide structural reform plan that encouraged qualified persons with innovative ideas (including non-educators) to apply to run new government-funded schools , the Independent Schools, under contracts with the government.
The National Plan for Education for All, Egypt, 2002 - 2015	Ministry of Education
The UNESCO National Education Support Strategy, Egypt	UNESCO