Community Involvement in Dducation in Damietta Governorate: the Role of School Board of Trustees

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Abstract:

Community involvement in education has in the last few years become a central concern of both governments and non-governmental organizations all over the world.This paper examines the role of school Boards of Trustees (BOTs) in achieving greater levels of involvement in Egypt. The specific objectives of the study were to investigate the levels of community involvement within BOTs in the region, examine the kinds of problems that hinder boards of trustees in the region and discuss the kinds of interventions that would be required to enhance the role of BOTs in community involvement.

For the purpose of this study, primary data have been collected utilizing semi structured interviews with 63 people linked to nine secondary schools within the Damietta governorate. The captured data were analysed using qualitative approaches that entailed that transcribed interviews were carefully read and triangulated with sources and then coded systematically.

The main finding that emerged from the study was that BOTs have thus far had little effect in facilitating greater community participation in the governorate and that the establishment of these bodies have provided schools with even greater challenges than in the past. It was also found that most of the examples of participation on the part of the BOTs are logistic in providing school with its needs or attempting to solve some material problems. The weakest pattern, however, is that related to taking decisions as it might clash with the central authorities.

Introduction:

Community involvement in education has in the last decade become a central concern of both governments and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) all over the world (Lewis, & Naidoo, 2006; Wankhede, & Sengupta, 2005; Chapman et al, 2002). In Egypt, there have been formal and informal calls for widening the scope of participation in education on the part of NGOs and individuals (Herrera, 2003). The importance of community involvement in education has been a commonplace of educational thinking in Egypt at least since the Ministry of Education (MOE) issued its document *National Standards for Education Report* of 2003.

It has become obvious for the MOE that it is extremely difficult to work alone or reach the grassroots areas especially with about 40% of Egypt's population belonging to the young age cohorts. Consequently the MOE seeks partnerships with the community represented in NGOs, Local Civil Society Organizations, and even individual community members to share responsibility for education. This partnership is shown in the establishment of Board of Trustees (BOT) for each school in Egypt to enhance the community involvement in education.

In this paper, I am going to show how community involvement in education results in a lot of advantages in Egypt especially when this is reflected in the work of BOT. I explore the role of school BOT in one area of Egypt, namely Damietta, and examine the various challenges associated with the process of securing greater community participation in the management and funding of education. In order to achieve this, the paper is composed of four parts. In the first part, the paper shows how community involvement is located internationally by reviewing the relevant literature. The second part illuminates how community involvement has recently gained much interest in the Egyptian context which ultimately has led to the establishment of the BOT. In the third part, the results of the field study will be discussed and findings will be shown. Finally, the paper will end with some conclusions and recommendation to activate the role of BOT.

Community involvement in education :

The wide range of literature on the emergence and intended role of community involvement in education suggests that the topic is both widely debated and hotly contested. Pailwar and Mahajan (2005) assert, for example, that the focus on community participation is aimed at encouraging people to become active agents rather than being treated as "target groups" or passive recipients of benefits. Thus, community participation in education is envisaged as an efficient strategy to achieve a variety of objectives, including increasing the relevance and quality of education, improving access and coverage, identifying problems reflecting local priorities and developing relevant curriculum and learning materials, improving ownership, local accountability and responsiveness, ensuring sustainability, reaching disadvantaged groups, mobilizing additional resources and building institutional capacity. They suggest that the support of all segments of the community helps significantly in achieving quality educational outcomes (Pailwar and Mahajan, p. 376).

Patterson and Harwood (1995) further observe that the interactions between school and the community add two dimensions to current education provision, namely it brings the community into the school and also brings the school into the community. The first dimension uses communities as a resource whereby the knowledge and expertise of community members are utilized for the benefit of the school and its pupils. The second dimension entails schools becoming active parts of community development and includes activities like student 'work days' and fund raising schemes for extracurricular outdoor programs.

Coppola et al. (2003) argue that community participation can be in the form of financial, material, and labor – varying from sending children to school and attending meetings, helping in school construction, managing schools and paying teachers' salaries. They note that community ownership and commitment may assist in making the program more substantial and sustainable so that it becomes a support and enabling system for community self-help.

Some authors also suggest that greater community participation in education may lead to parents getting more involved in helping their children with their homework, serving as teacher assistants, chaperones on field trips, or providing more assistance in the everyday running of schools, and that this often leads to improvements in overall student achievement (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory 2000, p.2)

Jordan *et al*. (2001, pp.10-11) outline some types of community connections with schools such as:

- Connections that integrate or locate health and human services at school sites and use school facilities and resources for the benefit of the entire community.
- School-to-work initiatives that link career training and real life experiences with academic content.
- After-school programs that provide remedial or enrichment learning activities for students while maximizing the use of school resources and fulfilling parents' need for childcare.
- School-business partnerships in which businesses provide schools with resources, business expertise, and volunteers.
- Direct support from individual community members.
- Connections with educational organizations, such as museums, libraries, and cultural groups.

- Community participation in school decision-making through formal mechanisms such as school governance councils.

Likewise, The Six Types of Partnerships Framework, developed by Joyce Epstein (1995, pp.9-10) and her colleagues at Johns Hopkins University, describes the general categories of partnerships that exist between schools, families, and communities. According to this framework, they are:

Type 1: Parenting: Enabling families and parents to create home environments suitable for supporting children as learners.

Type 2: Communications: Using effective forms and patterns for communications from school to community and from community to school.

Type 3: Volunteering: The recruitment and organization of the school's volunteer program

Type 4: Learning at Home: Encouraging families to help their children with homework and recognizing other learning at home opportunities.

Type 5: Decision-making: Including parents, students, and community members in the school decision-making process

Type 6: Collaborating with the Community: The identification and integration of resources and services from the community.

Davis (2000, p.16) observes that some benefits of community involvement in education are:

1. Schools feel they are getting help from multiple sources: With the support of their communities, schools can accomplish their goals, which in turn, can result in more community support for increased school funding.

2. Communities can unite around the shared responsibility of educating youth, and schools are able to expand the number of positive role models: Community partners can offer varied mentoring experiences to students.

3. Community businesses can make people aware of their support for schools and families: Businesses can benefit from the positive public relations of working closely with schools.

Furthermore, different outcomes and benefits of the community involvement in education can easily be identified to all parts involved in the educational process. According to Jordan et al., the outcomes for students are academic achievement, other achievement in school, social functioning, addressing barriers to learning, creating networks of support, and creating

new learning opportunities. In addition to supporting the success of students, community involvement have good outcomes for schools such as school reform efforts, school climate, access to resources, and increased instructional capacity and curriculum development. Besides supporting students and schools, community involvement can impact the community as a whole in many ways such as changes in skills, knowledge, and beliefs, acquisition of resources, and increased civic capacity and community development.

Similarly, Rutherford et al (1997, p.16) argue that Community involvement in education results in outcomes for students, parents, school personnel, and school and school districts as exemplified in the following:

- School and community partnerships are associated with positive effects on student outcomes, such as higher levels of achievement as measured by standardised test scores; factual, conceptual, critical, and attitudinal aspects of learning.

- Acquisition of new skills, increased involvement, interaction with their children, and positive self-concept are examples of parent outcomes associated with school-family partnerships.

- Teacher outcomes associated with partnerships included positive attitudes, the use of varied strategies, and an increased sense of self-efficacy.

- Positive effects for school and school districts are various such as an increase in student attendance rates; reductions in dropout, delinquency, and pregnancy rates; and improved discipline practices

Trying to throw light on the importance of community involvement in education, Patterson and Harwood (1995) note that the community represents a deep well of resources that is rarely exploited. The community with its people and organizations, possesses a host of skills, great knowledge, wisdom, and broad experience. Community people are at a variety of stages in their lives and offer perspectives related to their ages, a vivid contrast with the narrower spectrum of ages and stages with which most school students spend their days. They state that community people can be sources of information for the school and provide some examples o this. A physician may come to school and discuss sexually transmitted diseases, an artist leads a watercolor workshop, a garage owner tells stories about auto repairs, or a geneticist visits a senior biology class. In addition, every community includes people who have exceptional skills in traditional crafts and who are willing to instruct others. Such people can teach students

elementary skills in a traditional way. At the same time, students develop an appreciation of the traditions involved.

Imel (1995, pp.17-19) suggests some common elements to enhance community involvement and create effective collaborative relationships with schools such as involving the right player, ensuring commitment, developing a shared vision, producing a formal plan, emphasizing performance, focusing on common ground and maintaining the partnerships.

Community involvement in education in the Egyptian context:

In most education systems in developing countries, there are a number of obstacles and barriers that impede the achievement of educational quality. These include lack of infrastructure, functional deficiencies, poor socio-economic conditions, and gender discrimination. Community participation has proved to be an effective approach in addressing those socio-economic and cultural barriers by defining program initiatives for local conditions, framing and designing relevant, realistic, and flexible curricula catering to the area specific socio-economic needs, thus enabling the children to fulfill their economic and household responsibilities and also to simultaneously study (Pailwar and Mahajan, 2005).

According to Pailwar and Mahajan (2005, p.377), local communities have helped in many contexts to fill gaps where governments are unable to provide education services. They have done this by using limited resources quite efficiently and contributing to the development of infrastructural facilities in ways that improve education quality and access. Pailwar and Mahajan note that in some contexts communities often undertake building proper classrooms and toilets, providing furniture, textbooks and blackboard, establishing new schools, and constructing approach-roads to schools that make access easier for those students from remote areas.

The challenges facing education authorities in Egypt are quite immense. According to the World Bank Report of 2002 student enrolment in Egypt in 1999-2000 was approximately 16 million, of which 7 million in primary education, 4 million in preparatory education, 3 million in secondary education, and over 1.8 million in tertiary education. This makes Egypt's education system the largest in the Middle East and North African region, and also among the largest systems in the world. Moreover, the largest number of civil servants in Egypt, about 3.8 million employees, is employed within the education system. (World Bank, 2002, p.8).

Of greater concern is that the education system in Egypt has undergone significant expansion over the last decade, whether expressed in expenditure on education or educational infrastructure. The number of schools built in the nineties is double that built over the last century, with a 27.6 percent increase in enrolment (UNESCO, 2006, p.9). This pressure on the education system has led to a number of educational reforms, informed in large measure by interactions and co-operation with donor agencies, and to a realization that greater community participation will need to be encouraged if education provision is to be effective.

In this regard, the Ministry of Education of Egypt has pinpointed three key areas of interaction, namely

- Getting civil society to understand the problems and impediments from which education suffers, share the responsibility of helping schools to improve the quality of educational product, and appreciate the achievements realized by educational institutions.
- Maximizing the benefits from the sources utilized in the educational process and raising material support for schools.
- Encouraging both teachers and students to improve the quality of education and towards creating better attitudes of parents and communities towards schools (National Centre for Educational Research and Development, 2004, p.71).

The Ministry of Education recently set up a senior level committee that included members from the business community, NGOs, the academy community, and legal experts. In their deliberations they noted the need to initiate a process of decentralization in order to attain better efficiency and equity within education services, and recommended the devolvement of authority to local administration levels or even to school levels. They also recommended the establishing Boards of Trustees within each and every school as part of the process of decentralization.

As part of this process the Ministry of Education has committed itself to establishing a pedagogical information centre and a separate unit within each county that will focus on enhancing links between schools and communities. This is expected to involve developing networks between stakeholders at the local, regional, and national levels including politicians, teachers, and parents. The aim is to raise awareness on relations between stakeholders, training teachers, issuing legislation enforcing parental and family participation, and integrating the concept of community participation in school curricula (UNESCO, 2006, p.14).

Notably, this focus by the Ministry of Education on community involvement at the grassroots level has evolved from the early 1990s. For example, decree No.5/1993 was issued to highlight the importance of involving parents in the educational process, while decree No.30/2000 emphasized the important role that NGOs could play in education. Thus, from the 1990s already the Ministry of Education developed policies that widened the scope of participation of NGOs and that allowed them to establish certain types of schools such as Community and One Classroom schools. The Ministry of Education further established committees that examined the various ways in which community involvement in education could be enhanced. One such committee, composed of members of the MOE and from various NGOs, was established for example to propose and co-ordinate joint projects. This process led to the establishment of a general department within the Ministry of Education in 2000 that focused on how best to enhance its partnership with educational NGOs and to develop a database of these partnerships. (Ministry of Education, 2007; UNESCO, 2006, p.14)

The emphasis on community participation in education within the Ministry of Education culminated in the promulgation of the *National Standards for Education Report* in 2003. The document is considered to be a national strategy that sets out how the ministry will achieve comprehensive quality education standards for all both at the level of education provision and in terms of ministerial, regional and local accountability. It is expected that these indicators will allow schools the chance to determine individual processes and measures to achieve the various expected standards.

In this regard, the focus on community participation is deemed to relate to a number of activities linked to the education system. The *National Standards for Education Report* (NSER) of 2003 notes five domains that represent the essential elements of the education process, and has set standards for each of them (MOE, 2003, p.17). The five domains focus on:
• Effective Schools
• The Educator
• Management Excellence
• Community Participation; and
• Curriculum and Learning Outcomes.

For the domain of community participation, the NSER has identified a further five sub domains; i.e. partnership with families, serving the

community, mobilizing the resources of local community, voluntary work, public relations, and communication with community. With respect to *partnerships with families, the aim is to:*

- Encourage the participation of parents in educational decision-making and their effective involvement in drawing up a future vision for schools and in the implementation of their various programs
- Facilitate communication between parents and members of the community working in individual schools
- Inform parents of the educational and learning practices that take place in schools
- Encourage parents to voice their opinions on the educational service provided to their children (MOE 2003).

While highlighting the various ways in which available community resources and community material assistance can be utilized, the NSER further calls for the initiation of programs that encourage voluntary work within and outside the school and the development of mechanisms that organize the various kinds of voluntary work of parents and community members. This, according to the Ministry of Education, can best be achieved via the establishment of a Board of Trustees in each school in Egypt.

According to the Ministry of Education, Boards of Trustees will play a vital role in supporting the educational process in schools in Egypt (National Centre for Educational Research and Development, 2004, p.71; Ministerial decree No.258 – MOE 2005; Ministerial decree No.334 - MOE 2006). That is because Boards of Trustees comprise teachers, parents, businesspeople, members of NGOs, and community members active in public work and are able to utilise resources in localities that the government would not always have access to.

Boards of Trustees (BOT) are made up of 15 members, namely:
- five parents elected by the parents general assembly
- five community members chosen by the county governor
- three teachers elected by their colleagues in school
- the school head teacher as an executive director of the BOT
- the school social worker as a secretary of the BOT.

Furthermore, the head of the Board of Trustees is elected from its elected members but excludes the head teacher/principal and teachers.

Importantly, while the role of the Board of Trustees is multi-fold in terms of the ways in which it interacts with communities and outside agencies, it also serves important purposes in the overall functioning of individual schools. With regard to the former, Boards of Trustees are meant to:

- Enhance cooperation with parents and community members in an environment that supports the educational process.
- Assist in the decentralization process in terms of administration, evaluation, follow-up, and decision making.
- Encourage voluntary work on the part of civil society members to widen the scope of community participation in education.
- Mobilize community efforts to provide the utmost welfare for students, especially those with special needs.
- Decide on the financial allocations of school and increase individual school's financial resources (MOE 2005; MOE 2006*).

With regard to the latter, Boards of Trustees are authorised to:

- Work with the school to prepare a strategic plan within which the aims of the school are captured
- Work out ways in which external financial resources secured from businessmen and wealthy community members are used within schools
- Develop strategies whereby members of NGOs, civil society members, and intellectuals are involved in the everyday activities of the school
- Cooperate with the school board to ensure that school buildings, facilities, apparatus, and modern instructional media are adequately maintained
- Support student activities in school and enable students to overcome passive habits such as smoking, drug abuse, violence Conduct
- Develop and oversee collaboration programs with universities, NGOs, youth centres mass media
- Offer consultation and advice to the school management team in facing up to their various problems
- Assign the financial allocations and then revise and verify the school budget (MOE 2005; MOE 2006).

Notably, Boards of Trustees have been actively employed in Egypt since 2005 as the main way of encouraging and growing community participation in education. What is not known is how successful or not this initiative has been, and the degree to which Boards of Trustees have contributed to better community participation. The next section of the paper assesses the role of

Boards of Trustees in one area (Damietta) in Egypt and explores the various challenges and barriers that these bodies have thus far encountered.

Boards of Trustees in Damietta, Egypt

This section of the paper draws upon a research project that I conducted in 2006 in the governorate of Damietta in Egypt. Damietta lies in the north of the Delta on the coast of the Mediterranean sea. Unlike other counties in Egypt, it is famous for a variety of economic activities such as fishing, manufacturing furniture, dairy products, sweets, leather products, and textiles. As it is known as the most producing governorate in the country, the standard of living in Damietta is considered high compared to some other areas in Egypt.

My focus on the role of Boards of Trustees in this region was informed by a growing recognition in the region of the importance of community involvement in education as a way of solving the vast number of problems and impediments from which the education system suffers. Moreover, given that Boards of Trustees in Egypt had only recently been established, I felt that evaluating their role in one governorate of Egypt would provide some important perspectives on the value of these bodies and the kinds of developments that would need to be addressed if the government initiative was to be a success. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Investigate the levels of community involvement within Boards of Trustees in the region,
2. Examine the kinds of problems that hinder Boards of Trustees in the region
3. Discuss the kinds of interventions that would be required if the role of Boards of Trustees in enhancing community participation was to be improved.

The study utilized semi structured interviews with 63 people linked to nine secondary schools within the Damietta governorate to collect the data used in this paper. The chosen sites were representative of schools in all the various districts of the governorate, while the interview sample was sufficiently differentiated according to the various constituent groups that are represented on Boards of Trustees. The table below describes the breakdown of the interview sample:

Head teachers	9
Deputy Head Teachers	24
Teachers	15
BOT Members	15
Total	63

Interviews mainly focused on two issues, namely on the efficiency and effectiveness of Boards of Trustees in terms of encouraging greater community participation in the Damietta governorate and the kinds of barriers that limited this role. Interviewees were informed that the main purpose of the project was to understand and suggest how the role of Boards of Trustees in encouraging community participation could be enhanced and improved. The captured data was analysed using qualitative approaches that entailed that transcribed interviews were carefully read and triangulated with sources and then coded systematically.

Notably, the main finding that emerged from the study was that Boards of Trustees have thus far had little effect in facilitating greater community participation in the governorate and that the establishment of these bodies have provided schools with even greater challenges than in the past. It was found that the main function or contribution of Boards of Trustees in the governorate has been in fund raising. In this respect, the bodies have been relatively successful and have at least assisted in getting communities to realize their role and responsibilities with regard to the funding of education.

What Teachers and Members Of Boards Of Trustees Say About Education And Community Participation In Damietta, Egypt

Interview results show that there is a variety of perceptions and expectations about community involvement in education and the role of BOT, and the roles and responsibilities that school staff expects the BOT to offer. Furthermore, a number of barriers and problems impeding the role of BOT is cited. On account of this, results will be discussed as follows: first, efficiency of the BOT participation in schools; second, problems and barriers affecting the role of BOT.

First: Efficiency of the BOT participation in schools:

The interview data revealed that most participants have clearer concerns about the role of the BOT. So, when asked about their views on the idea of community involvement in education and the establishment of the BOT as a way to reinforce such participation, the majority of the interviewees confirmed that the BOT is very important and involved in many ways. One of the interviewed school deputy heads (DH) remarked that *"I am very much supporting the establishment of the BOT, since it plays a vital role in school reform and is considered as an effective way of enhancing community involvement in education."* Another DH agreed and added that *"with the BOT, we could do many things that we couldn't do before because of the centralisation"*. With reference to this, most of the participants welcomed the establishment of the school BOT as indicated in the following

excerpt by a head teacher (HT): *"Community participation in education embodied in the BOT is very useful as it connects school to its surroundings."*

Often, as observed by the interviewees, that the BOT helps in the community and field services and provides school with some of its needs either by the donations given by the BOT members themselves or by organizing campaigns for fund raising. For example, some businessmen who are already members of the BOT voluntarily buy some instruments or facilities that the school lacks. In the same way, the BOT can increase the financial resources of the school as noted by one of the HT: *"with the help of BOT members, campaigns for fund raising are organized to provide many things needed in my school."*

Most of the interviewees especially the head teachers revealed that the BOT can help in getting some of the most difficult bureaucratic approvals as some of its members occupy highly outstanding positions which enable them to obtain such approvals. Sometimes, things are lagging out and need some kind of push or a signature of a high rank officer. At this point, some members of the BOT can do this. A female HT gives an obvious example to prove that. *"The road to school is uneven, especially in winter it becomes muddy, and it is very hard for students and teachers to reach school. And I kept contacting authorities to pave the road and make it accessible but they turned a deaf ear to all my appeals. Eventually, I resorted to an influential member of the BOT who talked to the head of the city council and could obtain his permission. And as you see now they constructed an approach road that provides easy access to school."*

Likewise, another HT stated that he tried a lot to pave the school playground to be more convenient for students' activities but in vain. Eventually, with the help of the BOT head he could do it. Similarly, establishing a prayer room is another frequent example mentioned by some interviewees.

A considerable number of interviewees indicated that the BOT members always offer their services and are ready to help. As they belong to different backgrounds i.e. academic, social, and economic, they provide a strong supporting backing to school from the community. *"Most [not all] BOT members are cooperative and very interested in the educational process",* a female HT noted. Another head teacher added that she feels confident as all her decisions are backed by the BOT. The BOT members attempt to solve schools problems, if any, with the Directorate of Education or any other

authorities in the county. In order to demonstrate how helpful the BOT members are, one of the DH assured that *"the BOT includes some parents and they are very much interested in their children's education, so they are always here and participate effectively."*

The majority of the interviewees agreed that the BOT contributes to moving into decentralization, and that is what the MOE is now calling for. To exemplify, for a long time schools have been used to going through a very long process of bureaucratic procedures before they can buy any thing the school needs, such as some apparatus or lab materials. In addition, they have to prepare a lot of formal documents and obtain many hard-to-get signatures, then wait for a long time before they get what they need. But the ministerial decree has given the BOT members the authority to buy any thing that they feel the school requires. One HT commented that *"this is a radical change that we always called for* […] *a dream that we believed wouldn't come true."*

The participants have frequently referred to the BOT ability to take some actions over a wide range of students' behavioral problems such as misbehavior, reluctance to work hard, and absenteeism which is very obvious in secondary schools. For some social considerations, the school management team find it difficult to take some hard disciplinary measures against naughty students as they expect harsh criticism from students' families or even from local education authorities. Consequently, they depend on the BOT in these matters, and it has proved to be efficient in dealing with them.

When asked about the types of participation that the BOT performs in schools, the interviewees debated about that the BOT exerts a lot of efforts on different levels, but they agreed that the most obvious type is the materialistic one. One HT noted that *"the BOT participation in school is just financial or in the form of fund raising."*

To conclude, what would be regarded by participant as types of participation on the part of BOT can be exemplified as follows:
- Organizing celebrations to honor the talented and distinguished students and celebrations on some religious occasions such as the Prophet's birthday,
- Building and furnishing a prayer room,
- Awarding outstanding teachers and encouraging them to give more,
- Maintenance of the school buildings (e.g. toilets),
- Holding some awareness lectures for students (e.g. absenteeism, drug abuse)

- Providing the school garden with its needs, planting trees
- Organizing and sponsoring cultural contests financially,
- Taking some action against naughty students,
- Hiring some part time teachers,
- Increasing the school financial resources,
- Moving bad teachers from school
- Participating in forming the school vision and mission.

Problems and barriers limiting the role of BOT:

There are many positive outcomes associated with the BOT role in community involvement; nevertheless a lot of barriers arise to restrict this role. When asked about what they think impedes the participation of the BOT, participants in the interviews identified a range of factors that limit the BOT ability to be involved in schools.

Some of the BOT decisions cannot be put into effect. Obviously, this is a puzzling dilemma in the context of education in Egypt. In a country with a long history of centralization, it is apparently very difficult for the central authorities to transfer the power into schools or BOTs immediately. So, although the ministerial decree concerning the establishment of BOT gives this board the authority to take decisions that suit each place, the Local Education Authorities (LEA) however, reject some of the BOT decisions that they believe "*inappropriate*". According to the interviewees, the BOT is seen by LEA as just a consultative body whose decisions are not necessarily obligatory.

Most of the interviewees were very annoyed with that and a common example is frequently repeated by most of the participants. The government has recently adopted the system of five working days a week instead of six; a thing that has made the school day very long hosting about seven to eight classes a day. There are two breaks during the day; one of them is for one hour and the other is for half an hour. So, the BOT in some schools decided to cancel the short break in order to shorten the school day and make it more comfortable for students. Nevertheless, LAE refused and obliged schools to keep the school timetable as it is specified.

On the other hand there was some evidence that some HTs viewed the BOT as a source of threat to their authority. This resulted from the fact the BOT head according to the decree should be elected from parents and community members and not to be the HT who used to be the head of the Parents and Teachers Board which was cancelled and merged into the BOT.

In addition, the BOT is given an evaluative role over school and even has the power to change the school HT after the consultation with the LAE. One of the HT commented unsatisfactorily *"The BOT can change the HT! How it comes?"* That comment might be comprehensible when we know that it has been accustomed for a very long time that HTs were hired, fired, changed, and evaluated just by the LAE or the MOE not by the community. In such a case, the BOT involvement becomes a source of frustration and even disappointment for some HTs.

Another HT was uncomfortable about the BOT interfering in endorsing cheques on the ground that they have no experience in financial matters, and the BOT head has no idea about these things. As a result, *"I have to spend much time explaining every thing to him* [her]*"*, as mentioned by one of the HTs. Accordingly, tensions and contradictions are expected in the relation of BOT members and HT; a thing which necessarily affects the performance of the BOT.

It is significant here to note that the decree in its first version gave the BOT head the authority to endorse the cheques, consequently no financial provision is possible without his/her permission. However, few months after conducting the interviews the decree has been amended to give the authority of endorsement to the HT.

According to the interviews analysis, some of the BOT members were viewed as rather negative. Although many members are active, some other members do not exert any effort; a thing which badly influences the effectiveness of the BOT. Interview data revealed that less parent involvement is likely to happen in schools located in lower income neighbourhoods and in areas where parents have little formal education.

The interviewees recognize that some of the members of the BOT have relatively low levels of participation even in attending the meetings. Members who are punctual in meetings are the same persons whereas some few members do not come to meetings on a regular basis. Consequently their participation is quite limited as noted by a BOT teacher member: *"There are some other BOT members whom I seldom see in meetings"*. Thus, it seems that the degree of participation of the BOT members is not the same. Whilst some members exert much effort and participate effectively, some other (few) members do not have the same degree of participation, a thing which consequently affects the efficiency of the BOT in general.

A considerable number of interviewees revealed that one participant especially the BOT head exerts a greater degree of control over the direction and content of discussions in meetings. This might occur because most of the BOT heads are persons of highly outstanding positions in the society such as judges, wealthy businessmen and highly respectable community leaders.

On the other hand, the BOT head is considered by some of the HTs a hard-to-reach person. Sometimes, when they need him/her to endorse a cheque or sign some documents, he/she is not available. One HT was very critical of the BOT head who allegedly is so busy that he causes some delay to many decisions until he has time to show up. Conversely with this gloomy view, another female HT assured that the BOT head in her school is quite cooperative and he comes to school as soon as she calls him. So, it apparently depends on the personality of the BOT head and his/her readiness to save enough time to school in spite of his/her own personal affairs.

In the interviews, some teachers remarked that members who should be elected are sometimes chosen with no real election in some schools. To clarify, among the 15 members of the BOT, there should be three teachers elected by their colleagues to represent them in the Board. Surprisingly, a considerable number of the interviewed teachers denied this and assured that they were not asked to elect any body. When asked how those teachers were chosen then, a male teacher answered mockingly *"they are **selected** by the HT rather than **elected** by the other teachers"*. Another teacher added that *"there might be **fake** elections but neither I nor my colleagues were asked to vote"*. Although this is not prevalent in all schools as some other teachers reported that there were real elections in their schools, it undoubtedly affects the performance of the BOT. Furthermore, this may seem quite strange in a society aspiring to move into democratization on all levels as it is assumed.

Also, lack of awareness of the BOT role among school staff, parents, and community members represents a major concern for the majority of the interviewees. The interviews showed that a little is known about the nature of BOT especially among newly appointed teachers as voiced in the following excerpt from the interviews by one teacher: *"I have already heard about the BOT, but to be honest I have no idea about its role, responsibilities or even objectives"*. One of the DHs agreed and added that the idea of the BOT is still ambiguous and vague among the community people and even some members of the staff are not fully aware of it. The majority of the interviewees agreed that the objectives of the BOT are not

obvious enough to some teachers and parents. According to them, the establishment of the BOT is just newly adopted and it is still in the second year after implementing it, therefore people can not judge it or evaluate it soundly. Apparently, in the absence of clear views about the nature of BOT work, one should wait before expecting much of it.

Furthermore, the interviewees observed that although the BOT members take an active interest in children's education some of them are just primarily concerned for the welfare of their own child, and that is only what motivates them to be involved in school events. The problem is that they do not believe in the idea of community involvement in itself, but they just participate as a kind of support for their children.

Some interviewees gave a bizarre example in one of the sample schools. Two students were involved in a quarrelsome activity and one of them beat the other physically. This might seem ordinary in secondary schools where students are still adolescent. The following day the boy who was beaten came with his father who is a BOT member in that school and he called for the other boy. Surprisingly, the man beat him in retaliation to his son. The most awkward thing is that the HT took no action. Some interviewees explained that this person exploited his membership in the BOT to favor his son. Although this incident is unique, it indicates that some BOT members are not really interested in community participation as they are just interested in the welfare of their children.

Conclusion and recommendations

In this paper, I explored the idea of community involvement in education in Egypt focusing on the role of the school BOT and drawing the attention to the barriers limiting this role for a sample of school staff and BOT members. The findings of this study shows to a great extent that the idea of community involvement in education is of great interest to both the government and the NGOs in Egypt as it is in many parts of the world. As Chapman et al.(2002) have indicated that those closest to the school, e.g., community members, have a better understanding of local conditions and are in the best position to make decisions about the educational processes that best serve local needs, the adoption of the BOT in Egypt aims at achieving greater decentralization of education.

Community participation proved to be vital to all stakeholders of the educational process in Egypt. Due to several factors such as population growth, urbanization, insufficient resources, cultural and environmental factors, and policy neglect, public sector schools in Egypt and many

countries of the South are in a degraded condition. A participatory action approach is needed to achieve school facility upgrade (Herrera, 2003).

That said, most of the examples in my study suggest that participation on the part of the BOT is primarily about providing schools with their needs or attempting to solve some material problems. The weakest pattern, however, is that related to taking decisions as it might clash with the central authorities. On the other hand, some problems related to the centralized education system, the BOT members themselves, or the surrounding environment in the society are often ascribed by the interviewees as hindering community involvement of BOT in schools.

Increasingly, the adoption of the community involvement in education in Egypt has brought schools under more public scrutiny than ever before. In addition, the ministerial decree of establishing the BOT in each school has given the community people and especially those represented in the members of the BOT a highly important status as an observing, evaluating and even superior body to the school board and the school head teacher himself. Furthermore, the existence of BOT has obliged schools to be attentive and responsive to the community participation and to parents' views, and equally encouraged the NGOs and community members to be involved in the educational process.

In order to improve the level of community participation and activate the role of BOT in community involvement in education in Egypt, a group of procedures may be taken such as:

- School staff as well as community members need to raise their awareness of the BOT role of community involvement in the educational process, explaining to them the particular benefits that involvement will have. NGOs should play an active role in this.
- The MOE should strengthen ties with NGOs and civil society organizations in the community, and create partnerships that lead to more participation.

- School staff and specially the management team need to develop trust and build relationships with the community people in general and BOT members in particular.
- The school BOT should be given more freedom and authority to strengthen the participation of its members. At least, its decisions should be respected without interference of the formal education authorities.

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دور مجالس الأمناء بالمدارس في تحقيق المشاركة المجتمعية في التعليم في محافظة دمياط

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الملخص :

لقد حظي موضوع المشاركة المجتمعية في التعليم في السنوات الأخيرة بالاهتمام البالغ من المنظمات الحكومية وغير الحكومية في جميع أنحاء العالم، من هنا تسعي الدراسة الحالية إلي بحث الدور الذي تقوم به مجالس الأمناء بالمدارس في تحقيق مستويات أعلي للمشاركة المجتمعية في مصر، ولذلك تستهدف الدراسة استقصاء هذا الدور وتحديد المشكلات والعقبات التي تعوق مجالس الأمناء عن تحقيق هذا الهدف واقتراح الإجراءات التي يمكن اتخاذها من أجل تعزيز دور مجالس الأمناء في تحقيق المشاركة المجتمعية.

ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة تم جمع البيانات اللازمة عن طريق إجراء عدد من المقابلات الشخصية شبه المقننة مع عينة تتكون من ٦٣ شخصا في تسع مدارس بمحافظة دمياط، وتم تحليل البيانات التي جمعت وفقا للمنهج الكيفي الذي يتطلب فحص وتحليل البيانات الواردة بالمقابلات ومقارنتها بالمصادر البحثية الأخرى وتصنيفها منهجيا في عناصر منظمة.

وقد توصلت نتائج الدراسة إلي أن دور مجالس الأمناء لا يزال حتى الآن يفتقد إلي الدور المحوري والمؤثر في تحقيق فكرة المشاركة المجتمعية بمفهومها الواسع كما أن تأسيس تلك المجالس قد أوجد أمام المدرسة العديد من التحديات التي لم تكن موجودة في الماضي، وقد خلصت الدراسة إلي أن معظم أوجه المشاركة التي تقوم بها مجالس الأمناء بالمدارس تتمثل في الجانب المادي حيث تعمل علي توفير الاحتياجات المادية التي تنقص المدرسة والتي تفوق إمكاناتها المادية والعمل علي حل المشكلات الناجمة عن نقص الموارد في حين كان الجانب الأضعف لتلك المجالس المشاركة في اتخاذ القرارات حيث يؤدي ذلك إلي صدام مع السلطة المركزية.