

***Educational Opportunity  
and Students' Mobility***



# Admission Policies and Procedures in Arab Universities

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## Abstract

*This paper reviews the main requirements and procedures for admission to first degree programs (Bachelor /Licence) in the Arab countries, in terms of: coordination mechanisms (central coordination at state level, or decentralization by leaving decisions to the higher education institutions themselves); type of qualifying certificate required; minimum admission score required for admission; competitive selection on the basis of student ranking; duration of validity of certificate; and aptitude tests, or competitive entrance examinations, or personal interviews, etc. The paper then reviews in detail and compares examples of admission policies and procedures at a selection of public and private universities and their various colleges (depending upon available data) in a number of Arab countries representing the various geographical regions (Jordan, Bahrain, Sudan, Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen).*

*The most prominent examples of best-practice admission policies are then discussed, such as: standardized testing for ensuring equity and equal opportunity at entry level; use of more than one criterion for admission; granting concessions to certain disadvantaged groups and less developed geographical areas; and providing more than one admission opportunity in a year. The most prominent challenges are also discussed, such as: low rates of enrolment in higher education; educational imbalances resulting from admissions based on sole criterion (e.g. secondary-school final examinations); having "parallel sections" in some government colleges levying higher tuition fees to the detriment of equal opportunities; unjustified positive discrimination in favor of some groups; and the large proportion of students opting to study humanities and social sciences in preference to scientific disciplines.*

*The paper concludes with numerous suggestions for developing higher-education admission policies and procedures in the Arab countries.*

## I. Introduction

During the past decades, higher education has gained increased importance globally. Different countries started to develop this type of education and improve it, so it could take up the great challenges in society in order to pave the way for a well-educated and competitive generation of students.

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\* Translated from Arabic

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Higher education has expanded quantitatively throughout the world, albeit with varying levels between regions. In Arab countries also, students' enrolment rates in higher education have increased during the last decades. Nevertheless, gross enrolment rates are still much lower than in the developed countries. In 2006, the average rate in Arab countries was 22% with big differences throughout the region, for example, 48% in Lebanon and Palestine, 39% in Jordan and 9% in Yemen compared to 67% in developed countries and 70% in North America and Western Europe (UNESCO, 2008, p. 332 - 338). Unfortunately, universities in Arab countries are fewer compared to countries having similar population density. For example, we find around 3500 higher education institutions in the USA compared to 395 in Arab countries (El Amine et al, 2008). This is regrettable because each person who is intellectually able to learn is entitled to higher education.

In this regard, higher education admission policies and procedures are vital to select the students to be enrolled and prepare them for their future roles in societies. The more efficient admission policies are the more higher education helps enhancing socio-economic development as well as social mobility. Therefore, taking stock of admission policies models adopted in higher education and discussing their strong and weak points help governments and policy makers choose the best policies and procedures suitable to social conditions and capabilities, and allows, as much as possible, to achieve justice, equality and equal opportunities for all students.

Furthermore, studies show that admission policies, conditions and procedures vary enormously from one higher education institution to another throughout the world, according to the circumstances and capacities of these institutions and their leaders' convictions. A study prepared by Robin Matross Helms for the World Bank (Helms, 2008) concerning undergraduate admission policies, standards and procedures in governmental universities in different countries, indicates that many universities basically rely on the results of the last secondary school exams of prospective students. Some other universities look into students' results throughout the whole secondary cycle for all academic disciplines or some specific disciplines that the person intends to study in higher education. Some institutions organize standardized aptitude tests to evaluate more cognitive abilities such as reading comprehension and deductive thinking along with other skills outside their academic attainment. Other universities organize exams in specific academic disciplines according to their majors. Moreover, some institutions might ask for letters of recommendation and presentation from teachers, tutors, civil servants and others. Some institutions ask their candidates to present registration forms along with various documents such as summaries of their previous educational attainment, art works and contributions in extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, some practical and art majors such as sports, music, theatre etc. require different credentials. In other cases, practical performances are required and personal interviews are conducted with candidates. Each admission standard has its own importance, as defined by the institution. Moreover, some universities take into consideration the demographic characteristics of some groups such as their gender, race and socio-economic situation as well as their physical health. The most vulnerable are entitled to some privileges such as a certain number of seats allocated to them, or lowering grades for admission, so that justice and equal opportunities prevail.

Most of the time, admission procedures are coordinated centrally. A specified authority is in charge of defining vacant seats and the minimum average of grades in the General Secondary Education Certificate (GSEC) for admission in each university and degree course. Students are then distributed according to these criteria. In some cases, enrolment applications are submitted to a central authority. However, final admission procedures are undertaken in the universities

where applications are sent. They decide to accept or not the applicant according to their own standards, as is the case in the United Kingdom. In other cases, universities specify the number of students that will be accepted. However, in others a central competition authority is in charge of accepting students and distributing them according to the averages/grades they obtain at the end of the secondary cycle along with the majors they chose, as is the case in Ireland. Sometimes, universities themselves define the conditions of admissions and specify the number of students.

### **What are the Most Widespread Admission Policies and Conditions in Arab Universities?**

In the following paragraphs, we will discuss admission policies and procedures in governmental and private Arab universities and their different faculties (when data are available) for undergraduate levels (licence/bachelor). We will consider the general policies, procedures and conditions in all Arab countries from the following angles: type of required degree and minimum admission score. In case of competitive selections, these standards are applied according to the hierarchy of certificate results, duration of validity of certificate, aptitude tests and other competitions exams, personal interviews as well as other additional conditions (health, fitness, age etc)

We will then present in detail some models of admission policies, requirements and procedures in some private and governmental universities and their different faculties in some Arab countries representing the diverse geographical regions i.e. Jordan, Bahrain, Tunisia, Sudan, Lebanon, Egypt and Yemen, taking into consideration the disparity of information about the universities depending on their availability in universities guides or on internet sites.

After this presentation, we will shed light on the strong and weak points of admission policies, conditions and procedures in Arab universities. In conclusion, we will set forth recommendations to enhance these policies and requirements.

## **II. An Overview of Admission Policies and Procedures in Arab Universities**

The main trends in admission policies could be summarized as follows:

- All Arab universities consider secondary education certificates or their equivalent a basic standard for admission, with different designations such as: baccalaureate, general secondary education certificate (GSEC), general certificate, (I'dadiya/preparatory - Iraq).
- Some faculties impose specific sections of SEC as a condition for admission in their majors such as medicine, pharmacy, engineering and science. To be accepted in these faculties, the applicant should hold a scientific GSEC. Other faculties such as arts and education accept all sections of GSEC. When their averages are lower than the required admission score in pure science and practical majors, holders of a scientific GSEC enroll in humanities and social sciences faculties. For example, governmental Yemeni universities have an admission score of 90% in dentistry, while a 70% score is required in humanities and education faculties.
- Students' admission coordination and distribution to various faculties in governmental universities is a central process in most of Arab countries such as Jordan, Tunisia, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, the Sultanate of Oman and Egypt. This process could also be undertaken within universities themselves in some other countries such as Qatar, Bahrain and private universities, or in each faculty alone, as it is the case in the Lebanese University.
- The number of students that will be accepted in each faculty is set before beginning with admission and registration procedures as well as the minimum admission score

depending on the major. Applicants are accepted on a competitive base according to their averages in GSEC exams and their choices in conformity with the threshold of students. This is the case in most of Arab universities except in the Lebanese University where students, in most faculties, are accepted according to their scores in competitive entrance examinations.

- In some Arab countries, namely Egypt and Yemen, private universities accept lower scores than the ones set by governmental universities.
- Some universities such as Egyptian governmental universities accept working students, provided that they obtain a certificate of regular attendance, whilst some others preclude workers from enrolling in courses (Sultanate of Oman).
- Most Arab countries, such as Oman, Kuwait, Libya and Egypt, specify a validity period of around one year for the secondary education certificate (SEC) for admission in higher education institutions. It is also the case in Tunisia and Sudan, but in exceptional circumstances, students can apply one year later. This validity period ranges from 2 to 5 years in UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Yemen and from 5 to 10 years in Egyptian private universities. Each year, Jordanian governmental universities allocate a maximum of 5% of their seats to holders of GSEC or its equivalent from previous years. For the Lebanese University, the validity period of the GSEC is not a condition for admission.
- Some universities in Arab countries organize general aptitude tests such as the University of Bahrain, Tunisian universities in some majors, Saudi universities<sup>2</sup>, Sultanate of Oman universities and Qatar University as well as some private universities. Others organize entrance examinations like the Arab Gulf University, some faculties of the Lebanese University, Algerian Universities in some majors, Libyan Universities and Yemeni governmental universities, as well as some private universities. In addition, some universities organize personal interviews as an admission requirement such as the University of Bahrain, the Arab Gulf University, Tunisian universities in some majors and the University of Kuwait. Moreover, some private higher education institutions ask for the students' school records in the secondary educational cycle such as Texas and Carnegie Universities in Qatar, while others ask for letters of recommendation like Carnegie University in Qatar.
- Some universities set an age threshold for admission, such as the Arab Gulf University which has 24 years as a cut off and 25 years in the universities of Oman.
- Some universities prioritize the applicants living in the regions where higher education institutions are located (Oman). They can also allocate some seats to the least developed and most deprived groups of some regions and disabled people or grant them some privileges in admission scores (Jordan, Sudan).

### **III. Detailed Models of Admission Policies and Procedures in Universities in some Arab States**

In the following paragraphs, we will review admission policies and procedures for enrollment in

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<sup>2</sup> General aptitude tests in Saudi Arabia evaluate the analytical and inferential ability of the applicant. Importance is given to his ability to learn regardless of his/her skills in specific disciplines. This ability is evaluated according to his/her: reading comprehension, ability to understand logical relations and resolve problems based on mathematical fundamentals, deduction ability and calculation abilities (2009) [www.qeyas.com/Qiyas/exams/](http://www.qeyas.com/Qiyas/exams/) accessed March 15.

first degree (license/bachelor) in some Arab States which could be useful in discussing admission policies in the Arab universities.

## **1. Admission Standards in Jordanian Public Universities<sup>3</sup>**

### **a. General Conditions**

Before the beginning of the academic year, the Deans Council specifies the number of students to be enrolled in each faculty/major during the coming year in light of Jordan's needs and the university's capabilities. Students are accepted in Jordanian public universities according to the following conditions:

- The student must hold a Jordanian GSEC or its equivalent.
- Scientific GSEC holders can apply to various majors: science, humanities, social sciences and Islamic studies.
- Holders of GSEC in arts and Islamic studies can apply to the following majors: humanities, social sciences, Islamic studies and administrative information systems.
- Holders of GSEC in computer science can apply to various majors in literature and science pursuant to the regulations.
- General vocational secondary certificate holders can apply to specific vocational majors provided they study two additional disciplines defined by the relevant vocational section such as industry, trade, domestic economy, hotel management, agriculture etc.
- Students are accepted in various faculties of the university according to their choices and their grades in the GSEC or its equivalent.

### **b. Special Conditions**

Pursuant to paragraph "a" above, some students from specific groups are accepted in faculties and universities if they fall under the following categories:

- A defined number of seats in universities and faculties are allocated to specific groups as follows: for each governorate (muhafaza), students with the highest scores from the scientific section, first applicants from each district and students who are at the top of their classes in each district.
- A defined number of seats are allocated in each faculty of Jordanian universities to children of specific civil servants such as: armed forces, general security, intelligence services, civil defense, civil servants in the Ministry of Education and members of the teaching staff as well the university personnel etc.
- Each university can, according to its needs, accept a specified number of outstanding students in: sports (for example, a player in a Jordanian national team or a national school team that has already represented Jordan, or a player who has been in the first three ranks of an official championship in individual sports, as well as arts and music (according to the university's needs in a specific artistic activity).
- A specified number of seats in faculties of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and engineering are allocated to the children of the Jordanian teaching staff working in public universities where these majors are not available.
- 300 seats are allocated in Jordanian universities to students from Palestinian refugee camps.
- The Board of Trustees in the university shall accept a specific number of disabled and visually-impaired students.

### **c. The unified coordination admission office is in charge of the admission procedure.**

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<sup>3</sup> Jordan University, 2008



## 2. Students Admission Standards in the University of Bahrain<sup>4</sup>

### a. General Conditions

In order to be accepted in the University of Bahrain, a new applicant must fulfill the following criteria:

- Hold a GSEC or its equivalent with a minimum cumulative GPA of 70%. Have passed a competitive entrance examination based on the academic programs receiving capacities and his/her average results based on the GSEC exams, admission tests and personal interview.
- Hold the GSEC or its equivalent in not more than the previous two academic years.
- Take the aptitude test of the university.
- Successfully pass any test or personal interview decided by the University Council.
- Be in good health.
- Have a good reputation and behavior.

### b. Faculties Admission Requirements

- A GSEC section such as arts, science and trade, etc. that is suitable with the faculty's major.

## 3. Admission Standards in Tunisian Universities<sup>5</sup>

### a. Orientation System: Objectives and Core Principles:

- The Tunisian university orientation system allows all baccalaureate holders to join any higher education institution according to their results and to the receiving capacity in different majors.
- Applicants to each major are sorted differentially according to their scores and classified into three groups:
  - First group: 30% of best ranking applicants
  - Second group: 40% of applicants ranking after those of first group.
  - Third group: 30% of other applicants.
- The Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Technology makes sure application forms are available to all baccalaureate holders through the website: [www.orientation.tn](http://www.orientation.tn). Besides, dates of application submission and admission results are specified. Orientation and admission process occurs in three rounds:
  - First round: applicants of the first group (30%).
  - Second round: applicants of the second group (40%) and those of the first group who have not been oriented or accepted.
  - Third round: applicants of the third group (30%) and those of the second group who have not been oriented or accepted.
  - Final round: all applicants who have not been accepted in a university in the third round.

For each round, applicants get a Receiving Capacity Guide (available seats for each major) and fill application forms on the Internet depending on the dates of each round. Admission results are published on the website or sent by SMS.

The Baccalaureate degree is valid for the same academic year only. Registration may be postponed for an additional year for health or personal reasons.

Furthermore, some majors require taking special tests such as the bachelor degree in arts and

<sup>4</sup> [WWW.uob.edu.bh](http://WWW.uob.edu.bh), accessed January 20, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Technology, 2008.





music sciences and admission in higher institutes for theatre, arts, etc. If the applicant fails the entrance examinations of the first chosen major, his/her other choices are examined and his/her score compared to the score of the last applicant accepted in the other chosen major. Some majors require the study of specific academic disciplines such as physical education for physiotherapy and functional therapy.

In case the applicant is not accepted in the major of his/her choice, he can take part (during the second semester of the next academic year) in baccalaureate reorientation competitive tests for most majors and sit for written tests organized by universities in March of each academic year. If he/she succeeds, he/she benefits from a registration for the beginning of the next academic year. This procedure aims at enhancing the university orientation system as competitive tests are considered a core element of the orientation system reform process. The latter process allows the applicant to change his/her academic curriculum- in case he/she failed to enroll in his/her favorite field because of bad results-and benefit from another opportunity. Fifteen percent of the major's receiving capacity is dedicated to these competitive tests.

#### **b. Promoting Geographical Proximity**

There is 7% added to the total score of the applicant to a higher education institution, if the required major is available in his/her province or in the nearest location. In doing so, the applicant has a greater chance to enroll in an institution near his/her place of residence and avoids moving to a farther location. This initiative aims at alleviating the pressure on the education institutions in big cities, especially the capital, and eases the financial burden on students and their families.

### **4. Students Admission Standards in Sudanese Universities<sup>6</sup>**

The applicant specifies the major and institution of his/her choice according to his/her scientific qualifications and interests. It is preferable for the students and their families that applicants of Sudanese states submit their application forms in their own states.

#### **a. Admission Requirements:**

To be accepted in Sudanese universities, applicants must:

- Obtain the secondary education certificate (SEC) or its equivalent.
- Submit their registration forms in the same year just after obtaining the SEC. If for some reason, the student is not able to register in university after being accepted, he/she is given another chance to sit for admission tests within one academic year and after fulfilling all admission conditions.
- Applicants are accepted on a competitive basis, after completing the secondary cycle with success, passing the four compulsory disciplines (Arabic, English, religious studies, general and specialized mathematics) and the three disciplines specified by the relevant faculty depending on the major. The averages of these seven disciplines are added according to the percentage given by each faculty to these disciplines in conformity with the university admission requirements.

#### **b. Admission Procedures**

Candidacy and admission follow the following procedures:

- The applicant submits his/her candidature to universities according to the priorities set in the registration form.
- Admission results in all institutions are announced via the public media.

It is important to note that students cannot enroll in two degree courses at the same time.

<sup>6</sup> www.mohe.gov.sd/daleel, accessed February 21, 2009.



### c. Admission of Special Groups in Sudanese Universities:

- 50% of the seats in the universities of the least developed states are allocated to applicants from these states. Moreover, seats are allocated to these applicants in rare majors in the universities of their own states, provided that they originate from the states where they live with their families, that they also obtained their SECs from one of their schools and that they pledge to work in these states for five years after graduating. Students can neither transfer from one university to another nor from one major to another.
- 5% of the least developed states university seats are allocated to applicants coming from demarcation and exodus regions such as: Kaysan, South Kordofan, Abyay, Halayeb, etc.
- In addition, Umm Durman Islamic University allocates seats in its faculties to applicants coming from multilingual regions such as: the Southern states, the Nuba Mountains etc.
- Disabled students are accepted according to their scores in competitive exams and they are exempted from tuition fees. Children of martyrs who are accepted after passing entrance examinations are also exempted from scholastic fees in all governmental universities.

Each university can annually accept an additional number of students at their expenses, provided that the seats allocated to these students do not exceed 25% of the total amount of seats in each faculty. Non-Sudanese students are also accepted on scholarships, provided that their percentage does not exceed 5% of the total number of applicants accepted.

Other groups could also be accepted at their expenses such as: children and wives of people working in higher education public institutions, children of people working in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, children of retired people who used to work in higher education institutions, children of researchers in the Ministry of Science and Technology and research centers and children of members of university councils. When admission requirements are fulfilled in governmental universities, such students enter these universities for free.

## 5. Admission requirements in the Lebanese University (governmental)<sup>7</sup>

### a. General requirements

Applicants to the Lebanese University must fulfill the following requirements:

- Hold a Lebanese baccalaureate degree (second section) or its equivalent (some faculties specify the required baccalaureate section according to their majors).
- Pass the entrance examination in the relevant faculties.
- Applicants are accepted according to their passing grades and the defined number of students in each major and faculty.

Furthermore, entrance examinations and test disciplines vary according to majors<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Lebanese University 1993 - 1994, Lebanese University 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Lebanese University faculties use different terms to indicate the evaluation designations used in the admission procedures in line with their objectives :

**Entrance competition:** is a competitive test aiming at choosing the number of applicants with the best results defined by relevant faculties after sorting scores in descending order (faculty of education, languages and humanities centre at faculty of art, faculty of economics and management, faculty of tourism and hotel management, faculty of media and documentation, faculty of engineering, faculty of agriculture, technology institute, institute of economy and applied sciences, and faculties of medical sciences, dentistry and pharmacy).

**Admission Test:** aims at assessing the student's aptitudes in specific disciplines. Applicant must obtain a minimum score to be accepted (i.e. languages test in the faculty of literature and humanities)

**Admission exam:** defines whether an applicant succeeded or failed in the tested disciplines. Applicants who succeeded shall only be accepted (i.e. faculty of health sciences)





## 6. Admission Standards in Egyptian Universities

### a. Admission Standards in Egyptian Governmental Universities<sup>9</sup>

#### 1) Admission Requirements

- At the end of each academic year, the Supreme Council of Universities specifies the number of students that will be accepted in each faculty or institute during the next academic year based on the recommendations of the universities councils after consulting the various faculty councils.
- In order to be accepted in an undergraduate level, the applicant must have a GSEC degree or its equivalent. He/she will be accepted according to the hierarchy of results. Holders of a secondary education certificate (SEC) in business are accepted in business faculties. Holders of a SEC in agriculture are accepted in agriculture faculties. Holders of a SEC in industrial engineering are accepted in engineering faculties. Holders of the latter certificates are accepted in other relevant faculties according to the regulations and conditions specified by the Higher Universities Council after consulting the councils of the concerned universities.
- An applicant cannot register in more than one faculty at a time.

#### 2) Admission Procedures

- An applicant submits via the internet a registration form to the central e-coordination office after sorting faculties and majors depending on his/her order of priorities.
- Admission procedures in the coordination office occur in three phases of about one week each according to applicants' scores in the general baccalaureate. The best ranking applicants are accepted first followed by lower ranking applicants.

Furthermore, some faculties in Egyptian governmental universities have opened special departments teaching in foreign languages, namely English. Students can register in these departments after being accepted through an ordinary coordination process. However, they have to pay higher fees for these "special" services.

#### 3) Main Admission Problems in Egyptian Governmental Universities and Potential Solutions

Given that the scores of the GSEC exams are the only admission standard in higher education institutions in Egypt, applicants compete fiercely to obtain the highest scores, so enabling them to enter the faculty of their choice. This situation has led to the "epidemic" outbreak of private lessons for prospective university students. This phenomenon was stirred up after the GSEC exams started to take place during two semesters of the last two years of the secondary cycle. Thus, students stopped attending their classes at school so they can go to the relevant centers offering this type of lessons. This gave rise to an illusive soar of secondary cycle scores which was accompanied by the so-called "Nerds Crisis". These people obtained scores as high as 95% without being able to enroll in the faculty of their choice. Thousands of students having a 70% score saw their chances of enrolling in higher education institutions dwindle. Therefore, the secondary cycle became a great source of concern and tension for students and their families; the fear of results driving some of them to suicide. Social pressures to get high scores have given rise sometimes to cheating using the new types of technology, leaking of exams questions and selling them. (See articles in: Al-Ahram 2008, Part 1, Al-Delengawi 2009). For all these reasons, improving the secondary school exams and admission procedures in Egyptian universities was, during the last years, the subject of much research, studies and discussions in

<sup>9</sup> General Organization for Government Printing Office, 2008, 140 - 142



various conferences and specialized councils. In 2000, for example, the National Conference on Higher Education was held to discuss this problem. However, according to the report of the commission in charge of improving university and higher education, admission procedures in universities through the central coordination office are still the most suitable solution for Egyptian society. Furthermore, better results can be achieved when admission results are based on students' predilections and abilities that can be unveiled through aptitude tests, not necessarily related to secondary cycle academic discipline. (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000 b).

The above mentioned commission suggested many alternatives to improve admission procedures in higher education institutions, such as:

- **Alternative 1:** Improving secondary school exams so they reveal the real aptitudes of students, thus admission in universities will be based in proportion in the following elements:
  - \* Student secondary cycle score,
  - \* Student scores in qualifying disciplines defined by each higher education department,
  - \* Student grades in "high level disciplines"<sup>10</sup>
- **Alternative 2:** holding aptitude tests or competitive entrance examinations in faculties for some disciplines. Competent applicants are enrolled in the relevant university according to their predilections and others are oriented towards higher vocational institutes (See: Ministry of Higher education, 2000-a and 2000-b).

Discussing the problems of the SEC in Egypt is ongoing, as it represented a path leading to higher education. Thus, a second conference, The National Conference on Improving Secondary Education and Admission Policies in Higher Education was held in June 2008. Hundreds of leaders and specialists in the education field took part in this conference which was marked by deep discussions. Then, education, academic and popular groups examined the conference recommendations in seminars and dialogues covered by the local press, in order to achieve a minimum social consensus concerning the issue.

There were many recommendations suggested, including going back to the one-year exam to obtain the GSEC instead of two, in order to limit the phenomenon of private lessons. It was also suggested to hold a second round of exams in August, to accept applicants in universities twice an academic year in September and February, extend the GSEC validity period to three years when it comes to applying to higher education institutions and maintain the central coordination office as a body that guarantees equal chances and a just distribution of students in higher education institutions.

The importance of holding aptitude tests was highlighted by some to accept applicants in a higher education institution, while others suggested entrance examinations in specific disciplines within faculties and specialization departments.

Moreover, some others suggested, instead of the abovementioned tests, giving a greater importance to the applicant's qualifying specialization disciplines (amongst SEC academic disciplines) to enroll in the relevant faculty or higher institute (See: Al-Ahram articles, 2008, parts 1 and 2).

There were many who opposed holding aptitude tests after the secondary cycle exam, arguing that it was impossible to have the aptitudes required by each faculty and that some aptitudes could thrive during the tertiary cycle. Besides this, there is a lack of specialized scientific

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<sup>10</sup> High level disciplines are disciplines taken by students in addition to the compulsory ones such as languages. Students get extra-grade points that will be added to their scores in secondary certificate. This is why some students have scores exceeding 100%.



bodies to prepare quality education tests each year. In addition to the relevant administrative, organizational and financial difficulties encountered, there is unnecessary repetition along with, the outbreak of the private lessons phenomenon and an increasing moral and financial burden on Egyptian families.

Many consider that these tests are an instrument of exclusion that will defeat equal opportunities and free education; because poor groups will be the first victims due to rich applicants (representing a limited category of Egyptian society) will join private higher education institutions which the poor cannot afford.

If the aptitude test was to be held anyway, it was suggested to add it to the secondary cycle exam with a specific percentage for each test. Moreover, a written test could be added to assess the scientific or cultural achievements of the applicant and his/her ability to write a structured text and think in a structured way. This helps discovering the scientific and cultural knowledge of the student and his/her other aptitudes. (Read articles in: Al-Ahram, 2008, parts 1 and 2, and series of articles by Hamed Ammar published in Egyptian newspapers).

The Ministries of Education and Higher Education lately presented a new project to improve secondary cycle education and admission policies in higher education institutions and it should be discussed and adopted soon.

This project suggests cancelling the two-year secondary exams system that is being implemented and replace it with a one-year system (third year only), in addition to decreasing the number of common compulsory disciplines studied by all students from 6 subjects to 3 subjects (Arabic, English and civic education). Furthermore, 3 qualifying disciplines (2 compulsory i.e. chemical sciences and biology for faculties of sciences and medicine and mathematics and physics for engineering, and one elective) are required to enroll in various faculties in accordance with the student's predilections and choices. The project also suggests extending the GSEC validity period to several years (Al-Ahram 19 /1 /2009, Al-Fajr 16 /2 /2009, Al-Ahram 2 /3 /2009).

#### **b. Admission Standards in Egyptian Private Universities<sup>11</sup>**

The executive decrees concerning the establishment of private universities in Egypt were issued in 1992<sup>12</sup>. Pursuant to these decrees, the council of private universities was created with the Minister of Higher Education at its head and two presidents of governmental universities and two presidents of private universities as well as many officials, consultants and experts in higher education as members.

The Private Universities Council is in charge, among others, of elaborating general policies for private tertiary education that are in line with the country's needs. It also completes the following tasks: examines the applications for private universities, in order to establish that they fulfill the required standard; submit recommendations to enhance the exam process; specify the number of applicants to be enrolled in private faculties and institutes, in accordance with available human and financial resources; monitoring and assessing private universities activities and performances; and conducting studies about the equivalent scientific rankings provided by these universities.

<sup>11</sup> Ayoub, 2003, Ministry of Higher Education (Arab Republic of Egypt), 2004 (a) and (b), and Executive Decree on private universities, in: General Organization for Government Printing Office, 2008, p p 3414 - 348.

<sup>12</sup> Pursuant to this decree, the following universities were established: October 6 University, October University for Modern Science and Arts, Misr University for Science and Technology, Misr International University, the French University, the German University, the British University in Egypt, Al-Ahram Canadian University and Nile University.



Furthermore, the admission office of private universities was created in 2003 to guarantee the implementation of the various council decisions. Private universities made an admission guide available to students in order to inform them about the various opportunities found in each faculty and the relevant enrolment conditions.

### **1) Admission Requirements**

To be accepted in private Egyptian universities, one must fulfill the following conditions:

- Obtaining a general secondary certificate or its equivalent.
- Succeeding in the qualifying disciplines of the desired faculty.
- Obtain the minimum admission score as defined by the relevant faculty in accordance with the Private Universities Council annual decisions based on the GSEC results and available seats<sup>13</sup>.
- Respect admission requirements set by the council of the concerned university i.e. participating in tests required by some faculties.
- Respect the number of accepted students set by the council of the concerned university according to the receiving capacity of the faculties, departments and institutes and in line with the financial and human resources to guarantee the smooth functioning of the educational process.
- In addition, holders of GSEC or its equivalent from the same academic year or previous years shall be accepted after a period of a maximum of 5 years for applicants to scientific faculties and 10 years for applicants to theoretical faculties provided, they succeed in the qualifying disciplines and obtain the minimum required score.
- Holders of the GSEC who succeeded in "high level" disciplines obtain extra points from the grades they got in these disciplines.
- Best ranking students in sports obtain extra-bonus points according to their ranking in schools and sports federation championships, provided that these rankings are respectively verified by the Ministry of Education and the Championship Department of the Ministry of Youth.
- Holders of a technical and vocational certificate are accepted in the relevant faculties with the same minimum score required from other GSEC holders, after removing the grades of practical disciplines.
- Holders of Al-Azhar SEC are accepted in relevant faculties, provided they succeed in the qualifying disciplines and obtain the minimum score, after removing the grades of the religious disciplines.

### **2) Admission procedures:**

- The applicant presents the requested documents to the relevant university, which verifies that the given data fulfill the admission requirements in compliance with the Private Universities council's decisions for the new academic year. Furthermore, universities undertake an internal coordination of applications and organize tests in faculties where it is necessary to do so.
- The applicant's data is sent to the private universities admission office and reviewed

<sup>13</sup> The minimum admission score for different majors in private universities is often much lower than the minimum admission score in governmental universities for the same majors. However, some private universities breached the terms as they accepted many applicants who did not obtain the minimum admission score, holding non-recognized diplomas and lacking the qualifying disciplines necessary for their faculties. Thus, disciplinary measures had to be undertaken and the creation of the Private Universities Admission Office (2003) contributed in avoiding such breaches (Ministry of Higher Education, Arab Republic of Egypt, and 2004 A).

according to the Private Universities Council's decisions.

- The Private universities admission office is in charge of admission procedures in faculties. The university distributes students within the departments according to the academic groups system. An applicant is accepted only after a confirmation of the private universities admission office.
- Each new Egyptian applicant over 22 years must present proof that he completed the required military service or was exempted from it.

## **7. Students Admission Standards in Yemeni Governmental Universities<sup>14</sup>**

### **a. General Conditions**

- The applicant must have a general or specialized secondary cycle certificate.
- The applicant must have the secondary cycle passing grade required in the faculty/major of his/her choice.
- The applicant can only choose two majors/faculties within a university in his/her registration form. He/She sits for each admission test separately.
- Admission is made on a differential base according to the students' passing grades in the GSEC exams and admission tests grades (50% - 50%), in line with the faculty receiving capacity.
- A maximum GSEC validity period of 5 years starting from the year of the examination.
- The applicant must be entirely dedicated to his/her studies.
- The applicant must pay the fees specified in the list e.g. Tuition fees for the faculties of medicine, pharmacy, health science and engineering in Aden University amount to 3 000 USD, while they can reach \$US 5 000 for dentistry and \$US 2 000 for law, agriculture and education.

### **b. Minimum Required Scores and Entrance Examinations Disciplines in Yemeni Governmental Universities**

The Higher Council of Universities sets each year the minimum required score for each department. These scores are 5% to 10% lower in private universities.

## **IV. Strong and Weak Points in Admission Policies and Procedures in Arab Universities**

Admission policies and requirements are the key to enter higher education and benefit from its important socio-economic privileges. Thus on the one hand it is vital to study its strong points to take advantage of them and therefore on the other hand, to address its weak points. The following summarizes the strong and weak points of higher education admission policies and procedures as practiced by Arab universities.

### **1. Main Strong Points**

#### **a. Central coordination and adoption of secondary final exam results**

Various Arab countries adopted the central coordination system and a single standard for admission in higher education institutions, namely the results of GSEC exams taken by all students at the same time.

<sup>14</sup> Secretariat General of the Supreme Council for Education Planning (SCEP), unified regulations for students' affairs in Yemeni universities, via: Secretary General of SCEP, Sana'a-Republic of Yemen.

Many consider, especially in Egypt, that this process promotes equality of chances as all students are subject to the same conditions.

**b. Addition of other Criteria to Secondary final exam results**

A number of other Arab countries reckon that adopting a single standard to determine the student's future is inefficient. They suggest additional criteria (such as general ability tests, competitive exams, personal interviews and the applicants' secondary cycle records) which give a broader idea of the applicant's abilities and characteristics. The additional information takes into consideration the applicant's performance during the secondary cycle, enabling the relevant authorities to orientate the applicant towards the most suitable major.

**c. Granting privileges to some of the poorest groups**

Some Arab countries, in an attempt to achieve justice, allocate seats in higher education institutions to some of the deprived groups with limited income. They also lower the required passing rates and add additional points to their scores, enabling them to enroll in higher education (e.g. in Jordan and Sudan). Some other countries grant scholarships to these groups and pay their fees (e.g. Oman, provided they meet the minimum requirements). Countries such as Jordan and Sudan allocate seats to disabled and visually-impaired students in addition to Palestinians from the refugee camps (Jordan).

Furthermore, some countries, such as Jordan, Sudan and Oman, grant privileges to groups in isolated and less developed regions. The latter groups benefit from priority in admission or seats are allocated to applicants living in the location of the higher education institution. Applicants willing to enroll in a higher education institution in their place of residence benefit from a bonus score of 7% to encourage them to stay in their regions and not move to big cities. Thus, this alleviates the pressure on institutions in these cities and the financial burden that applicants and their families bear. This initiative helps people stay in their regions and ultimately to contribute to the area's development.

**d. Provide second chance to enroll in universities during a single academic year**

Some universities in Arab countries allow students to submit application forms twice in an academic year. The American University of Beirut (AUB) accepts, for instance, applicants in the fall and spring. In addition, private Egyptian universities accept students during the second semester if the defined number of students was not reached during the first semester. Therefore, applicants can seize the opportunity and avoid waiting for the next academic year.

**2. Main Weak points**

**a. Opening "special departments" in some governmental universities with high enrolment tuition fees compromises justice and equal opportunities**

"International degree courses" have been established in Jordanian universities and some faculties in Egyptian governmental universities launched special degree courses or "Foreign languages departments". These are especially in faculties such as medicine, engineering and business that teach in a foreign language to attract students. It is important to note that foreign languages have become an important competition factor in the labor market. Therefore, students pay very high tuition fees, which just rich people can afford, to benefit from the above-mentioned degree courses. Students following such courses are considered luckier than their counterparts in the ordinary system who are following courses in Arabic, as they then have broader work opportunities and higher wages (Zaytoun, 2005).

In Egypt, these applicants are accepted in various faculties in line with the central admission system. Once applicants are enrolled in faculties providing courses in a foreign language or



having a foreign languages department, they submit registration forms. Of these students, very few are chosen according to their scores in GSEC and foreign language. Students have then to pay very high tuition fees (thousands of Egyptian pounds) as the required courses allegedly provide students with additional services such as, courses in English or French, computers (not available in the main faculties), air conditioning and fewer students in common majors, etc. Many reckon that such courses compromise free education in governmental universities and equal opportunities, because they exclude poor and limited-income groups, depriving them of the chance to excel. These groups, deprived of such an education, are thus oriented to public faculties with low tuition fees, making "elite" education linked to money rather than to students' intellectual capacities. This reality adversely affects justice in the educational system and the ability to take advantage of preponderant talents in times of globalization and market culture. It also aggravates social discrimination issues and deepens the gaps between the different groups. Many others have concerns about the potential imbalances in the governmental higher education system. Such a system could lead to two kinds of education in the same faculty and thus to two kinds of graduates. For example a "common" doctor and an "elite" one; rich students are able to afford study fees and obtain a degree in "elite medicine" and poor students who obtain a degree in "common medicine" in spite of them getting a score of 97% on the GSEC (Zaytoun, 2005, Al Baradei and Al Sayyed, 2007, Al Wafd newspaper 17 -09 -2008, in: Al-Ahram, 2008, part 2). Imposing high enrolment fees in governmental higher education institutions, in Yemen for instance, compromises equal opportunities. Therefore, only rich students will be able to enroll in such institutions while poor students are excluded (even though they may have better aptitudes) unless they have access to scholarships granting them greater opportunities.

**b. Lower admission scores in private universities than in governmental ones**

Some private universities in the Arab countries (e.g. Egypt and Yemen) require lower admission score than governmental ones. The private universities council in Egypt, for instance, set in years 2008-2009- the minimum admission score in private faculties of medicine at 90%, dentistry and pharmacy 80% and engineering 70%. Those scores were way lower than the required scores in governmental faculties (Alam Al-Yawm (World Today) newspaper 22008-08-, in: Al-Ahram 2008, part 2). In Yemen, admission scores in private universities are lower by 5 to 10% compared to governmental ones.

In addition to what has already been stated, private universities are profit-making institutions which impose high tuition fees, hence, only students from wealthy backgrounds are able to join them. Therefore, a large number of students from limited income groups are not able to benefit from the relevant courses that are most suitable in the labor market. This reality compromises equity, social justice and equal opportunities.

**c. Positive discrimination for some groups of students**

Governmental universities in Jordan and Sudan, for instance, allocate some seats to children of university teaching staff and workers in universities and the ministry of higher education. In addition, universities in Jordan allocate seats to children of Armed Forces personnel, General Security and Secret Service members, in addition to children of retired staff in higher education institutions. This clearly goes against the principles of justice, equity and equality of educational opportunities for all.

It is noteworthy to say here, that the executive decree on governmental universities in Egypt allocated a number of seats in each faculty to children of the teaching staff and workers without taking into account the required scores. However, the Supreme Constitutional Court deemed these practices unconstitutional in the year 1985.



#### **d. Preferring pure and applied sciences to humanities and social sciences**

Some universities in Arab countries tend to promote pure and applied sciences and allocate seats relevant to these majors to applicants with the highest secondary cycle scores. Such majors are enhanced and benefit from financial support, while the wide majority of applicants who have the lower grades are oriented towards humanities and social sciences field which lack enhancing and support. Those fields are thus marginalized and deliver a relatively poor quality of education. Officials in the Arab region tend to neglect humanities and, to prove this point, Arab ministries of higher education and scientific research did not pay due attention in their conferences to humanities and social sciences. Besides, on the one hand, the development of pure and applied sciences have generated an “ideology” which is highly valueing this field and giving it great importance in the new labor markets, and on the other hand, humanities and social sciences are relegated to the background. However, prestigious universities such as Yale, Harvard and Princeton, pay special attention to the latter fields of humanities and social sciences, due to their respect of the tight relationship of the following areas in society: social cohesion, democracy, national security, to values and culture, to name just a few. These are necessary to understand the world and modern societies. Furthermore, selection systems in Western countries and Japan, classify universities and not majors. Thus applicants with the highest scores enroll in prestigious universities while lower score holders enroll in other ones. Accordingly, literature degree holders graduating from Harvard University (one of the best 10 ranking universities in the United State) feel superior to graduates from medicine or engineering faculties of a university ranking in the 150<sup>th</sup> place, for example (cf. El Amine et al, , 2008, pp. 127 -158).

#### **e. Rising educational and social imbalances due to the single admission standard in many universities in the Arab countries, namely secondary certificate exams scores**

Many universities in Arab countries have adopted a single admission standard, that being secondary certificate exam scores. Such an exam raises educational, social and economic issues which result in “crisis” in most Arab countries due to the fierce competition amongst students to obtain the highest scores.

In Egypt, for instance, among about a million students, this situation led to the “epidemic” outbreak of private lessons in most academic disciplines. Despite the high costs of such additional lessons, students take them hoping to get the high scores required which will enable them to enroll in their desired universities. This practice shows that education has deviated from a process of acquiring knowledge, developing analyzing aptitudes and critical thinking to a meaningless race for grades, where memorizing and spoon-feeding prevail (i.e. teachers give typical answers to questions that could be asked in exams and students learn them by heart). Moreover, students are neglecting school and not attending classes, but instead are preferring to take private lessons in “specialized centers”. Parents are also aiding their children in missing school and are presenting fake medical certificates to justify their absence. Private lessons have thus become a bad social practice, and at the same time all members of the affected Egyptian households are incurring a heavy financial burden because of this. This is shown by the great concern and tension the family have when one of them enters the secondary educational cycle. All of this contributes to an “illusive” increase in secondary cycle scores, as thousands of students obtain a maximum score in different academic disciplines, whose numbers exceed the maximum allocated for elective disciplines. For example, the minimum admission score for the year 2008 in faculties of medicine was of 98.7% on the GSEC. Nevertheless, in spite of this incredible score, Egyptian reports and articles show high failure rates amongst students enrolling in “elite”



faculties (medicine, pharmacy and engineering) In addition, private lessons hampered equal opportunities because only rich students have the ability to be well prepared for exams and get the high scores which enable them to enroll in elite universities (Al-Ahram 2008, part1 and Al Delengawi, 2009).

The high scores phenomenon has caused irrational conditions in Egypt and a “Nerds Crisis”. Thousands of students, having a total score of about 95%, are frustrated each year because they fail to enroll in their preferred faculties and are forced to study majors which do not suit their predilections and real capacities. This has also led to thousands of students who obtain an overall score of 70% seeing their chances of enrolling in higher education lowered (Al-Ahram 2008, part1 and Al Delengawi, 2009), which in turn has led to the state being unable to achieve the required human development of their people.

The fate of a student can be decided on the basis of an exam which only lasts a few hours and which could also be a misleading standard of their capabilities. Indeed, the student’s results may be influenced during the exam period by his/her health, social conditions or the examiner’s subjectivity if there is an essay test. However, the students’ results are influenced in this manner and thus their future at the same time.

#### **f. Students abandon scientific majors for literary majors and humanities**

The above-mentioned situation has driven secondary school students to change their academic studies from scientific to literary. For example, at the end of the second year of secondary school, 27% of students passed the first cycle and then registered in the scientific section, compared to 73% in the literary section. Students tend to prefer the literary section in order to avoid studying sciences and take very expensive private lessons. In addition they anticipate that they will only be able to enroll in humanities faculties. This all threatens the human development element; a large number of students graduate with a higher education degree in literary majors and humanities and the labor market cannot absorb those new entrants. This is in addition to the fact that the country needs an increasing number of engineers, scientific experts, doctors and many other professionals, who can only be trained after obtaining a scientific secondary certificate. Furthermore, this goes against any society’s ambitions to promote science and technology in an era where scientific knowledge prevails.

## **V. Recommendations to Enhance Admission Policies and Procedures in Universities and Higher Education Institutions**

Many reports and studies point to the need to enhance admission policies and procedures in universities and higher education institutions in some Arab countries. This need was echoed in many Egyptian reports; in the note sent by the director-general of the Studies, Planning and Follow-up office of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the province of Kurdistan (Iraq) to the UNESCO office in Amman; and in an assessment study conducted by the faculties of education in the Syrian Arab Republic (Hammoud, 2008). This enhancement must be at the heart of any attempt aiming to develop or reform universities and higher education institutions in Arab countries.

In this regard, it is worth noting to say that, given the wide diversity in admission systems, policies, requirements and procedures among universities and higher education institutions throughout the world, there is, as yet, no single appropriate system. Thus, recommending the best system is not an easy task since its efficiency depends on its social, political and economic conditions as well as its labor market conditions and the prevailing culture in each country where it is adopted. Many

recommendations should therefore be submitted and each country can choose the ones that are in line with its various conditions and capacities, taking into consideration its strong and weak points and discussing all their factors in detail. The members of teaching staff, parents, industry and trade stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental organizations, parliaments, media and civil societies and all relevant parties should participate in these discussions. The admission policies in universities and higher education institutions should be flexible and should be developed when the socio-economic conditions and national priorities change in order to meet any new needs. When necessary, SEC exams must be changed as well as admission standards.

When looking for the most appropriate system or trying to develop the existing one, it is important to discuss some main issues that help define the most efficient admission system (See: Helms 2008). For example:

## **1. Which method is better: Admission Procedures under Government Control or Admission Procedures under University Control?**

### **a. admission Procedures under Government Control:**

Governments can control admission procedures to universities through the following methods:

- Specifying the number of available seats in each university or degree course
- Organizing the central coordination of admission procedures
- Organizing SEC exams or entrance examinations

When the government is in charge of these three processes, its control would be strong. This is the case in China and Egypt. Some other governments exert partial control over admission procedures, leaving the remaining responsibilities to universities themselves or other independent bodies, as it is the case in Ireland.

Theoretically, the more control that governments can have over universities "inputs" via admission procedures, the more they can control "outputs" that can help to achieve national strategic and economic objectives. This could be realized when students are accepted in each major according to the market needs. In the event that there are more graduates in a particular field, or conversely, if a shortage of qualified workers exists, the government can increase or decrease the number of students admitted. The number of graduates is thereby adjusted and the imbalance is corrected within a few years.

Governments can also establish admission policies that encourage secondary school graduates to enter tertiary education in order to prevent them from entering the labor market at a very young age and without being properly prepared.

Another potential advantage of government involvement in the central coordination of admission policies is that it can remove a significant administrative and organizational burden from universities and higher education institutions, so that they focus their time and money on other strategic priorities.

Many consider that the admission system, via a central coordination office which is supervised by the government, as in Egypt for example, helps achieve equal opportunities. On the contrary, the decentralization of secondary school exams and admission coordination in universities and higher education institutions, and the organization of relevant examinations in each province/state undermine justice and equal opportunities.

### **b. Admission Procedures under University Control**

When universities themselves are in charge of controlling admission procedures and specifying their standards, they can choose candidates that best suit the requirements of their degree courses.

In this regard, one should take into consideration the available financial resources of governments and universities. It is also important to know how efficient universities and higher education institutions are in organizing admission procedures.

## **2. Objectivity of Standards and Subjectivity of Judgments**

In theory, when all candidates take the same tests, answer the same questions and are graded on the same scale, the results are more objective and their comparison is simpler. This standardization represents an important advantage, particularly in contexts where corruption and bribery are common and personal connections often determine access to opportunities and resources. Therefore, examination scores (preferably one identical examination) ensure a measure of fairness and equity of opportunities in the admission process.

It is important to note, however, that examinations, regardless of their types, are not necessarily entirely objective because subjectivity can play a very important role. Correcting essays can be subject to the examiner's viewpoints, values, beliefs, or even mood at the time of grading, as well as the conditions prevailing during the examination period.

Moreover, adopting additional standards for admission, other than the unified examination, provides a broader picture of the candidate's abilities and qualifications. These standards can include the students' academic records in secondary schools where grading, no doubt, differs from one school to another, evaluation of extra-curricular activities and personal interviews. However, these additional factors increase the subjectivity of the process.

When determining admission procedures and standards, the prevalence of corruption and bribery, and the power of personal influence should be a key consideration in decision-making. In the context of widespread corruption, it would be fairer to organize a unified examination on the national level which takes place at the same time and then undertake a central coordination process for admission. When civil servants themselves are corrupt, a decentralized admission process organized by the universities could mitigate the influence of corruption.

## **3. Enhancing Standards Reliability and Results Validity**

Of critical concern for any admission process, are its reliability and validity, including how well the process actually predicts candidates' academic success in higher education in general, and in their majors of predilections in particular. Often, exam results used during the admission process in universities can be inappropriate, as exams themselves may not have been adequately tested. Therefore, it is important to conduct detailed studies on the correlation between the grades of entrance examinations in universities and higher education institutions and the cumulative grades of students in tertiary education.

However, even in situations where an examination instrument has been rigorously tested and the results proven valid and reliable, a variety of circumstantial factors may influence a student's performance. For example, a student's health, living conditions and anxiety level can have a significant impact on his/her performance which will not then accurately reflect actual achievement and potential capacities. Conversely, there may be situations in which a student's score in an examination is higher than his/her academic ability because of coaching for exams or entrance examinations, which in fact has become very widespread. (from: Helms, 2008). This is at present the case in Egypt where private lessons coach students on the questions asked in exams rather than let them understand the discipline. This is why their grades in secondary school can reflect more their coaching, than their actual attainment in academic disciplines.

In this regard, essay-based examinations that focus on writing ability and analytical thinking,

rather than multiple-choice tests, may be more effective in predicting academic success in higher education. Moreover, school records and letters of recommendation may help institutions better understand applicants' capacities.

#### **4. Achieving Justice, Equal Opportunities and Equity in the Admission Process**

It is true that higher education is a right for each student capable of pursuing it, however it is important to treat fairly and equally all applicants during admission. The same standards must be applied to all of them and each one should reach the position he/she deserves based on their individual abilities and effective competences

At first glance, it might seem that it is very easy to fairly compare the results of all applicants when the examination is the same. However the content of examinations may be biased against certain groups. For example, if it draws on cultural knowledge or experiences to which they do not have access, it is then to be deemed unfair. Such grades, even in case of a single objective examination, do not provide a fair picture of applicants' actual merits.

Moreover, examinations might be biased against some population groups which, unlike others, did not have the chance to be well prepared. Indeed, students who attend lower quality schools are less likely to succeed than those who attend high-quality prestigious schools. Moreover, students who cannot afford private tutoring are less likely to succeed than the ones taking expensive private lessons, as is the case in Egypt, for example.

Thus, many admission systems worldwide take demographic factors into consideration in order to realize justice. Many exam-based systems set differential cutoff scores for particular groups, such as ethnic minorities, low-income and disabled people. Some other institutions established quotas that designate a certain number of seats allocated to these groups. Therefore, justice must be at the heart of any admission system in higher education institutions, so that consideration can be given to the various groups among candidates.

In addition, the following recommendations are submitted to enhance and minimize respectively the abovementioned strong and weak points.

**1. When necessary, keep the central coordination system with more than one standard test in the admission process.** In Egypt, for example, many reports, meetings and national conferences reiterated the importance of keeping the central coordination office because it helps in achieving equal opportunities in admission in higher education institutions. However, it was also suggested to enhance the office work and adopt admission standards other than the students' scores in the GSEC according to the country's conditions and capacities. Multiple standards help reveal the students' capacities, abilities and predilections and facilitate his/her orientation in line with the admission requirements of each major. In this context, we recommend the following:

- Organizing general ability tests or/and entrance examinations according to the major and taking into consideration two scores: the applicant's score in the general baccalaureate exam (60% – 70%) and in the entrance examination (30% - 40%).
- Calculating a "weighted average" based on the general baccalaureate results with a weight assigned to the grand total of the student in secondary school exam and a bigger one assigned to the grades obtained in the same exam for disciplines related to the major of predilection (i.e. 60% or 70% to the average obtained in GSEC and 30% to 40% for specialized disciplines).
- Organizing ability tests or general knowledge tests (essays) during and not after the

secondary educational cycle. These tests will be graded and considered as an admission standard in addition to the score obtained in the GSEC exam. This method aims at avoiding spending a lot of money and time on centrally organizing such tests after the secondary certificate exams, particularly in large countries.

- Taking into consideration the student's academic record and his/her different activities during the entire secondary cycle.
- Organizing serious personal interviews.

**2. Change trends that consider humanities and social sciences of less value compared to pure and applied sciences**, given the impact of these majors on the economy, society, politics, thought, values and culture. These sciences are also an essential component of general knowledge for any person, regardless of his/her major. In order to do so, universities must change the grading system they adopt in admission procedures as, they set lower scores for these majors than the ones required for enrolling in pure and applied science majors.

**3. Establish a mechanism for grants**, financial aid and student loans, in order to put an end to the inequality of opportunities caused by the tuition fees required to enter some departments in governmental faculties and in private universities. Such a mechanism can help limited-income applicants to enroll in these faculties and to benefit from their services, just like the wealthier students. Such a mechanism can also promote social justice and solidarity along with alleviating the social and moral burdens on students and their families, given that higher education is often the only means for poor families to get a job in the labor market. It also generates much more revenue than a pre-tertiary education job, and this extra income is needed to realize social mobility and to obtain a prominent position in society.

**4. Provide justice**, as far as possible through the adoption of admission policies in universities and higher education institutions that grant privileges to the most deprived students. These sectors include people such as women who have less education opportunities in some countries and geographical regions, ethnic minorities, limited-income students and disabled people. Such policies should allocate a specified number of seats (quotas) for these groups and lower the minimum admission score in order to compensate for the deprivation they are suffering from. Moreover, privileges wrongly granted to some groups (e.g. children of the teaching staff and higher education institutions and ministries personnel) should be abolished because they go against justice and equal opportunities.

**5. Disseminate higher education institutions among different regions**, to allow students living in remote regions to enroll in them and to achieve equality of chances and social mobility. This also helps rural populations occupy a prominent socio-economic position and put an end to the rural-urban migration of students, alleviating the financial and moral burdens they bear once moving to another place and easing pressures on cities. Not to mention that an equal geographical distribution bolsters the development of regions for a comprehensive social development.

**6. Allow students to sit for secondary exams and enter universities and higher education institutions more than once a year** (at least twice), thus increasing their chances to fulfill their desires and enroll in the majors of their choices without wasting their important time waiting for a second chance.



**7. Open secondary certificate validity duration**, or at least a longer one, so the student can enroll in the required higher education institution, when he/she can, in line with the permanent education principle.

**8. Revise admission policies and find new standards to increase the enrollment rates in higher education institutions in the Arab states**, in order to enable all secondary certificate holders with the required aptitudes and abilities (no matter what their social origins and financial situation are) to pursue their higher education. Higher education is a right, an instrument to develop thinking aptitudes, an essential factor in developing society's scientific and cultural capital, an instrument to bridge the knowledge gap between Arab and developed countries and a way to meet the social demand in this regard. In 2005, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization recommended a quantitative enhancement of the number of applicants enrolled in higher education institutions in Arab countries and an increase of the registered students' rates so it can rise by twofold by year 2015.

This all requires expanding higher education and diversifying it in accordance with the requirements of the labor market and the needs of society. It could be achieved by increasing the number of higher education institutions, their receiving capacities and enrollment rate in order to provide greater opportunities to applicants in compliance with their capacities. It is also vital to provide financial and human resources to preserve the quality of education which magnifies the required social output in the era of knowledge, globalization and market culture. Moreover this enables universities and higher education institutions to face the various considerable challenges and allow graduates to be more competitive in the market.



**9. Revise higher education admission policies in order to raise enrolment rates in fundamental and applied science fields**, which are essential to the labor market nowadays. It also should aim at defining the number of students to be enrolled in different majors according to the outcomes of continuous studies, according to supply and demand trends in local and foreign markets and in line with development and socio-economic plans requirements.



**10. Provide, or foster, guidance and counseling educational, psychological and vocational services during the secondary educational cycle and first years of higher education.** This is in order to help applicants acquire aptitudes and capacities. This enables them also to be aware of both the academic and work fields and to invest in majors that best suit applicants and development requirements.

**11. Provide sufficient budgets to regulate the admission process in universities and higher education institutions.** Such budgets aim also at mobilizing the human resources, professional skills, organizational and management activities needed in the admission procedures. Then, governments, universities and higher education institutions will be able to live up to their responsibilities,

**12. Establish an efficient admission and registration database**, which provides the information needed to review admission standards on a regular basis. Governments and/or universities and higher education institutions are thus able to assess the efficiency of admission policies and procedures in achieving socio-economic objectives, on the one hand, and to define how and when changes and improvements occur, on the other hand.







**13. Promote coordination and cooperation between universities and higher education institutions on the national, regional and international levels.** This allows the transfer of skills, studies and good practices (related to higher education in general and to admission policies and procedures in particular) in order to benefit from useful experiences.

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