

EDUCATION 2.0

CHRONICLES OF TECHNOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN EGYPT

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28. Primary School Teachers Leverage Social Media for Professional Development

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Abstract

There has long been a consensus that quality teaching leads to better learning outcomes and that Professional Development plays a role in that process. Yet to be effective, Professional Development must be grounded in local contexts and practices. This chapter investigates how primary school teachers in Egypt have been leveraging social media for Informal Teacher Professional Development during a national education reform. They are expected to transition from a traditional pedagogy based on drills, memorization, and top-down teaching, to activity-based and student-centered approaches that align with the new multidisciplinary curriculum. Teachers' initiatives on Facebook, YouTube channels, and WhatsApp groups, show what they themselves identify as their professional gaps and needs, and highlight their skills, techniques, and communication and artistic styles. A better understanding of teachers' professional cultures can lead to more relevant programs for Professional Development in which teachers and their students can have better chances to thrive.

Keywords

activity-based learning, curriculum reform, Facebook live, inclusive education, Teacher Professional Development, in-service training, Tokkatsu

1. Teachers' Initiatives Online¹

Professional Development activities in the digital age, both formal and informal, have incorporated virtual learning, digital resources, chatrooms, asynchronous trainings, and other models (Borko et al. 2010). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an especial spike in how teachers in different parts of the world leverage social media for peer-to-peer learning in innovative ways and for a range of Professional Development activities (Mercado and Shin 2023, Ranieri 2019). Within education policy circles there has long been consensus that Professional Development leads to quality teaching, which leads to better learning outcomes for students with diverse learning needs (Darling-Hammond et al. 2017). However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach for how to cultivate quality teachers (Koellner and Greenblatt 2018). The local culture and material conditions in which teachers work should be factored into what constitutes 'quality' when it comes to teaching. Effective approaches to Teacher Professional Development (TPD) should be adaptive to local contexts and mindful of the conditions and learning cultures in which teachers live and work (Hennessy et al. 2022).

This chapter investigates ways that primary school teachers in Egypt have been using social media in the context of a comprehensive national education reform to build a 'new education system' also known as Education 2.0. When the reform began being rolled out in 2018, teachers were expected to transition from traditional classroom practices based on drills, memorization, and top-down teaching, towards pedagogies that enhance learners' higher order skills through a new multidisciplinary curriculum and activity-based student-centered approaches. As stated in the Ministry of Education and Technical Education (MOETE) concept

1 This chapter draws on a research report about online Informal Teacher Professional Development in Egypt carried out for the Teach for Tomorrow (T4T) project of the Education Development Center (EDC). The internal report, 'Mapping Informal/Formal Online CTPD Resources' (2023) was designed and supervised by Linda Herrera and Amr Orabi and carried out by Menna Ahmed Saieed and Ayman Al-Husseini with the input of Andrew Lewis, Randa Gaber, and Hala El Serafy. The authors would like to thank the Education Development Center for permission to include portions of that report in this chapter. Any potential errors are the responsibility of the authors alone. In 2025 the Trump administration cut USAID projects across sectors including education, leading this project to abruptly shut down.

paper, 'Transforming Teachers: Education 2.0 Teachers: A New Cadre of Educators' (2020),

Higher order skills and capabilities [are] replacing the current focus on rote learning and factual recall. The way in which pupils learn and are assessed will be transformed, with technology playing a central role for every student and teacher [...] Teachers need to adopt a much more active, participatory, engaging and learner-centered approach to teaching.

Through Informal Teacher Professional Development (ITPD) activities, primary school teachers have been creating tutorials and live sessions for fellow teachers about changes in the career ladder, how to make weekly schedules, and techniques for teaching in the 2.0 system.

In theory, the twenty-eight Faculties of Education (FOEs) in Egyptian public universities should be the centers responsible for preparing and training current teachers (in-service) and would-be teachers (pre-service) in the foundations and pedagogies of the new system. However, as of 2024, the FOEs had neither updated nor aligned their programs to the new system in any systematic way.² Instead, the MOETE relied mainly on four strategies to support primary school teachers' transition to the new system. First, it oversaw the production of the Teacher's Guides, which provide detailed instructions on how to manage specific lessons in each grade.

Second, teachers were required to attend periodic short trainings that lasted between a half day to four days. These trainings were usually provided by the textbook publishers and other private companies and often depended on the 'cascade' model, which can be cost effective since

2 To address this problem, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have been working together on the USAID funded project, 'Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI)', a five-year project (April 2022-March 2027) which aims to redress the disconnect between the Faculties of Education and the Education 2.0 reform. According to the USAID website, the activity aims to improve the 'quality and relevance of teacher preparation in Egyptian public universities so that current and future primary school teachers have the skills to increase student learning and advance the Education 2.0 reform. The Initiative had plans to establish undergraduate and graduate degree programs for primary-grade teachers at fifteen Egyptian public universities', <https://web.archive.org/web/20250201182020/https://www.usaid.gov/egypt/basic-education>. However, this project abruptly shut down in 2025 after the Trump administration cut USAID projects in education and many other sectors.

it uses existing teaching staff and can be carried out in short intervals. However, the cascade method also has disadvantages. As David Hayes, an expert in curriculum development and continuing Professional Development cautions, ‘using trainers drawn from successive tiers of the cascade also has potential disadvantages, the principal one being dilution of the training—less and less is understood the further one goes. Yet it is not the cascade model per se which is the problem, but the manner in which it is often implemented’ (2000: 137-138).

Third, the MOETE has invested heavily in the digital infrastructure to provide teachers with platforms like Learning Curve platform for their formal Professional Development trainings and tracking, and the Egyptian Knowledge Bank (EKB) with its repository of digital content such as PDFs of Teacher’s Guides and textbooks. The EKB also has a digital board for announcements about teacher workshops and events, but it rarely provides full records of those events.

Fourth, the MOETE launched a television channel with a companion YouTube channel in 2020 called Madrasatna to broadcast videos for teachers and students on the new curriculum for Grades 4-9 (see Chapter 22 in this volume). The comments section on the YouTube channel is turned off. These videos are not interactive like Facebook live videos, so teachers watch them in a passive way. As research about education technologies (EdTech) confirms, interventions that focus primarily on hardware, software, and resources, are ineffective compared with those coupled with other measures to promote pedagogic change or teacher development (Hennessy et al. 2022).

To fill gaps in their Professional Development, a number of teachers have taken it upon themselves to initiate and participate in their own peer-to-peer in-service activities in informal ways through social media and WhatsApp groups. As one teacher noted, ‘WhatsApp groups by teachers are very helpful. The EKB and Madrasatna are not as helpful as these groups’.

2. Researching Teacher Activities

We began this research knowing that a cross-section of primary school teachers from rural and urban communities in Egypt communicate on social media, though we did not have hard data on the precise percentages and locations (Herrera and Shama 2020). To identify TPD groups and

activities online, we started with some basic keyword searches on the platforms Facebook, Telegram, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram such as, 'first grade teachers in Egypt', 'second grade teachers', etc. We were able to verify that primary school teachers were especially active on Facebook followed by YouTube, so we focused our efforts there. As we started observing teacher groups, we took note of the professional terminology they were using that related to the new education system, Teacher's Guides and teacher trainings. For instance, instead of talking about 'subjects' (*mawad*) they referred to 'windows' (*nawafidh*). The term 'multidisciplinary subjects' (*muta`adid al-ta`hasusat*) also frequently appeared. We then refined searches using this new terminology with words like 'grade one window for Arabic', 'grade four window for mathematics', and 'multidisciplinary teaching.'

We initially looked at the largest teacher Facebook groups with members in the hundreds of thousands such as the group, 'Ask Reda Yousef', which is specialized in Arabic grammar for primary school teachers and has over 500,000 members (see Fig. 28.1).



Fig. 28.1 Cover photo on the 'Ask Reda Yousef' Facebook page, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1849634368617130>

We did not limit our selection to these large groups. We also included mid-level groups with 30,000 to 40,000 followers, and smaller groups with followers in the thousands, the main criteria for inclusion being they were active groups with regular posts and comments. We supplement online observations with interviews with teachers who led

their own PD groups. We contacted them directly through social media using purposeful sampling to ensure geographic and topic diversity, and prioritizing topics most relevant to the reform. Through a trusted contact of one of the authors who works as a public-school teacher trainer (Menna), we also reached out to seven teachers from Cairo, Gharbia, Giza, and Kafr Elshiekh (see Fig. 28.2).

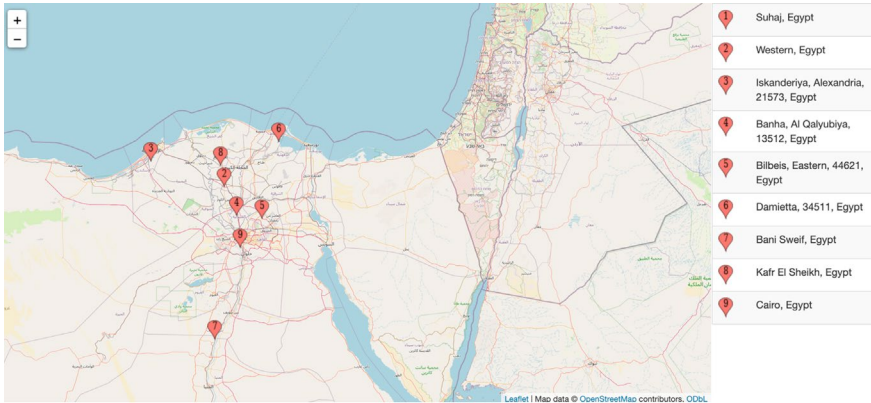


Fig. 28.2 Map of locations of teachers who participated in the study, created by Menna Ahmed Saieed, 2023.

Some of the interviews took place in-person, and others took place through calls. The questions focused on teachers' opinions about the new reform, experience navigating the changes, if and how they used education technologies and platforms to enhance their teaching and/or connect with their peers, and which platforms and applications they found most useful for their Professional Development.

In keeping with principles of research ethics when dealing with online research (Bouvier and Rasmussen 2022), we have been careful to protect the identities of teachers who make comments in the chats, though we do not anonymize teachers who promote their content for public distribution. Nevertheless, we are mindful to not identify teachers who might unwittingly incriminate themselves by, for example, sharing the answers to the Ministry's teacher exams or promoting their private lesson businesses.

As this study is exploratory and qualitative, it has certain limitations. First, it does not provide statistical evidence, but analysis based on observations and study of twenty Facebook groups, sixteen YouTube

channels, and over fifty videos. Second, it only includes teachers who use social media and does not deal with in-person TPD activities. However, in-person and online TPD overlap as the two mutually influence each other. Third, like the rapidly changing technology ecosystem itself, TPD is dynamic and adapts as new technologies, applications, platforms, and ideas enter the education culture and environment. This research took place largely in 2022-2023 (though we reviewed social media sites going back to 2019) and covers the tools and styles teachers were using at that time. Fourth, this inquiry does not set out to understand the impact of teacher PD activities in the classroom or on student learning outcomes, however important these may be. Rather, the aim is to make visible some activities initiated by primary school teachers to understand ways TPD emerges organically in local communities and contexts through social media and how teachers help their peers understand the requirements and technologies of the new education system.

3. Learning through ‘How-to’ Videos

When the MOETE rolled out an entirely new curriculum in 2018 (initially for KG-Grade 2 and eventually up to Grade 6 in 2022), large numbers of primary school teachers and mothers of young students convened in social media groups to ask questions and provide guidance and advice to each other (see Chapter 25 in this volume). Teachers took on roles as group administrators to spread information they learned from their in-service trainings on the new concepts, pillars, subjects, and forms of student assessment. They were also interested in teacher incentives and operational matters. Group members used the comments sections to pose questions and share advice and information.

By the 2021/2022 school year, these exchanges continued, while another practice began to emerge; individual teachers started producing ‘how-to’ videos on their individual social media pages. These teacher creators usually used mobile phones to film themselves giving a presentation on a specific topic, concept, or lesson. ‘How-to’ videos branched off into different thematic directions. We focus here on three branches within this category: how to apply Education 2.0; how to apply Tokkatsu activities; and how to enhance digital skills.

3.1 How To Apply Education 2.0

The first wave of ‘how-to’ videos covered a range of topics from classroom management and concepts underpinning the Education 2.0 system, to how to deal with specific lessons. Teachers shared what they learned in their in-service trainings and in the Teacher’s Guide. These videos covered topics like the multidisciplinary approach, activity-based learning, the new assessment system, inclusive education, and learning loss during the pandemic. Some videos dealt with subject-specific skills development like ‘How-to teach Grade 4 Arabic according to the new curriculum’, or ‘Tips on teaching math for Grade 5’. Teachers intentionally used a simple and straightforward language to communicate with fellow teachers. Some of them addressed the environmental realities of their classrooms. For instance, many teachers offered strategies for teaching large class sizes in schools with limited resources. The most common topic among ‘how-to’ creators concerned how to use the Teacher’s Guide to meet the learning outcomes for each lesson in every grade. For example, the Arabic teacher Asmaa Sabry uses her personal Facebook page and YouTube channel to coach fellow teachers on how to use the Arabic Teacher’s Guide (see Fig. 23.3). She writes specifically in her channel description that this work is a form of service, or ‘charity’ to benefit knowledge.



Fig. 28.3 The cover image of Asmaa Sabry’s YouTube channel, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/@asmaa-sabry/>

The next most popular video type is how to make a lesson plan. Teachers requested and shared their lesson plans in the hundreds on a range of topics and modules. These plans circulated on social media either as

PDF files of hand-written pages or as a series of screenshots (see Fig. 28.4). Judging by the effusive comments' section, teachers not only enormously appreciated these resources, but also used them as their own lesson plans.



Fig. 28.4 Arabic lesson plans for Grade 1, week three, prepared by a teacher named Maha Barakat and shared on a Facebook group, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2410125966056772&set=g.1849634368617130>

Videos about activity and play-based learning also trended among teachers who demonstrated ways to incorporate role-playing, performance and music, games, and movement, in the classroom. They often demonstrated with one or two students. Some of them spoke about the importance of making learning a form of 'edutainment'. Others kept these lessons more theoretical and less interactive, saying that they neither had the resources, space, nor time to organize their students into games and activities.

A subsection of videos in this category dealt with learning loss since the coronavirus pandemic and ways to support inclusive education. Teachers talked about students with special learning needs and highlighted extracurricular activities that parents and teachers might consider. Some

teachers referred to relevant sections of the Teacher's Guide. They generally talked in a positive tone about inclusive education, but in the comments section teachers often remarked that in reality, they neither had the time nor resources to provide individualized attention to their students

3.2 How to Apply Tokkatsu Activities

A number of Egyptian schools have incorporated the Japanese system of extracurricular activities called 'Tokkatsu'. While this began in 2016 through an educational partnership with Japan (see JICA 2023), it has gained momentum since the 2018 reforms.³ The MOETE has trained roughly 30,000 teachers on Tokkatsu using the cascade method, and asked teachers to continue to spread its principles through peer-to-peer learning. Teachers have showed especial interest in the Tokkatsu 'classroom council' facilitation, a system of student self-governance. Teacher trainers on Tokkatsu shared lesson plans about how to practice Tokkatsu activities in the classroom and used Facebook live videos for peer-to-peer training. They also posted recordings of in-school workshops on their social media for an online audience.

3.3 How to Enhance Digital Skills

From the inception of the Education 2.0 reform, the MOETE set out to train teachers on digital tools and platforms. It was not until the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to remote and blended learning in 2020, that teachers' digital competencies really spiked. The ministry envisioned that the EKB platform, with its Learning Management System (LMS) would provide a hub for a range of teacher activities

3 The seeds of the idea to introduce a Japanese style education to Egypt began in 2002 when Fayza Aboulnaga, the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs under President Hosni Mubarak, visited Japan and observed the children there. The Egypt-Japan Education Partnership (EJEP) was established fourteen years later in February 2016. As the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) reports, 'The concept of the partnership was to work together in introducing various facets of Japan's educational program into the Egyptian school system to strengthen the capacity of the nation's youth. ... Currently, two major projects are ongoing under this comprehensive partnership: the introduction of tokkatsu [...extracurricular activities] at Egypt-Japan School, or EJS; and the establishment and strengthening of the Egypt-Japan University of Science and Technology (E-JUST)'. As of 2023, nearly 20,000 students from K-12 and 3,500 students in higher education are exposed to a 'Japanese style' education (JICA 2023). See also Al-Shamaa 2021.

(see Chapter 4 in this volume). It provided virtual learning tools like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Outlook, Edmodo, OneDrive, and Microsoft Learn. Teachers could enroll in different MOETE trainings on these services and access courses and learning materials. Yet based on teacher interviews and a review of comments on social media, the Ministry's EKB platform was not especially user-friendly, and there were too many options which made navigating it cumbersome. Many teachers preferred to participate in peer-to-peer Informal Professional Learning Communities (IPLCs) via Facebook groups and YouTube channels organized by their peers. Groups on social media were generally organized according to grade and subject with titles such as 'Forums' (*montada* or *moltaqa*), 'Studying Together', 'Teachers of Grade 4', and 'Grade 6 Together Group'. These specific titles made them easy to locate.

When the MOETE introduced a new mandatory platform for teachers' training and Professional Development tracking called Learning Curve in 2022 (its full name is Electronic Platform for Teachers' Training and Professional Development), many teachers found out about it via teacher-led social media groups and pages. There immediately emerged a plethora of informal online videos by teachers wanting to guide their peers on how to register and access the platform. Many also shared information on what to expect from the required teacher tests, and some even shared the answers to the tests. Teachers did not seem to view this as a form of 'cheating', but rather a form of peer support and solidarity, especially since teacher tests were connected to their salaries and promotions on the career ladder. These videos were enormously popular and much appreciated by teachers who left grateful comments.

Another observable practice was how teachers moved between in-person and online PD, and the blurring between online and in-person trainings. For instance, teachers in PD groups would meet online synchronously using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Facebook Live and record and post their meetings on Facebook pages and YouTube Channels. These recordings would be shared on WhatsApp groups, Telegram channels, or played in a space where teachers congregated in-person in PD workshops or meetings. There was not a clear line between online versus in-person PD activities since they mutually influenced each other.

4. Communication Styles

Primary teachers congregated and formed informal virtual peer-to-peer communities on social media spaces. They produced, engaged in, and spread DIY videos. Their online spaces were for the most part supportive, friendly, and appreciative. In the comments section of their Facebook live and YouTube videos, viewers often expressed appreciation and shared stories about how these videos helped them with comments like, 'so helpful', 'great point', 'I tried that in my class, and it really worked'. They might also ask for additional videos about specific things like lesson plans.⁴ To recognize the efforts of participants, some admins would present them with a certificate.

These social media spaces also revealed differences in teachers' presentation skills and degrees to which they were comfortable with different applications. For instance, some teachers depended on more rudimentary visual aids like handwritten sheets or pages, while others experimented more with simple graphics as in the example of a teacher giving a lesson on the letter 'seen' using Facebook Reels (see Fig. 28.5).

Teachers in the upper years of primary (Grades 4-6) often posted more well-produced videos that used advanced graphics, animations, interactive books, and sound effects. These tended to be directed towards students rather than fellow teachers, and in some cases appeared to serve as a kind of enticement to bring students to that teachers' tutoring services.

5. Learning from Teachers: Some Key Takeaways

Since the start of the Education 2.0 reforms in 2018, 'how-to' videos and teacher-lead DIY professional learning community activities have proliferated across social media platforms, and they continue to develop. These videos represent an organic window into teacher practices, artistic and communication styles, and perhaps most importantly, their priorities.

4 This positive atmosphere among primary school teachers stood in contrast to large Facebook groups directed towards high school teachers and parents who express frustration and anxiety about the high-stakes Thanaweya Amma exam (the combined high school leaving-university entrance exam in Grade 12). This exam which hovers like a dark cloud over high school is intricately linked to an expansive and unregulated private lesson market, which places a huge financial and psychological burden on students and their families (Herrera 2023: 193-196).



Fig. 28.5 Teacher Radwa Hassan explaining the letter 'seen' on Facebook Live, 18 January 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/reel/204769658797315>

Many primary teachers, especially those teaching in the early years of KG to Grade 3, have taken to social media to share information, ask questions, provide peer-to-peer support, and engage in informal PD activities. Through social media spaces, teachers have been assuming leadership roles, enhancing their digital skills, practicing creativity and autonomy, and providing each other the freedom to ask questions. Their activities and behaviors online have spilled into in-person activities.

The informal PD activities led by teachers differ from the formal initiatives of the Ministry of Education which tend to be top down and inattentive to material realities on the ground. For example, the Teacher's Guides provide useful details about specific lessons and learning outcomes, but do not sufficiently address the actual conditions and social realities of working in public sector schools. It can be challenging for teachers to apply the prescribed classroom activities when faced with large class sizes, lack of resources, and high numbers of students with special needs. The YouTube channel Madrasatna provides videos of 'model lessons' for teachers, but do not allow comments and teacher feedback.

As the Ministry and its partners engage more in PD programs, whether as in-service or pre-service trainings, they should be mindful of the real-life environments and settings in which teachers and students learn, live, and work. They have much to learn from the IPLCs on social media which operate in nimble ways, with a continuous feedback

loop. The formal programs and Ministry-sponsored platforms can build on teachers' communication and artistic styles, online behaviors and practices, and self-identified areas for PD and growth. Through understanding, taking cues from, and engaging teachers' informal professional cultures, more systematic formal programs can be developed where teachers and their students could have the chance to thrive.

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