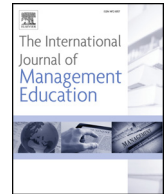


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## Should responsible management education become a priority? A qualitative study of academics in Egyptian public business schools

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper we investigate why responsible management education (RME) should become a necessity in Egyptian public business schools. A total of 80 academics from three universities were contacted and interviewed in six different focus groups. Three types of motives were identified from the interviews: extrinsic local, intrinsic school and extrinsic global, which inspired academics to believe in the importance of implementing RME in their business schools. Most respondents consider implementing RME is crucial to rebuilding their schools' legitimate and ethical role. Focusing only on academics rather than the executives of the selected business schools, is perceived to be a limitation. Moreover, addressing only public business schools and excluding private ones may limit the authors' ability to generalize results. Thus, the authors of this paper invite researchers from the fields of cultural diversity, CSR, sustainability and higher education (HE) to collaborate in producing more interdisciplinary and/or trans-disciplinary papers on the same topic. Future researchers may seek to investigate the perceptions of management in the addressed business schools. Replicating this study with private business schools in Egypt may be considered another research opportunity. The educational authorities need to develop a framework for implementing and assessing RME in public business schools. This paper contributes by filling a gap in HE management, responsible leadership, and sustainability literature in which empirical studies on RME and the responsible practices of academics have been limited so far.

### 1. Introduction

Despite the fact that business schools have been perceived to be a change agent for many national and multinational enterprises, they are accused of neglecting climate change, human rights and other challenges of sustainability, cultural equality and social peace (Crane & Matten, 2010; Doherty, Meehan, & Richards, 2015). An influx of studies (e.g. Field, Barros, Mach, & Mastrandrea, 2014; Petriglieri, 2012; Podolny, 2009) maintains that business schools have not devoted systematic effort to tackle environmental degradation and business-society relations. Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) emphasize that business schools have to modernize their curricula, culture, strategy and practices in order to secure a relevant and/or legitimate status of good governance and ethics. (see Table 1)

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**Table 1**  
UN principles of responsible management education (Source: PRIME, 2019).

Principle	Content
Principle 1: Purpose	We will develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy.
Principle 2: Value	We will incorporate into our academic activities and curricula the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the UNGC.
Principle 3: Method	We will create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.
Principle 4: Research	We will engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances our understanding about the role, dynamics and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value.
Principle 5: Partnership	We will interact with managers of business corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.
Principle 6: Dialogue	We will facilitate and support dialogue and debate among educators, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organizations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.

Parkes and Blewitt (2011) regret that business education abides, for the most part, by neo-liberalist assumptions regarding wealth creation, economic growth and profitability. Other professional executives such as Davis (2005) claim that the business of businesses is only to engage in activities that maximize their corporate profits. The Aspen Institute (2008) indicates that many enterprises employ practices in support of ethics and sustainability only to build a reputation.

Conversely, Tsurumi (2005) and Anninos and Chytiris (2011) indicate that business schools shape today's and future managers' ability to understand, analyze and employ management theories and techniques when making decisions by equipping them with skills and information about ethics, social responsibility and cultural diversity. Consequently, it has become popular to find business researchers diffusing sustainability-related issues in their courses (Audenbrand, 2010). However, Doppelt (2010) asserts that the main challenge for management education nowadays is to transform current business activity so that it aligns more with different stakeholders' pool of social expectations, particularly if there is an increasing orientation of many small and multinational enterprises to utilize their economic power, effect and networks in addressing major societal challenges such as climate change awareness, food security challenges, anti-terrorism initiatives, etc. (Mesure, 2009; Tilbury & Ryan, 2011). Such a change in business priorities represents a clear response to the change in consumers' behaviour and a fulfilment of stakeholders' expectations (Williard, 2005).

Consequently, and as a response to businesses' concern for CSR and sustainability activities on the one hand, and to international initiatives, such as the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) for accelerating socially responsible behaviour, on the other, many business schools have paid more attention to the inclusion of CSR-related aspects in their teaching and research (Lazarte, 2012; Moratis, 2013; Okoye, 2009). Authors such as Blaine (2009), Holland (2009), Morsing and Rovira (2011) and Waddock, Rasche, Werhane, and Unruh (2011) affirm that business schools have no alternative to incorporating socio-environmental aspects into their curricula to ensure their societal citizenship and conformity with international bodies of management such as AACSB International, EFMD, or the Aspen Institute's Business and Society Program. Tilbury and Ryan (2011) highlight the results of a survey prepared by the European Academy for Business in Society and conclude that 76 percent of top managers believe that their organization's success is extensively based on their abilities to effectively manage sustainability-related challenges. Accordingly, and at present, it has become popular to find aspects such as climate change, carbon footprint, global debt and rising unemployment in business research and scholarly papers (Jabbour, 2010; Valante, 2011). This also comes in line with the tendency of international NGOs to foster their understanding of the main global socio-cultural and environmental threats. WWF International, an international NGO organization, has developed its "one planet MBA" programme in collaboration with the University of Exeter, UK, in an attempt to guarantee a research and educational platform through which a new generation of responsible leaders can be prepared (WWF International, 2011).

There has been a shortage of empirical studies on RME being implemented by different business schools and how academics justify its importance (e.g. Alcaraz, Wiktorja, & Thiruvattal, 2011; Burchell, Kennedy, & Murray, 2015; Parkes, Buono, & Howaidy, 2017). Most previous literature in RME shows that RME is important to foster positive change of the business sector starting at business schools' level. For example, Abu-Alruz, Hailat, Al-Jaradat, and Khasawneh (2018) indicate that students in Jordan have overall positive attitudes toward three pillars of sustainable development, i.e. economic viability, society, and education. However, most of these studies discussed the main challenges of implementing RME. In the MENA Region, Alnodel et al. (2018) indicate that situation and economic stability are central factors influencing the level of implementing social responsibility and business schools' engagement with the community, and that university practices of social responsibilities come as a result of economic and social development, not as a result of the needs of the society itself. There are shortages in studies that explore the academics' motivations to adopt RME or in other words the necessity of implementing RME at faculty levels. Moreover, most of the previous studies have been conducted in the context of western culture with very few mentioned studies in other countries including the Middle East.

The contributions at the regional level are described as discussions and forums to identify the main challenges of integrating PRME into universities. For example, these regional discussions which have resulted in formally establishing the PRME Chapter MENA following the 4th PRME MENA Regional Forum "Regional and Local Challenges for Responsible Management Education," took place at ESCA School of Management, in Casablanca, Morocco in November 2014- has identified the following four main challenges faced in MENA universities/business schools to integrate PRME: 1. Teaching including curriculum development, content sharing, and

faculty webinars on topics of interest; 2. Research including anti-corruption; 3. Outreach on the sustainability literacy test; and 4. Women on boards in the Arab Region (Fourth PRME MENA Regional Forum, 2014) (<https://www.unprme.org/working-groups/display-working-group.php?wgid=3168>).

Accordingly, the authors of this paper were inspired to fill in a gap in HE management, ethics, sustainability, and HE literature by asking academics in the featured Egyptian public business schools about the extent to which RME should become a priority for their schools. It is noteworthy to mention that Egyptian public business schools represent a previously unanalysed organizational context and have unfortunately been ranked as the lowest globally in quality of management education, according to the 2018 global competitiveness report (<https://www.weforum.org/>). Furthermore, there are no current statistics on teaching elements of RME in Egyptian HE. According to the authors' knowledge, public universities in Egypt do not offer specific or general MBA explicit courses in responsible management. The elements of RME, as defined by UN, could be found in few modules and courses in other private universities in Egypt.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: The next section comprises the literature review. The methodology follows with a description of the characteristics of the organizational setting in which this study is conducted and the procedures undertaken to conduct interviews, together with the analytical mechanism employed. The authors devote the final part of their paper to highlighting the main findings, discussion and conclusion.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Sustainability and sustainable development

The concept of sustainability has its roots in the Latin word "sustinere", which means to last or endure. Moreover, the term 'sustainability' is used in natural science to describe the long-term beneficial dependence on biological systems. In environmental science, scholars use the concept to describe the rational consumption of natural resources, whereas in economic science, the term 'sustainability' reflects the systematic practices of meeting present generations' needs without ignoring the future generations' share of wealth. Finally, social sciences researchers rely on the term 'sustainability' to touch on a set of favourable and targeted societal obligations or wishes such as peace, human rights, security etc (Blewit, 2008; Durlauf & Blume, 2008). Accordingly, the Brundtland Report (1987) indicates that sustainable development reflects the process of meeting the needs of present generations without narrowing the readiness of future ones to meet their own needs. The concept of sustainable development was used to include economic, environmental and social axes, but cultural diversity has been considered as its fourth axis since 2001 (UNESCO, 2001).

In the corporate/organizational context, the concepts 'corporate sustainability' and 'organizational excellence' are used to reflect the systematic engagement of personnel to form relevant levels of both individual and organizational resilience, which may help them in maximizing shareholders' wealth besides securing other stakeholders' environmental, social and cultural ambitions. Consequently, any of these concepts should be embedded as a part of an organization's culture, purposes, and mechanism of doing business (Anninos, 2007; Banner, 2007).

### 2.2. RME

Over the past five years, and despite the end of the decade of 'Education and Sustainable Development' (2005–2014) launched by the UN, scholars have not been able to produce a generally accepted scope for RME. However, much clarity regarding its content, dimensions, and practices has been achieved as a result of its inclusion in different research themes and schools of thought (Godemann, Herzig, & Moon, 2013, chap. 5; Sterling, 2013; Wals, 2009). Moreover, many business schools have also embedded sustainable development as a main part of their teaching curricula (Bertotti, Harden, Renton, & Sheridan, 2012). The UN project of RME (PRME) has been carried out in collaboration with some accrediting bodies such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), the European Academy of Business in Society (EABIS), the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative (GRLI), and the Aspen Institute's Business and Society Programs. UN PRME has represented an attempt to determine the type of education business schools should pursue in order to meet today's real-world current and future challenges (Gentile, 2008, pp. 40–45; Wood & Clair, 2008). Below is the table of the principles of RME developed by the UN.

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) asserts the necessity of meeting the demands of the present generations without limiting the capacity of future generations to meet their demands (WBCSD, 2010). This fostered the development of the 2050 vision for a sustainable world. This vision entails an economic transitional shift to reduce ecosystem degradation and ensure the well-being of the whole world (Johnson, 2011). This inspired more than 100 experts, students, scholars, deans and consultants to collaborate for 18 months in order to create this vision by paying attention to the different domains of business (e.g. CSR, marketing, HR management, operations management etc.) without neglecting psychology, sociology, public administration, cultural diversity, teaching in HE, and cross-cultural communication (Muff et al., 2013; Dyllick, 2015). According to Podolny (2009), Datar, Garvin, and Cullen (2010), Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan, and Dolle (2011) and Muff (2013), the 50 + 20 agenda seeks to realize the following purposes: Design education to develop globally responsible leaders, ensure a kind of research accelerating sustainability and the betterment of the whole world, and stimulate educators/researchers and scholars to engage in continuous public debates aimed at organizing business-society relationships. Moreover, the agenda includes answers to the following questions: What kind of world do we seek? How should businesses act to secure the kind of society we want? How should leaders act to ensure this favourable society we hope for? And, what kind of management education will be needed for that?

UN PRME is the dominant actor, holding significant symbolic capital (Storey, Killian, & O'Regan, 2017). Filho (2017) gives an example of how to implement the PRME and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the school curricula by describing the methodology developed by Brazilian business school, and as a result, the students obtain a high degree of involvement, increasing awareness on their role in society and participation as protagonists of the changes the world needs. In a case study of sustainable management education in a business school in Germany, Kolb, Fröhlich, and Schmidpeter (2017) offer valuable insights for other business schools into how to integrate sustainability into their management education and suggest that PRME is helpful in proposing influence of business schools on SDGs for educational institutions. The sustainability literacy test (The Sulitest) enables HE institutions to assess that they are producing sustainability literate graduates and to engage multiple stakeholders in accelerating the integration of sustainability in higher education standards and beyond (Decamps, Barbat, Carteron, Hands, & Parkes, 2017).

### 2.3. Challenges to integrating sustainability into management education

Several authors have attempted to assess the implementation of PRME by analyzing business school reports (Wolfe & Werhane, 2010, pp. 144–160; Waddock et al., 2011; Alcaraz et al., 2011; Godemann, Herzig, Moon, & Powell, 2011, pp. 58–2011; Dickson, Eckman, Loker, & Jirousek, 2013; Mokoqama & Fields, 2017). Although these reports convey commitment to PRME and various successful transformative initiatives to strategically embed social responsibility and sustainability in academic (curricula, pedagogy, research) and organizational (stakeholder engagement, partnerships, and professional development) practices, there is limited information regarding challenges in implementation, progress monitoring, benchmarking activities via key performance indicators, and means of further enhancing visibility and accountability (Godemann et al., 2013, chap. 5; Wolfe & Werhane, 2010, pp. 144–160).

A lack of active faculty support for sustainability initiatives may cause business schools to severely lag behind in corporate sustainability practices, and RME would simply be a moral obligation that fails to be fully assimilated across business disciplines (Maloni, Smith, & Napshin, 2012). This may be caused by limited available time, lack of sustainability awareness, limited textbook coverage, limited reward prospects, and pressure on faculty and researchers to publish in “top-tier A journals” rather than invest in the sustainability agenda (Alcaraz et al., 2011; Maloni et al., 2012). Godemann et al. (2013), chap. 5 report a general lack of common understanding of the relationship between the principles and the educational frameworks, learning objectives and learning outcomes, and Sylvestre, Wright, and Sherren (2013) point to the potential “ideological tensions” caused by varying interpretations of sustainability and recommend aligning the mission, vision, and values of a school with the transformative approach to RME to avoid such tensions. Louw (2015, p. 231) criticizes PRME for including a highly contestable set of propositions and notes that signatories, for example, do not have a shared understanding of the values of global social responsibility and responsible leadership. Figueiró and Raufflet (2015) identified diverse challenges to the inclusion of sustainability in management curricula: terminological, organizational, capability, and pedagogical. In a case study of University of West England in Bristol, Cicmil, Gough, and Hills (2017) demonstrate that embedding Education for Sustainable Development across the university is a complex, emerging, evolving and non-linear process of addressing simultaneously the curriculum content, power, structures, identity, values, and external checks and balances. Rosenbloom, Gudić, Parkes, and Kronbach (2017) identified challenges of integrating poverty into business and management courses.

Given that not all business schools share the same culture, and that they operate in different contexts, there is no “one size fits all” solution. Each school should set the implementation strategy that best fits its reality and context after identifying all enablers and challenges to this process. Change towards sustainable development is a strategic issue in HE, with the potential to transform relevant policies and environments (Mader & Rammel, 2015). Changing the bureaucratic organizational culture and hierarchical structures of HE requires leadership endorsement and supportive policies. Godemann et al. (2013), chap. 5 note that instead of attempting to change their universities' cultures to embed sustainability across teaching, research and operations, most business schools simply opted to bolt-on some sustainability by establishing research centers. In proposing a framework to business schools to engage in SDGs, Weybrecht (2017) found that business schools still need to be more adaptable to maximize their impact on the SDGs. Greenberg et al. (2017) argue that to integrate RME into a university's ethos, the change process must be tailored to the university's past experiences with pedagogical change, and that reflection is an important step in the implementation of RME and can be useful for uncovering hidden assumptions that may be blocking systemic implementation of RME. In a case study of a Scottish PRME signatory institution Wersun (2017) argues that top-down commitment is a key driver of the implementation of PRME, and that understanding of local context and prevailing organizational circumstances explains the timing and nature of institutional commitment to PRME. Beddewela, Warin, Hesselden, and Coslet (2017) explore the PRME complexity in a UK business school and find that the misalignment between faculty skills and institutional bureaucracy, together with an inconsistent focus on responsible management across the curriculum raises key challenges for its adoption. They argue that a significant change in RME, requires fundamental changes of a business school's own ethos of *what* responsibility means to itself.

Borges et al. (2017) show that student organizations have concrete actions and potential to promote SDGs, as they connect people by their beliefs, passions and shared values to achieve several goals, acting as communities of practice. Warwick, Wyness, and Conway (2017) argue that students have a vital role to play as integrated catalysts for educational change with regard to PRME and business Schools can enhance sustainability learning through student centred, problem based and multidisciplinary pedagogies.

Few business schools in the UK have made institutional-level commitments to integrate sustainability practices in employability or skills agendas or even the “research excellence framework” (REF). They rather tend to put more effort into integrating sustainability only at postgraduate level and in campus greening activities (Godemann et al., 2013, chap. 5). Practitioner involvement is mostly in the form of guest speakers, advisory board members or supporting partners rather than in embedded collaborative sustainability interdisciplinary research. Doherty et al. (2015) describe Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)/RME adoption in

six UK business schools and maintain that business schools adopt RME owing to pressures of marketization, accreditation prospects, and stakeholder expectations (parents/students, employers, accrediting bodies, partner schools/colleges, NGOs, and local economic agencies). They conclude that fundamental changes in business schools' organizational cultures, structures and practices are rare. From their side, [Figueiró and Raufflet \(2015\)](#) have concluded that sustainability in management education remains fragmented in terms of its teaching approaches, research dynamics, theoretical framework and implications proposed.

[Annan-Diab and Molinari \(2017\)](#) highlight that the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals requires inter-disciplinarity which is limited by knowledge base and time, and that sustainability education requires tailoring teaching to students' backgrounds. An example of international service learning program focusing on cross-disciplinary collaboration presented by [Tyran \(2017\)](#) shows that faculty learn more about how to make the PRME principles more actionable and that students understand global citizenship better. [Ortiz and Huber-Heim \(2017\)](#) argue that collaborations between disciplines as well as between private and public organizations are relevant for teaching sustainability, and that collaboration needs to be learnt, not only as a technique but moreover as an attitude. [Awaysheh and Bonfiglio \(2017\)](#) find that experiential learning can be ideal to teach social entrepreneurship to MBA's in business schools. By presenting the case of *Celsius* – the 2 Degree Challenge, a board game designed to engage business students and leaders in the climate change discussion, [Carreira, Aguiar, Onca, and Monzoni \(2017\)](#) highlight the importance of games as a learning tool for sustainable development education as it can promote systematic relations, collaboration and self-analysis.

#### 2.4. Why this study?

Most previous literature in RME shows that RME is important for a change to be initiated at business schools. In general, most of these studies could be categorised into two categories, first, studies that discussed how business schools are currently implementing RME in their curricula, and second, studies that discussed the main challenges of implementing RME. There are shortages in studies that explore the motivations behind RME or in other words the necessity of implementing RME at faculty levels. Moreover, most of the previous studies have been conducted in the context of western culture with very few mentioned studies in other countries including the Middle East. Thus, for a context where RME is not implemented at the faculty level such as in Egypt HE, and giving the reasons illustrated above, an initial explorative study aiming at investigating the necessity of implementing RME at the faculty level will help in paving the road towards more relevant studies later when it comes to implementation and challenges at the micro level.

### 3. Methodology

The objective of this paper is to find an answer to the question of to what extent RME should become a necessity for Egyptian public business schools. For this reason, the authors of this paper decided to employ a case study approach focusing on three public business schools located in Upper Egypt which has four out of the 24 public business schools in Egypt. This area represents 25 percent of Egypt's total land area, and the proportion of the population in that area is almost 13% of the total population in Egypt ([Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in Egypt, 2019](#)).

It is worth highlighting that only three out of the four business schools in Upper Egypt agreed to collaborate with the authors to produce this paper. Moreover, the three targeted business schools have embedded social responsibility as a part of their mission statements, which constituted a motive for the authors to continue with their research. The total number of students in the three business schools for the academic years 2018/2019 is 33582 out of a total number of 182769 students registered in these three universities ([Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2019](#)).

Unfortunately, the authors found a lack of empirical studies conducted on RME, particularly in Middle-Eastern countries. The research process started in January 2018 by determining the research community of academics, as the targeted business schools' administrators and executives did not agree to participate despite the attempts of the authors to convince them. However, given the importance of the topic of this study, the deans of the schools helped the authors in facilitating the focus groups and in collecting the relevant responses.

The authors used a single method of data collection by employing only focus groups with academics. Moreover, the authors used stratified random sampling to target their respondents. The focus groups were in Arabic, the mother tongue of the respondents. The duration of each focus group was 45 min. A total of 80 academics from the three universities were contacted and interviewed in six different focus groups. Unfortunately, the authors could not review documentary evidence such as internal memos, CSR reports and marketing materials, as they were inaccessible to any of them. However, they browsed websites to gather further information about the targeted schools' mission and visions.

The authors classified respondents into three categories based on academic degree (Bachelor's, Master's and PhD). The respondents clarified that using gender, age and religion for classifying academics represents a sensitive issue, which would be better avoided. By dividing the population into homogenous subgroups and then taking a simple random sample from each subgroup, the authors adopted stratified random sampling in order to reduce any possible bias and, at the same time, ensure that the chosen simple random sample represents the general population. The use of stratified random sampling guarantees that each subgroup is represented in the chosen sample. This study involves the participation of selected teaching assistants (academic tutors who have not yet completed their Master's degrees), assistant lecturers (Master's degree holders), and lecturers and/or professors (PhD holders), all of whom work in one of the three targeted public business schools of three different Egyptian public universities. The authors selected the interviewees based on their academic degrees, as first, this criteria is the most popular and the clearest classification mode comparing with the other criteria, second it reflects the academic reading and the likely understanding of the studied phenomenon of RME and UN principles and third, this criteria as by academic cultural default at Egyptian public universities include the other



criteria such as experience or age; or by research productivity? In Egyptian public universities, a professor rank means a professor who is at least 45 years old, and who has a considerable number of publications.

In the Egyptian academic context, students and officials refer to business schools as faculties of commerce, or sometimes colleges of management. The total number of public universities in Egypt is 24. Each Egyptian province includes one university except Cairo, which has two, and both of the Sinai provinces (about 25% of Egypt's total area), which have no public universities at all. Three out of the four public universities in Upper Egypt agreed to participate in this study. The Upper Egyptian provinces are known to have received the least media coverage and the poorest infrastructure development plans in the past successive Egyptian budgets. According to [Human Development Index \(2018\)](#), Egypt is ranked 115 out of 189 countries. The [Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in Egypt \(2019\)](#) identified that Upper Egypt receives less development funding comparing to other provinces in Egypt and that the highest percentage of poverty among 99 million Egyptians was recorded in Upper Egypt, mainly in Assuit and Sohag, with 66.7 percent and 59.6 percent respectively.

The authors choose these three public schools as they represent an area in Egypt, as mentioned above, the poorest infrastructure plans which was reflected in the education system and culture. This however will not delay the generalizability of the study results as the higher education system in Egypt is centralized and the curricula development is a process that is approved at central levels, thus all schools have more or less similar organizational structure and bureaucracy which are heavily reflected in the educational culture at universities. Additionally, public schools were chosen for this study as historically they are much older and highly supported by the government policies than private business schools.

The three selected business school include four academic majors (accounting, management, economics and maths) and, as mentioned earlier, the authors chose to focus on the academic staff (teaching assistants, assistant lecturers, and lecturers/professors). The total number of academic staff in the three schools is 82, 148, and 122 respectively, and the number of respondents was 20, 40, and 20 respectively. In each school, the authors conducted two focus groups with a range of five to ten respondents in each.

The authors of the present paper had the advantage that two of them had worked before in Egyptian public business schools before joining European schools. Moreover, the authors of this paper during their academic work journey were and still are teaching and researching in the domains of responsible leadership, cultural diversity management, CSR and sustainability.

As highlighted, the majority of the interviews conducted were in Arabic because the majority of the respondents do not have a mastery of English, and one of the authors of this paper had the responsibility of transcribing relevant parts of the Arabic interviews before data analysis. It is worth highlighting that the authors of this paper are native speakers of Arabic. To analyze the collected data, the authors followed four steps of data analysis proposed by [Miles and Huberman \(1994\)](#): coding, categorization, memoing and developing propositions. To explain, upon conducting the interviews, the authors used thematic analysis, which mostly determines the main patterns/ideas from the transcripts. Through this kind of analysis, the authors were able to compare each transcript with the other transcripts collected in order to narrow down the data sets and come up with the main patterns ([Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2008](#)). Subsequently, the patterns were coded into constituent themes, and the main themes were extracted to reflect the respondents' main answers/experiences/viewpoints. All authors of this paper participated in the coding and analysis after agreeing in general principals. This was done first for one focus group individually to see the similarity level amongst the three authors, then after reaching to a reasonable level of similar thinking and coding, the authors divided coding and the analysis amongst them for the remaining focus groups.

#### 4. Findings

Worthy of note is that the authors could not start their interviews before explaining to the members of each conducted focus group what RME is and what the purposes of responsible management are. This was done to assure consistency of conceptual understanding, particularly after the authors realized that the majority of respondents had not heard about RME.

When asked about the importance of RME to the economic state of Egypt, one respondent said, *"As an accounting professor, I can assert that corruption of managers in different Egyptian public organizations is the main culprit hindering the country's economic development. It has become rare for a day to go by without hearing about a big bribery scandal,"* he added. *"So, the idea of creating responsible leaders who put ethics at the forefront of practices and strategies is so beneficial to Egypt."* One of his colleagues agreed with him and said, *"Although the National Anti-Corruption Strategy was launched in 2014 with the aim of eliminating corruption of public employees, Egypt will reap no value without teaching present and future managers the culture of being responsible."* A respondent also claimed that Egypt is two steps behind Middle-Eastern countries in creating and developing a comprehensive curriculum for sustainable and responsible behaviour. The claim of this respondent is perhaps true, as according to the [Global Competitiveness Report \(2018\)](#), out of 137 countries, Egypt is ranked 130 for the quality of the education system, 133 for the quality of primary education, 124 for the quality of management schools, 116 for the extent of staff training, and 129 for the transparency of government policymaking ([Global Competitiveness Report, 2018](#)).

The same was asserted by the majority of respondents in the conducted focus groups. However, a respondent who wishes to approach the issue from a religious standing as he claimed, said that *"being a responsible leader or acting in a responsible way or delivering responsible education should not be a novelty to a country with a Muslim majority like Egypt simply because it is embedded in the teachings of the prophet of Islam; Mohammad peace be upon him, who is quoted as saying, 'There is nothing weightier in the scales than good morals and manners.' ... Although moral and responsible behaviour represents one of the basic Islamic principles, ethical conduct is currently declining in business practices with the economic pressures of this day and age,"* the respondent emphasized.

In addressing the social impact/consequences of RME, two respondents indicated that social justice and social peace are, to a large extent, absent from the Egyptian scene. One respondent said, *"Even though the January 2011 revolution has called for socio-cultural*

peace which comes as a result of socio-cultural freedom, Egyptians are still missing social and cultural freedom ... that's why RME should be prioritized to accelerate social equality." Another respondent, who was a Christian, said, "I only feel safe when dealing with Christians. And it is a fact distinguishing the Egyptian labour market that Muslims recruit Muslims and Christians recruit Christians. Accordingly, any chance to undertake cultural tolerance and teach social inclusion, as is the case with RME, should be supported." What comes as a disturbing discourse was the intervention made by one respondent saying: "Unfortunately, Egypt has become a country of divisions: we classify ourselves based on our age, gender, religion and political ideology. And sadly, the members of every category do not accept outsiders. Dissimilarities have become a source of conflict and sometimes violence instead of excellence. Therefore, RME should not be considered a luxury or welfare any more". In Egypt, as in some other Middle Eastern countries, the religion is stated in the identity card. This makes discrimination and persecution easy when overlooked for jobs, planning permits are hard to obtain and be a target if someone goes to church. A recent article published by The *Guardian* (2018) states that Christians in Egypt are facing unprecedented levels of persecution, with attacks on churches, when 128 Christians were killed in Egypt for their faith and more than 200 were driven out of their homes in 2017. It attributed the rise in persecution to the overspill of Islamic terrorists driven out of Iraq and Syria.

Concerning the environmental challenges, a respondent highlighted that the coastal line of Egypt's land is about to be flooded by sea water and disappear, according to some environmental studies. The same was claimed by another respondent who said, "The coastal provinces in Egypt will disappear under the Mediterranean Sea in the coming two decades, yet the challenge has not been perceived to be significant either by Egyptian business schools or the business community. This prompts a new approach of management education if the Egyptian business schools care about their legitimacy." What comes as a set of threats is what was voiced by members of a focus group who clarify that the environmental risks Egypt faces are no longer limited to climate change but extend to include carbon emissions, expected shortages of water, and a notable decrease in the total area used for agriculture. They all asserted the need to re-design the current management education if the business schools seek to deal with their surrounding threats in the Egyptian environment.

From an academic standpoint, one respondent said, "Business schools in Egypt spent three decades doing research about cost accounting, the balanced scorecard, accounting disclosure, consumer behaviour and sometimes auditors' conservatism. Despite the importance of the aforementioned topics, I find it illogical to consume further effort in addressing them without linking them to issues of sustainability and ethical practices. That's why I consider responsible management and RME as a pool of new research opportunities for both early stage and senior researchers in our business schools." The same was affirmed by another respondent, who voiced, "Adopting RME will stimulate us to pay more attention to business-society relations, stakeholder engagement and accountability for environmental challenges. These topics unfortunately have not received any attention over the past three decades." Members of another focus group mentioned that they feel embarrassed to find business schools around the world participating in and following the Decade for RME launched by the UN while public Egyptian business schools do not.

In another perspective, a respondent who is a teaching assistant doing his Master's study, said, "The challenge we fully understand is the fact that sustainability has no existence in our school curricula." Additionally, a respondent said, "Unfortunately, the content of the courses we teach only focuses on how businesses attain profits and how they can decrease costs. There is no attention paid to socio-cultural and environmental challenges in our teaching courses ... moreover, the implementation of RME represents an open invitation for us as academics to revisit and subsequently update the contents of the courses we teach". Along the same lines, another respondent elaborated that the limited collaboration between businesses and business schools comes as a result of the ignorance of sustainability-related issues in the schools' research and teaching agenda. The same was asserted by a further respondent who said, "The absence of socio-political, cultural and environmental challenges in our research diminishes the level of trust we perceive from our stakeholders in the relevance or value of our work ... consequently, a future adoption of responsible management education would be a step towards re-building our reputation."

Two members of a conducted focus group wondered: "How can we teach marketing while neglecting the preferences of our clients? The majority of our students have the opportunity to read and know how significant sustainability is, but they do not touch on it in our business curricula. Learning about sustainability practices would not only enhance their personal development but also nurture an ethic of responsibility towards the social and environmental challenges in their surroundings."

One respondent commented sadly: "I understand now why our public business schools are not recognized by the international accrediting bodies for management education such as AACSB, while many Middle-Eastern schools have full accreditation." And another respondent criticized the situation and the level of research in his business school: "The dilemma also is that we neglect the global research priorities which are addressed by other business schools such as organizational inclusion, the relationship between climate change, and different organizational phenomena and many more. These hot research topics impede our local and global impact, so the adoption of RME would represent a rebirth for our present and future academic performance."

## 5. Discussion

Despite the fact that the majority of respondents were uncertain about the definition, scope and purpose of RME, after explaining these notions by the authors, the majority if not all of the respondents agreed on prioritizing the implementation of RME in Egyptian public business schools. Moreover, the authors do not exaggerate when claiming that some respondents consider it as a kiss of life in an effort to resuscitate the schools' legitimate and ethical roles.

The view that Egyptian public business schools have to adopt RME in order to mitigate the environmental risks Egypt is exposed to currently comes in line with the results of a study undertaken by Mousa, Abdelgaffar, et al. (2019) and Mousa, Puhakka, et al. (2019) which asserts that the climate change that Egypt faces nowadays negatively affects public employees' affective and continuance commitment. The EEAA's findings (2010, p.69) indicate that "Egypt is one of the most vulnerable countries to the potential impacts and risks of climate change." Moreover, this vulnerability includes and is not limited to growth of carbon emissions, an expected shortage of water, rising sea levels and an increase in population (Winn, Kirchengorg, Griffiths, Linnenluecke, & Gunther,

2011). The responses of academics and their prompt call for implementing RME reflect a positive change in those academics' value system and their rising awareness of the desired social role they have to fulfil (Voegtlin, 2011). This may entail modernization for their research and education processes to be more sensitive to sustainability issues, on one hand, and more resilient to any work stress resulting from this change on the other (Epstein, 2018; Schwab, 2017). However, and even if there is an acceptance and/or intention of academics to adopt RME, the authors of this paper find it logical to ask, "Are academics ready to implement RME?" and consider this to be a question for future research. Mousa, Abdelgaffar, et al. (2019) and Mousa, Puhakka, et al. (2019) found that there are functional, procedural and edu-academic barriers that Egyptian business schools need to overcome first before proceeding with implementation of RME and expecting positive outcomes.

Much can be said about respondents' desire to tackle contemporary and domestically relevant sustainability-related topics such as community engagement, human rights, socio-economic justice, media ethics, poverty alleviation, and eradication of corruption by undertaking and developing RME. This is also seen as an agreement with the attempts Egyptian government leaders undertake to fight corruption and create a proper work atmosphere for constituting integrity. However, eradicating corruption is considered a difficult process in Egypt. In 2017's Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Egypt was ranked 117 out of 180 nations, down from 108 in the previous year (Parnell, 2019). In fact, in 2014, Egypt had launched a 'National Anti-Corruption Strategy' aimed at the prevention and combatting of corruption and upholding the values of integrity and transparency. The next due step is to integrate responsible management and sustainable practice in HE and particularly in business schools.

On another note, the frequent verbal and violent attacks against Christians, besides forcing Christian families to leave their cities from time to time for security reasons, has had its toll on Christian academics who think that there is no solution guaranteeing full societal integration and organizational citizenship besides adopting a RME. This has been previously iterated by Mousa (2018) who proved that prejudice is the main feature distinguishing different Egyptian organizational settings and that the existence of workplace discrimination is one of the main motives behind Egyptian employees' negative behaviour towards their colleagues, managers and workplaces. Additionally, Hassi, Foutouh, and Ramid (2015) elaborate that Middle-Eastern countries have not yet designed an employment and/or social equity act programme through which workplace equality and numerical representation of minorities can be realized. It is important to highlight that cultural diversity was decreed as a fourth axis of sustainability and RME in 2001 (UNESCO, 2001). Since then, different countries have launched their socio-cultural and educational programmes to disseminate the virtues of equality, justice and citizenship (Vuuren, Westhuizen, & Walt, 2012). However, and unfortunately, in Middle-Eastern countries, individuals and different employees are often sidelined on the basis of religion and gender (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In Egypt, political ideology has become a tool for discrimination and negative stereotyping over the past decade (Mousa, 2018). This may constitute another motive for academics' desire to prioritize RME in Egypt. Fox (2013) examines religious discrimination between 1990 and 2008 against 47 religious minorities in 17 Middle Eastern Muslim majority states, and found that 45 of these, including all non-Muslim minorities, experience religious discrimination, and found that discrimination is lowest but still substantial against Muslim minorities (e.g. Shi'i Muslims in a Sunni Muslim state), higher against Christians, but highest against Hindus, Buddhists, Druze, and Bahai. In this context, in 2016, several political bodies declared that the atrocities of the militant group ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), against Christians, Yazidis, Shi'a Muslims and other religious minorities in areas under its control amount to genocide (Kraft & Manar, 2016; Ochab, 2016). In Egypt, Coptic Egyptians still face ongoing risks of sectarian violence (Puttick & Verbakel, 2016). However, the Ministry of Education in Egypt announced in 2015 that it had decided to remove passages from primary school textbooks, considered to promote incitement and extremist ideology (USCIRF, 2016). Efforts to improve the status of Christians in the region requires a multifaceted approach including promoting inclusive and responsible education management as education can play a key role in promoting unity, eliminating expressions of hatred and marginalisation of particular groups, and fostering religious tolerance and inter-religious dialogue (Ben-Meir, 2015).

It is clear that intrinsic school-based motives are key reasons why academics prioritize RME, demonstrated by the fact that two respondents make a link between the low ranking and the level of quality that Egyptian public schools occupy and their ignorance of RME. This comes in agreement with Gentile (2008, pp. 40–45), Wood and Clair (2008) and Bertotti et al. (2012) who indicate that business education accrediting bodies such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) and many others have explicitly set ERS (Ethics, Responsibility, Sustainability) competencies as compulsory standards of their evaluation criteria. Moreover, the implementation of RME in the selected schools should be perceived as a response to their customers' (students and managers in this case) needs. This matter has been affirmed by Mesure (2009) and Doppelt (2010) who demonstrate that not only students but also managers and their enterprises consider sustainability as an asset for securing jobs and market share. This has also been asserted by Okoye (2009) and Holland (2009) who highlight that business schools' orientation to address socio-cultural challenges such as unemployment, human rights, food security and political democracy is the bridge for developing business schools' societal citizenship. In the Egyptian case particularly, adopting RME provides further research opportunities especially in the areas of CSR, ethics, responsible leadership and cultural diversity which have not been addressed there before.

Based on the aforementioned analysis of the interviews conducted, three motives have been revealed: extrinsic local, intrinsic school, and extrinsic global motives. Implementing RME in the selected business schools comes as a logical response to these three motives. An integration of intrinsic and extrinsic responsibility orientation should co-exist by enhancing socio-cultural well-being and reducing environmental harm extrinsically on a local and global scale, and by increasing academic relevance, economic returns, and competitive potential internally at the school level. The following figure (Fig. 1) has been composed by the authors to summarize the details of the aforementioned motives.



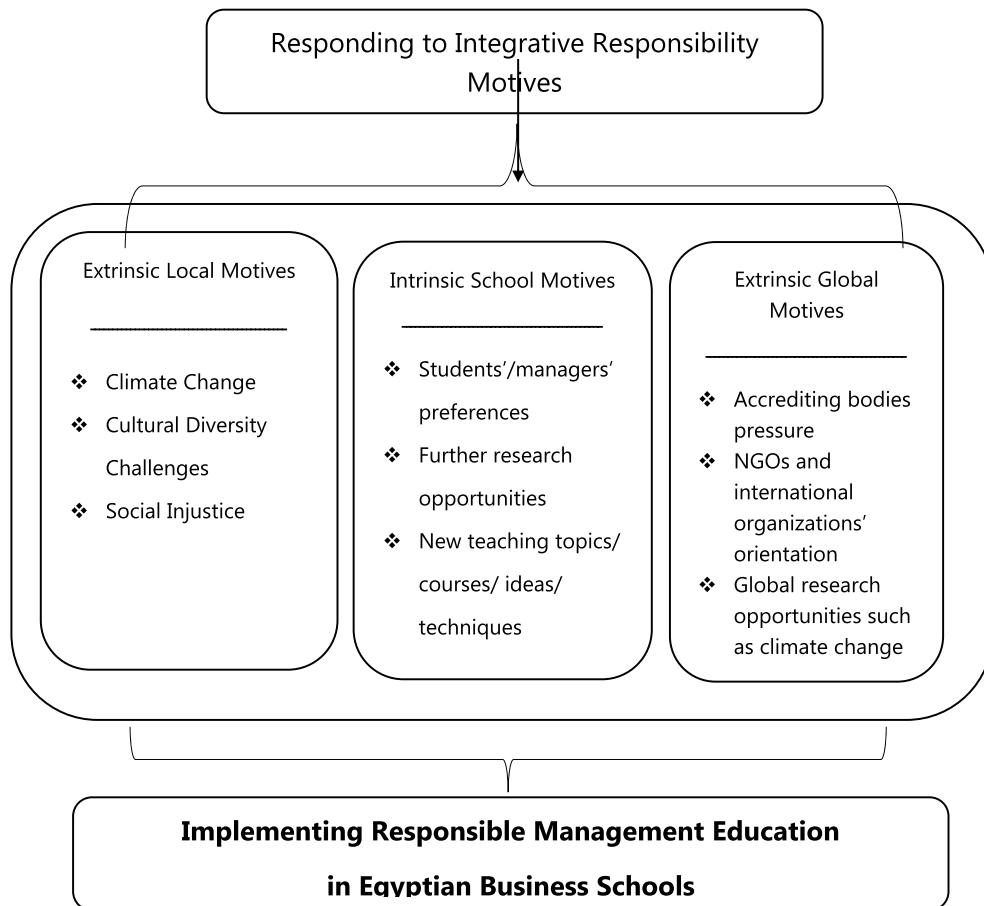


Fig. 1. Motives of implementing RME in Egyptian business schools (composed by the authors).

## 6. Conclusion, implications and limitations

This research has addressed academics in three selected business schools with the aim of investigating the extent to which RME should be perceived as a priority for their schools. Based on an analysis of the conducted focus groups, the authors found the academics in this study to be fully motivated to consider RME as a priority for their teaching and research agenda. Moreover, some of them went further and saw it as a cornerstone for rebuilding Egyptian business schools' legitimacy and quality. Based on the analysis of the conducted interviews, the authors of the paper have uncovered the following three types of motives: extrinsic local, intrinsic school-based, and extrinsic global motives for fostering the implementation of RME in the selected Egyptian public business schools.

As implications for the administration of the addressed business schools, the authors recommend initiating an open discussion among focus groups in the addressed schools to determine the extent of readiness these schools and their academics have to implement RME there. It is worth highlighting that determining the level of readiness entails an evaluation of the level of infrastructure and info-structure business schools have and the extent to which academics there are ready to deal with them. Furthermore, the addressed business schools should engage in an open public discourse with different surrounding stakeholders such as NGOs, banks, the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education, businesses and other faculties to identify the pool of societal obligations stakeholders expect business schools to fulfil and the kind and scope of contributions they can secure to the business schools before adopting the RME. Moreover, academics themselves should revisit the curricula of the courses they teach, the research they perform, and the conferences they attend to find out how successfully they can start moving forward in adopting RME. The authors believe that business schools should collaborate with the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education in this regard by establishing an Egyptian framework for RME. Specialized executives and responsible committees need to determine what academics have, what they miss, how to integrate RME in their curricula and academic practices, and how to create a benchmark model of RME that business schools can follow.

As implications for theory, the authors suggest that future researchers pose the same research questions to the executives (rectors and heads of academic departments) of the addressed business schools in order to develop more in-depth knowledge about the topic. Furthermore, the authors suggest other researchers find answers to the question of "to what extent are academics in the addressed schools ready for implementing RME?" Finally, it is advisable for other researchers to address private business schools in Egypt and

seek answers to the same research question as in this paper.

The research may be subject to criticism because the authors addressed only academics of the selected business schools and not those who occupy managerial positions, such as rectors and heads of academic departments. However, it was the intention of the authors to address them too, but their intention was met with disagreement from the executives there. Moreover, the authors of this paper sampled only academics in public schools and not those who work in private ones, owing to physical and time constraints.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2019.100326>.

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