

# Dysfunction and Educational Reform in Morocco

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## Abstract

Since 1956, the year in Morocco achieved independence, until now, the school system has been the subject of many discussions and controversies in the most varied areas of the country. We provide data on the educational situation. We analyze the reforms from a critical perspective, ending with final proposals. We concluded by acknowledging the efforts made in recent years in the Moroccan education sector, although there is still a considerable number of clearly important aspects of improvement.

**Keywords:** Morocco, reform, education, school, system

## 1. Introduction

The education system is an instrument favored by those in power to spread their ideology, largely by using education policy. The school, as an institution, cannot be detached from its social context; furthermore, it transmits and perpetuates the relations of the society in which it develops. The Moroccan education system did not create the division of labor, but it did contribute greatly to preserving the existing social order. The ruling class possessed the necessary resources to ensure that their children maintained the same social position, while among the poorer social classes, initial hopes placed in new educational reforms gradually faded with time. The jobs they looked forward to, and the attendant social mobility, proved to be illusory. In fact, the efforts that were made in education in favor of the poorer sectors of the population did not produce the desired results. Schools continued to fulfill their former role of reproducing social agents, and the distinction between citizens who had received an education and those who had not was a national scandal. The shift in emphasis, due to internal and external factors, has propelled new issues ranging from the urgent economic imperatives to the delicate question of political and social reform and far beyond to more complicated identity matters that globalisation has brought about. Consequently, a plethora of literature has been issued dealing with this subject both from official perspectives and ad hoc academic views (Arhlam, 2014).

## 2. Literacy and School Absenteeism

Pre-primary education in Morocco reaches only 61% (70% boys and 53% girls) of the relevant age group, with a very unequal distribution between the rural, urban and peri-urban environments. Primary education has the highest levels of school attendance, but, despite being compulsory, still fails to reach the entire population. In 2009, 10% of the population of primary school age was not attending school (Institut de Statistique de l'Unesco, 2011).

Since the year 2000, the number of those benefiting from literacy programs has continued to rise, from 233,650 in 2000 to 709,155 in 2007, representing an annual rate of increase of about 17.2%. The major operators in literacy are the civil society organizations, via the NGOs, accounting for 44% of the beneficiaries, followed by the public sector with 34%, and general programs, with 21 % of beneficiaries. The contribution made by private companies is tiny, with only 0.68% of the total (Conseil Supérieur de l'Enseignement, 2008).

In Morocco today, one and a half million children do not attend school. Of every 100 children enrolled in primary education, only 13 have any chance of going on to higher-level studies. The Moroccan education system is in a critical situation and in spite of the effort being made, the rate of illiteracy is still unacceptable.

Although it is true that the figures for most of the indicators relating to schooling have improved in Morocco, it is no less true that the CNEF objectives were not fulfilled by the dates scheduled. In view of this situation, the

aim is to achieve gender equity in every educational cycle and redress the considerable disparities between regions.

Table 1. Illiteracy among the Moroccan population over the age of 15

	1994	2009
<i>Men</i>	44.8	31.1
<i>Women</i>	71.3	56.1
<i>Total</i>	58.4	43.9

Source: L'Institut de Statistique de l'UNESCO: 2011.

Concerning the education in 2011-2012, it may be noted that Morocco has achieved good results in primary school (6-11 years). Indeed, the net enrollment rate in primary school, has reached 97.3% at national level, and 96% for girls, and 96.6% for boys (both rates are also good in rural areas, they are around 95%). However, the net enrollment rate in secondary school (12-14 years) is much less. Indeed, at national level, the rate is only 53.9% (52.9% for girls and 54.8% for boys) and even worse for rural areas, where the rate does not exceed 31.3% for boys and only 23.6% for girls, with a dropout rate of 15.8% in the last year of secondary school (UNICEF, 2012).

In 2006, the Higher Education Board carried out an assessment of the Moroccan education system and its report was alarming: many children drop out of school before obtaining a diploma, the academic level remains low and a large number of pupils have no command of a second language. It found problems such as: pupil and teacher absenteeism, overcrowded classrooms (sometimes bordering on 40 pupils), a deficient infrastructure (many schools do not have drinking water, toilet facilities and/or electricity), teachers complaining of the lack of resources and seeking greater recognition and an improvement in their working conditions, citing the dearth of supplies and equipment, the distances to be traveled to rural schools, and so on. All of this helps to explain the absenteeism of the teachers and their demotivation, which is made worse by their low salaries. Yet the national education budget takes up 25% of the total and 6% of GDP.

The corollary of biculturalism in the Moroccan school—with its roots in the French language—is a dualism, whereby pupils at private, foreign or Moroccan fee-paying institutions for the upper classes run along English, French or Spanish lines receive an education that paves the way to social and professional success. For some, the language question is key. Since the 1970s, Morocco has opted for a policy of Arabization throughout the school system; meanwhile, French is still the language in which classes are taught at university. Many students cannot attend classes given in this language and are obliged to curtail their studies, so that the system of Arabization is increasing the inequality.

To all these problems must be added the serious structural and organizational difficulties that the Moroccan education system faces. Many of these stem from too much centralization, and this has encouraged a reform of radical decentralization to redress the unequal distribution of human resources, the obvious rigidity in the administrative structure, the absence of gateways between vocational training and education of a more academic nature, the lack of a reliable form of evaluation, and the irrelevant role played by the pupils' parents in schools, among other things. In short, the internal restructuring of an inadequate school model is essential. The high dropout rates, the many pupils who repeat school years, the poor quality of teaching, the difficulties of pupils with special educational needs and the children of nomadic families or those who live in remote places in the mountains are just some of the issues where there is obvious scope for improvement.

### 3. Educational Reforms and Human Capital

This is a crucial moment for Morocco. There is widespread consensus about the need to rapidly reform the education system, which has neither a global perspective nor an integrated plan. The reforms that have been implemented up to now have been sector-specific. The failings of the education system are a reality that is widely recognized. Perhaps the first step to be taken should be to overcome the resistance and obstacles, and bring about a change in attitudes.

As we have already pointed out, Morocco is in a state of social and economic flux. For this reason, special attention should be paid to the "human capital" and ensure that it is the citizens themselves who become the most important agents of development. It is they themselves, acting on their own initiative, who should assume their

share of the responsibility, by demonstrating their readiness to adapt and innovate when confronted by future problems.

That policy makers should exert political pressure in order to make sure that the monarchy fulfils the promises made in the 2011 constitution (Alsaden, 2012). Bank concurs with this advice, stating that European countries should insist on earnest and rapid implementation of the constitutional reforms. He adds that they should also support further-reaching reform (Bank, 2012).

In a period of transition towards a capitalist model, Moroccan society is moving in the direction of greater economic development. At present, it is the university graduates who end up burdened with difficulties when they try to find a job in their particular specialty, occupying their place in society and the professions as best they can. Since a country's education system and its economy are closely interlinked, planning should bear productive needs in mind to prevent possible mismatches between education and employment.

The aim of the reform is to educate for responsiveness to change and openness, in short, to ensure that the students of today become citizens of tomorrow, integrated into the new social and economic environment, more active and better prepared for the future. It is obvious that tomorrow's education should not be confined to transmitting knowledge; what is required is a change of curricula and teaching methods which will lead to human capital being better educated and more effective.

The need to implement reforms which will modernize the Moroccan education system, adapting it to the changing times, was and is beyond dispute, even for the Moroccan authorities themselves. When the CNEF was adopted, an ambitious reform of education, based on consensus and government support, was drafted. A series of goals and strategies were proposed to be met by the year 2020. Nevertheless, its successes have left a good deal to be desired. The lack of adjustment to the needs of the labor market and the high rate of repeaters are two of the many arguments that can be used to prove conclusively that the country is burdened with a school system that requires urgent and profound changes. While not neglecting to recognize the efforts that have been made to improve education in the country, there is still much that remains to be done.

#### **4. New Attempts at Reform**

In September 2008, the Minister of National Education, Ahmed Akhchichine, presented the National Education Emergency Support Program 2009–2012. Its objective is stated as “consolidating what has already been achieved and making the necessary adjustments, guaranteeing the best application of the guidelines established by the National Charter of Education and Training” (Royal Speech of October 2007). In effect, in order to develop these royal guidelines, a very ambitious and innovative program was drawn up and is currently being implemented. Its aim is to accelerate the application of the Reform of Education and Training, proposed by the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education, Executive Training and Scientific Research.

This program, whose purpose is to rehabilitate the state school system—an essential springboard for the democratic modernization of Morocco—was adopted by consensus. It hinges on priority areas of intervention defined in the National Report on the School Situation and its Prospects, compiled by the Higher Council for Education in 2008. The urgency of this program is a result of the attempt to accelerate the pace of reform and make up for delays so far, with a coordinated and integrated approach based on the principles of participation, experimentation, control of the mechanisms of execution and close monitoring.

The main idea of this program is to place the pupil at the centre of the teaching/learning process, and therefore of the education system. The proposed action plan seeks to address four key objectives:

1. To introduce effective compulsory education up till the age of 15.
2. To encourage and develop education beyond compulsory schooling, above all at the level of qualifying secondary and higher education, in other words, to stimulate initiatives and raise the quality of education from collège to university. In spite of the progress made in recent years, the situation in secondary and higher education still reveals serious deficiencies: fewer than half the adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17 are enrolled in education, and the percentage of young people enrolled between the ages of 19 and 23 barely reaches 12% (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Formation de Cadres et de la Recherche Scientifique, July 2011).

At the same time, there are many higher education graduates who cannot find openings in the job market due to the persistent gap between the education they have received and the needs of the professional world. Measures adopted in recent years to improve the provision of secondary and higher education and develop the education of young people have not been sufficient. With this emergency program, a set of concrete measures is being offered to stimulate initiative and excellence by activating four key areas:

- To update and extend the coverage offered in qualifying secondary education, by refurbishing and adding to the existing network of schools.
- To promote excellence, in particular by setting up benchmark schools and developing preparatory classes for the Grandes Écoles.
- To improve the level of performance of higher education so that it can increase its student intake and train them appropriately for subsequent entry into the job market.
- To promote scientific research for the innovation and economic development of the country.

### 3. To develop cross-cutting aspects in the education system:

- To accelerate the policy of decentralization and redistribution of powers already begun by delegating more resources to different bodies.
- To give priority to the development of gender and promote girls' education.
- To modernize the teaching of Arabic, regulating the use of foreign languages and promoting the Amazigh language, bearing in mind the needs of the economy and the job market.
- With respect to human resources, the aim is to improve the skills and training of teaching staff and dignify the image of the teaching profession; to strengthen the supervision and evaluation of the various participants in the educational sphere; and to achieve the effective participation of all stakeholders in the educational process, by improving management methods, coordination, control systems and accountability.

### 4. To provide the human and financial resources needed to implement the program successfully. To do this, proper financing is required: maintaining and diversifying economic sources, as well as ensuring the participation of institutions of various types, and all this within a strict framework of cost control. In particular, nine cooperation agreements were reached at the highest level with:

- The Ministry of the Interior, whose objective was to implement programs and coordination mechanisms, as well as concerted action for the state schools.
- The Ministry of Youth and Sport to promote sport and physical education in schools.
- The Ministry of Culture establishing a general framework of cooperation across various areas, including continuing education, art, libraries, cultural activities and those associated with the national heritage.
- The Secretariat of State for Water and the Environment, to develop educational programs about the environment in schools and improve environmental awareness; also to promote a variety of practical activities related to environmental education and sustainable development, such as helping build a water supply and drainage system.
- The High Commission for Forestry and Desertification, to preserve the woodland environment by developing the rural area around the school, as well as organizing activities and programs to do with improving environmental awareness and skills.
- The National Office of Drinking Water, to improve the drinking water supply in schools—especially those located in remote rural areas—as well as finding space in the educational programs and socioeducational activities for water saving, the balance of the ecological system and the dangers of pollution.
- The National Office of Electricity to take electricity to rural schools, to make general use of energy-saving bulbs in school buildings, as well as maintain electrical equipment, share knowledge and develop action plans with the students and make them aware of the sensible use of electricity.
- The GENIE program (Generalization of Information Technologies and Communication in Education in Morocco) to improve the training and capabilities of instructors in the office of information services, guidance, maintenance and school refurbishment.
- The National Agency for Regulating Telecommunications, to promote information and communications technology in teaching in educational institutions.

## 5. Final Proposals

While recognizing the efforts made in recent years in the Moroccan education sector, there is still room for considerable improvement in many important areas. Among these, we would highlight universal access to education, which could be achieved by eliminating the inequalities that still exist. Segregation and inequality of opportunity are features of the Moroccan education system, with the rural areas being paradigmatic in this respect. The successes achieved in primary education have not been carried forward into collegial education,

particularly in rural areas. In fact, social background, the place where one lives, gender differences and so on form a series of determinants of educational inequality, accentuated by a parallel private network of openly elitist schools. Given the risk of perpetuating this situation, an urgent renovation of the school system is essential. If this is to become an instrument for greater equality of opportunity, the overriding objective must be to ensure that everyone of school age goes to school. This is a good reason for undertaking an effective strategy to prevent children from dropping out of school.

There is no question that there have been areas where Morocco has taken strides forward in achieving MDGs goals and in improving access to education; however, a comprehensive analysis indicates that it is lagging behind in meeting many targets. A look at what has been achieved in the education sector in Morocco makes us conclude that the Moroccan educational reforms have failed in achieving their goals. Issues of access to school, inequality of opportunities and absence of a quality education still do not respond to the needs of its citizens. The Moroccan constitution makes it compulsory to attend school until the age of 14, but reality contradicts that... (Nitami, 2014, p. 79).

To achieve an education of quality, a multitude of variables must be taken into account, which we summarize below:

- Improve teacher training, without neglecting the use of incentives.
- Foster greater participation of parents and pupils (depending on age), while at the same time providing them with useful information and guidance on content, types of education, work opportunities, and so on.
- Match the education and training provided in schools to the requirements of the job market.
- Provide an education that caters for all pupils, whatever their abilities and needs.

Obtain greater involvement from all the interested parties; that is everyone who has a stake in education - (teachers, parents of pupils, administrative personnel, head teachers, inspectors, etc.)

A rigorous appraisal of the state of the education system is required as it is indispensable for obtaining information and being in a position to regulate and run it. For this reason, a culture of evaluation must be developed, something which has been alien to Moroccan education up to now. Although the first report of the Higher Council for Education (CSE) in 2008 did perform the first evaluation of the system, the findings were not implemented.

If the intention is for the middle class to become the driving force in society and its mobility to energize the country's socioeconomic and cultural development, the education system must contribute to forming that middle class, which has been practically non-existent so far. There is no doubt that carrying through this modernizing proposal requires an education where equality of opportunity is a tangible reality and not just wishful thinking.

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