

EDUCATION IN NORTH AFRICA SINCE INDEPENDENCE

COUNTRY PROFILE: MOROCCO

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BACKGROUND

At Independence in 1956 Morocco inherited a public education system designed largely for the children of Europeans. A total of some 640 Moroccan Muslims had graduated from university,¹ and the great majority of the population was unschooled and illiterate. Education became the great social escalator, opening opportunities to Moroccans from all backgrounds and holding out the promise of jobs in the public administration to the small but growing number of graduates. Like other postcolonial governments, Morocco's pushed forward the Arabization of the school system, a process largely completed by the end of the 1980s, the last stage of which in particular was handled in a way seen by many as damaging the quality of education while at the same time the commitment to expanding access flagged. Since then, results have diverged: the best of the public and private schools and the lycées of the French Mission have produced excellent students who fill French universities. There are over 32,000 Moroccan students in France – the largest single group of foreign students there, and 66.5% of all Moroccans studying abroad; and this figure includes 4,335 at the Grandes Écoles. Of those at university 41% study sciences; of those at the Grandes Écoles, 68% attend the Écoles d'Ingénieurs.² These are the Moroccan elite, and many of them work abroad, or find jobs in Morocco through family connections and job fairs held in Paris. The public system on the other hand has generally declined in quality to the point where King Mohammed VI said in 2013, after a three-year emergency plan for education that had cost \$4.1 billion, "I am indeed sad to note that the state of education is worse than it was twenty years ago".³

Quality, though, is only part of the story. Despite considerable progress, Morocco's three-cycle school system followed by university, professional training or Grande École, has lagged in regional comparisons, with low literacy and attainment rates. But the last 15 years have seen concerted efforts, strongly encouraged by the king, to correct the fundamentals, through three successive campaigns – the National Charter of 1999–2009, the Plan d'Urgence of 2009–12 and now the Action Plan of 2013–16. On the whole the results have been positive, if not spectacular, with progress towards the Millennium Development Goals in this area, and UNESCO Education for All (EPT) targets.

Government expenditure on education is high, both as a proportion of GDP and of total government spending, around 6% and 25% respectively during the Plan d'Urgence period, which also saw non-salary investment in education rise from 16.6% of the government's total investment budget (2008) to 31.9% (2011).⁴ Morocco spends more, on both counts, than its North African neighbours. The challenge has been to translate this spending into results, through administrative devolution and reform of a very traditional, rote-learning-based pedagogy, to become responsive, innovative and child-centred. One of the big drags on progress is the very high cost of teaching staff, 2.7 times the average for a comparable group of nations at primary, and 3.2 times at secondary.⁵

Success has been notable at primary in particular, where enrolment rates have risen from 84.6% to 97.5% in the decade 2000–10, with retention of 90% to completion (2012/13).⁶ The levelling off of demographic growth has been helped (the grade 1 cohort was 4.02 million in 2004/5 and 4.01 million in 2011/12). At middle and secondary school, completion has grown significantly, to 62.5% and 33.9% respectively. There are, however, still some 1.2 million children outside secondary education. Gender parity is good and closing ("gender differences are not very

significant in Moroccan school enrolment,” notes the African Development Bank), though girls have pushed ahead of boys in both secondary cycles. There remain however, obstinate problems in the enrolment of girls in rural areas.

Although success at *scolarisation*, getting children into school, has been notable, and literacy has risen to reasonable, but not exceptional, levels (77% in the 15–24 bracket in 2008, as against 58% in 1994), educational outcomes have not met expectations. Morocco has bravely participated in TIMSS and PIRLS exercises, with less than happy results: 45th/45 in literacy (PIRLS 2011) and 49th/50 (TIMSS 2011). The country’s own PNEA assessment in 2008, one of the main stimuli to the reform programme, shows maths scores peaking in grade 6 (at 43% for boys and 45% for girls) before declining throughout middle school to a disappointing 29% and 28% at grade 9. In Arabic the story is only slightly better, with no average scores over 50% for either sex, but peaking at grade 9 with 40% and 46%.⁷

However, the expansion of school education combined with rising pass rates for the bac, is having a dramatic effect on numbers in the country’s Higher Education system. Total student numbers grew slowly in the first decade of the century, from 261,000 in 2000 to 308,000 in 2010, but since then have rocketed. In 2013 the total reached 585,000 (i.e. from 10.4% to 14.3% of the age cohort⁸), and in September 2014 the Minister reported growth of 47% in student numbers for 2011–14.

This is placing great strains on the whole education system, but in particular at tertiary level, where costs are highest. Quality ranges from good to not so good, and although Morocco was one of the first takers-up outside the EU of the Bologna LMD framework (2004–08), there is only limited continuity of quality between Moroccan and European undergraduate education. As the number of students increases, fast, the problem of structural graduate unemployment worsens, and the mismatch between university courses and the labour market becomes more painfully clear. This creates social and political risk, as all North African governments well understand.

Morocco’s problems are smaller than those of its neighbours. Despite being significantly smaller, in proportional and absolute terms, the growth in Moroccan Higher Education is very fast indeed and is already placing a serious strain on the system.⁹ With the rapid growth, there is time left, albeit not very much, to address some of the major problems before the worst of the “youth bulge” reaches the universities: Morocco’s fast-growing student body represents a gross tertiary enrolment rate of 13%, compared to Egypt’s 28% or Algeria’s 31%. The last couple of years have seen moves to internationalize the HE system, to consolidate institutions into hubs, to reform language demands and offerings, and to collaborate with employers in designing relevant courses. Real autonomy though, remains some way away, despite frequent assertions that it already exists.

LANGUAGE

Morocco faces, in more acute form, a language ‘question’ that it shares with Algeria. French traditionally is the elite language of culture, power and international trade; Arabic that of religion, the courts and public administration. But neither is the mother tongue of most Moroccans who grow up speaking either Darija (a dialectal Arabic that is some distance from the classical language) or one of the Amazigh dialects often referred to synecdochically as Tamazight. This lies at the

root, it is widely believed, of Morocco's problems with literacy, by institutionalizing a diglossia that seriously impairs the acquisition of reading skills in primary school. It may also contribute significantly to the difficulty of retaining children at that level.

The education system was never completely Arabized: tertiary study in science and maths remains in French with the absurd and damaging consequence that on entering university students of these elite subjects must switch languages, from the Arabic in which all public school education is taught, to French. This is much less problematic for those educated privately in French than for those emerging from the public system, often with skills in both French and Arabic that are not at a sufficient level for use in university study. This socially divisive discontinuity problem was highlighted by the king in his 2013 speech on education, as was the need to expand rapidly Moroccans' foreign language skills. In the last year, foreign language versions of the Moroccan baccalaureate have begun to be designed and trialled; and the Minister of Higher Education has made very clear in a series of policy statements that he intends English to become a requirement for higher study in the sciences. "A Moroccan student," he said in 2013, "who does not speak English, must consider themselves illiterate." The new 2011 Constitution made "formalized" Tamazight (an artificial synthesis of various Berber dialects) an official language that is now also taught in many schools, completing a complicated and difficult linguistic landscape.

Meanwhile the question of which language, Arabic or Darija, should be the language of instruction in primary education is a long-running, divisive debate, which is in truth political and religious to a far greater extent than it is educational.

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Moroccan schools are organized on a three cycle, 6-3-3, model culminating in the baccalaureate exam, which is the gateway to university. Primary enrolment is now high, at 117% for boys and 110.3% for girls (Gross Enrolment) and 96.8%/95.6% (Net Attendance).¹⁰ The dropout rate at primary has fallen from 6.1% in 2004 to 3.1% in 2009.¹¹ There are 4 million children in primary, of whom 11.8% are in private institutions.

Middle school, or *collège*, education (grades 7–9), has a slightly smaller population, of 1.46 million (1.44 million in 2007), of whom 6.6% are in private institutions, and an enrolment rate that is rising fast, from 60.3% (2000) to 79.1% (2010). There are marked differences in the rates for rural and urban schools: in 2010 urban collèges showed a rate of 97.4%, rural ones 59.1%.

Secondary education, much smaller at 871,000 (7.7% private), has advanced from 37.2% enrolment (2000) to 52.8% (2010), again with a very marked 80:22 bias towards urban schools, and a growing bias towards girls.

The baccalaureate pass rate has risen from 42.5% in 2009 to 57.3% in 2012 (with a slight dip to 51.5% in 2011). In 2000–08 an annual average of 95,000 passed: in 2009–13 that figure rose to an annual average of 164,000, peaking at 210,000 in 2010. In 2013 a French-language baccalaureate option was introduced (which has proved unpopular in many quarters); and this will be followed by bac options in Spanish and English. The English bac in particular, given the rapid moves towards making English competence an admission requirement for all science

and engineering faculties, seems likely to be transformative. Administration of the public schools system has been largely devolved to the AREFs, or local education authorities, since 1999. Despite valiant attempts at pupil-centred curriculum reform, the pedagogy remains resolutely exam focused and based on rote learning. Regular changes of approach by different governments have been notable, and the damage caused by constant changes of policy was another of the major criticisms in the king's 2013 speech. The appointment of an experienced and non-ideological Minister of Education in 2013, as well as the revival of the Conseil Supérieur de l'Enseignement to advise the Palace on educational matters, may prove to be the beginning of a new surge forwards.

THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Success in enrolment and retention at school, and a rising bac pass rate, have led to rapidly increasing student numbers. In the public universities this number has risen from 293,600 in 2009 to 543,400 today (an 85% increase), and across the HE system as a whole from 364,400 to 610,700 (67%).¹² The Minister of Higher Education recently cited a 47% growth in student numbers 2010–14.¹³ The proportion of students in private HEIs was 7.8% in 2010 and is rising, with a target of 15%. The retirement profile of university teaching staff is close to cataclysmic, and a recent report in *L'Economiste* noted that in order to reach the OECD median ratio for faculty-student ratio, Morocco would need to recruit 18,000 professors with immediate effect on top of the present 12,000.

Morocco has 16 public universities, of which one (Al-Akhawayn) is run on a unique public-private basis and teaches entirely in English: in the autumn of 2014 two major university mergers, in Rabat and Casablanca, are taking place, and there are moves towards the creation of inter-university hubs. At the same time, the newest public institution, the Université Polytechnique Mohammed VI at Beni Guerir, founded in partnership with Office Chérifien des Phosphates, is preparing to open its doors, while plans for a new university at Errachidia appear to be advancing. There are 61 specialized schools for the training of every profession from airline pilots to judges, architects, senior civil servants and teachers. And there are 196 private institutions, from universities like Mundiapolis at Casablanca, Universiapolis at Agadir and UIR at Rabat, to smaller and more specialized institutions. More than half of these are concentrated in Rabat and Casablanca.

Morocco was the one of the first countries outside the EU to adopt the Bologna Process LMD reforms, albeit not yet perfectly (Algeria and Tunisia have done the same). This is part of a determined attempt to internationalize the country's university sector, which has involved much groundwork in relationship building and the attraction of foreign institutions to Morocco. (The University of London, for example, has recently signed an agreement to open an office in Rabat.) Morocco is active in TEMPUS and Erasmus Mundus programmes, and is a significant exporter of students: the main destination has traditionally been France (66.5% of a total of almost 43,000¹⁴), followed at some distance by Spain, but there is fast-growing appetite for English education, with the UK as a growing choice. At the same time Morocco is the second largest destination in Africa (after South Africa) for transnational student movements.

It is worth noting that the place of English in Higher Education, in addition to the strong public statements by the Minister, is underwritten by the establishment of English-language competence as a criterion for recruiting university teachers in science and technology, economics, management, and health sciences.¹⁵

Research is a high priority for Morocco, but presents difficulties. Only one Moroccan university (Cadi Ayyad in Marrakech) appears in the world's top 400 rankings (at 301st in the *Times Higher Education*),¹⁶ though significant research is going on elsewhere in universities and more broadly under the auspices of the CNRST. With a low number of researchers by international standards (647 per million of population in 2006 as against 4,269 for the UK or 3,496 for France), Morocco nonetheless leads Egypt (617), Algeria (170) and Libya (60), while lagging significantly behind Tunisia (1,588).¹⁷ These figures do not translate easily into the number of patents filed: Morocco claimed only three in 2009 (but 46 in 2005), while Tunisia's much larger research community filed only four, and Egypt, with slightly fewer researchers, filed 65.¹⁸ Citations of published articles also lag behind Egypt and Tunisia, while leading Algeria (Morocco recorded 1.5 citations per 100,000 inhabitants in 2010, to Tunisia's 5.7, Egypt's 2.1 and Algeria's 1.1).¹⁹ There are problems about the legal status of researchers in Moroccan universities – and very serious pressures from heavy teaching loads in an expanding system. But language is also a hurdle, with non-English speaking francophone researchers increasingly confined – where they publish and work internationally at all – to a francophone research community that is itself recognizing the inevitability of English. Education reforms at the school level increasingly recognize the vital importance of English, and there are urgent, though controversial, moves to make English a condition of admittance to science faculties, ostensibly with effect from 2015.²⁰

PRIVATE SECTOR

Morocco has not one but three education systems, of unequal size but comparable importance: a public system, run by the government and paid for by the Moroccan taxpayer; the archipelago of French *lycées de mission*, run by the French government; and a growing pool of private institutions of variable quality, teaching, for the most part, in French. To a greater extent than any other North African country, the elite is educated differently from the mass of citizens; and this has consequences both for quality and perhaps also for policy decisions taken at various points in Morocco's post-Independence (1956) history. A sense of the function of the *lycées de mission* is given by the fact that 45% of Moroccan graduates from the lycées since 1956 have come from 500 families; and 15% from 20 families.²¹ Clearly the elite *lycées de mission* are beyond the reach of the vast majority of Moroccans, but a system of private schools at all levels has grown up to serve the aspirations of middle-class families. Of very variable quality, these schools teach in French, and the better of them give students a serious advantage in the bac, and in the fraught transition to science and maths at university – the high-prestige subjects still taught entirely in French.

The private sector is by far the dominant provider at preschool level (91.6% of the 740,000 children enrolled) and accounts for 11.8% at primary, 6.6% at middle school and 7.7% at secondary. This figure remains steady into Higher Education, at 7.8%.²²

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

As in most countries of North Africa (and elsewhere) TVET is often seen as a second-best form of education, with lower entry thresholds and lower outcomes. It is however extremely important as a means of equipping a segment of the country's young with workplace-orientated skills and

enhanced employment prospects. The Office de la Formation Professionnelle et de la Promotion du Travail (1974) supervises TVET, and is directly responsible for implementation of policy, as well as for the majority of the students in 237 colleges and institutions in the public sector. Divided into four levels, the training offered takes in at the top of the scale those who have graduated from secondary school, and at the bottom, those who completed primary school. The system has been growing at 9.5% a year since 2003, and by 2010 had 290,000 students.²³ However, take-up at secondary has been declining for some time, in line with a decline across the region.

Its efficacy remains in some doubt. By 2011 the differentiated unemployment rate for graduates of TVET institutions according to the World Bank was 19.7%, and of short training programmes 25.2% – against the national average of 8.9%. TVET graduates are therefore slightly better placed than graduates of “open enrolment” public universities (22.3%) and secondary school leavers (21.7%), but not by much.²⁴ However, the figures given by the ADB for unemployment rates three years after graduation are far more negative, with overall unemployment rate of 31.9%.²⁵

ENGAGEMENT AND PROGRESSION

Enrolment and retention at primary level have been Morocco’s great successes in the past decade. Enrolment is now over 100% gross (GER) and in the high 90s net (NAR). In addition, retention is good, with 90.3% of children reaching the final year of the primary cycle (up from 59.6% in 2000); 62.5% reaching the final year of middle school (35.1% in 2000); 33.9% completing secondary (15.7% in 2000). Ambitious targets (88% for middle school and 55.1% for secondary) are in place for 2019/22.²⁶

EMPLOYABILITY

The general rate of unemployment in Morocco has fallen from 13% (2000) to 8.9% (2011); but Morocco suffers from the same problems of transition to employment that all its neighbours share. In the 15–24 age band the figure is 17.6%, and it is higher still for graduates, who make up 20% of the unemployed in this band: graduates of “open-access” universities (i.e. the public universities, with the exception of faculties operating a *numerus clausus* and selective entry) see 22.3% unemployment, against a 21.7% for secondary leavers and 19.7% for TVET graduates. The country’s leading policy expert on graduate unemployment states that 80% of all graduate unemployed come from five degree courses: Arabic literature, Islamic Studies, chemistry, physics and biology.²⁷ Several universities are running schemes to facilitate the work transition and tracking employment outcomes meticulously; and a National Observatory has been set up with African Development Bank support. But the essence of the problem is structural. The African Development Bank cites some very telling statistics on the overproduction of graduates qualified for management jobs: it reckons that in the 45–59 age band, 95.9% of graduates became managers (of whom 39% senior managers), whereas by the 25–34 age band those figures are 34.4% and 10.3%. In other words supply is outstripping demand, and the problem will worsen until ways of absorbing the graduate unemployed are devised. It needs to be noted too that the continuing overhang means that each new generation of graduates is competing for jobs not just with its own peers, but with several previous generations, all still looking for jobs too.

There is also a very understandable risk aversion: 38% of Moroccans aged 15–34 polled (and for graduates the figure would be much higher) said that their preferred employment destination was the public sector, with its job security, good salaries and pension terms. It is hard for graduates to accept that the traditional compact whereby all or most graduates were once hired into the public sector is long dead, and with graduate numbers rocketing is fast becoming an impossible dream. But the melancholy drama of the *chômeurs diplômés* is played out week-in, week-out in demonstrations outside the Rabat parliament demanding non-specific absorption into the public administration.

DIFFERENTIALS OF GENDER AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

As noted above, the overall gap between men and women in Moroccan education is closing: survival to the end of primary is now equal at 99%. Essentially, in the earlier years of education boys still do better than girls, though by a reducing margin (boy: girl ratio dropped from 1.07 to 1.04 between 2000 and 2010); while at the higher levels girls are progressively outstripping boys (boy: girl ratio dropped from 0.97 to 0.87 over the same period).

Similar ratios for adult literacy (female: male 75.8%) and youth literacy (female: male 88.8%) show the progress that is being made; but there remain notable discrepancies between the two extremes of young urban males and young rural females in many measures.

Morocco is exceptional in North Africa in having lower female than male unemployment (19% and 18, cited respectively). Complicated as comparisons are, it seems clear that the relatively smaller size of the Moroccan public sector has protected women: across the region women are more reliant than men on public sector employment, and the shrinkage of such employment from a lower base has had less impact than elsewhere.²⁸

The Human Development Index places Morocco 129th in the world on the Gender Inequality scale, behind all its North African neighbours (though not very far behind Egypt at 125th), and 132nd on the Gender-related Development Index on which all North African countries drop significantly, and Algeria (129th), Egypt (125th) and Tunisia (116th) keep Morocco company at the low end.



NOTES

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