

Primary education in Morocco: Evolution and contrasts in educational reforms

L'enseignement primaire au Maroc: Évolution et contrastes des politiques éducatives

AIT BEN ASSILA Rachid

Docteur chercheur en sciences économiques

Faculté des Sciences Juridiques Économiques et Sociales

Université Caddi Ayad Marrakech

Laboratoire De Recherche, Innovation, Responsabilités et Développement Durable
Maroc

Aitbenassila_rachid@yahoo.fr

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Abstract

In Morocco, the low level of student achievement and the growing inequalities in primary education are among the most pronounced deficits. These deficits prevent any attempt to develop an inclusive growth model (OECD, 2017).

Despite the efforts made before and after the promulgation of the national education and training charter, quality still remains a value that struggles to prevail. The generalization of access, and although having substantially reduced the inequalities of access, has not been accompanied by efforts to improve the quality of learning.

This article attempts to present a brief overview of the evolution of primary education in Morocco, the objective being to identify the advances and constraints that are hindering its development. Thus, in the first section we will present the main evolutionary chronicles of this teaching cycle. In the second section we will try to highlight the main contrasts and fractures in the education policies adopted by Morocco since independence.

The aim is to be able to identify the gaps in relation to the objectives set both during the first years following independence and in those covered by the National Education and Training Charter.

Keywords : «Primary education» ; «schooling» ; «evolution» ; «contrasts» ; «educational policies».

Résumé

Au Maroc la faiblesse des acquis des élèves et l'amplification des inégalités au niveau de l'enseignement primaire sont parmi les déficits les plus prononcés. Ces déficits empêchent toute tentative de vouloir développer un modèle de croissance inclusive (OCDE, 2017).

De surcroît, malgré les efforts consentis avant et après la promulgation de la charte nationale de l'éducation et de formation, la qualité reste toujours une valeur qui peine à se prévaloir. La généralisation d'accès, et quoique ayant réduit substantiellement les inégalités d'accès, n'a pas été accompagnée d'efforts visant l'amélioration de la qualité des acquis.

Cet article tente de présenter un bref aperçu sur l'évolution de l'enseignement primaire au Maroc, l'objectif étant de déceler les avancées et les contraintes qui freinent son développement. Ainsi, dans la première section nous présenterons les principales chroniques d'évolution de ce cycle d'enseignement. Dans la deuxième section nous essayerons de mettre l'accent sur les principaux contrastes et fractures des politiques de scolarisation adoptées par le Maroc depuis l'indépendance. La finalité étant de pouvoir cerner les décalages par rapport aux objectifs arrêtés aussi bien lors des premières années consécutives à l'indépendance, que dans celles couvertes par la Charte nationale d'éducation et de formation.

Mots clés : « enseignement primaire » ; « éducation » ; « évolution » ; « contrastes » ; « réformes éducatives ».

Introduction

It is now commonplace to consider the importance that the question of education requires. Several surveys and meetings at the international level are attached to it in order to understand all the dynamics with which it is strongly imbued. However, and despite the progress made in this area, the effect of the policies put in place remains disparate from one country to another. The dysfunctions felt demonstrate that avenues still need to be explored in order to make more efficient a sector considered as the first "incubator" for any human capital capable of meeting the challenges of secure and sustainable development.

Knowing that any policy and the resulting effect are closely linked to the national, economic, social, political and cultural conditions of a country; It is therefore important to come back to the dysfunctions of the educational policies adopted by Morocco. Our objective is therefore to answer the following questions:

- 1) Despite the efforts made by Morocco to improve its education system, before and after the promulgation of the national charter for education and training, why is quality still a value that has difficulty in asserting itself?
- 2) why the generalization of access, and although having considerably reduced the inequalities of access, was not accompanied by efforts to improve the quality of learning?

Wanting to produce direct answers to questions that seem to be just as direct would be a purely simplistic approach. Indeed, an analytical reading of the policies adopted is likely to clarify the sources of the dysfunctions recorded.

1. Schooling in morocco: an evolution with continually pushed up deadlines

In Morocco, the education sector has undergone several successive reforms which have profoundly changed its physiognomy, its philosophy and its quantitative and qualitative performance. We will try to outline the main reforms that accompanied the evolution of this system before the country's independence until the implementation of the emergency plan.

1.1 Schooling in morocco before independence

Until the beginning of the 20th century, education was provided in urban areas in msids, zaouiās and the traditional universities of Al Quaraouyine (Fez) and Ben youssef (Marrakech). In the rural world, village communities ensure the maintenance and remuneration of the Fqihs who teach children the Koran, reading and writing.

Along with this traditional system, the protectorate gradually introduced a modern system

differentiated according to the target population: European, Jewish, and Muslim. From 1920, the national movement encouraged free schools which offer modern education in the Arabic language. But the number of children and young people attending school remained low at that time, both at the level of the modern system and of the schools opened by the national movement.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Moroccan schooling plan, set up by the protectorate, led to an increase in the number of children attending school, a number which rose from 35,000 in 1945-46 to 213,000 at independence, a rate of growth of 19% per year, double that recorded between the two wars (9% between 1919-20 and 1944-45).

The colleges were transformed into high schools, two colleges for young girls were created and high schools began to open their doors more to Moroccans. However, the school enrollment rate remained low, the education system inherited by independent Morocco was thus marked by very partial schooling, a shortage of executives and infrastructure deficits.¹

1.2 Schooling in Morocco after independence

Established as a national priority after independence, the reform of the education system was guided by four principles which constitute the backbone of its development strategy: unification, Arabization, generalization and Moroccanization. Attempts to achieve this necessitated the adoption of several programs. Thus the report of the commission of the five-year plan 1960-1964 emphasizes for the first time the problem of education as a whole and fixes work options.

In April 1964, after eight years of independence, the Symposium of Maâmora emphasized the need for a change in educational policy, in terms of school doctrine and educational planning (including budgetary management procedures and school buildings, financing problems and the revaluation of teaching function). The recommendations of the conference confirm the four national principles mentioned above and stress the need to improve the quality of education.

From 1964 until the beginning of the 1970s, great tensions affected the educational field in a turbulent political and social context, marked by the implications of the events of March 1965 in Casablanca. This period was also affected by an austerity policy, from 1964 to 1967, followed by strong economic growth between 1968 and 1972..

¹For a synthetic retrospective of the historical evolution of the Moroccan education system see, in particular, the synthesis established in the report entitled "Educational systems, Knowledge, Technologies and Innovation". (2005).

In view of the budgetary restrictions, the 1965-1967 three-years plans did not take into account the recommendations of the Maâmora. He even planned measures to curb mass schooling, despite opposition from political and union forces.

A new doctrine was developed in 1966 recommending the revision of the educational politics in force since independence in order to better control the development of education and raise its quality. It set as objectives the limitation of access to education at all levels, the extension of the timetable for the Moroccanization of education and the return to bilingualism. However, this approach was rejected by political and trade union organizations.

The 1968-1972 five-year plan sets as a priority the improvement of the quality of education and the global overhaul of the education system. A new statute for teaching staff was promulgated after the Ifrane conference, held in 1970. The same year, the Superior Council of Education replaced the Superior Council of National Education.

The following period, that of the decade 1973-1983, was characterized by the implementation of major reforms, focusing more on the problem of financing education, which is greatly weighed down by poor quality and excessive rates of repetition and dropping out of school. Profound changes were adopted concerning the school organization, the programs, the methods, the adaptation to the geographical and social space. It recommended the institution of semester cycles, the appointment of pedagogical advisers responsible for quality and performance, as well as the search for a balance between cognitive training and practical and awakening training. These proposals, as well as those tending to increase the training of teachers to 4 years, These various initiatives have made it possible to increase the number of pupils attending primary school in public education, going from 303,727 pupils in 1955-1956 to 1,603,862 pupils in 1976-1977. (Souali & Merrouni 1981).

The next reform, adopted in 1984 in Ifrane, was limited to the creation of the fundamental cycle, the establishment of quotas for the passage to the secondary cycle, and the establishment of a new statute for teachers. A 9-year basic education (made up of 2 cycles of 6 and 3 years) has been instituted as well as a 3-year secondary education (general and technical), access to which is limited to 40% of students from the basic cycle, vocational training should include 40%.

Between 1995 and 1998, the World Bank published a report on the state of education in Morocco, which advocates a profound reform of the sector. A parliamentary committee was set up to study the main lines. This period was also marked by the attempt to implement specific

actions aimed at school construction and the strengthening of human resources, as well as the introduction of the culture of evaluation through targeted educational support.

Several projects have been adopted (TFD, MEG, BAJ)² as well as studies and reflections on the educational system affecting various fields, as much in pedagogy, evaluation as management. In pedagogical matters, practical teaching has been introduced. A study was also carried out on a better articulation between the components of the education system, the definition of a new pedagogical architecture of higher education, the design and the launch of a non-formal education program intended to out-of-school youth. In terms of assessment, a national program (PNE) has been drawn up, studies to assess learning outcomes at national and international level have been launched. With regard to management, a public expenditure program (PDP) was prepared and a central organization was instituted thus aiming to prepare for the deconcentration and decentralization of the governance system. A fight was waged against absenteeism and redundancies. And proposals for incentives to encourage private education,

1.3 The search for an integrated and sustainable reform plan

No one can deny that the development of any country necessarily requires a school capable of guaranteeing both access and success for all children. Such a situation will undoubtedly allow the country to succeed both in its socioeconomic development and also to substantially reduce illiteracy and the ingredients of underdevelopment.

1.3.1 The national charter for education and training

The process of generalization of education in which Morocco has been engaged since independence has given rise to certain failings inherent in the persistence of inequalities of access and the questioning of quality. Faced with this observation, His Majesty King Mohammed VI declared in his Speech from the Throne on July 30, 1999 that the Moroccan education system "suffers from a chronic crisis" and notified the genesis of the project of "The National Charter of Education and Training "(CNEF), the implementation of which was activated during the decade spanning from 1999 to 2009.

Starting from the royal will, and relying on the contributions of national experts, the guidelines of the Charter aim to remedy the dysfunctions of the education system, through 17 levers of

²TFD: Training For Development; MEG: Moroccan Education for Girls; BAJ: Barnamaj Al Aoulaouiye Al Ijtimaïa or Social Priorities Program.

change covering all aspects of school life. The generalization of basic education (preschool, elementary and college) is therefore a major emergency. The charter specifies that “during the national decade of education and training, proclaimed by virtue of this charter, the competent authorities wish to take up the challenge of the generalization of preschool, primary and college education which will benefit from total priority over the entire territory of the kingdom”.

The main objectives relating to the generalization of education as they have been announced by the Charter are set as follows :

- *From 2002, any Moroccan child over the age of six must be able to find a place in the first year of the primary school closest to his parents' place of residence, by specially adapting the school to the specific conditions of the rural environment. , in accordance with the provisions of article 29 of the national education and training charter.*
- *By 2004, enrollment in the first year of preschool will be generalized. State financial support in this area will focus on rural and peri-urban areas and, in general, on disadvantaged settlement areas.*
- *Pupils enrolled in the first year of primary school will reach the end of primary school, 90% of them in 2005; at the end of college, for 80% of them in 2008; at the end of secondary education, for 60% of them in 2011; upon obtaining the baccalaureate; for 40% of them in 2011.*

Source: National Charter for Education and Training, October, 1999.

However, these goals need to be translated into reality. The impact of the effects that have been felt, shows some improvements, especially in terms of access. Nevertheless, retrospection shows strongly mixed indicators, because despite the generalization of primary education, the performances achieved remain far below expectations. Preschool has not been generalized, the dropout rate in elementary school remains high and means that a large proportion of Moroccan children leave school without acquiring basic skills and that, on the whole, the primary education provided has several shortcomings.

1.3.2 The emergency plan

On the basis of shortcomings observed, that the competent authorities have implemented a new reform entitled : The emergency plan (2009-2012), supposed to breath new lease of life into the CNEF. It proposes a set of measures aiming, among other things, to place the learner at the heart of the education system and to put at his service the other pillars of the reform.

The generalization of preschool education and the improvement of retention rates in primary education are among the first objectives, the commitments made in this area can be summarized as follows:

- *The opening of 3,600 preschool classrooms in public primary schools;*
- *The integration of more than 1 million preschool children by 2012;*
- *The improvement in 2012-2013 of the minimum enrollment rate to reach in each municipality more than 95% for children aged 6-11;*
- *Achievement in 2012-2013 of a completion rate of 90% in primary school without repeating a year for the children of the 2009-2010 cohort;*
- *The achievement in 2012-2013 of an enrollment rate of 90% for children aged 12-14;*
- *Achievement in 2017-2018 of an 80% college completion rate for students in the 2009-2010 cohort;*
- *The construction and opening of 2,500 additional classrooms between 2009 and 2012, mainly in rural areas (1,700 rooms);*
- *The establishment of 653 school buses with rural colleges and community primary schools to allow 50,000 students to benefit from school transport.*

Source: Emergency plan, 2009.

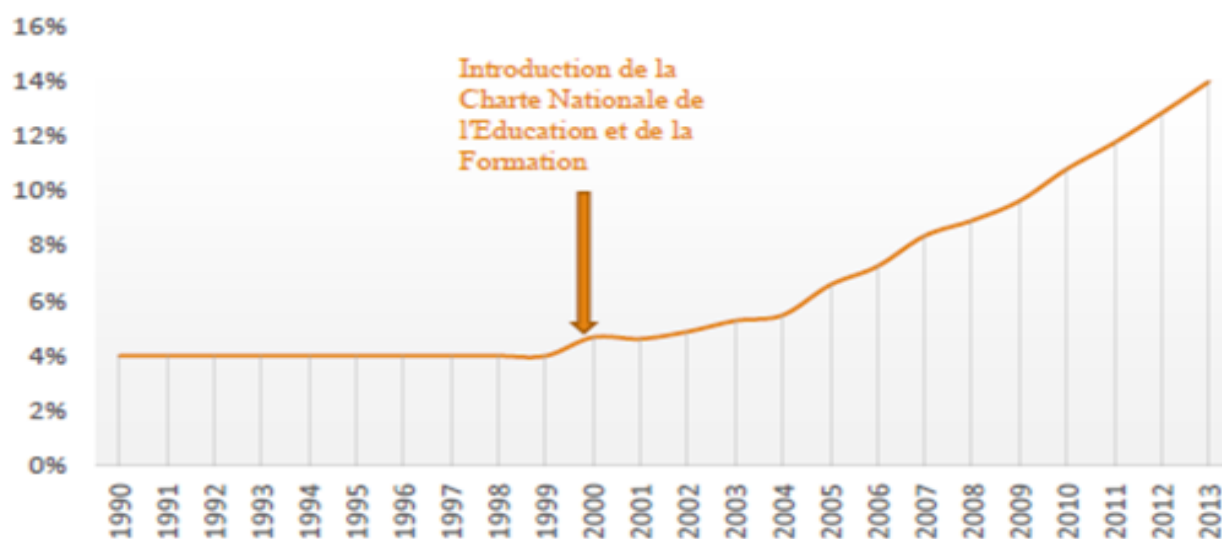
The objectives set out through the various programs and reforms are still reluctant to really get to work. Resistance located at certain levels, in particular the weakness of pupils' achievements and frequent dropping out, strongly question the slowness and effectiveness of the reform.

2. The contrasts of the education politics in morocco

Educational politics adopted since independence have always suffered from a major constraint. They are often presented as a response made in the haste of the emergency, often favoring the quantitative aspect to the detriment of the quality dimension. Thus, the low quality is observed between the public and the private sector and on the other hand between rural and urban areas.

2.1. Uncontrolled private development

Since the adoption of the National Charter for Education and Training in 2000, Morocco has voluntarily chosen to support the private sector as a partner in its quest to develop the education system. The Charter stipulates that "the private education and training sector is considered a main partner, along side the State, in the promotion of the education / training system, the expansion of its scope and continuous improvement. of its quality. ".

Figure N°1 : Percentage of pupils enrolled in the private sector at primary level

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>

The United Nations (UN) considers in particular in its last report published in 2014 that “access to private schools, which is based on the ability to pay often exorbitant school fees, violates the provisions relating to the grounds on which it is forbidden to base the exercise of discrimination, in particular "social origin", "economic condition", "birth" or "situation of fortune" in international conventions relating to human rights ”³. The same report raises that “the privatization of education in Morocco hinders the universality of the right to education, as well as the fundamental principles relating to human rights, by aggravating the marginalization and exclusion in the field of education, and creating inequalities in society ”.

Encourages it without restraint of the private sector, implies inequalities and discrimination between economically advantaged children and those who are disadvantaged. Inequalities in terms of education are growing rapidly in Morocco. According to PIRLS data from 2016, only 33% of children in the least advantaged group (poor households in rural areas) reached the minimum level in reading, while 75% of the most advantaged group (rich households in urban areas) have reached this level. Between 2011 and 2016, the inequalities in terms of learning to read between children from poor households in rural areas and those in urban areas increased by 26%.

Development blind private sector is worrying, it does not therefore take into account the situation of marginalized groups, the issue of inequalities must be the subject of a real social

³Special Rapporteur on the right to education (2014), A / 69/402, para. 41

debate. The United Nations (UN) is sounding the alarm by estimating that: “Morocco is sliding rapidly towards a model where education is regulated by the market, and experience has shown that such models are extremely unequal and inefficient ”.

2.2. Sociolinguistic varieties

Among the other glaring contrasts in educational politics in Morocco, we can cite the real linguistic malaise which negatively impacts student's academic performance and worsens inequalities. Indeed, Morocco presents a sociolinguistic landscape which is declined in the form of three great sociolinguistic groups: (1) The Arabic language materialized by two varieties: the standard Arabic, also called classical arabic (school language) and the dialectal Arabic called "Moroccan Arab" or "darija". (2) The Amazigh language, the mother tongue of the Amazigh-speaking communities, which manifests itself in three major linguistic variants, namely: tarifit, tamazight and tachelhit. Although they prove to be complementary in several respects, they are slightly different phonetically, morphologically and lexically. (3) Foreign languages, represented mainly by the French language and to a lesser extent, by the Spanish language in the north and south of Morocco. (Boukous 2008; Bensfia & Mgharfaoui 2013).

This varied sociolinguistic landscape, combined with the politics of Arabization of the education system generated learning difficulties. The extended place given to classical Arabic and the scrapping of French will logically lead to the creation of a real linguistic gap.

Classical Arabic constitutes the official language of instruction, carrying in itself a privilege for its speakers. However, it remains cut off from language experience, since it has undergone a whole series of transformations and mutations which take it away from the daily use of it. This form of transformation has given rise to several variants of “Darija” which could be reduced to the mother tongue of Arabic-speaking communities.

Darija and Berber share similar sociolinguistic properties, their use does not go beyond the familiar framework of everyday life. Darija is the language of the masses, followed by Berber. Classical Arabic takes advantage of its extent, despite the officialization by the new constitution of Amazigh as the country's second language. French remains since the first foreign language. French is taught in the first two cycles of studies, primary and secondary (college, high school) with a volume of limited hours. Its use, however, is maintained in higher education, particularly scientific and technical. The French language remains the reference in scientific and technical fields as well as on the job market.

The chances of Arabic-speaking students and Amazigh speakers to master French at the end of the initial educational path are more than reduced. The child, although a speaker of the mother tongue "Darija" or "Amazigh", is subject to learning classical Arabic in the same way as the French language. The situation is further complicated among Amazighphone children who have never known Arabic before entering primary school. Indeed, such a system eliminates the vast majority of students without solid linguistic and communication bases in French, the students face real difficulties of comprehension which partly explains the weakness of their academic achievements.

Only children who belong to culturally favored social strata manage to adapt more or less to the demands of the education system. Where appropriate, these social strata place their children in private schools and foreign mission schools which have seen their attractiveness progress remarkably in relation to this sociolinguistic paradox.

2.3. Socioeconomic varieties

However, in addition to the criteria of sociolinguistic imbalance that we have just cited, there is the extremely contrasting socioeconomic structure in Morocco. It constitutes in fact a catalyst triggering the process which hinders the quality of the education system. The socioeconomic and cultural structure of the environment in which the child evolves is characterized in Morocco by flagrant inequalities, both in terms of income and lifestyles, as well as cultural levels and intellectual aspirations thus constituting a certain obstacle to success. equalization of opportunities for access to quality education.

The influence of social environment on the quality and equality of opportunity is exerted first through income. If this income is too low, conditions become hostile to schooling, making child labor essential. This influence is also exerted through the family environment and its level of education. Admittedly, the high income implies greater chances of access to establishments which offer a better quality of education, but it is above all the cultural level of the environment which determines "the knowledge, the attitudes and the behaviors of the pupils, by the 'information it disseminates, habits, tastes, know-how it provides, the orientations to which it predisposes ". As a result, belonging to a high social background guarantees on the one hand material assurance for access to good quality education, and on the other hand the necessary predispositions for academic success.

Such disparities are in fact only revealed when education politics has begun the process of generalization aimed at providing quality education to all children of school age. However, this process never achieved its objectives. Indeed, the error of this Malthusian politics stems from the fact that it did not take into account the enormous differences that there are between, on the one hand, the various social strata and, on the other hand, the opposition existing between the city and the companion, opposition which still remains very striking in Morocco.

Conclusion

In this article we have tried to present some characteristics that have marked the evolution of primary education in Morocco as well as the politics underlying them. Indeed, the analysis allowed us to note the superficial and hasty nature of the politics implemented, sometimes trying to adapt to a shifting reality, sometimes to act on it, in particular after independence. Indeed, the strong demographic growth, together with considerations which relate more to the vagaries of political life have imprinted a particular evolution on this cycle of education.

The strategies thus adopted did not benefit from the serious preparations necessary for such an undertaking. The resulting situation highlights the contradictions that have made the Moroccan primary education system a burden that a promising sector, capable of playing the role of leverage, preparing future generations to take the path of growth and social progress. . Indeed, the goal of generalizing quality education, the achievement of which was previously set by the National Education Charter, is still out of reach. The waltz of the reforms undertaken focused on the development of the educational offer and on the increase of the enrollment in primary school while underestimating the negative consequences on the quality and the retention of the pupils.

Lessons learned from educational policy reform experiences show that every reform must be given time to take hold. In fact, the various reforms already underway are being carried out in haste. Indeed, adding classes, recruiting teachers and increasing budgets in a system characterized by a governance deficit is not appropriate to improve the quality of school achievements. The main objective of inclusive and equitable governance is to focus, as a priority, on how the school and the classroom are managed. Only then can deficiencies be detected and corrected.

Targeted and personalized support mechanisms for students in difficulty, as well as capacity building programs for low-performing schools, are the other side of the measures to be taken

to loosen the link between students' social background and their academic results. . These measures to compensate for the social disadvantage of students should be part of a systematic, holistic and diversified prevention and targeting approach in order to respond to situations of failure and dropping out of school. They should also be subject to continuous and effective monitoring and evaluation so that no child is forgotten.

To be as close as possible to the school-age population and raise the level of pupils' academic achievements, governance would benefit from approaching school pupils as closely as possible, through measures in favor of inclusion and equity and by vigilance at the territorial level to detect weaknesses and compensate for them. In particular, the objective of generalizing quality education for all cannot see the light of day and be translated into the daily life of the school without the overhaul of the mode of governance of the national education and training system. State responsibility is engaged on two levels: reducing territorial inequalities in the quality of education and readjusting the links between the private and the public in such a way as to respect a fair minimum of quality of education for all.

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