Transforming Schools Conditions for the Future: Challenges and Successes

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Do we need to transform our schools? Why and how? We had the opportunity to transform our educational system in 2000 but the transformational opportunities were not adequately mobilised to innovate and drive forward learning experiences in keeping with the needs of the future. The lowest performers in education quality in North Africa and Middle East are Morocco, Iraq, Yemen and Djibbouti. It is neither funding nor political unrest which affect education achievements according to the world results in education. What is behind Morocco low performance, then? Do we lack the will and determination to change the poor quality of education? Do we lack the right policymakers and engineers of education reform? Do we really know and admit with courage and responsibility our weaknesses in educationdevelopment when we attempt to resolve problems? To overcome the challenges faced by the education sector, the Moroccan Government

embarked on a comprehensive reform of the education and training system, with the

promulgation of the 1999 National Education and Training Charter (CNEF). The CNEF,

"with strong national consensus, declared 2000-2009 the decade for education and raining, and established education and training as a national priority, second only to territorial integrity." (World Bank, 2010)

According to a UNESCO report in 2010 the Moroccan educational system is in a crisis and its major challenges are equity of the system, low quality of learning, lack of internal and external efficiency of the system, and ineffectiveness of the educational sector. Other problems, according to the UNESCO report, like the high rate of dropouts and the dramatic gap between the graduates and the needs of the labour market are what characterise the Moroccan education system.

Figure 1

Integrated Index for Quality

Sources Statistical Appendix.
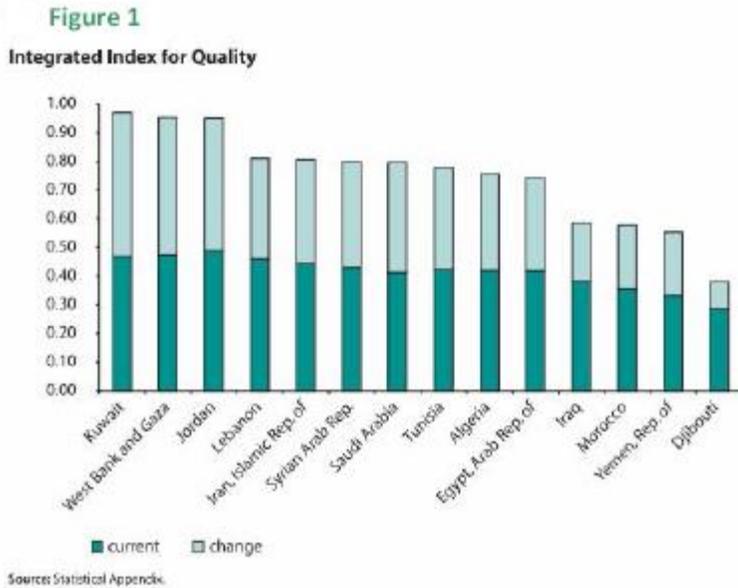
Source : World Bank (2007)

The EFA (Education For All) 2005 report identifies quality education in 5 groups of factors:

1) The character of the learner

2) The general context of the educational system

3) Material resources

4) The learning/teaching processes

5) Test scores of learners

All these factors need to be addressed radically in Morocco if we really want to move from the theory of the White Book (2002) and bring it to reality.

The new outlined objectives in the reform did not give the results expected due to many

reasons. One of the reasons why results did not meet the expectations was the lack of training for teachers to adopt the innovative pedagogical methods, «[C]e déficit de formation fait que la pratique de l'enseignement en classe s'est peu adaptée aux changements d'orientations pédagogiques décidés par les autorités éducatives et pour lesquels les enseignants n'ont pas reçu de formation spécifique. Ceci constitue un frein à l'amélioration de la qualité de l'enseignement et conduit à un réel décalage entre les nouvelles orientations et les pratiques

pédagogiques en classe. Il en résulte un décalage entre le niveau attendu des élèves et leurniveau réel ». (UNESCO, 2010). In the UNESCO report in 2010 there is a call for improvement of the relevance of curricula, training of teachers, ensuring the right to all in education without any discrimination by the promotion of equity in access to education, adopting policies to produce learners with knowledge that adds value to the world they live in, cultivating leadership, shared decision-making and accountability among students, teachers and administrators.

However, social class, geographical locations and gender differences especially in rural areas determine in Morocco the schooling of children and their retention in schools. The equality of access to education regardless of the individual's circumstances, background and identity does not meet the objectives of the charter « [C]ette quasi égalité des chances dans l´accès au primaire ne se traduit plus au niveau du collège où le taux de scolarisation n´est que de 73%,

avec des disparités très importantes en termes de genre et de milieu de résidence l´égalité des chances à ce niveau n´est donc qu´un souhait » (Rapport CSE, 2008) The study of Alama, Vélaz de Medrano et de Chedati (2008) shows that despite the existence of the law of compulsory schooling , there is no equity of right to basic education and especially at the first level of secondary education. The equity of chances in education is a far away objective. In 2005-06 in a group of 100 children who entered primary schools every year, 6, 5% among them left schools. They remained only 64 children. Among those, only 50 entered the first level of secondary education and 25 finished lower secondary schooling(collège). So fighting the problems of dropouts and repetition represents one of the major challenges in the future reform of education.

Figure 2

Integrated Index for Access, Equity, Efficiency, and Quality

■ access ☐ equity ☐ efficiency ■ quality
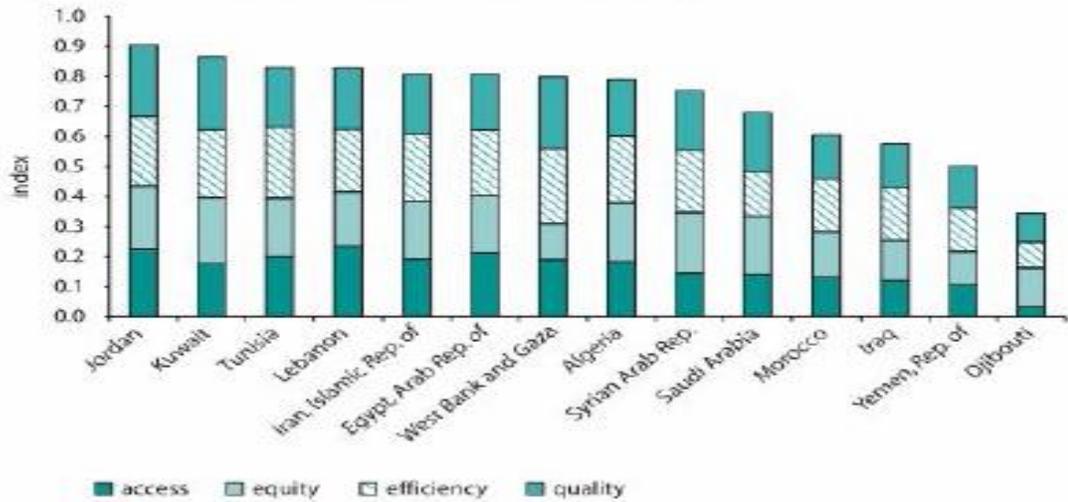
Source: Statistical Appendix.

Source : World Bank (2007)

alors que la généralisation de l'accès au primaire est un objectif réalisable, celui de la

généralisation de l'accès au collège semble compromis tant par le nombre limité

d'enfants qui terminent l´école primaire que par le manque de ressources pour faire

face à la demande latente. … Une réflexion sérieuse est à engager sur des formes

alternatives d'offre d'enseignement post-primaire, particulièrement dans les zones

rurales…L´existence d´un système éducatif dual aux différences tellement marquées

n´est pas seulement une injustice sociale mais un réel handicap au développement

économique et social national, à la cohésion sociale, et à la démocratisation

(UNESCO, 2010)

The high dropout rates and the low scores on international tests are a clear evidence of

Morocco's failure to compete internationally. Though there are improvements in expanding access and closing gender disparity at the primary education level, the education system does not produce the skills needed in an increasingly competitive world. Morocco scored 45 amid 50 countries which participated in the TIMSS test. (UNESCO, 2010). Compared to Middle East and North African countries it is among the lowest performers in TIMSS. (World Bank, 2007) In PIRLS (2001 and 2006) Morocco scored low, as well. Only 23% of pupils passed the minimum international score. (UNESCO 2010)

"The opinion polls conducted by COSEF in 2003 confirm the reported implementation

difficulties. The ETS actors and partners surveyed had great expectations of the reform, but observed that the pace of change had been fairly slow. They thought that:

 teaching methods and curriculum content did not yet match needs;

 working conditions for learners and teachers were not improving;

 the capabilities of those in charge of the reforms were inadequate and they had not

been sufficiently familiarized with the changes planned;

 local communities were not very involved in the development of education and

training, even though the CNEF treated them as key partners." (Hddigui, 2007)

At the request of the Government's highest authorities, a bold Education Emergency Plan (EEP) was drawn up to catch up on this reform process. The EEP, spanning the period 2009-12, draws on the lessons learned during the last decade. In this context, the Government requested five major donors (European Union

(EU), European Investment Bank (EIB),Agence française de développement (AFD), African Development Bank (AfDB) and World Bank to assist the implementation of the EEP reform agenda. (Pediaview.com)

The top four challenges facing public education are lack of adequate funding for education, lack of dedicated research in the present and past of education achievements, lack of commitment and will, lack of academic freedom, lack of transparency and accountability. The point here is that we can only begin to change education at our schools or universities once we have energetic determination through having a complete understanding of our education context, systems and processes. Policymakers, local authorities and schools must have the time to research and develop new concepts and strategies before engaging with the process. In other words they must know and understand what they want before going forward.

Other aspects that present a challenge to quality delivery are the relation of teacher and

learner that should change. This relation is still power oriented marked by violence or

exploitation as in the case of imposing private/home tuition on students through threats and enticements. The classrooms are overcrowded due to the shortage of teachers or their allocation and mobility (over 40 and as many as 45 pupils per class); (Hddigui, 2007) Outside these classrooms, we see buildings which are not equipped with hygienic and sanitary facilities nor do they possess health units for emergencies or sports fields, green areas and playing fields.

The current state of education has no correlation with what students learn in schools and what careers demand of people when they graduate and seek employment. The selection of textbooks and manuals does not follow coherent learning based objectives and is irrelevant to what skills students need to develop. This is one of the reasons why unemployment is particularly high among graduates. The high rate of dropouts also produces school leavers without any skills to meet the requirements of labour market. Furthermore, the lack of equity

of funding and resources in the education system is responsible of the disparity between urban and rural areas, between cities in the West of Morocco and cities in the East or North,between advantaged and disadvantaged groups who come from lower socio-economic classes or are disabled. Importantly, the achievement gap between these groups is translated in employment disparities. This shows that social inequalities are still dominating the education process though the reform claimed it would break the vicious circle poverty, low rate of schooling, poverty. (UNESCO, 2010) When we hear of the need to remodel our education system to face up to a number of new challenges that characterise a globalised world, that adapts to the fast moving labour market, and the skills it requires graduates to have to be able to fit in, when we hear of the investments in education, we expect they produce positive outcomes but the reality does not attest to that. We cannot see the economic growth returns to education, we do not see the integration of Morocco within top performers in education. We wonder why there is this disparity between investments and outcomes. One explanation is that the quality of instruction is too low for schooling to contribute to growth and productivity.

Illiteracy in Morocco is still a factor that affects the education process. In Morocco, the adult illiteracy rate is still high at around 40% in 2007. "Le Maroc enregistre l'un des plus forts taux d'analphabétisme dans le monde arabe. Même si le pourcentage de personnes analphabètes n'a cessé de diminuer depuis plusieurs années, il atteint aujourd'hui un niveau encore extrêmement élevé, proche de 40%. " (UNESCO, 2010) The illiterate adults have grown from six to nine million persons ."Morocco is one of the five Arab countries in which 70% of the some 70 million illiterate adults in the Arab world are concentrated. (UNESCO & Qatar Foundation, 2007) In rural areas and for female gender the problem is even worse; three quarters of women were considered to be illiterate in 2004.

Language acquisition is very weak at schools. The CSE (2008) report shows that language competency is insufficient and is limited both in classical Arabic and French which affects negatively students learning and their retention in schools. This factor also varies among learners'social class and background. The education

reform still cannot realise its objective in language proficiency and the results of this is the presence of « semi-analphabètes bilingues » produced by the education system. (Vermeren 2004) Instructional materials, learning space and language professionals for young and adult language learners should change. As to foreign language learning, the case is worse. We have to make sure teachers have adequate instructional resources for teaching not only a foreign language but first and second languages; otherwise this would remain among the problems that prevent from continuing education.

Technology illiteracy is dominant among school teachers, students and administrators. There are no computer facilities in classrooms, nor any other technological equipments or media tools for instruction that replace chalk board learning. The internet which offers unlimited potential to encourage learning is nowhere present in classrooms whether at school or university level .Changes in pedagogical practice involve the use of various technologies and tools as part of student activities. Teachers first have to develop their own competencies related to the technology literacy approach to be able to pass on to their students basic digital literacy skills. They should have ICT training, first, to be able to develop digital methods of learning to advance student learning which is changing all over the world.

The CNEF (1999) stressed teaching competency-based approach in the reform of education. Before any comment on this approach and the challenges it poses, we have to show that there was no provision of teachers or inspectors training for this methodological approach. So, the result was a complete confusion and ignorance among teachers as to what this concept means and its relevance to methodology. Watson (1990) states that the competency-based approach "appears especially useful in training situations where trainees have to attain a small number of specific and job-related competencies" (p. 18). (Quoted in Sullivan, 1995) Not surprisingly, we found in an Australian study a few years ago (Bowden and Masters 1993, pp 100—102) that more than half the academics expressed negative views about acompetency-based approach to university

education on the grounds that such an approach is too narrow and conformist. Yet nearly 80% of those same academics indicated that they had had no experience of a competency-based approach and nearly 60% acknowledged that they

had little or no knowledge of what a competency-based approach to education is about.

(Sullivan, 1995) What we notice is that the notion of competency-based education programmes was introduced mainly in higher education or vocational training. There is a

debate that a competency-based approach is appropriate for training institutions but not for university education. The notion of competency-based education programmes was first introduced in the USA, beginning in teacher education in the late 1960s, and evolved through applications to other professional education programmes in the USA in the 1970s, vocational training programmes in the UK and Germany among others in the 1980s and vocational training and professional skills recognition in Australia in the 1990s. (Sullivan, 1995) Facing these challenges requires an innovative and adaptable approach to both curriculum design and course delivery within the framework of an overall quality culture. The success will eventually depend on an efficient interaction between education research, and professional practice, between teachers and students as co-participants and parents to achieve the democratisation of the system. These are the steps towards quality education in the future.

Quality education is what can increase the ability of students, to add value to society and the economy by applying the knowledge of school subjects to solve complex, high priority problems encountered in real world situations of work, society and life. Such problems might relate to the environment, food security, health, and conflict resolution. (UNESCO, 2008) If we really want to transform education to achieve economic, social and personal growth, [F]irstly, we need to break free of our traditional and institutionalised ways of thinking, to think more creatively and to innovate in order to bring about alternative and more fitting solutions to the educational needs for the future. Secondly, we need bravery – the

courage to explore new opportunities, to follow these through with conviction and to develop models of learning and designs that are different and more appropriate than what have gone before, and this can mean challenging our own assumptions. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, we need belief - the belief that every one of us can bring about transformation as an active change agent through exercising our democratic right to be involved with the development of services that affect us and, most importantly, the young people we serve. (Rudd, 2009)

Conditions in schools and universities should change if we want to improve learning

effectiveness and offer learners opportunities to pursue curricula that are relevant and helping their cognitive and emotional growth. We should prepare teachers to have high –quality professional development to work in the right quality conditions. We should have new equitable measures for the selection of teacher candidates and designation of school heads based on qualifications and merit. We would then have teachers and administrators who do not make a poor fit with 21st education. Administrators of education institutions should be prepared to "cultivate teacher leadership and shared decision-making and help spread the expertise of the most effective teachers" and "be accountable for the growth in effectiveness of the teachers with whom they work, as teachers are held accountable for the learning growth of the students whom they teach." (Daughtrey, 2010). Policy architects of education reform should be selected from researchers in the field of education and know the day-to-day realities of teaching and learning instead of designing a reform by policymakers who know little of the needs and expectations of learners. Last but not least, budget constraints should be dealt with wisely and with transparency and accountability. Urgent budgetary support is needed to meet growing financing requirements in schools and universities. Those would be some of the conditions that support real and effective transformation. "Transformation is not merely modification, tinkering with the shell, the interior or outdoor spaces. This would be a wasted opportunity

both in terms of the level of investment and the potential to create new, improved and dynamic learning spaces" (Rudd, 2009)

Abbreviations in the text

CNEF: (Charte Nationale d'Education et de Formation); Education And Training Charter in Morocco COSEF: (Commission Spéciale pour l'Education et la Formation); The Special Commission for Education and Training in Morocco

CSE: (Conseil Supérieur de l'Enseignement); Higher Council of Education in Morocco

ETS: (Système d'Education et de Formation); Education and Training System in Morocco

TIMSS: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

PIRLS: The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

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