



HIGHER EDUCATION IN MOROCCO

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Introduction:

As strange as this may seem, Morocco boasts the world's oldest university, AlQuay-raouine in Fez, a higher institution that dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. Ironically, Morocco's modern educational system of higher education has suffered a series of setbacks since its independence from France in 1956. Soon after the French left, Morocco opened its first modern university, Mohammed University in 1957, to be followed later by a second university in Fez (EL-Fasi, 1962).

In view of the rising student demographics and democratising policies still in place, the country has reasonably expanded its university network which now includes 15 state universities that offer free education. This has significantly strained the state finances, affected the quality of tuition and ultimately released degree holders that are if "not unemployable, hard to accommodate in the job market as the Moroccan labour Minister openly admitted" (M.B, 2013).

Recently, over the last decade, we witnessed the emergence of private institutions which are invariably lucrative but have been nonetheless authorized in the hope of sharing the heavy cost that the state has to bear alone for decades. Most of these institutions operate in areas of business studies and engineering.

The ongoing education debate in Morocco reflects the low performance of this crucial sector in the economy. In fact, Morocco is ranked 155 in the world and 20th out of the 22 MENA countries (AMCML, 2013). Many economists relate the low growth figures of the Moroccan economy to its low qualified human capital (Zouhar, 2005). This is not surprising since the illiteracy rate is approximately 50% where over 40% of the 15-year and above population is not enrolled at school (Lebbar, 2013). This figure is very high in relation to a world average of 20% for illiteracy rates (Zouhar, 2005). It must be stressed that nearly 26% of government expenditure (5.38% of GDP) is allocated to the education sector (Index Mundi, 2013) whereas

public expenditure per student in tertiary education represents 82.3% of GDP per capita (WB, 2013).

Morocco has initiated a large scale reform of its entire education system as part of its development strategy to empower its human capital and increase its contribution towards higher and more sustained growth (Zouhar, 2005). Higher Education reform started in 2003 with the aim of solving the issue of graduate unemployment with which the Moroccan economy has been tackling for years but also encouraging innovation, research and development (EACEA, 2012).

Tertiary Education System in Morocco:

Higher Education falls under the responsibility of the state. The Ministry of National Education, Higher Education, Executive Training and Scientific research is the body in charge of this sector.

The number of Moroccan students enrolled in higher education is 339,044 where 308,503 are enrolled in public education and the remaining 30,541 in private education (OBG, 2012).

Public vs. Private Education

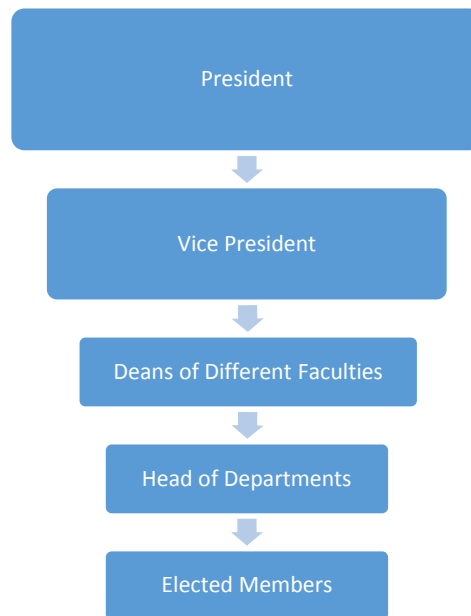
Public Education	Private Education
<p>There are currently 142 public institutions in Morocco (EACEA, 2012). They are free of charge and are divided into two main institutions:</p> <p>State Universities which have unrestricted access (open access to all students holding a baccalaureate certificate issued no earlier than 2 years prior to the date of the application)</p> <p>Schools of Higher Education (<i>Grandes Ecoles</i>) which are public institutions with restricted access (entry is conditional on passing a national exam after earning a high school degree with a set threshold usually equivalent to a B+). Medical Schools remain under the public system and are subject to the same admission requirements as the <i>Grandes Ecoles</i> mentioned above.</p>	<p>These institutions are not financed by the government. However, they can only operate after their accreditation from the Ministry of Education. Around 10% of students are enrolled in private higher education (OBG, 2012).</p> <p>There are currently 5 private universities in Morocco and 178 private institutions of tertiary education (OBG, 2012) that mainly offer courses in areas such as business and architecture.</p> <p>The admission process of these institutions differs from one to another. Their academic requirements are much less strict than those set for state elitist engineering and business schools or medical faculties at state universities.</p>

Education Programmes and Qualifications:

Like most education systems around the world, there are three cycles of higher education: This is mostly known in the educational jargon in Morocco as the LMD which stands for Licence (Bachelor's), Master's, Doctorate.

1. Bachelor Degree: the duration of this course is 6 semesters. Upon Successful completion of the first 4 semesters, the student is awarded a two-year undergraduate diploma in general studies (DEUG).
2. Master degree*: the duration of this course is 4 semesters after completion of the Bachelor cycle. Admission criteria are very strict as Master programs can accommodate only 40 students at most. Masters' programs require at least 2 distinctions earned during the six semesters on the bachelor's, together with recommendation letters, a sample of writing and an interview.
3. Doctoral degree*: 3 years (or more) after completion of a Master degree. The major requirement in addition to a Master's earned with distinction is a detailed statement of purpose.

*these two degrees have only recently been introduced as part of the reform agenda between 2006 and 2008 (EACEA, 2012).

University Hierarchy*:

*information represented above has been extracted from the European Commission report on Higher education in Morocco 2012

Governance Bodies:

- Higher Council for Education (CSE) monitors and evaluates public policies related to education.
- National Coordination Committee for Higher Education (CNCES) & the Coordinating Committee for Private Higher Education (COCESP). These two committees have been created as part of the quality assurance process of the reforms.
- National Evaluation Authority whose role is to audit and evaluate education policies and works under the Higher Council of Education's supervision.
- National Accreditation and Evaluation Committee (CNAE) is in charge of the accreditation process for masters and doctoral degrees and private institution degrees.

International Cooperation:

In terms of its international relationships, institutions of higher education are mainly linked to the European Union especially France, Spain, Belgium and Italy. Although Morocco still needs to strengthen this relationship and expand its horizons in other countries, its participation in the Tempus¹ EU programme has positively impacted the process of reform. In fact, joining Tempus in 2002 has helped Morocco modernise its system; setting up new courses, providing training for its academic staff and offering some Moroccan students the chance to attend European universities (EACEA, 2012).

¹ Tempus is an education programme run by the EU which encourages modernisation of higher education in its partner countries such as the Mediterranean region by running university cooperation projects. More information available on: <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/>

Tertiary Education Reforms:

Morocco has been pursuing its reform programme since the previous decade, although not without some pitfalls as indicated below. The thrust of the reforms lies in providing better access to higher education by fighting inequality (social and gender disparities), putting huge emphasis on the quality of the education system and encouraging good and effective governance (Hoel, 2013).

The National Education and Training Charter (1999)²

This charter outlines the main alterations to be made in order to improve the education system. As far as higher education is concerned, reforms mainly revolve around the following:

- Adapting the system to the job market demands;
- Encouraging research and innovation within universities;
- Revising and adapting the syllabi in order to provide students with a better quality of education;
- Offering better working conditions and adequate learning resources for both students and professors;
- Ensuring that the academic staff is qualified and provide them with regular training programmes;
- Better governance.

² The list of the reforms above has been extracted from the national document of the chart available in the Ministry of Education's official website.

The Emergency Plan (2009)

Due to several delays in the implementation of the reform, a three year- emergency plan was launched in 2009 to jumpstart the reform. The programme spanned three years 2009 through 2012.

The Oxford Business Report on Morocco OBG (2012) provides a detailed breakdown of the financing of the Emergency plan which amounted to 1.1bn Euros.

- 62% of the funding has been attributed to the enhancement of tertiary education.
- 17% has been allocated to student welfare benefits
- 12% for better governance and higher teaching quality
- 9% has been assigned to scientific research.

The Emergency plan has also been financed by external bodies. The table* below gives a summary of external financial support.

Name of the Institution	Amount of loan or donation (euros)
World Bank	80m
French Development Agency	50m
European Investment Bank	200m
European Commission	93m
African Development Bank	75m

*Source: information in this table has been extracted from the Oxford Business Report 2012

Although some goals were achieved, many remained on hold. Students continuously go on strikes protesting against the system and the high graduate unemployment rates. Every day, thousands of graduates protest in front of the House of Parliament in Rabat expressing their dissatisfaction with the education

system and its failure to equip them with the necessary skills to access the job market (Alami, 2013).

The 2013 Speech of King Mohamed VI: A Wake up Call

In his speech on the 21st of August 2013, King Mohamed VI expressed his disappointment with the progress of the education system reforms and its poor outcomes. He raised the awareness of educational authorities about the deteriorating standards of the education system in Morocco. He also pointed out to the failure of the Emergency Plan. Furthermore, he emphasised on tailoring education to the job market by enhancing vocational training and the need to tackle the issue of obsolete courses as he said: "Educational institutions which provide such courses should not be factories that produce unemployable graduates, particularly in certain obsolete subjects" (Lebbar, 2013).

The monarch also noted that the education problem should not be perceived as a political matter but it should be addressed from an economic and social angle where the aim is to build a strong and qualified human capital that can boost the development of the Moroccan nation. Indeed, this can only be achieved through an efficient provision of education (Lebbar, 2013).

Current Challenges:

Teaching:

In order to ensure a better quality of teaching, several improvements need to be made. First, the authorities need to reduce the staff to student ratio which is 1:29 at state universities (EACEA, 2012). Second, they should equip schools and universities with the appropriate facilities, especially in the field of science. Third, the authorities should modernise the syllabi and consolidate the learning of foreign languages (French and English). Last, they should offer vocational courses in order to meet the needs of the labour market in the most effective way and solve the unemployment dilemma besetting the Moroccan economy.

Research:

Research is a major obstacle in the higher education reform. Morocco is far behind in areas of research and technology and is not involved in any international research networks not only because of its low skilled human capital but also because of the lack of the necessary resources to undertake research projects. Research and development represent only 0.65% of the GDP (A.N, 2011).

Lack of initiative from individuals is also a problem. The root cause of this problem lies in the education system starting from primary school where students are not taught the importance of initiative taking nor given opportunities to be creative and develop a sense of innovation. It is a culture of learning that focuses on quantity instead of quality. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritise research in the reform agenda by promoting the learning of science, encouraging innovation since an early age and teaching research skills to students starting from high school.

Deborah MacArthur, president of an American university in Casablanca criticises the system saying “what is key to transitioning to professional life is to have innovative and critical thinking skills, as well as collaborative skills. This is what is

lacking in the Moroccan education system” (OBG, 2013, p. 230). Graduates from state institutions are ill-equipped for the job market. According to a survey conducted by the World Bank and the Agence Francaise de Developement, 31% of Moroccan companies deplore Moroccan state university graduates’ deficiency in cognitive, behavioural and cognitive skills (Jaramillo & Melonio, 2011).

Inequality:

As mentioned earlier, there is a strong correlation between employment and educational training. In fact, the corporate world is more welcoming of foreign degree holders and graduates of private universities; which puts at a disadvantage state university degree holders. One might well wonder about the reason.

In order to understand this “favouritism”, we need to look into the link between secondary education and higher education. Many parents (with the required financial means) prefer to put their children in private schools as these offer more learning-conducive environments: small size classes, better supervision and individual support. Indeed, these parents enrol their children in private institutions in the hope of guaranteeing high quality education and increasing their children’s employment opportunities. Not only do Students in private schools receive better academic training and higher language proficiency but they also benefit from extracurricular activities that are almost inexistent at state schools.

The government is obviously caught in a double bind. Higher education officials want to guarantee education for all but at the same time promote these private institutions by giving them tax incentives such as VAT exemption. In fact, private education has become an attractive business for many investors due to the “differentiated” demand in the education market as well as to excess demand that governments often fail to meet (WB, 2013). Besides, it could be perceived as a long term investment where demand is relatively inelastic (less sensitive to shocks) and a sector which receives government support more than others (AMCML, 2013). A

Recent study published in the Moroccan Daily has revealed that private higher education covers 9% of the cost for the entire higher education in the country (M.B, 2013).

Another form of inequality relates to gender in education. Female's illiteracy rate in Morocco is 66% (AMCML, 2013). This high figure is to be ascribed to some patriarchal cultural norms still present in the Moroccan society especially in rural areas. Even though girls' schooling is an issue which directly affects primary and secondary school enrolment rates, it negatively impacts the tertiary education system as fewer women gain access to it. This slows down the development strategies Morocco has adopted with regard to women's rights and emancipation.

Where are we now?

The educational system is now under pressure not only to increase access to education but also to accommodate graduates into the labour market. The Moroccan government has shown enough political will to improve the education system. The 2013 Oxford Business Report on Morocco has underscored the country's efforts in increasing international cooperation with foreign institutions, strengthening government support to students through scholarship programmes and the emphasis on an educational training geared towards science and research.

More autonomy has been given to universities in terms of their academic and financial management. In fact, the Ministry of Education's role is to regulate and oversee the performance of the 16 education and training academies. "We have to take into account regional needs. The current political landscape demands more decentralisation and greater regionalisation." Aziz Guedari, head of research and statistical division at the Ministry of Education (OBG, 2012, p. 222).

In terms of foreign collaboration, many partnerships have currently been brought to discussion with several universities such as University of Valenciennes in France, University of Granada in Spain and some other Russian Universities. The government has been encouraging these collaborations by giving its support to these institutions and providing them with state-owned land. "Under the current dynamic, the increase of university offers as well as international cooperation is essential. We want to transform Morocco into a regional education and research centre." Abdelhafid Debbarh, Secretary General of the department of Higher Education (OBG, 2013, p. 235).

In terms of training, the government has launched in collaboration of the Bureau of Official training and Employment Enhancement OFPTT training programmes to improve previously acquired skills and develop new ones in order to have a qualified human capital in different sectors such manufacturing industry,

construction sector, logistics and transport as well as aeronautics (OBG, 2013). Indeed, the reform agenda has put huge emphasis on engineering and technical courses as part of Morocco's strategy in upgrading its human capital to achieve higher economic growth. Figures reported by the UNESCO show an increase in the number of manufacturing and construction engineers from 2829 in 2005 to 10,300 in 2010. The enrolment rate in science and technology schemes has risen from 55.1% in 2008 to 60.6% in 2011 (OBG, 2013). However, demand and supply of engineers are yet to match. Statistics suggest in terms of ratio 8.6 engineers per 10,000 people in Morocco compared to 64 in France and 540 in Japan (OBG, 2013). Such a finding calls for further efforts to promote the learning of sciences and enrolment in engineering courses especially in areas such as renewable energies and IT.

The current agenda of reforms stresses the need for public-private partnerships (PPs) in order to meet the market demands and overcome the overcrowding problem in public universities. Thami Ghorfi, president of ESCAE Management School suggests that "Developing PPs between public and private institutions can help to increase the capacity of the system as a whole, helping provide places for more students" (OBG, 2013, p. 237)

Conclusion:

No one can deny that Morocco has made substantial progress in the tertiary education reform process. However, the path towards reform is still long. Although enrolment rates are increasing in primary and secondary education, many students drop out of high school and thus never make it to university. In fact, 3 out of a 100 students are holders of a bachelor's degree (OBG, 2013). This implies that the tertiary education reform needs to identify root causes that lie in primary and secondary education.

The public versus private provision of education dilemma remains unresolved to this date. This issue needs to be tackled by the government and the parties involved and should be at the top of the education agenda since it causes inefficiencies and inequalities in the education system that manifest on the job market. Indeed, the government ought to restore the confidence of its people in the public system of education (Hoel, 2013).

As mentioned earlier, the Moroccan government spending on education is very high (it has been ranked 5th in the world in terms of its public expenditure on education). This brings us to ask the hardest question of all. Is Morocco throwing money down the drain? One thing is for sure, the success of reform by no means hinges on financial resources alone. Consistent and sustainable reform strategies also come into play (Hoel, 2013). The involvement of civil society as well as the study body as the major stakeholders is crucial to successful reforms.

Morocco has been considerably responsive to recommendations made by the World Bank and the Agence Francaise de Development to countries of the MENA region (Jaramillo & Melonio, 2011). It has promoted public and private partnerships in order to optimise the sources and facilities. In 2011 and in an unprecedented manner, the private International University of Casablanca signed a partnership with the state university Hassan II Casablanca (Satori, 2011). It has also launched a

student guaranteed loan scheme. It was even brave enough to reconsider the policy of free tuition at state schools in a bid to make medium and high income households bear the cost (Ali, 2012).

One viable option that the ministry of education should seriously consider following one the World Bank's recommendations is to put in place a US style endowment policy (Jaramillo & Melonio, 2011). The current government, led by the Islamist party, can appeal to wealthy individuals and leading business organizations that can potentially share the high cost of higher education by endowing public universities and benefiting from tax deduction in return.

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