

Moroccan University Education: A History of a Failing Dualistic System

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Abstract

The university's dualistic system and the intrusion of politics into Moroccan higher education began long before the French protectorate, with a long-lasting traditional education aimed at the elite. It then increased during the protectorate and after Moroccan independence. Since then, Moroccan higher education has undergone several reforms to improve the university's educational system. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how most of these reforms resembled each other in their development and implementation processes: an ambitious political vision, long and difficult consultation with social partners, the promulgation of laws or the publication of administrative texts, media coverage that vacillates between support and defiance, and on the ground, a less than enthusiastic reception and implementation. Consequently, despite significant human and financial investments, the university remains trapped in a dualistic education favoring the limited admissions system over the open admissions', thus increasing student attrition and unemployment.

Keywords: Higher education, university, reform, open admissions, limited admissions.

1. Introduction

Despite the substantial progress made in Moroccan higher education since independence in 1956, significant challenges impede the university's development. Quantity has overtaken quality, and university education lacks a coherent and sustainable overall educational strategy, resulting in a dualistic university system broken up into open admissions versus limited admissions institutions with no unifying links. This dualism dates back to the French protectorate era, where selective higher schools were accessible to the elite and open admissions institutions, namely faculties to "the others." Today, not only does the state continue to reinforce this dualistic system, but it has added a third dimension to weaken the public university by creating private Moroccan universities, and in the last decade, by encouraging the mass influx of foreign universities, leading thus to more failure and more profound social inequalities. Through a chronological review of the leading educational reforms, this article aims to demonstrate that Moroccan university education has remained dependent on the vicissitudes of politics and further established its dual system. The article focuses on the National Charter for Education and Training (1999), the "Licence, Master, Doctorat" (LMD) system (2003-2004), the Emergency Program (2009-2012), and the Strategic Vision (2015-2030), and the Framework Law 51.17.

2. Development of the Higher Education System in Morocco

2.1 A Brief Overview of Traditional Higher Education in Morocco Before 1912:

Higher education in Morocco has a long-standing tradition that dates to the middle of the ninth century with Al Quaraouiyine University (henceforth referred to as AQU), founded in 859 CE

in Fez. Initially, AQU was founded as a mosque and subsequently developed into a teaching university. AQU was not only of a religious type, but also offered other disciplines, including mathematics, medicine, philosophy, sociology, architecture, law, astrology, historiography, economics, and letters. It owed its fame to influential scholars such as Avempace (1077-1082), Averroes (1126-1198) and Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), widely acknowledged to be one of the greatest social scientists of the Middle Ages.

As from the 12th century, however, AQU started declining, and continued to do so while the Renaissance of the Western world was progressing. It confined itself to Arabo-Islamic studies because teachers at that university were academically and financially autonomous and had great power. They focused on teaching subjects in which they had expertise--Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and Arabic literature--in order to guarantee their stability. Consequently, at the end of the nineteenth century, AQU's system was not ready to meet the challenges of modern civilization (Laroui, 1993).

From a functional point of view, AQU was the only institution in the country that prepared students to participate in public life. However, not all students as it was elitist and discriminating. For instance, mathematics, astronomy, geometry, and related subjects important to mosque astronomers, notaries, merchants, and surveyors were not provided to all students but were monopolised by a small minority of students belonging to wealthy families. The length of studies would depend on the student's social status. For the same degree, the higher the family's social status, the shorter the studies and the quicker the student's integration into a society of elites. This discrimination, whose keystone was traditionalism and co-option, was evident when considering the number (1300) of students originating from Fez compared to those (700) from other cities studying at this university (Laroui, 1993).

2.2 An Overview of Higher Education 1912-1956

Further to the Protectorate Treaty of Fez between France and Morocco on March 30th, 1912, by which Morocco officially became a French protectorate, and after the installation of Marshal Lyautey as the Resident-General of Morocco in 1912, two major steps were undertaken in education. First, a university council was established in 1914 at AQU to modernize education at that university. Second, a meeting held in Rabat in October 1915 helped determine both the colonial philosophy and the political foundations that governed the entire education system in Morocco until 1956 (Souali & Merrouni, 1981).

As a result, the colonial philosophy consisted of segregating schools according to students' race, social class, and religion (El Gharbaoui, 1985). Divide and rule was the colonial political strategy and education was the most powerful instrument for dividing the communities living in the country. This strategy yielded different types of education: education for the elite (mainly French, other Europeans and a minority of Moroccans), education for Muslims, education for Berbers and education for Jews (Moatassime, 2015). Some have claimed that this segregationist and elitist educational policy supported by the colonial power was deliberately planned to justify its policy of repression and domination in the face of the liberation movements that were rising in Morocco (Ayache, 1997). It resulted in a heterogeneous education system consisting of four major types of education: traditional and modern systems, the higher education system, the public education system (with a technical and professional orientation), and the emergence of an education system from the nationalist movement (Al-Jabri, 1989).

From 1926 to 1936, only fifty-one Moroccan Muslim students graduated in Morocco. Fifty students obtained a baccalaureate degree, and only one earned a bachelor's degree, in law studies. These graduations show that although Muslims had access to primary and secondary education, access to higher education remained virtually closed. In thirty-two years of colonization (from 1912 to 1944), the low number of higher education graduates was a

manifestation of the colonizers' segregationist policy. It consisted of three doctors, six agricultural engineers, six lawyers, four teachers and fourteen teacher assistants (El Gharbaoui, 1985).

In 1944, following several strikes, major improvements were made in favor of Moroccan Muslim students through the creation of several primary and secondary schools, as well as higher institutions, such as the institutes of agriculture and administration. In 1955, the number of Moroccan students graduating in engineering, medical studies, and law increased slightly (thirty engineers, nineteen doctors, two dentists, six pharmacists and twenty-seven lawyers). However, the number of university students hardly exceeded 1,700, reflecting the modest gains in access to university (Souali and Merrouni, 1981).

Thus, the Moroccan education system evolved very little during the French protectorate era. Instead, the French colonizers maintained this antiquated system which served their interests. While the improvement of primary and secondary education laid the groundwork for a diverse, democratized, and feminized higher education in France in the early sixties, the educational legacy of Morocco by the end of the protectorate in 1956 had been reduced to a discriminatory system. Notably, higher education was almost non-existent and inaccessible to Moroccan students.

2.3 Higher Education: From Independence to the 1980s

2.3.1 Higher education in the 1950s-1960s

In the aftermath of independence in 1956, higher education in Morocco was at an embryonic stage, with a total of about 2,000 students, of whom Moroccans represented less than a quarter (350), including 146 Jews. This figure was insignificant compared to the population of Moroccan students studying abroad. That year, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded did not exceed fifty. Most students were studying law, and the rate of female students was almost non-existent, with two in all. Only one Moroccan female student was studying law, compared to 157 foreign female students. Due to the scarcity of institutions, higher education was governed by the University of Bordeaux in France, which continued to issue degrees until the official creation of the Mohammed V University in Rabat in 1959 (Baina, 1981).

The first foundations for Moroccan higher education were laid with the creation of the University Mohammed V in Rabat in 1959 by King Mohammed V as the first modern university of independent Morocco. The primary objective of the country at the time was to expand the higher education network in order to train the people necessary to rebuild the country's economy, administration and society. Thus, the reorganization of higher education began directly after independence and continued until 1963. In that year, AQU underwent a modern reorganization for the first time in its history by adopting a western university structure, including three distinct faculties : Islamic law, Arabic studies, and Theology. In the same year, a Moroccan baccalaureate exam replaced the French one. The number of students enrolled in higher education increased from 200 in 1956 to 3,800 in 1962, including 241 Moroccan Muslim students. The number of female students enrolled at university also increased, representing nine percent of the overall student population (Zouaoui, 2005).

2.3.2 Higher education in the 1970s

Until 1975, about 15% of secondary school students had access to higher education. At most, one in ten higher education students completed a bachelor's degree. Attrition rates were particularly high in undergraduate studies, representing 60% of the overall attrition at university and 80% at the Faculty of Letters and Law. Attrition rates at the bachelor's level reached 20 to

30%, and most dropouts occurred in the first year. Nevertheless, despite increasing dropout rates, higher education enrolments continued to increase from 1965 on, reaching 47,000 students in 1976 and 60,000 in 1977 (Harakat, 2011). Female university enrolment increased by 9% during this time. The number of foreign students in Morocco increased from 877 to 1,803 in 1977. Non-traditional students, namely civil servants, grew to represent one-third of the total population of students. Despite the increasing enrolment rates, the student-professor rates remained low (one professor per 200 students), and the “Moroccanization” of the teaching staff, which was one of the fundamental post-independence principles, could not be achieved, as one in three professors was foreign (El Masslout, 1999).

In 1975, student enrolments reached 44,000, compared to 6,500 in 1965. This increase indicated the beginning of the massification phenomenon at universities, due to the massive increase in access to higher education, with first-year students representing a third of the university’s total student population. This massification phenomenon led the government to take a major step forward in Morocco’s university history in 1975, decentralising higher education by creating three universities. As a result, twenty-nine institutions were established in different regions in Morocco, and the period was further distinguished by the creation of the first faculties of education, medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy (El Masslout, 1999).

2.3.3 Higher Education in the 1980s

At the beginning of the 1980s, the university “unemployment generating crisis” began to emerge. The ever-increasing flow of students and the accelerated economic and social development of Morocco at the beginning of the 1980s required higher education policymakers to make a substantial adjustment to the physical and pedagogical structures of education. New directions were adopted to better match higher education to Morocco's socio-economic development, promote scientific research in line with the market’s needs, respond to pressing demands wrought by demographic changes and adapt to the evolution of technology. In 1986, to improve the university’s image, the government set up new universities across the kingdom and diversified the educational offering through the establishment of limited admissions institutions (engineering schools, higher technical and business schools) as well as through the rapid development of the private higher education sector (Lahlou, 2010a).

2.3.4 Deterioration of Quality in Public Higher Education

Following independence, the government had taken decisions on lower levels of education that inevitably had repercussions on the quality of higher education. Among these decisions : the highly questionable, rapid substitution of thousands of French teachers and aid workers by obviously ill-prepared and unqualified Moroccan teachers ; the hasty “generalization, Arabization, unification and Moroccanization” of the education system, which, conducted indiscriminately, caused severe harm to students in primary and secondary education (Mansouri & Moumine, 2017a). These decisions had a significant bearing on higher education in turn : the change in the content of philosophy and history courses in secondary schools and the implementation of courses in Islamic thought given by monolingual graduates of original or Islamic studies, to give two examples (Zouaoui, 2005).

The “Arabization” policy established in the 1980s became an obstacle to students attending higher education taught in French. The quality of higher education was further damaged around 1987. In an attempt to democratize education, the highly selective general baccalaureate exam was abolished in favor of a more decentralized, quarterly, flexible evaluation system administered by individual academies. It resulted in a rapid massification of the university, as baccalaureate completion rates increased to over 70% in 1991, compared to 33% in 1985.

However, generations of high school students landed at university poorly-advised and ill-prepared for a demanding higher education dispensed in French (Lahlou, 2010b).

Rather, the increase of baccalaureate and bachelor's graduates indicated the pressure exerted by the quantity over quality model ; they did not reflect the actual quality of higher education. In the early 1960s, the graduation rate was 2.4%. This indicator progressed in the 1970s and 1980s (2.4% in 1960-61, 4.6% in 1970-71, 5.7% in 1980-81, 10.01% in 1990-1991, 9.6% in 2000-01, and 8.3% in 2002-03) and reached 10% during the 1990s. This means that, for students in the nineties, the university was about four times less selective than it was in the aftermath of independence. This development showed that the improvement in graduation rates did not necessarily reflect a quality improvement (Lahlou, 2010b).

The other revealing piece of evidence as to a deterioration in the quality of higher education was the degree of attractiveness of Moroccan students to foreign universities starting in the early 1980s. The number of scholarships and students admitted to European universities, particularly in France, decreased. Some European universities ceased to recognize diploma equivalences. According to them, Moroccan students suffered from major handicaps in addition to linguistic skills: namely, difficulties taking notes, understanding and summarizing a text, contextualising concepts learned, and above all, thinking independently (Lamrini, 2007).

The 'massification' phenomenon and the lack of a quality education at the university clearly impacted the completion and market integration rates of university students. The job market could not sustain the massive influx of graduates, making employment increasingly complex, which led to a widespread, chronic unemployment crisis in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Nevertheless, the unemployment rates affected graduates differently, depending on the type of institution open or limited admissions and degree, reflecting the distinction the job market made between various graduates and institutions. Consequently, further to the Ifrane symposia's (1970 and 1980) recommendations, the reforms in technical education undergone by secondary schools in 1980 and 1985 led to the trend of establishing a technical higher education at university. It allowed the creation of opportunities for technical and scientific baccalaureate holders and would enable university institutions to meet the needs of the job market in terms of specialised technicians and engineers (Lahlou, 2010a).

2.3.5 Higher education decentralization

From an institutional point of view, higher education became more diversified and geographically decentralized during 1985-1999. The geographic location of institutions was determined according to regional specificities to strengthen the decentralization of scientific and technical education and establish regional centers of competence. Thus, limited admissions technical, engineering, and business institutions were created nationwide. Similarly, two faculties of medicine and pharmacy were established in Fez and Marrakech. Other faculties of science and technology were created in various cities.

From a pedagogical point of view, in the early 1990s, the Ministry of Higher Education created a professional bachelor's degree alongside the traditional academic bachelor's to curb the problems graduates of open admissions institutions faced with market integration. It was a way of creating a new, dynamic relationship between traditional faculties, the university and their economic and social environment by offering students from the third-year professional programs and content better suited to the needs of the economy (MENFPESRS, 2006).

2.3.6 Completion rates

During 1997-1998, over 258,000 students were enrolled at fourteen universities across seventy-four institutions, compared to 13,000 students in twenty-six institutions of higher education and

about 8,000 students in seventy-three private institutions. Within the university, a similar imbalance existed between limited and open admissions institutions (the latter referring to the four major faculties : original studies, law and economics, humanities and sciences). Open admissions institutions at the time in question comprised 92% of the overall student population, being referred to consequently as mass education institutions (El Masslout, 1 999).

The records show that, between 1980 and 1990, one in two high school graduates enrolled in law, one in four in letters, and one in seven in science. Faculties of law were as popular as they were in the 1970s. In 1999, female student representation reached 40%; in 1997, the highest feminization rate was registered in medicine (65%) and dentistry (70%). The lowest rates (30%) were recorded in science and original education. However, completion rates in general were poor. According to a cohort study conducted in 1986/1992, completion rates in open admissions institutions stood at 29% in the faculty of science, 42% in law, and 45% in letters, compared to higher rates in limited admissions institutions with 89% in engineering schools and 58% in medicine (El Masslout, 1999).

At open admissions institutions, one in ten students enrolled at the faculty obtained a bachelor's degree in four years. For example, at the faculty of letters, out of 1,000 students, only seventy earned their bachelor's degree in four years, and 80% left without earning a degree. In the faculties of law and economics, respectively, 230 and 180 students out of 1,000 earned their bachelor's degrees. The lowest completion rates were recorded in the sciences, especially in physics, with 140 graduates out of 1,000 students (Zouaoui, 2005).

2.3.7 Graduates' market integration

The quality of graduates from limited admissions institutions was considered significantly higher than that of graduates from open admissions institutions, as indicated by the discrepancy in unemployment rates between graduates of these two types of institutions in 1991. The unemployment rate for graduates of open admissions institutions was 23.3%, compared to 1.1% for graduates of limited admissions institutions. In 2000, these rates increased to 42.8% and 7%, respectively (Zouaoui, 2005). Among the 100,374 young people seeking jobs that year, university graduates represented only 5%, primarily from faculties of letters and law as well as from vocational institutions. Of the rest, more than half of these job seekers had just a baccalaureate degree or had left university in the first or second year without a degree (CNJA, 1994). In 1999, about 60% of students left the education system without a bachelor's degree and 52% without an associate's degree. The unemployment rate increased among higher education graduates to 40%, which prompted Morocco to start a deep reform of its higher education system (MENFPESRS, 2006).

2.3.8 Mode of university governance

The decline in the university's quality was also due to its mode of governance. Universities were governed by the first decree organizing the university, which dated back to 1975 (Dahir, 1975). From 1975 to 2000, the university system was under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. The ministry centralized all decision-making power, and universities were granted little or no pedagogical, administrative or financial autonomy. Universities could not make any educational offerings, accredit degrees or confer them upon graduates. Decrees determined university curricula, course content and assessment processes. At the administrative level, the university rectors had limited prerogatives. Just like deans of faculties and higher institutions directors, rectors were appointed by the ministry without a project. University and school boards were merely advisory bodies. Financially, the universities' resources came exclusively from

state endowments. They did not meet modern education and training standards, hence the need for educational reform (Aboussalah, 2014).

3. Educational Reforms

3.1 The National Charter for Education and Training (NCET)

In March 1999, King Hassan II identified education and training system reform as one of the country's priorities. A special education and training commission was set up to engage with this priority, namely the Commission Spéciale Education-Formation (COSEF). Its mandate consisted of preparing a draft of the National Charter for Education and Training (henceforth NCET), intended to lay the foundations for a new Moroccan school system at the start of the twenty-first century. COSEF's initial investigation into higher education revealed that the education system's weaknesses were manifest along three main axes: socioeconomic, institutional, and pedagogical. Socioeconomic weaknesses consisted of the difficulty of identifying the needs of a rapidly changing job market; employment shortages in the public sector due to the Structural Adjustment Plan adopted by Morocco; and the difficulty of university graduates in joining the workforce.

Second, the main institutional weaknesses concerned the open admissions institutions, with three faculties dominating at the university: The Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Law, Economics and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Science. They accounted for 92% of newly enrolled students and more than 85% of all students. Letters and Law and Economics students accounted for over 73% of the student body. The education system was poorly diversified and was dominated by general education, which led to significant attrition, particularly in the first year. Furthermore, the average time for a student to complete a four-year degree was 9.3 years. The system did not develop short and medium-length programs to enhance students' employability; instead, it encouraged lengthy higher education studies and did not provide bridges between different disciplines (COSEF, 2005).

Finally, the pedagogical constraints consisted of two major points: Firstly, educational programs were determined by decree. Secondly, pedagogical approaches did not consider students' personal development, and teaching consisted of knowledge transmission that did not enhance students' acquisition of methodological and analytical tools. Course content dated back to the 1980s, classroom equipment was lacking, and the student-to-teacher ratio was insufficient or poorly distributed, especially at the Faculty of Law (Cherkaoui, 2011). In addition, students were not provided with academic advising services and were unprepared to undertake higher studies. They had no general culture and study skills, which added to their difficulty understanding the language of instruction (i.e. French) at the faculty (Law 01-00, 2000).

Established in 1999, the NCET constituted a national strategic document prepared by consensus. Its goal was to make pedagogical, organizational, and financial changes to the structure and functioning of the public school and university systems. To achieve the educational goals of the reform successfully, the NCET called for a national commitment and declared the years 2000-2009 a national decade for education and training, and the sector of education and training the top national priority after territorial integrity. Consequently, it was to receive special attention at the state level from regional and local authorities, government, political parties, unions, professional organizations, associations, territorial administrations, religious scholars, and scientific, intellectual, and artistic personalities (NCET, 1999).

An overhaul of the higher education system was expected to take place over three years, in agreement with all the higher education institutions and their stakeholders. Its purpose was to coordinate the different components of the Moroccan post-baccalaureate education system; to optimize infrastructure and resources; to establish links and pathways between academic,

technical, and professional higher education systems; and to harmonize academic cycles and diplomas within the framework of a university system (MENFPESRS, 2006). One of the major contributions of the NCET was the drafting of Law 01.00 organising higher education. This law was put into effect after parliament's promulgation, on March 3, 2000. Under this law, goals for the higher education system and the strategic missions of universities were both subject to total reform in both the public and private sectors. Administrative, financial, and pedagogical autonomy was established, and the foundations of the quality assurance system in higher education were laid (Law 01-00, 2000).

3.1.1 The University's New Pedagogical System 2003-2022

The guidelines of the NCET (art. 8) and the provisions of Law 01.00 (art. 27) created a new pedagogical system for higher education organized in three cycles, majors and modules. In 2003-2004, Morocco's higher education pedagogical framework was gradually aligned with the European LMD system (Licence, Master, Doctorat), which had been generalized in Morocco before it was launched in Tunisia, Algeria, and France (Belkadi, 2009). This system was essentially dictated by Morocco's need to align with international educational standards, particularly the European system initiated by the Bologna Process (Crosier & Parveva, 2014; Mazella, 2019; Ravinet, 2009). By adopting this process, Morocco aimed to make its higher education more visible internationally; facilitate recognition of degrees and qualifications; promote the mobility of students, researchers, academic and administrative staff; and foster cooperation between Moroccan and foreign universities (CSEFRS, 2014). Thus, the LMD system provided an opportunity for Morocco to conduct a broad reform of its existing, dysfunctional pedagogical system and to improve the quality of its higher education. Furthermore, programs such as Tempus that support cooperation between European Union universities and those of the Maghreb and Middle East require that projects be aligned with the new LMD structure, in accordance with the Bologna Process (Croché, 2006, (2), 203-217).

3.1.2 Benefits of the Reform

It is generally recognized that the public policy on higher education undertaken since 2000, based on the NCET (1999) guidelines has been a significant overhaul. As per Law 01.00, the reform has reviewed the entire higher education system and defined new strategic missions of the university. At the governance level, the university has become somewhat more autonomous, its council given wider-ranging prerogatives, and its development project become by extension an opportunity for other institutions to implement and develop their own. Most importantly, the state is no longer the only source of funding for universities, which have been required to diversify their revenue by expanding their mission through continuing education, expertise, and consulting. Pedagogically, the LMD system has brought about new teaching and assessment methods. It has established an evaluation and accreditation culture, an essential tool to improve quality. Furthermore, within the context of the regional development policy that Morocco was implementing at the time, the period of 2003-2007 was further distinguished in higher education reform by the creation of an increasing number of institutions (CSEFRS, 2018).

3.1.3 The University in the Wake of Higher Education Reform

Despite genuine efforts made to ensure the implementation of the NCET (1999), the quantitative results yielded little qualitative change. In the wake of the higher education reforms, many issues rose to the surface nationally and internationally, indicating a failure of the LMD system. First, most professors either ignored the contents of the reforms or refused to participate in their

implementation. Second, the academic structure of the reforms was not adapted to the reality of the Moroccan university and was more appropriate for limited admissions institutions than for open admissions institutions. In theory, the LMD structure was designed to encourage manageable class sizes and establish conditions for group work, in order to foster relationships and exchanges among students and between students and teachers. It introduced new evaluation standards based on continuous assessment and an end-of-semester examination. However, given the mass enrolment of students in open admissions institutions, a shortage of professors and a lack of equipment, studies were dispensed just as in the old system, and students' knowledge was most often assessed based on one examination, including all modules. Third, the university was seen to be out of touch with the Moroccan economy's expectations, especially as most universities were in poor and remote regions providing academic degrees that were not attuned to changes in the Moroccan socio-economic environment. More practically, there were further unresolved questions related to the language of instruction, curriculum and textbook content, literacy, funding, and justification of resource management. Finally, there was no coordination between secondary and higher education reforms (Kouhlani & Ennaji, 2012).

3.1.4 The University's Crisis

In his July 2007 Throne Day speech, King Mohammed VI attributed the failure to implement an effective education system to curricula that were inadequate and unsuitable for the job market. The King pointed to the issue of the language of instruction for scientific subjects specifically and to the sudden switch of the language of instruction from Arabic to French in higher education at large, all of which had had a negative impact on students' achievements over several generations. His Majesty asserted that these various obstacles made most university offerings irrelevant to the job market and transformed open admissions institutions into real "unemployment factories." This royal speech was an unequivocal message on the deep crisis that the public education system was undergoing and led to the establishment of the Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research.

3.1.5 The Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research

Under the provisions of Article 32 of Morocco's Constitution, the Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research (henceforth called HCE) was established in 2006 as an institutional consultative body chaired by the king. The HCE would release an annual report on the state and the perspectives of education and training in Morocco. This report would be based on studies conducted by the Instance Nationale d'Evaluation du Système d'Education et de la Formation (INE), a body of the HCE. The mission of the INE was to assess Moroccan educational performance through universal, sectoral, and thematic evaluations (CSEFR, 2008a), while considering national and international standards in this area. In the meantime, international and national reports confirmed the declining quality and productivity of the Moroccan education system.

3.1.6 International evaluations

In 2008, the World Bank report on education in Africa ranked Morocco's education system among the worst in the world. Four measurement indices (access, equity, quality, and efficiency) were considered by the World Bank in the evaluation of education in MENA countries (Middle East and North Africa). The kingdom was near the bottom of the list of the fourteen countries in the MENA region. It was ranked 11th, just ahead of Yemen, Djibouti, and

Iraq, which were all politically and economically unstable. The report highlighted two important findings : Lebanon, Iran, Kuwait, the West Bank, and Gaza had experienced considerable political conflicts since the 1960s and yet had made achievements in education. Algeria and Saudi Arabia, with high per capita incomes, were ranked lower than Jordan and Tunisia, both of which had lower incomes per capita. It was concluded that neither a conflict situation nor the lack of resources was a barrier to progress in educational reforms (Banque Mondiale, 2008).

The 2007-2008 Human Development Report published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) revealed a new failure for Morocco. The country was ranked 126th out of 177 countries and was getting closer to countries with low human development. It performed poorly across all components of the human development index, particularly in education. At the end of 2005, the combined primary, secondary and university education rates were about 58.5%, and the adult literacy rate between 1995 and 2005 was approximately 52.3%, which meant that Morocco was far behind Uganda, Kenya and Madagascar. The 2007 World Bank report pointed out that 25% of the population lived at or below the poverty line. About 2.5 million children, mostly girls in rural areas, did not go to school, and 83% of women in rural areas were illiterate (Banque Mondiale, 2007).

3.1.7 National evaluation

A national report released by the HCE in 2008 noted that the advances achieved in education could not counterbalance the problems hampering Morocco's school and university systems. Although school generalization increased to 94% in 2007 and was one of the most significant achievements in the education system during the reform, this increase in access was tempered by high attrition rates. According to the report, out of one hundred children enrolled in primary education, only thirteen persisted until the baccalaureate degree. Nearly 300,000 dropped out of school every year. In 2006-2007, about 180,000 withdrew from school voluntarily. Dropout factors were multidimensional, particularly in rural areas where schools were isolated and lacked the basic infrastructure for students and teachers (Mansouri & Moumine, 2017a).

As far as higher education was concerned, the HCE 2008 national report presented many factors leading to the system's failure, the latter evidenced by increasing unemployment rates among graduates between 1999 and 2006. Besides the linguistic obstacle, teachers' lack of commitment and training, obsolete course content, bad governance and inadequate infrastructure, the report highlighted the job-education mismatch. While students with a baccalaureate degree represented 24.4% of the unemployed graduates and technicians 32.2%, higher degree graduates represented an alarming 43.4%. The report indicated that unemployment rates among graduates of limited admissions institutions were barely over 2%, compared to 41.3% for graduates of open admissions institutions. Furthermore, in 2006, literature and law represented more than 76% of overall graduates, which made it difficult to provide job opportunities for all, and difficult for the university to meet the labour market's need for specialized scientific and technical skills. A strong case could be made, therefore, that the university was not reactive to public development strategies (e.g. the training of 10,000 engineers and 3,300 doctors annually) or the changing needs of the economic environment (CSEFRS, 2008b).

3.2 The Emergency Program 2009-2012

Further to the evaluations of the education system's deficiencies, King Mohammed VI, in his speech at the opening of the parliamentary session of 2007, urged the government to prepare a reform project capable of bringing the education sector out of its "lethargy" within four years.

He called for establishing a four-year emergency program, endowed with the financial and human resources necessary to consolidate the system's achievements, improve its output and performance and expedite the implementation of the provisions of Law 01.00. In response to these instructions, the ministry of education developed an "Emergency Program 2009-2012" (MENFPESRS, 2008).

The emergency program adopted a project-based approach with defined measures, action plans, resources, and key performance indicators. Twenty-three projects were identified to speed up the implementation of the reform in four areas of intervention. The first area consisted of making education compulsory up to the age of fifteen years, stimulating initiative and excellence in high schools and universities, tackling the system's crosscutting issues and providing the means to succeed. Promoting excellence, improving higher education's offering, and promoting scientific research were three projects in the second area. The third area included seven projects: enhancing the skills of academic and administrative staff, strengthening mechanisms of staff supervision and evaluation, optimizing human resources management, completing the decentralization process, planning and managing the education and training systems, enhancing language proficiency, and establishing efficient information and academic advising systems. In the fourth area, there were two projects: mobilization and communication (MENFPESRS, 2008-2009).

To realize these projects, the state mobilized an overall budget of 12.6 billion Moroccan dirhams to implement the emergency program from 2009-2012 and distributed it as follows: 8.2 billion dirhams for operating needs (excluding salaries) and 4.4 billion dirhams for investments. It should be noted that 62% of the program budget was devoted to improving and expanding higher education offerings (MENFPESRS, 2008-2009).

3.2.1 The Emergency Program's Main Criticism

Student enrolment capacity: According to the HCE's 2014 analytic report, the university's enrolment capacity increased from 262,150 places in 2001 to 385,135 in 2013, representing an overall increase of 122,985 and an annual increase of 9,500 places. Only 67,135 places were created during that period, compared to the 112,000 places planned in the program. However, 30,000 places were created at limited admissions institutions between 2009 and 2013. Despite these efforts, the enrolment capacity could not keep up with societal demand for higher education. It was decreasing, especially in 2013, and the resources allocated were being used differently depending on whether institutions were open or limited admissions. Overall, the state's efforts to increase enrolment capacity made significant inroads in the open admissions institutions, with an enrolment rate of 175%. However, the enrolment rates at limited admissions institutions reached 63%, well below their full capacity. In other words, due to its selection procedures, the university system provided one hundred places for 175 students in the open admissions subsystem and one hundred places for sixty-three students in the limited admissions subsystem (SEFRS, 2014).

Student-professor ratio: The number of university professors recorded a 22% progression in the decade following 2001, reaching 12,036 tenured professors in 2012-2013. However, this progression was in favor of limited admissions institutions, with over 54% of the increase registering there, whereas the number of professors at open admissions institutions increased by only 8%. It should be noted that open admissions institutions received 87% of the total population of students, as compared to 13% at limited admissions institutions. The student-professor ratio at open admissions institutions increased from 54:1 in 2012 to sixty-five students per teacher in 2013. This rate reached as high as 104 students per professor in science and law faculties. By contrast, the rate at limited admissions institutions in 2013 was only sixteen students per professor (SEFRS, 2014).

Completion rates: The number of university graduates doubled between 2001 and 2012, regardless of academic major. In 2012, completion rates at open admissions institutions were equally distributed among students in three degrees, namely, humanities, science, and law and economics. Nevertheless, 64% of the students left the faculty without a licence degree, 25.2% in the first year, 40.2% after two years of study and 20.9% after three years at the university. Many students who struggled to persist spent up to six years at the faculty without graduating. The highest dropout rates (67.8%) occurred at faculties of law, economics and social sciences, followed by faculties of science (65.5%) and faculties of humanities (56.4%) (SEFRS, 2014). These results mean that many students left university without a degree and that the emergency program's targeted completion rates (69%) for the 2009-2010 cohort were far from being achieved. In 2016, the average graduation rate in the open admissions system was 42%, compared to 92% in the limited admissions system (MENFPESRS, 2017). Thus, student attrition in the open admissions system has been, despite all the reforms, one of the most significant failures of the university education system (CSEFRS, 2019).

3.2.2 Pedagogical Weaknesses of the Reform

The purpose of the modular system was to provide an optimal organization of studies and a possibility of inter-and intra-institution mobility nationally and internationally for students. However, it was difficult to establish coherent articulation and pathways between the university and non-university education systems due to an absence of a generalized LMD system. On the other hand, the Moroccan modular system did not evolve towards a credit system that would comply with international standards to ensure students' international mobility and greater visibility for the Moroccan university.

Most critically, while the LMD system called for practical, small-size group teaching and the use of ICT, it was confronted with an overcrowded open admissions system whose enrolment capacity deteriorated from one hundred students per place in 2000-2001 to 145 in 2012-2013. The initial objectives could not be applied appropriately in a system with large class sizes, a shortage of human and material resources in all degrees, and a lack of adequate equipment, notably in professional degrees (CSEFRS, 2019). Consequently, the LMD reform was able to meet neither the national pedagogical framework planned by the National Charter for Education and Training nor the international requirements of the Bologna process.

3.2.3 Market Integration of University Graduates

According to a longitudinal study conducted from August 2009 to April 2012 on a sample of 1,625 graduates under the LMD system, graduates' market integration rates became steady thirty-four months after graduation in June 2009. A month after graduation, market integration rates registered 38.6% for the studied population. This rate progressively increased to 81% by April 2012 (CSEFRS 2014). However, market integration rates varied according to whether institutions were open or limited admissions. Graduates from the limited admissions institutions recorded an assimilation rate as high as 100% after thirty-four months. Graduates from the open admissions institutions recorded an integration rate ranging from 63% to 79% (CSEFRS, 2014).

The study findings indicated that business school, engineering institution and doctoral program graduates were able to join the job market within thirty-four months. Holders of master's and associate's degrees achieved integration rates of 93%. Professional master's graduates recorded 92% and 90% market integration rates, while professional licence and academic licence graduates recorded 78% and 69% market integration rates, respectively. These findings revealed that despite the education reforms' focus on expanding the open

admission system and improving its pedagogical structure, the market integration rates of graduates of open admissions institutions were the lowest of all graduates (CSEFRS, 2019). It was concluded that the major reform projects of the education system undertaken since 1999 helped to achieve enormous quantitative progress in terms of the educational offering and increased access to university. However, the need for quality in higher education was not satisfactorily met, nor the university's mission of retaining students accomplished. Therefore, the achievements of previous reforms needed to be consolidated, reactivated, and enriched to propose innovative solutions, which were presented in the new "Strategic Vision of Reform 2015-2030," elaborated by the HCE in 2015.

3.3 Strategic Vision 2015-2030

The purpose of the Strategic Vision of the Reform (henceforth referred to as SVR) was to design an educational reform that reflects the principles and values proclaimed in the 2011 Constitution. SVR (2015-2030) is a global strategy for the education system. Its aim is to set up a new generation of schools based on three principal foundations: equity and equal opportunity, quality for all, and promotion of the individual and society. These foundations are broken down into twenty-three levers and one hundred thirty-four provisions to guide the implementation of the reform (CSEFRS, 2015). The assertive nature of the SVR makes it not merely a social or economic measure but a paradigm shift in Moroccan education whose positive effects should be increasingly felt on student achievements, qualifications and market integration (Bourqia, 2016). Nevertheless, the reform has faced many challenges. The most significant one is the government's capacity to translate it into operational measures and actions that can generate performance and lead students to success.

One of the major contributions of the SVR has been the drafting of Framework Law 51.17 (Law 01-00, 2000). Based on the Kingdom's 2011 Constitution, international agreements on human rights, the recommendation of SVR 2015-2030, and following months of debate, Morocco finally adopted its first framework law in the history of Moroccan legislation in education, training and scientific research on 17 July, 2019. Framework Law 51.17 contains six laws, seventy-nine decrees, and eighty ministerial decisions. Its goal is to establish a new "school" and to dignify human capital based on equity, equality of opportunity and quality for all, in order to improve the individual and advance society. Under this law, educational reform is an urgent national priority and joint responsibility of the state, the family, civil society, and economic and social actors, including those in the fields of culture, information and communication. More importantly, this legislative--indeed, constitutional--reform embodies a national contract binding all members of society. It cannot be changed or reformed according to a government's political leaning, or whatever minister of education is in charge, thus guaranteeing its sustainability. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that this law was breached as soon as a new government was appointed in Morocco in 2021.

3.4 The Bachelor's System: An Abandoned Project

After the LMD system had been applied for seventeen years and the licence degree conferred on students in three years, its evaluation confirmed various dysfunctions resulting primarily in low degree completion and market integration rates for students in the open admissions system (Cour des comptes, 2018). To overcome these dysfunctions, and after years of consultation, the previous government (2018-2021) presented the "bachelor's reform," in which bachelor's degrees were to be issued after four years, replacing the Licence degree from September 2020-2021. It was announced at a Moroccan-American conference titled the "National Pedagogical Reform of Higher Education, in Preparation for the Implementation of the Bachelor's," held in

Marrakech on January 7, 2020. This bachelor's was highly touted to enhance students' skills and as a response to the expectations of society and the job market (MENFPESRS, 2020). Most importantly, it was to end a long-standing relationship with Francophone countries in favor of a system widely used in Anglophone ones.

The bachelor's project coincided with the end of one government's mandate (2018-2021) and the arrival of another (2021-2024). Although some universities had already adopted the bachelor's system and applied it in several faculties before its generalization in 2021, it was abandoned by the new minister of higher education as soon as he was appointed by the new government. Not only did he order the resumption of the LMD system, but he once again ordered an overhaul of the entire higher education system with a new project entitled the "National Plan to Accelerate the Transformation of the Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation Ecosystem" (PACTE - ESRI 2030). This acceleration plan draws its substance from the priorities of Morocco's new economic development model. It adopts its doctrine and founding principles, aiming to translate the priorities of the government program into concrete actions regarding the development of human capital and Morocco's integration into the knowledge society.

The objective of the acceleration plan is to propel Morocco to the rank of a pioneering nation with a strong capacity for innovation and high added value at the academic and scientific levels. It includes all the regions through a co-construction approach based on a process of listening and consultation involving education actors, local authorities, figures from the regional economic ecosystem, civil society and other third-sector parties. Nevertheless, at the time of writing and after a year of the current government being in office, consultation is still ongoing, and higher education in Morocco maintains the status quo. Thus, within less than two decades of the national charter being penned, it had already been revised by an organizational reform, namely the emergency program (2009-2012). A pedagogical reform followed the latter in 2014, and the bachelor's was abandoned altogether before its launch in favor of a new reform, thus breaching Law 51.17, which was intended to guarantee its sustainability.

4. Conclusion

Moroccan higher education has developed a fragmented education system consisting of private universities for the most privileged students, a public limited admissions system for high achiever students, usually from middle-class families, and an open admissions system for the most disadvantaged students. While the French colonizers set up schools according to race, religion, and social status in the pre-independence era, today's Moroccan government replicates the same system based on social status only because religion and race are no longer relevant. This segregation threatens the quality and, most importantly, the equity deeply embedded in the National Charter for Education, the Strategic Vision 2015-2030, and the Framework Law 51.17.

It is high time the authorities stopped the race toward dualism and elitism in higher education. The public university should regain its primary mission of social promotion and equal access to knowledge and work. Obviously, it is impossible to set up a homogeneous educational system. However, efforts can be made to bring the different systems tearing society apart closer together by unifying all higher education institutions within a public university. This would give students equal opportunities and allow the higher education system to transform its quantitative success into qualitative success far from ideological or political control by the state or the market.

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