

**The National Plan to Accelerate the Transformation of the Moroccan Higher Education,
Scientific Research, and Innovation System (Pacte ESRI 2030): Trends and Future
Orientations**

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Abstract

Morocco's higher education, scientific research, and innovation landscape is undergoing significant transformation through the Pacte ESRI (*Plan National d'Accélération de la Transformation de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation*) 2030 reform. This research article examines the current state of public higher education institutions, regional disparities in student enrollment, gender distribution in selected faculties, and the new pedagogical and credit frameworks introduced under the national plan. Using secondary data from the Ministry of Higher Education's official statistics and the national book of pedagogical norms of the fundamental license 2023, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the latest shifts in Morocco's higher education. The findings highlight notable institutional diversity, persistent regional imbalances, ongoing efforts to enhance student skills, and structural reforms aimed at aligning undergraduate programs with the labor market and international standards

Keywords: Pacte ESRI 2030 (*Plan National d'Accélération de la Transformation de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation*), Higher Education, Power Skills, Pedagogical Reform and Credit System

1. Introduction

Morocco's higher education sector has been engaged in extensive reforms to bolster its capacity for quality education, scientific research, and innovation, reflecting broader trends observed

across the Middle East and North Africa (World Bank, 2021). In particular, the *Pacte ESRI 2030—Plan National d’Accélération de la Transformation de l’Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l’Innovation*—serves as a key policy framework guiding these efforts (Ministère de l’Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l’Innovation [MESRSI], 2022). The central objectives of this plan include modernizing curricula, enhancing institutional governance, promoting regional equity in educational opportunities, and producing globally competitive graduates (UNESCO, 2021).

Within this context, several challenges have shaped the discourse on higher education reform in Morocco. These include inconsistent quality across institutions and geographic regions, unequal access for students from different socio-economic backgrounds, and varied standards with outdated curricula lacking alignment to global benchmarks and labor market demands (OECD, 2018). Moreover, the limited integration of essential transversal or “power” skills—including digital competency, communication, leadership, and cultural awareness—remains a pressing concern (CSEFRS, 2015). The present study addresses these issues by examining recent data on the structure and scope of Moroccan public higher education institutions, student enrollment by gender and region, and the newly introduced pedagogical and credit system reforms with special reference to open access faculties of letters and humanities. These findings collectively offer a snapshot of how the *Pacte ESRI 2030* is reshaping the Moroccan higher education landscape and provide insights into the policy directions needed for sustained improvement. The current study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the enrollment patterns and institutional distribution in Morocco’s public higher education system, particularly regarding regional disparities and gender imbalances in public open access institutions, especially the faculties of letters and humanities from 2021 to 2023?

RQ2: To what extent does the new pedagogical structure in the PACTE ESRI reform—including power skills integration, foreign language requirements, and a standardized credit system—effectively align Moroccan undergraduate programs with international standards and labor market needs?

2. Literature review

A growing body of literature is on the critical transformation underway in Moroccan higher education, driven by efforts to align educational outcomes with evolving socio-economic demands (OECD, 2018; UNESCO, 2021). The *Pacte ESRI 2030* is the latest in a series of reforms aimed at enhancing institutional governance, curriculum relevance, and equitable access (*Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation* [MESRSI], 2023a). This literature review provides an overview of the historical context of Moroccan higher education reforms, examines enduring challenges such as equity and quality, and explores the trajectory of curricular and governance innovations, including the incorporation of “power skills.”

2.1 Historical Context of Moroccan Higher Education Reforms

Historically, Morocco’s higher education system has undergone multiple phases of reform. Following independence, universities primarily offered traditional programs in humanities, Islamic studies, and law, while technical and scientific fields were limited (El-Khawas, 2012). By the early 2000s, Moroccan authorities recognized the need to modernize and diversify higher education to meet the demands of globalization and address youth unemployment (World Bank, 2021).

One of the first systematic reform efforts was the National Charter for Education and Training (*Charte Nationale d'Éducation et de Formation*) in 1999, which targeted improvement in governance, pedagogy, and infrastructure across all educational levels (CSEFRS, 2015). Subsequent reforms included the Plan d'Urgence 2009–2012, focusing on expanding institutional capacity and improving quality assurance (OECD, 2018). In 2015, the Vision Stratégique 2015–2030 was introduced by the Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation, de la Formation et de la Recherche Scientifique (CSEFRS), emphasizing equitable access, quality enhancement, and alignment with socio-economic needs (CSEFRS, 2015). The *Pacte ESRI 2030* builds on these efforts by pushing for a more structured pedagogical overhaul, facilitating student mobility, and increasing the alignment of programs with labor market demands (MESRSI, 2023a).

2.2 Persistent Challenges: Equity and Quality

Despite decades of reform, regional disparities and unequal access remain a fundamental challenge. Research indicates that urban centers such as Casablanca and Rabat continue to benefit from better-resourced institutions, higher faculty-to-student ratios, and stronger partnerships with industry, whereas rural regions struggle with limited infrastructure and fewer specialized programs

(UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2021). Gender disparities, though narrowing in select disciplines, continue to be evident in STEM fields, with women more frequently enrolling in humanities and social sciences (CSEFRS, 2015).

Quality assurance has also proven difficult to standardize across a rapidly expanding network of universities and specialized institutes (OECD, 2018). Although accreditation bodies and internal quality units have been established, consistent application of quality standards varies by institution due to differences in resources, faculty qualifications, and administrative capacity (El-Khawas, 2012). The *Plan d'Urgence 2009–2012* introduced performance contracts between the government and universities to address these discrepancies, but uneven implementation has hindered long-term impact (OECD, 2018).

2.3 Governance Reforms and Institutional Autonomy

A recurring theme in the literature is the push toward greater institutional autonomy as a way to foster innovation and responsiveness to local needs. Several reports indicate that Moroccan universities historically operated under centralized administrative frameworks, limiting their capacity to tailor programs, engage with private sector stakeholders, and efficiently manage resources (OECD, 2018; UNESCO, 2021). The *Vision Stratégique 2015–2030* and subsequent legislative reforms advocated a gradual decentralization of decision-making, allowing universities more latitude in curriculum design, budget allocation, and partnership development (CSEFRS, 2015).

The *Pacte ESRI 2030* furthers this agenda by promoting enhanced institutional governance, supported by performance-based funding models and accountability mechanisms (MESRSI, 2023a). This approach aligns with global trends highlighted in OECD (2018), which suggest that increased autonomy, coupled with robust quality assurance, can drive more responsive and higher-performing higher education systems.

2.4 Curricular Innovations and “Power Skills”

Another pivotal development identified across the literature is the move toward curricular diversification and the integration of transversal competencies. Historically, Moroccan higher education emphasized discipline-specific knowledge with limited incorporation of technology skills, soft skills, or language proficiency beyond French and Arabic (OECD, 2018). In response,

several reforms have sought to embed ICT competencies and foreign language instruction within undergraduate degree structures (UNESCO, 2021).

The *Pacte ESRI 2030* and the National Book of Pedagogical Norms of the Fundamental License 2023 formally introduce “power skills,” including digital literacy, personal development, and social responsibility, as mandatory components of bachelor’s programs (MESRSI, 2023b). This initiative draws on global research that underscores the importance of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability in a rapidly evolving labor market (World Bank, 2021). Furthermore, increasing foreign language requirements—with a targeted B2 level in the primary language of instruction and at least B1 in a secondary language—aims to enhance Morocco’s position in the global knowledge economy (CSEFRS, 2015).

2.5 The Shift to a Modular Credit System and Mobility

An additional focus of recent reform has been the adoption of a credit-based system analogous to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The *Pacte ESRI 2030* envisions the standardization of credits across institutions to facilitate student mobility and recognition of Moroccan degrees abroad (MESRSI, 2023a). According to UNESCO (2021), such alignment with international standards is crucial for promoting cross-border collaborations, student exchanges, and the employability of Moroccan graduates in regional and global markets.

However, institutional capacity to implement and manage new credit structures varies widely. Administratively, transitioning to modular course designs and flexible transfer mechanisms requires training faculty in novel pedagogical approaches, reorganizing administrative processes, and investing in robust student information systems (OECD, 2018). Literature suggests that without strong institutional commitment and government oversight, disparities in system implementation may persist, undermining the reform’s intended benefits (El-Khawas, 2012). The National Agency for Evaluation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education and Scientific Research (ANEAQ) is an autonomous body in charge of evaluating the higher education system to guarantee its quality (Oustous et al. 2021). The framework reform of 2015-2023 is on the strategic vision of the Moroccan education system, of which Pacte ESRI is a major part.

2.6 Synthesis and Gaps

Collectively, the literature highlights an ongoing evolution of Morocco's higher education system. Reforms are increasingly holistic, reflecting awareness that quality and equity depend not only on additional funding but also on structural and curricular innovations (CSEFRS, 2015; MESRSI, 2023a). Yet, persistent challenges—such as balancing central oversight with institutional autonomy, ensuring equitable distribution of resources, and sustaining quality assurance—remain. Moreover, empirical studies focusing on long-term outcomes, particularly graduate employability and socio-economic impact, are relatively limited (OECD, 2018; World Bank, 2021). There is also a lack of rigorous evaluations assessing how “power skills”, “21st century skills” or “the millennial skills” integration translates into tangible improvements in student performance, labor market readiness, and civic engagement (Guerch, & Bouklah, 2023 ; Idrissi & Sakale, 2024).

In addressing these gaps, the present study examines the *Pacte ESRI 2030*'s institutional, enrollment, and curricular data to offer a current snapshot of how these reforms are being operationalized and to identify directions for future policy and research. By triangulating quantitative statistics with policy document analysis, this investigation seeks to provide both a systemic and context-specific understanding of how Morocco's higher education is adapting under the newest wave of reform efforts.

3. Research Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods design to investigate the ongoing higher education reforms in Morocco under the *Pacte ESRI 2030*. The methods are organized into distinct subsections addressing research design, data sources, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and issues of reliability and validity.

3.1 Research Design

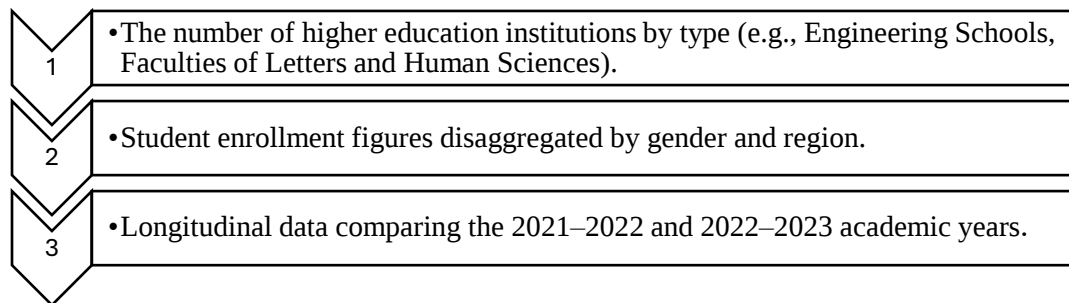
A convergent mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) was adopted to combine quantitative analysis of enrollment and institutional data with qualitative examination of policy documents. This design allows for a comprehensive understanding of both the statistical trends (e.g., distributions, growth rates, and comparisons) and the contextual details (e.g., policy strategies, curriculum reforms, and governance structures) underpinning the *Pacte ESRI 2030*.

3.2 Data Sources

3.2.1 Official National Statistics

Quantitative data were obtained from the *Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation* ([MESRSI], 2022). This publicly accessible database offers the most recent academic statistics.

Figure 3.1 Database variables extracted from <https://www.enssup.gov.ma/en/statistiques>



3.2.2 Policy Documents

Qualitative information was derived from two main categories of policy documents. The Pacte ESRI 2030 framework, which articulates the national strategy for accelerating transformation in higher education, scientific research, and innovation (MESRSI, 2023a). The National Book of Pedagogical Norms of the Fundamental License 2023, detailing the new curricular structures, credit systems, and skill requirements for undergraduate programs (MESRSI, 2023b). Additional publications from international organizations such as UNESCO (2021) and the OECD (2018) were reviewed for contextual insights on Morocco's higher education landscape in relation to global trends.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection proceeded in two phases:

Phase 1: Collection of Statistical Data

Official datasets were downloaded from the MESRSI website in spreadsheets. Data points included the number of institutions by category, enrollment totals by gender, and regional student distributions. All data were restricted to the two most recent academic years available (2021–2022 and 2022–2023).

Phase 2: Document Review

Hard and digital copies of the *Pacte ESRI 2030* and the *National Book of Pedagogical Norms of the Fundamental License 2023* were obtained through official channels. Comparative policy frameworks and reports from UNESCO and the OECD provided additional context and validation for national statistics.

3.4 Data Analysis

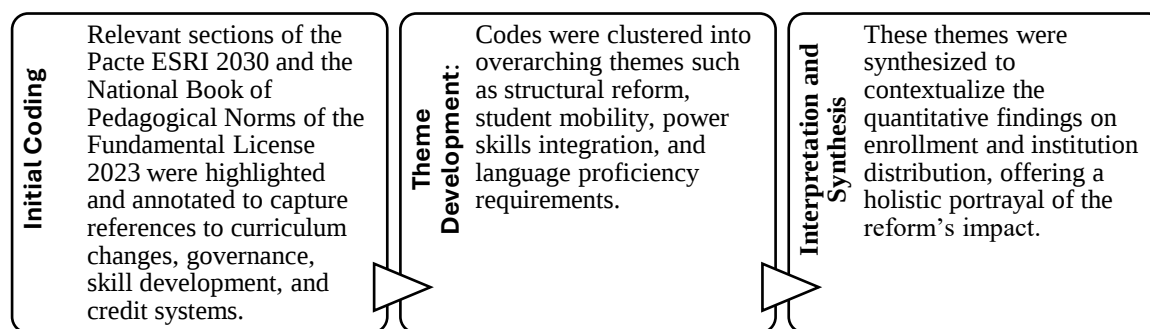
3.4.1 Quantitative Analysis

A descriptive statistical approach was applied to the quantitative data using Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics (version 29). The datasets were screened for inconsistencies (e.g., missing values) and sorted by academic year, institution type, and regional category. Frequencies, percentages, and cumulative counts were calculated to identify trends in student enrollment by gender, regional distribution, and institution type. Enrollment data for 2021–2022 vs. 2022–2023 were compared to detect any significant changes or emerging patterns. Cross-tabulations were generated to explore relationships between gender and region, as well as institution types over time.

3.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

The policy documents were examined via thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Figure 3.2 *Qualitative analysis workflow*



3.5 Reliability and Validity

To enhance reliability, the statistical data from the MESRSI were corroborated with cross-references to reports published by UNESCO (2021) and the OECD (2018). Any discrepancies in institutional numbers or definitions were clarified through MESRSI's official publications. Validity was strengthened by comparing national statistics with international agency data helped confirm the accuracy of enrollment figures and institutional information. Relevant policy statements and official press releases were reviewed to confirm interpretations of the *Pacte ESRI 2030* provisions.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All data utilized in this study were obtained from publicly available sources, ensuring that no personally identifiable information was used and no formal institutional review board (IRB) approval was required. The policy documents reviewed were officially published or publicly accessible, and citations were included to maintain academic integrity.

4. Results

The analysis of the secondary data is presented in this section.

4.1 Institutional Distribution and Diversity

Table 4.1 present the distribution of Moroccan public higher education institutions for 2022–2023, compared to the previous academic year (2021–2022).

Table 4.1 Moroccan public higher education institutions ranked from highest to lowest based on the number for the year 2022-2023 (source: <https://www.enssup.gov.ma/en/statistiques>)

Rank	Type of Institution (English)	Number 2021-2022	Number 2022-2023
1	Schools of Engineering Sciences	21	21
2	Higher Schools of Technology	18	18
3	Faculties of Legal, Economic, and Social Sciences	16	16
4	Faculties of Letters and Human Sciences	13	13
5	Multipurpose Faculties	12	12
5	National Schools of Commerce and Management	12	12
5	Faculties of Sciences	12	12

8	Faculties of Sciences and Techniques	8	8
8	Faculties of Medicine and Pharmacy	8	8
10	Higher Normal Schools and Higher Technical Education Normal School	7	7
11	Higher Schools of Education and Training	6	6
12	Institutes of Sport Sciences	2	3
13	Faculties of Shari'a, Arabic Language, and Fundamentals of Religion	4	4
13	Faculties of Economics and Management	4	4
15	Faculties of Legal and Political Sciences	2	2
15	Faculties of Languages, Arts, and Human Sciences	2	2
15	Faculties of Dental Medicine	2	2
18	Faculties of Languages, Letters, and Arts	1	1
18	Faculty of Human and Social Sciences	1	1
18	Faculty of Education Sciences	1	1
18	King Fahd School of Translation	1	1
18	Higher Institute of Health Sciences	1	1

According to Table 4.1, the Schools of Engineering Sciences lead with 21 institutions as it shows an increase from 2 to 3 institutions between the two academic years, indicating an emerging interest in diversifying specialized fields. Meanwhile, categories such as Faculties of Dental Medicine and Faculties of Languages, Arts, and Human Sciences remain relatively limited, each with only 2 institutions in 2022–2023.

Schools of Engineering Sciences rank first with 21 institutions, maintaining their count from 2021–2022. This suggests a continued emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields in Morocco's strategic planning. Higher Schools of Technology come in second with 18 institutions, unchanged from 2021–2022, reflecting the sustained focus on technical and applied fields. Faculties of Legal, Economic, and Social Sciences hold third place at 16 institutions, also showing no numerical shift from the previous year.

4.2 Regional Disparities in Enrollment

The numbers of enrolled students in faculties of letters and humanities suggest that major urban centers continue to attract the highest enrollments, possibly due to better infrastructure, greater institutional variety, and stronger perceived employment opportunities. Conversely, lower

enrollment in peripheral regions highlights ongoing challenges with equitable access to higher education.

Table 4.2 *Ranks of the number of students in the faculties of letters and humanities (Lettres et sciences humaines) for each region from highest to lowest*

Rank	Region	Number of Students
1	Casablanca - Settat	43,806
2	Rabat - Salé - Kénitra	37,364
3	Marrakech - Safi	31,175
4	Souss-Massa	31,029
5	Fès - Meknès	23,929
6	Tanger-Tétouan-Al Hoceïma	21,900
7	Drâa-Tafilalt	19,040
8	Béni Mellal - Khénifra	17,887
9	Dakhla-Oued Eddahab	10,783
10	Guelmim-Oued Noun	3,107
11	Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra	2,107
-	Total	239,020

This ranking illustrates significant regional disparities in student numbers within the Faculties of Letters and Humanities across Morocco. The major urban centers like Casablanca - Settat and Rabat - Salé - Kénitra lead with the highest numbers, which may reflect broader socio-economic factors, such as higher population densities and better educational infrastructures. In contrast, less populous regions like Guelmim-Oued Noun and Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra have significantly fewer students, pointing towards regional educational disparities.

4.3 Institutional-Level Enrollment in the Faculties of Letters and Humanities

Table 4.4 ranks the leading Faculties of Letters and Humanities by number of students in 2022–2023.

Table 4.3 *Ranks of the faculties of letters and humanities based on the number of students in 2022-2023*

Rank	University or Location	Number of Students	
		2021-2022	Number of Students 2022-2023
1	FLSH Agadir	22,777	24,024

2	FLSH Marrakech	19,474	19,698
3	FLSH Tétouan	17,231	17,887
4	FLSH Beni Mellal	17 169	17,172
5	FLSH Dhar El Mahraz, Fès	13,017	15,155
6	FLSH Oujda	14,170	14,459
7	FLSH Aïn Chock, Casablanca	12,186	12,013
8	FLSH Rabat	11,311	11,987
9	FLSH Saiss, Fès	9,393	9,428
10	FLSH El Jadida	7,634	6,970
11	FLSH Mohammedia	6,927	6,852
12	FLSH Ben M'Sick, Casablanca	5,458	5,145

The findings reveal that FLSH Agadir has the highest enrollment with 24,024, showing a notable increase from 22,777 in 2021–2022. FLSH Marrakech ranks second at 19,698, up from 19,474 previously. FLSH Tétouan maintains a strong student base, reaching 17,887 students in 2022–2023. Smaller faculties, such as FLSH Ben M'Sick, Casablanca (5,145 students), indicate a narrower enrollment range. Overall, these university-level variations align with broader regional patterns, where institutions in or near populous areas tend to register higher enrollments.

4.4 Enrollment Trends and Disparities

Table 4.4 compares the number of students by gender in the Faculties of Letters and Human Sciences for the 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 academic years.

Table 4.4 *Comparison of the number of students by gender for the academic years 2022-2023 and 2021-2022 in the Faculties of Letters and Human Sciences (source:*

<https://www.enssup.gov.ma/en/statistiques>)

Gender	Number of Students 2021-2022	Number of Students 2022-2023
Female	35,493 (56.66%)	35,557 (56.40%)
Male	27,138 (43.34%)	27,493 (43.60%)
Total	62,631 (100%)	63,050 (100%)

Female students comprise 56.40% of the enrollment in 2022–2023, compared to 56.66% in 2021–2022, indicating a slight proportionate decline. Male Students increased marginally, from 43.34% in 2021–2022 to 43.60% in 2022–2023. Although the overall shift is minor, these figures reassert a consistent female majority in the humanities. The total student population in these faculties grew from 62,631 to 63,050, which suggests stable or slightly expanding enrollment.

4.5 Pedagogical and Structural Reforms Under the Pacte ESRI 2030

A qualitative policy analysis of the *National Book of Pedagogical Norms of the Fundamental License 2023* reveals that the newly reformed Licence (Bachelor's) program spans six semesters, each consisting of 16 weeks of study and assessment, and encompasses 30 Knowledge Units, 6 Foreign Language Units, and 6 Power Skills Units (see Table 4.5). The first four semesters offer a broad foundational curriculum, while the final two semesters emphasize increased specialization by ensuring both comprehensive exposure and targeted expertise.

Table 4.5 *New pedagogical structure of the Licence program (article 2 from the national book of pedagogical norms 2023)*

Semester(s)	Knowledge Units	Specialized Knowledge Units	Foreign Language Units	Power Skills Units	Total Units
Semesters 1-4	20 (5 each)	-	4 (1 each)	4 (1 each)	28 (7 each)
Semesters 5-6	10 (5 each, includes 2 specialized)	2 (1 each)	2 (1 each)	2 (1 each)	14 (7 each)
Grand Total	30	2	6	6	42

Table 4.6 delineates the Power Skills Units, which emphasize life and personal development skills, digital competencies, artistic and cultural awareness, and social responsibility. This approach aims to produce well-rounded graduates capable of adapting to diverse professional contexts.

Table 4.6 *Power Skills (article 4 from the national book of pedagogical norms of the fundamental license 2023)*

Semester	Unit Focus	Description
Semester 1	Life and Personal Skills: University Adaptation	Focuses on introducing students to university life and academic practices to help them adapt after high school.
Semester 2	Digital and Information Technology Skills	Aims to enhance students' abilities to use modern technologies in their learning processes.
Semester 3	Artistic and Cultural Skills	Dedicated to developing students' artistic and cultural knowledge.
Semester 4	Life and Personal Skills: Personal Development	Focuses on developing personal attributes such as communication, leadership, and positive interactions with others.

Semester 5	Digital and Information Technology Skills (Advanced)	Enhances advanced digital and computing skills, building on the foundation laid in Semester 2.
Semester 6	Life and Personal Skills: Social Responsibility	Focuses on life and personal skills related to social responsibility, preparing students to contribute positively to society.

Further underlining this student-centered approach, the standardized credit system (Table 4.7) allocates 30 credits per semester—totaling 180 credits for degree completion—and is aligned with international norms to facilitate student mobility and ensure consistent academic standards across institutions.

Table 4.7 *New credit system (article 4 from the national book of pedagogical norms of the fundamental license)*

Unit Type	Standard Credits per Unit
Knowledge Units	4 to 5 credits
Foreign Language Units	3 credits
Power Skills Units	3 credits
Total Credits per Semester	30 credits

Knowledge units have more credits than power skills and language modules.

4.6 Student Mobility and Progression Provisions

The academic year consists of two semesters, each comprising 16 weeks of study and assessment (article 2 on the academic year from the national book of pedagogical norms of the fundamental license 2023). In the context of bridging connections between programs and institutions, students have the option to redirect their studies by choosing a different program within the same institution or another institution, while retaining their earned standard credits. This is subject to the conditions and procedures specified in the descriptive file of the program they wish to enroll in. Registration for a training pathway starts from the fifth semester, or from the first semester if necessary, according to the conditions specified in the descriptive file of the approved program. Registering for units in a semester of the bachelor's program requires the prior acquisition of necessary knowledge for these units, as outlined in the descriptive file of the approved program (the national book of pedagogical norms of the fundamental license, 2023).

During the training period, students can engage in activities parallel to their coursework within the framework of the program units. These activities are included in the student's cumulative file and are allocated additional standard credits by the program's deliberation committee. These credits are counted, when necessary, towards the completion of the program (the national book of pedagogical norms of the fundamental license, 2023). Students who do not pass a semester are allowed to re-register for the unit in which they scored less than 10 out of 20. Additionally, the head of the institution, upon the recommendation of the program coordinator and after consulting the pedagogical team of the unit, may permit a student to re-register for the unit for a third and final time, based on their request. This is subject to the provisions of regulation 14 below and available resources. The procedures for re-registering in units not completed are approved by the university council, and students are informed about these procedures.

Completion of the bachelor's degree program requires the accumulation of one hundred and eighty (180) standard credits, in accordance with regulations 9 and 12. Additionally, the student must demonstrate:

1. At least a B2 level in the primary language of instruction of the program, and a B1 level in a second foreign language if the primary language of instruction is a foreign language.
2. At least a B1 level in a foreign language if the primary language of instruction of the program is the official language.

In the undergraduate six-semester bachelor's program, students must complete a total of 42 modules, distributed as 30 knowledge modules (including 2 specialized units in the last two semesters), 6 foreign language units, and 6 power skills units, structured to provide a comprehensive education blending broad-based and specialized knowledge with essential linguistic and interpersonal skills. To get a bachelor's degree program requires the accumulation of one hundred and eighty (180) standard credits, at least a B2 level in the primary language of instruction of the program, and a B1 level in a second or foreign language.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The findings of this study provide important insights into how Morocco's higher education system is evolving under the *Pacte ESRI 2030*, revealing both strides toward modernization and persistent

challenges that require continued attention. With regard to RQ1, the institutional data show a relatively stable configuration of Moroccan public higher education institutions, as indicated by minimal changes in the number of institutions across most categories between 2021–2022 and 2022–2023. This stability suggests a deliberate effort to consolidate and strengthen existing structures, particularly in high-demand fields such as engineering and technology. At the same time, the slight increase in specialized institutions—such as Institutes of Sport Sciences—points to early diversification within the broader landscape, aligning with the national objective of meeting diverse socioeconomic and labor market needs.

A key dimension of enrollment trends involves regional disparities. Regions like Casablanca-Settat and Rabat-Salé-Kénitra continue to attract the largest student populations in the Faculties of Letters and Human Sciences, whereas peripheral regions (e.g., Guelmim-Oued Noun and Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra) lag significantly. These disparities echo long-standing challenges related to resource allocation, population density, and infrastructure. While the *Pacte ESRI 2030* places strong emphasis on equity and regional development, the data underscore the necessity of targeted policies—such as scholarship incentives or the expansion of remote learning technologies—to facilitate more balanced access.

With respect to gender imbalances, although female students still form the majority in the humanities, the slight year-over-year reduction in their proportion suggests that male enrollment is gradually increasing. This finding may represent a small step toward closing the gender gap in certain fields. Nonetheless, further research is needed to determine whether these trends extend to STEM disciplines, where female participation has historically been lower. Policy interventions that encourage women to enter and remain in STEM remain essential for achieving broader gender parity across the higher education sector.

Turning to RQ2, the qualitative analysis of policy documents reveals a comprehensive restructuring of undergraduate studies through the *National Book of Pedagogical Norms of the Fundamental License 2023*, aiming to align Moroccan bachelor's programs with international standards and labor market expectations. The introduction of power skills within the bachelor's curriculum—which encompass digital literacy, life skills, artistic and cultural awareness, and social responsibility—addresses a growing global demand for graduates who can adapt to rapidly evolving professional environments. These skills transcend disciplinary boundaries and promote

the formation of well-rounded citizens capable of driving social and economic development. Moreover, by setting clear foreign language proficiency requirements, including a B2 level in the primary language of instruction and at least a B1 level in a second language, Morocco is strategically positioning its graduates for enhanced global competitiveness.

Another critical reform is the new credit-based system, which standardizes each semester at 30 credits and mandates a total of 180 credits for graduation. This move harmonizes the Moroccan system with international norms such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), thereby facilitating student mobility and the broader recognition of Moroccan degrees. Notably, the policy provisions for student mobility and progression, including flexible re-registration for failed units and the ability to redirect to new programs without losing accumulated credits, further reflect an emphasis on creating a learner-centric environment. These measures should, in theory, reduce dropout rates and promote the continuous alignment of student aspirations with market or societal needs.

However, the successful implementation of these reforms depends on the capacity of institutions to provide the necessary support structures—ranging from effective academic advising to technological infrastructure for administering credit transfers and skill assessments. While the policy framework is robust, varying levels of institutional preparedness may lead to uneven outcomes, particularly in under-resourced regions. Additionally, the integration of power skills relies heavily on faculty development, interdisciplinary collaboration, and continuous evaluation to ensure that these competencies are genuinely embedded in teaching and assessment practices.

In summary, the *Pacte ESRI 2030* presents a forward-looking blueprint for Moroccan higher education, coupling quantitative growth (e.g., in engineering and technical fields) with qualitative enhancements (e.g., power skills and flexible mobility mechanisms). The results of this study confirm the system's gradual evolution toward internationally recognized standards but also reveal the depth and complexity of challenges, particularly regarding equitable regional development and the readiness of institutions to embrace new pedagogical methodologies. Future research may focus on longitudinal assessments of graduate employability, the extent and nature of regional catch-up, and the impacts of power skills training on student success. Likewise, more granular studies can elucidate how different demographic groups—especially women in STEM or students from remote areas—experience and benefit from these reforms. By maintaining a reflexive

approach and continuous dialogue among stakeholders (government, universities, private sector, and civil society), Morocco can capitalize on its recent reforms to forge a more inclusive, high-quality, and globally competitive higher education system.

Limitations and Delimitations

Although this study provides a broad overview of Morocco's higher education reforms, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the reliance on official statistics may not capture nuanced local conditions or the lived experiences of students and faculty, which could vary significantly across regions and institutions (CSEFRS, 2015). Second, the reforms under the *Pacte ESRI 2030* are still in progress, meaning that full implementation and impact assessment remain ongoing. Lastly, the study's primary focus on public institutions may not reflect parallel developments in the private higher education sector, which has also been growing in Morocco (OECD, 2018). Future research could incorporate qualitative interviews, case studies of specific institutions, and comparative analyses with private sector universities to deepen understanding of how these reforms translate into practical outcomes for different stakeholders.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research

To address regional disparities and resource imbalances in Morocco's higher education system, policymakers should invest in underrepresented regions, enhance quality assurance mechanisms, and scale the implementation of power skills through rigorous faculty training and clear, uniform credit-transfer guidelines. Meanwhile, future studies should conduct longitudinal evaluations of graduate employability, examine the efficacy of power skills in actual classroom settings, and explore cross-national benchmarking to inform continuous improvement.

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