



## **Education in the Maghreb: From the Construction to the Consolidation of Educational Systems**

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This article includes three interdependent parts. In the first part, schooling in the Maghreb will be examined from a descriptive point of view. Portraits of the Tunisian, Algerian, and Moroccan educational systems will be presented with special focus on the achievements made during the last 40 to 50 years. The second part will compare the educational situation of the Maghreb with that of developing countries having a similar level of economic development. The third part will summarize the changes that the North African educational systems must undertake to address the multiple and complex challenges imposed by mass schooling. This paper points out three main findings: North African countries have built strong formal educational systems in a relatively short period in spite of a weak French colonial legacy; the region's educational development is similar to international trends; gender inequalities and youth unemployment are still a big concern in the region.

### ***Introduction***

Guaranteed basic education for all children remains a key objective in the public policies of developing nations and of international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Bank. Indeed, the skills provided by schooling would allow future generations to escape illiteracy and underdevelopment. On the other hand, a failure in the expansion of schooling would serve to exacerbate numerous social tensions. In the Maghreb (the region comprising Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia), even if there continue to be large variations in educational quality according to region and social category, sufficient progress has been made since independence from France to allow access to basic education for all children. Research has nevertheless shown the

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insufficient impact of schooling on the technological and economic development of these nations (Hubert, 1978; Bennagmouch, 2001) and the various inequalities related to access to education (Mahfoudh, 1992). I first analyze the progress of the Maghrebian educational systems over the last few decades. Next, I analyze the progress of and the difficulties facing universal education in the Maghreb. Such an analysis makes sense only if compared with the progress of nations having a similar economic development, and I make such a comparison in the following section. Schooling has become a major project for many nations, part of a "world educational revolution" (Meyer, Ramirez, Rubinson, & Boli, 1977; Boli, Ramirez, & Meyer, 1985). I highlight some current and future challenges of education in the region.

### ***Maghrebian Educational Systems***

We will look first at the emergence and the consolidation of Maghrebian school systems. A discussion of the role of colonization, the quantitative expansion of schooling, and the incomplete literacy preparation of the majority of the population will follow.

#### **The Weak Educational Legacy of Colonization**

Along with the colonial conquest came a discourse on the necessity of providing instruction (Savarèse, 2002). In reality, however, school attendance levels at the end of the French colonial period were low among Maghrebian children (Lezé, 2001). On this point the situation is quite similar for all three nations as the rate of school attendance for the Muslim population was 13 percent for Morocco (1956), 11 percent for Tunisia (1953), and 16 percent for Algeria (Zouggari, 2006; Kateb, 2005). As Sraïeb observed (1997), from this feeble attendance rate handed down by colonization, we understand the magnitude of the task these nations have in training the professionals needed for management of public affairs.

Yet some praise the educational legacy of colonization. Chabchoub (2000) notes that, from 1883 on, Tunisia was forced to follow the colonial educational system imposed by France. In the end, this exogenous system sped up modernization of the school system and from there the modernization of all of Tunisian society.

All things considered, the colonial educational undertaking was weak in North Africa. On the qualitative side the results were equally poor. The few educated North Africans generally attended schools specifically meant for the local population, ones with lower standards and an emphasis on manual trades. Access to modern colonial schools was limited to the sons of a few local notables (Dhahri, 1988).

Once they gained independence from France, the Maghrebian countries had to construct their educational systems almost from scratch, starting with only the embryo left by colonization, in which roughly 10 to 15 percent of the local children attended schools. Thus, at least half a century in the worldwide race for schooling was lost for the region. The Koranic educational system, predominant before colonization, was not likely to help make up lost time insofar as it provides a basic, religious education rather than a preparation for economic and

social development. This impossibility to rehabilitate traditional educational systems did not stop Koranic schools<sup>1</sup> from playing an important supporting role, both during colonial times and after independence, in particular for the rural population and young children.

Currently, the Koranic school system offers some early childhood education. According to UNICEF (2004), in Tunisia 959 Koranic schools welcomed nearly 52,100 children ages four to eight, of whom most were between four and six. These schools offer a minimum of 200 hours of activities per year. This community mode of scholastic care is mainly present in urban, working-class neighborhoods or in small, rural towns. The majority of parents questioned by UNICEF were convinced of the importance of preschool education for a child's development. They also showed a clear preference for the modern kindergarten over the Koranic school, which they view as an inferior option, it being more accessible and less expensive, with the monetary contribution of the parents being largely symbolic.

### **The Construction of National Educational Systems**

The Middle East and North Africa region has made remarkable progress in primary education over the last twenty-five years (UNICEF, 2005). It is in this part of the world that the most progress has been made in the level of registration and of attendance, with an average annual growth of 1.4 percent. If this average yearly growth rate continues, the goal of primary education for all will be achieved by 2015. We consider next the progress in increasing school attendance made by each of the three countries of the Maghreb.

Tunisia was the furthest behind in terms of school attendance at the time of its independence from France, and it is also the country that has made the most progress. The education sector has been and is a priority of the Tunisian government since independence. Education spending was 6 percent of the gross national product (GNP) in 1990 and 6.4 percent for 2000–2002, which corresponds with shares of total educational expenditure of 13.5 percent in 1990 and 18.2 percent for 2000–2001 (Sfeir, 2006). Tunisia now has a good attendance rate at all levels of education. All eligible children are enrolled in the first year of primary school, and gender equality has been realized at the primary and secondary levels. There are now more female than male students at the university level (UNICEF, 2005). The effort made in favor of education has allowed construction of schools in the most rural areas of the country. This policy has resulted in an attendance rate of over 99 percent for six-year-old children for the 2002–2003 school year. The net rate of attendance in all primary schools, ages six to twelve, reached 91.3 percent for the same scholastic year.

Algeria has made considerable investment in education, and the attendance rate has gone from 47.2 percent in 1966 to 83.05 percent in 1998 (Kateb, 2005). At the time of independence in 1962, the departure of many teachers for France combined with the policy of using the Arab language as the sole language of

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<sup>1</sup> The majority in the Moroccan government following independence and to a lesser extent Tunisia's received a private education, religious or secular and essentially Arabic speaking.

instruction served to destabilize the nascent educational system for at least a decade. Yet oil income permitted an unprecedented development in basic education. More recently, areas affected by Islamic terrorism in the 1990s have experienced a deep deterioration in school conditions: schools destroyed, teachers assassinated, and isolated populations dislocated. The recent return of security has revived the educational machine. The efforts undertaken by the Algerian government to ensure a compulsory and free education for all have resulted in the delivery of instruction to almost everyone between six and twelve years old (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006).

In Morocco, student enrollment in primary and secondary schools has grown from 365,712 in 1955–1956 to over 5.8 million in 2003–2004. The overall number of pupils has thus increased by a factor of sixteen, whereas the population has only tripled (Lamrini, 2006).

Thus, between independence and today, the three Maghrebian countries have experienced a true educational expansion. All three countries have achieved at least a 90 percent attendance rate at the primary-school level. The development of education in the Maghreb has coincided with the setting up, the centralization, and the consolidation of various structures of the modern state (Sraïeb, 1997; Souali, 2004). The growth of enrollment in secondary education has been equally dazzling, rising in Morocco, for example, from roughly 0.3 percent in 1955 to 28 percent in 1985. Contemporary Morocco thus experienced many phenomena that Europe<sup>2</sup> spread out over a century and a half: adherence by the dominant class to the new meritocratic system and the universalization of secondary education. This situation explains the strategies of the social elite to transform the educational system into a two-tiered system,<sup>3</sup> one tier for themselves and their offspring, the other for the rest of the population (Vermeren, 2002).

After 40 to 50 years of independence, the universalization of basic education has become a reality in the Maghreb except for a few rural regions. These regions should achieve universal attendance in the next few years at the current rate of population growth in the region. Remarkably, in each of the three countries the fertility rate is decreasing. In terms of declining fertility the Maghreb has needed only 25 years to follow the same path that took France two centuries. After 35 years of continued decrease, in 1998 Tunisian fertility<sup>4</sup> reached the threshold of 2.2 children per woman and will probably decrease further to 2.1 in 1999, a fertility rate that maintains population size. Algeria and Morocco are right

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<sup>2</sup> From 1842 to 1876 the age group attending secondary school in France doubled, going from 1.2% of the population to 2.4%. The ruling class thus had sufficient time to take possession of this new mode of ‘social reproduction’ (Vermeren, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> The duality of the Maghrebian education system can be found at many levels, for example, social (schools for the elite, schools for the poor), geographical (coastal schools, interior schools), and linguistic (Arab-language schools, French-language schools).

<sup>4</sup> On the international level Tunisia has been a model of family planning. The country established in 1964 a birth control program and abortion became officially authorized. Family benefits were lost with the birth of a fifth child. The consequences were seen in demographic growth, which was above 3% before the 1960s and decreased to 2.6% in 1975 and then dropped further to 2.3% in 1987. It stands at less than 1% today (Lacoste & Lacoste, 1991).

behind: their fertility rates were below 3.1 children per woman in 1996 and 1997, respectively. Supposing that this decrease continues, in 2000 there will be only 2.5 children per woman in Morocco, 2.3 in Algeria, and 2.0 in Tunisia. Rates in some regions in Tunisia and Morocco are below 2 children per woman (Ouadah-Bedidi & Vallin, 2000).

It should be noted, however, that for some time to come this demographic issue will continue to influence efforts for universal schooling, most notably at the level of secondary education and beyond. In fact, North Africa's population will continue to increase despite the fertility rate reaching the replacement threshold. Those between 5 and 20 years old comprise the largest generation. Even with a low fertility rate, this group will give birth to more total numbers of children than their elders did. We can thus expect that between now and 2050 the population of Tunisia will increase 25 percent, Morocco 30 percent, and Algeria over 40 percent, presenting a challenge for the national educational systems (Ouadah-Bedidi & Vallin, 2000).

Formal education in the Maghreb was little developed by the French colonial power during its domination of the region. The independent states of Maghreb succeeded in building well-organized educational systems.

### **Uncompleted Literacy, Inequities within Countries, and the Insufficiency of Female Schooling**

In spite of efforts made toward universal education, the Maghreb has not succeeded in ridding its population of illiteracy. Morocco has a higher illiteracy rate than Tunisia and Algeria. Moreover, Morocco experiences a high level of regional inequalities in education. The farther from the coast and cities,<sup>5</sup> the weaker the educational indicators. The deep country (rural and mountainous areas, or what is known as inner Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) does not always receive an educational offering that is sufficient in quantity or quality (Vidal, 2006).

Sultana (2004) found large regional inequalities in Tunisia. The illiteracy rates in Kef and Kasserine were around 39 percent, while the national level was around 27 percent. Of the rural schools in these two regions, 44 percent have no running water, compared with 30 percent nationally.

In Morocco, notable efforts have been made to ensure school access for distant and isolated areas. But the establishment of schools is done in a way to cover many housing zones at the same time. In 1998 there were roughly 11,000 school units, such that over 21,000 rural communities (*douars*) had no school and over three-quarters of these educated their children in neighboring communities.

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<sup>5</sup> The example of Tunisia shows that school inequalities can also be found within cities. At the national level, 39% of students succeeded in passing the secondary school entrance exam in June 1991. Yet there exist large regional differences in success rates. From the region (*gouvernorat*) of Sousse, 46.8% of the students succeeded and four schools from the city of Sousse were ranked in the top five of the whole region, with a success rate of over 80%. For the whole country, these rates rise the closer one gets to a metropolitan area, but inspection of a map of Sousse shows deviations of over 50 points in the success rate between city-center schools and schools on the outskirts.

Having to travel to a neighboring community has important repercussions for student participation in schooling and achievement (Lamrini, 2006).

In Algeria the same regional inequalities can be seen between northern Algeria, with a solid overall attendance rate, and the other regions, particularly the Sahara, where basic education encounters numerous problems. This geographic inequality can be quite large: overall attendance rate is 56.5 percent for the Illizi Province (in the south) compared with 94.7 percent for Skikda (a town in the north; OECD, 2006).

In the Maghreb, children between the ages of 10 and 14, corresponding with the ages that impoverished families rely on for children's labor, are frequent dropouts. This shows itself in a continual and gradual diminishing of students, from primary to secondary to higher education, from underprivileged social classes. This can be seen in Algeria where, among 100 children entering primary school, 9 finish high school and 5 obtain a university degree (Conseil National Economique et Social, 2000).

Young girls in rural communities have received the least benefit from this effort at universal education in the Maghreb. Girls between 12 and 14 years of age often drop out to go to work and contribute to their household's income. Whether they have left school for domestic work or internal migration to the city, girls who drop out of school seriously compromise their future in a society where the majority of children now reach the level of secondary school (Gastineau, 2002; CREDIF, 1996).

Hindrances to school attendance in rural areas of the Maghreb are poverty, the absence or distance of schools, the involvement of children in agricultural or domestic tasks, and the tendency to favor the schooling of boys over that of girls in certain families. Cultural, economic, and social changes are necessary to improve rural educational attainment. Education is without doubt the most fundamental prerequisite for empowering the rural population, particularly for women.

By creating structured educational systems, the nations of the Maghreb have been able to decrease the gap in basic education that formed during the first half of the 20th century. However, perseverance and continued effort are needed to reach the goal of universal education and to eradicate illiteracy in the adult population.

The linguistic situation in the Maghreb does not help. Indeed, the school system uses languages not in the daily language practice of the populations (Arabic dialects and Berber languages). The Arabic-French bilingualism, present to a greater or lesser degree<sup>6</sup> throughout the Maghreb, is used in instruction. However, each language is assigned a different status. French is considered the principal linguistic vector of scientific subjects, representing modernity and economic rationality. Arabic is considered the language of social and literary subjects, and it is the safekeeper of tradition and of national political and

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<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of the 1970s, French was still the dominant language in the Tunisian educational system. It was used 50% of the time at the primary level, 80% at the secondary level, and 90% in higher education. This preponderance was aided by the presence of over 3,000 French aid workers (Le Monde, 1972).

religious identities. Taking students' cultural diversity into account would be a useful tactic for reducing educational inequalities in the Maghreb. By promoting the use of Arabic as the sole official language and by accepting French as the language of economic development, Maghrebian educational systems have contributed to the severe marginalization of Arabic dialects and of Berber languages and culture. The recent development of a Berber protest movement shows that postcolonial Maghreb has not been able to deal with its linguistic and cultural diversity. Fifty years after independence, French is accepted with ambivalence and the linguistic debate generally rests on political considerations, rather than on research findings on bilingualism in schools.

Finally, it is vital to understand that universal education is a necessary but not sufficient condition to eliminate illiteracy throughout the Maghreb. Becoming literate involves acquiring the status of a member of a community of practice and, by implication, acquiring a sense of ownership of the cultural meaning system that informs the literate activities of that community (Serpell, 1997).

The region today appears to be experiencing a particularly obstinate "returning illiteracy."<sup>7</sup> This phenomenon mainly concerns girls and rural children who, after having attended a few years of school, exit the system without a sufficient mastery of the written culture. What makes their situation worse is that they find themselves in a universe where written material is missing. This limited contact, along with their underdeveloped skills, quickly reverses their gains in literacy. This is a problem not only in the Maghreb but also the greater Arab world, as publishing is the poor relation among the region's priorities. Books published in the Arabic-speaking world represent 1.1 percent of the world's production, while the population of the 22 Arab nations represents 5 percent of the world population (UNDP, 2003). The social and cultural environments in which people live and work can be characterized as being either more or less supportive of the acquisition and practice of literacy (UNESCO, 2005). Obviously, these environments are far from being supportive in North Africa.

In the Maghreb, as in almost all societies, there has emerged a core of common educational practice that Serpell and Hatano (1997, p. 367) termed "institutionalized public basic schooling": "Most nations now plan for boys and girls to study together in a specialized institutional setting between the ages of 7 and 12, and during that basic phase of their education to be taught the elements of literacy and numeracy as well as being introduced to the natural and social sciences."

Historically, this movement toward public mass schooling was intended to replace home- and church-based instruction. Later, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, systems of compulsory mass schooling were established first in western and then in eastern Europe (Ramirez & Boli, 1994). By establishing the principle of compulsory schooling, states became the initiator, planner, and administrator of a system of schools. Moreover, building on a tradition established in the 19th century in Europe, governments the world over tend to

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<sup>7</sup> This term refers to a return to illiteracy by a person who at one time was able to read and write.

organize the curriculum in a sequence of age-graded tiers through which students are expected to progress from year to year. In many societies, schools are regarded both as instrumental vehicles for intergenerational transmission of culture and as authoritative repositories of humanity's accumulated wisdom (Serpell & Hatano, 1997).

Ramirez and Boli (1994) describe this process as the institutionalization of Western models of socialization and propose three distinct stages of development. *Compulsory education* was a part of the Reformation movement to enhance religious faith among Protestant families. It developed in the 17th century, mainly in northern Europe and the North American colonies. *Mass schooling* emerged in the 18th century and was part of a movement to weaken family socialization and home-based instruction by establishing community schools with largely religious and standardized curricula that emphasized the development of literacy, biblical knowledge, and moral character. Lastly, *compulsory mass schooling*, in which the nation-state became the central—if not the sole—initiator, guarantor, and administrator of an interconnected system of schools, emerged in 19th-century Europe and the Americas.

Overall, the work of Ramirez and Boli (1987, 1994) suggests that there was no single route to widespread mass literacy. In many Nordic countries and Protestant areas, high literacy levels *preceded* the expansion of formal schooling and reflected religious inclinations and pressures. In other regions, the growing provision of public and private instruction, administered by centralized nation-states or religious organizations, contributed to the spread of literacy. What is of note in the Maghreb is that unlike Western countries, where the transition to widespread literacy and schooling was a gradual process spanning centuries, within postcolonial Maghreb the spread of literacy came later but at a more rapid pace. In other words, the Maghreb really experienced only the third stage identified by Ramirez and Boli, compulsory mass schooling.

In the three North African countries, the relationship between the state (and its institutions) and Koranic schools is complicated. In Morocco revival of Koranic schools is connected to the inability of the state to extend basic education to all. Thus, Koranic schools make up the most widespread form of preschool in the country. They provide instruction of a renovated traditional style. Koranic schools serve 67 percent of all preschool children. However, only 27.1 percent of those are girls, compared with 44.6 percent in modern preschools (Ministère de l'éducation, 2000). Numerous studies of Moroccan village communities and the relationships between teachers and villagers show that those in rural areas distrust modern schools and are skeptical regarding its usefulness. Schools and teachers are not chosen by the local community and are clearly seen as cultural outsiders.

As suggested by Benavot, Resnik, and Corrales (2006), the formation of national educational systems in North Africa created at least two dilemmas for state administrators, one between religious and secular education, and the other between public and private education. The public versus private dilemma concerns the role and authority of the state in the finance, governance, and regulation of education, while the religious versus secular dilemma concerns the

conflict over worldviews and values. We may add a third dilemma particularly important in the region: the choice of the language, or languages, of instruction and language stratification.

### **The Maghreb in International Comparison**

Let us compare educational performance and policies of the Maghreb with three countries of similar economic development and other factors and pinpoint the specificities of the Maghrebian situation.

### **A Classification in Keeping with the Level of Economic Development of the Region**

To situate the Maghrebian educational system at the international level we will compare the three Maghrebian nations with three other nations having a comparable purchasing power parity (PPP): Namibia, Colombia, and Jordan (Table 1). Namibia is an African country doing well in education. Colombia is a South American country aiming to become a regional economic power. Jordan shares with the Maghreb a language and a religion. These countries also are comparable in size (both geographic and population) to Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

When looking at primary education, we see that the three Maghrebian nations have similar results to those of the comparison group. Tunisia distinguishes itself by its high percentage of children completing primary school, while Morocco is behind in this area. Between 1991 and 2004, the Maghreb lessened the gap in gender equality in primary and secondary education. Only Morocco needs to continue working to increase female education. As for poverty, the Maghreb clearly distinguishes itself, compared to Colombia and Namibia, by having a much smaller proportion of the population living on less than two dollars per day. Adult literacy is the area where the Maghreb is the most behind compared to the other countries. In Tunisia 25 percent, in Algeria 30 percent, and

**Table 1 – Principle indicators of the development of basic education**

	Children completing primary school (%)		Gender parity rate in primary and secondary education		Population living on less than \$2.00 per day (%)	Revenue per inhabitant in PPP	Population literate at age 15 and older (%)
	1991	2004	1991	2004	1995–2003	2005	2000–2004
Algeria	79	94	83	99	15.1	6,770	70
Morocco	47	75	70	88	14.3	4,360	52
Tunisia	74	97	86	102	6.6	7,900	74
Namibia	—	81	108	104	55.8	7,910	85
Colombia	70	94	104	108	17.8	7,420	93
Jordan	93	97	101	101	7	5,280	90

Source: World Bank (2006).

Note: PPP, purchasing power parity.

in Morocco 48 percent of the population older than 15 is illiterate. This is the most important educational challenge facing these three countries.

Within the framework of trying to evaluate the progress of basic education, UNESCO created the Education for All Development Index (EDI). This index is the arithmetic average of four elements: universal primary education, adult literacy, the quality of education as measured by the "survival rate" in the fifth year of school, and gender parity. Table 2 shows that Morocco made the most EDI progress from 1998 to 2002. If the Maghreb countries improve their adult literacy and gender parity, they will have one of the highest EDIs in the next few years among countries of a similar economic level.

**Table 2 – The Education for All Development Index**

	1998	2002	Variation
Algeria	—	0,877	—
Morocco	0.686	0.749	+0.06
Tunisia	0.859	0.895	+0.03
Namibia	0.841	0.883	+0.04
Colombia	0.849	0.876	+0.02
Jordan	0.936	0.946	+0.01

Source: UNESCO (2006a)

Participation of a country in international studies such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) makes it possible to compare its quality of education with different regions of the world. Generally, Maghreb countries, following the example of the majority of southern countries, seldom participate in such international studies. The few times that Maghreb countries did participate, their showing was poor. Morocco participated in PIRLS and achieved better results than Colombia, except in overall primary school attendance (UNESCO, 2006b). However, while Morocco has a fourth-grade attendance rate of over 80 percent, less than 20 percent of the students achieve the threshold of minimal competency for their grade (UNESCO, 2004).

Tunisia participated in PISA in 2003 and was placed in the lower part of the classification, as were most of the other non-OECD nations, in which quality of life and limited access to education by certain social groups can explain their relatively poor performance (e.g., Brazil, Thailand, Indonesia, and Turkey). The average math scores of Tunisian students were at the same level as those of Brazil and Indonesia but clearly inferior to those of Thailand and especially of Russia, countries with a similar per capita income (World Bank, 2006).

It is necessary to identify the reasons for the poor educational output of Maghreb students when compared to students of OECD countries. Beyond general school conditions (school facilities, didactic materials, teacher training),

there are two other possible explanations. First, it should be noted that, in comparison with developed nations and certain Asian nations, primary school in the Maghreb works with a "double flow" (in two halves) to allow the largest number of children to attend. Thus Maghrebian children spend less time learning in school. Education research has shown a correlation between time spent in class and the quality of learning. Second, time allocated to language instruction in the Tunisian school system represents 58 percent of the daily timetable (30 percent for Arabic and 28 percent for French), while this proportion is at 30 percent in European Union countries (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, 2002), reducing the amount of time spent learning math and science.

### **A Good Level of Investment in Education**

The double challenge of improving school quality and increasing school access necessitates a long-term financial investment. Compared to countries with a similar economic development, the countries of the Maghreb distinguish themselves by the priority they give to the public education sector in terms of educational expenditures as a percentage of GDP and educational expenses as a percentage of total public spending. This shows both that education is a priority for the governments of the region and that the public sector is predominant in terms of employment and investment. In 1999, Morocco spent 6 percent of GDP and 25.7 percent of overall government spending on education (Welmond, 2004). The allotted financial investment in the education sector is even more noticeable when looked at in terms of the global public resources of the state. However, a large proportion of national education budget is allocated to teacher wages. In addition, the excessive centralization of management and the lack of a mechanism of supervision, evaluation, and rigorous assessment greatly limits the efficiency of the system (Lamrini, 2006).

### **The Relative Prominence of the Public Sector within National Educational Provision**

Compared to current trends in southern countries at a similar stage of development, the development of private education is limited in the Maghreb, as shown in Table 3. Tunisia and Morocco (no numbers are available for Algeria) have an average participation in private school of less than 5 percent, far from the higher levels found in Latin America or Asia. This would seem to be an interesting particularity in the Maghrebian educational system. The low level is partly explained by the strict control of religious educational institutions in the Maghreb but also by the fact that in the decades following independence commercial private education has not been able to establish itself as a standard of educational quality. On the other hand, it should be noted that private educational institutions connected to foreign diplomatic missions (principally French) educate the children of the rich. Even if the numbers of students remain small, this education plays an important role in the social reproduction of the elites.

Concerning this, the World Bank study by Mingat, Tan, and Rakotomalala (2002) shows that it is vital that all children have access to primary education that is both free (no school fees and no private expenditures directly resulting from

schooling) and of good quality. The authors of this study consider it appropriate to allow certain parents to educate their children in private schools. Analyzing the situation of the highest-performing nations in terms of EDI, a range of 5 to 10 percent of children in private education seems reasonable. The Maghreb is right within this range.

**Table 3 – Number of private students as a percentage of all students**

	Primary		Secondary	
	1998– 1999	2002– 2003	1998– 1999	2002– 2003
Morocco	4	5	5	5
Tunisia	0.7	0.9	8	4
Namibia	4	4	5	4
Colombia	20	17	33	24
Jordan	29	29	17	16
Indonesia	—	16	—	43

Source: UNESCO (2006b).

However, the bilingualism referred to earlier encourages prudence for the Maghrebian countries concerning the development of private education.<sup>8</sup> Nonregulated private education would likely encourage divergence by establishing a two-level educational system: a public system, using Arabic and archaic pedagogical methods for underprivileged students, and a private system, partially connected to foreign diplomatic missions, using French and in line with international standards for the elite. A substantial development of private education would deepen the current divide in Maghrebian intelligentsia: on one side, the Arabic-educated intelligentsia and, on the other, the modern-educated intelligentsia essentially educated in French. The Arabic-educated intelligentsia, and with it the excluded members of Maghrebian society, is looking for an authenticity they hope to restore to ease the difficulties of modernization and the postcolonial national construction (Vermeren, 2002).

### **Current and Future Challenges**

Access to basic education is assured for the majority of children in the Maghreb. However, three important issues need addressing: the archaism of pedagogical methods coupled with many children's early exit from the educational system, the limited benefits of academic investment (that is, what gains have been made in the Maghreb as a result of universal education), and the low standards for professional and pedagogical training of teachers.

<sup>8</sup> In an agreement reached by the Moroccan government and representatives of the private sector, private education will account for 20% of all primary and secondary students by 2012.

### **Making Sense of School Knowledge**

Charlot (1993) showed that children's relationship with knowledge (*rappport au savoir*) differed according to whether they considered school as a place of personal engagement (where they worked to learn) or as a place of inculcation (where they were obliged to attend and to obey). The dominant educational method in the three Maghrebian nations is the inculcationist mode of pedagogy and not one of engaging school knowledge that has meaning for the student. The Maghrebian school is essentially characterized by a traditional pedagogy geared more to teaching than to learning. The school does not play much of a role regarding socialization and autonomy. Children do not learn to manage their own learning process, do not actively participate in school activities, and cannot blossom and become open, creative, and enterprising. School is essentially seen as a place to gain knowledge that will lead to obtaining a diploma, thus offering the possibility of getting a decent job and social recognition (UNICEF, 2004). To break from this transmissive pedagogy and strive for a pedagogy encouraging socioculturally productive learning, fundamental reforms of the school curriculum are needed. However, the reforms that have already been started, in essence copied from current trends in industrialized nations (competency training, project learning), do not allow for profound changes in the Maghrebian educational systems. The heart of the problem is the persistence of educational methods that date from another time: overloaded schedules, tendencies toward encyclopedism, strict division of scholastic disciplines, and low standards of professional and pedagogical training of teachers (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, 2002).

### **Growing Graduate Unemployment**

For half a century, Maghrebian governments have heavily invested in education. However, in spite of all the changes and economic investment, the region has a hard time finding suitable employment for its young graduates. A 2004 study by the World Bank shows a high unemployment rate for people with a higher education diploma: in 1997 out of all unemployed people unemployed university graduates in Tunisia were 6.4 percent, in Algeria 37.6 percent, and in Morocco 68.4 percent.

In Morocco roughly 600,000 active employees have a university degree, while over 280,000 students are enrolled in university and 250,000 graduates are unemployed (Lamrini, 2006). In Tunisia higher education is further developed than in Morocco; in 2005–2006 roughly 270,000 students attended the universities of the country, including a majority of females (59 percent). In terms of population Morocco has a population three times larger than Tunisia's (Sfeir, 2006).

The economic sectors do not offer career prospects in keeping with graduates' skills. Professional opportunities are rare. Yet the universalization of education in the Maghreb has created a strong demand for schooling and a legitimate hope on the part of the students of a return on their investment. As Bourdieu and Champagne (1992) assert, the school institution is enduringly inhabited by the potentially excluded, who in turn inject the institution with the

contradictions and conflicts associated with education that has no other end than itself. For working-class families, schooling represents a lure, a collective deception.

It is no longer possible to ignore the growing social demand for education, created by the countries of the Maghreb heavily investing in education. Thousands of young people have been trained in technical<sup>9</sup> and scientific professions. Others have achieved a university degree after many years of sacrifice. But finding a job is difficult if not impossible. This provokes frustration, discouragement, and the desire to emigrate. Having become a structural phenomenon in Morocco, the unemployment of graduates necessitates three simultaneous responses: a revision of the way that students are taught in secondary school and university, a voluntaristic policy of assistance for professional insertion, and active involvement of public and private businesses in the hiring of young graduates.

### **Improve Teacher Training to Raise Overall Quality of the educational system**

More and more observers point out that a large part of educational quality depends on the human resources on which the system relies. Teachers are obviously at the heart of any reform trying to raise the quality of an educational system. While some believe that one becomes a teacher by vocation and others push for rapid, on-the-job professional training, converging research shows that initial teacher training plays an important role in the quality of the system (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

As pointed out earlier in this article, teacher education is of poor quality in the region. Following independence, teacher training was not a priority while the educational system was being constructed. Moreover, this aspect of the system receives little notice in educational research in the region. I was unable to find any systematic studies on this subject in the Maghreb. Even international organizations such as UNESCO and the World Bank, which have carried out numerous studies in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America, have not produced much material on teacher training in North Africa. Teacher training is an old problem in the region. Just before Moroccan independence, 42 percent of the French teachers and 96 percent of the Moroccan teachers were substitute teachers with no pedagogical training. Under pressure to deal with the double necessity of "Moroccanization" and of generalizing education, the lack of trained teachers continued for many years after independence by mass recruiting of teachers with no professional training (Lamrini, 2006). In Algeria the education minister recently observed that 85 percent of primary-school teachers and 65 percent of middle-school teachers lack a high school degree (*baccalauréat*). This is an alarming statement for which measures need to be taken. In Tunisia a special effort during the past 15 years targeted the educational level of initial training in the teaching corps. In 2005, 72 percent of primary-school teachers and 83.4 percent of secondary-school teachers met international standards. In 1985

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<sup>9</sup> The professional integration of technical secondary-school graduates deserves a detailed analysis that is not possible within this article.

these numbers were 11.3 percent for primary school and 49.3 percent for secondary (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

Far from being alarming, the findings in this article are mixed. On one hand, the three Maghrebian nations have succeeded in constructing well-structured educational systems, starting from the embryonic educational system left by colonialism. The three countries have mostly comparable systems, even if Tunisia, and to a lesser degree Algeria, are doing better on the quantitative level (school attendance rate). On the other hand, persistent illiteracy and the difficulty secondary school and university graduates have in finding jobs severely handicap the economic development of these countries and stir up social tensions.

At the international level the Maghrebian educational systems bear comparison with other southern nations having similar economic development. It is also important to point out that the relative strength of the public education sector in the Maghreb is an exception among southern nations. Even if the limited French private<sup>10</sup> education has a certain prestige for the elite, overall, the private sector does not hold a monopoly on the reproduction of elites such as is the case in many other southern nations. In the next few years, educational studies need to examine the Maghrebian educational systems in terms of the quantitative and qualitative progress of education. The bilingualism, employment difficulties, curricular reforms, and initial and continuing teacher training make up so many research priorities for the region. Furthermore, traditional religious educational institutions have been ignored. Even though contemporary models of mass schooling derive mainly from the European experience, the interplay between traditional (Koranic) and contemporary models must enter the analysis, particularly in early childhood education.

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to monitoring the progress of private education, researchers must pay attention to the increasing private supplementary tutoring used by high-income and middle-income families to enhance their children's education (Bray, 2003).

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