

Global Threads in Moroccan Education: Weaving Identities and Bridging Disparities

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Abstract: *This study delves into the multifaceted effects of globalization on the Moroccan education system and its profound implications for the nation's cultural identity. Following Morocco's independence from colonial rule, educational reforms were initiated to address disparities rooted in the colonial legacy, though challenges persist due to financial constraints and population growth. International organizations such as the United Nations and UNESCO have advocated for equitable and high-quality education, emphasizing the concept of "global citizenship" that promotes versatile competencies and intercultural understanding. However, Morocco grapples with persistent disparities in educational outcomes compared to developed nations. Furthermore, this study explores the potential of technology transfer to democratize education, although disparities in technology access persist. As globalization increasingly shapes cultural identity in Moroccan society, the educational landscape becomes more complex. This research provides a comprehensive analysis of the opportunities and challenges posed by globalization to Morocco's education system, offering insights into the broader implications for the nation's cultural identity.*

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Curriculum Reform, Globalization, Moroccan Education

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1. Introduction

In an era characterized by unprecedented connectivity and interdependence, the impact of globalization on various facets of society cannot be overstated. As the world shrinks and cultural, economic, and technological exchanges continue to accelerate, the educational landscape is a focal point in the global dialogue. In this context, Morocco, like many other nations, is experiencing the transformative effects of globalization on its education system and, by extension, its cultural identity. The ramifications of globalization reach deep into the heart of Moroccan society, touching upon the very essence of how knowledge, values, and cultural identity are transmitted to the nation's youth. As such, the Moroccan educational system has become a dynamic crucible where the forces of tradition, change, local identity, and global influence interact in complex and multifaceted ways. This paper endeavours to explore the intricate dynamics of these interactions, offering an in-depth examination of how globalization has both challenged and reshaped Moroccan education.

Throughout the following sections, this paper will delve into the historical legacy of colonialism, government initiatives, the role of international organizations, and the ever-evolving curriculum to provide a comprehensive understanding of how globalization has left its mark on Moroccan education. By scrutinizing the impact on language, cultural values, and the quest for both cultural preservation and adaptation, this study aims to shed light on how Morocco navigates the tension between globalization's universalizing forces and the preservation of its unique cultural identity in the educational sphere.

2. Tracing the Moroccan Educational Trajectories

The Moroccan educational system has experienced a series of transformations since gaining independence from the French and Spanish protectorates. The legacy of colonial rule has left a deep and conspicuous imprint on both education and the societal fabric. The colonizers introduced new types of schools that fundamentally challenged traditional Moroccan educational institutions. These colonial schools conducted instruction in French and Spanish and introduced novel curricula. In contrast, traditional Moroccan schools employed the Arabic language and focused on the transmission of time-honoured knowledge inherited from ancestors, typically confined to religious subjects, the Standard Arabic language, and a few topics associated with religion, such as history and mathematics. This historical context has led to substantial disparities that continue to affect the Moroccan education system.

One of the foremost concerns of successive Moroccan governments post-independence was the need to bridge the gaps within the educational system. The early administrations embarked on a mission to harmonize the various educational streams within the state into a cohesive and standardized framework. The

landscape consisted of Spanish schools, French schools, and traditional schools. A strategic effort was made to unify these diverse streams in terms of goals, certification timelines, and transitions between different educational cycles. Arabization and Moroccanization of the education system also emerged as top priorities. Unfortunately, the political turmoil during the period of independence cast a shadow over these initiatives, leading to the failure of numerous educational reforms.

3. Moroccan Education within the Global Challenges

Nevertheless, the influence of global organizations on Moroccan education commenced remarkably in the 1980s. Faced with a severe economic crisis, the World Bank recommended reducing the education budget, coinciding with a substantial population increase. As a result, the objective of universally accessible education became increasingly unattainable. The scarcity of human resources led to overcrowded classrooms with varying levels, compounded by insufficient training for educators. The quality of education began to erode, and instances of educational drifting became alarmingly prevalent. These consequences represent the major challenges that continue to afflict the Moroccan education system.

Furthermore, global interconnectedness facilitated by organizations such as the United Nations and UNESCO offer support for educational reform and development. The primary focus of their efforts centres on ensuring equal access to education for all children, irrespective of factors such as race, language, or religion. Attention is also directed towards children with disabilities, striving to adapt the educational environment to their needs. Moreover, they aid governments in enhancing educational quality by establishing universal benchmarks for measuring progress and ranking the cost-efficiency of global educational systems. Competency taxonomies are provided to enable governments to restructure their curricula in alignment with international educational standards. Additionally, there is an emphasis on modernizing schools through the integration of technology and infrastructural improvements.

UNESCO also underscores the importance of lifelong learning in the 21st century. Four core principles underpin this approach. Firstly, the concept of "learning to know" signifies that students must acquire the competence to independently seek, absorb, and assimilate knowledge. Traditional rote learning is ill-suited for a world characterized by the constant influx of ever-evolving information. Second, students should "learn to do," indicating that practical skills are equally essential for vocational integration. A theoretical understanding alone is insufficient in today's job market, which demands a broad spectrum of competencies. Furthermore, students must acquire the ability to "learn to live together" and accept differences in religion, race, language, and more. The complexities of contemporary professions necessitate collaboration and cooperation, transcending cultural boundaries. Lastly, education should address the psychological aspects of students' personalities, fostering aesthetic sensibilities, positive interpersonal interactions, and an emphasis on health and well-being.

The international classification of educational systems exerts a coercive influence on Morocco, compelling a re-evaluation of its educational strategy. The prevailing concern now centres on the enhancement of learning quality. National and international evaluations consistently reveal that Moroccan students have not acquired the fundamental learning abilities and competencies necessary for effective social and economic integration. The most recent study conducted by the Higher Council for Education, Training, and Scientific Research paints a grim picture of public education's inadequate performance and underscores the imperative need for a profound educational overhaul. This assessment evaluates Moroccan students' proficiency in Arabic, French, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology (HCETSR, 2019).

In the same vein, international assessments such as TIMSS, PIRLS, and PISA consistently place Morocco far below global averages. The TIMSS scale's midpoint is set at 500, but Morocco's 2019 score was only 374, showing marginal improvement from the 2015 score, signalling a troubling lack of progress. Similarly, the assessment of reading competencies through PIRLS demonstrates that Moroccan students struggle to read and comprehend even straightforward texts (Sassi, Chaibi, & Hammani, 2021). PISA results further confirm this concerning the educational landscape (The National Exam Centre, 2023).

International assessments play a pivotal role in shaping educational systems, offering comparative insights into national achievements relative to other countries. While these assessments provide an accurate measurement of fundamental competencies among carefully selected study samples, they do not trace the complex cause-and-effect relationships between policies and practices. Instead, they offer a snapshot of the

current status quo, urging policymakers to consider curriculum reform and teacher training revisions based on these insights.

These international assessments are embedded within a globalized world that seeks to define essential competencies required for social and economic integration. Present-day educational reforms aim to address both local and international demands, given the rapid evolution of technology worldwide. Critics, however, argue that these global organizations serve the neoliberal agenda (Beck, 1999), commercializing education and reducing individuals to mere instruments for economic productivity. They contend that an excessive focus on specialization, at the expense of broader human values, culture, and literature, risks diluting the essence of humanity.

Moroccan educational policy is dedicated to expanding access to education and improving its quality (Sassi, Chaibi, & Hammani, 2021). Substantial strides have been made in rendering schools more accessible, even in remote regions. Efforts have included financial assistance for disadvantaged families to send their children to school, transportation, and accommodation. While these measures are pivotal for achieving widespread education, the issue of educational drifting remains prevalent. Each year, more than 300,000 students disengage from the educational system without acquiring the essential foundational competencies (The National Exam Centre, 2023). The percentages touted following baccalaureate exams often mask the actual level of students' proficiency. Consequently, the overarching goal of achieving educational quality remains elusive, as students frequently fail to acquire fundamental learning skills. Moreover, the influence of schools on students' personal development appears to be diminishing relative to the sway of media and peers, engendering a culture of violence, cheating, and disruptive behaviour.

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4. Cultural Identity, Technology and Modernization

The aspirational vision of a national school, fervently championed by nationalist entities, finds itself confronting the winds of social transformation within the country. The pervasive influence of market values and the overarching mechanization of societal facets extend their reach into the realm of education. Notably, the realm of high-quality education becomes predominantly accessible to those who can afford higher financial investments. Successive governmental discourses, while acknowledging the exorbitant cost associated with public education, delve into discussions surrounding potential alternative solutions within the context of reform. However, the proposed alternatives frequently exhibit a proclivity towards compromising quality, thereby exacerbating the gaping chasm between envisioned objectives and tangible outcomes. The omnipresence of hard power and the proactive communication strategies emblematic of the globalized world actively contribute to the reshaping and reconfiguring of national consciousness. While there is a discernible trend towards the democratization of schooling in the country, this democratization necessitates a concomitant emphasis on equity in terms of educational quality and equal opportunities for all.

Dating back to 1999, official documents have underscored the state's inclination towards openness, emblematic of the impact of globalization. This compelling force compels decision-makers to reevaluate the pedagogy of cultural values and societal structures. The imperative is to concurrently preserve the collective heritage of the nation while fostering an embrace of diverse cultures and literature. The contemporary Moroccan policy emanates from this dual commitment, sculpting the contours of a new nation-state. Embracing the constitutional acknowledgement of plurality, this policy advocates for a liberal stance, eschewing absolutism. Inherent in curriculum development is a dedication to this principle, strategically aligned to navigate the intricacies of a dynamic and globalized world.

The conceptualization of a 'global citizen' stands as a linchpin within the broader agenda of globalization, where individuals are expected to possess a diverse skill set and extensive knowledge, navigating the realm of intense competition. Across epochs, education has traditionally responded to immediate environments, intricately entwined with their specificities. However, the contemporary imperative directs education to align with a world economy characterized by rapid change and development. Consequently, disparities in education quality emerge as direct contributors to global inequality and the perpetuation of societal structures. Empirical evidence from international tests underscores the substantial gap in competencies between students in developed and developing countries, particularly in the domains of reading and sciences. This disjunction serves as a harbinger of a future world order predicated on creativity, technology, and

innovation, eclipsing traditional measures of wealth and physical power. The inefficiencies in education, therefore, emerge as a formidable impediment to progress and societal well-being in the Moroccan context.

Globalization facilitates the fluid movement of knowledge and technology across the global landscape, markedly enhancing standards of living. While their dissemination is not uniform, these elements are primordial in infusing even the most marginalized regions with modern attributes. Consequently, the integration of technology into both the economic and educational spheres serves as a catalyst for innovation and heightened productivity. This integration not only empowers Southern nations to partake in the creation of new technologies and knowledge but also marks a shift from a unidirectional flow, where the North exports innovations to the South, to a more reciprocal dynamic. Southern nations are increasingly taking the initiative to patent innovations, albeit the number remains relatively modest. This trend not only bolsters the income of emerging countries but also holds promise for authentic development by diffusing essential know-how.

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The promise of democratizing education through technology transfer heralds increased opportunities for knowledge accessibility. The ubiquity of the internet and computers holds the potential to bridge information gaps between the North and the South, the affluent and the underprivileged. However, this promise has been met with frustration, especially highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic. Accessibility models in Morocco reveal significant disparities based on school types (public or private) and geographical locations (rural or urban). Paradoxically, despite the widespread use of over 44 million cell phones, they have not significantly contributed to knowledge construction and dissemination.

The traditional educational framework is undergoing swift transformations as universities and institutions endeavour to adapt to contemporary changes. Actively participating in state development planning, these entities view higher education as an investment in human progress and prosperity amid rapid social and economic shifts (Chaudhary, 2016). To meet the evolving needs of both students and employers, they formulate novel strategies. These strategies encompass the integration of cutting-edge technologies, artificial intelligence, and machine learning into their curricula. An entrepreneurial mindset is promoted as a pivotal objective. Additionally, there is a heightened emphasis on personalized learning, and interdisciplinary education spanning diverse fields of knowledge, fostering creativity. Furthermore, cultivating intercultural competencies is prioritized to navigate the diverse cultures of the world.

Education thrives in the globalized world as a major force for high-skill job opportunities. The symbiotic relationship, between education and the economy, fuels growth, despite the World Bank advocating for nations to minimize its funding. The educational economy vividly demonstrates how education significantly contributes to national welfare, reduces inequality, and fosters future prosperity. Human capital, coupled with physical financing, becomes imperative for enhancing productivity. It is inherently clear that education plays a crucial role in advancing skills, resulting in well-compensated individuals in the job market. The reciprocal benefits between education and the market position education at the core of development policies, not only in Morocco but also globally (Paul, Jennifer, & Mary, 1997).

The increased accessibility to education has resulted in a significant rise in women's education rates. Women are not merely seeking access to basic education; instead, they are prominently present in substantial numbers in advanced fields such as engineering, medicine, and trade. Their notable achievements in high-demand institutions directly contribute to an augmented presence in the labour market. This shift has led to a transformation in their perspectives on social rights, prompting active participation in movements advocating for women's equality and equity across all domains (Bargain & Lo Bue, 2021). The traditional societal roles previously ascribed to them are being actively contested, propelling them to attain elevated status. This transformative phenomenon not only reshapes their self-perception but also restructures their identities in relation to themselves and their surroundings.

In the pursuit of modernity and development, the developing world, including Morocco, often looks to the Western model of education as a paradigm. This aspiration to align local education with Western standards has profound implications for culture, thought patterns, and values. The influence of international tests not only dictates educational content but also imposes global values into the national curriculum. In response, educational institutions shift towards a market-oriented approach, prioritizing the preparation of students for the job market over cultivating good citizenship. This competitive stance geared towards market dominance

and increasing clientele, contrasts with a collaborative ethos that would otherwise foster the sharing of optimal educational practices among institutions. The insertion rate, highlighting graduates' success in the job market, becomes a key advertising tool to attract a larger customer base.

Educational institutions are assuming novel roles by forging connections with entrepreneurial endeavours and engaging in collaborative projects with companies to secure funding and sustain their initiatives. The emphasis on employment prospects is progressively eclipsing the intrinsic value of education and training objectives. This trend is particularly evident in disciplines like engineering, where the focus on employability becomes paramount, shaping the trajectory towards a better life in the social realm. Alarming, this employability-driven paradigm extends even to fields traditionally centred on human aspects, neglecting the essence of nurturing altruism and promoting positive facets of humanity. The overarching value system in education is increasingly tilting towards a technical and materialistic orientation, a hallmark of the pervasive influence of globalization (Carnoy, 2005).

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The strategic integration of professional branches within both junior high schools and high schools serves a dual purpose. On one hand, it facilitates a comprehensive general learning experience for students, while simultaneously equipping them with specific professional competencies essential in the competitive job market. The nature of these branches is intricately shaped by the prevailing economic policies of the country, with branches spanning industries, tourism and hotel management, economics and trade, agriculture, and more recently, computer science. Despite the diverse array of branches introduced, the output does not necessarily yield highly qualified manual labour. Instead, it predominantly caters to the growing demand for technical, low-paid jobs spurred by investments in alignment with the dynamics of the global economic network.

In the globalized landscape, the contracted world facilitates symbiotic relationships between universities and research centres, forging collaborations that meticulously address shared challenges and offer collective solutions. This dynamic engagement unfolds within expansive academic networks embarking on ambitious research projects that draw in researchers from diverse corners of the globe. This collaborative spirit yields unprecedented advancements across various research fields, with scientists attaining notable accolades, including Nobel Prizes, transcending geographical boundaries. However, the aspirations of universities in developing countries to participate fully in these global collaborations encounter formidable obstacles, resulting in a widening gap between North and South universities, perpetually relegating the latter to lower rankings. Despite these challenges, the imperative to perceive education as a public good and the commitment to ensuring quality education open new avenues for learning in the country. Transnational schools, such as the British International School of Casablanca, American Academy, and Casablanca American School, have emerged, offering Moroccan students access to flexible global programs. This educational paradigm provides a distinctive experience characterized by diverse languages, curricula, values, and perspectives on culture, life, religion, and politics, accentuating the palpable gap between cultural blocs.

The intersection of education, as a public good and the pursuit of quality presents the nation with newfound opportunities for learning. In response, various transnational schools have established their branches, particularly in prominent urban centres. These institutions offer flexible global programs, exemplified by the likes of the British International School of Casablanca, American Academy, Casa Blanca American School, and other French and Spanish schools. Moroccan students enrolled in these establishments are immersed in instruction delivered exclusively in the language of the respective schools, following their distinctive curricula. This divergence in educational approaches imparts a unique learning experience, shaping perspectives on culture, life, religion, and politics that stand distinct from the ethos cultivated in Moroccan schools. Consequently, the perceptible gap between cultural blocs becomes evident not only in academic settings but also permeates through media and lifestyles.

In response to the challenges outlined above, the Higher Council for Education, Training, and Scientific Research has formulated a reform-oriented vision aimed at ensuring equitable access to quality education for all Moroccan students. Acknowledging the insufficient integration of technology within the educational system, the council underscores the imperative for Morocco to actively participate in a knowledge society and advance scientific research. It further recognizes the limitations in the current quality of education, deeming it inadequate for equipping students with the requisite skills in a globalized world characterized by

challenges and competition. In light of these assessments, the council proposes a series of measures designed to address and rectify the identified weaknesses within the educational system.

In the realm of values and Moroccan identity, the Council acknowledges Morocco's linguistic diversity and endeavours to construct a cohesive model for the national cultural sphere. Recognizing the pivotal role of the youth in the nation's advancement, the Council emphasizes the necessity of providing them with linguistic skills and contemporary knowledge to enable their constructive engagement. Simultaneously, it underscores the importance of instilling national and religious values, while also fostering intercultural communicative competence. This multifaceted approach aims to empower the youth to express themselves confidently in a global context without harbouring feelings of inferiority or superiority in the face of cultural diversity.

A pivotal reform measure entails the decentralization of educational management, aiming to empower regional and local cultures by integrating them into the regional curriculum. This approach seeks to enhance the sense of belonging among parents and teachers within the educational system, fostering creativity. By appropriating the local environment, schools can become integral to the identity of their communities, providing support and protection. Despite some decentralization initiatives, the Moroccan educational system predominantly remains centralized, particularly in policies related to the curriculum.

In pursuit of educating global citizens, the curriculum has undergone substantial reforms, addressing various critical issues. Foremost among these is the transformation of the portrayal of women's rights within educational materials. Texts and images that perpetuated traditional patriarchal stereotypes have been replaced with new content promoting the notion of egalitarian status between genders. Similarly, Islamic educational books have been rewritten to emphasize the religion's values of tolerance, acceptance of differences, and encouragement of interreligious dialogues. Moreover, the curriculum now places significance on universal themes such as sustainable development, environmental concerns, water scarcity, animal conservation, and civil rights across various school subjects.

A democratic society, grounded in the principles of plurality and diversity, necessitates educational institutions that actively celebrate these values. The Moroccan school model, rather than adhering to a one-dimensional ideological discourse, is characterized by the integration of components from both national and international cultures, encompassing the teaching of both the national and foreign languages. The ongoing debate surrounding these elements reflects the genuine diversity present in Moroccan society. At times, the government takes decisive steps to integrate specific elements into the curriculum, but it also demonstrates a willingness to reconsider when met with opposition from global public opinion. The treatment of culture within the educational system is delicately balanced, subject to the shifting dynamics of political power. Nonetheless, it remains aligned with the constitutional principles of diversity, multiplicity, and openness.

As the state undertakes the task of redefining the cultural identity transmitted in schools, the pervasive influence of globalization concurrently shapes the evolving personalities of students. Globalization introduces a transformative shift in the conditions of identity formation, marked by a rich diversity of identities characterized by varying traits and behaviours within educational settings. This multiplicity of identities signals a societal transition from collective modes of thought toward a more individualistic paradigm. The profound impact of globalization becomes evident as students adopt identities diverging from those articulated in official documents, ranging from fundamentalism to universalism. This dynamic reflects the profound disparities inherent in modern Moroccan society (Nikoloz, 2009).

Exploring the profound impact of globalization on identity construction within educational institutions forms the central focus of this thesis. The perspectives on this influence vary, with some viewing it as a detrimental force on the social and cultural fabric of the nation, while others actively embrace the transformation, seeking to modernize society in a manner akin to Western ideals. Beyond the cultural and ideological discourse, globalization's implications extend to issues of school access and the rights of marginalized groups, including children with disabilities and immigrants. Furthermore, the imperative of international assessments and higher education rankings compels the government to intensify its focus on ensuring and enhancing educational quality.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, globalization has left an indelible mark on the Moroccan educational system, generating both challenges and opportunities. The historical legacy of colonial influence, coupled with the post-independence initiatives, has shaped the system's present landscape, with disparities persisting. Global organizations have exerted considerable pressure on Morocco's education policies, aiming to enhance quality and access. However, budget constraints have resulted in overcrowded classrooms and lowered educational standards. International assessments have consistently underscored the need for curriculum and pedagogical improvements.

The convergence of global and national values within Moroccan educational institutions reflects the complex nature of cultural identity in the country. As the digital divide becomes more pronounced, bridging the gap between different regions and socio-economic groups remains a critical challenge. The Moroccan education system must adapt to these changes by fostering collaboration, embracing innovation, and seeking partnerships that align with the evolving needs of students and employers. Balancing cultural authenticity with international standards is pivotal, ensuring that the quality of education remains a top priority.

Morocco's response to the influence of globalization will significantly impact the trajectory of its education system and, by extension, its position in the globalized world. Navigating these dynamics requires careful decision-making, recognizing that the preservation of cultural values can coexist with the demands of the contemporary global knowledge-based society. Morocco stands at a crossroads, and its ability to strike this balance will be instrumental in shaping its future.

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