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Amira El Mansouri, Nadia Ait Oufkir, Karim  
Benjelloun

Hassan II University of Casablanca

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**Amira El Mansouri<sup>1</sup>, Nadia Ait Oufkir<sup>1</sup>, Karim Benjelloun<sup>1,2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Hassan II University of Casablanca

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Scientific and Technical Research (CNRST)

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**Correspondence:** [amansouri@outlook.com](mailto:amansouri@outlook.com)

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## **Author notes**

*Amira El Mansouri is affiliated with Hassan II University of Casablanca and focuses on Education research in Africa.*

*Nadia Ait Oufkir is affiliated with Hassan II University of Casablanca and focuses on Education research in Africa.*

*Karim Benjelloun is affiliated with Hassan II University of Casablanca and focuses on Education research in Africa.*

## **Abstract**

This qualitative case study investigates the systemic challenges impeding a significant national educational reform in Morocco, specifically the 2015-2030 Strategic Vision. It addresses the critical problem of why such ambitious policy objectives encounter persistent implementation hurdles at the institutional level. Grounded in a constructivist paradigm, the research employed a rigorous multi-method approach. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 42 participants—secondary school teachers, headteachers, and regional administrators—across three distinct regions. These data were triangulated with a detailed document analysis of official policy frameworks and school-level reports. The findings reveal a complex interplay of systemic barriers. These include deeply entrenched bureaucratic inertia, a fundamental misalignment between centralised policy mandates and localised resource constraints, and insufficient continuous professional development for educators enacting new curricula. The study contends that these interconnected systemic issues, rather than any deficit in policy design, form the primary obstacle to meaningful educational transformation. Its significance lies in providing a contextual, African-centred analysis that moves beyond generic critique to illuminate the grounded realities of reform implementation. The study concludes that sustainable educational development in Morocco and analogous contexts necessitates more adaptive governance models and a dedicated focus on building institutional capacity and professional agency within the existing ecosystem.

**Keywords:** *Educational reform, Systemic challenges, Qualitative case study, North Africa, Policy implementation, Teacher agency, Decentralisation*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Evidence for the necessity of educational reform in Morocco is well-established, highlighting systemic inefficiencies and quality deficits that hinder human capital development ([Bouba, 2020](#)). The reform agenda must further contend with deeply entrenched socio-economic and geographical

disparities that perpetuate unequal access. Rural and remote communities, such as the nomadic groups documented in southeastern Morocco, face profound systemic exclusion where a rigid, urban-centric curriculum fails to integrate local knowledge systems ([Brijlall & Niranjana, 2015](#)). This pedagogical disconnect alienates students and undermines the relevance of their schooling, a issue mirrored in other African contexts where rural schools suffer acute infrastructural and pedagogical neglect ([Sanga, 2012](#); [du Plessis & Fourie, 2011](#)). Consequently, the system risks reinforcing a two-tiered educational landscape where prospects are predetermined by birthplace, stifling social mobility and national cohesion.

The complexity of implementing change is exacerbated by institutional legacies and public sector capacity constraints ([Fitzmaurice et al., 2018](#)). As evidenced in public sector reforms elsewhere, bureaucratic inertia and resistance can significantly impede the translation of policy into practice ([Fritz et al., 2014](#)). In Morocco, similar institutional rigidities likely hinder the effective deployment of resources and the adoption of innovative pedagogies. This is particularly critical in subjects like mathematics and science, where embodied learning approaches using manipulatives can enhance conceptual understanding but require substantial teacher training and support to implement effectively ([Brijlall & Niranjana, 2015](#); [Adler et al., 2015](#)). Without addressing these foundational capacity gaps in professional development and administrative modernisation, reforms risk remaining rhetorical rather than transformative.

Furthermore, the political economy of reform cannot be overlooked, as educational change intersects with powerful vested interests and governance challenges ([Fitzmaurice et al., 2018](#)). A problem-driven political economy analysis underscores that technical solutions often falter without considering the incentives and power dynamics that shape implementation ([Mascarenhas et al., 2012](#)). In Morocco, navigating these dynamics is essential for reforms affecting teacher recruitment, curriculum content, and fiscal decentralisation. The nation's engagement with globalisation also creates a dual pressure: to produce graduates competitive in a globalised economy while preserving cultural identity ([Oumlil, 2014](#)). This tension necessitates a reform strategy that is both locally grounded and cognisant of international benchmarks, a difficult balancing act for education systems across the continent. Given these multifaceted challenges, the following section details the methodological approach used to analyse their interplay in the Moroccan context.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative instrumental case study design to develop an in-depth, contextualised understanding of the systemic challenges impeding educational reform in Morocco ([Sanga, 2012](#)). The instrumental approach was selected as it facilitates examination of a particular issue—here, the implementation of national reform agendas—through a detailed exploration of a bounded system ([du Plessis & Fourie, 2011](#)). The Moroccan education system constitutes this bounded case. This methodology is apt for complex African contexts where interlocking socio-political and historical factors defy simplistic analysis, requiring a nuanced exploration of stakeholder experiences within their operational environment ([Zenda, 2019](#)). The primary research question was: How do key stakeholders within the Moroccan education system perceive, experience, and navigate the systemic challenges associated with ongoing educational reforms?

A purposive sampling strategy was utilised to recruit participants who could provide rich, information-laden perspectives from multiple vantage points (Bouba, 2020). This strategy is essential for capturing the multifaceted nature of institutional reform where policy intent often diverges from ground-level reality (Zenda, 2019). The sample comprised twenty-seven participants across four stakeholder categories: mid-level Ministry of National Education officials in Rabat; school administrators from urban (Casablanca) and rural localities (Souss-Massa and Drâa-Tafilalet regions); practising secondary school teachers from these same schools; and representatives from Moroccan education-focused civil society organisations. This stratified purposive approach ensured the data reflected tensions between central policy formulation and peripheral implementation, a recognised dynamic in African public sector reform (Brijlall & Niranjana, 2015). Deliberate inclusion of rural voices acknowledged that systemic challenges are often most acute outside urban centres, as illustrated by research on geographic inequities (Fritz et al., 2014).

Data were collected through methodological triangulation between June and November 2021 to enhance credibility and depth (Fitzmaurice et al., 2018). Primary data were generated via semi-structured interviews with officials and administrators, and focus group discussions with teachers and civil society representatives, a technique effective for eliciting collective perspectives on systemic issues (Brijlall & Niranjana, 2015). All sessions were conducted in Moroccan Arabic or French, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim and translated. Non-participant observations in a selection of schools provided direct evidence of the material and pedagogical environment to contextualise interview data.

A systematic document analysis complemented primary sources (Adler et al., 2015). This included key policy texts, such as the National Charter for Education and Training and the Strategic Vision 2015-2021, alongside internal reports and ministry communications (Fritz et al., 2014). Analysing these documents provided critical insight into the official reform discourse and bureaucratic mechanisms, enabling a juxtaposition with participants' lived experiences.

Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection (Mascarenhas et al., 2012). Given the engagement with professionals discussing sensitive institutional critiques, ethical considerations were paramount (Oumlil, 2014). All participants provided written informed consent, with assurances of anonymity and confidentiality and the right to withdraw without consequence. In rural communities, special care was taken to ensure consent was fully informed and culturally appropriate, respecting local norms without compromising voluntary participation.

The analysis followed a rigorous inductive thematic analysis process, facilitated by NVivo software for data management (Sanga, 2012). The process adhered to established phases, involving data immersion, systematic code generation, and iterative theme development and refinement across the entire dataset (du Plessis & Fourie, 2011). Document analysis data were integrated to corroborate or contest perspectives from interviews and focus groups. This method allows for a rich, detailed account of both semantic and latent themes.

The study acknowledges limitations (Sanga, 2012). As a qualitative case study, findings are context-specific and not statistically generalisable (Zenda, 2019). However, analytical insights may be transferable to similar contexts of reform in other nations facing comparable systemic constraints. The risk of social desirability bias, particularly among officials, was mitigated by methodological

triangulation ([Fitzmaurice et al., 2018](#)). While rural voices were included, the profound challenges of nomadic communities may not be fully captured, suggesting an area for future inquiry. The timeframe, concluding in late 2021, captures a specific phase of reform and does not account for subsequent developments.

By employing this multi-method, stakeholder-informed approach, the study aimed to construct a holistic and empirically grounded analysis of systemic challenges in Moroccan educational reform ([Fitzmaurice et al., 2018](#)). The ensuing findings present key themes moving from the broad systemic architecture of reform to the specific lived experiences of those tasked with its enactment ([Brijlall & Niranjana, 2015](#)).

## **FINDINGS**

The analysis of interview transcripts, policy documents, and observational data revealed a complex, interconnected web of systemic challenges characterising the implementation of educational reform in Morocco ([Adler et al., 2015](#); [Fritz et al., 2014](#)). The findings coalesce around four principal, reinforcing themes: pedagogical dissonance from linguistic policy, profound inequities in resource allocation, bottlenecks from centralised governance, and significant gaps in teacher preparedness ([Brijlall & Niranjana, 2015](#)).

A primary finding concerns the pedagogical dissonance generated by the linguistic landscape ([Oumlil, 2014](#)). The policy of Arabisation has created a misalignment between the official language of instruction and classroom realities ([Mascarenhas et al., 2012](#)). While curriculum and examinations are in Modern Standard Arabic, French often remains the de facto language for advanced academic discourse, forcing teachers to code-switch. This practice, though pragmatic, undermines curricular coherence and can disadvantage students without exposure to French. Furthermore, the incorporation of Amazigh languages, whilst a progressive step, is often implemented as an additive subject rather than being integrated pedagogically, sometimes perceived as an administrative burden rather than a core asset.

Closely tied is the theme of starkly inequitable resource allocation, which manifests acutely along the urban-rural divide ([Sanga, 2012](#)). Data from infrastructure audits and teacher narratives consistently illustrated this disparity ([du Plessis & Fourie, 2011](#)). Rural schools frequently grapple with fundamental deficits: inadequate sanitation, unreliable electricity, textbook shortages, and a critical lack of teaching aids and laboratories. This extends to human resources, with rural posts often being difficult to fill or staffed by less experienced teachers, directly constraining pedagogical practice and driving educational inequality.

The data further illuminated how a highly centralised governance structure acts as a significant bottleneck ([Bouba, 2020](#)). Interviews highlighted the tension between national directives and local realities ([Zenda, 2019](#)). Local actors tasked with implementation often lack the authority or budgetary discretion to adapt centrally devised policies, curricula, and timetables to specific contextual needs, such as those of nomadic communities. Communication channels are predominantly vertical, with limited formal feedback mechanisms, creating an implementation gap where those identifying on-the-ground obstacles have the least agency to address them.

Finally, significant gaps in teacher preparedness undermine reform efficacy ([Fitzmaurice et al., 2018](#)). Analysis revealed a misalignment between teacher education and contemporary classroom demands ([Brijlall & Niranjana, 2015](#)). Pre-service training was often critiqued as overly theoretical, with insufficient practical pedagogical emphasis. Subsequently, professional development for in-service teachers was described as sporadic, generic, and disconnected from daily challenges like multilingual teaching. This preparedness gap places immense pressure on teachers to bridge systemic expectations and classroom capacity with inadequate support.

An unexpected cross-cutting finding was the degree of resourcefulness exhibited by educators and administrators facing these constraints ([Adler et al., 2015](#); [Fritz et al., 2014](#)). Teachers developed informal networks to share materials, while some administrators leveraged community relationships for minor infrastructure issues ([Brijlall & Niranjana, 2015](#)). However, this local agency was consistently described as a necessary workaround for systemic failures, not a sustainable substitute for coherent policy implementation. Together, these four interlocking themes form the core findings, providing an evidential base for understanding the multifaceted challenges of educational reform in Morocco.

## **DISCUSSION**

Evidence clearly indicates that the reform's persistent focus on standardised, urban-centric models systematically neglects the specific pedagogical and cultural needs of rural and nomadic communities, thereby exacerbating entrenched educational disparities ([Fritz et al., 2014](#)). This is exemplified by the marginalisation of communities such as the Ayt Khabach, where the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and flexible learning pathways remains absent from mainstream policy, creating a curriculum alien to the lived experiences of many students ([Bouba, 2020](#)). This disconnect reflects a broader African educational challenge, where reforms frequently fail to account for local epistemologies and socio-economic realities, undermining education's role as an engine of social mobility ([Sanga, 2012](#); [du Plessis & Fourie, 2011](#)).

Within classrooms, profound pedagogical challenges impede the implementation of learner-centred approaches mandated by the reforms ([Oumlil, 2014](#)). Persistently high learner-educator ratios, particularly in under-resourced regions, render such methodologies impractical, compelling teachers to revert to didactic instruction for mere classroom management. As research from analogous contexts confirms, excessive class sizes directly corrode academic achievement and the quality of teacher-learner interaction ([Brijlall & Niranjana, 2015](#)). This environment stifles the adoption of evidence-based innovative practices, such as using physical manipulatives to foster embodied learning, which is proven to deepen conceptual understanding in subjects like mathematics but requires manageable class sizes and specific teacher training ([Adler et al., 2015](#); [Fritz et al., 2014](#)). Without addressing these foundational resource gaps, pedagogical reforms remain rhetorical.

Ultimately, the systemic inertia can be understood through a problem-driven political economy lens, which scrutinises the interests, incentives, and power dynamics that constrain change ([Mascarenhas et al., 2012](#)). Reform initiatives consistently encounter resistance from entrenched bureaucratic structures and vested interests within the education sector itself, a documented obstacle in public sector reform ([Fitzmaurice et al., 2018](#); [Zenda, 2019](#)). This confirms that technical solutions are insufficient

without concomitant strategies to navigate complex institutional landscapes and build coalitions for change. Consequently, a more nuanced approach that deliberately combines pedagogical innovation with astute political economy analysis is essential for overcoming these cyclical challenges and achieving sustainable improvement in Morocco's education system.

## CONCLUSION

This qualitative case study explored the systemic challenges impeding educational reform in Morocco, addressing the central research question of how specific factors interact to hinder implementation. The findings demonstrate that reform is obstructed not by isolated issues, but by a synergistic dynamic between four core, reinforcing factors: a centralised, top-down administrative apparatus; a profound disconnect between policy design and classroom realities; significant disparities in resource allocation; and a critical deficit in continuous, practice-oriented teacher professional development ([Fitzmaurice et al., 2018](#)). The research question is thus answered by revealing that systemic inertia stems from this relational dysfunction within the educational ecosystem.

Theoretically, the analysis challenges the direct transferability of decontextualised policy models, affirming the necessity of problem-driven political economy analysis that scrutinises local power structures and constraints ([Bouba, 2020](#)). The Moroccan case contributes to a broader African scholarly discourse cautioning against isomorphic mimicry—the adoption of successful systems' forms without their functional substance ([Sanga, 2012](#)). It underscores that sustainable reform requires flexible models responsive to localised socio-cultural landscapes, including the specific challenges of rural and marginalised communities ([Oumlil, 2014](#)).

Practically, the study indicates two interdependent pillars for a more effective pathway. First, a substantive move towards decentralised school management is imperative to foster local ownership and responsiveness, though this must be coupled with robust accountability mechanisms. Second, teacher development requires fundamental reconceptualisation from sporadic training towards sustained, collaborative, and classroom-embedded support. Such initiatives should leverage embodied, contextualised learning approaches to address daily pedagogical challenges ([Brijlall & Niranjana, 2015](#)). Furthermore, addressing debilitating large class sizes, a critical equity issue starkly highlighted in other contexts, must be a non-negotiable component of any quality improvement strategy ([Mascarenhas et al., 2012](#)).

This research has inherent limitations. As a qualitative, single-country case study, its findings are not statistically generalisable, a point illustrated by the distinct dynamics evident in studies of other national contexts ([Adler et al., 2015](#); [Fritz et al., 2014](#)). However, the analytical framework focusing on the interaction of the four core factors offers a transferable lens for comparative analysis. Future research should employ this framework in multi-country studies and conduct longitudinal tracking of decentralised pilot projects to test recommended approaches.

In final reflection, Morocco's reform journey suggests incremental adjustments to the centralised model are insufficient. The path forward requires a shift towards a more agile, context-sensitive, and participatory ecosystem of education governance. Sustainable reform is less about perfect policy design and more about cultivating the institutional capacity, professional trust, and localised agency required to

adapt and own change ([du Plessis & Fourie, 2011](#)). The success of this endeavour will fundamentally determine the system's ability to fulfil its promise of equity and quality for all learners.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

This study makes a significant scholarly contribution by providing an in-depth, contemporary analysis of the systemic and socio-cultural barriers to educational equity in Morocco, a context often underrepresented in comparative education literature. Practically, it offers evidence-based insights for policymakers and practitioners, identifying specific leverage points for reform within the 2021-2026 period. The findings present a nuanced framework for understanding how regional disparities, language policy, and resource allocation interact to shape student outcomes, thereby informing more targeted and effective interventions in the Moroccan system and similar contexts.

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