



World Education News and Reviews

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Practical Information

Education in the Maghreb – ALGERIA, MOROCCO & TUNISIA

The three profiles offered with this issue of World Education News & Reviews provide an overview of the education systems of [Algeria](#), [Morocco](#) and [Tunisia](#) and a discussion of past and recent reforms.

INTRODUCTION

The education systems of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia have undergone several transformations over the last few centuries. Prior to the French colonization of Algeria in 1834 and the beginning of the French mandates in Tunisia (1881) and Morocco (1911), all three countries of the Maghreb had long-established histories of Koranic-based education. The struggle against French colonial rule culminated with independence for Tunisia and Morocco in 1956 and Algeria in 1962. After independence, the governments of the three countries undertook the process of realigning their education systems to make them more responsive to their particular social and economic needs. Central to this reform process was the nationalization and Arabization of education, with emphasis in the early years placed on educating a corps of indigenous teachers able to replace a mainly European body of educators.

Under French rule, education in the Maghreb was reserved almost exclusively for children of French nationals, with a limited number of places made available to an elite few within the local population. Just before the Algerian war of liberation, for example, there were only 1,000 Algerian university graduates, and in Tunisia at independence just 700 students were enrolled at an institution of higher education. Efforts to nationalize instruction at schools, therefore, required a huge expansion of all levels of education coupled with measures aimed at greatly increasing and encouraging access. Even today, however, there continues to be a strong French influence over education including language, curriculum, degree structure and nomenclature.

To increase participation in the tertiary sector, a policy of universal open access was instituted at a majority of the higher education institutions in the region. While most required that students hold a *baccalauréat* secondary school degree for admission, some faculties in the arts and humanities adopted even more liberal admissions policies by admitting students without the *baccalauréat*, provided they could pass a competitive entrance examination. This policy was justified by the fact that there was a relatively small number of secondary school graduates from which to train professionals in the skills required to occupy positions formerly held by members of the departing French bureaucracy. With such a need for educated manpower, students were essentially guaranteed employment upon graduation from university in the early decades after independence.

By the 1980s, after more than 20 years of open access and growing student enrollments, the goal of nationalizing and Arabizing education, administration, and other government agencies had largely been achieved. As a result, the notion of guaranteed employment upon graduation was no longer a reality for a new generation of university students. Overcrowding and the general pressure of numbers have therefore been used to justify the introduction of more stringent admissions procedures. Although students holding a *baccalauréat* are still guaranteed a place at university, those wishing to enter certain technical disciplines or high-demand programs are now often required to pass an entrance examination and/or score minimum grades in major subjects such as mathematics and the sciences.

In addition to opening access to tertiary studies, education officials placed a great emphasis on widening participation at the primary and secondary levels. This goal has been witnessed by wide-reaching literacy campaigns, the provision of free education, the introduction of compulsory primary education, high relative expenditures on education as a percentage of national budgets, and dramatic increases in enrollments and the number of institutions of education. New curriculums with an emphasis on national and Arab identity were introduced soon after independence, as was Arabic-language instruction. French, however, continues to be used at the secondary and postsecondary levels in many technical fields.

Today, education officials in all three countries are in the deliberative and pilot phases of restructuring their higher education systems in an effort to make them more internationally compatible, while also making them more efficient and responsive to the needs of the public and private sectors. Following the lead of education reformers in Europe, new higher education structures based on the Bologna model of three-year bachelor degrees, two-year master and three-year doctoral degrees are being considered and, on a limited basis, introduced in all three countries. In Algeria, for example, a pilot group of ten universities introduced, in 2004, three-year *licence* degrees at a number of faculties.

Institutions and government departments involved in drafting and implementing the “LMD” reforms (*Licence, Master, Doctorat*) have been working in a spirit of international cooperation. Not only have the three countries of the Maghreb consulted closely, but there has also been a high degree of cross-Mediterranean consultation and discussion, much of which has been undertaken with an eye to extending the European Higher Education Area beyond the physical boundaries of Europe to incorporate the three countries of the Maghreb in what would become the Euro-Mediterranean higher education and research area.

ALGERIA

MOROCCO

TUNISIA

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