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Practical Information

Education in Tunisia

By Nick Clark
Editor, WENR

Since gaining independence from France in 1956, Tunisian education officials have been working to develop an education system that is responsive to the needs of a rapidly developing country, while also emphasizing the need to develop a distinct national and regional identity. Building on the French model left behind, the focus of education reformers has been to “Arabize” curriculum and faculty at the nation’s schools and universities while producing a skilled Tunisian workforce that is able to build and manage a modern economy. The Education Reform Law of 1958, therefore, emphasized technical and vocational education, and the training of a corps of Tunisian educators qualified to teach a new uniform school curriculum emphasizing Arabic language and literature, Islamic thought, and the history and geography of the Tunisian and North African region.

In the university sector, the government established the University of Tunis (UT) in 1960 by incorporating several existing higher schools and institutes. The new university acted as a springboard for the development of tertiary studies in the country. A higher education law passed in 1969 placed all government-recognized institutions of higher learning and scientific research under the umbrella of the university. In 1986, the faculties, schools and institutes of UT were separated into three distinct universities, which have in turn been reorganized over time to form new universities. Today there are 43 public university-level institutions in Tunisia (13 universities, 24 higher institutes of technological studies and six higher institutes of teacher training).

Enrollments within the tertiary sector have been growing exponentially since the passing of the higher education law of 1969, and they are expected to continue to grow at a sustained rate over the next ten years (see University Section for enrollment figures).

In academic year 1990-91, the New Education Act introduced a reformed educational structure which increased the length of instruction at the primary and secondary levels from 12 years to a total of 13, and mandated that the first nine years of education be compulsory. Reform and restructuring plans within the higher education sector are currently under discussion and are aimed at realigning tertiary training to be more in tune with the needs of the workplace, while also being more internationally comparable and transferable (see ‘LMD’ Reform section).

The Ministry of Education supervises basic and secondary education, and the [Ministry of Higher Education](#) is responsible for the supervision and regulation of tertiary education. Responsibility for the supervision and administration of education at technical institutions falls under the portfolio of the most relevant ministry.

Private schools exist at all levels in Tunisia although within the school system instructional standards are generally considered to be inferior to



standards in the public system. Private institutions of higher education are becoming increasingly common and tend to offer training in professional and vocational fields such as business, information and communications technology, and tourism. The Private Higher Education Law of 2000 mandates that diplomas from all private schools approved (*agr  *) by the Ministry of Higher Education be recognized by public universities for admission into second and third cycle programs, or by public sector institutions for employment purposes.

The academic year runs from October to June and *premi  re session* (first session) examinations are held at the end of June or in early July; for those who fail, a *deuxi  me session* (second session, or re-takes) is scheduled in September each year. The official language of instruction at the school level is Arabic; French is introduced as a foreign language in the third year of school studies. Many technical subjects are taught in French beginning in the secondary cycle and to a greater extent at the tertiary level.

BASIC EDUCATION (*Enseignement de base*)

Enseignement de base, the first nine years of school education, is compulsory and divided into two distinct stages: six years of primary and three years of preparatory education (lower secondary). Students must score an average of 50 percent (10/20) or better on regional examinations at the end of the sixth grade to progress to the lower-secondary cycle. Students are tested in Arabic writing and reading comprehension; French writing; reading and dictation; mathematics; introductory science; Islamic studies; history; geography and civic education. Although a relatively high percentage of students fail their grade six examinations, the number is decreasing due to government efforts to make secondary studies more accessible. In 1991-92, 26 percent of students had to repeat grade six; in 1999-2000 that figure dropped to 18 percent. During the same period, the number of students dropping out after grade six fell from 17 percent to 7 percent.

After completing the basic nine-year cycle, students sit for the *examen national de fin d'  tudes de l'enseignement de base*, success in which (average of 10/20 or better) leads to the award of the **Dipl  me de Fin d'Etudes de l'Enseignement de Base**. All subjects are taught in Arabic with the exception of French and English which are taught from the third and eighth grade respectively. Students are tested at the end of each trimester in all subjects via oral, written and practical tests. Progress from one year to the next is based on the cumulative results of trimester exams and coursework on which students must score an average of 50 percent or better.

The first six years of the primary cycle is taught at primary schools and the final three at *coll  ges*.

Duration: Nine years divided into six years of primary education followed by three years of preparatory education.

Curriculum:

Primary Education

Subject	Grade level and weekly class hours					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Arabic	11.5hrs	11.5hrs	10hrs	10hrs	7hrs	7hrs
French	-	-	9 hrs	9.5 hrs	11.5 hrs	11 hrs
Islamic studies	2hrs	2hrs	2hrs	1.5hrs	1hr	1hr
Civics	-	20mins	20mins	45mins	45mins	-
History	-	-	-	20mins	45mins	1hr
Geography	-	-	40mins	20mins	45mins	1hr
Mathematics	4hrs	4hrs	4hrs	4hrs	4hrs	4hrs
Science	1.5hrs	1.5hrs	1.5hrs	1.5hrs	1.5hrs	1.5hrs
Music	1hr	1hr	30mins	30mins	30mins	30mins
Art	45mins	45mins	30mins	30mins	30mins	30mins
Technical Education	45mins	45mins	30mins	30mins	45mins	45mins
Physical education	1hr	1hr	1hr	1hr	1hr	1hr
Total Hours	22.5hrs	22.5hrs	30hrs	30hrs	30hrs	30hrs

Ministry of Education (1999)

Secondary Education

Subject	Grade level and weekly class hours		
	7th	8th	9th
Arabic	5hrs	5hrs	5hrs
French	5hrs	5hrs	5hrs
English	2hrs	2hrs	2hrs
Islamic studies	1.5hrs	1.5hrs	1.5hrs
Civics	1.5hrs	1.5hrs	1.5hrs
History	1.5hrs	1.5hrs	1.5hrs
Geography	1.5hrs	1.5hrs	1.5hrs
Mathematics	4hr	4hr	4hr
Natural Sciences	1.5hrs	1.5hrs	1.5hrs
Music	1hr	1hr	1hr
Art	1hr	1hr	1hr
Technical Education	1.5hrs	1.5hrs	1.5hrs
Physical Education	3hrs	3hrs	3hrs
Total Hours	30hrs	30hrs	30hrs

Ministry of Education (1999)

Leaving Certificate: *Diplôme de Fin d'Etudes de l'Enseignement de Base*

SECONDARY EDUCATION

The final four years of formal schooling are open to all holders of the *Diplôme de Fin d'Etudes de l'Enseignement de Base* and focus on preparing students for university-level studies or entry into the workforce. *Enseignement secondaire* (secondary education) is divided into two two-year stages: general academic and specialized education. Students choose, or are placed into, one of six streams which will partly determine the university programs a student is eligible for if he/she chooses to pursue tertiary studies.

In the academic stream, all students follow a common curriculum (*tronc commun*) during the first two years, after which they choose one of five specializations from: language arts (*lettres*), mathematics, technical sciences, experimental sciences, and economics and management. The language of instruction in technical, scientific and mathematical fields is French; with the exception of foreign languages, all others are taught in Arabic.

Students are evaluated on a cumulative basis, with end-of-year grades calculated as an average of all end-of-trimester grades. As in the basic-education cycle, students must score more than 10 out of 20 as an average across all subject areas to progress to the next grade level. Students may repeat a year in the secondary cycle just once or, in certain cases, twice if the second repeat is in the final year of studies.

At the end of the fourth year of secondary studies students take the ***Examen National du Baccalauréat*** (baccalaureate exam). Students are examined in an average of six subjects, each of which is assigned a *coefficient* (weighting) depending on the stream. Students who complete the secondary cycle, but fail the *baccalauréat* are awarded a certificate of completion that can be used for entry into the workforce or for entry to further studies at a private school.

In 1995, the last year for which statistics are available, 42.5 percent of *baccalauréat* takers were successful. Students who pass the baccalaureate are guaranteed a place at university, although not necessarily in the discipline of their choosing.

Structural Reform

From academic year 2004-05, the ministry has been implementing a new structure to secondary studies under which:

1. The first year constitutes the *tronc commun*.
2. The second year constitutes the first stage of specialization within four main subject areas: language arts (*lettres*), sciences, technology, and economics and services.
3. The last two years constitute the second stage of specialization, in which students choose a concentration from multiple fields of study: languages, human and social sciences, economics and management, mathematics, experimental sciences, technical and technological sciences.

VOCATIONAL SECONDARY EDUCATION

Professional/vocational programs are administered for the most part by the newly established Ministry of Employment, and in the more specific disciplines by individual ministries such as agriculture and tourism.

Students pursuing vocational studies may enroll in two-year programs leading to the award of the **Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle** (CAP) after completing the basic education cycle or after having completed a requisite number of foundation courses. Students who have completed the first two years of secondary education, or who have scored 12/20 or better on the CAP, may enroll in two-year programs leading to the award of the **Brevet de Technicien Professionnel**, which in turn gives access to two-year **Brevet de Technicien Supérieur** programs (open also to baccalaureate holders).

In the field of agriculture, the ministry has established agricultural secondary schools that run three- and four-year programs leading to the *Brevet de Technicien Professionnel* and the **Diplôme de Fin d'Etudes Techniques Agricoles**. The latter of the two awards grants access to tertiary-level programs at agricultural schools.

Duration: Four years divided into two two-year cycles (general and specialized).

Curriculum:

General Secondary

Grade level and weekly class hours												
Subject			Languages		Ec./Mngmt.		Math		Exp.Sc		Tech.Sc	
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	3rd	4th	3rd	4th	3rd	4th	3rd	4th
Arabic	4.5	4.5	5	4	3	-	3	-	3	-	3	-
Philosophy	-	-	1	7	-	4	-	4	-	4	-	4
French	3.5	3.5	4	3	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2
English	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Islamic Stds.	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Civics	1.5	1.5	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
History	1.5	1.5	2	2	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Geography	1.5	1.5	2	2	2	1.5	1	1.5	1	1.5	1	1.5
Mathematics	4	4	1.5	1.5	4	5	7	7	5	5	5	5
Physical Sc.	3	3	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Natural Sc.	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	4	4	1.5	1.5
Technical S.	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	8
Physical Ed.	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Economics	-	-	-	-	4	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Management	-	-	-	-	5	5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Music	-	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Art	-	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3rd foreign language	-	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
IT	-	-	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

Ministry of Education (1999)

(In the general cycle, students choose to take either a third foreign language or music or art for two hours a week. In the second two-year cycle, subjects not on the core curriculum for each stream are optional (subjects in italics); students from the language arts stream are required to take a minimum of two elective classes for the baccalaureate exam; students in the other streams must take at least one elective)

Leaving Certificate: *Diplôme du Baccalauréat* (student's stream is indicated on the diploma)

HIGHER EDUCATION

Institutions

In 2005-06, there were 178 public institutions of higher education among which there were 13 universities; 24 *instituts*

supérieurs d'études technologiques (higher institutes of technological studies), training midlevel technicians; and 6 *instituts supérieurs de formation des maîtres* (higher institutes of teachers training). The remaining institutions are subject-specific institutes that operate under the aegis of one of the country's universities. The Higher Education Ministry (HEM) supervises 155 institutions and 23 are under the co-supervision of the HEM and other ministries. In addition, HEM recognizes 20 university-level private institutions.

The number of students enrolled in tertiary studies has been growing exponentially since the early 1970s. In 1970, 10,000 students were attending university. By 1990 that number had risen to 69,000, by 2000 to 207,000 and by 2005 to 327,000.

Admission and Evaluation

Access to postsecondary studies is guaranteed to all students holding the *Diplôme du Baccalauréat*. The admission process is centrally controlled through the *système national d'orientation universitaire* (national university orientation system), which selects students based on an algorithm that computes student preference, scores, program of instruction at the secondary level, and the ministry-set quota for each field of study and institution.

The system has been criticized for a high level of rigidity and centralization that leaves many students unsatisfied with the discipline into which they have been placed. It has also been criticized for preventing students the chance to change disciplines in the course of their studies. Officials have been trying to address this problem, most recently through the introduction of a credit-hour system aimed at greatly increasing the intra-faculty mobility of students.

Because the *baccalauréat* examination acts as both a high school leaving examination and a university entrance examination, pass rates are considerably lower than for many other national school leaving examinations. On average, 60 percent of students fail the *baccalauréat* each year.

The grading scale used at universities is the same 20-point scale used in earlier stages of the education system. In order to progress from one year to the next, students must average at least 10 out of 20. If a student's scores in a majority of subjects are unsatisfactory he will be required to retake the year. Most institutions allow students to retake a year once in each cycle of their particular program. The university dropout rate is very high, with approximately 45 percent of all students beginning a first university program failing to graduate.

For a suggested US equivalency of Tunisian grades, please see the table at the end of this profile.

PROGRAMS AND DEGREES

Stage I: The first cycle of studies in the academic stream is two years in length and, in most fields, leads to the award of the ***Diplôme d'Etudes Universitaires du Premier Cycle***. This first degree is regarded as a preparatory one and students generally go on to complete the second stage of studies.

In engineering, studies follow a similar two-step process. Studies start with two years preparatory training (*cycle préparatoire*) at an *institut préparatoire aux études d'ingénieur* (preparatory institute for engineering studies), after which students must take a competitive examination. Those who are successful on the examination are eligible to complete the second stage of their studies at a higher institute of technological studies (ISET). Those who are unsuccessful on the examination can either enter a university science program or complete the training for the lower level ***Diplôme de Technicien Supérieur*** at an ISET.

Technical programs of two to three years in length lead to the award of the *Diplôme de Technicien Supérieur* and the ***Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures de Technologie***. These degrees are generally terminal.

Stage II: In most fields, the second two-year cycle leads to the award of the ***Maîtrise*** (or more recently, ***Mastère***) which, despite representing the second stage of studies after the *baccalauréat*, is considered the first degree in the Tunisian university system. In the field of engineering, the ***Diplôme National d'Ingénieur*** is awarded after three years of study beyond the two-year *cycle préparatoire*. The ***Diplôme National d'Architecture*** (architecture), the ***Diplôme National de Médecine Vétérinaire*** (veterinary medicine) and the ***Diplôme National de Docteur en Médecine Dentaire*** (dental medicine) require four years of study beyond the two-year first cycle program. The ***Diplôme National de Pharmacien*** (pharmacy) requires three years of study beyond the first cycle. Medical training is a further five years beyond the first cycle of training and includes two years of rotations; graduates are awarded the ***Diplôme National de Docteur en Médecine***.

Stage III: The *Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures Spécialisées* is awarded after a minimum of one year of specialized training, and requires a first (two-stage) university degree for admission. The *Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies* (DEA) is awarded to *Maîtrise* holders after a further two years of study and the preparation and defense of a thesis. The DEA is a prerequisite for entry into a doctoral program. The *Diplôme de Doctorat* is awarded after three years of original research and the preparation and defense of a dissertation.

'LMD' Reforms

Tunisian education officials and stakeholders are currently in the deliberative stages of reforms that would lead to the introduction of a new higher education structure based on the new European three-tier model. The main objectives of the reforms, as outlined by the Ministry of Higher Education, are:

1. The adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
2. The establishment of an academic credit-hour system;
3. The development of professionally oriented higher degrees;
4. To encourage student and faculty mobility through greater international degree and credit comparability;
5. The internationalization of higher studies;
6. Greater institutional autonomy;
7. The award of national diplomas based on explicit criteria and standards set by the state.

The reform, known as the "L.M.D.," is set to introduce a degree structure based on the new European 'Bologna' model of bachelor's, masters and doctoral degrees (*Licence*, *Master*, *Doctorat*). Similar to the new degree structure in France, which was introduced in line with the goals of the Bologna Process, a new framework of degrees would be introduced under the following guidelines:

- The *licence* (*recherche* or *professionnelle*), corresponding to three years' study beyond the *baccalauréat* (bac+3), with the first two years comprising general studies and the third either focusing on a professional specialization or research;
- The *master* (*recherche* or *professionnel*), corresponding to two years' study beyond the *licence* (bac+5), with the first year comprising general studies and the second focusing on either research or professional specialization;
- The *doctorat*, corresponding to three years of research beyond the *master* (bac+8).

Under this new system, the engineering track and two-year vocational programs at ISETs would remain unchanged, as would teacher-training programs (see below) and medical programs.

The new credit system is designed to give students a greater deal of flexibility in designing their study tracks, while also allowing them to earn and transfer credits between institutions both domestically and internationally. Credits would be organized into required and optional *Unités d'Enseignement/UE* (modules), whereby:

- 1 credit = 24 student workload hours
- 1 UE = 5 credits
- 1 semester = 6 UE
- *Licence* = 6 semesters = 36 UE = 180 credits
- *Master* = 120 credits = 4 semesters (M1+M2)
- *Doctorat* = 180 credits = 6 semesters

* A detailed PowerPoint presentation on the proposed LMD reforms from the Ministry of Higher Education is available at: www.gustra.com/reforme_lmd%20tunisie.pdf

TEACHER TRAINING

Basic Education

Students wishing to teach at the primary level (grades 1-6) are required to have passed the *baccalauréat*. Two-year training programs are offered at one of the country's six *instituts supérieurs de formation des maîtres* (higher teacher training institutes); students graduate with the title of *instituteur* or *institutrice*. In the first year of instruction, students follow a general program of studies covering all subject areas to be taught at the primary level. The second year of studies concentrates on pedagogic and practical training.

Secondary Education

Secondary school teachers are now required to complete a *Maîtrise* or *Diplôme d'Ingénieur* in the subject they plan to teach followed by one year of further studies, after which they take the qualifying *Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement Secondaire* (CAPES) examination. Candidates who are successful are awarded the title **Professeur de l'Eseignement Secondaire** and must then undertake a period of practical training. Holders of the CAPES are eligible to teach grades 7-13. A more rigorous examination, the *Agrégation*, qualifies students to teach at the upper secondary and first cycle undergraduate levels.

WES Grade Conversion Guide <http://www.wes.org/gradeconversionguide/>

Suggested scale for **Tunisia**

Scale	Grade Description	U.S. Grade Equivalents
15+	Très Bien (Very Good)	A+
13 - 14.9	Bien (Good)	A
12 - 12.9	Assez Bien (Quite Good)	B+
11 - 11.9	Passable (Satisfactory)	B
10 - 10.9	Moyen (Sufficient)	C
8 - 9.9	-	*

* May be considered passing grade if entire year is passed.

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Bowling Green Station
P.O. Box 5087
New York, NY 10274-5087
USA