**Research and Comparative Analysis of Adult Education:**

**The Maghreb**

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EHRD 643: Adult Education, Globalization, and Social Inclusion

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**Abstract** The educational landscape of Northwest Africa is changing, but how are women in this region experiencing and entering that change? The Maghreb, a dynamic region spanning Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, is home to inspirational ideals, daring practices, as well as debilitating obstacles and seemingly unceasing disruptions. This research paper investigates how this region is responding to the Incheon Declaration goals of equality and access to education as well as improving outcomes for women in the Maghreb through a human capabilities’ framework. Comparing the regions Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) findings alongside local studies and stories of women’s access and utilization of learning, we find this land hosts a paradox of success and failure yet is brimming with possibility and potential. “When women get information, tools, funding, and a sense of [their] power, women lift off and take the group where they want it to go.” (Gates, 2019, p. 25).

**Introduction**

The Maghreb refers to the region of northwest Africa. It is a region with deep history, diverse peoples, exquisite cuisine, dramatic topography and increasing opportunities for its remarkable women. For the scope of this research, I am focusing on the nations of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. This region, stretching nearly as wide as the continental US, has abundant natural and human resources. It has a growing population of 100 million inhabitants whose average age is 25.5, nearly 15 years younger than its northern neighbors in Europe. From a global perspective, that means the western world with its aging population needs to be invested in what is taking place today in the Maghreb because it will undoubtedly need them. (Strack, 2014). Historically this region has been home to numerous empires, influential communities, and individuals. Geographically positioned between the Mediterranean and the great Sahara Desert, north Africans have been learners of how to utilize and conquer barriers for their survival, growth, and curiosity for at least 2 millennia. These same drives will come in use again as they face modern challenges. In our time, this land has made a name for itself through launching the Arab Spring in 2011 cascading social uprising and even civil wars. Yet the region, specifically Morocco, has also been a hallmark in renewal energies and climate change policies. Behind the headlines and stereotypes, we find a diverse people, imperfect and poised for growth.

The Education 2030 Framework for Action outlines how to translate into practice the commitment made in Incheon. This framework seeks to integrate into a cohesive whole the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on education, its targets, and its implementation strategies while acknowledging the need for a contextualized approach. This approach should take into consideration local development, policies, and capacities. (UNESCO, 2016). This approach allows each context to note progress based on where they are currently and how they will arrive at these noble yet lofty goals. On an economic level, the Maghreb and its Middle Eastern neighbors generally have not been overly infatuated with neoliberalism, which is often equated with globalization as a negative, imperial force. The Arab uprising in 2011 (and beyond) is attributed, at least in part, to globalization and its negative impacts on the nations. (Springborg, 2016). Nussbaum explains the failures of a purely economic interpretation on development. She cites the failures of GDP (gross domestic product) numbers to reveal the distribution of resources in a nation as well as its required simplicity of funneling all areas of life together into one lack luster number. (Nussbaum, 2011). But, if not economic frustrations, why were the people rioting in 2011 attempting and often succeeding in overthrowing governments? Though no signs were hoisted during the protests asking for a capabilities approach to development in their countries, I am persuaded that what many were/are asking for is an increase in what they can *do* and *be,* as well as anger over political arrangements that were failing to address the problems of human vulnerability, while amassing political invulnerability for themselves. If we are to align ourselves with the thinking of Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Huq in seeing that, “the real wealth of the nation is its people, and the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to live long, healthy, and creative lives.” (Nussbaum, 2011). How is the Maghreb doing or pursuing that end?

**The Literacy Challenge**

It was in 2011 that I first saw the painful, disempowering reality of illiteracy. I was living in Safi, Morocco, working alongside a local handicapped association to bring physical therapy to children in need. A woman named Raja asked me to come to her home. She had received the results of her medical tests. She held them open in her hand yet was unable to read them. She asked me to read it and tell her if her cancer has returned. Raja like 60% of women her age was illiterate. And though the numbers are dramatically improving across the region, challenges persist with UNESCO’s estimate that 9 out of 10 children in North Africa are learning to read and write in a different language than they speak at home effectively being required to learn a new language in order to become literate. (Berthaud-Clair, 2021).

Each of these nations emphasized literacy to the global audience as a focus area in their GRALE. This focus is essential as literacy has now been acknowledged as a central component in the process of enabling women to maximize their potential. Numerous studies demonstrate how literacy skills are a critical building block in poverty reduction and overall development. Literacy among women has a profound impact on matters of children’s education as well as overall family health. (Laaredj-Campbell, 2016). Literate women are one of the best things that can happen for a community. But it is as complicated as it is essential. Each of these nations has multiple languages in use. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the official language of each of these four nations, but no one in the 100 million residents speak that language in their home. Most North Africans speak a dialect of Arabic that only took on a written form with the advent of texting. Others across the region speak one of the Tamazight languages, that has existed in the region since before Arabic was introduced in the 7th century, these languages are predominantly oral, though they share an ancient alphabet that has recently been resurrected. These Tamzaight languages have only been recently officially recognized in Morocco (2011) and Algeria (2016) and remain unofficial in Libya and Tunisia. (Aloui, 2021). The 19th and 20th century colonization impact on the region cannot be overstated and lingers powerfully in the presence of their continually used languages. If you live in the Maghreb and would like to participate in business, education, or most other administrative tasks you will need to also know Italian in Libya, French in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, and Spanish in some parts of Morocco. Recent global pressures have also increased the request and demand for English.

Given this complex backdrop, literacy gains across the region are worth celebrating, specifically for the youth. In Morocco, the illiteracy rate fell from 43% in 2004 to 28% in 2012 according to the national survey on illiteracy in Morocco. (Morocco, 2009). Libya saw significant progress in this area with women’s literacy in 1980s being recorded as 35% and reaching up to 72% in 2004. The chances of a woman in north Africa knowing how to read and write in 1970 was 10-12% and today it is nearly 70%. That is wonderful, but a closer look tells you the effort is not over, and distribution continues to be a challenge. The average female adult literacy numbers continue to lag twenty percentage points behind their male counterparts. And though GRALE reports that “Morocco is prioritizing women’s literacy programmes focused on developing socio-economic skills” (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2019), many literacy programs in the region are institutional and funded through the neighborhood mosque yielding with a narrow program reinforcing rote memorization, not empowering learning. Studies indicate that “these literacy programs are not being adapted to the needs and concerns of the participants resulting in low retention and high dropout rates.” (Laaredj-Campbell, 2016). And while literacy is not singular in causing empowerment and development, many models include a cognitive aspect within which literacy plays a critical role. (Prins, 2008).

**Regional Findings and Observations**

There are numerous success markers in the region including Morocco and Algeria’s robust definition of ALE found in the 3rd GRALE country monitoring surveys. They both also report measurable indicators in participants improved mental health, economic outlooks, and more. (Morocco, 2009) (Algeria, 2009). This reflects that these two nations recognize the holistic value of Adult Learning. Another success is that across the region women are participating more than men in these ALE programs both in literacy and non-literacy-based ALE programs which will have a direct impact on the equity gap. Regional participation sees it’s high points with Morocco and Tunisia having participated in GRALE surveys 1-4. Algeria also exhibits active involvement with this global conversation and has only missed the GRALE survey 2, while Libya has only participated in the GRALE survey 1. Therefore, data for Libya is not represented on the chart below. Figure 1 lists the selected target populations of three of the four countries in North Africa. Across the region we see an emphasis on literacy and developing youth not living at full capacity which are excellent areas to focus on when your citizens are asking what we can *do* and *be*.

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| **Figure 1.** | Morocco | Algeria | Tunisia |
| Shared priority targets | Adults with low literacy or basic skills | Adults with low literacy or basic skills | Adults with low literacy or basic skills |
| Shared priority targets | senior citizens/ retired people (3rd age education) | senior citizens/ retired people (3rd age education) |  |
| Shared priority targets | Young persons not in education, employment, or training | Young persons not in education, employment, or training | Young persons not in education, employment, or training |
| Nonshared priority target | Individuals seeking personal growth and widening of knowledge horizons | Workers in low-skill, low-wage, or precarious positions | Parents and families |
| Nonshared priority target | Women & Men in midlife transitions | Residents of rural or sparsely populated areas |  |

Additional studies are inquiring about *why* women are pursuing adult education in Algeria which hopefully will enable a more targeted approach to their needs and desires within the broader structure of ALE. (Boumarafi, 2015). Other successes include greater participation in tertiary education. Since the middle of the 1990s, tertiary education is on the rise across the region. Tunisia enrollment has tripled in 15 years going from 8% to 32% enrollment from 1995 to 2011. Algeria had 300,000 students enrolled in post-secondary education in 1995 and 1.8million enrolled in 2018. Morocco saw a dramatic 300% increase in enrollment from 2000-2015. (Oussama, 2020). Evidence for a massive increase in Libya’s enrollment in post-secondary education is not forthcoming yet following Libya’s civil war and the fall of Gadaffi’s regime in 2011, massive faults and limitations in the education system were revealed and addressed bringing welcome changes for all students in the nation.

But access to education is only part of the solution. While the region has overwhelmingly succeeded in attending to the rising enrollment, it has not been able to meet the employability needs of those graduates. The region is facing a quality of education problem. Test scores for the region rank painfully behind the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.This poor performance reflects the trend of education systems in the Maghreb to favor rote learning, rather than problem solving and the application of knowledge. (Oussama, 2020). This in turn leads to problems of equivalence in the global workforce, resulting in an Algerian trained accountant not being recognized in France, but a French trained accountant being welcome to work in Algeria. Stemming from years of rote memorization and regurgitation the region also suffers from an enormous gap in innovation and adaptive thinking (Oussama, 2020), which is highly valued in the modern work force.

In reviewing the GRALE country surveys, I noted the unavoidable limitations involved in collecting data in this manner. One must sift through the politically crafted comments as well as recognize the way each nation is engaging with the survey process. It is a useful tool for those who engage with the survey, but it is likewise a waste if it is completed as a perfunctory form, and not integrated into the planning or reflection of the ALE focus nation.

Despite its shortcomings GRALE and other large-scale institutions play an important role in creating space for learning and developing vocabulary for the conversation. Similarly, there are various governmentally funded initiatives across the region that are aiding to launch a conversation about education, access, and development. Morocco has seen multiple large scale development projects be launched throughout the kingdom creating just that. The latest one recently inaugurated in the province of Taza. (Jaouadi, 2021). And while sceptics might critic the size of the building or the grandiosity of the mission statement, the community at a minimum has new access and new awareness to something it might have never dreamed possible.

But for women across this region, far more detrimental than institutional grandiosity or poorly filed GRALE findings is the persistent problem of domestic and sexual abuse and the devastating social ramifications. A 2019 survey by the Ministry of the Family showed that more than half of women say they have been victims of sexual violence. But only 6 percent of them have dared to file an official complaint. (Aubin, 2021). When we are considering developing learning and educational practices we must also attend to the broken trust and tattered social fabric to bring lasting change that advances the capabilities of an entire community. (Giraldo, 2006). As we are analyzing this situation through a capabilities approach, this is a vulnerability that needs to be addressed and managed on a governmental and community level.

**Community self help**

“Most efforts for social transformation are not initiated by the government or with social institutions but emerge in the form of community self-help.” (Roumell & Jin, 2021). Najat is an example of such a grassroots initiative. After obtaining her law degree, she served as a legal clerk for the regional courts in Marrakech, Morocco. Day after day she was typing up divorce claims for women who were coming in asking for help in how to dissolve their marriage. The most consistent reason she was given was domestic abuse. After a year of clerking, she decided there must be a better way to engage this problem. Even though Morocco’s Mudawana.(family law package) had reforms in 2004, giving new freedoms and rights to women, most women (and men) still were clueless. Najat’s first step was to open a safe house, then she began a Listening Center, where lawyers would volunteer their time to hear women and give legal advice. Next, Najat began a job skills training center nearby, because many women were unskilled and unable to support themselves financially without marriage. After that, Najat realized that without educating young men, nothing would change, so she added new courses to her training center. These courses included training programs in hair cutting and carpentry, but each young man was required to participate first in a course about women’s rights. Najat most recently added literacy training to the center’s program too. In her center she proudly displays a poster of UNESCO’s Sustainable Development Goals, and she is doing her best to align with them. This is challenging yet meaningful work, and she is learning how to access the resources the government has allotted for community self-help programs like along the way. She feels proud that she is helping women exist in an environment that is safer, healthier, and more hopeful.

**Conclusion**

Through the Capabilities Approach to Human Development, we see language that asks, “what are people able to do and be?” (Nussbaum, 2011). And across the Maghreb region we see more and more individuals, communities and nations asking those questions. While the ever-increasing globalization push towards monetizing the globe and its resources is not absent in this region, this paper has served to take a view not towards a cash increase but a human flourishing increase. Undoubtedly there is a tension as sufficient resources are critical for life in this world and many nations, including those in the Maghreb are playing a catchup game economically. The ALE definitions found in GRALE 4, reveal a focus on the increasing economic viability and development through adult education more than an emphasis on how to address the problems of the human vulnerabilities that prevent a more holistic perspective to education and development. But the evidence in other studies reveal that this region is apply intentional growth across many sectors to achieve an elevated experience of life for more of their citizens. “A capabilities approach asserts that education and ongoing learning improves people’s opportunities and creates new options to choose from. It is also centered on building a sense of dignity, the ability to more critically read one’s lifeworld, and a sense of agency in addressing pressing needs and problems.” (Torres, 2013). As this approach is applied on national levels, we will see more opportunities for self-starting individuals to enact change and invite transformation.

In conclusion, no external scaffolding can be applied to elevate a people to actualize their capabilities. And equally, without the helpful frameworks provided through UNESCO and other international organizations, each community would be forced to fend for themselves creating models and wasting both energy and time. This region needs the internal and external help to accomplish the audacious goals set in the Incheon Declaration. Most leaders in these nations recognize that need. Simultaneously, these nations need internal governmental policies to create margin and space for the conversation on how best to achieve these goals. The Maghreb must invest their own governmental resources to facilitate programs and new initiatives while also making these funds available for community self-help initiatives. Grassroots transformation and community self-help will not be able to emerge without the social and cultural space of accepting new ideas and new possibilities. The nations across North Africa need CONFITEA VII and all the thinking and plans that will be developed through it. They also need their governments to assuage the vulnerabilities that are inhibiting women from rising. And they need more room for women like Najat to be able to consider what a better way would be. When this trifecta of force is in full swing then the Maghreb will be giving their entire communities those moments of lift! (Gates, 2019).

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