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Inclusive education in Morocco: the challenges of integrating deaf-mute pupils and the role of CRMEFs in initial and continuing teacher training

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Abstract

This article on inclusive education for deaf-mute pupils in Morocco examines the challenges and opportunities associated with the integration of deaf pupils into the education system. It highlights the importance of accessibility and raising awareness amongst teachers, as well as the need to adapt school curricula to meet the specific needs of these pupils.

The article also emphasises the role of parents and organisations in promoting inclusive education. The findings show that, despite progress in some regions, many barriers remain, particularly in terms of teaching resources and teacher training. Finally, it offers recommendations for improving the inclusion of deaf-mute people, such as continuing professional development and the development of appropriate teaching materials.

Keywords: inclusive education, deaf-mute people, accessibility, teacher training, teaching resources.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental and universal right, yet many children with disabilities remain marginalised within the school system. In a context where access to information and opportunities relies largely on communication, deaf and mute pupils face considerable educational and social barriers. Their integration into mainstream classes proves particularly complex, due to the scarcity of teachers trained in sign language, the persistence of language barriers and a lack of public awareness of the specific nature of this disability.

This article aims to analyse the main challenges associated with the educational inclusion of deaf and mute pupils in Morocco, whilst highlighting existing initiatives and prospects for improvement. It will also seek to formulate recommendations aimed at strengthening equity and accessibility within the education system, in order to guarantee these learners a full and effective participation in school and social life.

1. Definition of inclusive education and its relevance to deaf and mute people

Inclusive education is based on the fundamental principle that all children, regardless of their abilities, special needs or differences, must have to high-quality education in a suitable and supportive environment. It goes beyond the mere physical presence of pupils with disabilities in mainstream schools; it requires a genuine pedagogical transformation, including differentiated approaches, adapted resources and a school environment conducive to everyone's fulfilment. As Ainscow (2005) points out, Inclusion "is not simply a matter of welcoming pupils into the classroom, but of adapting the system to meet their diverse needs". In the case of deaf and mute children, this approach involves, in particular, the recognition and use of Moroccan Sign Language (LSM) as the language of instruction and communication, specialised training for teachers, the adaptation of teaching materials through the use of visual and digital resources, and the provision of interpreters. Furthermore, raising awareness amongst hearing pupils and educational staff is an essential condition for fostering genuine social inclusion and reducing discrimination. The ultimate objective, as Booth and Ainscow (2011) point out, is to create a school capable of 'valuing diversity as a resource rather than an obstacle', by ensuring that deaf and mute pupils have the opportunity to develop their full potential and to participate actively in civic life.

In this regard, UNESCO (2009) points out that inclusive education is 'the most effective means of ensuring equal opportunities and building a fairer society', whilst Slee (2011) emphasises the fact that it constitutes a political and social project aimed at transforming education systems so that they no longer marginalise certain groups of learners.

Thus, whilst inclusive education is an essential prerequisite for ensuring equity and social justice, its effective implementation relies heavily on the preparation and training of teachers. In Morocco, this responsibility falls largely to the Regional Centres for Education and Training Professions (CRMEF), which lie at the heart of the system for the professional development of teachers. These institutions are tasked not only with imparting general teaching skills, but also to develop specific expertise in meeting special educational needs, particularly those of deaf and mute pupils. Their role is therefore crucial in translating educational principles into concrete practices, adapted to the realities of Moroccan schools.

2. A brief overview of the Moroccan context regarding the inclusion of pupils with hearing impairments

In Morocco, inclusive education has been the subject of several initiatives' government initiatives, notably the **Strategic Vision 2015–2030** and the **National Inclusive Education Programme launched in 2019**. These reforms aim to improve access to education for children with disabilities.

However, as regards **deaf and mute pupils**, several challenges remain:

- **Moroccan Sign Language (LSM)** is not yet officially recognised as a language of instruction in state schools.
- The majority of **teachers are not trained** in teaching methods suitable for deaf and mute children.
- The **lack of specialised schools and interpreters** severely limits access to quality education.
- **Families lack support and information** about the options available.

These barriers contribute to a **high school drop-out rate** amongst deaf children and to **low levels of social and professional inclusion in adulthood**.

3. Statistics and data on access to education for deaf and mute children in Morocco

In Morocco, inclusive education has seen institutional growth following the adoption of the *Strategic Vision for Reform 2015–2030* (Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research, 2015) and the launch of the *National Inclusive Education Programme* in 2019 by the Ministry of National Education. These reforms reflect the government's commitment to ensuring equal opportunities and improving access to education for children with disabilities. Several ministerial circulars, such as Circular No. 19-047 (MEN, 2019) on the implementation of inclusive education, have set out guidelines for the provision of education for pupils with disabilities in state schools, emphasising the need to adapt teaching practices and support measures.

However, the situation of deaf and mute children remains characterised by persistent obstacles. On the one hand, Moroccan Sign Language (LSM) has not yet been granted the status of a language of instruction in state schools, which limits communication and learning. On the other hand, the

majority of teachers are not sufficiently trained in teaching methods tailored to the needs of deaf pupils, due to a lack of systematic specialisation within the Regional Centres for Education and Training Professions (CRMEF), despite these centres being responsible for preparing teachers to cater for the diversity of learners. Added to this are the lack of specialised schools, the scarcity of LSM interpreters and the inadequacy support offered to families – all factors that contribute to high school drop-out rates and low levels of social and professional inclusion in adulthood.

Inclusive education for deaf-mute children in Morocco thus emerges as a major issue, situated at the crossroads of legislative progress and structural challenges. To gain a better understanding of this issue, it is important to examine the current situation from four complementary perspectives: institutional recognition of deaf-mute children, teacher training and the role of the CRMEFs, the adaptation of teaching resources, and support for families.

4. Legislative framework: laws and education policies promoting inclusion

Morocco has implemented several reforms to promote inclusive education, notably:

The 2015–2030 Strategic Vision for Education: The *Strategic Vision for Reform 2015–2030*, drawn up by the Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research (CSEFRS, 2015), provides a foundational framework for inclusive education in Morocco. It highlights the principal of ‘a school based on equity, quality and the development of the individual’, emphasising the need for a school an inclusive system capable of welcoming all children, without distinction. This vision advocates for a diversification of teaching methods in order to meet the varied needs of learners, particularly those with disabilities.

It asserts that education must be regarded as a fundamental right rather than a privilege, thereby aligning with UNESCO’s principles (2009), according to which inclusion is ‘the most effective way to guarantee equal opportunities and build a fairer society’.

4.1. The National Inclusive Education Programme (2019)

In 2019, the Ministry of National Education, in partnership with UNICEF, launched the *National Programme for Inclusive Education*. This ambitious programme aims to ensure the integration of 100 per cent of children with disabilities into mainstream schools by 2030, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4), which call for equitable and inclusive education for all (UN, 2015). The

programme notably provides for the training of 10,000 teachers specialising in supporting pupils with disabilities, as well as the creation of around 4,000 adapted inclusive classes (MEN, 2019). According to the joint MEN–UNICEF report (2019), this programme represents a major step forward, but its success will depend on the implementation of rigorous monitoring, the mobilisation of resources and raising awareness amongst educational and social stakeholders.

4.2. Framework Law 51.17 on Education (2019)

The enactment of *Framework Law 51.17* on the education, training and scientific research system in 2019 marks a decisive step in the institutionalisation of inclusive education in Morocco. This law affirms the right of all children to education and emphasises the importance of equity and inclusion in schools. It highlights two key aspects: teacher training and the adaptation of school infrastructure to meet the needs of learners with disabilities. This legislation is thus in line with the principles set out by Slee (2011), who points out that inclusive education cannot be achieved without a structural transformation of education systems. However, challenges remain regarding the translation of these commitments into, particularly with regard to the official recognition of Moroccan Sign Language (LSM) and the effective roll-out of inclusive classes.

4.3. The role of CRMEFs in inclusive teacher training

The Regional Centres for Education and Training Professions (CRMEFs) play a central role in Morocco’s national strategy for the professionalisation of teachers. Established as part of the 2011 reform, their main remit is to provide initial and continuing training for teachers in pre-school, primary and secondary schools. In the field of inclusive education, their role is all the more crucial given that the success of the reforms depends on teachers’ ability to adapt their practices to pupils’ diverse needs.

As set out in *Framework Law 51.17* (2019), teacher training must include ‘modules relating to the support of learners with disabilities, with a view to ensuring equity and equal opportunities.

In practice, some CRMEFs have begun to introduce awareness-raising and training on inclusive education, in partnership with international organisations such as UNICEF and Handicap International. However, these efforts remain insufficient and unevenly distributed across the country. The challenge is twofold: on the one hand, to roll out systematic training in inclusive education for all trainee teachers; and, on the other hand, to enhance the specialisation of certain

categories of staff capable of working directly with pupils with special educational needs, particularly deaf and mute children. In this regard, Slee (2018) points out that ‘inclusion cannot be imposed; it must be taught, practised and institutionalised’. Strengthening the capacities of the CRMEFs thus appears to be an essential prerequisite for translating Morocco’s strategic guidelines into concrete and effective teaching practices.

Despite these advances, **concrete measures are slow to be implemented**, and many deaf pupils continue to **face a lack accessibility and suitable resources**.

5. The Moroccan educational landscape for deaf and mute pupils

5.1. Specialist schools

The provision of education for deaf and mute children in Morocco relies largely on specialised schools, often run by associations, charitable foundations or NGOs. One of the most iconic institutions is **the National Institute for the Deaf in Rabat**, which provides education in **Moroccan Sign Language (LSM)**. These institutions are essential spaces for socialisation and learning, tailored to the of deaf pupils.

However, they remain limited by their **scarcity** and their **concentration in major cities**, which deprives many children in rural or semi-urban areas of access to appropriate education (Benmoussa, 2020). Furthermore, educational provision is often limited to primary school, with no real educational continuity into lower and upper secondary school. Public funding remains insufficient, which places the majority of these institutions in a position of dependence on external grants or private donations.

As Ainscow (2005) points out, “the success of inclusive education cannot rely solely on isolated specialised facilities, but on a coherent link between mainstream schools and special schools”. In Morocco, this link is still in its infancy.

5.2. Integration into mainstream schools

At the same time, some deaf children are enrolled in mainstream schools as part of integration efforts. However, this inclusion remains **largely formal** and faces numerous structural and pedagogical obstacles. In the majority of cases, no specific support measures are in place:

Very few teachers are trained in **Moroccan Sign Language**, no Moroccan Sign Language (MSL) interpreters are systematically provided, and teaching materials are not adapted.

This situation means that deaf pupils face enormous difficulties in following lessons, leading to **gradual marginalisation** and a **high school drop-out rate** (Ministry of National Education, Circular No. 099/2019).

UNESCO (2017) points out that ‘inclusive education cannot be limited to the physical presence of children in classrooms; it requires the adaptation of teaching practices, content and learning environments. However, in Morocco, the integration of deaf pupils into mainstream schools is more akin to symbolic social integration than to genuine educational inclusion.

The Moroccan education system for deaf and mute children is based on a **fragile duality**: on the one hand, specialised schools play a pioneering role but remain limited by their scarcity, their lack of resources and the absence of long-term educational support; on the other hand, integration into mainstream schools remains poorly supervised and inadequately resourced, which undermines equal opportunities and the academic success of these pupils.

This observation is in line with the analyses of Slee (2018), who argues that ‘inclusion remains a goal of educational justice to be achieved, rather than a concrete reality in many school systems.

6. First-hand accounts and realities on the ground: persistent challenges

Although Morocco has undertaken several ambitious reforms to promote Inclusive education: observations from the field reveal a between education policies and their actual implementation. Accounts gathered from teachers, parents and pupils highlight structural and pedagogical challenges that continue to hinder the genuine inclusion of deaf children.

6.1. Lack of suitable teaching resources

One teacher describes her daily struggles:

“We have deaf pupils in our classes, but we have no suitable tools to support them effectively. Without specific training, it is very difficult to meet their needs.”

Indeed, no official school textbook incorporates **Moroccan Sign Language (LSM)**, and the audiovisual materials used in teaching still lack subtitles or translation into LSM. This shortfall considerably reduces opportunities for independent learning and increases deaf pupils’ dependence on specialist support, which is often lacking.

6.2. Shortage of trained teachers

One parent describes their experience: *“My son was enrolled in a mainstream school, but as none of the teachers knew sign language, he was completely lost. He eventually left the school.”*

However, several reports and studies highlight significant shortcomings in teacher training regarding inclusive education, particularly for deaf and hard-of-hearing pupils. A qualitative study conducted amongst ten primary school teachers in Morocco revealed that the majority of them had not received training in inclusive education and lacked suitable teaching resources to support pupils with disabilities. The teachers expressed their support for inclusive education, but also highlighted the challenges associated with the lack of specialised training and appropriate teaching materials (Machamrah, 2022).

7. Recommendations and solutions for inclusive education

To address the challenges identified, it is essential to implement a set of integrated measures aimed at strengthening the inclusion of deaf and mute pupils. Teacher training is a key lever: it must include compulsory learning of **Moroccan Sign Language (LSM)**, adapted teaching methods and proficiency in digital educational tools to support pupils. At the same time, the development of **bilingual LSM-Arabic teaching resources**, interactive multimedia materials and accessible technologies – such as educational tablets and LSM apps – helps to improve understanding and independence of pupils. Inclusion also requires **awareness-raising and community engagement**, involving families, peers and organisations; parents must be trained to support the learning of LSM at home, whilst should encourage non-verbal communication and collaborative work between hearing and deaf pupils. Finally, a Cross-sector collaboration is essential to mobilise all stakeholders: the Ministry of Education must incorporate LSM into the curriculum and train teachers; NGOs and associations must provide support and advocacy; technology companies must develop inclusive educational tools; and the media must promote LSM through accessible content. Taken together, these actions aim to create a truly inclusive, equitable and stimulating educational environment for all deaf and mute children in Morocco.

Conclusion

Inclusive education for deaf-mute pupils in Morocco remains a major challenge, both strategic and humanitarian. Recent reforms, such as the Strategic Vision 2015–2030, the National Programme for Inclusive Education and Framework Law

51.17, demonstrate the commitment of the to guarantee the right to education for all. However, observations on the ground reveal a significant gap between these ambitions and everyday reality: a lack of suitable teaching resources, a shortage of trained teachers, a shortage of LSM interpreters and inadequate school infrastructure. These shortcomings result in limited integration into mainstream schools, a high school drop-out rate and persistent social exclusion.

To address these challenges, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive and coordinated approach. This is based on compulsory training for teachers in LSM and inclusive teaching methods, the development of bilingual textbooks and appropriate multimedia resources, the use of new technologies to facilitate learning, as well as raising awareness and engaging families, hearing pupils, organisations and public institutions. Cross-sectoral collaboration, involving the Ministry, NGOs, technology companies and the media, is a key driver for transforming inclusive policies into effective practices. By combining educational innovations, community support and institutional commitment, Morocco can create a truly inclusive educational environment, offering deaf and mute children the same opportunities for success, personal development and active participation in society.

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