



How Morocco is improving student learning: the success of the Pioneer Schools

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17.04.2026

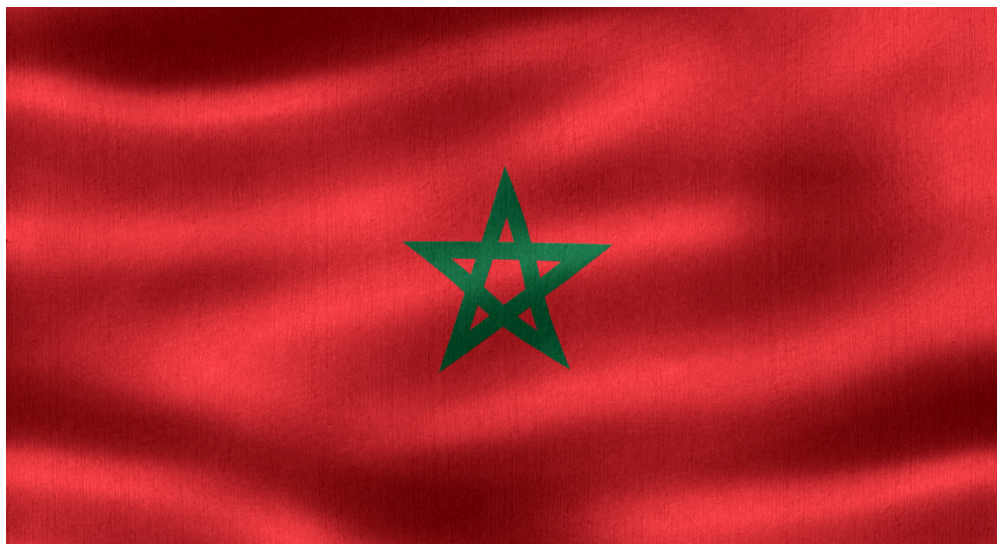
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Moroccan Pioneer Schools have replaced intuition with evidence to achieve learning gains that turned around a looming educational crisis. Using a combination of explicit instruction and Teaching at the Right Level, paired with rigorously scripted pedagogy and solid digital monitoring, the program has quadrupled proficiency rates in one single year, providing an inspiring model for global educational reform.





among a large proportion of students. Data from the 2019 National Assessment Program (PNEA, in French) shows that 70% of primary school students have not mastered basic learning, while international PISA 2018 results ranked Morocco 75th out of 79 countries. In response to this concerning situation, the country's Ministry of Education launched the Feuille de Route 2022-2026, an ambitious strategy aiming to transform public schools. At the heart of this reform lies the Pioneer Schools Program (PEP, in French), implemented during the 2023/2024 academic year across 626 primary schools, with the goal of rapidly improving the learning outcomes of 322,000 students.

The PEP is based on two complementary pedagogical approaches, both rooted in evidence-based data. The first, Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), aims to bridge cumulative gaps by grouping students according to their actual level of competence rather than their age. This intensive remedial measure takes place during the first six weeks of the school year and relies on structured and engaging techniques — such as concept presentation, strategy modeling, guided practice, and corrective feedback — to reinforce foundational knowledge in Arabic, French and Mathematics. The second approach, explicit instruction, relies on scripted lessons that guide the teacher through concept presentation, strategy modeling, guided practice, and corrective feedback. This structured pedagogy ensures clear progression and a solid understanding of new knowledge. The entire framework was supported by successive training for teachers and inspectors, and accompanied by international experts (Gauthier & Bissonnette, 2025).

The PEP's outcomes are based on four independent evaluations conducted through the 2023/2024 school year. The Sindi study analyzed the impact of TaRL in 63,000 students, while a quasi-experimental study by J-PAL compared 138 schools running the PEP against control groups. Alongside these quantitative measures, the National Observatory for Human Development (ONDH) gathered perceptions from teachers, parents, and students, and the Higher Council for Education, Training, and Scientific Research (CSEFRS) assessed implementation compliance. Together, these evaluations converge on a remarkable finding: the PEP achieved learning gains on a magnitude rarely seen in low- to middle-income





schools outperforms 82% of their peers in non-participating schools. The Sindi study demonstrates that proficiency rates quadrupled following the intensive TaRL remedial phase, surging from 20% to 80%. These results surpass those of benchmark international programs and benefit both struggling learners and high-performers students alike, testifying to a robust equity of impact.

Average student in PEP schools outperforms 82% of their peers in non-participating schools

Stakeholders on the ground also demonstrate a strong commitment to the program. According to ONDH, 85% of teachers report being satisfied with scripted lesson plans, noting that they clarify expectations and streamline lesson preparation, even though 60% highlight an increased workload. Students, on the other hand, report higher engagement levels due to interactive activities and the clarity of explanations. The CSEFRS assigned a compliance rating of 79/100 for program implementation, confirming the adoption of core practices, despite persistent challenges in certain rural areas regarding infrastructure and IT resources.

The success of the PEP can be attributed to several strategic factors. First, the adoption of evidence-based pedagogical methods, such as explicit instruction and TaRL. Second, the implementation of a cascading training model that ensured a coherent transmission of practices, while scripted lesson plans reduced teachers' cognitive load and promoted adherence to the core model. Lastly, data-driven monitoring, which was primarily enabled by the **MASSAR platform and app**, facilitated rigorous tracking and real-time adjustments. MASSAR plays an essential role in optimising school administration within the Ministry and in enhancing the educational experience for both teachers and students.





THE SUCCESS OF THE PEP CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO SEVERAL FACTORS: THE ADOPTION OF EVIDENCE-BASED PEDAGOGICAL METHODS, THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A CASCADING TRAINING MODEL AND DATA-DRIVEN MONITORING

Nonetheless, scaling the program nationwide by 2028 presents significant challenges. The rapid expansion of teacher training risks decreasing instructional quality if not rigorously supervised, particularly as initial university-level training remains heavily influenced by constructivist approaches that are largely incompatible with explicit instruction.

It is important to note that the Moroccan school system follows a 6-3-3 structure through *école*, *collège* and *lycée*: after six years of primary school, pupils attend three years of lower secondary and three years of upper secondary education.

Extending the model to secondary education training through the «Pioneer Early Secondary Schools» framework also raises concerns regarding classroom management and student discipline in certain environments. In addition, uncertainties surrounding international funding and political tensions leading up to the 2026 elections could undermine the reform's long-term sustainability.

To consolidate the gains achieved through the PEP, it will be essential to integrate explicit instruction and TaRL into initial teacher training, secure funding through diverse partnerships, maintain rigorous data monitoring via the MASSAR platform, and update the digital infrastructure, particularly in rural areas.

Ultimately, the Pioneer Schools Program demonstrates that a structured, evidence-based approach can rapidly transform learning outcomes for a large number of students, serving as an inspiring model for other educational systems facing similar challenges.





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