



## TEACHER EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: PRINCIPLES AND IMPLICATIONS

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### **Abstract:**

Education for sustainable development policy in Morocco places a great deal of emphasis on upgrading human resources within and through the education sector. In this context, the present article outlines and discusses the major defining principles and goals of education for sustainable development in Morocco and its implications for language teachers' education and training in general and English language teachers' education in particular. It highlights the need for providing teachers with critically grounded fundamental education, reinforcing the effectiveness of their continuing training, and promoting their interest in and abilities of reflective practice, particularly action research, which constitutes one of the most important components and driving forces for their self-motivated and sustainable lifelong professional development. It argues that teachers' education and training should aim to help teachers to acquire and sustain their sociolinguistic and pedagogical knowledge, expertise, values, and competencies necessary for them to cope with the varied and ever-changing needs of different groups and generations of students to use particular languages for communication in different academic and professional contexts. To this end, it suggests the need for English language education, including English language teachers' education programme to include more space for teaching English for specific communicative purposes (ESCP). This would largely respond to the needs of the country for English as the most widely used foreign language in various key domains such as science and technology, as well as the increasingly emerging needs of students to use English for communication in various academic and professional contexts.

**Keywords:** sustainable development, teacher education, EFL, language education policy

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## **1. Introduction**

This article briefly outlines and discusses the major defining principles and goals of education for sustainable development in Morocco and its implications for language teachers' education and training in general and English language teachers' education in particular. This discussion will be based on a brief overview of the relevant guiding principles of The National Charter of Education and Training (1999) and The National Charter for Land Management and Sustainable Development (2001). These official documents reflect a recently emerging acknowledgement of the great need for equitable and sustainable development and the improvement of the quality of education as an integral part of this endeavour. To this end, the policy outlined in these charters places a great emphasis on the development of qualified human resources within and through the education sector, through capacity building and competencies development. In this context, this presentation will highlight the need for providing teachers with a more critically grounded fundamental education, reinforcing the effectiveness of their continuing training, and promoting their interest in and abilities of reflective practice, particularly action research, which constitutes one of the most important components and driving forces for their self-motivated and sustainable lifelong professional development. It argues that teachers' education and training should aim to help teachers to acquire and sustain their sociolinguistic and pedagogical knowledge, expertise, values, and competencies necessary for them to cope with the varied and ever-changing needs of different groups and generations of students to use particular languages for communication in different academic and professional contexts. This concern with quality teachers' education and training would ultimately contribute to respond effectively to the profound challenges of education for sustainable development in Morocco, particularly human resources upgrading, successful implementation of a useful education policy, and effective integration of the country in the global knowledge society and knowledge-based competitive economy.

## **2. Education and Sustainable Development**

The relationship between educational policies and sustainable development has been one of the most widely debated issues among development thinkers, educationalists, and decision-makers in both developed and developing countries. Therefore, educational policies and programmes and their reforms all over the world, including Morocco, have been always justified in terms of the need to update these policies and programmes in order to meet the ever-changing developmental needs of a particular country. The need for educational policies and programmes to be reconsidered and reformed has been increasing given the challenges and innovations brought about by an increasingly interdependent world characterised by the great expansion and rapid growth of economic and industrial activities, the rapid pace of exchange of goods, services, and capital, and the continuing revolution in the field of information and communication technologies.

These challenges have motivated more and more interest in sustainable development issues, including defining equitable and sustainable development policies at international, regional, and national levels, conducting corresponding educational reforms, and establishing national and large scale bilateral and multilateral networks to co-ordinate efforts, conduct research, and exchange expertise in the field. The next two sections will try defining sustainable development and education for sustainable development with a particular reference to the Moroccan context, for the need for local definitions and dimensions of sustainable development policies and corresponding educational policies and programmes is one of the major issues addressed in the field and one of the challenges that a particular country has to take up.

## **2.1 Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development is a recently evolving complex concept, reflecting a different perspective on development that integrates both socio-economic and ecological concerns of development. Within this perspective, development policies should be extended beyond traditional measures of economic growth and development to integrate concerns with the ecological dimension of development. This concern with equitable and sustainable development has been motivated by the great and rapid increase in socio-economic and industrial activities and the effects of these activities, among many other factors, on the ecological environment of which human beings and their ability to sustain life on the globe is an integral part. This focus on the ecological dimension of sustainable development was summarised by the World Commission on Sustainable Development (WCSD) and reported in The Brunt land Report. This report underlines that *“the fulfilment of the needs of the present generations should not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs”* (1987:43). This definition places a great deal of emphasis on the ecological dimension of development and calls for the urgent need for measures to protect and preserve the biologically diverse ecosystems.

Moreover, In spite of the current unprecedented economic growth of the international economy and developments made in the fields of science and technology, a large part of the inhabitants of the globe are still suffering from very difficult life conditions, particularly poverty, lack of health care and services, unemployment, illiteracy, and many other types of social exclusion and discrimination. For these reasons, the major defining goal of sustainable development is that *“all current and future generations of humans will be able to meet their basic needs, pursue meaningful work and have the opportunity to realise their full human potential personally and socially”* (Downess, 1994:2). In brief, sustainable development is then a different perspective on development that cannot be separated from equitable development, integrating economic, ecological, and socio-cultural dimensions of development, the ultimate purpose of which should be social justice and inclusion.

In Morocco, a developing country, the broad guidelines of sustainable development policy are outlined in The National Charter for Land Management and Sustainable Development. This policy is defined essentially in terms of human resources development. It reflects one of the most challenging preoccupations and priorities of

Morocco, namely the urgent need to upgrade human resources and rise the indices of human resources development in the areas of education (widening access to fundamental education and alleviation of illiteracy), health care (improvement of health care services), employment (employment generating economy and job-market-oriented education), and other basic needs and services in addition to environmental and civic education. This Charter underlines that *“development is unsuccessful unless the citizens are both its means and target. Therefore, it should start from a diagnosis of the needs of the population in the areas of education and training, employment, etc.”* (p. 36).

This policy places a great deal of emphasis on human resources development and upgrading in order to enable *“citizens of the knowledge and competencies and life conditions that allow them effective contribution to the general development of the country, which requires removing all constraints that impede their use of their capacities and the resources of their environment and their realisation of their full potential”* (p. 36). This concern with human resources development as one of the major defining principles of sustainable development in Morocco suggests that a great emphasis should be placed on the role of education in the achievement of these goals. This interrelationship between education and development is generally referred to as education for sustainable development, which is defined and briefly discussed below.

## **2.2 Education for Sustainable Development**

Education for sustainable development generally refers to the critical interrelationship between educational systems and sustainable development. In other words, it stresses the vital role educational policies and programmes play in the successful implementation of sustainable and equitable development policies and programmes and the achievement of sustainability goals. In this regard, Downes explains that *“there are two identifiable dimensions of sustainable development: a curriculum development dimension whereby the educational issues are incorporated into the learning process of each generation, and a human resources dimension whereby the educational system provides the skills, training, and knowledge for a society to achieve the objectives of sustainable development”* (1994: 1). This multidimensional perspective of ESD places a great deal of emphasis on human resources development and suggests that educational reforms should be carried out in the spirit and essence of sustainable development.

This relationship between education and development has been always one of the most debated issues in Morocco, for all the reforms our educational policy and programmes have undergone including the recently introduced and outlined in the national charter of education and training have been justified essentially in terms of human resources upgrading in order to meet the ever-changing and emerging developmental needs of the country and to respond to the socio-economic changes it has been undergoing. Moreover, the declaration of education and training as the first national priority after national integrity is another argument for this unprecedented concern with the role of education in the development of qualified human resources as a prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development goals. This concern is based on a strong recognition that *“human resources development plays an integral role in the overall development*

*process*" (Downs, 1994:1). To this end, The National Charter of Land Management and Sustainable Development highlights the human resources development dimension and stresses that *"educating and training citizens constitute a vital vector and dimension of development given its role in changing mindsets and practices that waste resources, impede initiatives and hinder the development of effective citizenship"* (2001: 36). The next section deals with the principles of ESD in Morocco in more details.

### **3. Principles of ESD in Morocco**

The present section deals with the major defining principles and primary preoccupations of education for sustainable development in Morocco, which are essentially integration in the knowledge-based society and economy, useful education and upgrading human resources.

#### **3.1 Competitive Economy and Knowledge Society**

Since its independence, Morocco has opted for an open economic policy based on the principles of free initiative and economy of the market. In other words, Morocco has opted for liberalising its economy and opening on the external markets. Within this perspective, a great deal of effort has to be made at the socio-educational and economic levels in order to improve the quality and competitiveness of both the national education and economy. This suggests that educational and economic reforms are necessary in order to take up the challenges of globalisation and benefit from the opportunities it provides at the levels of exchange of goods, capital, and services, as well as assimilation of technologies and transfer of knowledge. In other words, the advance of appropriate education for sustainable development policies and programmes and their successful implementation is a prerequisite for Morocco to integrate effectively in the global knowledge-based society and economy. In this regard, The National Charter for Land Management and Sustainable Development highlights these priorities and underlines that:

*"The current international situation [is] characterised by regular and increasing free trade, striking and harsh economic competition at the international level, the rapid pace of technological innovations, and the information and communication revolution. in the light of this situation, we need to prepare and equip ourselves to take up the challenges of international competitiveness through reinforcing our economy and the competencies of our human resources, which is the only way for our country to take up the current and future challenges of globalisation"*(pp.:5-7).

To take up these challenges the education policy has a great share to contribute. First, it should respond to the urgent need of Morocco to rise the indices of human resources development, particularly at the levels of access to fundamental education, alleviating illiteracy, encouragement of vocational education, environmental and civic education. Second, it should aim to provide the national economy with the necessary

skilled and qualified workforce, able to participate in and positively contribute to the economic growth and development of the country. Third, it should target upgrading human resources, for the purposes of reinforcing the competitiveness of the national economy and successfully and effectively integrating in the international knowledge society and knowledge-based competitive economy. This would also contribute to the country's effective engagement in and implementation of different bilateral and multilateral agreements and organisations, of which The Free Trade Agreement between Morocco and the United States and the Middle East Partnership Initiative are examples.

The vital role that the educational policy and programmes in the achievement of the goals presented so far lies behind the advance of the educational policy and programmes outlined in The National Charter of Education and Training. This policy highlights the priority of openness of the Moroccan school and university on the national and international socio-economic environment. For example, this Charter underlines that:

- Citizens are educated on openness to the most widespread languages in the world (article 2).
- The education and training system aims at upgrading the country to assimilate the most recent sciences and advanced technology and the contribution to its development to reinforce Morocco's competitive capacity and its socio-economic and human growth (article 3).

This policy stresses what decision makers have not ceased to refer to as quality and useful education. They use this notion interchangeably with competency-based education, which generally refers essentially to a great concern with job-market related education. The next section presents a brief overview of the main principles of this useful education policy as outlined in The National Charter of Education and Training.

### **3.2 Useful Education**

Useful education is repeatedly used by Moroccan decision makers to emphasise the priority of vocational training which aims at qualified workforce preparation. Then, usefulness of education and training institutions and programmes is measured essentially in terms of their openness on the socio-economic environment, particularly the job market. In this respect, Article 7 of the National Charter of Education and Training stresses that the goal of education and training should be *"to help individuals acquire knowledge and skills that enable them to fully integrate in the professional life and develop lifelong learning capacities."* This policy also stresses the openness of the institutions of higher education and research on the national and international socio-economic environment. This Charter highlights the role of the university as *"a centre for global scientific and technical progress and workshop of vocational training"* (article 9) Therefore, particular emphasis is placed on providing students with educational experiences that enable them to develop the knowledge, competencies, skills, and values they need to fully participate in and effectively contribute to the socio-economic growth of the country.

This policy points to the adoption of a competency-based approach to education and training, which is generally defined with reference to its particular concern with the

development of programmes based on a diagnosis of the needs of the job market or the roles students are expected to fulfil in the socio-economic sector on completion of their educational programme. This orientation of the national education policy and programmes to be competency-based in approach aims at facilitating students' effective vocational integration and their development of lifelong learning capacities. This competency-based orientation is further suggested in articles 6-9 of The National Charter of Education and Training. These articles repeatedly underline that the education and training programmes should aim:

- to help students become skilled and capable of lifelong learning,
- to provide individuals with the values and skills that qualify them to integrate in the professional life, and continue learning through life,
- to provide society with qualified competencies,
- to provide economic sectors with the qualified staff, capable of vocational integration.

These objectives stress the need to provide the socio-economic sector with qualified human resources, who are equipped with the knowledge, competencies, skills, values, and lifelong capacities required by both society and the job market. This focus on human resources upgrading and development constitutes one of the major defining goals of competency-based education and the openness of institution of education and training and scientific research.

This priority is also highlighted by The National Charter for Land Management and Sustainable Development. This Charter underlines that:

- priority should be given to practical research and integration of enterprises in research networks. (p. 100)
- developing scientific research and establishing the conditions for the university openness on its socio-economic environment. (p. 101)

In order to achieve these goals and successfully implement this policy and its principles, teachers and teachers' educators are considered key change agents for they have a great and decisive share to contribute. Therefore, this policy places a great deal of emphasis on teachers' sustainable and quality education and training. The major guiding principles of teachers' sustainable professional development are overviewed below.

### **3.3 Sustainable Teacher Education and Training**

Human resources upgrading and development within and through the education sector constitutes one of the major defining elements of education for sustainable development policy in Morocco. Since teachers are considered key change agents and key persons in the delivery of education, a great deal of importance has been given to their sustainable quality education and training as the main principle of upgrading human resources working in the educational sector. This emphasis on the role of quality teachers' education and training constitutes an important component of the education policy outlined in The National Charter of Education and Training (1999). For example, article 133 of this Charter insists that:

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*“The renovation of the Moroccan school is dependent on the quality of teachers’ performance and their commitment. Teachers’ quality education refers to strong fundamental training and effective sustainable continuing training as well as appropriate pedagogical tools and clear assessment of pedagogical performance.” (p. 61).*

Along with this concern with quality teacher education and training, the charter suggests unifying different institutions of teachers’ educations and training at the regional level and building up bridges between these institutions and the university in order to mobilise all human resources available to reach the following goals:

- enabling teachers, educational supervisors and directors and administrators of strong training before the step into their jobs; (article 134)
- reinforcement of educational research on all related fields to enhance the quality of training and education at the levels of objectives, syllabuses, methodologies and teaching aids. (article 134)

In addition to this concern with fundamental pre-service training, the charter underlines the importance of practicing teachers’ continuing training for their sustainable professional development. To this end, Article 136, for example, suggests that the education and training staff benefit from two types of continuing training and upgrading:

- short term annual sessions to improve their competencies and its promotion and it takes 30 hours to be carefully scheduled; (p. 62)
- sessions of fundamental upgrading organised at least each three years (p. 62)

In order to contribute to the achievement of the goals so far discussed, the national education authorities intend to restructure the staff of educational supervisors and their organisation through:

- clearly defining the entrance standards to training institutions and graduation; (p. 62)
- reinforcing basic training and organising continuing training seminars to make them capable of the knowledge standards and communicative and pedagogical competencies required by their profession. (p. 62)

To sum up, the development and upgrading of human resources both within and through the education sector is central to an optimal contribution of education to the achievement of sustainable development, particularly the improvement of the competitiveness of the national education and economy. This constitutes a prerequisite for the country to take up the challenges of openness on the global competitive economy and knowledge society, and assimilating the most recent sciences and technologies. The role of quality foreign languages education including English language education has a prominent share to contribute towards the improvement of the quality of education in Morocco and the achievement of the goals so far discussed. In what follows, some of the major implications for language teachers’ education are presented with a particular emphasis on English language teachers’ education and training.

#### 4. Implications for Language Teachers Education

Sustainable teacher education refers to both pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes that are concerned essentially with strengthening and improving the quality of teachers' fundamental education, and more importantly, reinforcing and sustaining practicing teachers' lifelong professional development. To address these issues, more exploratory dichotomies than pre-service and in-service training have been advanced in the recent literature on language teachers' education and research such as "*knowledge-for-practice*" versus *knowledge-in-practice* (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993), teachers' conceptual knowledge versus their perceptual knowledge (Freeman and Johnson, 1998), and "*theory-for-practice versus theory-in-practice*" (Van Lier, 1996). The first component of these dichotomies refers to the theoretical knowledge and pedagogical expertise teachers are equipped with before they step into their jobs. The second component refers to the development and changes that practicing teachers' knowledge, practice, and conceptions undergo as a result of their contact with and understanding of varying groups and generations of students and many and varied classrooms contexts, that is, "*the peculiarities of everyday life in schools and classrooms*" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, 262).

In the recent literature on second and foreign language education and research (e.g., the references cited above) there is a general agreement on the importance of teachers' reflective practice for their sustainable lifelong professional development for it helps them in a range of settings "*to sort through complex beliefs, understanding, experiences and practices in very personal ways*" (Bigelow and Walker, 2004: 11). More importantly, it helps to promote their intellectual interest, pedagogical commitment, and professional engagement, as well as their awareness of and interest in different issues of theory and practice in the implementation of language education policy and programmes. This kind of interest and commitment on the part of both pre-service and practicing teachers is one of the most important and lasting driving forces for self-motivated and sustainable professional development. In this context, Van Lier (1996) argues that the aim of teachers' education should be to encourage them to think for themselves, whereby the curriculum is seen as a project, the critical context of their work becomes central, and teachers become aware, autonomous, and authentic professionals.

In this respect, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on action research as the most important and effective area of teachers' reflective practice for their sustainable professional development. To this end, it has been generally recommended that teachers' education and training should aim to encourage and motivate teachers to "*carry out their own investigations to learn about their immediate teaching contexts and contribute to building contextualised theories of learning and teaching*" (Bigelow and Walker, 2004: 14). Here, it is worth noting that second and foreign language classrooms differ with respect to the socio-institutional contexts where they are hosted, teachers' and students' conceptions, expectations, and perception, which are not only socially conditioned and deep-rooted in their socio-educational backgrounds, but also classroom-generated. Therefore, teachers' engagement in action research would likely allow them to evaluate the effectiveness of their practices and activities, to evaluate and better understand the ever-changing reality

of their very specific contexts and the nature of classroom communication and context and its socio-institutional context, which has far-reaching impact on their classroom life, practices and management. It would also help them to renovate their knowledge and competencies, refresh their pedagogical expertise, improve their practice, and introduce the necessary and appropriate changes that may help them meet the many and varied affectional and future professional needs of different groups and generations of students. To this end, teachers' education should aim at providing them with a more critically grounded fundamental and continuing training as well as encouraging them to engage in reflective practice including action research, within a sustained process approach to language education and a 'context-sensitive' perspective to teachers education. It should aim to create context-sensitive practitioners and *"make the tension between technical and critical concerns, that is, between classroom experiences and the wider socio-institutional context part of an ongoing research process in a theory-in-practice"* (Van Lier, 1996: 218).

Finally, this concern with students' future academic and professional needs, which are generally communicative in nature, is one of the major defining and coordinating principles of English for specific purposes, learner-learning-centeredness, and communicative language teaching. This suggests the need to carry out needs analysis, that is, the identification of a set of specific needs of specific groups of students to use English for specific communicative purposes in specific academic and professional communication contexts. However, it is interesting to mention here that learners' needs should be defined not only in terms of future professional needs, but also in terms of methodology, that is, classroom activities, materials, patterns of classroom organization and interaction and assessment procedures used to evaluate their learning outcomes. English for specific purposes is then learner-centred and communicative in approach and methodology. Therefore, critical implementation of these methodologies is recommended in teaching English as a foreign language for it would allow teachers to cope with the variation among different groups and generations of students with respect to their future professional needs, as well as their expectations, perceptions, conceptions, and their socio-educational backgrounds. This variation among students and the socio-institutional contexts constitutes one of the major arguments for sustainable lifelong teachers' professional development. Such training would allow them to develop as context sensitive practitioners, able to sustain their ability to cope with the complexities of the specific contexts where they operate as teachers of a foreign language.

## **5. Conclusion**

To conclude, education for sustainable development policy and programmes in Morocco places a great deal of emphasis on upgrading human resources within and through the education sector in order to improve the competitiveness of the national education and economy and facilitate the country's effective and successful integration in the global knowledge society and the knowledge-based competitive economy. This policy gives priority to the development of students' specific marketable competencies and skills to facilitate their vocational integration. It also highlights the importance of openness on

and mastery of the most widely used foreign languages and their teaching for functional and communicative purposes, using learner-centred and animation-based methodologies. This clearly suggests the need for English language education, including English language teachers' education programme to include more space for teaching English for specific communicative purposes (ESCP). This would largely respond to the needs of the country for English as the most widely used foreign language in various key domains such as science and technology, as well as the increasingly emerging needs of students to use English for communication in various academic and professional contexts.

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