Citizenship Education in Morocco: An Exploration of Baccalaureate Students’ Civic Outcome

Sanae Fahmi
Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Mohammed V University, Rabat, Morocco


Abstract

Since 2000, Morocco’s interest in citizenship education has been reflected in a series of educational reforms. The main drive has been the development of virtuous and active citizens willing to engage in the public and political life of their country. Now that a long time has elapsed since the introduction of the National Charter of Education and Training, it is important to know where the process of citizenship education stands in terms of the objectives the charter set to develop the ideal citizen. This need is further emphasized by the persisting impact of globalization and the challenges of international as well as intra-national security. It is within this spirit that this paper explores the impact citizenship education has had on the civic knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of 100 Moroccan high school students in the academy of Rabat-Sale-Zemmour-Zaer. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study uses three research instruments: a questionnaire, interviews, and participant observation. The main finding reveals that citizenship education is still conceptually minimalist in its approach since it does not encourage learners to become agents of social change equipped with enquiring minds and participatory skills.

Keywords: Civic learning, knowledge, attitudes, curriculum, citizenship.
0. Introduction

Since its independence, Morocco was comfortable with the kind of education it offered to its citizens with no attempts to alter the conventional model of citizenship it adopted, stressing submissiveness and blind loyalty (Al Aroui, 2009). It was not until 1999 that Morocco decided to launch structural educational changes with the adoption of the first educational reform, the National Charter of Education and Training (NCET). This reform came as a reaction to the gloomy picture the World Bank report (1999) portrayed by highlighting the disparities it outlined concerning girls’ literacy and the high illiteracy rate. The introduction of such educational reform was also indispensable, given the urgent need to deal with global changes such as globalization and the growing threats of terrorism.

The charter sets as a primary objective the development of civic values designed to strengthen the moral, political and social character of young people to fit in the frame of a more challenging global world. In this policy, young people are identified, targeted and educated towards responsible active adulthood. Within this educational reform, citizenship education has replaced civic education which once emphasized civic knowledge and favored conventional civic values. Instead, the current conceptualization of citizenship education gives high esteem to both conventional and active forms of citizenship values. Furthermore, it is presented as an integral part of the curriculum explicitly taught throughout primary education as a stand-alone subject and implicitly implemented through an integrated component of the curriculum spread over several school subjects at high school.

It is undeniable that the NCET has brought about new insights and directions in the field of education in general and citizenship most particularly. Nevertheless, many researchers expressed their worry to end up with high ambitions degenerating into mere reform rhetoric confined to sterile invocations of well-intentioned resolutions that serve only as an analytical step for further changes (Boubkir & Boukamhi, 2005). Research also reports a gap between the societal expectation and political interest that civic education should create among students, and their readiness for active participation in reality. Paradoxically, the dramatic political disinterest and disengagement among adolescents is the antithesis of the strong positive association of political interest to civic engagement reported by various international and national surveys (Torney-Purta, 2002; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). This makes the need to inquire about the effectiveness of citizenship education in Morocco a necessity.

The purpose of this paper then is to explore the impact citizenship education has had on the civic knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of
Moroccan high school students in the academy of Rabat- Sale-Zemmour- Zaer. More specifically, this study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. What civic knowledge have Moroccan high school students developed?
2. What are their civic attitudes towards their country, gender equality, and ethnic groups?
3. To what extent are they civically predisposed to engage in the public and political life?
4. What is the role of the school, community contexts in enhancing students’ civic outcomes?

It is important to note that this paper will be confined to a presentation and discussion of the students’ civic outcomes without detailed reference to the obtained statistical results due to space constraints.

1. Literature review

2.1 Citizenship Education International Research Projects

This section reviews some of the important empirical research projects on citizenship, more specifically those on the effectiveness of citizenship education in enhancing civic engagement and promotion of positive citizenship attitudes. The projects included have a strong comparative focus, and involve the participation of many European countries

2.1.1 Carol Hahn comparative study (1999)

One of the most established and influential comparative studies on civic education is that of Carol Hahn (1999). In this study, Hahn compared differing policies and practices with respect to citizenship education in six countries-Britain, the USA, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and Australia with the focus being on secondary school students aged 14-19.

The findings supported earlier empirical research in which students’ positive political attitudes towards participatory democracy were associated with open classroom climate that encourages democratic inquiry and discourse. Hahn’s observations showed differences in the civic culture in those countries. The researcher noted that Danish schools were expected to model democracy by providing students with many opportunities for decision-making and relevant political content in history and social sciences. Hahn also observed that citizenship education is minimally present in the English and Dutch national curriculum while it was quite similar to a social studies subject in Germany. Hahn’s observations were equally illuminating with respect to
the role of controversial issues class discussions which proved to be distinct depending on prevailing pedagogical culture in each country.

Hahn (1999) concluded that differing policies and practices with respect to citizenship education among the six Western democracies were conducive to different patterns of political attitudes and perceptions among the students. When students are encouraged to enquire, make decisions and openly express diverse opinions on public policy issues, they are more interested in and positive about political participation.

2.1.2 Civic and Citizenship Education Study (CIVED)

Another comprehensive, large-scale and rigorous study in the field of citizenship education is the IEA Civic Education Study (CIVED). The study investigated the ways in which young people are prepared to undertake their roles as citizens in several countries. The main finding of the study was that home environment and educational resources had a considerable influence on civic knowledge. Students from highly educated and small families with frequent exposition to books at home were more knowledgeable about the functioning and the values of democracy than those who were less exposed to books at home and belonged to larger, less educated families. These variables also influenced students’ interest in politics.

The study also showed that school climate is important in promoting civic knowledge and engagement. Democratic practices and civic activities at school are essential in the civic education process while encouragement of open classroom climate for discussion accounted for higher civic knowledge. Favorable school climate was also a positive indicator of students’ views on the effectiveness of participation in school civic activities.

2.2 Citizenship Education Research in Morocco

Research on citizenship education in Morocco has approached the issue from different perspectives with the objective of investigating either the implementation of citizenship education, its impact on students, or the obstacles impeding its effectiveness.

Toubi (2004), for instance, explored the impact of the school climate on students’ civic knowledge. The interest was to investigate how the behavior of the school administration towards students influenced their civic actions and knowledge as well as their attitudes towards the school administrative staff.

The study showed that students developed negative attitudes towards the school administration. It was qualified as being negative, violent and intolerant as it did not respect the students’ rights and resorted to
oppression. The students also demonstrated poor civic knowledge especially in what relates to human rights as they were incapable of recognizing dignity as one of human rights; worse, they could not differentiate between rights and duties.

In 2007, the High Council for Education in Morocco investigated the effectiveness of school educational councils in enhancing democratic practices. The results revealed that the implementation of many of the school councils’ tasks was impeded by several obstacles. For example, some members had a blurry conceptualization of the tasks of the school council, and others were reluctant to attend its meetings. This was attributed to the unfocused objectives the councils outlined or to the belief that they were void of essence since they could not take practical and concrete measures to implement whatever decisions were taken. Thus, the study concluded that though the role of school councils is primordial in improving school outcomes, there is still need for more serious efforts to meet the aspirations outlined in the national charter with respect to their effectiveness.

Similarly, El Ouazzani et al. (2010) explored the way teachers, students and headmasters conceived of citizenship values and their behavioural manifestations in the classroom, school, and family. The sample included children from the primary and the middle schools, teachers and headmasters in both rural and urban areas.

The results indicated that citizenship education is largely treated as a school subject emphasizing knowledge, especially in rural areas. The study advocated that most teachers and headmasters were not very well prepared for citizenship education. Despite civic-related activities targeting behaviour change and development of citizenship competencies, the children found difficulties in translating those acquired values into actual behaviours. The main reasons were attributed to the mismatch between what the school advocated and the reality outside, including the family environment. Thus, they concluded that classroom and school climates do not instil the expected behavioural manifestations since other factors including those related to family background do intervene.

Other studies on citizenship education in Morocco were conducted, but they were mainly concerned with its implementation, representation in textbooks, or the obstacles impeding its effectiveness. The present study offers a holistic picture of citizenship education in the context of Morocco since it approaches the concept from multidimensional perspective supported by the methodology it adopts and the instruments it uses.

2. Methodology
2.1 Research questions and Design

The present study revolves around four key research questions. The first and second ones relate to the students’ civic knowledge and dispositions to engage in public and political life while the third question relates to their attitudes towards their country, gender equality and ethnicity. The fourth research question concerns the relationship between contextual variables including the school, community, and family contexts and civic related outcomes.

The study adopts a mixed-method research design that uses both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods including a questionnaire, participant observation and interviews. The International Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) assessment framework provides the conceptual point of reference for the conduct of the present study. The (IEA) framework is comprehensive in terms of the constructs it investigates as it offers multiple opportunities for a holistic approach to civic education. It considers the various contextual variables involved in the process of citizenship education namely the individual learner, their immediate context and the multilayered communities they relate to either locally, nationally, or globally, which highly increases the framework’s construct validity.

2.2 Data collection Instruments

2.2.1 The IEA Questionnaire

The use of the IEA questionnaire is warranted by its tested construct validity and reliability (Schulz & Sibbers, 2004). To ensure content validity, the researcher attested to carefully translate the questionnaire into Arabic, considering the guidelines for translation and cultural adaptation recommended by the IEA translation booklet. These included the manual translation that considers the cultural specificities of Morocco and a process of verification of the quality of translation by independent translators. The researcher was equally careful to find equivalent words and phrases that capture the essential meaning conveyed in the original English version. The IEA questionnaire includes:

(i) The international student cognitive test: this was adapted by referring to the civic content specified in the Moroccan White Book in order to omit the items that are irrelevant to the Moroccan curriculum. Accordingly, the test consisted of thirty-eight items measuring civic and citizenship knowledge.

(ii) The international student questionnaire: this included 147 items and was used to obtain student perceptions about civics and citizenship, their attitudes towards their country, gender equality and Moroccan
2.2.2 Observation

Participant observation was used to enable the researcher to participate and learn more about the process of citizenship education within the natural context of school through the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in this social setting (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). It provided ways to check both verbal and non-verbal expression of civic values and beliefs, grasp how participants manifest civic/“non-civic” behaviours through their communication with each other, and check for distortions or inaccuracies in informants’ descriptions reported in interviews. Additionally, the observation increased the validity of the study and granted credence to the interpretation of the findings.

Throughout the observation period, which lasted for two years, the researcher conducted both descriptive and focused observations. To record the observations, the researcher wrote field notes entries and an observation protocol. Field notes entries were written after each observation into fieldwork journal. The objective was to describe all the events the researcher witnessed inside the school including her impressions, interpretations, perceptions, feelings, and insights as well as the constraints, and dilemmas faced in the context of educating for good citizenship. The observation protocol addressed four key aspects of citizenship education: (a) school characteristics, (b) students’ civic behaviours in school and attitudes towards civic related topics, (c) the civic behaviours of teachers and administration (d) and teacher-students relationship. The researcher also observed, whenever scheduled, other school activities that teachers and students participated in such as school ceremonies and community-based events.

To ensure the quality of observations, the researcher followed Spradley’s (1980) verbatim principle. Since it was not possible to take note of all what teachers, students and administrative staff said in relation to citizenship education, the researcher kept a verbatim record of what people say. Thus, when writing field notes entries, the researcher quoted key words and phrases that were used to write detailed accounts of what happened. In addition, to guarantee the accuracy of the observations the field note entries were written the same day the observation took place.

1 The translated questionnaire included items to explore students’ attitudes towards three Moroccan ethnic groups: the Sahroui, the Amazigh, and the Rifi groups.
2.2.3 The Interviews

Both formal and informal interviews were used in this study. Informal interviews helped to inform the research findings since they allowed asking clarification questions that emerged from the school observations. Semi-structured and open-ended interviews were also used with teachers. They lasted from 30 to 45 minutes and followed a set of guiding questions. In this study, interviews were seen as “conversations with a purpose” into the process of teaching and learning about citizenship education. Teachers’ interviews were in standard Arabic and informal interviews with teachers and students were in Moroccan Arabic. The questions were used as a guide; thus, they were adapted or expanded according to the information collected through observations and to the interviewed teacher. The interviews were central to elicit teachers’ personal evaluation of citizenship education in relation to the textbook content, students’ civic knowledge and classroom and school context. The interviews were also important to gain insights into the obstacles that inhibit the optimal realization of the purposes of educating for good citizenship and provided valuable insights into the governing ideas and themes about good citizenship and citizenship education.

2.3 Sampling

The study used probability sampling in the form of random assignment in the selection of the students, the schools and the teachers involved in this research project. The study used a two-stage sampling procedure whereby a random sample of schools was selected at the first stage and one intact target grade class from each school was surveyed. Similarly, a random sample of teachers from the target grade was sampled at the second stage. Purposeful sampling is then used to select the school where participant observation and teachers’ interviews took place. Accordingly, the choice of the school where the researcher was a member as a site for observation helped tremendously to collect qualitative data and to gain an understanding of the contextual and the educational interplay involved in the process of civic and citizenship education.

The teacher population for the study was defined as all teachers teaching civic-related school subjects to the students in the target grade (baccalaureate). Twenty teachers were selected at random from all teachers working within the physical boundaries of the target school. The student population included 100 baccalaureate students in four schools, which belonged to the Rabat, Sale, Zemmour, Zair Academy. These data were augmented by contextual data collected from official documents.

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis
The cognitive and behavioral tests as well as the students' questionnaire were administered to baccalaureate students by the end of the school year. It is assumed that by the end of the Baccalaureate school year, students would have covered the civic input outlined by the general guidelines and specified in the NCET. During the questionnaire administration the researcher informed all the participants that the questionnaire was part of an academic research project. They were also informed that their participation was optional and confidential to reassure them and assuage their worries.

The data obtained was then analyzed by using SPSS 19 software package. The study used descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, multiple regression and multivariate analysis of variance. Descriptives were used to screen out the data as an initial step and to capture any patterns that the data might display while correlation was conducted in order to explore the relationships among the variables involved in the study namely the students’ civic knowledge, engagement and perceptions, and the variables related to the classroom context, school environment and family background. The use of Multiple Regression as a further step sought to determine the contribution of each of the independent variables (contextual variables) in predicting the dependent ones (civic outcomes). Multivariate analysis of variance was also necessary to explore group differences at the level of the students’ gender, place of residence and parents’ literacy level.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings pertinent to the students’ civic knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and the contextual variables affecting them.

3.1 The Students’ Civic Knowledge

One of the main concerns of the NCET is to equip the youth with the relevant civic knowledge to exercise their rights and undertake their responsibilities as civic citizens. In this study, the students’ civic knowledge was measured through a civic knowledge test comprising thirty-eight items. They addressed broad concepts of citizenship, government and democracy necessary to the organization and conduct of democratic societies. Table 1 below presents the students’ overall performance on the civic and citizenship test.

Table 1: Civic knowledge Descriptives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concepts of democracy</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>51.76</td>
<td>6.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts of citizenship</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20.64</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions and democratic practices</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts of government responsibilities</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>19.67</td>
<td>6.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 above reveals that the students performed differently across the various concepts of civic knowledge. The students seem to have quite high knowledge about the different concepts of democracy with a Mean of (M= 51.76) and of the concepts of citizenship (M= 20.64). At the same time, the students’ knowledge of institutions and democratic practices is below average (M= 3.20) and poor with respect to the concepts of government responsibilities (M= 19.67). More specifically, the students displayed good understanding of what should be the government responsibilities and what practices and values might strengthen democracy.

Despite this promising result, data reveals that students’ civic knowledge of what might threaten democracy such as gender inequality and press monopoly is poor. This claim is further endorsed by the interviewed teachers since all of them qualified the students’ civic knowledge as being “poor”. For example, a history and geography male teacher, who has accumulated a teaching experience of more than twenty years, when asked about his opinion of the outcomes of citizenship education, stated with a bitter tone:

[I will tell you my personal judgment, there is a complete ignorance of the simplest issues as if he “the student” has never had citizenship education as a school subject; there is a complete ignorance of the vocabulary and concepts related to citizenship education, complete ignorance; you can say that the student memorizes summaries to pass the exam and not to take advantage of that knowledge or put those concepts into practice; total ignorance]

A close analysis of the above testimony reveals how this teacher felt. The terms used indicate a kind of resentment and regret especially when the words are combined with his facial expressions. His judgment reflects the extent to which the students’ knowledge is poor; thus, he did not use adjectives like “poor”, “weak”, “lack” but rather opted for a very extreme description and kept repeating it “total ignorance”.

The same is attested regarding democratic institutions and practices. Consequently, it could be concluded that citizenship education has been partly successful in developing students’ civic knowledge while being deficient in certain aspects, yet no cause effect relationship is claimed in this context.

This path of findings can be attributed to the citizenship course content. Content analysis of the white book, which is the official document designed to outline the content of the Moroccan national textbooks, shows that the emphasis is on political rather than economic literacy.
The white book’s guidelines aim at helping the learners to interiorize citizenship values related to rights and duties and developing positive attitudes that would enhance active citizenship. At the cognitive level, the aim underlying citizenship education as a statuary school subject is to acquire cognitive knowledge characterized by being “functional” and to “know” the communicative skills that would help to work systematically. The practical projections of these objectives take the form of several outlined competencies evolving around human rights, democracy, values, institutions and “citizenship practice”. Reference to threats to democracy or economic literacy is overlooked both in the objectives and the competencies.

Similarly, when considering the recommended curriculum, the content included in relation to the concept of democracy is reduced to a mere comparison between democracy and autocracy. This could explain the students’ lack of sufficient knowledge about the threats to democracy. A finding that can be considered as a deficit inflicting the selected content for the curriculum since a comprehensive knowledge of democracy requires knowing not only what it is but also what strengthen or weaken it. This was supported by teachers’ testimonies which considered citizenship content as either insufficient or inappropriate. For instance, a male Arabic teacher asserted that:

“The choice of [these] texts is usually unsuccessful because they do not focus on skills such as critical thinking and analysis. Most of them contain either mere information or a set of definitions.”

He went on arguing that:

“This means that the content of the texts cannot be translated into civic behavior. It remains simply a piece of information which has to be handed in to the teacher when required.”

More than that the teacher commented that:

“Even the texts chosen are not taken from sources or references specialized in the field; they are just general impressionistic writings”.

To illustrate the argument, he provided the following example:

“Araed, which is one of the common track science textbooks, contains a text about human rights, written by Mustapha El Qabbage, which states that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights became obligatory in 1948, which is a mistake. This is incorrect information. It became obligatory only in 1966.”

He concluded that:
“There are mistakes at the level of knowledge besides a failure to choose relevant content.”

The same teacher attributed students’ low civic knowledge to Moroccan educational policy. He asserted that:

“The educational policy of ‘Annajah’ has played a detrimental role in the production of an unqualified learner who is at the secondary level while they should be at the junior school. As a result, they are unable to keep up with the competencies required for this level.”

In fact, all the interviewed teachers agreed that more efforts should be made in order to attain the desired outcomes, specifically in relation to students’ civic knowledge and attitudes. The same point was stressed by HCE (2008) which highlighted that citizenship content related to human rights is still insufficient with apparent divergences in the civic values presented in the French, Arabic and Islamic Education classes.

3.2. The Students’ Civic Attitudes

Exploring students’ civic attitudes was another concern of this study given its importance in sustaining a healthy democracy. Interest was essentially in how students viewed their country, gender equality and the different ethnic groups involved in the fabric of the Moroccan identity. Descriptive data analysis yielded the results presented in Table 2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions about the government role</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards one’s country</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>19.23</td>
<td>6.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards women</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>31.09</td>
<td>8.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards ethnic groups</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17.29</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of civic participation</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11.93</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effectiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17.18</td>
<td>6.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Tendencies of the Students’ Civic Attitudes
The results attest to a consensus among students in their positive attitudes towards their country, gender equality and rights of different ethnic groups. Students seem to share a strong national pride in Morocco’s history and achievement and tend to resist any external interference or influence in its political or cultural affairs. This was quite expected since instilling a sense of patriotism or national pride has often been prescribed as an antidote for the loss of civic culture and responsibility (Schatz et al., 1999).

Such positive attitudes towards one’s country should not be solely attributed to citizenship education. Instead, they should be regarded as natural feelings experienced by most citizens. In this respect, Schatz et al. (1999) differentiate between blind patriotic feeling and constructive patriotism which represents a willingness to question whether the policies and actions of one’s nation are consistent with its highest ideals.

The results also report significant gender differences in the students’ civic attitudes towards utter gender equality as can be attested in table 3 below.

Table 3: Multivariate Analysis of Students’ Attitudes Towards Gender Equality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Error df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family literacy</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender*residence</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence*family</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Female students were more supportive for unconditional gender equality in what relates to enjoying equal job opportunities, getting the same pay when doing the same job and having a high political position; this was not the case with male students. Such pattern of results could be understood as the persisting effect of traditional values which tend to be conformist with high emphasis on collective discipline, group conformity and are basically associated with societies that have high levels of national pride and a nationalistic outlook (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). The global culture map produced by the World Values Survey showed that societies with high scores in traditional values included Zimbabwe, Morocco, Jordan, and Bangladesh. This might account for such ambivalent attitudes that several Moroccan citizens, especially the youth, hold towards gender equality and might also explain their strong attachment to their country. The students’ attitudes towards the different ethnic groups making up the fabric of the Moroccan society,
namely the Sahraoui, the Rifi and the Amazigh, were favorable inclusive and pluralistic attitudes.

3.3. The Students’ Expected Civic Engagement

Engaging in civic related activities comes as the most outstanding component of citizenship outcomes. It is closely related to formal educational practices that take place within the border of the school system as research has demonstrated the intimate and direct relationship between youth’s citizenship education and their civic engagement. So, it could be advocated that the success of any citizenship education process is a matter of the outcome it instills in young people to participate actively in different spheres of public and political life.

The results reported in this study are quite disappointing since most of the students who participated in this research project were not drawn to the kind of activities that are common among politically involved adults. Thus, aside from learning about candidates in elections, the students were quite sceptical about traditional forms of political engagement. The majority expressed low levels of participation in conventional political activities since they were less willing to vote or to join a political party.

On the contrary, the students were willing to engage in social movement related activities. In fact, they reported that they have already had several positive civic experiences by participating in social movement activities outside the school, yet these were restricted to voluntary activities to provide for the poor or protect the environment. Other activities that reflect political maturity and effective participation in decision making such as activities related to legal protest or petition writing were less appealing to students.

Although the students showed low readiness to engage in political civic activities; this should not be considered threatening since it is not a prerequisite to ensure democracy (Tocqueville, 2000). Such pattern of results could be attributed to temporal barriers including professional interests, stable residential location, home ownership, marriage, and parenthood which make young adults less attached to civic life than are their parents (Galston, 2001). Furthermore, political engagement should not be seen as a failure of citizenship education since it is possible that high levels of political engagement can engender violent instability in the absence of essential democratic ingredients (Arendt, 1963); what is a priority then is to guard against total political disengagement (Galston, 2001).

The students’ low civic predispositions can also be interpreted in relation to the school practices, which do not reinforce political participation; rather they reduce it to concerns about environmental
issues (Hughes, 2004). The school climate does not provide students with opportunities for the full exercise of citizenship though it is assumed to be determining to citizenship education, a point also emphasized by teachers’ testimonies and the researcher’s observation. For example, the school clubs whose role is to provide students with opportunities both to learn and practice civic values are usually eroded of their function. Their role is often limited and confounded with the other forms of extracurricular activities (HCE, 2008). Throughout my several years of teaching as high school teacher, the presence of school clubs was almost an idea or at best a name. In fact, most of the interviewed teachers shared the same opinion. For instance, the interviewed Arabic teacher explained that:

“The role of the school clubs is seasonal; they are inefficient; there are only some activities here and there”

He accounted for the situation explaining:

“This is so because of the nature of the school curricula and timetables. The teacher works the whole week from Monday to Saturday; it is impossible for the teacher to attend school on Sunday. Moreover, the learner studies everyday morning and afternoon; the learners themselves are exhausted. This means that even if the teacher is willing to work and volunteer, there are other obstacles […] some students consider school clubs to be unnecessary because what is important for them is to give priority to the syllabus at the expense of civic values.”

The same idea was reiterated by a female Arabic teacher, who stated that:

“The role of school clubs is inefficient because teachers work long hours. If they had less working hours, it would have been possible for them to activate school clubs and make them more efficient.”

Alternatively, she suggested that:

“The slots for these extracurricular activities should be scheduled as part of teachers’ working hours.”

The inefficiency of the school clubs is often associated with a limited involvement of local municipalities and civic society in the process of citizenship education. This claim was supported by the interviewed geography teacher who asserted that:

“The actual presence and effective participation of the local municipality is very limited and dependent on the personal relationships that the principal of the school can develop with its members; it is only then that they are more willing to help and relatively participate in citizenship education. The local
municipalities do not participate in citizenship education because they are not convinced that this is one of their duties.”

Classroom environment also explains students’ civic disengagement. Data revealed that students’ discussion of political and social issues is almost rare with their teachers though they express their interest in politics with their family members and peers. This could be explained by investigating the relationship between students and teachers.

The Moroccan National Charter of Education insists on reconsidering the position of the students in the education system and their positioning at the center of interest in all the educational activities. The Charter also stresses the need to adopt more efficient teaching methods whereby the teacher acts as a facilitator, moderator and a model, but what happens in classrooms is different. Traditional teacher-centered methods where the teacher is the main source of authority and knowledge are still prevalent (HCE, 2008).

Regression analysis shows that classroom discussion openness is a significantly predictor of students’ civic engagement. This suggests that the absence of a favorable and positive class environment that encourages free discussion about different issues will contribute to low civic participation. This is further documented by the data collected through participatory observation, which suggests that the teaching practices sometimes contradict what is outlined in the general orientations. The teachers’ informal interviews of their usual daily classroom events illustrate the conflicting relationship reigning in the classroom and attest to the pedagogical paradox inflecting classroom climate. The accounts suggest that some were more concerned with asserting their power than providing a positive and healthy classroom atmosphere for educating students.

This argument was further supported by students’ testimonies which highlight the negative impact classroom climate could engender in students’ self-belief. One of the researcher’s students, who was a literature common track male pupil aged 16 years old, stubbornly refused to write on the board although I insisted. When asked privately, the student answered in a sorrowful tone:

“I decided to never step up and write on the classroom board since the day when my math teacher at junior school mocked at me; I really felt deeply hurt. Now, sometimes I know the answer to many of the questions teachers ask in class but I can’t say them for fear that I would live the same experience.”

Inconsistencies also concern some teachers’ paradoxical behaviors in classrooms. For example, it is quite common to ask students to switch their mobile phone or put them on the silent mode while the teachers
are on. When teachers were informally asked about the reason underlying such behavior, they explained that they have more authority and their behaviours in class should not be compared to that of their students’.

All these attest that students’ civic experiences within the school are far from being conducive to effective civic involvement.

3.4 Contextual Variables and Students’ Civic Outcomes

In this study, contextual variables seem to be particularly influential on students’ civic engagement. Thus, involvement in community related activities is a determining predictor of students’ civic participation; most notably, on their intentions to engage in legal forms of protest. Similarly, the significance of the effect of family background is most documented in relation to students’ expected civic engagement, especially to their participation in more conventional forms. Discussing political and social issues with parents or family members as well as exposure to political news through the media are very strong predictors of students’ intentions to participate in conventional forms of citizenship and could nurture their interest in politics. The students’ family background is also effective in enhancing students’ civic knowledge in the sense that parents’ literacy level is a determining factor in modeling students’ knowledge of government responsibilities.

The relationship among the contextual variables and citizenship outcome reflects a complex interplay whereby the variance in one outcome variable is explained in association to one or two other variables as demonstrated by the following figure:

![Figure: The interaction between contextual variables and citizenship outcomes](image.png)

The figure above shows that while the three identified contextual variables exercise an influence on students’ civic engagement, only school and family background seemed to affect on their knowledge and understanding of civic related concepts. In addition, civic knowledge,
attitudes and engagement are often involved in dual interactions whereby each predicted the other. Interestingly, students’ civic knowledge was intimately associated with their civic attitudes so that good civic knowledge entailed positive civic attitudes.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the interaction among these contextual variables does not necessarily mean that they have been effective in the process of citizenship education. Thus, although the findings of the present study support the reciprocal connection among the various citizenship outcomes and the contextual variables related to them, no causal relationship is suggested.

4. Pedagogical Implications

The study offers several implications that could be integrated in the process of citizenship education. They are mainly relevant to education policy, classroom practices and textbook content.

4.1 Guarding against pedagogical paradoxes

Recognizing the ‘pedagogical paradox’ whereby teachers’ behaviors within the classroom boundaries contradict several civic values is essential in order to safeguard against such paradoxes and work for the betterment of the whole process of citizenship education. While teacher education programs and textbooks may encourage active student engagement and thinking and put the learner at the center of the learning process, the teachers’ daily realities in the classroom do not always reflect this ideal.

Teachers’ interviews reveal that their teaching daily realities are extremely affected by the consequences associated with teachers’ burnout. In fact, research on teachers’ burnout consider that workload and time pressure can cause emotional exhaustion manifested in defective behaviors such as impaired performance, low morale, high absenteeism, high turnover, reduced sympathy towards students, lower frustration in dealing with students, and a general irritable, depressed and anxious demeanor. Consequently, it is crucial to admit the existence of such ‘pedagogical paradox’ and act in such a way as to safeguard against it and work for the betterment of the whole process of citizenship education.

Undoubtedly, many factors of policy, curriculum, school and community context, and others contribute to citizenship education. Nevertheless, what teachers do and how they behave in the classroom needs equal attention. The educational reforms Morocco has introduced attempt to implement changes in the interrelated parts of the educational system. Accordingly, focus is on, among other factors, curriculum and
teacher development; the NCET stresses a learner-centered approach that sets the students’ cognitive and personal development as a priority. Unfortunately, the informal discussions with several teachers suggest that the values transmitted to students sometimes contradict what is preached. This is most salient when it comes to correcting students’ misbehaviors especially if teachers suffer from occupational stress. This suggests that there is much to be done to reduce teachers’ burnout for the sake of the success not only of citizenship education but education as a whole.

4.2 Quality Imperative

Since 2000, Morocco has engaged in ambitious policy programs to expand school enrollment, especially at lower levels. But the increase in educational quantity has been accompanied with a decrease of educational quality since increased enrollments require increased resources. The decline in quality has been further aggravated with “Madrassat Annajah”\(^2\) which aims at increasing the pass rate of students statewide. The results of such policy have had negative consequences on students’ performance and values. Students’ performance is getting increasingly poor as indicated by TIMSS and PIRLS results (2011) while values such as laziness, disinterest, irresponsibility and cheating are getting widespread.

This implies that there is an urgent need to reconsider the adopted educational policy in order to gain both at the level of academic performance and at the level of civic values and attitudes. There is a persistent need to adopt educational programs that nurture positive values such as responsibility, autonomy and hard work by making academic success a meaningful experience.

4.3 Reviewing Textbooks Content

One of the primarily issues that should be a major concern for policy makers and curriculum developers is the “disconnect with reality” present in some Moroccan textbooks. Thus, although textbooks’ civic content refers to civic concepts in various domains, it remains disconnected from the contradictions reflected by the political and social realities. For instance, most textbooks, especially at the primary and lower secondary levels, do not address the prevalence of serious deviations in the Moroccan society from democracy such as sectarianism, corruption, and the absence of transparency and public accountability (Faour, 2010). Similarly, though efforts are made to explicitly promote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the

---

\(^2\) “Madrassat Najah” is an educational programme initiated in 2009. One of its objectives is to combat school drop- out by allowing all children aging between 6 and 15 years to go to school regardless of their academic achievement.
textbooks, they do not necessarily reflect the reality of human rights conditions in society.

Second, attention should be directed to text selection in order to ensure appropriateness and accuracy. What some of the interviewed teachers testified refer to problems related to accurate information and lack of the use of primary resources in the selection of civic related texts. This implies that text selection should involve not only textbook designers but also specialists in the field of citizenship education in order to spare any potential misinformation.

It is equally important to select civic content that lends itself to practical implementation and practice inside the classroom instead of being merely theoretical. This point was highly stressed by different teachers who described textbooks’ civic content as isolated information that students must give back in exams, which makes it almost difficult to create meaningful situations for a better internalization of such values; thus, most of the civic information is forgotten.

4.4 Meaningful learning

Although citizenship education involves different variables, it is important to emphasize the role of the school. Accordingly, it is important to give due attention to the classroom climate and the content directed towards discriminating civic values and citizenship practices.

Research stress that focus on meaningful learning should be a fundamental preoccupation due to the positive outcomes it carries (Galston, 2001). In this respect, the integration of current events into classrooms discussions can be very effective in conveying political knowledge, especially when it involves discussions that are tailored to students’ interests and do not avoid controversial topics (Niemi & Junn, 1998). On the other hand, presenting political information in a redundant material and in a dry format would not yield the expected outcomes (Galston, 2001).

However, absolute reliance on mere discussions of current events may not be sufficient to enhance increasing political knowledge and develop political attitudes. Vercellotti and Matto (2009) and Niemi and Junn (1998) suggest that discussing current events may require some reinforcement through educational materials like readings throughout political articles and simulations through role playing, mock elections, and mock trials.

In the same vein, meaningful learning of civic knowledge can also be promoted through community-based activities. Research shows that attending meetings, service learning, meeting with community leaders, and field trips, can enlighten students about civic engagement.
especially if the curriculum is linked directly to the experience (Youniss & Yates, 1997).

Unfortunately, the results of this study reveal that among the several challenges that need to be considered for effective citizenship education is instruction. Teachers’ interviews show that several constraints inhibit the effective teaching of civic content. Some of these constraints relate to the very limited allotted time to citizenship education and the length of the covered curriculum, which make any meaningful or in-depth class discussion of civic content quite impossible to reach. Teachers report that they are trapped in the vicious circle of exam-oriented teaching, and they do not have enough time to devise meaningful related civic activities or to engage the students in discussions of current events necessary for enhancing their civic knowledge.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the students seem to have developed quite good knowledge of broad civic concepts such as democracy, government and good democratic practices. Nevertheless, their knowledge of what might be a threat to democracy is rather weak. The same ambivalence characterizes their civic attitudes. Although they hold positive attitudes towards their country and the different ethnic groups in Morocco, they are still reluctant to accept utter gender equality when it comes to getting the same pay or accessing high-ranked jobs. More than that, they are politically disinterested in conventional forms of citizenship such as voting and are mostly drawn towards social-related activities such as volunteering.

This pattern of results suggests that citizenship education in Morocco is still minimalist in its approach. It is largely content and knowledge-led since it basically valorizes core civic values for the making of virtuous and law-abiding citizens. Such conservative vision of citizenship education emphasizes moral and social responsibility to serve instrumental need in order to fit in the overall requirements of the state without having the intention to produce citizens capable of introducing structural change that critically analyze existing social policies and priorities. This finding concords that reported by El Ouazzani et al. (2010) who acknowledged the persistence of existing structural barriers as those related to the very limited role of communal municipalities and other similar agencies in the promotion of citizenship education. Hence, the optimal presence of a maximal version of citizenship education in the curriculum is faced with different social and political barriers that reduce most of the aspects of active citizenship into mere voluntary activities.

References


