

Quality assurance and internationalization in Moroccan higher education: An ecosystemic analysis of the Faculty of Educational Sciences and a comparative benchmark of global Faculties of Education.

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Abstract

This article examines how quality assurance and internationalization are reshaping Moroccan higher education when viewed through an ecosystemic lens. Focusing on the Faculty of Educational Sciences (FSE) at Mohammed V University in Rabat, it analyses how successive national reforms, the development of a national quality assurance framework, and emerging internationalization practices are transforming the faculty's position within a multi-level network of actors that includes ministries, institutions, schools, local communities and global partners. Methodologically, the study is based on qualitative documentary analysis of policy texts and institutional data, complemented by a comparative benchmark of selected Faculties and Colleges of Education in Europe, North America, Asia and the Arab world. The findings highlight, first, the persistence of structural tensions in the Moroccan system despite an increasingly dense architecture of reforms and evaluation instruments. Second, they show that quality assurance and internationalization can operate either as fragmented, bureaucratic add-ons or as levers for reconfiguring university-ecosystem relations, depending on how they are embedded in institutional missions and governance. The international benchmark identifies organizational models and practices that offer realistic options for FSE and Moroccan universities. The study concludes with policy and institutional recommendations to support a more coherent, context-sensitive use of quality assurance and internationalization as drivers of transformative change.

Keywords

Quality assurance; Internationalization of higher education; Faculty of Educational Sciences; Comparative benchmark; Educational policy.

Introduction

Over the past three decades, higher education systems worldwide have gone through deep alterations driven by massification, diversification of provision, and intensifying global competition (Trow, 1974); (Altbach et al., 2009), Morocco is no exception. Since the late 1990s, the country has significantly extended its university network, increased student registration, and raised public investment in higher education and research, positioning the university as a strategic lever for economic growth, social cohesion and democratic consolidation (Kingdom of Morocco, 1999); (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, de la formation et de la recherche scientifique, 2015). New universities, faculties, and specialized schools have been created; doctoral education has been restructured; and research capacity has progressively been strengthened, particularly in priority areas identified by national development strategies.

However, this quantitative expansion has been accompanied by persistent structural challenges. High dropout rates, especially in open-access institutions, recurrent difficulties with academic guidance and support, and significant levels of graduate unemployment continue to undermine the effectiveness and social legitimacy of the system (World Bank & KfW Development Bank, 2017); (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, de la formation et de la recherche scientifique, 2014). The pressure on human and material resources is reflected in unfavorable student–staff ratios, constraints on research time, and uneven supervision conditions in doctoral training. At the same time, Morocco is faced with the need to upgrade skills, foster innovation, and align university outputs with the ambitions of the New Development Model, which explicitly assigns higher education a central role in human development and knowledge-based growth (Kingdom of Morocco, Commission spéciale sur le modèle de développement, 2021).

In response, a succession of major reform instruments has sought to rethink the missions, governance, and organization of Moroccan higher education. The National Charter for Education and Training (Kingdom of Morocco, 1999), the Emergency Program (2009–2012), the Strategic Vision 2015–2030 (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, de la formation et de la recherche scientifique, 2015), the framework law 51-17 (Kingdom of Morocco, 2019), and more recently the New Development Model and the PACTE ESRI 2030 have all attempted to move from a logic of disorganized adjustments to a more systemic approach connecting pedagogy, governance, quality assurance, and research.

Quality assurance (QA) has consequently become an increasingly important component of higher education reform. Its development reflects a broader international shift toward evaluation, accountability, performance measurement, and institutional improvement. In principle, QA can provide institutions with mechanisms for monitoring performance, improving teaching and learning, strengthening research, and enhancing governance. However, when primarily conceived as a compliance mechanism, it may become associated with administrative burden, standardized procedures, and a proliferation of evaluation instruments rather than with genuine institutional learning. On the other hand, when designed and implemented in a participatory and context-sensitive way, QA can foster organizational learning, professional development, and the construction of a genuine culture of quality that strengthens teaching, research and governance (Harvey & Green, 1993); (Nait Belaid, 2020). This ambivalence is particularly visible in Morocco, where some quality-oriented reforms have produced unintentional effects, such as fragmentation of curricula, overload of new policies, or difficulties in aligning evaluation tools with institutional realities.

Internationalization constitutes the second important lever through which Moroccan universities are seeking to reposition themselves. Rather than a simple importation of foreign models, internationalization is now widely conceptualized as a multidimensional process encompassing mobility, curriculum reform, international research collaboration, and the development of intercultural competences (Altbach & Knight, 2007); (de Wit et al., 2015). It involves networks, partnerships, and mutual exchanges that reshape how knowledge is produced, circulated and used across borders (Marginson, 2010). For a country like Morocco, located at the intersection of African, Arab and Euro-Mediterranean spaces, internationalization offers opportunities to fit in global scientific communities, attract and retain talent, and participate in regional and international ventures.

Yet internationalization also raises critical questions. To what extent does it risk reinforcing asymmetrical relations (Tikly, 2004); (Knight, 2013) and dependence on models from the Global North? How can Moroccan universities avoid a purely symbolic or window-dressing internationalization that focuses on rankings and branding, and instead develop strategies anchored in local needs and national priorities? These questions are particularly salient for Faculties of

Educational Sciences, which occupy a strategic position at the crossroads of teacher education, educational research and policy dialogue.

In this context, the Moroccan university appears as a key actor in national transitions, situated at the heart of complex interactions between national policies, socio-economic demands, and global academic dynamics (Altbach et al., 2009). This study examines the relationship between quality assurance and internationalization in Moroccan higher education, with a particular focus on the Faculty of Educational Sciences (FSE) at Mohammed V University of Rabat and its positioning within a broader international landscape of Faculties of Education. Created in the early 1980s, the FSE has played a pioneering role in institutionalizing educational sciences in Morocco and currently operates within a multi-actor setting that includes ministries, teacher education institutions, regional centers, schools, NGOs, and international partners.

At the same time, FSE is part of a broader, international landscape of Faculties and Institutes of Education that have been at the head of debates on quality, professionalization, and internationalization. By situating the FSE within a comparative benchmark of selected Faculties and Colleges of Education in different world regions, the article seeks to identify convergences and differences in missions, organizational models, and practices, and to discuss their relevance for the Moroccan context.

The objective of this study is to examine how quality assurance and internationalization are shaping the position and role of the Faculty of Educational Sciences within the Moroccan higher education ecosystem. More specifically, the study seeks to analyze the effects of recent reforms and the national quality assurance framework, examine the contribution and constraints of internationalization at FSE, and identify organizational models and practices from international Faculties and Colleges of Education that could inform context-sensitive institutional development in Morocco. The analysis adopts an ecosystemic perspective, considering the university not as an isolated organization but as an institution embedded in multiple and interdependent relationships involving public authorities, educational institutions, socio-economic actors, local communities and international partners.

The article is guided by the following interconnected questions. First, how have recent reforms and the development of a national quality assurance framework reshaped the missions, governance and perceived role of Moroccan universities, and particularly of the Faculty of Educational Sciences,

within a multifaceted socio-economic ecosystem? Second, in what ways does internationalization contribute to, or constrain, the transformation of FSE and its relations with national and international stakeholders? Third, how do organizational models and best practices observed in selected Faculties and Colleges of Education worldwide compare with those of FSE, and what do they suggest for reconfiguring university–ecosystem relations in a way that is both ambitious and context-sensitive?

The article is structured into several sections. It first examines the trajectory of higher education reforms in Morocco and the persistent challenges associated with massification and institutional transformation. It then analyzes the development of the national quality assurance framework and its implications for institutional quality and governance. The following section focuses on the internationalization of Moroccan higher education, with particular attention to the Faculty of Educational Sciences at Mohammed V University of Rabat. This is followed by a comparative benchmark of selected Faculties and Colleges of Education worldwide, aimed at identifying relevant organizational models and practices. The article then discusses the implications of these findings from an ecosystemic perspective and formulates policy and institutional recommendations for Moroccan higher education.

1. The diagnostic cycle of reforms

Since the early 2000s, Moroccan higher education has been the object of consecutive major reform initiatives that have wanted to address structural weaknesses while aligning the system with international standards and national development wishes. The National Charter for Education and Training (1999–2000) laid the foundations of a comprehensive reform agenda, emphasizing democratization of access, quality improvement, and the repositioning of education as a national priority (Kingdom of Morocco, 2000). This was followed by the Emergency Program (2009–2012), which aimed to accelerate implementation through targeted plans and increased investment, and by the Strategic Vision 2015–2030, which proposed a long-term roadmap for an “equitable, quality and promoting” school and university system (Conseil supérieur de l’éducation, de la formation et de la recherche scientifique, 2015).

The adoption of framework law 51-17 in 2019 sought to give necessary legal force to this vision, reorganizing governance, funding and curricular structures and reaffirming the centrality of higher education and research in national development strategies. The New Development Model

(Kingdom of Morocco, Commission spéciale sur le modèle de développement, 2021) reinforced this orientation by explicitly linking higher education to competitiveness, inclusion and territorial cohesion, while the PACTE ESRI 2030 (Plan d'Accélération de la Transformation de l'Écosystème d'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation) launched in 2023 proposed a new pedagogical architecture, new objectives, and a reconfiguration of the training–employment nexus.

Despite their differences, these instruments share a common pattern: each is preceded by diagnostic reports and evaluation studies that document governance issues, employability limitations, deficits in supervision and teaching approaches, weak links with the socio-economic ecosystem, and the challenges of digital transformation. The stated objective of these diagnostics is to drive a qualitative dynamic in the development of the higher education system in Morocco and to bridge the gap between sectoral analysis, political orientations and implementation realities. However, the accumulation of diagnoses and reform texts has sometimes produced a painful path of reform attempts rather than a coherent transformative trajectory, with fragmentation of measures, limited institutional appropriation, and reform fatigue among actors.

2. Massification and key quantitative indicators

One of the most striking features of Moroccan higher education over the last three decades has been its rapid massification. The public budget for higher education grew from nearly 3.6 billion dirhams in 2000 to more than 16 billion dirhams in 2023, reflecting a continuous public investment effort. Over the same period, the gross enrollment rate in higher education rose from 10.3% in 1990–1991 to 45.7% in 2021–2022, an increase of more than 35 percentage points.

The institutional landscape has also expanded significantly: the number of university institutions increased from 43 in 1990 to 157 in 2022, while the number of professor-researchers reached 21,416 in 2021–2022, of whom 31.6% are women. In 2022, higher education enrolled 1,170,836 students, 90.6% of whom were in public universities, 4% in non-university public institutions, and 5.4% in programs under public–private agreements; women represented 52.7% of the total student population. Doctoral studies have experienced particularly rapid growth: the number of doctoral students increased from 9,645 in 2001 to 40,500 in 2017, a rise of more than 400%.

Programmatically, the system has diversified. In 2021–2022, 2,725 accredited programs were offered in public higher education and 1,077 in private institutions, spanning an increasingly wide

range of fields and professional orientations. These figures illustrate both the scale of the effort to democratize access and the complexity of managing a massified system that must, at the same time, ensure equity, quality, and relevance.

3. Persistent challenges

Notwithstanding these quantitative advances, major qualitative and structural challenges persist. First, internal efficiency remains problematic: 50% of students leave university without obtaining a degree, a figure that signals serious issues in academic guidance, teaching practices, and student support. Second, external efficiency is weakened by high rates of unemployment among graduates, particularly in open-access institutions where the unemployment rate reaches 18.7%, reflecting a misalignment between training profiles and labor market needs.

Third, human and material resources are under intense pressure. The average student–staff ratio stands at one teacher for 120 students, compared with 15 on average in OECD countries, limiting the possibility of pedagogical innovation, individualized support, and sustained research activity. Research and development remain underfunded: the budget allocated to scientific research represents only 1.6% of the overall higher education budget (2021–2022), and Morocco counts 1,708 researchers per million inhabitants, compared with 1,772 in Tunisia and 2,916 in Brazil.

Fourth, there are significant linguistic deficits among new students, who often struggle with French, English and basic communication and information technologies, which hinders their integration into global knowledge networks and disturbs their academic success. Fifth, the implementation of the LMD (Licence–Master–Doctorat) system continues to face difficulties, particularly in adapting pedagogical organization to the credit system. This results in weak bridges between programs and disciplinary paths and limited student mobility across fields, institutions and cycles. Problems of balance between Bachelor and Master provision, blocks in access to Master’s programs, and a reduced pool of doctoral profiles undermine the effectiveness of doctoral training and the renewal of the academic workforce. Governance and autonomy remain sensitive issues too; tensions between ministerial guidance and institutional autonomy in the management of human resources, funding and strategic priorities have repercussions on both the quantity and quality of provision, and on the capacity of universities to build strong partnerships with their socio-economic and cultural ecosystems. All these factors raise questions about the external performance of the system and its ability to provide opportunities for employability and social mobility in line with the

expectations of the New Development Model (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, de la formation et de la recherche scientifique, 2021).

4. Toward a systemic approach

In this context, the perspective proposed by recent analyses and policy documents is to move beyond an institution-by-institution diagnostic approach towards a systemic understanding of higher education as a complex, multi-level ecosystem. The objective is not merely to identify dysfunctions at the micro level (individual institutions, programs, or governance units), but to examine how regulations, funding mechanisms, pedagogical models, quality assurance devices, and university–ecosystem relations interact and co-produce outcomes.

Institutional diagnostics remain necessary, but they must be situated within a broader systemic analysis that takes into account demographic trends, economic transformations, territorial inequalities, and global dynamics. Systemic reform, in this sense, implies coherent adjustments across governance, pedagogy, quality assurance, research and internationalization, rather than isolated measures. The management of positive change then involves supporting actors such as leaders, academics, students, administrative staff in appropriating these reforms and transforming them into lived practices, rather than treating them as external constraints.

This move towards a systemic approach resonates with broader theoretical discussions on higher education as a complex adaptive system, where policies produce non-linear and sometimes unintended effects (Dill, 1997) ; (Teichler, 2017)). In the Moroccan case, it also provides a framework for rethinking the place of quality assurance and internationalization as levers for restructuring university–ecosystem relations, which is the focus of the next section.

5. Quality assurance and the quest for quality in a complex ecosystem

5.1. The global circulation of quality assurance

Quality Assurance (QA) has become a central feature of higher education reform worldwide, promoted as an indispensable tool for enhancing transparency, accountability and competitiveness. In many countries, QA has developed in the wake of new public management reforms, which recast universities as strategic organizations to be steered through performance indicators, audits and contractualization (Hood, 1991); (Neave, 1998); (Amaral et al., 2009). The emergence of the evaluative state has thus positioned QA at the heart of regulatory regimes in higher education.

Morocco's engagement with QA must be understood within this broader global circulation of ideas, instruments and standards. International organizations, notably the World Trade Organization, the OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank, have acted as arenas for the diffusion of QA models and as producers of comparative indicators that encourage convergence of national systems around certain benchmarks. The rapprochement with the European Commission and the Council of Europe, particularly in the context of Bologna-inspired reforms and Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, has further contributed to the co-production of higher education policies oriented towards quality, mobility and recognition of qualifications.

At the same time, QA is the object of intense debate in academic literature and among practitioners. Some authors highlight the ideological nature of QA systems, arguing that they translate managerial logics and market rationality into the university field, thus narrowing academic autonomy, privileging measurable outputs, and reinforcing competition at the expense of collegiality (Morley, 2003; Shore & Wright, 2015). Others emphasize their potential to drive organizational learning, foster professional mobilization around shared standards, and diffuse good practices, provided that QA is designed as a formative rather than purely punitive instrument (Harvey & Green, 1993); (Stensaker, 2008). The Moroccan case reflects this ambivalence: QA is both contested and unavoidable, a site where global prescriptions meet national specificities and institutional realities.

5.2.The Moroccan national QA framework

In order to structure and harmonize quality-related practices, Morocco has adopted a National Framework for the Evaluation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education. This framework is defined as a set of values and objectives that the institution sets for itself within the framework of its missions to meet the legitimate expectations of its users and partners, as well as its staff. It thus goes beyond narrow notions of control to encompass a global vision of institutional responsibility towards students, staff and society.

The framework is structured into five domains, fifteen fields, thirty-eight references and 146 criteria, which together constitute a comprehensive grid for evaluating universities:

Table N°1: The Moroccan national QA framework

Domain	Fields	References	Criteria
Governance and management of support functions	5	12	47
Teaching and training	3	6	32
Scientific research	4	11	36
Student support and student life	3	7	23
Service of the institution to society	—	2	8
Total	15	38	146

Source : Own table

This architecture reflects an understanding of quality as multidimensional, covering governance, research, student experience and societal engagement. It aligns with international approaches that stress the importance of considering both internal processes and external interfaces when assessing institutional performance (Harvey & Green, 1993); (ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2015)).

In practice, the framework is intended to guide self-evaluation, external evaluation, and improvement plans at institutional and program levels. It provides common benchmarks against which universities can position themselves, while leaving room for contextual interpretation and prioritization. Its effective implementation, however, depends on the availability of reliable data, the capacity of institutions to organize evaluative processes, and the willingness of actors to engage in sometimes demanding exercises of reflexivity and change.

The Moroccan experience also illustrates how reforms introduced in the name of quality can sometimes generate unintended or even perverse effects. A telling example is provided by the set of reforms explicitly framed as quality-enhancing: the Bachelor reform, the creation of the Bachelor's of Education, the introduction of Soft Skills modules, and the institutionalization of educational activities in schools as components of university curricula.

These initiatives were designed to respond to real challenges: improving the employability of graduates, strengthening generic competences, bringing universities closer to schools and communities, and aligning degrees with international formats. However, when implemented in a fragmented, top-down or poorly piloted manner, they risk becoming “solutions that turn into problems.” In some institutions, the Bachelor reform has been perceived as adding complexity to an already fragile LMD architecture, without sufficient preparation of staff or adaptation of support services. Bachelor's of Education has sometimes suffered from overlap with existing teacher education routes, challenges in coordination with ENS, ESEF and CRMEF structures, and uncertainties regarding professional recognition. Soft Skills modules, while widely recognized as important, have occasionally been reduced to loosely connected add-ons, poorly integrated into disciplinary learning and delivered under constrained conditions. Educational activities in schools, conceived as a way to anchor learning in real contexts, can produce administrative and logistical overload if partnerships and supervision arrangements are not carefully designed.

These experiences echo international research on the unintended effects of quality-oriented reforms, which points to risks of bureaucratization, ritual compliance, and the crowding out of intrinsic academic motivations by externally imposed indicators and procedures (Ball, 2003; Merton, 1936). They also highlight the importance of policy coherence: quality-enhancing reforms must be aligned with resources, staff development, and realistic timelines if they are to contribute to genuine improvement rather than to reform fatigue.

In light of these challenges, recent reflections on quality in Moroccan higher education emphasize the need to move from a narrow, compliance-oriented view of QA to a broader, more organic “culture of quality.” Quality assurance policies are argued to be most effective when they are realistic, “armed with wisdom,” non-fragmentary, and when they reflect the continuous relationship between research, teaching and learning, while taking into account the international, national and local contexts in which institutions operate.

Developing such a culture of quality requires an ecosystem in which all internal and external stakeholders – academic and administrative staff, students, governing bodies, socio-economic and cultural partners – assume responsibility for quality and engage in QA at all levels of the institution. This includes explicit and implicit rules and procedures of organization, governance arrangements, pedagogical approaches and instructional design, relationships with the socio-economic and

cultural environment, and the social and inclusive mission of the university. In other words, quality becomes a shared reference point guiding strategic decisions and everyday practices, rather than a checklist imposed from outside.

This perspective resonates with international debates that distinguish between “quality assurance” as formal procedures and “quality enhancement” as a continuous, internally driven process of improvement (Harvey & Green, 1993); (Stensaker, 2008). It also connects directly to the question of university–ecosystem relations: a genuine culture of quality must integrate not only intra-university dimensions but also the ways in which universities interact with schools, employers, local authorities, civil society and international partners.

Building such a culture in the Moroccan context implies rethinking the role of Faculties of Educational Sciences, which are simultaneously training grounds for future educators, sites of educational research, and interlocutors for policy-makers. The next sections therefore examine how these issues play out in the case of the Faculty of Educational Sciences in Rabat and in comparison with leading Faculties of Education worldwide, in order to explore how quality assurance and internationalization can contribute to a renewed configuration of university–ecosystem relations.

6. Internationalization of Moroccan universities: the case of the Faculty of Educational Sciences (FSE)

6.1. Internationalization as a process

In continuation with the broader discussion above, this article adopts a processual understanding of internationalization. Internationalization of higher education is not conceived as the simple joining of foreign institutional models onto the Moroccan system, but rather as a dynamic process of exchanges, partnerships and reciprocal transfer of knowledge and good practices, in a world where the quality standards of universities, programs, research and evaluation are increasingly inspired by so-called international standards (Altbach & Knight, 2007); (Marginson, 2010). In this sense, internationalization encompasses mobility of students and staff, joint and double degrees, international research collaboration, curriculum development, language policy and participation in global policy arenas.

In the Moroccan context, and particularly for Faculties of Educational Sciences, internationalization can be understood as a means to: integrate into global networks of educational research; expose students and staff to diverse pedagogical and socio-cultural environments; and

contribute to international debates on education while bringing in perspectives from the Global South. At the same time, as highlighted earlier, this process must be negotiated with attention to national priorities, institutional capacities and the risks of reproducing asymmetrical relations in global knowledge production (Knight, 2013); (Tikly, 2004).

6.2.The FSE within the national ecosystem

The Faculty of Educational Sciences (FSE) at Mohammed V University of Rabat occupies a singular place in the Moroccan higher education landscape. It was created in 1983 by Decree No. 2-82-355 on the creation of university institutions, published in the Official Bulletin No. 3666 of 2 February 1983. Since its establishment, FSE has been mandated to provide higher education in both initial and continuous training and to conduct research in fields related to educational sciences, languages and communication. According to Decree No. 2.04.89 of 7 June 2004, it is responsible for preparing and awarding the University Diploma of Technology (DUT), the Bachelor's degree, the Master's degree, the Specialized Master's degree and the Doctorate.

In quantitative terms, the faculty currently counts around 2,234 students, 104 teachers, 3 departments and 17 study programs which illustrates both its institutional weight and its relatively modest size compared with large open-access faculties. Its missions combine academic education in educational sciences, preparation of education professionals, and the development of research in areas such as pedagogy, curriculum studies, educational psychology, language didactics and educational policies.

Within the national ecosystem, FSE is embedded in a broader constellation of institutions concerned with teacher education and educational development: Higher Normal Schools (Écoles Normales Supérieures, ENS), Higher Schools of Education and Training (Écoles Supérieures de l'Éducation et de la Formation, ESEF) and Regional Centres for Education and Training Professions (Centres Régionaux des Métiers de l'Éducation et de la Formation, CRMEF). This configuration is specific to Morocco: whereas in many countries Faculties or Institutes of Education concentrate both academic programs and professional teacher training, in Morocco, responsibilities are distributed across multiple institutions. FSE thus acts as a hub for educational sciences within a wider network, which creates opportunities for collaboration but also coordination challenges.

6.3. Internationalization practices at FSE

Situated at the intersection of a national network (13 ENS and ESEF) and an emerging international network of Faculties of Education, FSE has progressively engaged in diverse forms of internationalization. At the level of academic programs, internationalization is reflected in the use of foreign languages, notably French and increasingly English, as languages of instruction and research, in the inclusion of international literature and comparative perspectives in curricula, and in the participation of staff in international conferences and publication circuits.

Mobility constitutes another important dimension. Teaching staff and doctoral candidates participate in exchange schemes and research stays through programs such as Erasmus+, bilateral cooperation agreements and cotutelle arrangements with European universities, especially in educational sciences and related social science fields. These mobilities allow for exposure to different pedagogical and research cultures and contribute to the circulation of ideas, methods and comparative insights. At the same time, FSE welcomes visiting scholars and, to a lesser extent, international students, which further diversifies its academic environment.

International projects and partnerships also play a role. FSE is part of networks with Faculties or Colleges of Education in Tokyo, Montpellier, Qatar, Arizona, Montreal, Helsinki, Hong Kong and Barcelona, among others, which have been mapped through a benchmark exercise on Faculties of Educational Sciences worldwide. These relationships range from informal cooperation such as joint seminars, staff exchanges, participation in international conferences, to more structured collaborations like joint research projects, co-supervision of theses.

FSE's engagement in international debates on quality and internationalization, illustrated by its role in conferences on the university in the service of transitions and by its involvement in projects on internationalization of higher education and educational policy, contributes to positioning the faculty as an actor in the global conversation on higher education reform, while grounding its interventions in the Moroccan experience.

Despite these advances, FSE faces a set of constraints that shape its internationalization trajectory. Resource constraints, both financial and human, limit the capacity to sustain large-scale mobility, to provide systematic linguistic support, and to develop an extensive portfolio of international programs. Governance arrangements, including the distribution of responsibilities between the ministry, the university and the faculty, can make it difficult to negotiate and implement

international partnerships with the flexibility and speed often required by foreign partners. Language remains a critical issue: while staff are generally comfortable with French, many students face difficulties in foreign languages, which restricts their access to international mobility and internationalized curricula. Recognition of diplomas and the articulation between national and foreign qualification frameworks can also complicate the development of joint and double degrees. High teaching loads and the demands of massification constrain the time that staff can devote to building and maintaining international networks (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, de la formation et de la recherche scientifique, 2021).

At the same time, the opportunities are considerable. FSE is uniquely placed to position itself as a regional hub for educational sciences in the Maghreb and wider African space, drawing on its long institutional history, its critical mass of expertise, and its location in the capital city. By strategically leveraging international networks, it can strengthen its research profile in areas of high global and national relevance such as inclusive education, educational leadership, early childhood education, educational technology, assessment and evaluation, and lifelong learning. Aligning research themes and teaching programmes with global agendas—such as the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 on quality education—can enhance both international visibility and local impact.

Internationalization can serve as a catalyst for internal change, encouraging the adoption of innovative pedagogies, the strengthening of quality assurance practices, and the development of student-centered approaches that are increasingly prevalent in the benchmarked Faculties of Education. The key challenge for FSE is therefore to articulate an internationalization strategy that is selective, coherent with its missions and resources, and firmly anchored in the needs and aspirations of Moroccan society.

7. Comparative benchmark of Faculties of Educational Sciences worldwide

7.1. Methodological note

In order to situate FSE within the broader landscape of Faculties and Colleges of Education, a comparative benchmark was conducted of a set of internationally recognized institutions. The sample, presented in the table below, includes the Faculty of Education at the University of Tokyo, the Faculty of Education at the University of Montpellier, the College of Education at Qatar University, the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University, the Faculty of

Educational Sciences at the University of Montreal, the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Helsinki, the Faculty of Education at the University of Hong Kong, and the Facultat de Educació at the University of Barcelona.

Table N°2: Selection sample of Faculties of Educational Sciences

Faculty / College	University	City and country
Faculty of Education	University of Tokyo	Tokyo, Japan
Faculty of Education	University of Montpellier	Montpellier, France
College of Education	Qatar University	Doha, Qatar
Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College	Arizona State University	Arizona, United States
Faculty of Educational Sciences	University of Montreal	Montreal, Canada
Faculty of Educational Sciences	University of Helsinki	Helsinki, Finland
Faculty of Education	The University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong, China
Faculty of Education	University of Barcelona	Barcelona, Spain

Source : Own table

The selection criteria combined academic reputation, geographical diversity (Asia, Europe, North America, Middle East), and availability of information on missions, organizational structures, programs and research activities. Data were collected through desk research, drawing on institutional websites, strategy documents, public reports and other accessible materials. This approach does not aim at statistical representativeness, but at constructing a set of illustrative cases that can illuminate different ways of organizing Faculties of Education and engaging with quality and internationalization.

One of the first observations emerging from the benchmark concerns the appellations used. Most institutions adopt the titles “Faculty of Education” or “College of Education” (Tokyo, Qatar, Hong Kong, Barcelona, Montpellier), while a smaller number retain the traditional name “Faculty of Educational Sciences” (Montreal, Helsinki). In Morocco, by contrast, there is a specific configuration with a single Faculty of Educational Sciences in Rabat, bordered by ENS, ESEF and CRMEF structures that carry a significant part of teacher education and professional training.

Across the benchmarked institutions, the missions display strong convergences. Faculties of Education emphasize the preparation of specialists and professionals in education capable of operating in diverse national and international contexts; the provision of expertise for the

improvement of educational policies and practices; and the preparation of educational leaders who can act as agents of change in schools, systems and communities. In addition to these general formulations, most faculties articulate five core functions: teaching, research, innovation, publication, and expertise/consultancy to external partners.

The benchmark also highlights cross-cutting values: interdisciplinarity, respect for diversity, development of strategic partnerships with public and private sectors, the importance of technology, and the leading role of alumni associations in maintaining links with graduates and supporting student engagement and networking. These elements echo, in more institutionalized form, aspirations that are increasingly present in Moroccan policy discourse and within FSE itself. The Faculties and Colleges of Education analyzed differ in their primary target audiences, according to the nature of their missions. Some focus mainly on academic education and research in educational sciences, without being directly responsible for initial or continuing teacher training as in the cases of Hong Kong and Helsinki. Others integrate the training of educational staff, teachers, counsellors, administrators, into their core activities, combining academic and professional programs, as in Montpellier and Montreal.

All faculties underscore the importance of their degrees on the labor market, highlighting both the excellence of their training and the high academic quality of their staff. They place strong emphasis on scholarship schemes, particularly merit-based scholarships, as tools to attract and retain the best students, including international candidates.

Compared with these patterns, FSE combines academic programs in educational sciences with a role in training education professionals, but it does so within a fragmented national architecture where ENS, ESEF and CRMEF also play major roles in teacher education. Its program portfolio is relatively diversified, but its capacity to offer a full continuum from undergraduate to doctoral education in close articulation with professional training is constrained by this institutional division of labor. The benchmark suggests that more integrated models can facilitate smoother transitions between academic and professional pathways and strengthen the link between research and practice in teacher education.

The organizational architecture of faculties in the sample reveals both continuity and innovation. While the majority still operate with departments, a number of faculties have moved towards

models that rely more heavily on research centers and institutes, sometimes with no formal departmental structure (Helsinki, Hong Kong).

Among those that maintain departments, there is a coexistence of traditional and new departmental structures. Traditional departments include Educational Sciences (Qatar), Education (Helsinki), Administration and Foundations of Education (Montreal), Psychopedagogy and Andragogy (Montreal), Educational Science and Technology, Psychological Sciences (Qatar), and Language Teaching (Montreal, Montpellier). Newer departments reflect emerging fields and concerns, such as Child and Family Development, Educational Leadership (Montreal), Developmental Sciences (Tokyo), Inclusive Education (Helsinki, Hong Kong), Research Methods and Diagnosis in Education, Social Work and Social Services (Barcelona), Training Sciences (Montpellier), and Arts Education (Doha).

Beyond departments, the faculties surveyed host a rich ecosystem of research structures, presented in the table below, such as centers, institutes, units, chairs and observatories, that contribute to the development of society. Examples include the Center for Family, School & Community Engagement (FSCE) at Helsinki, which serves as a networking hub linking field actors; the Center for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) at Arizona, dedicated to human rights in education; the Center for Teaching Critical Thinking & Creativity (CTCTC) at Arizona, focusing on critical and creative thinking in schools; the Center for Educational Assessment (CEA) at Helsinki, specializing in evaluation and educational systems; the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at Hong Kong; early childhood centers at Doha and Tokyo; the Research for Equitable Access and Learning Centre (REAL) at Cambridge; and the Center for Advancement in Inclusive and Special Education (CAISE) at Hong Kong.

Table N°3 Research structures of Faculties of Educational Sciences from around the world.

Structure	Assignment	Faculty/University
Center for Teaching Critical Thinking & Creativity (CTCTC)	Developing research to improve critical and creative thinking in schools.	Arizona Faculty of Education
Center for Educational Assessment (CEA)	Evaluation and educational systems and their development.	Faculty of Education-Helsinki.
Center for Educational Leadership (CEL)	Development of research on educational leadership;	Faculty of Education-Hong Kong.
Center for Family, School, & Community Engagement (FSCE).	Networking center designed to help people in the field connect.	Faculty of Education-Helsinki
Center for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT)	The center develops research on the universal culture of human rights, and more particularly human rights in education.	Faculty of Education-Arizona
Early Childhood Center	Development of early childhood research	Faculty of Education - Doha
Research for Equitable Access and Learning Centre	Conduct research to improve learning outcomes (international assessments).	Faculty of Education-Cambridge.
The Center for Early Childhood Development, Education, and Policy Research.	Development of research on early childhood and educational policies	Faculty of Education-Tokyo.
Center for Advancement in Inclusive and Special Education (CAISE)	Development of research and encourage synergies in the implementation of projects on inclusive education.	Faculty of Education-Hong Kong.

Source : Own table

This dense research infrastructure supports strong linkages between teaching, research and societal engagement. In comparison, FSE has fewer specialized research structures of this type, which limits its visibility and its capacity to position itself as a key national and international reference in specific thematic niches, despite the individual productivity of many of its scholars.

The benchmark highlights a set of convergent best practices in the faculties analyzed, many of which are closely linked to quality assurance and internationalization. Students are systematically involved in the evaluation of programs and teachers, through surveys, focus groups and representation on decision-making bodies. International mobility of students and staff is strongly encouraged and institutionally supported. All institutions promote engagement in community programs as part of the university's social responsibility, and organize social and societal activities, particularly for the benefit of local populations, often through various forms of volunteering.

All faculties and their universities invest in promotional materials and digital communication for international visibility. They emphasize academic integrity and freedom, backed by robust mechanisms to detect and sanction academic fraud. They attach great importance to Recognition of Prior Learning (VAE) within a lifelong learning perspective, and to respecting student diversity by offering flexible learning paths. Alumni associations play a crucial role in maintaining links with former students and supporting current students through mentoring and networking. A rich program of social, cultural and sports activities organized by and for students aims to foster personal development and academic success. The links between training and research in educational sciences are cultivated from the outset of university studies, and all faculties promote work-study formats that connect flexible and solid training architectures with professional activities and labor market requirements such as internships, applied projects, etc. Entrepreneurship education is also highly developed to foster initiative and innovation.

From an internationalization standpoint, each faculty develops an extensive network of international partners, including consortia, co-diploma arrangements, international mobility schemes for students and professors, the hosting of foreign students, and participation in international project calls. They actively encourage the enrolment of foreign students and adopt innovative, forward-looking training offers to anticipate changes in education-related professions and labor market demands.

When contrasted with the Moroccan context and FSE, these practices highlight both gaps and opportunities. FSE shares some of these orientations, such as an increasing concern for student participation, community engagement, and the link between training and research, but their institutionalization remains partial and uneven, constrained by resource limitations and the broader governance environment. At the same time, the benchmark provides a repertoire of concrete mechanisms that could be adapted to the Moroccan context: strengthening alumni networks; systematically involving students in evaluations; developing thematic research centers; promoting flexible learning paths; and designing targeted international partnerships around clearly defined thematic priorities.

In short, the comparative analysis underscores that quality and internationalization are not abstract principles but are embodied in specific organizational choices and practices. For FSE and Moroccan universities more broadly, the challenge is to appropriate and reinterpret these practices in ways that reinforce their missions and respond to national needs, rather than to reproduce foreign models uncritically.

8. Discussion: reconfiguring university-ecosystem relations

The analysis of Moroccan higher education reform, of the national quality assurance framework, and of internationalization practices at the Faculty of Educational Sciences suggests that the main challenge is no longer the absence of reform initiatives, but rather their fragmentation and limited embedding in a coherent ecosystemic logic. As argued earlier, successive reforms have frequently operated through isolated measures like curricular adjustments, structural reorganizations, new QA instruments, or international projects, without fully addressing how these elements interact within a broader socio-economic, cultural and global environment (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, de la formation et de la recherche scientifique, 2015); (Kingdom of Morocco, Commission spéciale sur le modèle de développement, 2021).

An ecosystemic perspective conceptualizes the university as a node in a dense web of relationships linking public authorities, schools, enterprises, civil society, local communities and international partners (Clark, 1998);(Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). Quality assurance and internationalization, seen through this lens, are not technical devices that can be grafted onto existing structures, but mechanisms that reshape flows of knowledge, expectations and accountability between the university and its environment. QA influences how universities define

their missions, allocate resources, and respond to the needs of students, employers and policy-makers. Internationalization reorganizes connections to global knowledge networks, introduces new norms and practices, and affects the symbolic positioning of institutions.

In Morocco, the tendency to treat QA and internationalization as separate policy domains, each with its own indicators, projects and administrative units, risks attenuating their transformative potential. An ecosystemic approach would instead seek to articulate them: internationalization strategies that prioritize joint research on nationally relevant issues, for example, can feed into QA processes that value societal impact; conversely, QA frameworks that include criteria on partnerships, community engagement and international cooperation can encourage universities to strengthen their ecosystem relations in meaningful ways (Harvey & Newton, 2004); (Stensaker, 2008). For Faculties of Educational Sciences in particular, the key question becomes how to align QA and internationalization with their role as mediators between educational policy, professional practice and academic research.

Within this ecosystemic perspective, Moroccan universities, and the Faculty of Educational Sciences in particular, can be seen as having at least three strategic roles. The first is to act as providers of high-level human capital that is responsive to the priorities of the New Development Model (NMD). The NMD emphasizes the need for a skilled workforce capable of driving digital transformation, fostering innovation, and supporting inclusive development (Kingdom of Morocco, Commission spéciale sur le modèle de développement, 2021). FSE contributes to this agenda by training specialists in educational sciences, future educational leaders, curriculum designers, assessment experts and researchers. Strengthening QA processes around learning outcomes, employability and the relevance of curricula can help ensure that these profiles are better aligned with the evolving demands of the national education system and labor market. Internationalization, in turn, can expose students to comparative perspectives and innovative practices, equipping them with the intercultural and analytical skills needed in a globalized knowledge economy (Altbach et al., 2009).

The second role is to position FSE and Moroccan universities as nodes in international knowledge networks. Participation in joint research projects, international conferences, and co-supervised doctoral programs allows FSE to contribute Moroccan perspectives to global debates on education while benefiting from methodological and conceptual advances developed elsewhere. The cotutelle

arrangements and Erasmus+ mobilities already in place illustrate how such networks can enhance research capacity, doctoral training and the international visibility of Moroccan scholarship. To consolidate this role, FSE needs to develop a more explicit thematic positioning, for example in inclusive education, educational technology, or assessment, around which it can build long-term partnerships and specialized research structures, as seen in the benchmarked faculties.

The third role is to act as an anchor institution for local development and community engagement. Faculties of Education are uniquely placed to work with schools, regional academies, NGOs and local authorities to address concrete educational challenges, from classroom practices to dropout, school–community relations and lifelong learning. International experiences show that when Faculties of Education develop strong outreach programmes, practicum schools, community-based projects and continuing education offerings, they not only enhance their societal relevance but also enrich their teaching and research through closer contact with practice (Darling-Hammond, 2010). For FSE, articulating QA and internationalization with community engagement, for instance, by valorizing partnership projects in evaluation exercises and by connecting international collaborations to local priorities, could significantly strengthen its ecosystemic role.

Repositioning in these three directions requires not only strategic reflection but also concrete organizational adjustments: rethinking program portfolios, rebalancing teaching and research loads, incentivizing collaborative projects, and embedding community and international dimensions in QA processes.

8.1.Lessons from the international benchmark

The international benchmark provides a repertoire of practices and organizational models from which FSE and Moroccan universities can draw, while remaining attentive to contextual constraints. A first set of lessons concerns organizational structures. Several benchmarked faculties have created departments and research centers in emerging areas such as inclusive education, educational leadership, child and family development, educational assessment or educational technology. These structures provide clear thematic identity, facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration, and offer visible entry points for external partners. For FSE, establishing a small number of thematic centers or chairs, for example, on inclusive and special education, educational leadership and governance, or digital education, could help crystallize its strengths and attract both national and international collaborations.

A second lesson relates to QA culture and internal evaluation. In the benchmarked institutions, internal QA processes are often designed not only to ensure compliance with external standards, but also to generate feedback loops that inform curriculum redesign, teaching methods, and student support. They typically combine systematic student evaluations, peer review of teaching, regular program reviews, and data analysis on progression and completion rates (ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2015); (Stensaker, 2008). While Moroccan institutions have begun to implement similar tools, their integration into everyday academic practices remains uneven. FSE could take the lead in developing participatory internal evaluation processes that involve students, staff and external partners, and that explicitly link findings to pedagogical and organizational innovations.

Third, the benchmark highlights the centrality of student-centered pedagogy and flexible learning pathways. Faculties of Education abroad increasingly promote active learning, project-based work, practicum experiences and formative assessment, supported by flexible curricula that facilitate horizontal and vertical mobility within and across programs (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In the Moroccan context, constraints related to massification and limited resources make it difficult to replicate these models wholesale. Nonetheless, targeted initiatives – such as integrating more practicum-based components, using blended learning to manage large cohorts, or offering elective modules that allow students to specialize gradually – could move the system in that direction.

Fourth, alumni engagement and external partnerships emerge as powerful levers. Strong alumni associations maintain connections with graduates who can provide mentoring, internships and feedback on program relevance. Partnerships with schools, NGOs, companies and local authorities allow faculties to co-construct training and research projects and to anchor international collaborations in local realities. For FSE, formalizing alumni networks, establishing partnership frameworks with key educational and community actors, and involving these partners in advisory boards would contribute to embedding the faculty more deeply in its ecosystem.

The key, however, is not to imitate foreign models but to adapt them selectively. The Moroccan context, marked by massification, resource constraints and a complex governance environment, calls for incremental and context-sensitive adaptations rather than radical importation.

8.2. Tensions and conditions for success

Any attempt to reconfigure university–ecosystem relations through quality assurance and internationalization must confront a series of structural tensions. One central tension is between massification and excellence. Expanding access while ensuring high-quality teaching, meaningful student support and robust research capacity is a challenge faced by many systems, but it is particularly acute where student–staff ratios are high and resources are limited (Trow, 1974); (Altbach et al., 2009). QA mechanisms that focus solely on compliance with minimum standards may stabilize quality at a low or uneven level; conversely, standards that are too demanding without adequate support may exacerbate inequalities between institutions.

A second tension is between standardization and contextualization. International QA frameworks and templates for internationalization tend to promote convergence around certain models (for example LMD structure, learning outcomes, mobility schemes). Yet educational systems are historically and culturally specific, and reforms that neglect local pedagogical traditions, linguistic realities and socio-economic conditions risk generating resistance or superficial adoption (Tikly, 2004); (Marginson, 2010). For Moroccan universities, the challenge is to engage with international standards while preserving the capacity to adapt them to national priorities and institutional specificities.

A third tension opposes managerial conceptions of QA to academic freedom and professional autonomy. While performance indicators, accreditation and external audits can improve transparency and accountability, they may also constrain innovation if they are experienced as rigid bureaucratic controls (Morley, 2003) ; (Shore & Wright, 2015). Faculties of Education, which work at the intersection of academic, professional and policy logics, are particularly exposed to such tensions. Designing QA processes that support, rather than inhibit, reflective practice and pedagogical experimentation is therefore crucial.

Addressing these tensions requires a set of enabling conditions. Governance and autonomy are key: universities and faculties must have sufficient decision-making power over curricula, partnerships and resource allocation to develop coherent quality and internationalization strategies, while being held accountable for their outcomes (Clark, 1998). Adequate and predictable resources are indispensable, both to reduce extreme student–staff ratios and to fund strategic initiatives (research centers, mobility, continuing education). Linguistic policy is another critical condition:

strengthening students' and staff's competencies in French and English, while valuing Arabic and Amazigh, is essential for effective participation in international networks and access to global knowledge.

Support for staff, through professional development, reduced teaching loads for those engaged in research or international projects, and recognition of outreach and partnership work, is equally important. Finally, international partnerships must be strategic rather than symbolic: instead of multiplying memoranda of understanding with limited concrete impact, institutions should prioritize a smaller number of partnerships built around shared research themes, co-developed programs and mutual capacity building (Altbach & Knight, 2007); (De Wit, 2019).

Reconfiguring university–ecosystem relations in Morocco is less a matter of inventing new slogans than of aligning governance, resources, QA practices and internationalization strategies around a shared vision of the university as a key actor in national and global knowledge ecosystems. For the Faculty of Educational Sciences, this means capitalizing on its historical role and strategic position to become a laboratory for context-sensitive quality enhancement and meaningful international engagement.

9. Policy and institutional recommendations

9.1. For national policy-makers

From the perspective developed in this article, the central task for national policy-makers is to move from a fragmented approach to reform towards a coherent steering of the higher education ecosystem through systemic quality assurance and strategically framed internationalization. Strengthening systemic QA implies that evaluation frameworks should explicitly integrate teaching, research and employability, instead of treating them as separate domains. In practical terms, this requires refining the national QA framework so that it captures not only compliance with minimal standards, but also the way in which institutions articulate curricula, research agendas and partnerships with socio-economic actors to support the priorities of the New Development Model. Evaluative criteria should therefore consider, for example, how Faculties of Educational Sciences connect their research on pedagogy, curriculum, assessment or inclusive education to teacher education, school improvement and regional development (Harvey & Green, 1993; ENQA, 2015).

Funding and evaluation mechanisms need to be aligned with long-term quality and internationalization objectives rather than driven predominantly by short-term quantitative indicators. If resources are allocated primarily on the basis of enrollment numbers or publication counts, institutions may be encouraged to expand low-cost programs and produce “output” without necessarily improving the substance of teaching and research (Knight, 2021). A more balanced approach would combine baseline funding that guarantees institutional stability with targeted envelopes that reward sustained efforts to develop high-quality programs, robust research structures, and meaningful partnerships with schools, local communities and international networks. Evaluation cycles, in turn, should leave sufficient time for experimentation, consolidation and learning, instead of constantly shifting priorities.

Genuine institutional autonomy is a necessary condition for universities and Faculties of Education to design and implement coherent strategies. Autonomy should not be understood as the withdrawal of the state, but as a reconfiguration of the relationship between public authorities and institutions around shared objectives and clear accountability. Universities need room to maneuver in areas such as curriculum design, partnership development, recruitment and resource allocation, while being held responsible for the quality and relevance of their activities through transparent, negotiated performance contracts (Morley, 2003). In such a framework, national policy can act as an enabler of context-sensitive quality and internationalization, rather than as a source of fragmented and sometimes contradictory injunctions.

9.2. For university leadership and the Faculty of Educational Sciences

At institutional level, university leadership and the Faculty of Educational Sciences have a key role to play in translating national orientations into concrete organizational choices. A first priority is to clarify and communicate a specific mission for Faculties of Educational Sciences within the Moroccan higher education ecosystem. Given the multiplicity of actors involved in teacher education and educational development (ENS, ESEF, CRMEF), it is essential to articulate what is distinctive about the contribution of a Faculty of Educational Sciences: its responsibility for advancing educational research, training specialists and leaders in education, and serving as an interface between policy, practice and academia. Making this mission explicit, both internally and externally, would help guide program development, partnership strategies and resource allocation.

Building on this clarified mission, FSE and its peers could develop or reorganize departments, units and research centers in line with emerging themes that are salient both globally and nationally. The international benchmark shows how departments and centers in inclusive education, educational leadership and governance, educational technology, early childhood, assessment, and community engagement have enabled Faculties of Education to concentrate expertise and signal their thematic priorities. In the Moroccan context, creating a limited number of such structures within FSE—even if initially modest in scale—could help consolidate scattered initiatives, facilitate collaboration with external partners and international institutions, and increase the faculty’s visibility as a reference point in specific areas.

Institutionalizing good practices identified in the benchmark is another crucial task. Rather than relying on individual initiatives, FSE could deliberately embed student participation in evaluation and governance, alumni engagement, community programs, work–study arrangements and entrepreneurship support into its standard operating procedures. This might involve, for example, establishing formal mechanisms for student feedback on programs and teaching, with clear processes for discussing and acting on this feedback; creating an alumni office or committee responsible for maintaining contact with graduates and mobilizing them as mentors and partners; and integrating community-based projects and internships as structured components of curricula across programs. Equally important is the development of robust internal evaluation mechanisms that go beyond external audits: regular program reviews, peer observation of teaching, and data-informed reflection on student progression and completion can foster a genuine culture of quality enhancement.

For such changes to take root, university leadership must also invest in staff development and recognition. Academic and administrative staff need training and support to engage with new pedagogies, QA practices and international partnerships. Workloads and career advancement criteria should recognize contributions to quality enhancement and internationalization, such as curriculum innovation, coordination of partnerships or supervision of practicum projects, alongside traditional research outputs. Without this alignment of incentives, even the most sophisticated QA frameworks and internationalization strategies are unlikely to produce sustained transformation.

9.3. For international partners

International partners, universities, research centers, funding agencies and international organizations, have an important, if often underestimated, role in shaping the trajectory of internationalization in Moroccan higher education. The analysis presented in this article suggests that the most promising forms of cooperation are those that are reciprocal and co-constructed, rather than based on one-way transfer of “models” from North to South. For Faculties and Colleges of Education abroad that collaborate with FSE, this means approaching partnerships as opportunities for mutual learning, where Moroccan experiences of educational reform, multi-actor governance and linguistic diversity can inform global debates just as much as foreign expertise informs local practice.

Concretely, international partners can prioritize joint research projects, co-diplomas and shared doctoral training programs built around themes of common interest—such as inclusive education, digital learning, educational leadership, or equity and quality in massified systems. Co-supervised doctoral theses, for example, can create long-term intellectual and institutional ties, while exposing doctoral candidates to multiple academic cultures and enhancing their employability in diverse contexts. Joint programs should be designed with careful attention to the recognition of credits and diplomas, the financial and linguistic constraints faced by students, and the workload implications for staff on both sides.

Equally important is that international partners respect local contextual constraints and priorities. This entails avoiding an overly prescriptive stance, taking the time to understand Moroccan policy frameworks and institutional dynamics, and co-developing projects with Moroccan counterparts from the initial design phase. Funding schemes can be structured to support capacity building—such as investment in research infrastructure, training for staff in QA and internationalization, or development of bilingual and multilingual teaching resources—rather than focusing exclusively on short-term outputs. In doing so, international partners can contribute to the emergence of a more equitable global knowledge order, in which institutions like the FSE are recognized not merely as recipients of “best practices,” but as producers of knowledge and innovation in their own right.

Conclusion

This article has argued that quality assurance and internationalization in Moroccan higher education should not be understood as technical add-ons or externally imposed decorations, but as potential drivers of deep transformation in the ways universities interact with their multi-level ecosystems. When approached through a narrow, compliance-oriented lens, QA risks degenerating into bureaucratic ritual, and internationalization into symbolic branding. However, when embedded within an ecosystemic vision of higher education, as a set of institutions situated at the intersection of national policy, local communities and global knowledge networks, both QA and internationalization can contribute to a reconfiguration of university missions, practices and relationships that is aligned with the priorities of the New Development Model and responsive to the complex realities of Moroccan society.

Empirically, the article has traced the trajectory of higher education reform in Morocco from the National Charter to the PACTE ESRI 2030, highlighting the persistent diagnostic cycle in which lucid assessments of dysfunctions coexist with limited implementation capacity and reform fatigue. It has documented the massification of the system, the expansion of institutions and programs, and the continuing challenges of dropout, graduate unemployment, unfavorable student–staff ratios, underfunded research and linguistic deficits. It has examined the emergence of a national QA framework that seeks to structure evaluation across governance, teaching, research, student life and societal engagement, while also showing how some quality-driven reforms, such as the Bachelor architecture, the Bachelor's of Education and soft skills modules, have generated perverse effects when poorly coordinated or insufficiently piloted. Against this backdrop, the article has analyzed the Faculty of Educational Sciences in Rabat as a strategic case, situated within a complex national ecosystem of ENS, ESEF and CRMEF structures, and has described its evolving internationalization practices in terms of mobility, partnerships, research projects and engagement in global debates on education.

Conceptually, the analysis has advanced an ecosystemic perspective that locates QA and internationalization within broader socio-economic, cultural and political configurations. Drawing on international literature on the evaluative state, new public management and the internationalization of higher education (Ajayi et al., 2023); (Cheong Cheng & Ming Cheung, 1995), the article has argued that QA and internationalization reshape flows of expectations,

resources and accountability between universities and their stakeholders, and that their effects depend on how they are articulated with institutional missions and governance arrangements. The comparative benchmark of Faculties and Colleges of Education in diverse contexts has provided a repertoire of organizational forms and practices, departments and centers in emerging areas, dense research ecosystems, student-centered pedagogy, internal QA mechanisms, alumni engagement, community programs and strategic international partnerships, that illustrate how faculties elsewhere have connected quality and internationalization to their roles as providers of human capital, nodes in knowledge networks and anchors of local development. The discussion has distilled from this benchmark a set of lessons for repositioning Moroccan universities and the FSE around three strategic roles and has identified key tensions, massification versus excellence, standardization versus contextualization, managerial QA versus academic freedom, alongside enabling conditions such as autonomy, resources, linguistic policy, staff support and genuinely reciprocal international partnerships.

At the same time, the article has clear limitations. Methodologically, it is based on a qualitative, desk-based analysis of policy documents, institutional data and publicly available information on international Faculties of Education, complemented by conceptual reflection. It does not incorporate systematic fieldwork, nor does it capture in detail the perspectives and practices of academic and administrative staff, students, school partners or policy-makers on the ground. The focus on a single faculty, the FSE in Rabat, provides depth but limits the generalizability of findings across Morocco's heterogeneous university landscape. The international benchmark, while deliberately diverse, is illustrative rather than representative and cannot account for the full variety of models and experiences in the Global North and Global South.

These limitations point to several avenues for future research. Empirical studies of the implementation of QA and internationalization policies in Moroccan universities, through interviews, focus groups and ethnographic observations, would help illuminate how these policies are interpreted, appropriated or contested by different actors. Comparative case studies of multiple Faculties of Education within Morocco could shed light on institutional variation and on the conditions under which certain practices travel successfully across contexts. More broadly, comparative research with other countries of the Global South facing similar challenges of massification, resource constraints and international pressures, whether in North Africa, sub-

Saharan Africa, Latin America or Asia, would enrich understanding of how ecosystemic approaches to quality and internationalization can be adapted to diverse historical and socio-political configurations. By combining such empirical work with continued conceptual reflection, future research can contribute to building a more inclusive and context-sensitive global conversation on the role of universities, and Faculties of Educational Sciences in particular, in shaping educational futures.

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