

Constructing National Identity in School History Curriculum

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Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a number of academic and cultural activities that, using various approaches and perspectives, focused on teaching history at Moroccan public schools in relation to questions of national identity. The sociopolitical and cultural context has also reflected a preoccupation with national identity, pluralism, and cultural belonging (as evidenced by the increase in intellectual and academic research on topics related to culture, identity and other similar concepts.) Likewise, the emergence of a civil society movement concerned with Amazigh identity starting in the early 1970s and 1980s affirms the existence of this preoccupation (although, the results of this movement did not gain visibility until the 1990s). Undoubtedly, the teaching of history has many different educational, social, cultural, and political functions, especially those pertaining to cultivating national identity and shaping collective memory. In addition, historical knowledge shared at school represents a society and state's cultural and political priorities, while simultaneously revealing how these priorities are shaped and contested by young people and the intelligentsia.

In order to understand this dynamic, it is necessary to carry out two tasks. On the one hand, it is essential to implement a methodology that analyzes the dialectical relationship that exists between the sociopolitical and cultural contexts that dominate in the field and revisions across academic research in history as well as in education and pedagogy. On the other hand, one is required to connect changes in the socio-political and academic sphere with transformations that took place in the discourse on history at school as reflected in relevant educational documents, including curricula, textbooks, and didactic media used in teaching.

Research Problematic

What are the future challenges for teaching history at Moroccan schools regarding cultivation of national identity?

National identity refers to the conception (of Moroccan identity) - as shaped by hegemonic powers through their authority over political and educational decisions in society. It is a conception that reflects those hegemonic powers' perspective on society and culture in the past, present, and future. This definition is often the result of an interaction between the identity of society, on the one hand, and the ideological preferences of one or various social group or groups, on the other hand. In sum, national identity is the product of an interaction between the identity of society, its components and history, as well as the various ideological patterns that intersect within that community (as affirmed in Mostafa Hassani Idrissi's definition; Idrissi, 2008). This claim denotes that there is a distinction between the historical identity of society and the subjective view that one holds towards it. I allude here to the procedural interpretation of collective identity through state institutions, their legal and legislative frameworks as well as their philosophy in managing issues in the homeland. Among these institutions is the school, with its differing components. The extent of the school's contribution to identity formation can be observed in the formation of a set of perceptions, representations, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors of national identity that individuals and groups then process throughout their developmental journey in the national sphere.

Classroom Historical Knowledge and the Construction of National Identity

Classroom historical knowledge, in my usage, refers to the totality of knowledge, ideas, conceptions, values, and data contained in the various documents pertaining to the teaching of history at Moroccan collegiate public schools. Among these documents, one finds textbooks, official directives (the educational curriculum), and pedagogical media accompanying the teaching-learning process, as well as the discourse that teachers disseminate in the classroom.

Researcher Pierre Milza (2010) pointed out that the process of teaching history is rightly a centerpiece in the process of standardizing the principles of pluralistic historical thinking among the youth by presenting the human past as naturally pluralistic (Hassani Idrissi, 2008). The intent behind highlighting the importance of teaching history in the course of building and shaping identity lies in re-reading how the status and location of temporal, spatial, and societal dimensions within school historical knowledge influence the formation of national identity. This includes understanding where the social and intellectual meanings and connotations given to historical facts stop. Educational approaches that affix a definite meaning to historical facts, events, and issues do not adequately reflect the epistemological philosophy of scholastic historical knowledge despite what has been declared in the components of the history curriculum in Morocco since 2002 (Hassani Idrissi, 2008). The dominance of these approaches

removes all the basic competencies hoped to be achieved by teaching this vital subject at Moroccan schools, including regulation of this field and its relationship to representing Moroccan national identity now and in the future (Hassani Idrissi 2008).

Questions bearing on memory of places or places of memory and collective memories are clearly present in the processes of teaching history at Moroccan schools. The emergence of these questions was facilitated by a set of lessons in Moroccan school history curricula devoted to subjects having to do particularly with culture, civilization, colonialism, interactions between different peoples, and resulting amplifications at the level of political legitimacy, as well as other issues. Hence, it is necessary to think of a method to teach such historical issues on account of their sensitivity and connection with social forces, in addition to their future impact on subsequent generations since they affect the possibilities of coexistence, especially in societies characterized by cultural and ethnic pluralism, such as Moroccan society (Remaoun, 2008). Obviously, these courses contribute to the shaping of the learners' national identity and to the formulation of their opinions and attitudes towards historical events, facts, and issues that relate to the current societal reality. Thus, it is necessary to develop pedagogical plans that take into account the historical reality of those events, their processes, and contexts, in a manner consistent with scientific objectivity.

A number of studies have shown the disproportion representation of certain major historical periods in Moroccan history textbooks (Tamer and Hassani Idrissi, 2012). Some researchers insisted on the necessity of breaking with the methodology of “benchmarking historical periods” (Assid, 2009), which was standardized in accordance with classical academic writing in history and later propagated in education through timeline-based pedagogy. Others believe that the major Arabic-language sources did not record events of the Pre-Islamic era and were rather satisfied with genealogies and recounting of legendary stories and contradictory, less credible, anecdotes about "the Berbers" (Sebti, 2012).

The poverty of serious research on the pre-Islamic period and the first centuries of the Islamic era is a condition that nourishes the polarization that exists between two positions. The first position perpetuates the severance of Moroccan memory and nullifies a local historical experience distinguished by its peculiarities and interaction with multiple regional entities. The second position sometimes lacks a sense of differentiation between the logic of cultural pluralism, the illusion of ethnic identity, and ahistorical memory as a kind of reaction (Sebti, 2012). While it is necessary to seek the appropriate formulas that guarantee an equilibrium between historical periods, it is also essential to condense elements of collective memory by

subjecting them to the logic of historical thinking which questions those elements and is qualified to eliminate confusion from their various aspects (Sebti, 2012). One might recall Mostafa Hassani Idrissi (2002) research demonstrating the need to favor intellectual, cognitive, and methodological dimensions of teaching history over those centered on the accumulating data through the recounting of events, facts, and persons. History does not mean “the narration of past events or simply in being aware of the news and events. History is also a continuous criticism or scrutiny in order to know about the reality of the people’s conditions. Thus, history is a human’s philosophy in his or her thorny relationship with time” (Triki, 1991).

In addition, the historical view on which essential learning in history textbooks is based, especially when it comes to history lessons concentrating on ancient Morocco, has continued to emphasize an approach that stresses the superiority of the foreigner and his continuous superiority over the native. It has become necessary to review some representations regarding the ways in which some events and facts in the ancient history of North Africa developed because of “what has been written about foreign presence and its central role in the development of civilization in Morocco” (Ghazi, 2011). Jean-Paul Morel (1965) was, according to Ghazi, bewildered by the level of prosperity and urbanization in North Africa before the arrival of the Romans and the advent of mixed armies composed of many peoples (Ghazi, 2011). This of course attests to the falsity of the notion that the Berbers were solely mountain and cave dwellers, alongside other similar stereotypes. While reviewing what was reported by Morel, Ghazi affirms the following:

... this statement being issued by a foreign researcher who has nothing to do with the Amazigh people is sufficient to refute that view and those statements that, unfortunately, were instilled in the minds of Moroccans through the educational system which propagated rumors about the first inhabitants of Morocco as dwellers of caves and that at best they were nomads until the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and especially the Romans, initiated them to sedentary modes and construction. This is what historical and archaeological evidence contests by proving that the first inhabitants of Morocco dwelt in houses and walled cities. Also, their settlement in cities indicates their knowledge and practice of agricultural activities such as farming and raising livestock. Agriculture reached a level of prosperity that made the Moroccan kings proud of engraving symbols of wheat ears, grapes, horses, cows, and bees on their coins. All this happened before the Romans ever set foot on the Moroccan soil (Ghazi, 2011).

It is clear that the issue of history and its teaching in a country that aspires for a democratic construction and formation of knowledge in society should not be manipulated and falsified for propagandistic and ideological purposes. Analysis of course material, including manuals and school curricula, created after the education reform of 1973, demonstrate the existence of a successive hierarchy in how history is taught. The hierarchy is based on religion

first, ethics second, and scientific foundations in classifying this knowledge, last. The teaching of history in Moroccan schools, thus, violates the scientific method that should be followed while approaching the historical past of Morocco and the Maghreb, in general. Is there any approach that can be used to steer the building of Morocco’s multifarious national identity and contribute to the formation of a community of citizens instead of a community of believers (El Ayadi, 2000)?

In fact, the historical discourse in Moroccan schools is dominated by a monolithic view of the historical past more than it allows for pluralistic thought. The validity of this proposition is clarified when we explore the concept of historical knowledge in terms of the duality existing between “vocation and professionalism,” which is the dichotomy that Sebti summarized in “a permanent negotiation relationship” (Sebti, 2012), between the professional historians and opinion-makers who manage opinion within society at large. No matter how highly professional the historian’s work – which aims for scientific objectivity - is, it is not isolated from society’s upheavals, transformations, and evolution, especially in today’s world, characterized by greater and greater means of openness, interaction, and communication between people. Because of this new reality, it has become difficult for,

... the professional historian to monopolize the task of defining the content of history and to delimit its features.... historians are forced to convince the public of the legitimacy of the perceptions from which they proceed to carry out their research. It is unlikely that professional historians themselves would unanimously agree to exclude journalistic and literary writing from the field of history, and many of them are aware that the exclusion of non-professionals is unfair (Sebti, 2012).

If “university authorship is generated by indirect knowledge thanks to the mediation of archives, [and] authorship by journalists, writers, and amateurs is linked to current knowledge and memory,” then history in schools requires that the producers of the academic history widen their perspective to cover the transformations that impact society politically, socially, economically and ethically no matter how tumultuous these transformations appear to be (Sebti, 2012). This matter is intricately related to an urgent need to create interest in contemporary history (Kably, 2011).

In the context of the existing correlation between academic knowledge and scholastic knowledge in the field of history, one may ask the following question: does the scholastic historical knowledge that is presented today to Moroccan youth respond to the aspirations of Moroccans? Does it keep pace with the transformations and general aspirations that Morocco has witnessed? Did differences and pluralism find a way into the historical discourse at school?

At the present, one is not yet ready to give a definitive answer to these questions, but some indicators reflect what seems to be the implicit domination of the symbolic, intellectual, and historical frameworks of a particular culture over the others. These indicators reflect those frameworks' tendency towards establishing legitimacy and historical validity rather than constructing historical knowledge in a way that questions, criticizes, and sows seed of doubt in that dominant culture. Reconsidering history “as a human’s dwelling and the source of his multiple identity” necessarily requires redrawing and reshaping the features of collective memory, which constitutes the central element in the construction of the national identity (Khatibi, 1983).

Hassan Boubekraoui (1998) confirms the impact that the scholastic historical knowledge has on the formation of the Moroccan learner starting from early childhood by “preparing him to consider himself a Moroccan with a singular form of belonging” (Hassani Idrissi, 2008). Likewise, El Qadery emphasizes, in one of his jointly authored articles on contemporary history and the functions of the historian, the importance elements that contribute to ensuring social harmony since this enables tremendous possibilities for coexistence within the community space, which harbors awareness of the need to conjure a common destiny for all, regardless of common language or race (El Qadery, 2009). This vision centers on the idea of the future rather than clinging to the past and remaining hostage to it.

Educational and Social Functions of Teaching History and Building Identity

What perception of history do we give legitimacy to teach in an educational institution?
What educational and social functions do we seek in this teaching?

If it is necessary to question the educational and social functions expected from the teaching of history, it is even more appropriate to ask about the traditional functions of teaching history. At the heart of the matter is the relationship between narrative history and problematic history,¹ a relationship in which the latter triumphs over the former, which requires that the process of didactic transposition takes into consideration all the methodological and intellectual developments in the fields of academic historical research and educational research pertaining to teaching methods and curricula of this vital subject. Narrative history hides behind (and at the same time conceals) some ideological bearing and some methods that must be disclosed.

¹ Problematic history is an academic trend within historical research, based on issues rather than historical events or facts, thus going beyond the traditional school within Moroccan historiography.

Narrative history must be confined to school curricula and to the process of simplifying history for the general public.

In all cases, we hope that the spirit of this history will be integrated into the educational system and find its way to books directed to the general public by adapting it to the level of its non-expert consumers, and those who do not have the necessary knowledge to understand it as it was when it was first produced. In the same vein, Nicole Allieu Mary (1995) contends that there are strong interactions and complementary relationships between different social and educational functions of history teaching to the extent that history class constitutes an opportunity to acquire critical thinking skills, documentary research methodology, and demystification of the community's actual present by acquiring and absorbing basic concepts, developing learners' analytical abilities, and encouraging them to formulate a stance. On the other hand, history class is a space where the totality of social, cultural, and intellectual values that have been chosen are questioned. The content of the history lesson aims to transmit these values, thereby building a sense of individual and collective identity. Is it legitimate to ask about the status that religious and national values, or everything relating to national identity and its ideals, should occupy within the realm of the history textbook? Is it possible to talk about the prospect of including religious and national values in the history curriculum and the contents of schoolbooks in light of the latest developments in the field of history teaching, whether at the level of topics, or methodological approaches, or even functions and societal expectations towards its teaching?

As for Christian Laville (1991), the essential function of teaching history is to enable learners to develop the abilities, skills, and competencies indispensable for the construction of informed citizens that can efficiently participate in their society's affairs with independence, impartiality, free thinking, and good judgment (Segal, 1990). When one criticizes the values on which the teaching of history draws, one thus contributes to a critique of the historical knowledge delivered to the youth in its totality. At the heart of the polemic revolving around history and values, one can refer to Abdallah Laroui who contends that: “There is no difference between a critique of history and a critique of values, and critique does not mean encumbrance, but denudation, that is, liberation in preparation for innovation” (Laroui, 2000). This means that innovation depends on criticism and that they are both essential characteristics of free and developed societies.

The educational functions of teaching history are manifest in the didactic and pedagogical situations that put the learner at the center of what Christian Laville calls historical

education. History lessons are expected to ensure that learners acquire the principles and values of critical thinking (Hassani Idrissi, 2008) by providing them with the viable intellectual mechanisms that enable them to strengthen their critical sense of the self, the subject matter, and the public sphere.

In order for young learners to be able to think critically, they must acquire reading, analysis, and interpretation skills and blend them with a constant search for documents and didactic materials even if they were not included in the components of the lesson in question. This practice would help young learners discover other ways that will lead eventually to the shaping of independent and rational thinking that defies ideologies that permeate society and school. In this sense, young citizen will not easily be lured to accept mainstream ideas or adopt them incautiously. This means that the contents of scholarly historical knowledge, especially history textbooks, must be constantly criticized, scrutinized, and reviewed. Additionally, thinking relatively when processing and appreciating historical issues and facts should also be taken into consideration as it is one of the essential functions of education. It is necessary to draw the attention of history textbooks’ designers to this principle of relativity by diversifying various didactic materials and means of illustration (graphs, data, statistical tables, timelines, historical maps, pictures, etc.) so that young learners would realize that historical knowledge is relative by nature.

The reality of teaching history in Morocco, despite progress in terms of documents and content, pushes us to believe that there is a certain kind of shunning away from cultivating the values of true citizenship that Abdallah Laroui emphatically dwells on when he affirms that “We have not yet necessarily divorced reason from instinct, independence from subservience, determination from reliance, citizenship from allegiance” (Laroui, 2000). Academic history, as a subject matter open for exploration by historians and researchers in accordance with the raised issues and a strict scientific methodology, aims to contribute to an awareness of the past according to the imperatives of each historical stage and what they involve in terms of specific problematics, pivotal issues, as well as the preoccupations of the historians themselves. History at school constitutes a subject that imbues the learners, intellectually and educationally, with a sense of informed citizenship through what is required by the construction process in instances where mentoring ingrains a certain understanding of the present with its various problems in an attempt to push the learners to effectively and rationally participate in social life in all its forms. These procedures aim to build a democratic and equitable society that cherishes the ideal values within society and reinforces them. If one summarized the features of the

educational function of history as a school subject, one would affirm that the cognitive content of this subject must contribute to ensure what Laroui calls the broadening of the horizon, the proliferation of ideals, and the diversification of conceptions (Laroui, 2000).

The social functions of teaching history reside in shaping the future of humanity and human societies in a way that foregrounds the importance of “recognition that this shaping starts from peoples’ present to return them to the past in order to search for the roots that help determines the major attributes of national identities” (Kadouri, 2002). This historian refers to the channels through which historical discourse is disseminated, and he considers history as a vital medium that plays a pivotal role in the establishment of the national character through diligent work that entices peoples to resort to the past and simultaneously unveil its issues in order to “search for the roots that enable them to determine their identity” (Kadouri, 2002). Kadouri affirms that the peoples’ will, in the shadow of its historical trajectory, strengthens the foundations of their identity and national character. This is what makes history, particularly history at school, play a pivotal role in understanding the degree that a country has democratized, its institutions, and the extent to which the perspective of history teaching is based on the parameters of critical, free thinking and the cultivation of citizenship values among the youth. In this regard, Rita Aouad claims that “despite the role played more independently and radically by the media in simplifying historical events as well as the ‘special’ or militant transfer of a family’s, regional or collective memory, school remains the main disseminator of historical knowledge, and it is therefore the fundamental means liable to ingrain this knowledge in the memory of Moroccan youth” (Aouad, 2013).

Due to the relevance of history taught at school, its sensitivity, and the extent to which it relates to the development and democratization of the state and society, school history has become a thermometer by which we measure the degree of this development and openness. As such, Aouad claims that “The condition of history taught at schools, which is controlled by the state in the primary and secondary levels via the content of school programs, mandates, and exam topics, is a good indicator to evaluate the degree of political openness and its limits” (Aouad 2013). Additionally, the history lesson works to transcend the formation of a primal identity that takes feelings and emotions as its elementary constituents towards an interest in a civic identity based on reason and thinking. This distinction entitles the learners to establish the necessary distance between the self and the object so as to ensure the mandatory equilibrium between the two functions of history lesson: identarian and critical. For the achievement of the intended objective, a pedagogical scheme must be adopted to fulfil the ultimate goal of

historical knowledge which aims for the construction of informed citizens who possess competencies that qualify them to probe their past in all its diverse convergences, complexities, and interplays with the hope of dismantling and understanding socio-political and cultural problems corresponding to national identity. This project should dispose of cultural and historical foundations sufficient to carry on steadily and confidently towards the future (Boukous, 2008).

Among the social functions of the historical lesson, one finds what Mohamed Kably and Maarouf Al Rusafi summarized as the essential tenets of national identity. While Al Rusafi claims that people are unified by kinship, lineage, language, belief, homeland, norms, customs, social laws, and human relations (Al Rusafi, 2002), Mohamed Kably conceived of the concept of national identity as a category that based on a set of fundamental tenets that control the national identity of societies. Principally, Kably focuses on the tenet of belief or doctrine, language, norms, social systems, and the laws under which society interacts in its development (Al Rusafi, 2002). Whatever the case may be, Al Rusafi and Kably agree, relatively speaking, that national identity has basic foundations, including the beginning and the end. Ultimately, the “social demand for history originates from the will to strengthen identity and national character” (Kably, 2000). It is a premise that has proven its validity in many societies, especially when this leads to the disclosure of some hidden aspects in the history of these societies that would not have seen the light if it had not been for the obsession with research in the realm of national identity.

Scholarly Historical Discourse and National Identity: Outcomes of Social Change

On the one hand, the process of constructing a scholarly historical discourse is a consequence of the historical knowledge held about the past according to various actors including the state. On the other hand, it is simultaneously an outcome of the socio-political, cultural, and intellectual context of the present-day Morocco. It is needless to say that this context is characterized by rivalry and conflict between social groups that operate within various social fields, but one also should take into account the influence of external factors. These factors include the international situation and power relations, especially since Morocco is connected with various countries. Often these relations with other countries are dictated not only by historical elements that give them a strategic character, but they also have to do with circumstantial requirements that are often linked to immediate or presumed mutual interests (Sebti, 2012).

If national identity in Morocco today is in the middle of transformation, rivalry, and conflict between the movements that make up the national social fabric, then it is legitimate to ask the nature and foundations of policy managing national identity? Do educational policy makers have a clear vision of the issue of national identity in Morocco?

The process of Arabization, to which history was subject, is attributed to a national and regional context characterized by the political, cultural, and intellectual realities originating in the Middle East. This paper does not assume that unravelling the complications of Arabization project - from the perspective of our work - is not immune to methodological and epistemological pitfalls. Undoubtedly, previous specialized scholarly work examined Arabization's components, manifestations, and ramifications through sociological and anthropological studies from the perspective of language policy taking into consideration individual and group stances towards metropolitan languages, especially Francophonie and Arabization. The polemic intellectual and political debate about language since independence is attributable to the importance of language, whether for individuals or groups, to its organic relationship with affectivity and existence (individual and collective identity), and its relationship with the social and the political (the form and nature of the construction of a national state and the determination of national identity). It is important to understand Arabization as a social and political project before conceiving of it as a spontaneous technical process that substitutes French for standardized Arabic. Arabization gives clear indications that enable the researcher to understand various issues associated with it, including the claims of some of the discourses dominating the cultural and intellectual scene throughout the decades that followed independence (Boukous, 2008).

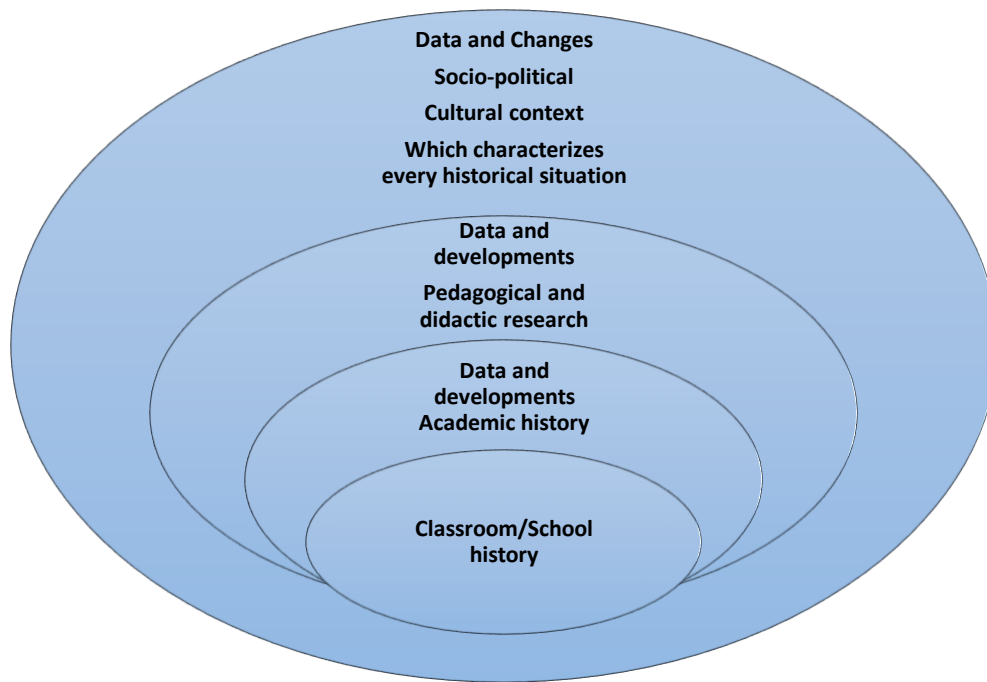


Figure 1 The location of school historical discourses between the components it influences and those by which it is influenced.

Recommendations

Based on the issues raised and discussed by this paper, it is evident that a dialectical relationship exists between metamorphosis in the political discourse and the contents of the historical discourse at school. The presence of national identity in the scholarly historical discourse fluctuates from one period to another, depending on the political, cultural, and social context, which in turn is affected by internal and external factors. However, the scientific developments in the field of history teaching, especially in relation to issues of national identity, required that the contents of history textbooks adopt a different strategy to respond to the principle of cultural pluralism that characterizes many societies, including Morocco.

We also infer from this study that the Moroccan school, at least during the independence era, was a space for social and intellectual rivalry between the forces that characterized the political and cultural Moroccan scene throughout that period. This rivalry manifests itself in the contents of the textbooks, the concepts and expressions that infiltrate the educational directives of history as a subject, as well as the aims and objectives that are intended to be fulfilled through the curriculum and their instructive contents. This research will confine itself to an analysis of some aspects of Arabization, as a manifestation of the social and political repercussions on school historical knowledge. Accordingly, this research recommends the following:

- Revising contents of history textbooks, as well as official directives or curriculum in light of the political, constitutional, cultural and moral improvements in terms of values that Morocco has known in the last decade;
- Employing cultural pluralism when developing scholastic knowledge by following similar international experiences, and by drawing inspiration from their methodological and procedural aspects in order to serve the development of Moroccan education;
- Intensifying efforts to ensure, with the addition of pluralistic content, that there is harmony in terms of the nature of national identity as reflected both in the contents of textbooks (for history in particular) and in educational discourses (across subjects), more generally.

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Abridged Translation from the Arabic by El Habib LOUAI

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