Imported pedagogies… can't work here: Teachers' cultural model on pedagogical reform

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents an ethnographic study conducted in five Moroccan primary schools in Marrakesh and region. This study utilizes cultural models theory as an instrument of inquiry to probe primary school teachers' beliefs and assumptions about pedagogical reform initiatives. The intent is to develop awareness of the sociocultural embeddedness of teachers' thinking with regard to pedagogical renewal. In the course of interviews, the overwhelming majority of teachers harbor lingering doubts about the possibility of institutionalizing pedagogical reform. Imported pedagogies are informed by knowledge, values, and justifications generated in their own contexts. Henceforth, there is a need for a thoughtful consideration of the local context if imported pedagogies are to yield some of their anticipated results. The teachers believe that reform in primary school, in the face of daunting challenges, is doomed to failure. This might explain the fact that after years of 'implementation', pedagogical innovation in primary school has done poorly in terms of being institutionalized and does not appear to have achieved its desideratum. In the absence of optimal conditions that facilitate implementation, reform effort is a waste of time, money and energy. The teachers call for a bottom-up model for policy development which takes into account the central role of teachers' beliefs and actual practices in the policy design and enactment processes.

KEYWORDS: culture, teacher, reform, cultural models, pedagogy.

1 INTRODUCTION

Following the economic crisis of 1990's Morocco recognized the compelling need to reform its educational system to expedite its economic recovery and to keep pace with swift social, political and economic challenges transpiring as a result of globalization. This culminated in a movement toward educational reform represented in the National Charter for Education and Training (1999), and decentralization as parts of a strategic plan to economic recovery. In 2000, the Moroccan government adopted the Charter's project and declared 2000-2009 the National Decade for Education and Training with a conviction that the development of manpower and its rehabilitation is a type of investment in a nation's resources and at the meantime is a utilization of the future. Impelled by the urgency to enhance the quality of Moroccan education, the Charter placed a high premium on the interests of learners and situated them at the center of the educational enterprise. The Pedagogical Guideline for Primary Education reflects this tendency in its narrative by placing " the learner in general, and children in particular, at the heart of attention, thinking and acting in the process of education and training" [1]. Thus, providing children of Morocco with the conditions necessary for their awakening and their development by adopting "an active educational approach, beyond the passive reception and individual work to the adoption of self-learning, and the ability to dialogue and to participate in collective endeavor" [2]. The reform meant to effect a paradigm shift from traditional teacher-dominated, knowledge-based transmission style of teaching to more student-centered, experience-based, problem solving approach of teaching, putting more emphasis on reflection and action learning, developing learners' cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and encouraging their cooperative and interactive abilities. Thus learner-centeredness has become the philosophy underlying the educational reform across all school subjects.

2   RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

In spite of the official rhetoric on pedagogical reform, classroom observations confirm that reform ideals have done poorly in terms of being institutionalized [3] [4]. The reality of classroom practice does not correspond to the highly advocated educational ideal set by the National Charter for Education and Training. A close look into the space of classrooms in some primary classrooms reveals the divide existing between official pronouncement on pedagogy and teacher actual classroom pedagogic practice. Teaching and learning in the observed Moroccan primary classrooms continue to be characterized by traditional, teacher-dominated instruction. Teachers transmit knowledge to be regurgitated by learners who are expected to passively and unselectively copy and reproduce the conveyed information in its original, objective form. Horizontal information flow is quasi-absent under the pressure of teacher–fronted interaction.

This study utilizes cultural models theory as a tool of inquiry to illustrate primary school teachers' conceptualizations of pedagogy. Within the framework of this paper, our definition of pedagogy draws heavily on Alexander's definition of pedagogy explicated as the "the act of teaching together with its attendant discourse of educational theories, values, evidence and justifications. It is what one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command, in order to make and justify the many different kinds of decision of which teaching is constituted" [5]. Pedagogy is much wider and deeper than teaching as it comprises not only all the elements of teaching but also the contingent discourses about the character of culture, the purpose of education, the nature of childhood, knowledge and understanding of how children learn, and knowledge and understanding of the structure of knowledge. Pedagogy "connects the apparently self-contained act of teaching with culture, structure and mechanisms of social control [6]. Pedagogy encompasses the performance of teaching in conjunction with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform, shape and seek to justify it.

It is also our intention to develop awareness of the social and cultural embeddedness of teachers' beliefs and assumptions regarding pedagogical renewal. Considering teachers' interpretive framework is essential to demonstrate the cognitive process through which meaning is constructed and behavior is influenced and motivated in classroom context. The significance of scrutinizing teachers' interpretive framework lies in the fact that teachers' preexisting cultural models of pedagogy can avert the consideration of alternative understandings of pedagogical practice.

Inadequate investigation and discernment of teachers' conceptualization of pedagogy and actual classroom practices can impede the identification of an appropriate focus for pedagogical improvement. Therefore, the study of teachers' cultural models of pedagogy has the potential to provide significant and profound insight into many aspects of teachers' professional world. Observance of cultural models of pedagogy can inform educational practices in ways that prevailing research has not explored yet. Understanding cultural models of pedagogy is instrumental in determining the quality of interaction one wishes to witness in a classroom, taking into account cultural models' motivational force that guides classroom behavior.

3   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is anchored within the theory of cultural model. As used in cognitive anthropology, cultural models describe intersubjectively shared beliefs by groups of individuals around different subjects, objects, and areas of thought and behavior. These models, being implicit and explicit in the minds of individuals, provide guidelines for and motivate action [7]. Cultural models are seen to have a directive force for the individual in terms of the authority and persuasiveness invested in them [8]. Thus, cultural models serve as a general basis of guidance, direction, and point of reference for experiencing and acting in the world. As intersubjectively shared conceptions that are culturally and socially constituted, cultural models are anchored in experience and memory, particularly resilient, and deeply ingrained. Equally important, it should be noted that cultural models are not true or false, may or may not be logical or rationale, may not be realized or conscious, but are very real and instrumental in guiding thought and behavior. When individuals participate in a community, they learn, function within, and become indoctrinated to the cultural models of that community. Gee views that when people take action and respond in convenient ways, given a community's expectations, they are executing a socially-constructed identity and are acting in response using what they know, intentionally or unintentionally, by means of an established cultural model [9]. Individuals and society are reciprocally produced and reproduce in the course of-- the use and construction of--cultural tools accessible, the way in which participants construe it, the resources of knowledge, and the skills they utilize to resolve problems they stumble upon.

Cultural models within the context of this research hold two meanings, both of which are fundamental to this research. First, cultural models are viewed as the researcher constructed representations that describe the knowledge held and shared by primary school teachers. Second, these models are perceived also as cognitive strategies the group of teachers studied actually use and believe in with reference to their daily classroom practice [10].

Investigating teachers' cultural models of pedagogy serves to illustrate how culture can frame and constitute many aspects of teachers' thinking and practice related to pedagogy. Furthermore, investigating teacher interpretive framework is essential to demonstrate the cognitive process through which meaning is constructed and behavior is influenced and motivated. The significance of scrutinizing teachers' interpretive framework lies in the fact that teachers' preexisting cultural models of pedagogy can avert the consideration of alternative understandings. Policy efforts, intended to result in behavioral change through educational mediums, should sincerely consider the worth of appealing to teacher compelling, preexisting cultural models. The introduction of new ideas and behaviors that are not reflective of teacher interpretive framework is often overridden and never fully considered. As Strauss and Quinn explain, new knowledge is always incorporated, rejected, and remade in relation to and interaction with previous cultural models [11]. When these cultural models and schemas alter to comparatively stable ones over time, they are more liable to structure interpretations of succeeding experiences that activate them than to be influenced by alternative understandings [11]. Thus, when new experiences or understandings that are "under-schematized" are introduced (i.e., do not fully relate to existing cultural models and schemas), they are likely to set in motion durable preexisting cultural models and schemas with similar experiential features that result in interpretations that confirm original understandings and prevent new ones from surfacing [11].

4   METHODOLOGY

This paper is a part of an ongoing doctoral research project investigating Moroccan primary school teachers' cultural models of pedagogy and their manifestations in classroom practice. The working conceptual framework of this study is grounded within the interpretive paradigm with ethnography as a strategy of inquiry. Precedence is given to the participants' conceptualizations of pedagogy and pedagogical practice. Ethnographic research prioritizes the cultural perspective of the group: description of behaviors and insights into why the behaviors occurred. Two ethnographic research methods, namely classroom observation and interviews, were used in the research. While classroom observations were carried out to describe the characteristics of classroom interaction and identify salient patterns of teachers' behavior in the classroom, the interviews were conducted to allow teachers' thinking on pedagogy to account for their classroom patterns of behavior. Therefore, my research integrated ethnographic methods to reconstruct the cultural models of pedagogy held by the participants. This reconstruction entailed the use of numerous interviews and interpretation of these interviews. My purpose in the analysis was to search for patterns across interviewees and interview passages that would be indicative of shared beliefs and understandings of pedagogy and pedagogical practice.

Data were collected in five primary schools in Marrakech, including rural, urban, and suburban sites. All of them were public schools. They were selected to be as representative as possible – geographically, economically, and culturally. Twenty-five teachers were observed and interviewed over 8 months. Data collection occurred in cycles which were guided by the analysis of the data and the emerging themes. The first cycle commenced with participant observation to document teachers' pedagogical practice and note emerging themes and cultural patterns. The second cycle focused on one-to-one interviews. Semistructured interviews were conducted to shed light on observations outcome and disclose teachers' cultural models shaping their pedagogical practice. The final cycle employed focus groups to verify the intersubjectively shared nature of teachers' cultural models of pedagogy.

For the analysis of my transcript data, I made use of some cultural analysis implements drawn on by [12], D'Andrade [8] [7]. In general, I looked for explicit propositions and the taken-for-granted presuppositions found within them. I investigated the use and meaning of key words in context, over and above how informants reasoned about and integrated and related their understandings of particular topics and beliefs. Furthermore, I searched for shared understandings and patterns and investigated the relationships between these shared findings, particularly those between shared implicit and explicit understandings. My general purpose was to conclude whether my data and cultural analysis provided evidence of the existence of cultural models that primary school teachers shared and drew on to inform their understandings of, and guide and motivate their responses to classroom interactional practice. The overall results of the analysis and interpretation phases reveal that the teachers' cultural models of pedagogy are anchored in four cultural constructs: (i) teacher excessive pedagogical authority, (ii) teacher low expectations of students, (iii) knowledge as static and objective, and (iv) "Imported pedagogies …can't work here". The focus in this article will be on the last model.

5   "IMPORTED PEDAGOGIES… CAN'T WORK HERE": TEACHERS' CULTURAL MODEL ON PEDAGOGICAL REFORM

This proposition: "Imported pedagogies…can't work here" has its roots in teacher knowledge of and experience with the dynamic complexities inherent in educational transfer and the implementation of progressive pedagogical practice. This cultural model of pedagogy was specified, through transcript analysis, by many interpretative codes like "Imported

pedagogies… can't work here", "I don't see the possibility of any school reform", "I don't expect things to improve", "Reform doesn't take into consideration the sensitivity of the Moroccan context", "educational reform can't be imported", "mistrust", "top-down approach", "How can you apply modern pedagogies in a very traditional setting?", and "undermined teachers' confidence". The overwhelming majority of teachers harbor lingering doubts about the possibility of institutionalizing pedagogical reform. The teachers believe that reform in primary school, in the face of daunting challenges, is doomed to failure. In the absence of optimal conditions that facilitate implementation, reform is a waste of time, money and energy. The teachers' interviews highlighted various constraints that thwart pedagogical reform.

The inappropriateness of imported pedagogies to Moroccan educational culture surprisingly surfaced as an important issue in most of the interviews, particularly in focus groups. Teacher Insaaf metaphorically views that:

> Importing western models of pedagogy is like planting tropical fruit in a desert. Failure is inevitable…The plant and the environment are incompatible…It's the same story. Imported pedagogies are not useless, but can't work here. These pedagogies are products of social, cultural, political, and historical matrices. They can't function properly in a different environment without major revisions and adaptations…I expected failure from the start… We need a pedagogy that takes into consideration our context and reality; something teachers can relate to, indentify with and use comfortably…When we were being trained to learn about implementing the Pedagogy of Integration, I could see that the majority of teachers were there simply because they had to. They were only waiting for the time to run out. They weren't committed because they lacked interest and couldn't see how that approach might be applied in a context such ours… The trainers themselves failed to communicate commitment. Some of them openly expressed their indignation that they were not consulted… The trainers' presentations were limited to readings from ministerial documents and Power Point presentations without proper understanding of the material.

Teacher Insaaf ascribes the failure of the institutionalization of pedagogical renewal to the absence of congruity between the local context and the philosophy of the projected reform. She does not deny the utility of progressive pedagogy, but casts doubt on its suitability in serving our educational framework. She puts incongruity down to the fact that imported pedagogy is a reflection of a certain social, cultural, political, and historical background that produced reform ideals in its original milieu and therefore may not dovetail with our setting, which complicates the issues of transferability—the movement of ideas, structures and practices in education policy from one time and place to another. She calls for a pedagogy that takes into account the sensitivity of the local context; something teachers can relate to and identify with. The teacher also refers to the passivity and nonchalance with which teachers react to reform initiation. The teacher's words seem to denote that lack of commitment characterizes the attitude of both trainers and trainees. The tyranny of top-down education reform ideals seems to be a factor behind poor teacher engagement.

The same concern, highlighted above, is reiterated by teacher Widad; she considers that:

> Educational reform that doesn't take into account the sensitivity of its context is doomed to failure…We have tried a lot of imported pedagogies and educational theories but we have just accumulated failure. If we consider Pedagogy of Objectives, Competency Approach, and Pedagogy of Integration they haven't changed anything. The situation is still deteriorating. Figures, statistics, and international assessment tests attest to that…I believe that real reform should read properly the local context and search for solutions from within because educational reform can't be imported and implemented the next day. We need to do away with such mentality; it's proven fruitless.

The teacher calls for a thoughtful consideration of local context if imported pedagogies are to yield some of their anticipated results. Imported pedagogies are informed by knowledge, values, and justifications generated in their own contexts. Pedagogical practice is culturally embedded. Recognizing context is acknowledging the spatial and temporal framing of the practice of teaching. Both teachers, Insaaf and Widad, underscore the challenges posed by the process of educational transfer and call for taking into account the local context in educational borrowing.

The teachers' perceptions of the practicality of pedagogical innovation have a powerful impact on their willingness to implement it. Radical changes to teacher behavior are most often likely to be seen by teachers as impractical, irrespective of their merits. Teacher Hayat says:

> I was excited about implementing the Pedagogy of Integration then. It seemed promising. I got myself ready. I did some reading on my own. The training we received wasn't very helpful…I prepared activities and tried to implement certain principles and ideas….After some time I gave up…I was exhausted. I had to spend hours preparing materials and thinking about how to conduct activities according to the principles of the

approach…Even though the approach claims to center on learners and their activities, it demands a lot from the teacher….I couldn't see that my students were learning any better; I was just tiring myself and wasting their time.

Similarly, teacher Omar echoes teacher Hayat's view: "Learner-centered pedagogy can't be implemented in our context. The conditions that might lead to its successful implementation aren't provided…The approach is quite complex and demands a lot from teachers and students." The factors underlying resistance to pedagogical renewal are often justified that the approach is unfit to the context and that change is tiring and demanding. Being used to old ways of doing things, the teachers have difficulty to change old teaching styles underpinned by entrenched beliefs and assumptions. Interviews with the teachers unraveled a limited knowledge and understanding of learner-centered approach; indeed many teachers do not understand the underpinning epistemological assumptions of the approach. They also have problems understanding a significant number of its concepts like teacher as learning facilitator, scaffolding and autonomy. The implementation of learner-centered approach requires highly qualified and experienced teachers. Contrastingly, the majority of teachers are under-qualified to operate within the framework of progressive pedagogy; they are constrained by their traditional beliefs and assumptions. Hence, implementation of the approach is beyond their professional capacity. Furthermore, the teachers were exposed to traditional teaching during their own schooling, pre-service and even in in-service training; they have had little familiarity with or exposure to new progressive pedagogical approaches. They have not had opportunities to see the projected approaches in action. So, entrenched knowledge and practices override innovative ideals, and contextual factors 'conspire' to inhibit implementation.

Resistance might occur when teachers do not understand and appreciate the need for change. Teacher Khadija reminisces about the past and how things worked well:

They [the Ministry of National Education] are just complicating things for us and students. Every now and then they introduce changes and nothing improves. We were well-taught in the past in poor conditions. I remember, as a student, I had a reading book and a slate…Things worked well then. Today, they are pouring a large part of the budget into the educational system to no avail.

This view is shared by many teachers, especially veterans, who are dissatisfied with attempts to reform the system. These teachers are more interested in maintaining the status quo or even wish that time could run anti-clockwise to revert to old practices. Habits play a role since it might be easier to continue to teach in the same old ways rather than adapt to develop new instructional skills and strategies. Moreover, many teachers get a sense of security from doing things in familiar ways. For this reason, teachers might fear the loss of what is common and comfortable, and might feel anxious about the unknown when their deep-rooted professional and instructional patterns are disrupted. Teachers' opposition to innovation could also be propelled by a reduced leaning to commit to innovation in the later years of career (Huberman, 1989).

From a different perspective, teacher Khadija links the difficulty of implementation of pedagogical reform with top management. She says:

I can't see how school reform might succeed …I don't think that those in charge are serious about reforming public school. There is no political will. They just pay lip service to it [reform]; we just hear empty words and promises…The proof is the absence of any long-term vision…We have no idea what the leaders envision in 20 or 30 years. There is no clarity; there is just improvisation and patch work… Every new minister brings in a new 'vision' and puts aside his predecessor's. School reform has been politicized. I think that the management of education needs to be freed from political wrangling…We have just accumulated failures and implanted mistrust in any future success…I've been teaching for more than 30 years and witnessed waves of educational reforms and the result is what we see today; an educational system on the verge of collapse.

The teacher's view represents other views that hold top management responsible for the poor performance of educational reform. These teachers attribute the lack of efficiency to the absence of a strategic vision that sets clear objectives and draws plans for initiation, implementation and assessment of reform ideals. More importantly, the teachers draw attention to the notion that educational reform needs to remain independent of political altercations that only undermine reform efforts. The teachers commonly mistrust the intentions of the ministry to institutionalize reform. Many teachers confirm that the situation is just deteriorating despite claims of improvement reflected in numbers and statistics put forward by officials in the ministry.

Many teachers take issues with mandated reform that relegates teachers to mere implementers of top-down dictations. Teacher Khadija's beliefs, quoted above, on this matter are widely shared among interviewees. For instance, teacher Hasna believes that:

Children in the Moroccan educational system have become guinea pigs. They [the Ministry of National Education] have experienced a lot on them: Pedagogy of Objectives and Pedagogy of Integration, and nothing has worked…There is no long term strategy. All reform efforts have failed because the approach has been erroneous. School reform is always mandated and imposed by people who are divorced from the reality of daily life in schools and classrooms… The teacher is always the last to know even though he is the first one concerned about reform…We are being infantilized… They expect teachers to implement what they put on the table and just execute orders …I don't expect things to improve at least in the foreseeable future because the approach of handling educational issues seems to remain unchanged…The Minister of education [Elwafa] ended the practice of the Pedagogy of Integration that the previous government spent a lot of tax payers' money to implement…I've noticed that many decisions taken lately at the ministerial level lay the blame on the teachers and place responsibility for the failure of school reform on them. The teacher is the weakest link in the educational chain and always bears the blame for the failure of the educational system. They [the Ministry of National Education] have disreputed teachers and undermined their social status …I'm not a pessimist but when it comes to reforming primary education, I really don't expect much.

This view reflects a widely shared belief that decision-makers at the top of the educational ladder are remote from the lived reality of school and classroom. The leaders are detached from the nitty-gritty concerns of reform implementation. Practitioners on the ground are not consulted and expected to receive and implement top management's dictates. Teachers do not contribute to the manufacturing of institutional discourse on education. Despite the centrality of teachers in the implementation of school reform, the interviewed teachers bitterly disapprove of being marginalized and excluded and at the same held responsible for the failure of reform.

The same care is echoed by teacher Hassan: "The teacher always takes the blame for the mismanagement of the ministry…if you pay attention to the content of recent document issued by the Ministry, they all explicitly and implicitly put the blame on the teacher. In one way or another they [the Ministry of National Education] evade responsibility. It's always the teacher:

"tˤaħt sˤsˤəmʕa ʕəlqu lħaʒʒam" [meaning that teachers unjustly take the blame]…Disreputing teachers will only aggravate the situation… Sometimes I feel ashamed to say I'm a teacher…It's unfair to picture teachers as responsible for the ills of the educational system…I'm not going to be like them [the Ministry of National Education] and exempt teachers from any responsibility, of course we are part of the problem…I have no problem admitting that. They [the Ministry of National Education] should have enough courage to acknowledge their mistakes…We need to remember it's a system and we are all responsible.

The teacher rejects the 'official tendency' to shift the blame on teachers for the failure of school reform. He believes that the failure of the system is a shared responsibility and no one is to be absolved. He claims that teachers are disreputed by constant accusations shouldering them the blame of reform failure. Reforming school is a collective endeavor; every stakeholder is expected to contribute his/her fair share. Exchanging accusations only exacerbates tension and hampers reform efforts.

The approach of designing and implementing reform, according to many teachers, is another issue that does not smooth the way for educational reform in primary school. Teacher Rachid says that:

I don't see the possibilities of school reform succeeding as long as there is no holistic approach…Things are interconnected. Therefore, reform should be addressed holistically. Focusing on some elements and turning a blind eye to others only slackens the pace of reform efforts…Atomistic handling of reform, in my conception, proves that the decision-makers lack deep understanding and a long term view of reform…An effective reform should involve teachers in planning, not just in implementing reform…It's important to reform pedagogical practice, we can't object to that; however, reform should also include the betterment of the physical space of classrooms and schools in general. We need more facilities….The curriculum needs to be revised in a way that incorporates rapidly changing students' interests… And above all the teacher needs moral and financial support…Human resources are the key to successful reform. Teachers should be given the care they deserve because the operationalization of any reform rests on their shoulders.

The teacher holds a deep conviction that school reform requires a holistic approach that generates synergies and ensures ownership and consensus among all stakeholders. The ministry ownership of reform strategy and implementation can be guaranteed by a 'real' involvement of all participants because atomistic handling of reform, according to the teacher, denotes that decision-makers fail to understand the complexity of reform and its implementation. Henceforth, it is pivotal to build capacity at all levels to ensure shared understanding and commitment to a vision of quality education at systemic,

institutional/organizational, and individual level. The teacher seems to suggest that the success of school reform hinges on a strategy that guarantees that all educational structures and systems operate within a strengthened overall environment. A holistic approach incorporates non-school factors as well such as family and culture in determining student outcome.

The dearth of the provision for optimal working conditions in the space of primary school is another factor that determines the success of reform. The interviewed teachers generally affirm that the intended pedagogical renewal is thwarted by the absence of different aiding resources and facilities. For instance, teacher Hassan states that "the talk about reform in the absence of adequate resources is absurd….The success of any reform is conditioned by supplying financial resources to provide different necessities…How can you apply modern pedagogies in an inappropriate setting? ... No material, no electricity, no copy machines…I buy my own chalk. The kind of chalk they provide is of low quality; it 'damages' your hands…I always have to buy my own material. We still lack basic things." The teacher believes that the implementation of modern pedagogies requires the existence of some aiding and operative physical conditions. The traditional setting in which the teachers operate is not conducive to quality performance. Resource allocation is a criterion by which the teacher evaluates commitment to reform.

Likewise teacher Omar states that:

> Reform is not about importing a set of pedagogical principles and asking teachers to make use of them in their classes. Reform is far more than that…The first thing we need to pay attention is fixing our classrooms. We spend hours daily in these classes…As you see in winter and summer it becomes difficult for us to do our job, some windows are broken… There are no light bulbs. .. At the beginning of the year I had to repaint the blackboard myself… I love to use ICT in class but there is no data show, no TV, no tape recorder. We are still waiting for the new parents' association to provide these things …It seems that we will spend another year waiting for hollow promises…There aren't even decent toilets for teachers let alone students.

The teacher believes that the transfer of pedagogical ideas is not sufficient; reform should be first concerned with the provision of basic necessities that affect daily practice. He enumerates different logistical items that render teacher performance a real challenge. He seems to assert that poor physical conditions are not conducive to quality practice.

Many of the interviewed teachers believe that the implementation of learner-centered approaches is also challenged by large classes. They maintain that modern pedagogies could only be effectively implemented in small class sizes. Teacher Bochra sees that:

> Modern pedagogy encourages cooperative learning… I have no objection. However, in large class sizes, group work is hard to implement. As a teacher you need a lot of energy to monitor and control all the groups which is a challenge in a more-than-forty-student class. I have tried group work and haven't seen that learning improved. On the reverse, many students do not take that seriously. Only few students do the job; the rest just seize the opportunity to go off-task. Group work could be practiced in a twenty-student class where the teacher can manipulate four groups and make sure that they are all on task.

In a related vein, teacher Hayat sees that:

> The large number of students in class makes it difficult to implement the principles of modern pedagogy. For instance, group work becomes a challenge in the presence so many students. When they are seated in groups, children converse a lot with each other and concentrate less on the lesson; classroom management then becomes difficult. Even when we work in groups not all groups have the chance to present their work due to time constraint. In group work high achievers usually lead the work and the rest of students do not benefit much. Actually, I prefer the way I have been teaching. I can control my time and class, and all students benefit from the teacher.

The teachers seem to believe that large classes are not the right environment where the principles of modern pedagogies may materialize. Large classes are demanding and energy-consuming. They subscribe to the notion that group work is best practiced with a limited number of students. When the researcher initiated a brief discussion on the organization and implementation of group work, the teachers seemed to be unaware of many group work management techniques. Indeed, group work may prove exacting and chaotic if the teacher lacks the tools for successful execution.

The interviewed teachers link the successful implementation of reform with the degree of assistance they receive. A lot of teachers complain that there is not enough support in the process of measuring up to reform ideals. Teacher Samir complains that:

A three-day training workshop and sporadic meetings with inspectors are largely insufficient to provide the support the teacher needs. All what you see is theoretical explanation of the principles of the approach…nothing is practical … The teachers are left to their own devices to implement reform ideas in classroom… Inspectors' visits are rare and usually motivated by technical matters; usually related to teachers' promotion… sometimes you only receive a grade without the report justifying it.

The teacher believes that lack of support is another obstacle to adopting and going ahead with pedagogical innovations. When changes are introduced, teachers are left on their own to figure out how to put into practice the innovations, how to develop appropriate curriculum material, and how to solve problems specific to the context in which change is induced. There is a near consensus among the interviewed teachers that they are not well prepared to apply innovative pedagogical principles. They seem to agree on a conviction that in-service training, to upgrade the content knowledge and pedagogical skills of teachers, is a sustained process rather than occasional quick-fix workshops. All the teachers seem to resent the idea that during in-service training session they are bombarded with theoretical input but receive no concrete ideas on handling practical issues. Teachers need hands-on activities they can make use of in class away from theoretical ramifications that do not help them much.

In a response to a question on her understanding of some basic principles of constructive pedagogy, teacher Fatima says:

Constructive pedagogy calls on students to assume responsibility for their own learning. I sometimes try to involve students in research assignment. I'm aware of the constraints…Many students do not have internet connection or encyclopedias at home…Even when connection is available, students aren't interested in doing research. They delegate the assignment to parents, family members or consult cybercafés for printouts of Google research results. Students can't even read and understand the material they bring to class. It's really a waste of time and money. It's rare when I assign research or projects because the research skills we intend to foster can't be developed that way.

In spite of her acknowledgement of the importance of students assuming responsibility in their own learning, the teacher decided to do without an important aspect of learning— research assignment—simply because the process of research is not done properly. Instead of assuming her responsibility to create adequate strategies to encourage and personalize students' research, the teacher settled on letting go of the whole endeavor. The teacher, despite awareness of students' need to assume responsibility for their own learning, seems to lack conviction of the utility of the principle she discussed above. Students need training to conduct projects and do research, and the classroom certainly remains the right place where they can learn to do that.

6   DISCUSSION

The interviewed teachers cast doubt on the possibility of institutionalizing pedagogical reform. The teachers seem to share the belief that reform in primary school, in the face of diverse daunting challenges, is doomed to failure. In the perceptions of the teachers, in the absence of favorable conditions that smooth the progress of reform implementation, attempts at reforming the system remain a waste of time, money and energy. The teachers' interviews highlighted various constraints that hamper pedagogical reform.

Change initiatives in primary school seem to assume that effective implementation is basically an issue of providing 'implementation plans'. Policy makers and academic 'experts', who are so often the only ones actually involved at the initiation stage, still seem to accentuate the technicality of change—the observable resources and systems that need to be accessible or established—over the 'personality of change', the existing practices and beliefs of all the people who will be affected [13]. This results in the ensuing primary strategic defect: the fundamental defect in most innovators' strategies is that they tend to lay emphasis on their innovations and on what they are attempting to do–instead of considering how the larger culture, structures, and norms might act in response to their efforts [14]. As has been demonstrated earlier, the teachers' collective representations about imported pedagogies seem to resist the implementation of pedagogical renewal for different reasons.

Despite efforts by educational authorities to promote innovative pedagogic practices through training and information dissemination, there are still serious discrepancies between official discourse and classroom reality. The reasons for this, according to the interviewed teachers, are varied: (i) the failure of policy makers to take into account existing sociocultural factors, (ii) low in-service training quality, (iii) limited understanding of policy decisions, (iv) under-resourced working conditions, (v) and large classrooms. The persistence of the teachers' long-established classroom practices seems to be explained in terms of the absence conditions amenable to genuine educational reform.

With little or insufficient information about the desired change, Moroccan primary school teachers are supposed to implement what is written in reform documents. Such a 'communication' process is not supportive for teachers' perception of how much their leaders value the change. The interviewed teachers seem to share the belief that decision-makers lack the will and adequate strategies to reform the system. The researcher noticed that the teachers have become cynical about change initiatives. In such circumstances the hoped-for new practices are unlikely to find their way into most classrooms, and any further changes will be welcomed with even less enthusiasm.

The interviewed teachers generally suspect the intent of the ministry to institutionalize reform. They are in disaccord with mandated reform that relegates teachers to mere implementers of top-down dictations. Practitioners on the ground are not conferred with and expected to take delivery of and implement top management's dictates. The teachers do not contribute to the manufacturing of institutional discourse on education despite their centrality in the implementation of school reform. Primary school teachers resentfully disapprove of being marginalized and excluded, and at the same held responsible for the failure of reform. In such a state of affairs, practitioners feel immobilized and settle into the routine of conducting their jobs. In such a state of affairs, teachers may develop into workers putting in their time to keep their names on the payroll. We believe that school effectiveness stems from empowering teachers to acknowledge ownership of reform process as a central determinant in establishing reciprocated respect, common purpose, joint decision making, and collegial affiliation. When teachers are empowered and incorporated in the decision making course of action, they will feel more invested in the reform and in the accomplishment of its aims, which will, therefore, add to the chances of success. Accordingly, ownership over school reform needs to shift so that it is no longer an exclusively "external" reform, controlled by top management reformers, but rather becomes an "internal" reform with authority for the reform held by schools and teachers who have "the capacity to sustain, spread, and deepen reform principles themselves" [15]. In brief, schools are most effective when teachers feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for educational endeavors and decisions. Empowerment results in greater ownership, and greater ownership gives rise to more ingenuity and productivity [16].

Many of the interviewed teachers relate the difficulty of adopting and implementing progressive pedagogical principles to their large class sizes. For example, the teachers eschew the use of group work due to the managerial and disciplinary challenges it poses to them along with the under-resourced environment in which they operate. However, West confirms that "the larger the class and the more difficult the circumstances, the more important it is to stress learning as the objective... if the pupil has learnt how to learn he [sic] can go on learning afterwards" [17].This puts accent on the necessity to train students to take charge of their own learning in a large class than it is in a small one. This is due to the reason that it is possible and manageable for the teacher to supervise students' work in a small class as compared to a large class where it becomes quite challenging [18]. This view corresponds with Fonseka's argument for engaging with students' autonomy as a kind of 'rescue strategy' in under-resourced instructional settings [19], and is consistent with Smith's claim that a 'strong version' of pedagogy for autonomy—that is one which engages with students' existing autonomy rather than differing such engagement [20]. Effective implementation of learner-centered pedagogy in large classes with a poor supply of resources require teachers to be reflective and creative enough to adjust according to classroom circumstances and provide any necessary support for students to take responsibility for their learning.

In a similar vein, [21] Kuchah and Smith stress that in under-resourced environments—like our Moroccan context—teachers need "an awareness of the role of learners in the teaching/learning process and to recognize this role by accepting learners' own rights and responsibilities in the process." The authors suggest four considerations—rescue strategies— for effective teaching and learning in large classes:

- Knowing learners as unique individuals through recognizing the variety of their talents to establish rapport. The proposition here is that "it is only through the proper rapport that an atmosphere conducive to learning can be built up. Also, humanizing a large class is perhaps the only way to motivate learning" [18].
- Negotiating with learners and treating them as partners not rivals; defining common goals and making contract. Teachers need to ask students regularly the following questions: what do we want to achieve? How shall we achieve it? And where shall we find the resources we need?
- Viewing learners as resource providers and as resources themselves—developing learners' creativity, critical thinking and voice.
- Building rapport with school management and colleagues.

The establishment of good teacher-student rapport tops other concerns. Motivating students goes through the creation of a learning environment in which students feel valued. Teachers' instructional practices need to treat students as partners with a say in what takes place in the classroom. Furthermore, learners should be viewed as resource providers and as resources themselves to reduce the effect of resource scarcity. Finally, teachers need to weave a web of school connections to find the support they often require.

According to the interviewed teachers, even when teachers do their best, there is little recognition or reward for doing so. On the other hand, teachers bear the blame when innovations fail. In this context, it is not surprising that most teachers stand their ground with what is comfortable and accustomed to rather attempt an innovation. Reform ideals cannot be institutionalized when the majority of teachers are left to their own devices to figure out the right way to put things into effect. Complex pedagogical change can be a daunting task in the absence of practical guidance and support; that is why teachers revert to their old ways and renounce innovations.

Reforming instructional practice entails much more than the dictation of the principles of certain methods and approaches; the implementation of reform ideals is a principally challenging transformation due to the major shifts involved in teacher-learner power relations and also the character of teacher professional learning. Teachers' profession is a reflection of their beliefs, which have a direct impact on how and to what extent teachers put into practice curriculum reform. McLaughlin notes that:

> Implementation is not about mindless compliance to a mandate or policy directive, and that implementation pitfalls are not just cases of individual resistance, incompetence or capability. Rather, implementation involves a process of sense making that implicates an implementer's knowledge base, prior understanding, and beliefs about the best course of action [22].

Teachers' attitudes and practice are fashioned by various multifaceted factors related to their cultural contexts, their own learning experiences, pre- and in-service training, and on-the-job experiences. For instance, it is hard for teachers who are accustomed to operating in an authoritative manner to reassign some of their long-established authority and duties to students. Indeed, within the patriarchal Moroccan society, it is not common for children to assume responsibility or challenge authority. Children may not be willing to be at the center of instruction; they have difficulty in becoming active learners, or prefer passive teaching methods which reduce their work load.

Darling-Hammond [23] asserts that teachers teach from what they know; thus if policy makers aspire to transform teaching, they must take into account teacher knowledge. This contention is underpinned by [24] Clarke, who emphasizes that "until the experience of teachers is central to the process of developing and applying theory, the discourse must be viewed as dysfunctional." Since teachers shoulder the full burden of operationalizing the tenets of innovation policy, it is imperative that decision-makers be aware of teachers' inherent and informed beliefs and practices to be able to better involve them in policy conception and implementation or, at the very least, draw upon that for policy development. Teachers are pivotal to the improvement of schooling and should be offered a substantial role in shaping the direction, content, and form of change [25]. Eisner corroborates this view through confirming that teachers are stakeholders of considerable importance. However, the top management in the Ministry of Education seems to maintain belief in structural functionalism that dominated discussions on the role of the teacher until the 1970s [26]. The foundation of this theory is that within a structure each part has a function. The teacher's function is to be the "regulated servant" [27] or "technician" [28] responsible for adopting and executing the decisions taken at the highest echelon of the system.

The teachers commonly refer to the inadequacy of inservice training. They complain that disseminating innovative ideas on pedagogy do not go beyond organizing a set of quick-fix workshops by some 'expert' trainers, usually distant from classroom context. Such 'experts' view teaching as technical, learning as packaged, and teachers as passive recipients of 'objective' research results, giving teachers the impression that their knowledge gained from their experiences with their learners is less valuable than the understandings of teaching and learning offered by 'experts'. This perspective of teacher training is grounded in the positivist paradigm and structured around the assumption that teachers could learn about the content they are expected to teach through listening to and observing experts [29]. This attitude to reform runs counter the very doctrine—participatory approach—of progressive pedagogy the top management is trying to institutionalize in primary school classroom.

Processes of inservice teacher training fall short of preparing teachers for the expectations placed on them. Lieberman identifies limitations of traditional approaches to teacher development. Many of the limitations proposed largely apply to the Moroccan situation:

- Teachers' definitions of problems have been ignored;
- Professional development opportunities have often ignored the critical importance of the context within which teachers operate;
- The agenda of reform involves teachers in practices that have not been a part of the accepted view of teachers' professional learning.
- Teacher development has been limited by lack of knowledge of how teachers learn [30].

Lieberman's conception is particularly true of recent policy changes in Morocco where teachers are perceived as implementers of decisions taken at the top level of educational management. Failure of implementation of pedagogical policy is perceived not as a failure of the policy itself to attend to contextual issues but as a failure on the part of teachers to adjust the policy to their individual context; a situation which serves to sustain the unequal power relationships that exist within the educational system.

Reform projects in our Moroccan context constitute a top-down transmission model, which perceive teachers as deficient without considering their culture and other contextual factors that impinge on innovative efforts. The researcher believes that innovations and policies that are constructed on a bottom-up model and not imposed on practitioners by a powerful 'outsider' may be more durably applied because of the sense of appropriation the practitioners hold about it. In a sense, therefore, it can be argued that for successful in-service training, reform principles need to be integrated into teachers' existing beliefs about its practicality, and this, in part, can be facilitated by involving teachers at the initial conception phase of formulating the principles of the new policy so that the final product is seen as originating from teachers, not from elsewhere. Unless teachers comprehend and value the want for change in their schools, their concerns in preserving the status quo will indisputably take precedence over their willingness to accept change [31]. Rather than working to develop new skills/strategies, it is simply easier to continue teaching in the same ways.

Any serious national educational renewal endeavor needs to consider diverse interlinked variables. Three broad interconnected categories may influence the change process in our local context, and need to be taken into account. The categories are:

- The existing experiences and educational culture of teachers. What degree and manner of reculturing is feasible to concretize change.
- The existing 'organizational culture' of the institutions at every level of the system. What reculturing will be needed for each level to be able to communicate, support and lead the change adequately?
- The material conditions into which the change is to be introduced. Are they attuned to the behaviors and activities of the aspired change? [32].

Effective change is contingent upon careful consideration of teachers'educational culture to determine the scope of the reculturing process. The culture of the context where teachers operate also needs to be a subject of investigation; probing into the existing organizational culture can determine the level and degree of intervention. Ultimately, the physical condition where reform is operationalized needs to be readjusted to smooth the implementation of desired educational behavior. Reforming educational practice is a complex endeavor that requires the infusion of a multiplicity of perspectives within a global approach.

The observed teachers operate in a highly individualized and personal ways and depend almost exclusively on their students for feedback, rewards, and indications of success. The teachers lack collegial interaction and peer supervision. The observed teachers operate in self-contained classrooms and have no opportunity to observe other teachers at work. They seem to know little about their colleagues' relationships with students, their job competence, or educational beliefs. Fullan stresses that institutionalizing change is largely conditional upon collegial support:

> New meanings, new behaviors, new skills, and new beliefs depend significantly on whether teachers are working as isolated individuals or are exchanging ideas, support, and positive feelings about their work. The quality of working relationships among teachers is strongly related to implementation. Collegiality, open communication, trust, support and help, learning on the job, getting results, and job satisfaction and morale are closely interrelated [33].

Teachers in primary school feel relatively powerless outside the realm of their classrooms. They develop their strategies based on trial and error. Their teaching is invisible outside the classroom; the behavior of their students is not. Fullan identifies interactive professionalism as crucial to effectively contend with ongoing development in education. He views teachers and other stakeholders operating in groups, interrelating recurrently to devise schemes, put new ideas to test, resolve new problems, and assess effectiveness. Within this outlook, teachers would be constant learners in an accommodating community of interactive professionals. Relationships with other colleagues are compelling variables. Change involves learning to put into practice something new, and interaction is the foundation for social learning. The value of working relationships amongst teachers is powerfully linked to implementation.

Innovations are neither built up nor put into operation in vacuity. It has long been documented that the policy context enclosing an innovation is a considerable aspect influencing its course. Fullan points to the weight of considering how implementers of an innovation struggle to make sense of it, drawing on their past experience and the shared beliefs and values of their professional culture [34]. Changing practices is easier than changing culture which, however, is often essential

if implementers are to enter into the spirit of an innovation and put it into effect fully rather than simply going through the motions. Henceforth, of particular importance in innovative curriculum implementation is the investigation of the culture of teachers who interpret and execute the curriculum. The need to scrutinize teacher beliefs and practices stems from the conception that teachers are not see-through entities who carry out curriculum plans and goals as prearranged by their authors, but who sift, process, and implement the curriculum depending upon beliefs and contextual constraints.

Effective pedagogical change is not only contingent upon the provision of technical matters, but also on modification of how teachers think and what they believe. Classroom practices, informed by ingrained beliefs, become habits of the mind and heart that make sense as long as they are not queried. Enduring change calls for a rethinking of teachers' most common, deep-seated and fundamental educational beliefs, assumptions, practices, and behaviors. Reform strategies should center on careful identifications of commonly cherished values. The taken-for-granted and accepted understandings and beliefs of practicing teachers need to be scrutinized for the reason that these understandings and beliefs constitute theories of practice that first establish and then affirm what teachers do [35].

The interviewed teachers drew attention to the complexity of educational transfer. Borrowing educational policies in the absence of congruity between the importing and exporting contexts may not yield the wished-for results. Teacher Insaaf metaphorically put it, "importing western models of pedagogy is like planting tropical fruit in a desert. Failure is inevitable…The plant and the environment are incompatible." The teacher calls for a pedagogy that considers the sensitivity of the local context; something teachers can relate to and identify with. Fullan asserts that transferability of ideas in the educational field is a complex problem of the highest order. He explains that replication and dissemination of innovations is an overwhelming task in view of the fact that "the products of other people's ideas hide many of the subtleties of the reform in practice" [36]. He adds that transferability is complex in the sense that successful reforms in one place are in part a function of good ideas, and fundamentally a function of the conditions under which the ideas thrived. Successful innovations, argue Healey and De Stefano fall short in the process of replication because the wrong thing is being replicated—the reform itself, instead of the conditions which generated its success. Success stories are success stories because:

> (1) the reform addressed a well-understood local need, (2) there is a significant local demand for the reform, (3) the reform itself is locally derived, (4) it is championed by one or more "messiahs", (5) it is adequately financed, and (6) there is widespread ownership of the reform. Attempting to replicate the reform itself (i.e., take it to scale) inevitably violates some of the very conditions that render certain innovations successful in the first place. The fact is that people's educational aspirations, needs and contexts differ from place to place. Accordingly, what works in one location won't necessarily work in another. And even in those instances where an 'outside' innovation addresses some of the specific needs and aspirations of a particular location, its fate is still precarious, for unless there is widespread ownership of the innovation (a factor largely engendered through the development of local solutions), chances are that it will not become a permanent part of that location's educational landscape. Instead of replication of the reform itself, we contend that it is the conditions which give rise to the reform in the first place that should be replicated [37].

Imported reform initiatives habitually encounter inconceivable difficulties related to implicit knowledge, local prehistory, local politics and personalities. In social reform, there is really no such thing as easy product transfer. Innovation transfer is "not a pill, a widget or a silver bullet" [36]. The act of borrowing a theory of education is not enough, what matters most is the provision of a well-thought of theory of action to address local context or conditions. Effective reform needs to be built in the soil of its context. Therefore, a consultative process, involving all stakeholders, needs to predate any implementation of educational reform.

7 CONCLUSION

There is overwhelming consensus among Moroccan primary school practitioners that top- down models of pedagogical innovation have proven ineffective. The teachers have reasoned that different factors hamper the implementation of reform initiatives. They stress that reform in primary school, in the face of daunting challenges, is doomed to failure. In the absence of optimal conditions that facilitate implementation, reform is a waste of time, money and energy. The teachers emphasize that change in pedagogical practice is conditional upon changes in other contextual areas and managerial style in education. In order to minimize disconnection between policy ideals and actual classroom practice and smooth the progress of reform implementation, there is a need for a bottom-up model for policy development which takes into account the central role of teachers' beliefs and actual practices in the policy design and enactment processes. There is an urgent need for more practitioner friendly research approaches that build on the socio-cultural experiences that participants bring to the classroom. This study suggests that policy makers may effectively benefit from espousing a bottom up approach that draws on the perspectives and practices of teachers and learners in ways that have been thus far discounted in research. Rather

than dictate, at ministry level, quick fix solutions based on hasty enthusiasm for an educational scheme born, nurtured, and brought to maturity in a distant context and hold teachers responsible for their failure/inability to implement such policy in their classrooms, policy makers could benefit from results of studies undertaken on the ground to establish an inventory of teachers' perspectives and practices which could serve as a framework for incorporating them in new reform strategies.

Successful school reform entails an inclusive approach where school teachers are part of planning the reform and the design of the implementation process. Important here is the involvement of teachers at all different phases of the change management process. "Teachers are the ultimate change agents" for "no educational reform can get off the ground without the active participation of the teachers" [38]. Involvement of teachers creates an ownership among them and supports the effective implementation of reform. Furthermore, positive reception of change goes through explaining the benefits of change for teachers and students. Moreover, there should be a realistic time frame for teachers to make sense of the change proposals. Clarification is not an event and in-service training programs must provide adequate time for the process to occur. This enables teachers to develop not only an understanding of the innovation proposals as they evolve during implementation, but also confidence that such proposals do actually work and that they are relevant to their operating environment. Moreover, teachers need time to distance themselves from the familiar and to accept the unfamiliar so that with increasing familiarity change proposals become less threatening.

The researcher emphatically agrees with Holliday's suggestion that the adaptive approach of imported pedagogical practice depends on having accurate information about the local culture of teaching and learning [39]. Holliday argues that curriculum innovation needs to be preceded by classroom ethnographic research, involving teachers, syllabus designers, materials writers and other parties [39]. The aim of this research should be to study the behavior of teachers and learners in its social context. Once this knowledge has been obtained, the next step is to adapt the innovative methods so that they are culturally appropriate in the light of locally produced research findings.

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