



Stagnation or Growth? Algeria's development pathway to 2040

Education

Jakkie Cilliers and Stellah Kwasi

Last updated 12 May 2023 using IFs v7.53

Education

After independence from France in 1962, Algeria embarked on a concerted effort at Arabisation and Islamisation that sought to displace the dominant role of French and French culture in the country.[1] Compulsory basic education was introduced in the 1970s, and the country's enrolment levels have improved significantly since then.

The government invested heavily in expanding access to education. In 1990, for example, the education sector received almost 30% of the national budget. [2] As a result, the country's literacy rate currently stands at about 78%, compared to under 50% in the 1980s.

Algeria is also considered to have achieved universal primary education with a 97% net enrolment rate in 2015. [3] Today Arabic is the language of instruction from primary to secondary school. At tertiary level, hard sciences are taught in French.

The average years of education in the adult population is a good first indicator of the stock of knowledge in society. Improvements in the average years of education slowed down in Algeria from 1995 at the height of the civil war and only began an upward trajectory again after 2005.

The average years of education for adults aged 15 and over is currently 7.6 years and will improve to 9.2 years by 2040. This is almost a year above the average for OLMICs and 1.6 years below the average for UMICs.

Education can be conceptualised as a pipeline. The more learners a country can enrol in primary school, the more learners will complete that level and so become eligible for secondary and tertiary education. Bottlenecks or leakages at any stage in the system hamper efforts to grow the overall stock of education, with negative implications for improvements in human capital.

Although Algeria has achieved universal primary education and generally records good educational outcomes, there are significant leakages in its secondary system, particularly in upper secondary. Here completion rates are 11 percentage points below the average for OLMICs (see Chart 8). The continuous but flawed reforms in the education sector are behind some of these leaks.[3]

Chart 8: Education stock and flow rates (2018–19 data)



Geography	Primary			Lower secondary			Upper secondary		Tertiary	
	Enrol (gross)	Survival	Completion	Enrol (gross)	Completion	Transition	Enrol (gross)	Completion	Enrol (gross)	Graduation
Algeria	109.9%	96.3%	110.5%	120.2%	91.4%	89.8%	72.2%	34.9%	51.4%	29.2%
Tunisia	115.4%	94.2%	100.6%	107.7%	73.8%	98.6%	79.7%	33.9%	32.2%	22.5%
Lower middle-income countries	75.3%	82.0%	79.1%	58.7%	66.3%	83.5%	43.2%	36.9%	25.2%	25.3%
Upper middle-income countries	106.0%	96.5%	98.2%	98.2%	87.1%	98.6%	82.6%	50.6%	42.3%	23.9%

Source: IFs version 7.53, historical data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Barro & Lee data

[View on Tableau Public](#)

↶ ↷ ↺ ↻ | 📄 📱 🔗 Share

Chart 9: Definitions in Education

Analysis in this section is done according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics classification of primary, lower and upper secondary education schooling. UNESCO does not currently include/gather data on pre-primary education.[4]

Gross enrolment rate: The number of learners enrolled at a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education. Rates can therefore be above 100%.

Completion rate: The number of people in the relevant age group who have completed the last grade of the given level of education, as a percentage of the population at the theoretical graduation age for the given level of education.

Like many African countries, greater access to education in terms of number of learners enrolled has come at the cost of quality and relevance. Educational reforms stalled under Bouteflika, and education modernisation appears to have halted as rote learning predominates.[5]

The quality of education in Algeria lags behind that in UMICs, including in Africa, but is above the averages for OLMICs. The challenges include shortages in educational resources such as teachers, issues with the language of instruction and poor

infrastructure.

Reforms to improve quality of education were introduced in 2003, and included new teaching methods, restructuring of the curriculum and an ongoing switch in the language of instruction from French to Arabic. Despite these reforms, the UN special rapporteur reported in 2015 that the quality of education in Algeria was low, citing inadequate teacher training and overcrowding in classrooms as key factors.[6]

In 2008, private higher institutions were authorised to operate. [7] There has been a significant shift towards and greater support for these institutions since 2018 in an effort to alleviate some of the pressure on the free government-sponsored public education system.

The language of instruction at various educational levels also plays a big role in the 'quality' of graduates. In September 2019, Algeria's higher education minister introduced a proposal to switch from French to English in teaching and research. This reform aims to increase the visibility of research in higher education institutions and to open it up to the international environment in the belief that English is the language of the 'knowledge economy'. [8]

There is also a disconnect between the current demands of the job market, future prospects for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the education system. [9]

Algeria has not fully achieved gender parity, with female gross enrolment below that of males. However, it does better than most sub-Saharan countries. The situation is significantly worse in rural areas and the obstacles often cited include socio-cultural limitations on girls' potential, remote schools and domestic chores. [10]

Trends do show that beyond age 16, which is the age up to which education is compulsory, girls stay in school longer than boys and do better in getting high school diplomas and proceeding on to higher education. As a result, at higher levels of education Algeria has seen an inversion of the gender imbalance in favour of women. [11] The ratio of females to males is more than 1.5 to 1 at the tertiary level.

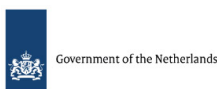
To prepare for the 4IR, countries need to invest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and commit to life-long learning and education that encourages entrepreneurship. An encouraging trend in Algeria is that the number of learners enrolling in vocational training has risen in the recent past. [12]

In addition, the per cent of learners studying STEM fields in tertiary school is higher in Algeria (9.1%) than what would be expected for its level of development (2.6%). [13] In 2018, for example, women accounted for 41% of STEM graduates. [14] This mismatch between the skills of the labour force and the needs of the market is one of the reasons for high unemployment rates in the country. [15]

Endnotes

1. CS le Roux, [Language in Education in Algeria: A Historical Vignette of a 'Most Severe' Sociolinguistic Problem](#), *Language & History*, 60:2, September 2017
2. HC Metz (ed.), [Education, in Algeria: a country study](#), Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994
3. World Bank, [Algeria: Country overview](#)
4. IFs uses the UIS International Standard Classification of Education (ISCE) codes. See [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#), International Standard Classification of Education ISCED 2011
5. H Saleh, [State education: Bias towards rote learning stifles critical thinking](#), *Financial Times*, 20 October 2013
6. Oxford Business Group, [Algeria overhauls teaching methods and increases funding](#)
7. Lois, [Journal Officiel De La République Algérienne](#), February 2008
8. E Fox and R Mazzouzi, [Algeria's higher education minister encourages switch from French to English](#), *Al-Fanar Media*, 3 September 2019
9. A Nagazi, [Reading the shortcomings of the Tunisian educational system](#), *World Bank blog*, 30 October 2017
10. A Nagazi, [Reading the shortcomings of the Tunisian educational system](#), *World Bank blog*, 30 October 2017
11. O-B Zahia, [Gender Inequity in Algeria: When Inequalities are Reversed](#), *Journal of Education and Social Policy*, 5:2, June 2018
12. The 2015/16 enrolment was estimated to have increased by 14%. See Oxford Business Group, [Efforts to improve educational infrastructure and technical skills in Algeria](#)
13. Expert workshop, Tunis, September 2019.
14. O Khazan, [The more gender equality, the fewer women in STEM](#), *The Atlantic*, 18 February 2018
15. Tin Hinane El Kadi, Peer reviewer, London School of Economics, 15 June 2020.

Donors and sponsors



Reuse our work

- All visualizations, data, and text produced by African Futures are completely open access under the [Creative Commons BY](#) license. You have the permission to use, distribute, and reproduce these in any medium, provided the source and authors are credited.
- The data produced by third parties and made available by African Futures is subject to the license terms from the original third-party authors. We will always indicate the original source of the data in our documentation, so you should always check the license of any such third-party data before use and redistribution.
- All of our charts [can be embedded](#) in any site.

Cite this research

Jakkie Cilliers and Stellah Kwasi (2024) Stagnation or Growth? Algeria's development pathway to 2040. Published online at futures.issafrica.org. Retrieved from <https://futures.issafrica.org/special-reports/country/algeria/> [Online Resource] Updated 12 May 2023.



About the authors

Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the ISS's founder and former executive director of the ISS. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees and head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria office of the ISS. His 2017 best-seller *Fate of the Nation* addresses South Africa's futures from political, economic and social perspectives. His three most recent books, *Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution* (March 2020), *The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities* (April 2021), and *Africa Tomorrow: Pathways to Prosperity* (June 2022) take a rigorous look at the continent as a whole.

About African Futures & Innovation

Scenarios and forecasting can help Africa identify and respond to opportunities and threats. The work of the African Futures & Innovation (AFI) program at the Institute for Security Studies aims to understand and address a widening gap between indices of wellbeing in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The AFI helps stakeholders understand likely future developments. Research findings and their policy implications are widely disseminated, often in collaboration with in-country partners. Forecasting tools inspire debate and provide insights into possible trajectories that inform planning, prioritisation and effective resource allocation. Africa's future depends on today's choices and actions by governments and their non-governmental and international partners. The AFI provides empirical data that informs short- and medium-term decisions with long-term implications. The AFI enhances Africa's capacity to prepare for and respond to future challenges. The program is headed by Dr Jakkie Cilliers.