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School in Tunisia is going badly. Everyone says it even the current Minister of Education who affirms without the slightest nuance that "the public school is today more threatened than ever, it is not able any more to answer the aspirations of the pupils and of the parents ". Here is for the observation. For the rest, "the current stage requires concerted efforts to save what can be saved, especially since the education system and public schools are in danger and have lost their role as a social elevator".



While Tunisia's centralized education system could produce equitable outcomes for boys and girls, research published in "The Political Economy of Education in the Arab World" shows that there are substantial inequalities between families and girls. municipalities and that these inequalities are determined by the socio-economic status of students, rather than by their gender.

Written by its researcher Lindsay Benstead, the Wilson Center notes "the limited access system that emerged and consolidated after independence has frozen structural regional disparities as well as income differences at the family level. Tunisia has historically experienced higher levels of investment in education in coastal areas, which has resulted in persistent regional disparities in enrollment".

In addition, it is added, Tunisia's centralized system and emphasis on national exams opens up possibilities for rent-seeking by teachers as well as higher expenses for tutoring and related educational services by families. richer. Students prepare for two major exams - including the baccalaureate (secondary school leaving exam) - which determine whether they will be able to continue their studies. Higher scores are also associated with placement in more prestigious careers and institutions. This puts extreme pressure on students and families to get an increasingly narrow margin on exams. According to the report of the Program on Governance and Local Development (GLD), Tunisian families spend more on tutoring and other services than the entire state budget spent on education. This plays an important role in reproducing historical inequalities between students from different socio-economic backgrounds and regions.

Quality of schools

There are other concerns as well. The poorest households and those in the less rich regions suffer from poorer quality schools, underlines the Wilson Center in terms of evaluations of the infrastructure and quality of Tunisian schools. Almost 40% of those polled in an opinion poll indicated that the toilets are clean and a similar proportion (41%) said their child's school has a parent-teacher association. About half (52%) said their school has only one team and 66% said the school is well built. About 69% of boys and girls were perceived to be safe in school. Almost 80% said it was wrong to say that teachers are often absent and most (90%) believe that teachers do not show favoritism towards students who take special lessons with them. 93% were studying in classes of less than 40 students.

While the quality of education is generally better in the coastal and eastern regions of the country than in the west and south, some municipalities perform better or worse than one might expect. Yet the socio-economic status of the family and the educational level of the respondent consistently determines the quality of education across the country. Multivariate analysis shows that respondents with more education and those with higher socioeconomic status have access to better quality schools for their children, all other things being equal.

A recurring problem is grade repetition, a form of inefficiency that is usually the result of a poor system rather than the individual. Among young people aged 6 to 16 in Tunisia, 6.2% had repeated at least once. 13 percent of respondents said that for at least one of their children in the there had been a problem in the previous year, such as repeating a year or expelling it. The extent to which this was the case ranged from a maximum of 38% in Bouarada (Siliana) to none in Jbel Jloud. Very few students (3%) encountered a problem in Bizerte Sud, a relatively poor area in the west of the country, while a quarter of households with children did so in the Tunisian municipality of La Marsa.

Transparency

Transparency is also a significant issue in Tunisia, with seven percent of families - disproportionately in rural areas - having made at least one informal payment in the past year for their child's school, for example to enroll a child or help him get a good grade. The proportion of respondents who have done so varies from 32% in Tebolba to none in Bizerte Sud, Bouarada (Siliana), Monastir, Souassi (Mahdia) and Jebel Jelloud (Tunis).

However, poorer households and those in poorer regions benefit from poorer quality schools, and socio-economic status inequality (SES) is more striking than gender inequality. Transparency is an important issue, especially in rural areas of the country. Yet there are unexplained variations between communes, with poor areas sometimes performing better than expected - which deserve to be investigated more. These differences suggest that some local authorities are more effective than others when it comes to managing material and human resources and achieving better outcomes for students and their families.

The Wilson Center researcher believes reforms that strengthen the rule of law are essential, prompting the Tunisian government and its partners to develop accountability standards for educators. Development organizations could provide monetary incentives or resources for quality improvement (eg, teacher attendance), and engage local authorities in development reforms. Thanks to these and other targeted reforms, the education system will better meet the aspirations of Tunisian youth and the country's development goals, she hopes.

