

ENGLISH DEVELOPMENT IN MOROCCAN HIGHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

MAROUANE ZAKHIR

Département des Enseignements Transversaux, Faculté des Sciences Juridiques, Economiques et Sociales, El
Jadida, Université Chouaib Doukkali, Morocco
zakhir.m@ucd.ac.ma | <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9303-3968>

ABSTRACT

Moroccan higher education has witnessed various changes during the last decade. The shift from *Licence-Master-Doctorat* (LMD) to the Bachelor system through a more technical reform was not without effects on reshaping the linguistic situation and paving the way for English language to flourish at university. Using the lens of post-colonial theory and sociolinguistics, this empirical research relied on a mixed approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the perceptions of students and professors on the status of English and the various macro and micro factors intervening with its development in Moroccan higher education. It also examines how English spread in education reshapes the linguistic behaviours and identities of Moroccan students and professors. The implications drawn from this study revealed that strong internal socio-political factors led to the increasing positive tendency to adopt English in higher education and use it as a promising language for a better future career.

KEY WORDS

english; natural evolution; linguistic conspiracy; higher education; post-colonialism.



SISYPHUS

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 02,

2026, PP 280-298

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25749/sis.43776>

CC BY-NC 4.0

DESENVOLVIMENTO DO INGLÊS NO ENSINO SUPERIOR MARROQUINO: DESAFIOS E PERSPECTIVAS

MAROUANE ZAKHIR

Département des Enseignements Transversaux, Faculté des Sciences Juridiques, Economiques et Sociales, El
Jadida, Université Chouaib Doukkali, Marrocos
zakhir.m@ucd.ac.ma | <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9303-3968>

RESUMO

O ensino superior marroquino testemunhou diversas mudanças na última década. A transição do sistema de Licenciatura-Mestrado-Doutoramento (LMD) para o sistema de Licenciatura, através de uma reforma mais técnica, teve impacto na reformulação do panorama linguístico e abriu caminho ao florescimento da língua inglesa nas universidades. Utilizando as lentes da teoria pós-colonial e da sociolinguística, esta investigação empírica adotou uma abordagem mista, combinando métodos quantitativos e qualitativos, para explorar as percepções dos estudantes e dos professores sobre o estatuto do inglês e os diversos fatores macro e micro que intervêm no seu desenvolvimento no ensino superior marroquino. Examina também como a disseminação do inglês na educação remodela os comportamentos e as identidades linguísticas dos alunos e professores marroquinos. As implicações deste estudo revelaram que fortes fatores sociopolíticos internos levaram à crescente tendência positiva de adoção do inglês no ensino superior, porque encarado como um idioma mais promissor para se conseguir uma melhor carreira futura.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

inglês; evolução natural; conspiração linguística; ensino superior; pós-colonialismo.



SISYPHUS

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 02,

2026, PP 280-298

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25749/sis.43776>

CC BY-NC 4.0

DESARROLLO DEL INGLÉS EN LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR MARROQUÍ: RETOS Y PERSPECTIVAS

MAROUANE ZAKHIR

Département des Enseignements Transversaux, Faculté des Sciences Juridiques, Economiques et Sociales, El
Jadida, Université Chouaib Doukkali, Marruecos
zakhir.m@ucd.ac.ma | <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9303-3968>

RESUMEN

La educación superior marroquí ha experimentado diversos cambios durante la última década. La transición del sistema de Licenciatura-Máster-Doctorado (LMD) al sistema de Grado, mediante una reforma más técnica, tuvo repercusiones en la configuración del panorama lingüístico y propició el auge del inglés en la universidad. Desde la perspectiva de la teoría poscolonial y la sociolingüística, esta investigación empírica empleó un enfoque mixto que combina métodos cuantitativos y cualitativos para explorar las percepciones de estudiantes y profesores sobre el estatus del inglés y los diversos factores macro y micro que influyen en su desarrollo en la educación superior marroquí. Asimismo, examina cómo la difusión del inglés en la educación transforma los comportamientos lingüísticos y las identidades de estudiantes y profesores marroquíes. Las conclusiones de este estudio revelaron que importantes factores sociopolíticos internos propiciaron una creciente tendencia positiva a adoptar el inglés en la educación superior y utilizarlo como una lengua prometedora para un mejor futuro profesional.

PALABRAS CLAVE

inglés; evolución natural; conspiración lingüística; educación superior; poscolonialismo.



SISYPHUS

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 02,

2026, PP 280-298

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25749/sis.43776>

CC BY-NC 4.0

English Development in Moroccan Higher Education: Challenges and Prospects

Marouane Zakhir¹

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of globalisation, the world knew a swift development in technology and digital communication, which coincides with an unprecedented dissemination of information via English. These factors stirred countries to reform their education systems and policies to keep abreast of the technical innovations in the Anglophone world. Morocco was not an exception, as during the last decade higher education survived various changes that led to the promotion of the status of English language in science and technical universities, in an attempt to internationalise and modernise university, and to prepare students for a more globalised economy. A significant example was the adoption of the Bachelor reform, an Anglo-Saxon system, to match higher education degrees with Anglophone universities in the UK and the US, and to replace the *Licence-Master-Doctorat* (LMD) French system, giving English more space to flourish in science and technical universities. Though it has not survived much after the appointment of a new francophone Minister, Abdellatif Miraoui, the Bachelor reform left good impressions among policy makers, mainly due to its integration of English, digitalisation, soft and power skills into higher education. These reforms had a strong impact not only on the status of French in education and scientific research, but also on the linguistic strata in society. Although English was never officially adopted as a medium of instruction in science and technical universities, the overall positive attitudes towards it due to its lack of association with any previous colonisation, the rich opportunities it offers students and the wide resources and materials it possesses for scientific research, boosted its status among students and professors, to the extent that some scholars believe that it will overtake French in the nearest future (Belhiah et al., 2020; Domingues, 2021; Errihani, 2017).

However, the promotion of English language was not without effects on local languages and identities, which already suffered the wide dominance of French. For the status of Amazigh and Standard Arabic, the two official languages in Morocco, remains ineffective in higher education, particularly in science and technical schools and universities. A significant body of research that focused on the status of English in post-colonial countries revealed that it has a strong influence on local languages, cultures and identities (Lukianenko, 2024; Zeng & Yang, 2024). However, there is a dearth of studies which explored both internal and external factors behind the promotion of English in higher education.

The present empirical research, therefore, is an attempt to examine students' and professors' attitudes towards the status of English in higher education, the impact of digitalization on its progress in scientific research, its effects on the reconstruction of identities and linguistic behaviours of students, and its role in shaping the linguistic situation of Morocco. It also aims to unveil the factors behind English promotion at university to see whether its use is reinforced by any Western agencies to dominate the

¹ FSJESJ Route Nationale N°1 El haouziya, Boîte Postale n°356 24000 El Jadida, Maroc.



education sector as believed conspiracists (Kangas, 2006; Lai, 2019; Mackenzie, 2021; Phillipson & Kangas, 2022), or it is just the outcome of its high demand in economy and education (Bekou & Ben Mhamed, 2023; Wright, 2004).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The emergence of English as a world lingua franca has been a topic of much controversy among scholars. Naturalists (Bekou & Ben Mhamed, 2023; Crystal, 1997; Wright, 2004) perceived its international promotion as an ordinary phenomenon, where a language flourishes when its domains of use increase in vital sectors. Wright (2004) mentioned a plethora of sectors in which the UK and US dominate the world paving the way for English to widely spread as a lingua franca. The hegemony of the US and UK in the world political sphere, arts, cinema, technical inventions, industry, internet and scientific research led to the promotion of English to the status of international lingua franca. On the other hand, conspiracists such as Phillipson and Kangas (2022) and Zeng et al. (2023) refused the natural evolution theory and accused the US and UK for working on a hidden agenda to push English forward using all the means available in education, politics, economics, technology and even arts.

In Morocco, the presence of English seems to have a different experience due to the absence of any direct effective control of powerful Anglophone countries in the region. English existence in the country has no colonial overtone, as it is the case for French and Spanish (Errihani, 2017; Sadiqi, 1991). The status of English within Moroccan multilingual context was more natural than would be planned by any colonial agent (R'boul, 2020). Belhiah and Abilkassem (2016) argued that the early traces of English in Morocco go back to the period of the World War II after the establishment of few American bases in Tangier and Kenitra. There were few occasional contacts between American soldiers and Moroccan inhabitants of these regions, which resulted in the familiarity of the original people with English though in a limited way. Later on, the establishment of diplomatic relations with Americans reinforced the presence of English in Morocco (Jebbour, 2021). According to Sadiqi (1991), Morocco signed a bilateral commission agreement with the US and another convention with UK between 1960 and 1980, which led to many cultural and language exchanges. The US government started sending its missionaries and volunteers such as Peace Corps to instruct English to Moroccans in the sixties, bringing with them various materials and tools to ease its learning. All these resulted in the foundation of American centres (AMIDEAST and the American Center) to teach English and facilitate students' exchange programs with schools and universities in the US and UK. The year 1993, according to Ouakrime (2016), knew the establishment of the first Moroccan English University, Alakhawayn, by a royal decree in Ifrane. The success of the Alakhawayn University in adopting the American teaching system attracted children of affluent Moroccans to it. It also prompted the establishment of other Anglophone universities such as Universiapolis in Agadir in 1998, Cardiff Metropolitan University in Casablanca, New England University in Tangier and an increasing number of private institutes to teach in English. According to Jebbour (2021), the sixties also witnessed the birth of many English associations such as MATE (Moroccan Association of Teachers of English), the MACECE (Moroccan-American Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange) to teach English for young Moroccans, organise workshops and conferences on English pedagogy and to encourage exchange programs like the ones from Fulbright.

Furthermore, the raise of the US model in economy, politics and culture was also an important factor for English to spread in educational sectors in Morocco as a promising language for learners. Phillipson and Kangas (2022) believed that the US model was imposed on all countries, including those in MENA region (Middle East and North Africa region), and forced them to reconstruct their education systems to give English priority as a medium of instruction. This conspiracist perspective, on the other hand, was overlooked by many Moroccan scholars (Baaqili & Ed-dali, 2024; R'boul, 2020; Sadiqi, 1991; Zouhir, 2007), who viewed the general tendency to adopt English as free from any Western control and rather a pragmatic choice to improve students' academic career and prepare them for a complex economy. Baaqili and Ed-dali (2024) mentioned three factors for English adoption in Morocco: (1) English has no colonial history in the country; (2) there is a positive tendency to learn it by students and teachers; (3) the country's desire to benefit from other resources in the world.

Belhiah and Abilkassem (2016) regarded the year 2014 as a turning point in English status in Moroccan Education system. For the minister of higher education and scientific research, Lahsen Daoudi, declared to media that English will be mandatory for students of engineering and medical studies and that obtaining doctorates will necessarily depend on students' proficiency in it. His successor, the minister Saaid Amzazi, has made bolder decisions to improve English status at university by adopting the Bachelor system in 2022. His decisions, though severely criticized by many as hasty and lacking clear visions, left a good impression among officials, students and their parents who favoured the idea of teaching English at all university levels (R'boul, 2022). Later, the minister Abdellatif Miraoui adopted a new reform which added few technical touches such as the reinforcement of languages, particularly English, and soft skills instead of a total shift to the Bachelor system. He kept the LMD system and mandated the learning of English at all levels, encouraging online learning methods based on new platforms of languages such Rosetta Stone and Moodle, where students have to spend a mandatory total of 30 hours of equal self-learning of English and French in each semester before taking their exams.

The openness on English in higher education, actually, benefited from the general positive tendency among students and professors to learn the language for the development of scientific research and education standards (El Kirat et al., 2010; Errihani, 2017; Hilili, 2003; R'boul, 2022). A survey conducted by the British Council in 2021 showed that young Moroccans started to favour English over French, for 60% of the informants opted for English as their best language while the rest chose French. Similarly, R'boul (2022) interviewed 28 students and 4 professors at a Moroccan university to examine their views on languages of education, and he discovered a positive attitude to promote the status of English at university.

Nowadays, higher education for the first time witnesses the use of English as a medium of instruction various subjects in Masters level by the current minister Azzedine El Midaoui, in an attempt to strengthen its position within the university curricula and help students mastering it for a better future career that meets the requirements of the international job market. However, El Midaoui reduced the years of English language learning in BA degree to two semesters (5 and 6) instead of six, given the lack of financial and human resources. El Midaoui is now working on a new local platform of learning languages, baptised *ELOGHA*, to replace Rosetta Stone, solve some of its technical problems and add imbedded courses on Moroccan history, culture and lifestyle.

A review of the above descriptive literature reveals that studies of English in post-colonial Moroccan education system were mainly based on its historical development since the independence. There is, however, a shortage of empirical research which delves deep into students' and professors' attitudes towards English language in higher



education so as to understand whether its wide use is influenced by foreign imposed programs and ideologies or is just the result of a natural evolution of the language that coincides with a general positive tendency among Moroccan students to learn it in order to be effective in scientific research and economy. The present research builds on the previous findings to explore perceptions of both students and professors of economics and engineering on the status of English in the current higher education reform, the effects of English on scholarship life and students' learning traditions, linguistic behaviours and identities to unveil the micro and macro factors behind English promotion Moroccan higher education. Using R'boul's (2022) concept of language ontology, the study will examine students' and professors' attitudes towards English use in higher education and the effects on their construction of a foreign identity that allows them to be westernized within a complicated process of cultural assimilation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Using the lens of macro and micro-sociolinguistics, this study explores the factors behind English progress in Moroccan higher education system. It investigates students' and professors' perceptions of English implementation in the current reform of higher education to see the extent to which their attitudes conform to the conspiracy or natural evolution theories of English implementation in education, play a role in the spread of the language at university, and how their use of English affects both their linguistic behaviours and their reconstruction of identity. The study aims at responding to the following questions:

- What is the status of English language use in science and economic streams at university?
- Do the respondents perceive English evolution in Morocco as natural or a result of external political influence?
- Is there any impact of digital tools on the progress of English language among students?
- Are there any effects of English language on students' and professors' identities and linguistic behaviours?
- Are the attitudes of students and professors positive towards the decisions made to implement English at university?
- Does English language reinforcement in education have any influence on French and other existing languages at university and society?

To examine these questions, the present research relied on a mixed approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect the data. It utilised a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to study a sample of students and professors randomly selected from one engineering school, *Ecole Nationale des Sciences Appliqués* (ENSA), and two colleges of economics, *Faculté des Sciences Juridiques, Economiques et Sociales* (FSJES) and *Ecole Nationale de Commerce et de Gestion* (ENCG), in El Jadida, Morocco. The study required 6 months for data collection; it started in February 2025 and was finished in July 2025. Below is an overview of the research methodology adopted in this study.

PARTICIPANTS

The present research engaged (n=275) participants, randomly selected from a school of engineering and two colleges of economics, as mentioned above.

Professors

Thirteen professors participated in this study. Five of the professors were females while (n=8) were males. They had different age ranges: the age of (n=11) professors was between 31-40 whereas (n=2) were between 49-65. They taught different subjects. Four instructed technical subjects such as computer networking, industrial and civil engineering, six instructed economics and three taught English for specific purposes (ESP). They have different teaching experiences, as (n=5) professors worked for 9 years and (n=7) for 20 years while (n=1) worked for 35 years.

Students

Two hundred and sixty-two students participated in this study. One hundred and eighty-three (69,8%) of them were females while 79 (30,2%) were males. Their ages ranged between 18-25 (n=169) and 26-30 (n=93). They followed their studies in different disciplines: (n=227) of them were enrolled in economics whereas (n=35) were in engineering classes. Two hundred and six studied in the third year of their BA degree, (n=50) were in Master level whereas (n=6) were following their doctoral studies. They all belonged to the province of Casablanca-Settat. Students also have different levels of English mastery depending on the number of years they had studied it, but a slight superiority was recorded among students of engineering due to their exposure to English since their first year at school. The selection of students from diverse levels and disciplines of higher education was intentional to have a clear general view on their perceptions and change of habits towards English use in their studies.

INSTRUMENTS

Questionnaires

The questionnaire was used in this study to collect quantitative data from students. It consisted of 37 written questions which can be divided into five major parts: the first part dealt with questions about students' ethnographic information such as sex, age, origin and education background; the second examined their proficiency in English and its use both as a subject and medium of learning at university; the third part asked questions



about the role of digitalisation and new media of communication in students' acquisition of English; the fourth inquired about their views on English impact on their education, identity and behaviour; while the fifth part enquired about their views on the reasons behind English promotion at university and the effects on the linguistic situation. The questionnaire was administered to students in English with French translation; it included Likert Scales and close and open-ended questions with the possibility to justify answers. The questionnaire was pilot-tested on a small number of students (n=23) and led to few adjustments and additions to questions such as those enquiring about attitudes towards the effects of English on students' learning methods and linguistic behaviours. The questionnaire required about 30 minutes for accomplishment by all students. The data of the questionnaire were collected, transcribed and systematically studied using frequency analysis method to compare percentages of the calculated responses. Some key quotes of the respondent students were used as evidence for their responses to questions or a support for their interpretations in data presentation. The technique of the questionnaire has been routinely used in macro-sociolinguistic studies (Belhiah, 2020; Yongqi Gu, 2016) and yielded reliable results. Its use allowed the researcher to generate information from a large number of students, delving deep into their views on English promotion at Moroccan universities.

Semi-structured interviews

Oral semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 professors to study their attitudes towards English status in the current higher education reform. They consisted of close and open-ended questions. They were conducted in English and French either through focus group discussions or at an individual level in various settings: in cafes, at university or in public spaces. It was noticed that professors felt more comfortable responding to questions in focus group discussions in French in the pilot-test phase. Hence, French was added to the interviews to stimulate more ideas from professors. The interviews required around 40 minutes with each professor, that is, a total of 520 minutes. Based on thematic analysis method, the data of the interviews were registered using a tape recorder, and then transcribed, coded and inductively analysed and grouped within major recurring themes. The technique of oral interviews and focus groups discussions was adopted from R'boul (2022).

DATA PRESENTATION

RESULTS OF STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

The responses of students revealed that their use of English in classroom communication is informal, as only (20.12%) stated that their professors 'persistently' utilise English in instruction while the majority (36%) claimed that they 'sometimes' rely on it. "This is quite normal since French is still the official language of instruction of sciences and

economics disciplines,” said respondent 31. “The informal use of English in classes of engineering and economics is limited to oral presentations,” added respondent 7.

It seems significant that the new digital devices to teach sciences and, particularly, languages served in a way or another in the development of English in Moroccan universities. Around (60.6%) of the students who were positive toward their professors’ use of data-shows, language platforms and internet-based learning agreed that they get introduced to new horizons of learning that helped them to acquire English. Students (60.2%) are now more motivated than ever before to study their subjects in English. Respondent 113 argued, “The sum of information we get in English through these adopted devices is very important. They really modernise our ways of learning both English and our science subjects”. She also added, “AI revolutionised our learning of English.”

Actually, the use of these new devices has a double sword in developing students’ learning of both English and sciences subjects. Around (63.47%) of the respondents stated that they often use English in surfing the internet for information, (25.57%) sometimes rely on it while (10.86%) rarely use it. No wonder here that students started to feel that they are able to pursue all their subjects in English. For (44.3%) confirmed their capability to study sciences in English, (29.8%) stated that they might, to some extent, do that while (28.8%) were not able. “We are familiar with the use of English in social media, where we chat, prepare with each other for exams or watch blogs. We also use other new language platforms such as Duolingu, Premova and Rosetta Stone to improve our English skills outside university,” stated respondent 7. Yet, these tools are considered by conspiracists (Lai, 2019; Mackenzie, 2021; Phillipson & Rose, 2025) as ideology-laden and imbedded with Western hegemonic values that affect students’ local cultures and values.

When asked about the effects of English use on their behaviour and personality, the respondents gave quite similar attitudes. Around (64.4%) underscored a positive effect of the language on them. They argued that English made them more self-confident, open-minded and sympathetic to Western culture. To talk about the effect of English on his behaviour, respondent 209 claimed, “My use of English raised my self-esteem and confidence. Sometimes I feel more Westerner in mood than Arab.” This view aligns with Bekou and Ben Mhamed (2023) who argued that much exposure to English may lead to identity shift, a shift in values, cultures and thoughts. The respondents also reported that their mates who master English very well sound foreigner in their looking and behaviour. “Girls who use English react as Americans in their ways of speaking and gestures. Even boys look different with their strange haircuts and funny clothes,” said respondent 2. In this regard, R’boul (2020) argued that the use of a language might deracinate its speakers from their original identity and context to assimilate with its other language speakers who might be different from the land where it is used.

The respondent students also showed that the development of English in Morocco has many effects on society. Respondent 51 argued that English is now strongly used in business and advertising. “It is creeping day by day in economic sectors,” he added. It becomes a must to use English in the job market; we can’t find a well-paid job which does not use it in Morocco nowadays,” argued respondent 9. “French has become outdated in front of English,” he added. Moreover, respondents also mentioned that the dissemination of English in society through media, particularly cinema and internet, led to new practices among Moroccan young generations. “Some students now celebrate the Halloween, the New Year and Saint Valentine just because of the effects of English movies on them,” said respondent 3. It seems here that English has challenged local cultures and values of learners. In this regard, Lobatón (2012) stated “those who learn the language may drop some of their cultural aspects in the process due to the confusion



caused by confronting values and different aspects of both cultures” (Lobatón, 2012, as cited in Bekou & Ben Mhamed, 2023, p. 99).

It is worth noting that the respondents’ preference of English in their studies is also corroborated by the fact that it does not have any colonial overtones as the case of French. About (73.9%) considered its spread in the country as natural and not pre-planned by Anglo-Saxon countries, as some researchers (Al-Kahtany & Alhamami, 2022; Kangas, 2006) might assume. They (70.8%) disagreed with the idea that English language dominance is pre-planned by the US and UK to control education systems and cultures around the world. “English is just a language and its wide use in different sectors all around the world helped it to reach what it reached,” stated respondent 57.

Furthermore, a common positive attitude was noticed in students’ views on the ministry’s decision to implement English in higher education. For (80.3%) regarded the decision as necessary due to English widespread as a language of science, technology and economy at the international level. “Using English will open our industry and research on the world and make us more competitive in the international market,” said respondent 11. Similarly, respondent 23 explained, “English now is dominating the world; all countries made it mandatory to modernise their education systems, and Morocco is not an exception.” Yet, the majority of the respondents (70%) were not satisfied with the amount of time devoted to English in the curriculum. “Two hours per week is not enough to improve our speaking and writing skills,” pointed out respondent 17. The same participant also added: “Learning English needs practice and more exposure to it at university.”

In short, the enquired students shared positive attitudes towards English learning and perceived it as a promising language for their future career. This tendency to learn the language can be ascribed to its wide usage in scientific research, social media, technology and economy as an effective language of communication. These attitudes played a significant role in paving the way for English to gain more ground in higher education and society.

RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS WITH PROFESSORS

The interviews with professors showed favourable attitudes towards English use as a language of sciences instruction and as a modern tool to bandwagon with the scientific community in the West. Though a majority of the interviewees stated that they still fully rely on French in teaching their subjects, they confirmed that English is ‘sometimes’ used in explanations of some lessons or in presentations in conferences, which also encourage students to use it in writing their reports and theses. However, despite the state’s tendency towards the development of English in higher education, the interviewees argued that they received no pre-service training in using it in instruction, except for those who belong to English department or had their studies in Anglophone universities. Accordingly, their interest in using English is always faced with their limited proficiency in it. “This issue questions the role of the higher ministry of education and universities to create partnerships with English institutes and embassies to improve professors’ skills in it,” reported interviewee 11. “This problem seems to concern only public universities, for professors who work in private universities have free access to English classes in famous institutes in the country, such as the British Council and AMISDEST, or participate in programs of exchange with foreign Anglophone universities abroad to improve their language,” added interviewee

7. It seems from the responses that the intervention of the Anglophone agencies in higher education is still weak, which totally reduces the validity of conspiracists theory in Morocco's case.

The interviewees also reported that they are still more inclined to French as a preferred language of instruction. Although they feel the importance of English, no one of the interviewees underrated the status of French as an effective vehicle of knowledge in higher education. Rather, they cherished it due to the number of years they spent learning it and using it as a means of sciences instruction. "I have a francophone formation that's why I still prefer French in my work," said interviewee 9. "I love English but French is dear to me; it is such a poetic language which I carry in my blood," argued interviewee 2. English supporters of course did not share those views, as the interviewee 11 who complained, "The world speaks English now. We are obliged to learn it and teach it to our students if we want to improve our education standards."

Another factor that corroborates to the general proclivity to use English in higher education is its significant use in scientific research. The interviewees confirmed that English affects their scientific production. "The fact that all highly impact scientific journals in my domain (engineering) are in English requires me to use it in writing scientific articles and books," stated interviewee 1. He also added, "We cannot participate in esteemed conferences abroad using French or any other language than English. English has become a necessity for professors and researchers all around the world to communicate their scientific research." This point of view aligns with Ammon (2003), who argued that the Anglophone bibliographic databases recorded that 87.2% of world publications in natural sciences and 82.5% of social sciences in 1995 were in English (see Ferguson, 2006). Similarly, Wright (2004) stated,

When we come to the medium in which the flows of information on cutting-edge science take place, then English does dominate exclusively and in every sphere. The research community has come to inform itself, debate and publish in English, even where the innovation originated in other speech communities. (p. 151)

These factors raised English to the status of the world scientific language par excellence, as explained the interviewees. Some interviewees (5 and 11) argued that they pay for private classes in English centres just because they cannot reach refereed journals that necessitate high standards of English. "It is very common to get a negative feedback from indexed journals due to your inability to reach the high standards of English they require, despite the originality of your research," reported interviewee 11. Perhaps, this priority which is given to English is what some conspiracists (Kangas, 2006; Lai, 2019; Phillipson & Rose, 2025) regarded as an agenda "to reinforce a monolingual mind-set in worldwide communication" (Zeng & Yang, 2024, p. 3).

However, the problem of English mastery is less influential among students, as claimed all the interviewees. "Fortunately, the current generation of students have access to new devices of technology and internet, which offer them a good resource to learn the language beyond university," pointed out interviewee 5. The interviewees also confirmed the interest of their students to study their subjects in English. They reported that their students are now more inclined to English than to French due to social media and cinema. "Students show much enthusiasm in delivering their presentations in English; they see it as a language of innovation and a sign of good education status," reported interviewee 6.



Furthermore, the current reform to promote English status at university seems highly appreciated by the participants, who believed that its implementation could save time and efforts to promote education. They also insisted that the reform should cover all education levels, including primary and middle schooling to make the coming generations of students and professors familiar with the language. The interviewees also advocated the use of professional platforms to teach languages but at the same time criticised the lack of the ministry's vision in their implementation. Professors of ESP, for instance, complained that the ministry has a blurred vision regarding ways of adapting classroom teaching methods and evaluation to the courses available in the platform of Rosetta Stone. Some interviewees (3 and 11) also reported that this platform of languages should rather be implemented in high school, not university where students are supposed to take more advanced courses of technical and business English. The interviewee 11 reported, "The majority of professors of English designed their own syllabi instead of using the same courses of Rosetta Stone". "Even the evaluation process of students' work on the platform seems to be unsystematic due to technical problems and to the shortage of training offered to professors," he added. The interviewees also reported the need for the creation of local platforms to lessen the impact of Western language platforms which may influence students' cultures and values through cultural shifts and evasion. R'boul and El Amrani (2024) in this context argued that Morocco should rather make its education more glocal by decolonizing teaching strategies and tools from all Western cultural dominance that are imbedded in its tools.

Yet, despite these imperfections recorded in the reform, the interviewees still perceive it as a catalyst for the development of English in education and society. Roughly, all of them agreed that the reform would surely serve English to flourish in education and to modernise it. "The adoption of English makes both students and professors more exposed to digital communication and modern ways of self-learning," said interviewee 1. Finally, the interviewees believed that the current promotion of English status in the country, in general, and education, in particular, is natural and has nothing to do with any foreign political influence, as conspiracists would argue. They thought that its wide use in various sectors, particularly social media, makes it a loved language for new generations. Besides, the interviewees also showed a positive thought on the bilingual use of French and English at university. They argued that both languages are required for education. "We need English for scientific research but French should also be kept given our historical relationship with France", reported interviewee 10. "The full radical shift to English might jeopardize the education outcomes for both students and professors," he added. Advocates of English, however, did not accept this view, as they regarded French a dead language and a barrier for the development of education standards in the country. "Our shift to English is a necessity to liberate our education from the French colonial legacy and to benefit from the development in scientific research of the Anglophone industrial countries," replied interviewee 3.

In brief, the above responses showed that professors were positive to the importance of English as a technical language for the progress of both education and scientific research. They advocated the current reform, which reinforces English use in higher education, and foresaw its positive consequences on their future career. They all agreed that English promotion in the current academic reform reflects its natural development in all vital sectors in the country and has no colonial overtone, as conspiracists thought. The interviewees also favoured bilingual education and recommended the usage of both French and English at university due to the new horizons they both open to students in research and education.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings reveal that English is rapidly creeping into Moroccan universities. There is a strong tendency among both professors and students to learn English and use it as a means of instruction. Although professors still have some difficulties using it in instructing their science subjects, they keep encouraging their students to use it in doing research and delivering their presentations. Besides, students seem more influenced by English than their professors do, given their rate of exposure to it in private schools, social media and cinema.

However, the wide use of French in science and technical universities still impedes the progress of English as a medium of instruction. Professors are more influenced by French and refuse its substitution by English despite their belief in its instrumentality and dominance in scientific research. They also recommend the use of both languages as media of instruction in science and technical universities.

It is also remarkable that neither students nor professors perceive English development in education as the outcome of a linguistic stratagem used by powerful Anglophone countries to dominate the Moroccan education system according to their benefits, as conspiracists would think. The respondents rather go for the theory of the natural evolution of English because of its growing use in different vital sectors in the country. In this vein, Gordin (2015) claimed that “the global promulgation of English did not materialize abruptly; it is the culmination of a protracted process of development and evolution” (Gordin, 2015, as cited in Zeng, 2024, p. 2). This attitude seems quite logical given the absence of any direct control of Anglophone countries of Moroccan education and political spheres, and the fact that English “uniquely comes to be accepted as the symbol of modern technologically advanced society” (Bekou & Ben Mhamed, 2024).

However, the respondents’ general positive view on English barely accounts for the fact that a blind adoption of a new powerful Western language might worsen the status of education system, which is still fighting to free itself from the French yoke. The epistemic dominance of knowledge production of English might leave no room for post-colonial countries, including Morocco, to rebuild their education systems based on their values and national principles (R’boul, 2022). The adoption of English, with its culture and mode of thinking package, will play a critical role in reshaping all peripheral countries in Africa and subdue their cultural values through cultural assimilation and hegemony. Even the use of new digital platforms to teach the language can be detrimental to local cultures. The images and lessons they provide mimic a Western environment, which has nothing to do with students’ identity, life style and culture. Professors, together with education actors, can only solve this issue by decolonizing English from its ideological Western dependency and using it in a way that fully respect local cultures.

Bouziane (2025) argued that no scientific research has ever proved the link between the use of a particular language and the economic and social development of a country. Of course, English may ease access to rich scientific resources and contact with powerful economic countries, but using it as a medium of science instruction might be detrimental to local languages and cultures, particularly that the country is still struggling with French dominance. English, therefore, can be instructed as a foreign language so as not to complicate the task for both students and professors because neither financial nor human resources are sufficient to use it as a means of science instruction. Besides, the attitudes of professors show a clear shortage of training offered to them in English by the ministry of higher education in order to make them capable to teach their subjects in English. This has also an influence on their



scientific research, for both ministers Lahsen Daoudi and Saaid Amzazi believed that professors have problems publishing in high impact journals due to their weak mastery of English, hence the low rate of Moroccan universities in world ranks. The recent report of the Times Higher Education rate of world best universities in 2025 showed that the polytechnic university of Mohammed V was rated 500 in the world among 2000 universities of 115 country. This issue could be resolved by looking for partnerships with the British council and American institutes to offer pre-service trainings to professors before being appointed in universities.

The literature also shows that there is a lack of consistency in Moroccan ministers' visions regarding the implementation of languages in higher education. The rapid change of ministers in every government reshuffle causes various interruptions in the reform, including English implementation in all higher education levels. Students and professors get confused in front of the bulk of changes they are introduced to following the shift in visions of each minister. Despite the existence of the Higher Council of Education, which evaluates the quality of education and offers ministers recommendations to improve education standards, it remains only an advisory body. The Higher Council of Education should rather have autonomous authority to watch over ministers' decisions regarding education reforms in a way that adapt visions or, at least, preserve consistency in their implementation. The rapid shift from the LMD (Licence-Master-Doctorate) to the Bachelor system through a more technical education reform had a negative impact on a wide generation of students and professors, who were somehow confused within these hesitant projects. Jaida and Haoucha (2025) pointed out that "reforms attempts have failed partly due to imported models being replicated without incorporating Morocco's unique complexities." (p. 469). Reforms should be well studied and pilot-tested before being implemented in all universities. This would at least save efforts and reduce expenses that emanate from hasty decisions to officially implement English in higher education.

Last but not least, the access to English at university should be equal to all students regardless of their regions and social belonging. The regional rate of English Proficiency Index in Moroccan universities showed that students who live in the capital and central Morocco are much better than their mates from peripheral zones (2M.ma, 2025). This is due to the number of private English institutes they have access to and to the exchange programs they are offered by their universities. The ministry should encourage professors to make partnerships with Anglophone universities and institutes to create their branches inside universities and increase exchange programs for the benefit of all students and professors. The ministry also should recruit more professors of English to meet the high need inside universities. One professor per five hundred students is anti-pedagogic. English has to be taught in small groups, not large ones of 120 students. In short, without sufficient resources to implement the current reform on the real ground, any debate on its efficiency would be just a waste of time.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the study offers a clear insight into the factors that led to the improvement of English in Moroccan universities. It shows that there is a common positive attitude towards English as a scientific language that helps open students to new resources of knowledge and prepare them for a complex future. Both students and professors play a significant role in the spread of the language in education by giving it priority in learning and research. This general proclivity to learn English seems natural and logical given the



benefits English offers students and professors in academic, scientific, professional and social spheres. It reflects the strategies used by the Ministry of Higher education to modernize education and open students to new horizons of knowledge within a healthy-natural climate that is free from any kind of hegemony or impact from Western states. Moreover, students seem more influenced by English culture than their professors due to their frequent exposure to the language in classrooms and outside through language platforms, social media and cinema. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the vision of current reforms and the existing resources are not enough to implement English in all levels of education and to reach students in all regions. Besides, the adoption of English as a medium of instruction is still struggling with the hegemony of French at least at the present time. Whether English will take over French or not in higher education in the future will depend on resources, attitudes and geopolitical relations of the Anglophone world with the Moroccan government.

AKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported by the LARGESS Laboratory at the Faculty of Legal, Economics and Social Sciences in El Jadida, Morocco. The author would like to thank Professor Dounia Rabhi for providing access to the specialized laboratory equipment at the faculty and for her invaluable advice regarding statistical analysis. The paper is dedicated to the memory of Professor Mohamed Mellouk, whose profound insights on Moroccan language policy laid the foundation for this research. He is deeply missed by colleagues and students alike.

REFERENCES

- Al-Kahtany, A., & Alhamami, M. (2022). Linguistic Hegemony and English in Higher Education. *Sustainable Multilingualism*, 20(1), 1845. <https://doi.org/10.2478/sm-2022-0002>
- Ammon, U. (2003). The international standing of the German language. In J. Maurais & M. A. Morris (Eds.), *Languages in a Globalising World* (pp. 231-249). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511613739.015>
- Baaqili, M., & Ed-dali, R. (2024). The Escalation of English in Morocco: From the Blue to the Breakthrough. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 11(10), 124-140. <http://dx.doi.org/10.46827/ejes.v11i10.5558>
- Bekou, A., & Ben Mhamed, M. (2023). The Rise of English in Morocco and the Question of Identity: Ibn Tofail University Students as a Case Study. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 5(4), 95-110. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v5i4.1369>
- Belhiah, H. (2020). English as a global language in Morocco: A qualitative study of students' motivations for studying English. In H. Belhiah, I. Zeddari, N. Amrous, J. Bahmad & N. Bejjit (Eds.), *English Language Teaching in Moroccan Higher Education* (pp. 33-48). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3805-6_3



- Belhiah, H., & Abilkassem, A. (2016). English as a Medium of Instruction in Moroccan Higher Education. *Arab World English Journal*, (December), ASELS Annual Conference Proceedings. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2895569>
- Belhiah, H., Bejjit, N., Bahmad, J., Zeddari, I., & Amrous, N. (2020). English Language Teaching in Moroccan Higher Education. In H. Belhiah, I. Zeddari, N. Amrous, J. Bahmad & N. Bejjit (Eds.), *English Language Teaching in Moroccan Higher Education* (pp. 1-10). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3805-6_1
- Bouziane, A. (2025). The Role of English in Morocco: Challenges and Prospects for Policy and Implementation. In *Language Education Policy Conference*. April 30th 2025, El Jadida, Morocco.
- British Council. (2021, April). *Shift to English in Morocco*. [https://www.britishcouncil.ma/sites/default/files/shift to english in morocco 16 042021 v2.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.ma/sites/default/files/shift%20to%20english%20in%20morocco%2016042021_v2.pdf)
- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Domingues, V. (2021). Beyond English language. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 5, 1567. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-021-01596-9>
- El Kirat, Y., Hajjam, M., & Blila, S. (2010). Student's Attitudes towards the Language in use in Morocco: the case of the Faculty of Letters-Rabat. In Yamina El Kirat (Ed.), *Globalization and mother tongues in Africa: between exclusion, threat of loss or death and revival and maintenance measures* (pp. 333-349). Editions & Impressions Bouregreg.
- Errihani, M. (2017). English Education Policy and Practice in Morocco. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa* (Vol. 13, pp. 115-131). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-46778-8_8
- Ferguson, G. (2006). *Language Planning and Education*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Gordin, M. D. (2015). *Scientific Babel: how science was done before and after global English*. Chicago University Press.
- Hilili, M. (2003, June 18th). Changing Tides: The Rise of English over French Among Morocco's Youth. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/@mohammed.hilili/the-rise-of-english-over-french-among-moroccos-youth-16f8a46d607d>
- Jaida, Fz., & Haoucha, M. (2025). Navigating Morocco's Public Higher Education Landscape: Characteristics, Endeavors & Setbacks. *African Scientific Journal*, 3(28), 452-474. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14883387>
- Jebbour, M. (2021). English language teaching in Morocco: A focus on the English department. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 26(1), 103-115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2019.1681267>
- Kangas, S. T. (2006). Language Policy and Linguistic Human Rights. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *An Introduction to Language Policy: Theory and Method* (p. 383). Blackwell.
- Lai, M. L. (2019). English linguistic neo-imperialism – a case of Hong Kong. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 42(4), 398-412. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1702667>

- Lobatón, J. C. G. (2012). Language learners' identities in EFL settings: Resistance and power through discourse. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, 14(1), 60-76. http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0123-46412012000100005
- Lukianenko, N. (2024). Language and power: linguistic imperialism. *International Science Journal of Education and Linguistics*, 3(5), 41-49. <https://doi.org/10.46299/i.isjel.20240305.06>
- Mackenzie, L. (2021). Linguistic imperialism, English, and development: implications for Colombia. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 23(2), 137-156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2021.1939977>
- Ouakrime, M. (2016). *Issues in Language Teaching and Learning for University Students: An Anthology*. Publications of the Faculty of Arts & Human Sciences, Dhar El Mehraz.
- Phillipson, R., & Kangas, S. T. (2022). Communicating in Global English: Promoting Linguistic Human Rights or Complicit with Linguicism and Linguistic Imperialism. In Y. Miike & J. Yin (Eds.), *The Handbook of Global Interventions in Communication Theory* (pp. 425-439). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003043348-32>
- Phillipson, R., & Rose, H. (2025). Linguistic Imperialism and World Englishes. In K. Bolton (Ed.), *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of World Englishes* (pp. 1-8). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119518297.ewoe00044>
- R'boul, H. (2020). Re-imagining intercultural communication dynamics in TESOL: Culture/interculturality. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 14(2), 177-188. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-03-2020-0016>
- R'boul, H. (2022). The spread of English in Morocco: Examining university students' language ontologies. *English Today*, 38(2), 72-79. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078420000449>
- R'boul, H., & El Amrani, A. (2024). Education for emancipation and disrupting colonial legacies in Morocco. In A. E. Lopez & H. Singh (Eds.), *Decolonizing educational knowledge: International perspectives and contestations* (pp. 201-216). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-55688-3_12
- Sadiqi, F. (1991). The Spread of English in Morocco. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 87, 99-114.
- Times Higher Education (2026). <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/university-mohammed-vi-polytechnic>
- Wright, S. (2004). *Language Policy and Language Planning*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Yongqi Gu, P. (2016). Questionnaires in language teaching research. *Language Teaching Research*, 20(5), 567-570. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168816664001>
- Zeng, J., Ponce, A. R., & Li, Y. (2023). English linguistic neo-imperialism in the era of globalization: A conceptual viewpoint. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1149471. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1149471>



- Zeng, J., & Yang, J. (2024). English language hegemony: retrospect and prospect. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11, 317. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-02821-z>
- Zouhir, A. (2007). The impact of globalization on Moroccan language situation and policy. *Journal of the African Professors Association*, 41-60.
- 2M.ma Morocco state-controlled media. (2025, November 21th). *Morocco leads North Africa in English Proficiency Index*. https://web.facebook.com/2m.official/posts/morocco-ranked-68th-worldwide-in-the-2025-english-proficiency-index-released-by-/1387058212789624/?_rdc=1&_rdr#

*

Received: October 22, 2025

Preliminary Editorial Review: November 25, 2025

Revisions Required: April 20, 2026

Minor Revisions Required: May 11, 2026

Accepted: May 19, 2026

Published online: June 30, 2026

