

English Education Policy and Practice in Morocco

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Abstract The debate about which language is best suited to take on the role of the first foreign language and language of education in Morocco is in full force these days. The policy of Arabization, which many blame for the current education crisis in Morocco, has failed to replace French as the linguistic medium of science and technology in tertiary education and as a result has produced high school students who are unable to function in any foreign language upon graduation. The 1999 National Charter of Education and the 2009 Emergency Program have been attempts to come to the rescue through the proposals of several reforms to the system of education as a whole, including the introduction of another foreign language – for the teaching of science and technology – on an already saturated linguistic scene. The question is which foreign language is it going to be: French, which represents continuity, or English, which provides access to international communication and economic development? All indications point to a language shift towards English. What remains to be seen are the steps the government will take to guarantee the success of this new venture, especially after the failures of recent policies meant to salvage the Moroccan educational system from total ruin.

Keywords Morocco • English • Arabization • Education • Language

1 Introduction

Je considère que ceux qui ne cessent d'appeler à l'arabisation ne sont pas encore libérées car leur esprit est encore bourré d'infériorité [...] Le fait que je parle la langue française – et j'aurais aimé parler d'autres langues – ne signifie pas que je suis encore sous le Protectorat des Français. (Late King Hassan II)

Moroccans are typically known to be gifted speakers and learners of foreign languages, especially when compared to other Arabs in the MENA region. Such a claim may not be supported by much empirical evidence, but there are certainly

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historical events and facts to support it. Morocco's recent history has been marked by several encounters with foreign linguistic cultures that have left their marks on the Moroccan linguistic landscape (Laroui 1977). Such encounters account not only for the openness of Moroccans onto other cultures (Ibn Khaldoun 2004) due to its close proximity to Europe, but more importantly for their ability to absorb and adapt many of these foreign cultures' linguistic traditions, hence the appreciation, ease, and effortlessness with which they speak and learn foreign languages (Gellner 1969; Grandguillaume 1991).

The average educated Moroccan will speak at least one foreign language – typically French – in addition to the mother tongues, Moroccan Arabic (Darija) and/or Berber (Tamazight) and Standard Arabic. And due to the proximity of the Northern part of Morocco to Spain and the influence of Spanish culture on these provinces, Moroccans from the northern regions will typically also speak Spanish in addition to the languages mentioned above. Therefore, the culture of speaking at least one foreign language in addition to the mother tongues is expected of all educated Moroccans to the point where education and socio-cultural capital can be based on one's proficiency in a foreign language(s).

The validation of the importance of mastering foreign languages came in 1999 in the form of the National Charter of Education Kingdom of Morocco (MEN 1999). Article 100 of the Charter stresses the, “renforcement et perfectionnement de l'enseignement de la langue arabe, diversification des langues d'enseignement des sciences et des technologies, et ouverture sur le Tamazight” (www.men.gov.ma). (Strengthening and improving the teaching of Arabic, diversifying the languages for teaching science and technology, and openness to Tamazight.)

“Strengthening and improving the teaching of Arabic” has always been the goal of Moroccan language policy, so there is nothing new here in terms of language planning. What is new, however, is the push to diversify the languages used for teaching science and technology, although the foreign language(s) to be adopted for teaching these subjects remains shrouded in mystery and ambiguity. The implicit message in the Charter is the attempt to revert to French and possibly English as the mediums for teaching these subjects, something that Arabic has not been able to accomplish at the tertiary level. The Charter even goes further as to suggest that French may not be the only language used in science and technology, and the implication here is that English might be taking over.

The move to promote the teaching and learning of English both as a language and as a means teaching in tertiary education has already been in place since the 1995 inauguration of Alakhawayn University, the first Moroccan institution to adopt English as its medium of instruction. Whatever the case may be, there seems to be an implicit recognition that the policy of Arabization has failed, and that a return to bilingualism is a necessary course of action to guarantee that in the global village, Morocco is not left behind (King Mohammed VI's speech, August 20, 2013).

2 Linguistic Landscape in Morocco

2.1 Languages of Morocco

2.1.1 Arabic

Arabic is dubbed the official language of Morocco. But the question is, “which Arabic?” Is it Classical Arabic, the language of the Qur’an and a great body of literary and religious texts? Is it *Darija* (Moroccan Arabic vernacular), which is the mother tongue of all Moroccans of Arab ancestry? Or is it Modern Standard Arabic, a type of modernized, neoclassical Arabic used in schooling and the media? Even though the type of Arabic considered to be the official language is not made precise, it is assumed to be a hybrid of Classical Arabic and the so-called Modern Standard Arabic. Nevertheless, no Moroccan can claim Classical or Modern Standard Arabic to be his or her mother tongue; it is a language to which Moroccans are introduced only through schooling. As such, Arabic is marked by diglossia wherein Vernacular Arabic (*Darija*) is the Low variety, while the highly codified Classical/Standard Arabic assumes the High variety label (Ferguson 1959; Wagner 1993).

Standard Arabic is taught as a language throughout elementary and secondary education, in addition to its being the medium for teaching literature, religion, history, etc. In the last three decades, however, the policy of Arabization, whose goal was to institute Arabic as the dominant language on Morocco’s multilingual scene, became so predominant in primary and secondary education to the point where subjects such as math and science, which used to be taught in French were now taught in Arabic. However, the policy of Arabization failed to make Arabic the medium of instruction at the tertiary level. The failure of Arabization at the tertiary level has resulted in lower standards of achievement at the Moroccan university, as students who had gone through the Arabized system in high school all of a sudden found themselves deficient in French, the medium for teaching scientific and technological subjects. A direct outcome of the failed policy of Arabization is the low education standards in the public school and university in Morocco. This situation has resulted in parents actively seeking private institutions where French, and sometime English, is the medium of instruction.

2.1.2 French

French used to be the official language up until Morocco’s independence in 1956. Although it holds no official status in Morocco, French continues to enjoy widespread prestige and use in the business, finance, science, and technology sectors; it is also an important language for the cultural and regional ties that it represents for the government and elites of Morocco. French is a controversial language, however, because it represents a legacy of colonialism. Because of this colonial legacy, many political groups, namely Istiqlal Party (Independence Party), pushed for the policy

of Arabization with the goal and hope of eliminating French from the socio-linguistic scene of Morocco immediately after Morocco's independence. Arabization never succeeded in achieving its stated goal of eliminating French and making Arabic the sole language in use in Morocco, and to this day French continues to enjoy a prominent and powerful position on the socio-economic scene in Morocco thanks to the economic and cultural capital it engenders (Errihani 2008).

In the public school system, Moroccan students are introduced to French in the 2nd grade of elementary education, and the number of hours taught at every grade varies between 6 and 8 a week. This is because "regional Academies for Education and Training in each of the 16 administrative regions of Morocco have been charged with, among other things, developing up to 30% of the curriculum for their respective regions to help ensure that these curricula are locally relevant" (PIRLS 2011, p. 408).

In private schools, French plays a bigger role, for children are introduced to the French language in pre-school. The number of hours taught varies depending on the type of school, but it is generally much higher than the number of hours taught in public schools. Private schools have thus realized the importance of using French as a medium of instruction early on to lure parents who are wary of sending their children to public schools, where Arabic is primary the medium of instruction, and where French instruction is typically poor.

2.1.3 Berber

As of July 1, 2011, Berber, also known as *Tamazight*, became the second official language of Morocco. Berber, with its three varieties – Tarifit, Tashelhit, and Tamazight – is the mother tongue of about 50% of Moroccans (www.Berberworld.org), most of whom also speak the Moroccan Vernacular (Darija) as another native language. Until July 1, 2011, Berber had no official status in Morocco, although the royal decree of 2001 required that this language be taught to all elementary school children in an effort to maintain and promote the Berber language and culture of Morocco as they are integral parts of the Moroccan identity (www.ircam.ma). The teaching of Berber in elementary schools implies introducing it as another foreign language, in addition to Standard Arabic and French. The Ministry of Education's initial goal for having Berber taught to every Moroccan child by the year 2011 has proven to be a myth due to the many issues that this language policy ran into (Errihani 2013), which are beyond the scope of this chapter to detail.

2.1.4 English

English as a foreign language in Morocco has recently been gaining ground steadily. There are many educators and leaders in the private sector who have been calling for strengthening and promoting the teaching of English at the expense of French because of the global reach that English possesses. In the fall of 2013 alone, two

major conferences have been organized for this specific purpose, one in Casablanca: Colloque International sur l'Éducation: Le Chemin de la Réussite 4–5 Octobre 2013 (International Symposium on Education: the Road to Success 4–5 October 2013). The other conference took place in Rabat and was more specific and outspoken about its orientation, which is evident from its title: “Strengthening the Position of English in Morocco for Development 21 December 2013.” The program for this conference states that

The Conference hopes to provide what is perhaps the first opportunity to engage and listen to language experts, business people, service industry actors, decision makers, education officials and members of the public as they debate and make their cases about the foreign languages they would want to adopt and use as they trade and communicate with the rest of the world.¹

Therefore, one notices that the linguistic situation in Morocco is laying the ground for welcoming the English language as a critical tool to assist in the reform of the educational system in Morocco. English now even serves as the medium of instruction in the most prestigious university in the country: Al-Akhawayn University (www.aui.ma). However, Like French, English holds no official status, but unlike French, it is a neutral language that carries no imperialistic undertones. At this time, Moroccan students are introduced to English in the 9th grade of secondary education, although the Charter of National Education mentions its introduction in primary education, which is still to take place. In private schools, however, English is no introduced earlier, although there seems to be no consensus among the private school sector as to what grade to introduce students to language or how many hours of instruction a week students should receive.

3 Policy of Arabization and Its Effects on Foreign Language Instruction in Morocco

Morocco is a country whose sociolinguistic reality is marked by bilingualism, diglossia, and several languages and dialects spoken in everyday interactions. The official languages in Morocco are Arabic and Berber, but Arabization has been the official policy since the independence of Morocco in 1956. In fact, post-independence Moroccan education policy was based on 4 principles: Moroccanization of education, generalization of education, Arabization of education, and a free education for all.²

Arabization is the policy that has the most controversy because of how it affected education in Morocco. In an effort to do away with the remnants of colonialism, including the French language, and to unite the country linguistically and culturally,

¹ *Strengthening the Position of English in Morocco for Development*. (21 December 2013). Rabat, Morocco: Conference program.

² Interview with Dr. Boulouz on www.hespress.ma. Retrieved September 27, 2013.

Morocco adopted the “One language – one nation” slogan as a springboard for its nation-building project. Therefore, the imposition of Arabic as the sole national and official language in the country gained popularity, especially among the nationalists at the time. Such a policy was viewed as a necessary tool for revamping the Moroccan national identity and building the political and cultural infrastructure of the newly independent nation. This policy has now proven to be a myth and probably a major cause of the decline of the Moroccan system of education, especially in the last two decades (King Mohammed VI, August 20, 2013).

4 Effect of Major Educational Reforms (1999 and 2009–2012) on the Teaching of English

The 1999 Moroccan National Charter of Education has dubbed the 2000–2009 decade the *National Decade of Education*. Education is deemed the second most important priority for the government after the country’s territorial integrity, which became a most crucial issue in Moroccan politics ever since Spain relinquished its hold on the Western Sahara, which was reclaimed by Morocco in 1975. Due to the importance given to education, the government has “pledged all the resources necessary to reform and develop the education sector in order to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century” (National Charter of Education: Articles 20 and 21).

The 1999 National Charter of Education is a large-scale, inclusive project that addresses the whole system of education and proposes detailed and well-thought out plans on how to go about implementing all the changes and reforms put forward. The Charter is a rather long and detailed document of 157 articles providing exhaustive and comprehensive steps about implementing the reform of the educational system in Morocco. It has more global goals for the entire system of education, including, among other things, making elementary and secondary education mandatory for all Moroccan students until the age of fifteen, setting up new guidelines for required courses and exit exams for each level in the educational system, as well as proposing different languages to be adopted in teaching each subject, from elementary school through tertiary education.

In terms of the Charter’s linguistic propositions, one will notice early on that one of its grand goals is to repeatedly underscore the importance of strengthening the teaching of the Arabic language (both spoken and written) and encourage its use in all different domains of Moroccan society, as well as in science and technology, a goal that should, according to the Charter, constitute in effect a national objective. The Charter also reiterates that the Arabic language is mandatory for all Moroccan students in all educational institutions, both public and private. This statement seems to be a clear admonition to any private institution that has opted to use French or English only as the medium of instruction rather than Arabic. The message is that every educational institution in Morocco is required to teach the Arabic language to Moroccan students, regardless of whether it uses French or English as its principal

medium of instruction. At the time this charter emerged, this requirement seemed to fly in the face of that segment of Moroccans who are of Berber descent, especially now that their language has been recognized as a second official language besides Arabic. As such, the Charter has been viewed by some as a vehicle for the pan-Arabists and Islamists to propagate their narrow ideologies (Assid 2000).

The Charter goes on to argue that mastering the oral and written expression of the Arabic language shall be made accessible to every Moroccan student. In addition to being proficient in Arabic, Moroccans are also called upon to be open and receptive to other world languages, especially those deemed instrumental in today's global economy; the Charter does not specify which ones, however. French, for example, which is considered by almost everyone in Morocco to be the country's second language, is never mentioned in this Charter, nor is English, which the state seems to have decided to promote at the secondary and tertiary levels of education.

The Charter indicates that it intends to introduce two foreign languages in elementary school, the first starting in the second grade and the second at the fifth grade level. The Charter will not mention any foreign language by name, however. This unwillingness to admit that Morocco is a multilingual country where local as well as foreign languages are alive and in daily competition can be explained by the strong hold that the policy of Arabization still has on the minds of pan-Arabist language planners, so much so that to mention any other language in an official document besides Arabic is tantamount to linguistic apostasy.

To put this Charter's new propositions in perspective, here is a summary of the proposed linguistic changes for elementary school children that the 1999 put forth: Students in the first five years of primary education are introduced to Modern Standard Arabic, which is a new language with a new script for all Moroccans, despite being related to Moroccan Arabic Vernacular.³ Additionally, students are introduced to two different foreign languages, which are never specified in the Charter.

As of 2001 – two years after the advent of the Charter, a new language policy that recognized the Berber language and culture has instituted the Berber language as yet another mandatory language for all children in elementary schools, regardless of their ethnic or linguistic background. This language policy went into effect in 2003 and was expected to be generalized across all schools in the nation by the year 2011; however, the implementation of this policy has so far not yielded the desired outcome. Therefore, when this new policy is taken into account, the Charter expects students in elementary schools to learn four different languages with three different writing systems: Arabic, Latin, and Tifinagh⁴ (the Berber script). Once again, the foreign languages that are supposedly going to be introduced at the elementary school level are not specified in the Charter, and one can only assume they are French and English.

³Moroccan Arabic Vernacular is a spoken language only.

⁴Tifinagh is a Berber script that has no resemblance to Latin or Arabic. It is a script that apparently was used by the Berbers 5000 years ago. Berber activists opted for this script for the teaching of Berber instead of the Arabic or Latin as a political solution to a linguistic problem.

Although everyone would agree that children have an unmatched ability to acquire new languages at an early age (Chomsky 2006; Crystal 1989; Clark 2003), introducing them to four different languages with three distinct writing systems, while simultaneously stressing the importance of strengthening the Arabic medium, seems to be an over-zealous and an unrealistic goal to achieve on many levels: in terms of planning, pedagogy, human resources, teacher training, etc. The Charter constantly reiterates that acquiring a solid foundation in the Arabic language should be the main focus of primary education. One wonders how this can be achieved when students are introduced to three additional languages in addition to Arabic.

One major difference between previous language policies that stressed the exclusive use of Arabic and the 1999 Charter is that the latter for the first time seems to suggest that scientific and technological subjects in higher education may be taught either in Arabic or in a foreign language. This in itself is an implicit recognition of the failure of the Arabization process to remove French from the linguistic scene in Morocco. In other words, the idea behind this change in policy is that Arabic has never been able to replace French as a medium of instruction of science and technology in higher education, and the state seems to have made peace with this reality, albeit quietly. Nonetheless, this discreet admission is not meant as a final submission to the ascendancy of French in higher education, since the Charter also proposes the progressive introduction of Arabic as a medium of instruction of scientific and technological subjects in higher education too, which only adds more confusion to an already saturated linguistic scene. Thus, in addition to calling for the introduction of Arabic as a medium of instruction in higher education, the Charter also suggests the introduction of a foreign language “*offrant la meilleure performance scientifique et la plus grande facilité de communication*” (offering the best scientific performance and the most ease in communication” (National Charter of Education, article 114). This foreign language is not named in the Charter but can only be assumed to be French, which is not something new. If this foreign language ends up being English, then higher education in Morocco would be following a completely new orientation altogether.

The fact that the Charter calls for the introduction of Arabic at the tertiary level in addition to maintaining French or introducing English – something left ambiguous – aims at fulfilling a promise to all those students who were affected by Arabization in secondary school only to find themselves required to learn or relearn French to be able to study scientific subjects at the university. Thus, creating a linguistic continuum and bridging the linguistic gap between secondary and tertiary education can only be described as a practical and sensible plan. Providing high school students with linguistic choices can provide a more or less a level field of opportunity for everyone. Nonetheless, the attempt to re-introduce Arabic as a means of instruction in higher education remains ambiguous, especially after the obvious failure of the previous policy of Arabization to achieve that goal. One therefore wonders if this talk about strengthening the role of Arabic in higher education is nothing short of a face-saving measure and a way of paying lip service to the initial policy of Arabization without openly admitting its failure, especially since as

of the end 2013, the plan to introduce Arabic in higher education as a medium for teaching science and technology has not materialized.

Moroccan language policy has historically been characterized by ambivalence (Miller 2006), and this confusing ambivalence seems to be the hallmark of the Charter's articles that deal directly with language planning. On the one hand, the Charter insists on the importance of acquiring foreign languages, while at the same time it stresses the importance of promoting and strengthening Arabic at all levels of the educational system, which is nothing new. In fact, this has always been the official discourse of language planners in Morocco: Arabization first, and openness towards foreign languages second, but it is always possible to provide funding and resources to both, and that is exactly why the Arabization process was not generalized in tertiary education. Still, one thing remains certain: because of its prestige and status, French is expected to continue to enjoy total supremacy in the field of science and technology in higher education, at least temporarily. In fact, Arabization has had its day on the linguistic scene in Morocco. The door has been made open to foreign languages to take on the challenge of educational reform in Morocco, whether it is French, English, or both.

Moroccans themselves are ambivalent about the role of French in the Moroccan cultural and educational scenes. Although French is seen as an extension of political and cultural imperialism, it remains indispensable in Morocco because of the prestige, cultural, economic and social capital it entails. Moroccans generally understand the need to learn French despite their hostility to the political and cultural values it may represent. Such antagonism coupled with a need to learn French might change, however, if and when English assumes a more leading role in the education sector in Morocco.

On the other hand, the new role and status that English is gaining as measured by the numbers of Moroccans who now speak it as a second language or have a working knowledge and use it on a regular basis does not depend on nostalgic or sentimental attitudes towards the British or the Americans. It is rather the result of the practical and concrete demand of a globalized world where English plays a leading role. Contrary to French, speaking English effectively in the Moroccan public sphere does not signify prestige or cultural capital, although its status might change in the coming decades as it becomes more widespread and gains more acceptance as not only a useful but also a prestigious language in Morocco.

5 Emergency Plan: Najah Program 2009–2012

The National Charter of Education and Training launched in 1999 was a roadmap for what was termed a “decade of education.” Unfortunately, the grand objectives and visions of this Charter were never realized due to lack of funding and coordination (www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/weekly01.asp?id=4695). In fact, the reforms identified in this charter continued to yield poor results: the adult literacy rates, especially among females, have remained static; the male-to-female education

ratios continue to be a challenge; the graduation rates continue to be dismal, etc. As a result, Morocco received very low grades for its mediocre system of education (www.worldbank.com/ma), which prompted the Moroccan government to cook up yet another plan, conveniently called the Emergency Plan, Najah 2009–2012 (the Arabic term, Najah, stands for success). “The implicit aim of this program is to help Morocco make significant strides toward meeting some of its UN Millennium Development Goals by 2015” (PIRLS 2011).

This Program is also meant to boost the 1999 Charter by increasing funding to the education sector in Morocco with the primary goals of making elementary education universal and increasing the adult literacy rate. In terms of linguistic changes or improvements, there seems to be no change in policy between the 1999 Charter and the Emergency Program. Nonetheless, despite the lack of any tangible realizations of the Charter or the Emergency Program, the Ministry of Education’s latest report of 2011 continues to paint an unrealistically glamorous picture of the state of higher education in Morocco (http://www.enssup.gov.ma/enssup1/doc_site/documents/Programme_urgence/Programme_urgence2009-2012/Bilan_miparcours.pdf).

The King of Morocco’s speech of August 20, 2013 came to deconstruct this rosy picture as the reality on the ground points to no substantial gains or accomplishments in the state of education in Morocco despite the increased funding and the rhetoric that characterizes every official report coming out of the Ministry of Education’s headquarters.⁵ The King of Morocco seems to have felt the need to interfere for the first time by openly criticizing the current government’s handling of the education sector in Morocco and indirectly accusing it for the lackluster results on the ground. The outcome of these “non-existent” reforms has therefore led the King to call for the total overhaul of the educational system (King Mohammed VI’s speech, August 20, 2013).

What has led to this catastrophic state of education, then? The linguistic medium (aka as the policy of Arabization) has played a leading role in this debacle. Prior to the implementation of this policy at the elementary and secondary levels in the 1980s and 1990s, the education system in Morocco in general produced high school students who were able to function in a minimum of two languages, and those who chose scientific and technological majors at the university level were equipped with the linguistic tools to succeed in their education and eventually compete in the job market. Currently, and because of the Arabization policy, students who study in the Moroccan public system are set up for failure at the tertiary level if they choose to specialize in science or technology simply because they have to study the same topic in a different language in which they have minimal proficiency.

⁵ See: 1. *Pour un nouveau soufflé de la réforme: Présentation du Programme “Najah 2009–2012” Rapport de synthèse. Juin 2008*

2. *Rapport National sur le Développement de l’Éducation: rapport préparé pour la conférence internationale de l’éducation 2008 sous le thème: « L’éducation pour l’Inclusion: la voie de l’avenir ».*

3. *Programme d’Urgence 2009–2012- Principales mesures prévues et éléments de bilan à mi-parcours 2008/09 – mai 2011*

The aftereffect was a consistent decline in the level of education of Moroccans who opt for public education at the tertiary level. Therefore, to say that the employment prospects for a Moroccan who graduates from a public university in Morocco are dim is an understatement, a phenomenon that has led to a mushrooming effect of private institutions that vow to use foreign languages for instruction as a means of providing equal opportunities to Moroccans who cannot afford the exorbitant French or American schools.

6 Language and Socio-economic Capital in Morocco: English vs. French (Historical and Political Implications)

Until the turn of the century, English was simply one of the three foreign languages (in addition to Spanish and German) routinely taught at the high school level in Morocco, although the state usually steered the majority of students towards the “English Option.” Arabic and French, on the other hand, were the established languages of education, with Arabic dominating the public sector and French the private sector. The linguistic status quo in Morocco experienced a transformation with the inauguration of the first private, English-medium-university in the country in 1995, which also coincided with the spread of the Internet and the role that English played as the language of technology and the World Wide Web. As a result, private schools of English, namely the British Council, AMIDEAST, and the American Language Centers, witnessed an unprecedented increase in their enrollment to a point where demand for English surpassed supply and every school director’s expectations. The number of students studying English at the American Language Center in Fez, for instance, has gone from fewer than 1000 students in the late 1980s to over 6000 students in 2010 (www.alif.org.ma).

Morocco’s system of education has always included the teaching of foreign languages as a major staple of its high school curriculum, but this system has not been able to adapt to the high demand for English instruction due to lack of human and material resources. To set an objective to teach English at the elementary and early secondary level (Charter of National Education 1999) might have been an easy objective to target, but the reality on the ground shows that such a goal is not easy to achieve due to lack of English training schools and instructors who are proficient enough in English to be able to gain entry into one of these schools.

English teacher education/preparation is not in the hands of universities in Morocco as is the case in the United States, for example. Two institutions have always been in charge of preparing future teachers of English in Morocco: the ENS and the CPR⁶ (*Ecole Normale Supérieure* and *Centre Régional Pédagogique respectivement*). Any student with a Bachelor’s degree can take the entrance exam, but only a few make the cut due to the limited number of available spots in the school. The

⁶www.ensrabat.ac.ma; www.cpr.ac.ma

ENS typically trains future high school English teachers, and the CPR is in charge of training future middle school English teachers. Therefore, before a language policy that introduces English in the school curriculum is put in motion, additional English teachers' colleges need to be put in place to prepare future English teachers. The government will also, at least initially, have to rely on foreign English instructors and teacher-trainers until a cadre of Moroccan professionals is ready to assume the responsibility of teacher training.

Additionally, the government will have to seriously reconsider its English textbook adoption policies. Until the mid-1980s, the Ministry of Education used to adopt English textbooks that were written by foreign specialists in the field of ELT and published in the U.K. and the U.S. However, after this period and with the process of Arabization in full swing and the rise of Islamization, the Ministry of Education, under pressure from more conservatives, determined that these "foreign" English textbooks were simply too laden with foreign cultural influences considered too hazardous to the young Moroccan mind.⁷ It was assumed that teaching English using foreign textbooks was tantamount to teaching about the cultural values of the textbook writers', which was antithetical to the mission of the educational system in Morocco (National Charter of Education 1999).

The Ministry of Education's official document, *English Language Guidelines for Secondary Schools: Common Core, First Year, and Second Year Baccalaureate 2007* came to lay down strategies and recommendations, and sometimes rules, on what to teach at each level of secondary school.

A good case in point is found in the section that instructs English teachers with regards to the type of writing prompts they should give their students:

Ensure that the topics are not culturally biased. Writing prompts can address relatively neutral themes, such as asking learners to describe a local monument. Alternatively, they may include more controversial topics designed to have learners to (sic) take a stand, such as learners' attitudes toward televised sit-coms in Morocco. (p.71)

According to this official document, a less "culturally biased" topic and a "relatively neutral" theme would be to describe a "local monument" or "learners' attitudes towards televised sit-coms in Morocco." Such prompts implicitly expect students to watch TV sitcoms in Arabic and write about them in English, which is contrary to every principle of language teaching (Celce-Murcia, et al. 2014; Burns and Richards 2009; Brown 2007). "Language has no independent existence, living in some sort of mystical space apart from the people who speak it" (Crystal 2003, p. 7). Any attempt to teach a language devoid of its cultural and social contexts is tantamount to robbing the learner of the richness and joy that come with learning a new language.

One could therefore argue that the Arabization process did not affect only the teaching of French in Morocco, but it did extend to how English is taught, by whom, and using what teaching methods and materials. Again, the end result is the same:

⁷See www.hespress.ma's interview with one of these conservative Arabists, Dr. Mohamed Boulouz: <http://hespress.com/interviews/89853.html>

low standards and low English proficiency levels of high school graduates, compared to those whose education was bilingual in Arabic and French prior to the 1980s.

The 1980s is a crucial decade for the education sector in Morocco: this is the decade when the Arabization policy was completed at the elementary and secondary levels; this is also the period of that witnessed the rise of conservative Islamism in Morocco. Another direct result of these strange coincidences seems to have been the flight-en-masse of all the foreign English instructors who had taught in Morocco for decades. Currently, every instructor of English in every English department and every English teacher preparation department who are on the government payroll are Moroccan. The only occasional foreign instructors in these departments are the English Language Fellows⁸ or Fulbright Scholars.⁹ The only schools that will hire foreign language instructors are private English schools, including Al-Akhawayn University. The fact that these private institutions are able to have a balance between a foreign and local language teaching staff¹⁰ usually results in students higher graduation rates and higher proficiency levels in English and therefore employment prospects, especially in the private sector. The same could not be said of those who graduate from the public university system in Morocco.

7 Major Players in Planning and Advancing the Teaching and Learning of English in Morocco

(a) The Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education in Morocco is in charge of all language education policy decisions including foreign language teaching and learning in Morocco. The Ministry of Education is a very centralized institution, although it has 16 regional branches (called academies) in the major cities and provinces of Morocco. “These branches are responsible for implementing the government’s policies and managing educational needs in their respective regions by developing up to 30 % of the curriculum for their respective regions to help ensure that these curricula are locally relevant” (PIRLS 2011, p. 408).

(b) Moroccan Association of English Teachers

Another crucial organization in the English education sector in Morocco is the Moroccan Association of English Teachers – MATE, a non-profit, non-governmental organization that consists mostly of high school teachers of English as a foreign language. MATE was created in 1979 with the goal of providing ongoing professional

⁸ See ww.elf.georgetown.edu

⁹ See cies.org

¹⁰ Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane boasts 40% of its teaching staff as foreigners – with 30 % from English-speaking countries – and the rest from Morocco.

development opportunities such as conferences and in-service training in order to help improve the quality of teaching English in Morocco.

MATE receives a great deal of material support from both the British Council and the Regional English Language Office of the American Embassy in Morocco.

(c) The British Council

The British Council assists MATE through the:

- “Organisation of a number of ELT seminars, workshops and summer schools;
- Participation of British Council professionals and experts in MATE national events through workshops and presentations;
- Enabling MATE members to participate in international ELT events and conferences;
- Assistance for newly qualified teachers through the provision of a wealth of ELT materials and resources
- Provision of free places on British Council Teaching training courses.” (<http://www.britishcouncil.org/morocco-english-mate.htm>)

(d) Regional English Language Office (RELO)

Similarly, the U.S. embassy in Morocco’s Regional English Language Office (RELO) assists MATE and the teaching of English in Morocco in general in the same way. Additionally, this office has one of the most successful English programs in Morocco: ACCESS. This program provides 2 years of English instruction to needy students, who cannot otherwise afford private language schools, in urban as well as in remote areas of the country (<http://morocco.usembassy.gov/root/pdfs/access-in-morocco-info-sheet.pdf>).

The RELO office runs other programs, such as the E-Teacher scholarship, English Language Exchange Programs, namely through the Fulbright Scholarship, wherein novice teachers of English are sent to the United States to learn about American culture while teaching Arabic to American college students. The English Language Specialist Program and the English Language Fellow Program are two other programs that regularly send a number of TESOL professionals to teach in different institutions and provide in-service training to Moroccan teachers (<http://morocco.usembassy.gov/relo.html>).

(e) The American Language Centers

The American Language Centers of Morocco are the oldest private English language institutions in the country. There are 11 centers in Morocco – mostly in large urban centers. The American Language Centers, which are private language schools run by American educators, teach EFL to Moroccans, and especially to middle and upper class children that can afford their tuition, which has more than doubled in the last 10 years due to high demand for English.

These schools employ a large number of Moroccan high school and university instructors and tend to provide teacher training in the form of national conferences and in-service training. Some of these centers, especially the one in Fez, has an

internationally respected Arabic as a Foreign Language program that attracts hundreds of American students every year. The advantage of such a program is that it houses its students with Moroccan families, which not only benefits the students but also the family members who are learning or interested in learning English.

(f) AMIDEAST

AMIDEAST is an institution that provides advising to students interested in studying in American universities. It also runs exchange programs between the United States and Morocco, but in the last decade it has started offering English language classes as well. In doing so, it has followed the American Language Centers' model and has excelled in attracting students to its new headquarters in Rabat and Casablanca.

(g) Private Moroccan English Language Schools

In addition to these foreign-run English language schools, Moroccan businessmen in particular seem to have realized the potential of this sector and have therefore embarked on launching new private school ventures, most of which include the teaching of English as a Foreign Language. Even government teachers who are still on the state payroll have entered the private language school business by setting up English, and sometimes additional language schools. And so far the state has turned a blind eye to the proliferation of these schools.

The private English language school is a not a regulated sector in Morocco; the government has largely stayed out of the private language school business primarily because it is focusing its energy on fixing its public school system. According to the BBC, (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-24017596>), Moroccan teachers of English and new graduates of English departments are also playing an important role in the spread of English by becoming more entrepreneurial in their approach to delivering English to those who are unable to afford the American Center, AMIDEAST, and the British Council. Thus, the number of English speakers in Morocco is on the rise, and how this is going to play out with the small minority of influential Moroccans who have strong and ongoing political and economic ties with France and the French language remains to be seen.

8 Conclusions and Recommendations

Language planners in Morocco may not agree on many things, but when it comes to the state of the education system, everyone seems to agree that the system is dysfunctional and needs a total overhaul, especially in terms of the linguistic tools used as mediums of instruction in primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Several attempts to address this failure have been introduced, including the 1999 National Charter of Education and Training and the 2009–2012 Education Emergency Plan. Still, both plans have failed to address the specific and concrete measures to improve the quality of education, and as a result the system continues to see high dropout

rates, low student achievement at all levels of the system, in addition to producing students who are unequipped with the linguistic, technical, and technological skills to compete on the job market.

A 2007 World Bank report on development and education in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region ranked Morocco in the 11th place out of 14 countries in the region (http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2011/downloads/P11_IR_Chapter1.pdf)

The United Nations Development Program, where education plays a primary role in how countries are ranked, put Morocco in the 130th place, out of 187 countries (http://www.pnud.org.br/atlas/ranking/IDH_global_2011.aspx). In the PIRLS's 2011 comparison of international student achievement in reading, Morocco's reading averages at the end of elementary school ranked it among the least performing countries, one position before last (http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2011/downloads/P11_IR_Chapter1.pdf).

The Moroccan government and most Moroccans are well aware of the educational crisis in the country, and the introduction of all these reforms that have unfortunately not paid off is a clear indication that the will is there to turn the education sector around. But unless the issue of foreign languages and the linguistic medium to adopt for teaching scientific and technological subjects is confronted and addressed openly and honestly, it would be hard to predict a way out of this educational conundrum.

In the midst of this chaotic educational atmosphere, English continues to gain ground on the linguistic scene in Morocco, and all indications at this time point to a strong shift in Morocco's language education policy from a focus on Arabic and French as the traditional mediums of education to English. How the state will unroll this project is anybody's guess.

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