Chapter 1
English Language Teaching in Moroccan Higher Education

Hassan Belhiah, Nourdin Bejjit, Jamal Bahmad, Ikbal Zeddari and Nourddine Amrous

Abstract This introductory chapter provides a survey of the history and current situation of English as a medium of instruction and research production in Moroccan higher education. It opens with a historical account of the diplomatic relations between Morocco and the English-speaking world. English made its entry into the Moroccan university in the 1960s, and its influence has grown apace especially in the era of globalization. The second part of the chapter outlines a series of challenges facing the departments of English in Moroccan higher education institutions. Finally, we preview the sixteen chapters in this volume, which consists of extensive and empirical studies by experienced Moroccan faculty members.

Keywords English in Morocco · Diplomacy · Moroccan university · Teacher training · Globalization

Morocco's first major documented encounter with the English-speaking world can be traced back to the thirteenth century, when King John of England (r. 1199–1216) solicited Sultan Mohamed Ennassir's (r. 1199–1213) support against France. Three centuries later, the diplomatic ties culminated in decrees issued by Sultan Abd al-Malik (r. 1575–1578) allowing English merchants to conduct their commercial activities with their Moroccan counterparts. The Moroccan victory over the Portuguese at the Battle of the Three Kings in August 1578 established the reputation of Morocco, induced European courts to solicit their friendship with the Saadis, and encouraged

H. Belhiah (✉) · N. Bejjit · J. Bahmad · I. Zeddari · N. Amrous
Mohammed V University in Rabat, Rabat, Morocco
e-mail: hbelhiah@uwalumni.com

N. Bejjit
e-mail: nbejjit@yahoo.com

J. Bahmad
e-mail: jamalbahmad@gmail.com

I. Zeddari
e-mail: ikbal.zeddari@yahoo.com

N. Amrous
e-mail: amrous10@yahoo.com

H. Belhiah et al. (eds.), *English Language Teaching in Moroccan Higher Education*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3805-6_1

Sultan Ahmed al-Mansur (r. 1578–1603) to restructure Moroccan ports and develop trade with England (Bovill, 1958). The Anglo-Moroccan relations were strengthened after the creation of the Barbary Company in London in 1585 and the exchange of envoys between Queen Elizabeth I and Sultan al-Mansur. The occupation of Tangier by the English (1661–1684) brought further awareness and contact between the Moroccans and the English. Though strained at times, diplomatic ties were never severed, and treaties that were consecutively signed over the next three centuries fostered much desired diplomatic, economic, and trade relations between Great Britain and Morocco. These details reveal the extent to which Moroccans' contact with the English people—and their language—is deeply rooted in history. British-Moroccan relations have always been vibrant and in a state of flux. In recent decades, cultural ties have been instrumental in strengthening the economic and political ones. The British Council office was first founded in Morocco in 1960 and now has centers in Rabat and Casablanca offering courses in English, information on educational opportunities in the UK, and organizes cultural events. In 2018, an education agreement was signed between the UK and Morocco to allow British schools to open in Morocco in the fall of 2019.

Across the Atlantic, Morocco's relations with the United States date back to the late eighteenth century when Sultan Sidi Muhammad Ben Abdullah signified his intention to establish diplomatic and economic ties with the United States. His overtures were part of a general policy to encourage trade with the Christian world. The Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the Kingdom of Morocco and the United States—the longest unbroken pact in the US diplomatic history and the first of its kind between the United States and an Arab, Muslim, or African state—was signed in Marrakech in 1786 and paved the ground for future military and economic relations. During World War II, Morocco was a zone for much interaction between Americans and Moroccans since the country was part of the North African Landing and Operation Torch. A decade later, US airbases were established in 1951 in the Moroccan towns of Nouasseur, Ben Guerir, Sidi Slimane, and Kenitra as part of the American military strategy to position its air force within striking distance of the Soviet Union. Morocco proved to be a strong ally in the fight against communism over the following decades.

Americans' presence seems to have had a strong effect on local populations and encouraged Moroccans to acquire good working knowledge of English. American cultural diplomacy dictated that Americans deploy every means to sustain their cultural influence in the country to combat the advance of communist ideologies that were on the rise in many newly independent countries and were perceived as a potentially menacing factor in international politics. This included exercising soft power through cultural and educational exchange opportunities, and appeasing sentiments of the Moroccan youth, who found in the American—and the liberal world at large—much of what they had been yearning for. Language and cultural institutions were founded in the country to maintain the cordial relationship between the two countries. American Language Centers were created in the late 1950s and multiplied to 11 centers; the Peace Corps organization started its volunteering work in early 1960s;

Amideast opened its branch in Rabat in 1960; and the American schools were established in Tangier (1950), Rabat (1955), Casablanca (1973), and Marrakesh (1995), to name a few initiatives that the US governments launched and sponsored in Morocco to foster cultural links with Moroccans and a better understanding of the United States and its people.

Against this background, Moroccans seem to have grown used to—and influenced by—an Anglo-Saxon culture for which they seem to have much respect and admiration. English as a language gained popularity over the years to become one of the most important foreign languages that shape the linguistic landscape in Morocco. According to Ennaji (1991), this popularity is the result of two reasons: along with its emergence as an international language of science, technology, diplomacy, business, publishing, entertainment, and communication, English is untainted by the colonial connotations often associated with French in Moroccan collective consciousness. Sadiqi (1991) adds that educational policies of successive Moroccan governments have also been favorable to English.

In line with the general political tendencies of Morocco, educational decision makers have integrated the teaching of English in higher education since independence. Thus, by 1963, a section of English studies was started at the faculty of letters in Rabat, offering an English program leading to a *License* (BA) in English studies. Once a full-fledged department in the mid-1970s, the presence of English language in Moroccan higher education was not only secured but also desired. English departments increased from two in the early 1970s (Rabat and Fez) to six in 1984 (Casablanca, Oujda, Marrakesh, Meknes, Rabat, and Fez) while student numbers witnessed a significant rise (fewer than 500 in 1973 and over 6,000 in 1984) (Ouakrime, 1986). The strong demand for English studies led to the establishment of English departments elsewhere. Thus, by the end of the 1980s, faculties of letters in Tetouan, Kenitra, Mohammadia, Casablanca (Ben M'sik), Al Jadida, and Agadir had their own English departments. In all these faculties, English has become the most desired subject, thus surpassing Arabic and French. These departments have contributed to the spread of English by training instructors, teaching aspects of British and American cultures, and offering master and doctoral degrees in English language, literature, and the nascent cultural studies stream.

The 1990s brought further changes to Moroccan life. Following the 1987 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, Morocco started to liberalize its monetary sector and privatize state-owned enterprises. This openness translated into various aspects of Moroccan political, economic, social, and cultural life. Most relevant to us here is the change that occurred within the educational landscape as scores of private institutions began to open doors for Moroccan students. This was spearheaded by the founding of Al Akhawayn University in 1995, the first English-medium institution of higher education. Several other private higher education institutions have followed suit and provided academic programs entirely or partially through the English medium.

However, these private institutions cater to the needs of a very small portion of the Moroccan student population, often from an upper social background. The majority of Moroccan students enroll in public higher institutions. They start to learn English in their 9th grade through the next three years leading to their Baccalaureate. At the

university level, they are allocated a 38-course curriculum extended over 3 years. With the exception of the English department, which uses English as a medium of instruction, all other departments and institutions use either French or Arabic. The main challenge that students face at this level, therefore, is their inability to read references relevant to their academic field in English (Ennaji, 1991). Belhiah and Abdelatif (2016) have found that university students are strongly in favor of using English as a medium of instruction due to the necessity to read and cite indexed journal articles in their assignments and dissertations, their intention to pursue post-graduate studies abroad, and their desire to have an edge in the job market. In another study, the majority of students think that English will supersede French in the future although French will continue to hold ground in the short term (Marley, 2004). It is most likely that, overtime, the status of English in Morocco will be consolidated as English becomes indexed with prestige, socio-economic mobility, and globalization (Boukous, 2009; Buckner, 2011; Errihani, 2017).

Due in no small part to the growing reach of English as a medium of education and business across different areas of social and economic life in Morocco today, the English department at the Moroccan university is faced with enormous challenges. The first major challenge has to do with the increasing appeal of English and its study among Moroccan students. English studies is the first choice of these students even though the existing numbers of instructional faculty as well as the facilities at the disposal of the English department are not adequate to accommodate the increasing enrolment numbers. When the students graduate from high school, those among them who decide to go to university (usually after failing to get enrolled at one of the country's prestigious schools offering specialized training and a guaranteed job in medicine, business administration, computer science, journalism, and so on) head to the university with their eyes set on attractive subjects such as law, economics, and English. English studies departments have found themselves with increasing student populations enrolled in the first year (see Dellal in this book). The trouble is that the Moroccan public universities are not allowed by law to control the number of students desiring to enroll in each department. This has led to an overwhelming number of students being taught by a very limited number of professors; for example, this has reached a ratio of 587 students per teacher at Ibn Zohr University in Agadir. Only the English department in Rabat is still allowed to administer an entrance exam for its incoming students. The results are often abysmal, showing the students' lack of readiness to earn a place in the department due to their inadequate language skills. However, the university administration inflates the lists every year to make sure *enough* students are admitted regardless of their proficiency in English. Once in the department, the students' low proficiency haunts most of them, and they find it difficult to address their skill shortages in overcrowded classrooms with a very small number of instructors having to teach hundreds of students. This makes it challenging for the instructors to offer help to students on an individual basis even when it is what they need most. The problem of overcrowding and its consequences are thus a thorny issue in the side of the English department today. Unfortunately, the situation is getting worse in the absence of concrete measures by the government to tackle this issue.

The second major challenge lies in the lack of research infrastructure and incentives for faculty members in the English department. The first cause of this research drought is extrinsic. The Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education has always seen the university as a place for teaching first and foremost. Generations of Moroccan researchers hired to work as instructors of English have thus found themselves unable to fulfill their research potential and hence contribute to the development of the national university and the country at large. This unbecoming situation manifests itself today in the low rates of publishing output and conference participation among English department faculty. This is not at all the case in other departments at the Moroccan university. In fact, the departments of Arabic, philosophy, history, geography, among others, eclipse the English department by far in terms of academic publications and research output (Dahbi, 2003). This goes to show that low research capacity among English department members has intrinsic causes to do with their inability to devote enough time and attention to academic production. This problem cuts across the different generations of academic faculty, who often blame the status quo on the exhausting teaching duties in a department with high student numbers. Another explanation in this regard lies in the fact that a large number of faculty teach in the private sector to supplement their incomes, thus leaving them with hardly enough time to read widely and continuously in their fields and produce cutting-edge research. This situation also transpires in the lack of MA degrees at many English departments in Moroccan universities whereas other departments offer plenty of such programs every year.

The last pivotal challenge to the English department is a consequence of the intensive neoliberalization of the Moroccan education sector in the new century. While the market reforms introduced in the country at the behest of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund since 1983 were late and relatively slow in affecting education unlike other areas of public policy (Bahmad, 2013), the marketization of the education sector has intensified in recent years. Hundreds of private schools and over two-dozen private higher education institutions have been created with economic incentives from the government such as tax breaks and the conferring of equality of degrees between the public and private sector institutions of education. The public university, which is the traditional home of the English Department in Morocco, has thus come under pressure from the government and the general public to deliver better results even in the absence of prerequisites like adequate faculty numbers and decent running and research budgets. Another face of this competition from the private sector, which has been given preference by recent Moroccan governments in their annual budgets and strategic planning, is the changing attitude to the value of education in society. Whereas students and their parents in the past looked up to the university as a place of acquiring knowledge and learnedly discovering oneself and the world, the dominant perception today is that the university should prepare students for the job market. The university has thus been reduced to a training centre and supplier of labor for the marketplace. This has translated in the decreasing interest in core humanities subjects such as literature and philosophy, on the one hand, and, on the other, the rise of marketable subjects like communication and business English. The government has supported putting the public university,

and the English department by extension, at the service of the job market without much thought or consideration for the fundamental role of the English Department and the Moroccan university at large in educating the young in the cause of good citizenship, critical thinking, and the pursuit of social and climate justice.

It is unequivocal that the afore-mentioned challenges are likely to boggle down the English department for many long years and perhaps decades to come. Resolving these challenges will take a lot of good political will accompanied by concrete policies along with adequate budgets and training programs for academic and managerial staff at the Moroccan university. If successive governments continue to encourage the private sector while paying lip service to reforming the public education system, the future can only be uncertain both for the English department and the country's economic and political development.

The contributions in this volume cover various interdisciplinary research areas that touch upon management, teaching and learning practices of English in Moroccan higher education, especially at English departments. Each chapter in the book is a representation of an aspect of the situation of English studies at different universities in Morocco. The book is organized into five parts: (I) English: evolution and spread, (II) motivation toward English, (III) teaching practices, (IV) curricular innovations, and (V) challenges and future prospects.

In order to contextualize ELT in Moroccan higher education, Part I sets the scene for the chapters of this book with historical and empirical accounts of the status of English and English studies in Morocco. In Chap. 2, Hassan Mekouar, who played a major role in the development of English studies at the Moroccan university as a Department Chair and Dean of Faculty in Rabat in the 1970s–1980s, and then as the first president of Mohamed I University in Oujda, brings to the fore the whole gamut of reforms and legal frameworks that underlie the emergence and development of the Faculties of Letters and Humanities and English Departments more particularly since their first creation in post independence Morocco. This personal and institutional perspective touches upon issues relating to curriculum and faculty.

In the same vein, Hassan Belhiah explores the global spread of English and its ramifications on the status of English in Morocco and ELT practice within English Departments in the country (Chap. 3). Using a qualitative approach, Belhiah taps into the motivational profiles of the students opting for English as a field of study. Ten students' motivations are identified, encompassing affective, instrumental, and socio-cultural factors. The results point to the evolving status of English in Morocco and suggest implications for language policy and planning in Morocco.

In Chap. 4, Yamina El Allame El Kirat and Youssef Laaraj make a case for the LMD system (Licence, Master, Doctorate), which remains the most important reform in Moroccan higher education since 2003 when it replaced the old four-year *License* program. Through the accounts of both former and current professors and students, the researchers compare and contrast the merits and shortcomings of both systems inasmuch as they affect faculty's professional careers and students' learning.

Given the key role of motivation in language learning in general, Part II is dedicated to an analysis of various motivational issues in English language teaching and learning in Moroccan higher education. In Chap. 5, Adil Azhar explores how

Moroccan EFL learners invest their resources in learning English as an alternative cultural capital. From a critical and socio-cultural standpoint, the analysis of the student interviews situates English language learning motivation within a network of social macro-level processes that render language learning as a form of identification, recognition and voice for the language learners.

Youssef Nadri and Malika Haoucha, in Chap. 6, examine the prospects of adopting English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in Moroccan higher education. They investigate the perceptions and attitudes of economics instructors at Hassan II University in Casablanca in order to identify the perceived merits of the EMI policy and their potential needs as instructors within an EMI setting. The findings reveal that the participants hold positive attitudes toward the EMI policy, but recognize several challenges that would likely impede its effective implementation. The study ends with reflections and suggestions for EMI to be successfully implemented in tertiary education.

In Chap. 7, Nourddine Amrous takes a motivational approach to the student in his analysis of the impact of the students' ought-to self, cultural interest, and attitude to learning on their intended effort. While the study attributes a positive role to attitudes in the amount of student invested effort, significant differences emerge between typical students in the regular program and their non-traditional peers in the evening program, especially at their early stages. The chapter concludes with pedagogical recommendations and demotivational pitfalls to avoid.

In the course of the three-year license program in English studies, students are faced with the task of major selection in their senior year. Abdellatif Bouhlal examines this issue in Chap. 8 by highlighting the major personal and motivational factors involved in choosing whether to specialize in linguistics or in cultural studies. He also explores students' attitudes toward the literature stream, which seem to have recently fallen into disfavor. Emanating from the findings are a few implications concerning streaming reform implementation in English studies undergraduate programs.

A successful educational experience involves not only the students' motivation and attitude but also effective teaching practices. This is what Part III of the book addresses. It opens with Chap. 9 reporting on a study by Amina Ichbah, where she shows how teachers' beliefs and cognition in the EFL classroom have a powerful impact on their perceptions and pedagogical practices. Comparing teachers and students' perceptions revealed not only a mismatch between the two but also a lack of congruence with the effective teaching practices in the literature. Thus, the research suggests that different conceptions of effectiveness may variously inform teaching practice, an observation that warrants further research. With these conceptions in mind, the author recommends that pedagogy be negotiated between teachers and students.

In Chap. 10, Abderazak Gharafi points to some challenges that hinder the successful teaching of the translation course and impede the achievement of the course objectives. Gharafi notes that the students' poor performance in the course can be attributed to a number of factors, important among which is the status of the course in the overall curriculum, the students' negative attitudes toward translation, their low academic and linguistic profiles, as well as cross-linguistic influences due to

Arabic and French interference. These stumbling blocks seem to prevent students from developing their translation competence. Still within the realm of teaching practices, Ikbal Zeddari, in Chap. 11, considers how final-year undergraduate dissertations offer senior students a culminating learning experience to cap off their educational journey. The study documents how undergraduate supervisors view the supervision process through the lens of good students and supervisors' attributes, students' actual personal and academic profiles, and supervisory practices. A major finding the chapter highlights is that the potential the undergraduate research experience promises may be lost on the students due to their lack of research preparedness. By implication, the extent of structure and autonomy in the supervision relationship need to take into account the needs of the students concerned.

Part IV revolves around the issue of curricular innovation. Said Zaidoun's Chap. 12 is a call for the integration of community service in public higher education in general and the English studies curriculum in particular. Based on a case study at the English department (Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Ben M'sik), Zaidoun argues that community service contributes to the students' personal, academic, and professional development. In fact, not only does this learning experience benefit students, but its dividends extend to all stakeholders involved, including the institution providing service, hosting institutions and beneficiaries, partners, and the community at large.

The next Chap. 13 highlights technology's relevance to higher education and ELT. Mohamed Dellal explores the potential of a curricular digital transformation at English departments in Morocco. In response to the rising demand for English studies programs among incoming students, Dellal offers the digitization of the curriculum as an innovative form of pedagogical provision. Despite its high initial cost, it is argued that this initiative will enhance students' competencies, reduce dropout rates among students, and consequently maximize the institution's internal effectiveness and efficiency.

Part V of the book explores the challenges constraining Moroccan higher education and explores its future prospects. Hssein Khtou's Chap. 14 sheds light on the mission of the Department of English and the major challenges it faces at the level of teaching, training, and research. He argues that a more favorable environment should support learning through reduced class size, provision of teaching materials and support equipment, in addition, to pre-service and in-service pedagogical training. Improving ELT at the level of high schools will also help overcome incoming students' poor language proficiency. To ensure the intellectual growth and professional development of faculty, it is suggested that more research opportunities be provided.

In Chap. 15, Abdelghanie Ennam addresses the status of scientific research in the Moroccan national policies for higher education and explores how sustainable research progress can be achieved through a good governance model. More particularly, he investigates the perceptions and attitudes held by undergraduate and postgraduate Moroccan students toward the employability and functionality of scientific research and its methodology in the Moroccan university context. In the backdrop of the survey results, he provides an analysis of the current situation of research and takes a futurist account of the challenges lying ahead.

The book closes with Jamal Bahmad's Chap. 16, in which he attributes the crisis of the English Department and the Moroccan University to the neo-liberal model of governance that has been adopted since the 1980s. Based on empirical data, Bahmad provides a political economy analysis of the challenges facing the English Department and suggests practical measures to counter its current crisis despite the overwhelming pessimism among instructional faculty and educational policy analysts.

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Hassan Belhiah holds a Ph.D. (2005) and an MA (1998) in English from the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He is Associate Professor of English and Linguistics at Mohammed V University in Rabat. Previously, he held the positions of Chair of the Department of English Language and Literature at Mohammed V University in Rabat (2016–2018), Associate Professor of English and Education Studies at Alhosn University in Abu Dhabi, UAE (2009–2013), Assistant Professor at Al Akhawayn University in Morocco (2005–2009), and Lecturer/Teaching Assistant (1997–2005) at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Dr. Belhiah has presented his research in conferences in the UK, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Turkey, Morocco, UAE, and the United States. His publications have appeared in Classroom Discourse (Taylor & Francis), Journal of Pragmatics (Elsevier), The Modern Language Journal (Wiley), Language Policy (Springer), and Applied Linguistics (Oxford University Press).

Nourdin Bejjit is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Letters, Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco, where he teaches courses on print culture, British culture and history, and Third World literatures. He earned a Ph.D. (2009) in colonial and postcolonial book history from the Open University, and previously received his MA (2004) in national and international literatures in English from the Institute of English Studies, University of London. His research interests include book history, postcolonial literature, and travel writing.

Jamal Bahmad is Assistant Professor of Literature and Cultural Studies in the Department of English at Mohammed V University in Rabat. He earned his Ph.D. degree from the University of Stirling (UK, 2014) with a dissertation on contemporary Moroccan urban cinema. He has held a British Academy postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Leeds and, prior to that, was a research fellow at Philipps-Universität Marburg (Germany). Bahmad was most recently a research fellow at the University of Exeter on the AHRC-funded project: "Transnational Moroccan Cinema." He specializes and has published widely in the field of North African cultural studies with a focus on cinema, cities, literature, memory, and youth cultures. He recently co-edited a special issue of French Cultural Studies (SAGE, August 2017) on trash cultures in the Francophone world. Bahmad is also the co-editor of a special issue of The Moroccan Cultural Studies Journal on Moroccan cinema (November 2017). In addition to working on his first monograph on Moroccan cinema and globalization, Bahmad has recently finished a book (co-authored with Will Higbee and Florence Martin) on Moroccan transnational cinema to be published by Edinburgh University Press in 2020.

Ikbal Zeddari is Associate Professor and Chair of the English Department at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Mohammed V University in Rabat. He holds a doctorate in Applied Linguistics and TEFL. His main research interests lie in the area of second language acquisition. More particularly, he investigates lexico-semantic phenomena at the syntax–semantics interface. He is also interested in higher education pedagogy, with a focus on student experience and teaching methodology.

Nourddine Amrous is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities at Mohammed V University in Rabat. He is holder of a doctorate degree in Education (2006). From 2007 to 2009, he worked as a researcher at the Royal Institute of the Amazigh Culture, where he was mainly involved in textbook design and teacher training. In 2009, he assumed his teaching and research activities at the Department of English at the Faculty of Letters, where he continues to teach various courses such as syntax, stylistics, composition, and spoken English. His main research interests include second language acquisition, language teaching, teacher training, and theoretical linguistics, mainly phonology and syntax. Dr. Amrous has supervised a number of Master's and Doctoral theses.