

# Chapter 8

## Motivations, Attitudes, and Introspections of Moroccan Undergraduate Students Towards Major Selection



**Abdellatif Bouhlal**

**Abstract** This study aims to investigate the motivations, attitudes, and introspections of Moroccan undergraduate students towards linguistics and cultural studies as a part of their Bachelor of Arts Program at a large public university in Morocco. A total of 100 students (50 studying cultural studies and 50 from a linguistics stream) participated in the study. By applying mixed method research, questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data and introspective essays were used for qualitative data. The results of the study showed that most participants had positive attitudes towards linguistics and cultural studies courses, but literature selection was not welcomed by most participants. The findings also suggest that students' extra-curricular environment factors such as classmates, teachers' profiles, and future career embarking significantly contribute to construct positive or negative attitudes as the main motivations behind major choice: linguistics, cultural studies, or literature courses. The study offers pedagogical recommendations that should be taken into account. Decision makers and reform appliers in Morocco need to take into account students' voices in the selection process of streams to major in.

**Keywords** Motivation · Attitude · Linguistics · Cultural studies · Literature · Introspections

### 8.1 Introduction

Nowadays, it is well known that English is an international *lingua franca* (Graddol, 2010; Jenkins, 2006). At this moment of time, one can just admit this claim strongly advocated by Crystal (2003) who argues that for communication purposes, English has now become the unmarked choice. Therefore, English is viewed as a dominant language, conferring legitimacy in the academic and business realms.

To follow the trend, Moroccan universities without exception confirm this external legitimacy reflected in the teaching practices explicitly spelt out in the Moroccan

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National Reform Charter for Education and Framing to meet the surge of interests in educating Moroccan students who are mostly multilingual and equipped with many linguistic and cultural values.

Mohamed V University in Morocco is no exception in exhibiting the multi-linguistic scene in Morocco by providing students in semester five with the opportunity to major in linguistics or cultural studies and dispense with a literature stream that most students tend to consider inappropriate or old-fashioned for any real-life situations.

## 8.2 Literature Review

English has taken a prominent status in the linguistic landscape in Morocco. Early research in this area has shown how Moroccans, especially university students, see in English a window of opportunity to better their prospects on the personal and professional levels (Sadiqi, 1991). This trend has even further intensified in recent years. Buckner (2011) rightly noted that “English is becoming a new means for socio-economic competition in Morocco, by appealing to upper and lower classes alike”. While this research documented the rising importance of English among Moroccans. This does not particularly apply to students majoring in English at the university. Few studies investigated the personal motivations, lying behind students’ selection of English as a major at the university level.

A seminal study in this respect is Ouakrime (1986). In an evaluation of the experience of the English department in Fes, Morocco, he found out that four different types of motives explained students’ choices as they believed that majoring in English would nurture their quest for knowledge as well as ensure better employment opportunities for them. Their higher education experience was also considered as a source of personal empowerment although they tended to undervalue the social relationships that they may develop during their studies.

From a motivational perspective, a recent study by Omari, Moubtassime, and Ridouani (2018) gauged the motivational orientations of students belonging to the English department in two Moroccan public universities (Moulay Ismail University in Meknes (SMBAU) and Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University in Fes (MIU) and non-English major programs in one private university, Al Akhawayn University (AUI). They found out that the students in their sample exhibited higher extrinsic than intrinsic motivation. This pattern was stronger among students in SMBAU than their peers in MIU with females best exemplifying the trend. This dominance of the extrinsic motivational orientation seems to vary with context as Brigui (2017) found out that students majoring in English had at Mohamed V University in Rabat a higher intrinsic motivation with a stronger intrinsic orientation among female students.

Even for non-English majors, El Aouri and Zerhouni (2017) found out that extrinsic motivation was the least pronounced in the motivational profiles of science students at Mohamed V University in Rabat, ranking instrumental motivation first, intrinsic motivation second, integrative motivation third, and extrinsic motivation

last. The results in the Moroccan context seem to vary along institutional lines. However, it seems reasonable for English majors to exhibit a more intrinsic orientation as they invest more effort and time. The dominance of an intrinsic orientation among English majors is also reflected in the international literature (Ngo, Spooner-Lane, & Mergler, 2015).

The research reviewed above highlights the motivational factors behind the students' choice to learn English in higher education either as a major or as a course. One point that this body of research has overlooked is the motivations underlying the English major students' selection of their stream of specialization within the English studies programs (Linguistics, Literature, Cultural Studies). This chapter attempts to fill this gap by exploring why students opt for a given stream to the exclusion of the other possible alternatives. While all three streams offer promising opportunities for personal and professional developments, students in the context of the present study predominantly opt for Cultural Studies or Linguistics to a lesser extent and shun literature.

In the literature devoted to learners' motivations, attitudes, and introspective perceptions, it is argued that literature courses offer a cultural background, expand learners' language awareness, and develop interpretive abilities among them (Carter & Long, 1991; Obeidat 1996; Spack 1985; Widdowson, 1975). Other scholars like Coolie and Slater (1987) argued that literature is an enlightening and a great source for cultural enrichment, authentic material, personal involvement, and most importantly language enrichment. With these potential benefits in mind, students in different contexts prefer literature to linguistics courses, (Abu-Melhim, 2009). However, students majoring in English in Gulf universities prefer linguistics to literature courses. In an early study on the motivations of Linguistics majors in Morocco, Sadiqi (1990) found out that students opted for linguistics for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons. While they demonstrated a keen interest in Linguistics as a field of study, they showed an awareness of the potential a training in Linguistics holds for knowledge acquisition and employability.

Such a growing interest in linguistics as compared to literature represents an issue that necessitates a study of this nature because learners' attitudes and aims have been acknowledged as important factors contributing to their overall choice in major selection, be it linguistics, literature. More recently, we observe what Berlin (1996) called "the cultural studies turn" in English departments. Not only has this change refigured English studies programs but offered students an alternative to the traditional linguistics-literature dichotomy. This, of course, calls on them to reconsider their motivations and priorities in major selection.

As can be noticed in the discussion thus far, students' internal beliefs are highly significant in the process of choice making (Arnold, 1999). In fact, beliefs "act as very strong filters" of reality since the choice of the courses is influenced by many dynamic factors. The most facilitating and significant factor is the student's positive attitude. In the process of choice making, psychological factors, mainly attitudes and introspections contribute to the students' choice of the stream they would like to major in" (Arnold, 1999).

In the Moroccan higher education architecture, the English studies Licence degree is a two-phase program. In the first two years, students are trained mostly in language skills with some introductory courses in civilization, literature, linguistics, and cultural studies. In their graduation year, they choose to major in literature, linguistics, or cultural studies. Historically speaking, literature was the first stream to be established followed by linguistics. Both were equally popular among students. More recently, a cultural studies stream has been on offer with courses on Media Studies, Cultural Studies, and Popular Culture, to name but a few. With this came a noticeable trend of major selection as this major increased in popularity among students attracting more than two-thirds of senior students.

### 8.3 Research Methodology

The discussion in the previous section revealed that most of the studies in Morocco explored the learners' motivation behind learning English in general. Very few studies have investigated university students' perceptions, lying behind their major selection in their senior year. Therefore, the current research seeks to fill this void by putting the main focus on the students' voices and their beliefs concerning the implementation of linguistics, cultural studies, or literature as fields of study. To this end, this chapter focuses on addressing the following research questions:

1. What motivate students' choice of linguistics?
2. What are the students' motivations behind their choice of cultural studies?
3. If literature were offered to them, would they select it?

The current study adopted a mixed method design and follows the guidelines suggested by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) for language and linguistics-related research. It combines quantitative data through the use of a questionnaire and qualitative data, namely, students' introspections expressed through essay writing.

#### 8.3.1 *Participants*

The population sample of this study included undergraduate students enrolled in the English department at the faculty of letters and Human sciences, Mohamed V University in Rabat, Morocco. The participants who completed both the questionnaire and the essay writing task were all semester-five students of linguistics and cultural studies streams. These participants whose total number was 100 were selected using stratified random sampling; so 50 students were selected from cultural studies and 50 from linguistics courses. In this context, it should be noted that both variables of gender (males and females) and the participants' baccalaureate type (letters and sciences) have been considered in this study.

### 8.3.2 Data

As for the data, it was collected during the 2017 spring semester. The focus sample groups were informed and assured that the data collected through the questionnaire and essay writing procedures would be used for research purposes to meet their effective needs and satisfy their sought objectives both in the present and the future.

## 8.4 Results and Analysis

In what follows, background information about the participants, especially their gender and baccalaureate type variables are provided in Tables 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3, respectively.

As Table 8.1 indicates, most students who have chosen cultural studies or linguistics are females with a total of 65 (65%) while 35 (35%) are males. The positive attitudes espoused by female post-high school learners seem to be in line with the self-assertion orientation exhibited by females in other related studies in other disciplines (Yuksel & Inan, 2015).

As Table 8.2 shows, scientific baccalaureate type holders opted for cultural studies. From the sample group of 50 students, 28 (16 females, and 12 males) voiced their positive attitudes towards cultural studies. However, the case is not the same for the participants with literary background.

**Table 8.1** Participants' gender

	Female	Male
Cultural studies	30	20
Linguistics	35	15
Total	65	35

**Table 8.2** Cultural studies participants' baccalaureate type

Letters		Sciences	
Female	Male	Female	Male
10	12	16	12
Total: 22		Total: 28	

**Table 8.3** Linguistics participants' baccalaureate type

Letters		Sciences	
Female	Male	Female	Male
13	12	15	10
Total: 25		Total: 25	

However, Table 8.2 reveals the opposite situation documented in Table 8.1. As can be seen, out of 22 students who have chosen cultural studies, 12 are males, while 10 are females. Note, however, that the scenario in Table 8.2 is not similar to the one in Table 8.3 exactly. Some significant differences emerged. A close comparison between Tables 8.2 and 8.3 clearly indicates that the baccalaureate type of linguistics participants' is immaterial since equal balance between the two branches is explicitly manifested (25 students are from letters and 25 are from sciences). As far as the gender variable is concerned, it seems that unlike Table 8.2 where females dominate only in cultural studies, in Table 8.3, female participants with both literary and scientific backgrounds dominate in the linguistics group as well.

Before tackling the first focus study questions, it is worth noting at this stage that most male and female participants with scientific and literary knowledge demonstrate an overall positive attitude towards linguistics and cultural studies. However, a brief look at Table 8.1 indicates that female participants' exhibit a preference for linguistics or cultural studies as the score of 65 (65%) shows.

### 8.4.1 Cultural Studies

To address, the first research question concerning motivations behind some participants' choice of cultural studies, the respondents' hierarchy of answers is presented in Table 8.4 offering top–down responses.

As Table 8.4 demonstrates, the motivations of the cultural studies' group choice of their major are spelt out from the most favorable reasons to the least welcome one. In this hierarchy of competing motivations, the first candidate is the participants' accumulation of knowledge 38 (76%). In this context, it seems that these students' first choice stems from the fact that their high school and university course contents are not put in oblivion or under-estimation as it may be thought of. Furthermore, job opportunities and professors' profiles come on equal rank with 25 (50%) for each as the motivating forces for their choices of cultural studies. Thus far, one may wonder as to why teaching methods are ranked fourth 23 (46%).

**Table 8.4** What motivated your choice of cultural studies?

Item	Responses (50 participants)	Percentage
1. Your accumulated background knowledge	38	76
2. Cultural studies provides better job opportunities after graduation	25	50
3. Professors' profiles	25	50
4. Teaching methods	23	46
5. What you have heard from students who graduated before you?	20	40
6. Quality of Semester 1–Semester 4 syllabus	18	36

Such a fact may implicitly imply that cultural studies students are happy in the tutoring setting with their professors' pedagogical tools of knowledge transmission without, of course, neglecting the participants' assets, other extra intelligence factors, and their own know-how in knowledge seeking per se that would hopefully forge their own profiles, hence helping them embark on their careers and future job opportunities seeking.

A further comparison of results in Table 8.4 reveals that what cultural studies students have heard from other graduated students before them is of no great significance 20 (40%) when compared to other motivations discussed so far. Once more, the least motivational element in Table 8.4 is the quality of the curriculum covered from semester 1–4. What emanates from this state of affairs is that the syllabus should be revisited so that students can choose content and materials that they see most relevant to their needs and may sustain their motivations.

In order to further advance our understanding of the cultural studies students' motivations and attitudes, the research question concerning their non-choice of linguistics is posed and results are analyzed. As the statistics in Table 8.5 shows, most cultural studies participants find linguistics technical; 29 (58%) of them find it beyond their reach. For this reason, their second negative response automatically comes next 25 (50%) and by implication, the third response related to the difficulty of linguistics content courses cannot be overlooked. Differently put, if the degree of difficulty which is 19 (38%) is present in linguistics, the percentage implies that the course is highly unlikely to help them to have access to job opportunities expressed by 16 (32%). In this context, one may legitimately wonder why cultural studies students have these negative attitudes towards linguistics although they have not experienced it yet. Note that this dissatisfaction with linguistics may have originated from the students' accumulated external perceptions or from common beliefs whose main causes are other students or some teachers' personal assumptions founded on subjective arguments. The present interpretation of results leads us to the third focus research concerning cultural studies participants' choice of literature if it were offered to them as Table 8.6 illustrates.

Focus on the right side part of Table 8.6 demonstrates that the majority of cultural studies respondents are against literature. Out of 50 participants, 37 responded negatively, while only 13 answered positively for literature.

A further scrutiny of Table 8.6 shows that the majority of cultural studies participants who voiced their opposition to such a choice are scientific baccalaureate holders

**Table 8.5** Why did not you choose Linguistics?

Item	Responses (N 50)	Percentage
1. You find linguistics technical	29	58
2. You have a negative attitude towards linguistics	25	50
3. The course content is difficult	19	38
4. Linguistics does not help in job opportunities	16	32

**Table 8.6** Cultural studies participants' yes or no responses to literature selection

	Yes responses (N 13)				No responses (N 37)			
	F		M		F		M	
Gender	7		6		22		15	
B	L	S	L	S	L	S	L	S
	6	1	4	2	9	13	7	8

*F* Female, *M* Male, *B* Bacalaureate type, *L* Letters, *S* Sciences

from both sexes; 13 were females and 8 were males, which totaled 21 students, while the remaining 16 had a literary background with 9 females and 7 males.

Seen from a different angle, the right side of Table 8.6 demonstrates the positive responses of cultural studies participants. Out of 13 respondents, 7 are females and 6 are males. As may be noticed, the majority of students who show their positive choice of literature were bacalaureate letters holders; with a total of 10 students, only 3 had a scientific bacalaureate diploma.

### 8.4.2 Linguistics

As was previously done with the cultural studies group, this section focuses on the linguistics group where the three research questions are exhibited in Tables 8.7, 8.8, and 8.9, respectively. To begin with, in Table 8.7 concerned with the linguistics

**Table 8.7** What motivated your choice of linguistics?

Item	Responses (N 50)	Percentage
1. Linguistics provides better job opportunities after graduation	30	60
2. Professors' profiles	29	58
3. Your accumulated background knowledge	25	50
4. What you have heard from students who graduated before you	25	50
5. Quality of Semester 1–Semester 4 syllabus	23	46
6. Teaching methods	22	44

**Table 8.8** Why did not you choose cultural studies?

Item	Responses (N 50)	Percentage
1. You find cultural studies boring	28	56
2. You have a negative attitude towards cultural studies	26	52
3. Cultural studies do not help in job opportunities	26	52
4. The course content is difficult	25	50



**Table 8.9** Linguistics participants' yes or no responses to literature selection

	Yes responses (N12)				No responses (N38)			
Gender	F		M		F		M	
	8		4		22		16	
B	L	S	L	S	L	S	L	S
	6	2	3	1	8	14	6	10

*F* Female, *M* Male, *B* Baccalaureate type, *L* Letters, *S* Sciences

participants, responses are given according to their order of importance.

As illustrated in Table 8.7, the primary reasons that induced the linguistics students to choose their major of specialization were mainly job opportunities after graduation 30 (60%) and professors profiles 29 (58%). Then, came on equal rank their accumulated knowledge and what they heard from other graduated students with 25 (50%) each. Finally, the last two responses exhibited in Table 8.7 concerning the quality of the semester 1–4 syllabus together with teaching methods were the least motivating factors. As Table 8.7 indicates, with a slight difference, the syllabus quality scored 23 (46%) and teaching methods 22 (44%). If Table 8.7 shows an overall satisfaction of participants with linguistics, Table 8.8 demonstrates the opposite scenario as far as their non-choice of cultural studies is concerned.

What one can deduce from the following Table 8.8 is that most respondents from the group of linguistics find cultural studies boring 28 (56%) and 26 (52%). Students really show their negative attitude towards this stream. The third and fourth responses may suggest why these students negatively view cultural studies. The answer is simply because 26 (52%) students find cultural studies not helpful in job opportunities and 25 (50%) of them find the course content difficult.

To answer the last focus research question, Table 8.9 is used as a basis to show the responses of the linguistics participants group concerning their potential choice of literature.

What emanates from Table 8.9 is that the most significant feedback shown by the majority of linguistics participants is the strong negative view they hold about literature. Such a view is supported by the fact that out of 50 participants, 38 of them who were mostly females with scientific streams backgrounds responded negatively. It is worth noting that females dominance is also witnessed with participants who answered positively for literature since out of 12 positive responses, females with literary background outnumbered males.

## 8.5 Results of Qualitative Data

As claimed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), any thorough analysis of any phenomenon cannot be complete without a qualitative data analysis. By following the same line of reasoning, we feel that qualitative method proved to be effective in order to understand the issue under study in this chapter. Based on these assumptions, we collected quantitative data using introspective commentary essays from different participants among the two focus groups as regards their introspective views about literature. The aim behind such a procedure is to try to find whether there is any systematic correlation between the participants' responses of the two focus groups as previously analyzed quantitatively and to see to what extent students' reactions in forms of commentary essays qualitatively corroborate the main focus research questions addressed in this study as well.

Most participants explained that various factors hinder them from choosing literature. To support their introspections with solid arguments, it is deemed necessary to provide reactions of both focus groups in forms of some students' quotations and paraphrased summaries taken from the participants' excerpts.

To be more concrete, some cultural students' quotations related to the theme of importance of literature are cited herein. To start with, 38 students claimed:

Literature course content is linked with British culture, so it cannot help in Moroccan context and job openings.

For the course of literature to be fruitful 35 other participants stated that:

Literature content and format needs adjustment. If not, it is useless.

29 Other participants among the cultural studies' group believe:

In literature, we have to learn by heart what teachers have already given us; it involves a lot of lecturing without assimilation or analysis.

In the same context, eight participants from the cultural studies' group thought that for the course to be more effective, new content, more innovative teaching methods of literature and teachers' profiles have to be updated in order to encourage students to change their present view about the course. Others went as far as to claim that literature is a huge burden whose future horizon is limited. Six participants thought that the course of cultural studies implicitly included literature. Therefore, the existence of some overlapping between the two courses did not encourage learners to make an optimal and a decisive choice. Some participants even belittled literature by stating that it is just for leisure including reading stories and novels in an enjoyable fashion during their free time. Therefore, they believed that the selection of literature is of no great avail.

The linguistics participants' commentary essays on literature did not differ much from those expressed by the group of cultural studies. In this context, six participants from the group of linguistics stated that although cultural studies included literature in a less complicated way, the latter was still theoretical and did not help in getting jobs after graduation. Once more, four participants claimed that literature was relegated to

the past, so they did not like to live in the past and spend time reading old-fashioned texts or being dictated old poems remote from current reality.

In a nutshell, the present qualitative results have shown many common negative attitudes exhibited by both the linguistics and cultural studies group participants towards literature. Most participating students find that teaching methods, the course content, and teachers' profiles should be updated. Otherwise, literature will always be seen negatively at present as the students' negative reactions have indicated.

It is worth mentioning at this stage that the burden of proof is not just on students, but on the educational system in Morocco, which is also to blame for the bleak present state of literature. In order to motivate students and encourage them to make the best choice in major selection, policy and decision makers should come up with new pedagogical norms and flexible program contents that would meet the current social and economic trends and challenges that students would face when applying for jobs. Simply put, stakeholders involved in the implementation of reforms in Morocco need to take into account students' voices in the selection process of streams in the future.

## 8.6 Conclusion

Based on both the quantitative and qualitative results, we can deduce that most students of cultural studies and linguistics are highly motivated since they have shown strong motivational and favorable attitudes for the course they hope to major in. Upon comparing results, no major differences in responses of both groups emerged. In this respect, the results have shown that gender is an affective variable of measurement since it enables to see how females have exhibited some dominance over males in both groups. In fact, the common motivations for both groups' major course selection, with a slight degree of emphasis, are job opportunities, accumulation of knowledge, and professors' profiles. Moreover, while the baccalaureate degree type shows some vitality in cultural studies, its significance vanishes within the group of linguistics where even balance between students with literary and scientific background is maintained. Finally, literature is, as it is at the moment, negatively conceived of by both focus groups since only 24% of the participants positively support it.

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