

# Chapter 6

## English Language Teaching Development in the Midst of Morocco's Continuing Language Policy Conundrum



Awatif Boudihaj and Meriem Sahli

**Abstract** Language policy in multilingual Morocco has been extremely controversial and largely politicized. It has historically sparked an enormous debate and engendered multiple reforms that have relied on political manoeuvres rather than educational and experts' opinions. This chapter provides a description of Morocco's complex linguistic landscape and discusses the impacts of the implemented language policy reforms on multilingualism in Morocco and the quality of education. It further evaluates the development of English language teaching (ELT)/English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in Morocco and its relation to other existing languages. The chapter then highlights the challenges in promoting a linguistic environment where national/official languages (Modern Standard Arabic and Tamazight) and foreign languages (French, English, and Spanish) can coexist and develop under cultural harmony.

### 1 Introduction

Morocco is a linguistically rich country with a variety of dialects and multiple languages that play a key role in maintaining and enhancing the country's intangible cultural heritage. Morocco is a historically multilingual and multicultural nation that has encountered different linguistic cultures since the beginning of the twentieth century as a result of the French and Spanish colonization and recently globalization. Despite multilingualism, Moroccans are largely loyal to their vernaculars (Moroccan Arabic and Berber) as they constitute a core value of their Arabo-Islamic and Berber cultural identity. The Moroccan speakers range from monolingual speakers of either Moroccan Arabic or Berber, bilingual speakers of Arabic and Berber or Arabic and French to multilingual speakers of Arabic, Berber, French, and Spanish/English.

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A. Boudihaj (✉) · M. Sahli  
Al Akhawayn University, Ifran, Morocco  
e-mail: [a.boudihaj@au.ma](mailto:a.boudihaj@au.ma)

M. Sahli  
e-mail: [m.sahli@au.ma](mailto:m.sahli@au.ma)

In recent years, English has been steadily increasing among Moroccan students and among the Moroccan educated community due to international processes and the growing number of private higher education institutions and secondary/middle international schools where English is the EMI. English has witnessed unprecedented development and has become a language associated with academic excellence, enhanced job opportunities, and personal growth. Opportunities for obtaining scholarships for higher education studies abroad and well-paid jobs are contingent upon attaining a good competency in English. Under this situation, demands for the government to enhance the number of hours of teaching English in the school curriculum and even the inclusion of English as the first foreign language instead of French have become stronger than ever before. Despite these demands, the French language continues to thrive in the sociocultural, economic, and educational environments of the country, whereas the national languages are merely surviving and are not seen as particularly important in the job market. Arabic is being compartmentalized in domains which do not directly have an impact on the economic and technological development of the country.

This complex linguistic situation has been a source of an ongoing debate that is ideologically, sociopolitically, and economically driven and that has made the language situation in Morocco unstable. Ever since Morocco's independence in 1956, conflicts on language policy have constituted a moving target with a fuzzy future. The country has undergone a string of educational reforms to improve its system of education since independence, but most of them, if not all, have been doomed to failure. One of the country's major reforms since independence was the Arabization policy, the goal of which was to restore Arabic in the public/official domain and diminish French, the language of the colonizer and an extension of political and cultural imperialism (Errihani, 2016). Arabization failed to fulfill its role as science and technology subjects are still taught through the French medium at the tertiary level. In 2000, the Charter for Educational Reform came to the rescue of Morocco's educational system and its multilingualism by recognizing the importance and the necessity of foreign languages for the development of the quality of education in Morocco.

## 2 Linguistic Landscape in Morocco

Due to its strategic location, Morocco has historically been at the crossroads of civilizations as it constitutes a bridge between Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. Morocco's location at the threshold of the Mediterranean Sea has made it open to different cultures over history, namely the Greeks, Phoenicians, Africans, Arabs, the French, the Portuguese, and the Spaniards. These different cultures have contributed to Morocco's linguistic richness and complexity and led the country to embrace a multilingual norm. In fact, from early childhood, Moroccans are confronted with several languages as most Moroccan children grow up speaking at least two languages: the mother tongue and the languages learnt at school. The

mother tongue can be Moroccan Arabic (MA), the spoken dialect in Morocco, or one of the three varieties of the Berber language (Tamazight, Tashelhit, and/or Tarifit). The languages learnt at school are Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and French, a colonial language used as a second language. As to foreign languages, students can choose between English, German, and Spanish. The latter is another colonial language spoken by a minority in the northern border areas and in the south.

## 2.1 Arabic

Arabic is a supranational language used only in formal situations as it is nobody's mother tongue (Grandguillaume, 1990). It is the language used in literary oral and written discourses and in Muslim prayers and rituals. Being the language of the Quran, classical Arabic (CA) constitutes both a reference and a symbolic tool of the Arabo-Muslim identity, a key factor that has contributed to its privileged status in the Arab and Muslim world, in general, and Morocco, in particular (Ennaji, 2005). According to Article 5 of the 2011 Moroccan Constitution, "Arabic is [demeure] the official language of the State. The State works for the protection and for the development of the Arabic language, as well as the promotion of its use" (Moroccan. Const. art. 5, § 1, 2012). It is employed in religious, political, administrative, legal, and cultural contexts. Since CA is not used as a vehicle of communication in everyday life by Arabs, it was modernized in the nineteenth century to MSA, a modern version of CA. MSA is employed in schools and is used in official and institutional events, for example, in the Moroccan Court and the Parliament. The third variety is MA, which is the language spoken by Moroccans in their daily lives. MA consists of different regional varieties: the urban variety spoken in cities such as Fes and Rabat; the Mountain variety (Jebli) spoken in the Northern part of the country; the Bedouin variety and the Hassani variety spoken in the southern Saharan regions (Boukous, 1998; Ennaji, 2005). All these regional varieties of MA are to a large extent mutually intelligible as they all form a continuum of Moroccan dialects.

The presence of these three varieties of Arabic (CA, MSA, and MA) has created a linguistic situation in Morocco that has been referred to as Triglossia (Youssi, 1995), where the three languages "exhibit a functional, usually hierarchical, relationship between each other" (Loutfi, 2017). CA is the high variety, MSA the median variety, and MA the low variety, though it is the main language of communication among all Moroccans. MSA shares many linguistic features with MA partly through the borrowing of a large number of words from MSA due to schooling, exposure to Arabic media, Moroccan immigration to the Middle East, and the Arabic film industry. MSA remains a unifying language among all Arabs, and this status has given it a strong position in the multilingual context of Morocco.

## 2.2 *Tamazight*

Tamazight (Berber) is the native language spoken by the original inhabitants of Morocco, Imazighen (Berber). It enjoys a status of linguistic marker of belonging to the Amazigh community and, thereby, serves as a vehicle of the Amazigh cultural identity (Boukous, 1995). There are three varieties of the Tamazight language, each of which is spoken in different geographical parts of Morocco. Tarifit is spoken in the north and more precisely in the Rif Mountains. Tashelhit is spoken in the southwest of Morocco and in the region of Souss Massa Daràa. Berber is spoken in the Middle Atlas. The latter has the largest number of speakers of Berber in Morocco and covers the largest geographical area (Sirles, 1985). There are differences between the three regional dialects with regard to the phonetic, morphological, and lexical aspects, which makes the three varieties unintelligible and, as a result, MA is frequently used as a means of communication between the speakers of these three different areas.

It was not until 2011 that Tamazight became an official and hence a constitutionalized language alongside Arabic, following a long debate of it being excluded from the public sphere and being oppressed by Arabic. The new law calls for more inclusion of the Berber language in Morocco's public life and the integration of the Tamazight language and culture into the school curriculum, the media, and the administration. Tifinagh alphabet became the official script for the Berber language and was adopted in the teaching of Tamazight in primary schools and primary school textbooks. Today, Tamazight enjoys a stronger position in the Moroccan multilingual setting; however, its implementation in the school curriculum has always raised questions with regard to its practicality and future effectiveness both academically and economically.

## 2.3 *French*

In addition to the existing mother tongues, there are many foreign languages in Morocco, namely French, English, and Spanish. French is the most visible and dominant of these foreign languages and can even be considered as a second language since it is the language of learning in higher education for scientific subjects and the language used in administration. French raises the most contradictory judgments: sometimes valued, sometimes ignored or even rejected. So, several questions arise, concerning its importance, its place, its challenges, and prospects.

Since the establishment of the French protectorate in Morocco in 1912, French has been used, along with Arabic, in business, diplomacy, and government, and has strongly been introduced to the Moroccan educational system. During the colonial period, France chose a two-track educational system: one advanced system for the social elites and another basic one for the masses (Sahli & Boudihaj, 2021). The former aimed at preparing students for jobs in administration and trade, while the latter was mainly oriented toward handmade jobs such as construction, agriculture,

and fishing. This segregationist educational system made it impossible for these two classes to be intimately and educationally intertwined (Feldmann, 2016). Once France handed over power to Morocco, it was the political and cultural Francophone elite that planted the seeds of Francophonie (Al-Jabri, 1973), and later the promotion and dominance of the French language and culture.

After Morocco got its independence in 1956, the French system of education persisted, especially in terms of its structure and elitist nature (Feldmann, 2016). The persistence of the colonial educational policy is meant to serve the interests of France and guarantee the subordination of the upcoming generation to the French language and France. Most teaching continued to be in French for both scientific and art disciplines, and only later French was partly replaced by Arabic, especially in the teaching of literary, historical, and ideological programs while it assumed the role of “*language vehiculaire*” for scientific subjects such as math, physics, biology, and economics. This disparity in the teaching roles has in a way instrumentalized already conflicting poles. On the one hand, Arabic serves as a vehicle of identity, national personality and Islam; on the other hand, French is a vector of modernity, science, and technology (Nissabouri, 2005). In 1980, French was fully replaced by Arabic through the Arabization of scientific subjects, which was carried out until the baccalaureate; teaching at the tertiary level remained in French. Till today, French remains an instrument of widely used communication in both formal and informal settings; it is considered as a prestigious language by the ruling class, a means of social advancement, and a key to the job market (Ennaji, 1991).

## 2.4 *English*

English was initially introduced to Morocco in the Second World War when American military bases were established in Casablanca, Kenitra, and Tangiers (Jaafari, 2019). Morocco's strategic geographical location has played a key role in the introduction of English to Morocco through diplomatic and trade relations with USA and UK (Ennaji, 2005; Loutfi, 2017; Loutfi & Noamane, 2014). The spread of English in Morocco further witnessed a rise thanks to the emergence of private English language centers, the oldest of which is AMIDEAST that opened its doors in 1950 in the capital city, Rabat, during the colonial period. Thereafter, English has further imposed itself with globalization and the rapid growth of new technologies. This has led to the popularity of English among university students, which has resulted in a large number of enrolled students in the departments of English throughout Morocco (El Kirat, 2008) and a high number of university students graduating with an English major degree (Sadiqi, 2011). A significant number of private universities that use EMI have been established, which has led to the increase of the number of students pursuing their higher education in Moroccan universities with English medium. Al Akhawayn University, which opened in 1995, was the first non-USA, American accredited university to adopt English as its medium of instruction and to follow the American liberal arts model.

The study of the spread of English in Morocco and its status has been a subject of investigation by Moroccan scholars (El Kirat et al., 2010; Ennaji, 2005; Errihani, 2008; Sadiqi, 1991). English is a foreign language just like French, but most importantly English is a language without any colonial undertones, which makes it more popular than French (Buckner, 2011; Sadiqi, 2011). El Kirat (2008) further argues that “unlike French and Spanish, which are a symbol of political and cultural dependence, English has no colonial connotations [in Morocco]. Negative attitude towards French increases the positive attitude towards and popularity of English” (p. 125). With the advent of new technologies, English has become almost a prerequisite to adapt to the high demands of contemporary life and, as a result, “policymakers in Morocco have certainly realized that international communication between Morocco and the rest of the world could not be achieved by French alone; they know that English is the key to communication in a very tangible sense” (Sadiqi, 1991, p. 106). In view of these facts, many Moroccan government officials, educators, and private sector leaders have called for promoting the teaching of English and even adopting it as a medium of instruction instead of French (Errihani, 2017). In a survey conducted by a Moroccan electronic newspaper, Hespresse, in 2015, 86% of Moroccans were in favor of switching from French to English in the teaching of science and technology in schools and universities (“Morocco and the English Language Debate”, 2018). At the tertiary level, students believe that English is indispensable to their education and will enhance the quality of their research since they feel compelled to use scholarly sources in English when working on their capstones, theses, or dissertations (Belhiah & Abdelatif, 2016). In 2017, the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Training circulated a memo to Moroccan universities requiring Moroccan doctoral students to publish at least one research article in English prior to their graduation and have their theses abstract written in English (El Kaidi, 2016). As a result, there has been growing demands from institutions of higher education in Morocco to conduct research in English particularly at the doctoral level; however, this is not always feasible due to the professors’ and students’ low competency level in English, in general.

### 3 Language Policy in Morocco

#### 3.1 *From Monolingualism to Multilingualism*

The linguistic situation briefly surveyed above shows that Morocco is characterized by triglossia, bilingualism, and multilingualism in the sense that there are three varieties of Arabic [the high variety (CA), the median variety (MSA), and the low variety (MA)], two layers of bilingualism (MSA-French and Berber-MA) and multilingualism (Arabic, Berber, French, English, and Spanish) (Ennaji, 2005). Despite this multilinguistic reality, Morocco has adopted, after the independence, a language

policy to safeguard its national unity and cultural identity through the Arabization process. To this effect, MSA replaced French in education and administration, creating instead a seemingly monolingual situation in Morocco.

The Arabization process in state education was completed by the end of the 1980s through the Arabization of scientific subjects in all primary and secondary schools. Despite this, French remains an important medium of instruction in the domain of science in higher education. This lack of continuity in the execution of the Arabization process beyond high school has had negative repercussions for students as they are left linguistically unprepared to switch to French at the university level due to their low competency. Their linguistic proficiency in MSA has also been negatively affected since most primary/high school science teachers opt for MA (Darija) as a medium of instruction due to the lack of suitable training and their low level of competence in Arabic. Consequently, the students' current linguistic proficiency in both MSA and their overall performance in both school and university are alarming.

The year of 2000 marked a major change in Morocco's language policy by the institution of the Charter for Educational Reform founded on "the principles of democracy, pluralism and social justice" (Ennaji, 2005, p. 30). It was also mandated in the charter that English be introduced in grade 5 of primary education starting from 2004. This new language policy called for the reinforcement and improvement of Arabic teaching, the diversification of languages for teaching science and technology and an openness to Tamazight language and culture to reflect Morocco's pluralism (Ennaji, 2005). The purpose of the charter was to introduce local languages, namely Tamazight, into the school curriculum, improve learners' competency in MSA, and promote the use of foreign languages for specific purposes. The charter is thus a departure from a monolingual Arabic to a multilingual state educational system.

### ***3.2 ELT/EMI Policy Directions in Multilingual Morocco***

Under the 2000 charter, English has become a component of the middle school curriculum with plans to generalize it to all school levels and use it as a medium of instruction alongside Arabic and French. Being aware of the growing importance of English in the field of science and technology and the limited role of the French language in this respect led policymakers to consider introducing English in primary education in grade 4 in 2025 in the National Strategic Vision of Reform 2015–2030 for Education, Training, and Scientific Research (CSEFRS, 2015). This positive attitude toward the promotion of English was also shown in the establishment of the Moroccan International Baccalaureate English option in 2014, where an increased number of hours were allotted to English language classes and English was the medium of instruction in science subjects. However, students who have opted for this option are set up for failure just like mainstream students who study science subjects in Arabic since French remains the only language of instruction in public institutions of higher education.

The teaching and learning of English in Morocco have witnessed further development; thanks to the rapidly growing numbers of American/British private schools and higher education institutions and universities where the medium of instruction is English, and the increasing number of Moroccan students pursuing their higher education in the USA and UK. In fact, the number of private ELT centers and private schools has more than doubled in the last decade in many cities across the country. In public universities, the demand for enrollment in the English departments has exceeded supply due to the high interest in English shown by Moroccan students. As a result, English departments have unprecedentedly started to require admission tests as part of the application process. The substantial progress in EMI is largely attributed to the creation of Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane (AUI) in 1995, the most prestigious US accredited Moroccan university with a liberal arts model. AUI was a turning point in promoting the teaching of English as a medium of instruction at the national level, guided by its mission to promote academic excellence and form future leaders.

Also, ELT in Morocco is considered to be a developed profession compared to other languages, notably French, due to its innovative and varied teaching methods (Benzahaf as cited in Bouziane, 2018). EMI at AUI has adhered to the student-centered approach to learning and the use of subskills to support this approach through its Center for Academic Development (CAD) that started in 2000. CAD is the first developmental education center of its kind in Morocco that was created to help meet the evolving demands in students' English study skills, information literacy skills, and critical/creative thinking skills. The center was created based on the developmental education philosophy to meet the twenty-first-century skills education and to respond to different stakeholders' needs, demands and expectations. CAD courses are informed by the five core areas (5Cs) in foreign language learning in the twenty-first century, which include: creativity, critical thinking, corporation, collaboration, and communication. The introduction of these skills to Moroccan students has proven to be very valuable, especially that they come from a system that is highly teacher-centered and product-oriented.

## 4 Conclusions and Recommendations

Moroccan language policy decision-makers are well-aware that communication between Morocco and the rest of the world could not happen through French only, yet the future of English as a medium of instruction in the Moroccan schooling system is still blurry. According to the 2015–2030 Strategic Reform, English will be introduced starting grade four as a foreign language and will maintain the same status along with French in secondary and middle school levels, while Arabic will remain as the only language taught throughout the schooling cycles as a medium of instruction in all subjects (CSEFRS, 2015). However, in 2019, French was back on the scene as a medium of instruction in scientific subjects in high schools, relaunching the debate over the French dominance in Morocco's language policy. This inconsistency



in language planning has brought about a dysfunctional educational system and a linguistically lopsided nation. Language policy is largely responsible for the existing hierarchy among languages in Morocco, creating inequality and even division among Moroccans: A French-speaking community with better job opportunities versus an Arabic-speaking community often left with low-paying jobs.

Language planning in Morocco has always been politically controlled and determined by the ideology of the political party that has more power in the government. Politicians' conflictual beliefs over Arabization and foreign language policy have largely impacted the development of multilingualism in Morocco and, thereby, failed to offer a sound and serene environment for languages to develop in an equal and equitable manner. Debates over maintaining or ending the Arabization process, reinstating French as medium for science subjects and the diversification of foreign languages, notably English, have sparked one of the most controversial debates for the last forty years in Morocco's political scene. This ongoing political debate has formed two main opposing poles: the guardians of Arabic as a vehicle of Islam, Arab nationalism and cultural identity, and the allies of the Francophonie as a vector of modernity and social stratification. In the midst of this conflict, the overwhelming majority of young people, parents, and educators strongly demand that French be replaced by English, which will be impossible to achieve in an economic and political context monopolized by the French elites as argued by Jaafari (2019):

What is certain is that the fervent defenders of the Francophonie will struggle again to impose French because they are finding it harder to take a backseat and watch English become the first foreign language in Morocco and the lingua franca of the world, in addition to seeing Arabic gain more ground and strength in Morocco. (p. 137)

For the Moroccan educational system to embrace the twenty-first-century education and empower generation Z learners, it first needs a total restructuring with regards to the mediums of instruction in primary, secondary, and university levels. Morocco needs a democratization of education through the refocusing on MSA and Tamazight languages that symbolize its cultural identity and the promotion of foreign languages that are essential for interaction with the outside world. Arabic and Tamazight need to thrive and not merely survive in the Moroccan linguistic, social, and economic sphere. Judicious reforms are needed to enhance the spheres of influence of both Arabic and Tamazight languages and cultures through enabling these two languages to fulfill their roles as official languages. The scope and focus of Morocco's language policy should be reversed from marginalizing to promoting national official languages.

Language policy in a multilingual context deserves careful language planning that entails a clear vision and long-term strategic goals, not conjectures, ideological motives and/or decisions, adopted in haste and in a non-integrated fashion. Language planning should also involve all stakeholders, mainly those who are facing the worst impacts of language policy and who have no voice in the political debate about what to do to preserve national languages and to equally promote foreign ones. School principals, teachers, education officials, parents (both Arab and Berber natives) should participate in language planning at all levels, especially in a context where language policy has been taken hostage by the French elites in power and any attempts for

its democratization have been relentlessly hampered. Morocco should reconcile the power of French with national languages and foreign languages. It should empower Arabic and Berber to become real and not just apparent vehicles of education, administration, and media and promote other languages, especially English, a lingua franca, that would equip graduates to work in a globalized society and enrich the country as a whole.

The challenges awaiting all Moroccans are how to transcend dependency on French, change the disparaging attitudes to Arabic and Berber, reverse a sociopolitical and socioeconomic context from suppressing to promoting national languages, embrace linguistic openness, and develop a sound climate conducive to a progressive and balanced multilingualism.

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**Awatif Boudihaj** is an Assistant Professor of Education at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Al Akhawayn University. She holds a Doctor of Education from the School of Education at the University of Leeds. She currently teaches study skills, critical thinking and research skills. Her research interests are on developmental education, applied linguistics, study skills, foreign language policy, language planning and education policy in Morocco.

**Meriem Sahli** is an Assistant Professor of Arabic language and literature in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Al Akhawayn University. She obtained her Ph.D. in applied linguistics from Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah University in Fes. Her main research interests include education, teaching and learning Arabic, curriculum design and development, use of technology, and language program evaluation.