

English as a Medium of Instruction in Moroccan Higher Education

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Abstract

Currently, French is used as a medium of instruction in Moroccan colleges of science and engineering. There have been several calls to replace French with English since English is gradually becoming the language of science and technology par excellence. This study examines science and technology doctoral students' attitudes towards the use of English as a medium of instruction in three Moroccan colleges using a survey questionnaire. The results indicate that students are strongly in favor of using English as a medium of instruction. Some reasons behind this preference include the need to read and cite indexed journal articles in their dissertations, their intention to pursue postgraduate studies abroad, and the desire to have an edge in the job market.

Keywords: bilingualism, bilingual education, English as a medium of instruction, English-in-Education;

Introduction

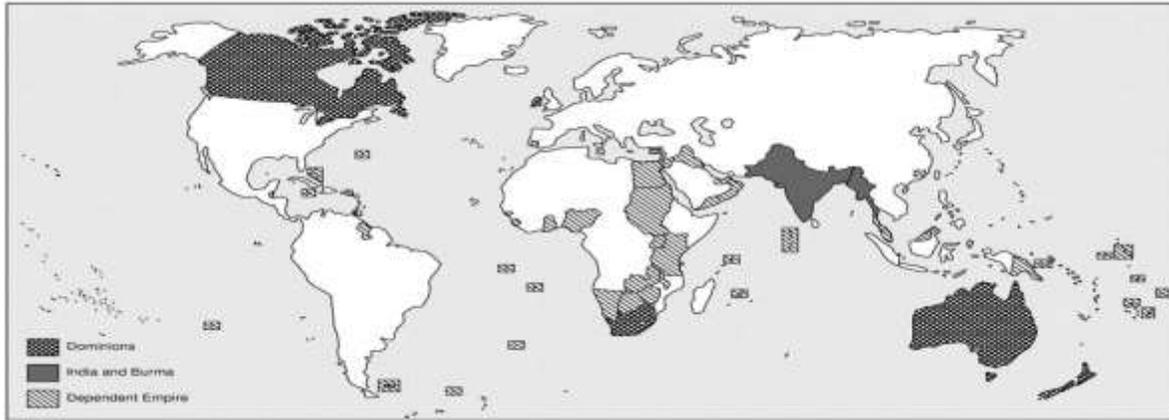
In recent years, the Moroccan government has been striving to improve the outcomes of the higher educational system and to boost scientific research output. One of the main measures that are key to achieving this goal is openness to foreign languages, especially English, a language that is becoming the international language of science and technology. The Minister of Higher Education, Scientific research, and Training Mr. Daoudi Lahsen announced in an interview with “Akhbar Alyaoum newspaper”, that the government “will make it mandatory for students of engineering and medical studies to demonstrate English proficiency before obtaining a doctorate”(2014, p.9).

However, the above-mentioned decision has not been accompanied with concrete measures. French is still the language of instruction in faculties of science and engineering, and English is not a mandatory subject. In addition, such a decision should normally take into consideration the opinions of science students toward this issue because they are the target group; otherwise, the envisaged goal may not be achieved.

This study investigates the perceptions of science and engineering doctoral students vis-à-vis the use of English as a medium of instruction instead of French. Furthermore, the study seeks to determine the challenges students encounter when it comes to the use of English in their studies. The study derives its importance from two significant reasons. The first one is the topic that it deals with, which is language planning in education. As argued by Ferguson (2006), “Education is probably the most crucial, sometimes indeed bearing the entire burden of LP implementation” (p. 33). Indeed, the education sector is considered one of the most crucial sectors for a country’s development. It enables the students to contribute to economic, social and cultural development (HM King Mohamed VI, 2013). Secondly, the study targets doctoral students, who are the main entities concerned with the issue of using English in Higher Education. The findings of the study will provide decision makers with useful recommendations regarding the use of English as a medium of instruction in science and engineering schools.

English as an International Language

English is, nowadays, enjoying the most important status amongst all languages in the world. Two major factors have led English to gain ascendancy over the rest of the world’s languages. According to Ferguson (2006): “Standard explanations of the spread of English have ... the role of the British Empire and secondly the growing economic, military and political dominance of the United States in the later twentieth century as key factors” (p.110). The historical factor that stands behind the spread of English is related to British colonialism that impacted different sectors of the colonized societies to the extent that Great Britain was referred to as “The Empire on which the sun never sets” (see the map below).



Map 1: Map of the British Empire in the 1920s

Source: The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV: The Twentieth Century (Brown & Louis, 1999, p. 10).

According to Ferguson (2006), the fact of colonizing many countries all over the world by the British Empire has created conditions that served as fertile ground for the emergence of English as a global language. This emergence occurred due two processes, which Brutt-Griffler (2002) refers to as “spread by speaker migration” and “spread by macro-acquisition”. The “spread by speaker migration” refers to the settlement of British immigrants in the colonized territories, which led to the emergence of new native speaker communities, while the “spread by macro-acquisition” means that the indigenous populations maintained English owing to its social and economic benefits.

During the twentieth century, this world presence was maintained and promoted almost single-handedly through the economic supremacy of the new American superpower. Economics replaced politics as the chief driving force and the language behind the US dollar was English (Crystal, 2003, p. 10). In addition, since the economic position of a given state determines its political one, the US stands as a major political actor on the international scene. This explains the emergence of English as the first dominant language in international institutions such as the United Nations, in which English is the most widely used language for spoken and written communication. According to Ferguson (2006):

There is no shortage of evidence, then, for American economic and political influence, and it seems reasonable therefore to assent to the linkage (..) between the dominance of the United States and the increased use of English not only in former colonies but as an international lingua franca in countries where there was no British colonial presence – in Europe, for example (p. 111).

This claim is confirmed by Thomas (1999) who explains that: “English - thanks largely to the predominant world role of the United States - is now the international language most sought everywhere, including in North Africa and Central Asia”(p. 2).

In his endeavor to explain this linkage between the political dominance of the US and the spread of English, Phillipson (1992) proposes the concept of hegemony as it was first

conceptualized by Gramsci. Hegemony in this sense refers to the process by which ruling elites maintain their dominance not through overt coercion but by winning the consent of the mass of the population to their own domination and exploitation. This explanation sounds reasonable since one can easily observe how English and the American culture are widely spreading all over the world. The hegemonic character of English is expressed in the media, technology, and cultural industries. This dominance is also expressed in the educational arena since there is a huge demand for learning English and an increasing number of non-English speaking countries that use it as a medium of instruction.

This hegemony is also manifest in the field of science. Ammon (2003) explains that by 1995 English accounted for 87.2 per cent of publications in the natural sciences and 82.5 per cent of publications in the social sciences. Crystal (2003) highlighted the fact that the majority of scientific papers were published in the English language in the 1980s: 85% in biology and physics, 73% in medicine, 69% in mathematics, and 67% in chemistry. Today, many countries have realized the importance of English as a vital means to reinforce scientific research and adjusted their language policies in order to integrate English in their educational system.

and engineering in non-native English speaking countries who do not master this language find themselves faced with the inability to access scientific references in their areas of research. This problem will certainly affect the quality of their training and their research. Another hurdle resides in students' limited job and research prospects. Once they receive their diplomas, students find themselves unable to pursue their studies in prominent research universities, which offer better conditions in terms of the quality of the training, thus assuring better employment opportunities.

English in Morocco

The presence of English in Morocco goes back to the period of World War II, when American bases were established in Tangier and Kenitra. The Moroccan workers, who had interactions with Americans, were motivated to learn English in order to communicate with them (Ennaji, 2005). Since that time, English has witnessed an increasing degree of popularity in Morocco and become overtime one of the important foreign languages that shape its linguistic landscape. According to Ennaji (1991), this popularity was the result of two main reasons: the absence of colonial connotation associated with English (in comparison with French for instance), and the positive attitudes towards this language and its emergence as an international language of science.

Sadiqi (1991) identifies four major factors behind the spread of English in Morocco: first, the policy of education adopted since independence, which has been favorable to English; second, the emergence of English as an international lingua franca widely used in vital sectors and activities, such as trade, diplomacy, and finance; third, Moroccans' positive attitudes toward English; and fourth, the lack of an association between English and colonialism in Morocco.

Some of the fields in which the spread of English has been acutely observed are education, mass media, internet websites, business and tourism (Ennaji, 1991). In the mass media sector, many newspapers, especially the digital ones, have emerged in the Moroccan media landscape. In tourism, English has become an indispensable language, both in the private sector (hotels, tourist guides, etc.), and in the public one, as the government aims to increase the

number of visitors to the kingdom, thus increasing the revenue generated from tourism. According to Buckner (2011), “Today, the rise of tourism in Morocco, with the country aiming to attract millions of new tourists over the next five years, and the growth of international trade, facilitated by Morocco’s Free Trade Agreement with the US, are bringing new job opportunities to Morocco that increasingly require English skills” (pp. 233-234).

In the field of education, the educational policy adopted in Morocco since independence has been favorable to English. This important link between English and education (Ennaji, 2005) was in fact, a result of a cooperative and beneficial interaction between the two of entities. The importance and the global spread of English as an international language prompted colonial and national authorities to integrate the teaching of English in secondary education. In higher education, English is taught as a foreign language to freshmen in many public universities. However, the subject matter is taught either in French or Arabic.

Regarding the significant position that English enjoys in the world, and its crucial role as a language of science, one may feel the scale of the loss Moroccan higher education will endure because of the weak presence of this language in the curricula. The main problems students face at this level have to do with their inability to access scientific references in English, and pursue their studies abroad in universities that adopt English as a medium of instruction. According to Ennaji (1991) “A good number of university students and researchers must learn English to be able to read the English references relevant their specialty” (p.21).

Recently, the Moroccan higher authorities have displayed a keen awareness of this issue and started efforts to improve the position of English in higher education. In his speech on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the People, HM King Mohamed VI (2013) has hinted that the educational language policy needs to be revisited when he explained that:

The education sector is facing many difficulties and problems. They are mostly due to the adoption of some syllabi and curricula that do not tally with the requirements of the job market. Another reason has to do with the disruptions caused by changing the language of instruction from Arabic, at the primary and secondary levels, to some foreign languages, for the teaching of scientific and technical subjects in higher education. Accordingly, students must be provided with the necessary linguistic skills so that they may fully benefit from training courses. Moroccans should, therefore, be encouraged to learn and master foreign languages(www.maroc.ma)

Another indicator of the trend to enhance the status of English in Higher education is reflected in a recent memorandum addressed to university presidents by Dr Lahsen Daoudi, The Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Morocco on Sep 15, 2014. He explained that proficiency in English should be taken as one of the criteria in the recruitment of new professors in Moroccan universities, particularly in the areas of science, technology, health, management, and economics. He added that the reason behind this decision lies in the fact that mastering English provides promising prospects to develop scientific research in universities, and affords graduates better opportunities in the job market.

In addition, Dr Daoudi announced in March 2014 that the government is seriously considering using English, albeit partially, as a medium of instruction in Moroccan universities. In his view, Engineering and medical programs should be conducted in English, and English proficiency ought to be a condition for obtaining a doctorate. Daoudi also stressed that English will play a key role in improving Morocco's fledgling education system(www.alyaoum24.com). If these ideas come to fruition, English will finally gain a foothold in the Moroccan educational arena. As explained by Ennaji (2005), "English will start to compete seriously with French in the areas of education, science, and technology" (p. 114).

Data and Methodology

The purpose of the study is to examine science and doctoral students' attitudes towards the use of English as a medium of instruction in Moroccan universities. A total of 208 students participated in this study: 110 females (53%) and 98 males (47%). The subjects were pursuing their doctoral studies at Mohammed V University in Rabat in the faculty of Sciences, the National School of IT, and Hassan II Institute of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine.

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to explore students' perceptions regarding the use of EMI. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section A asked for demographic information about the students (e.g., gender, age, college). Section B asked students about their views on the current status of English in their studies and research. Section C tapped into students' perceptions about the adoption of an EMI policy in Moroccan higher education. Students were given an open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire asking them to write down any further comments that they might have about the EMI policy. The goal was to glean new ideas and insights from the perspectives of the students in case these would not have been captured by the Likert scale method. The table below provides the key demographic information pertinent to this study.

	Number and percentage of students in sample					Total
1. Gender	Female		Male			208
	110 (53%)		98 (43%)			
2. Age	< 25	26-30	31-35	36-40	40+	208
	20 (10%)	121 (58%)	36 (17%)	17 (8%)	14 (7%)	
3. College	College of sciences		National College of IT (INSIAS)	Hassan II Institute of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine		

				208
	149 (72%)	30 (14%)	29 (14%)	

Discussion and Analysis

The Current Status of English in Higher Education

Table 2 below summarizes the students’ answers to the survey questions 4 to 8. These questions have to do with the current status of English in the institutions under study, and its use by the respondents. As illustrated in the table, responding to question 4, which reads “Does your college provide English courses?”, 75 % of the students said that their institution does not (or did not) provide English courses. The answers to question 5 show that among the students who said their institution provide English courses, no one claims that those courses are adequate compared to 23% who state that the courses are “adequate enough”. On the contrary, more than two-thirds (77%) report at the courses are “inadequate” and do not enable them to use English for research purposes effectively.

Table 2: The current status of the use of English in the higher education

Questions		Number and percentage of students in the sample			Total
4	Does your college provide English courses?	No	Yes		208 (100%)
		156 (75%)	52 (25%)		
5	If yes, are these courses adequate?	Adequate	Adequate enough	Inadequate	52 (100%)
		0 (0%)	12 (23%)	40 (77%)	
	How often do you	Always	Never	Sometimes	208

6	need to use English in your academic research?	171 (82,2%)	17 (8,2%)	20 (9,6%)	(100%)
7	What reasons prevent you from using English in your academic research?(Those who chose never)	I don't master English	References in French are sufficient.	Access to English references is difficult.	17 (100%)
		11 (64,8%)	3 (17,6%)	3 (17,6%)	
8	What do you do when you encounter difficulty with English?	Ask for help	Rely on my own efforts	Other	181 (100%)
		15 (8,3%)	149 (82,3%)	17 (9,4%)	

In response to question 6, which asks whether students use English references in their research and studies, more than 80% of the students claim that they “always” use references written in English, 9,6% said they use them “sometimes”, while only 8,2% said they never use English references in their research. A doctoral student from the faculty of sciences explains:

All my research is in English; even the articles that I have published are in English. My thesis is the only work that will be in French Insha'Allah. I want to mention that the best scientific articles are written in English.

Three alternatives were proposed in the questionnaire as a possible response to question 7, which tackles reasons behind the lack of English use. Among the 17 students who said they never use English in their research, nearly 65% said they are unable to use English, while 17,6% stated that scientific references in French are sufficient for them, and 17,6% said that they have difficulty accessing English references.

Responding to question 8 concerning how students deal with obstacles in using English in their research, 82% said they rely on their own efforts (e.g., using dictionaries), 15% seek help from another person, while 17% use other solutions to overcome the problem, such as using “Google translation” and studying English in language centers.

The Importance of English as Language of Science and Technology

Table 3 shows students' answers to statements 9 to 13. Statement 9 deals with students' opinions about adopting English as a language of instruction in HE. Sixty three percent said they "Strongly agree", and 31,3% "Agree", while 4,3% "Disagree", and none of them said they "Strongly disagree". Three approaches were suggested in the questionnaire (statement 10) in order to investigate the opinion of students who agree with the adoption of English as a language of instruction in higher education.

Table 3: Students' perceptions adopting English as a medium of instruction

Statements		Number and percentage of students in the sample					
		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
9	English should be adopted as a language of instruction in HE	131 (63%)	65 (31,3%)	3 (1,4%)	9 (4,3%)	0 (0%)	208 (100%)
10	The best approach to introducing English as a language of instruction in higher education is	First option*		Second option*		Third option*	196 (100%)
		54 (28%)		49 (25%)		93 (47%)	
		* First option: Maintain the use of French and add some courses in English (Scientific translation). * Second option: Switch from French into English from the first year of studies. * Third option: Progressive switch from French into English.					
11	English is an important language because:	First option*	Second option*	Third option*	Fourth option*	Fifth option*	Total
		2 (1%)	115 (55%)	15 (7%)	72 (35%)	4 (2%)	208 (100%)
		* First option: It helps one obtain an attractive job. * Second option: It is a crucial language for conducting scientific research and using recent references. * Third option: It helps one pursue his or her studies abroad. * Fourth option: All of the above * Fifth option: Other					
12	The use of English will improve the quality of scientific research.	Agree		Disagree		Not necessarily	Total
		164 (78,8%)		3 (1,4%)		41 (19,7%)	
13	The use of English will improve the quality of The quality of student education	Agree		Disagree		Not necessarily	208 (100%)
		182 (88%)		4 (2%)		22 (11%)	

As is shown in the table, 28% of students said that the appropriate approach is to maintain the use of French and add some courses in English, especially in scientific translation. 25% said they prefer switching from French into English from the first year of studies in higher education, while 47% thought that a progressive switch from French into English should be adopted.

It is worth mentioning that some students suggested other proposals concerning this issue. For example, some students proposed that English be enhanced from the secondary level. A doctoral student from Hassan II Institute of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine said:

I think English should be used from the first year of high school with a large number of hours, especially in scientific branches. It is essential to prepare students in high school in order to enable them to study sciences in English. For me, studying scientific subjects in Arabic is useless.

Another student from the faculty of science commented:

English should be introduced from primary school and not high school. If we do not implement this change, we will disable many generations, for good!

In response to statement 11, which deals with the importance of English in student's academic and professional life, 55% of the students said that English is significant because it is a crucial language for conducting scientific research and using the latest academic sources. Moreover, 7% claimed that it is helpful because it opens doors for pursuing studies abroad, compared to 1% who said that English helps better access to the job market. In addition, 7% said that all the options mentioned above are valid.

Concerning the added value of English, the responses to statements 13 and 14 show that the overwhelming majority (84%) of students agree that the use of English will improve the quality of scientific research and the quality of students' education, compared to 1,7% who disagree. For the rest of students (14,9%), they think that English will not necessarily have an added value. According to a student from the INSIAS institute:

It is true that English language is important in scientific research, but it does not necessarily represent the key factor of improving the quality of scientific research. Indeed, other complementary factors are involved to guarantee a successful research and education in our country, such as coaching, equipment, and communication.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions held by science and technology doctoral students toward the use of English in higher education. The major findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

The majority of the students do not seem to be satisfied with English courses offered by their colleges. Yet, they believe English is a crucial language to conduct scientific research.

- a) The majority of the students face difficulty using English to conduct their research.

- b) The majority of the respondents agree with the need to mandate EMI in engineering and medical programs.
- c) A progressive switch from French into English from the first year of studies in higher education is viewed as the best language-in-education policy for HE.
- d) English is perceived as a significant language for students due to many reasons, namely its crucial importance in conducting scientific research, pursuing studies abroad, and ensuring better job prospects.
- e) The majority of the students believe that using English in higher education will improve the quality of scientific research and their overall educational experience.

The results of this study thus reveal that English is gradually perceived by Moroccan doctoral students as a vital language in higher education. The study also shows the inefficiency of the current measures to reinforce the status of English in higher education even though decision makers continue to underscore the importance of English for the country's development. Another important finding of this study is that French seems to be less useful for these students even though it is the first foreign language in the country and the language of instruction in colleges of science and technology. Indeed, many participants in the study expressed this fact explicitly, arguing that French has become a real burden on the Moroccan higher educational system. As one of the participant said, "we should switch to the Anglo-Saxon system simply because the French one has proven its weakness and failure for years."

Based on these findings, the current study proposes the following recommendations:

- a) Improving the teaching of English in secondary and tertiary education.
- b) Providing universities and technical colleges with the necessary tools to conduct research in English (e.g., databases, translators, editors, etc.)
- c) Establishing partnerships with international universities that use English as a medium of instruction
- d) Offering courses using English as a medium of instruction.
- e) Creating a synergy involving policy makers, language planning experts, subject matter instructors, and English language teachers in order to prepare a comprehensive plan that will help elevate the status of English in higher education

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