



SCIENCES POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS MAKING ENGLISH THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION IN MOROCCAN TERTIARY EDUCATION

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Abstract:

The current study investigated the attitudes of Moroccan university students in scientific disciplines towards using English as a language of instruction in tertiary education. Major published articles on English language described the upsurge of its speakers in the expanding circle as phenomenal. Morocco is no exception. Studies have shown that there has been a growing interest in learning English among youth. By the same token, students have been less enthusiastic about French currently used in academic settings and believe that English is more useful for the future of the country. In order to test the validity of the claim, quantitative research in which ninety-eight university students from different master's program participated was conducted. The aim was to know their attitude towards making English the medium of instruction in higher education and either confirm or disconfirm the claim made by researchers in scholarly journals. After undertaking a survey questionnaire, it was shown that the vast majority of postgraduates specializing in scientific disciplines were in favor of using English in their studies. They definitely wanted English to take over French currently used in academic context in Morocco.

Keywords: English as a global language, the language of instruction, the language of progress and prosperity, the language of the future

1. Introduction

Unlike many developing countries in the world, policymakers in Morocco have not decided to make English the main language of instruction in higher education yet. Apparently, English has conquered different professional domains and has taken over other languages, traditionally accepted as languages of modernity and progress. English seems to gain more and more ground every year. In academia, scientific papers and

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publications are originally written or translated into English language, not to speak of international seminars and conferences that make English mandatory for participants (David Crystal, 2019). In fact, there is a growing demand expressed by university students in scientific domains for making English the language of instruction in higher education (Belhiah and Abdelatif, 2016). Their voices nonetheless have not been heard. There is a striking reality when considering the status of English in Moroccan society although the government has not made English the language of instruction in tertiary education, the number of its speakers is steadily increasing. In 2017, the number of Moroccans speaking English was estimated about 4,934,000 (14%). There is no doubt that this figure has doubled or tripled since then (Crystal, 2019).

The current study therefore seeks to identify university students' perception of using English as the language of instruction in higher education. To empirically account for their attitudes towards English, a number of questions are formulated and addressed to master's students in different scientific majors. Do Moroccan students recognize the importance of English as the language of the future? Is English, in their mind, equated with progress and prosperity? Is it possible to replace French language, currently used in academic settings, and adopt English instead? Would the adoption of English language as a language of instruction in higher education improve the quality of Morocco's educational system? The article will tentatively respond to the questions above and test whether Morocco, according to university students, is ready to make English the language of instruction or still unable to dispense with French language. To find out the prevailing attitude towards English, the investigation will mainly focus on students in scientific disciplines at Cadi Ayyad University in Marrakesh.

2. English as a global language

No one can deny the fact that English language has become widely spoken around the globe. It is qualified as a global language due to a massive upsurge in the number of speakers (Scott and Crystal, 2013). According to Crystal, "*no other language can match this growth*" (2003, p.6). Recent studies have shown that the number of English users in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context has outnumbered the native ones (Crystal, 2019). Native speakers of English language can no longer claim that English belongs only to them since the vast majority of English speakers exist in countries where English is used as a second language (Nunan, 2015).

According to the Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language (2019), current estimates indicate that 2.3 billion of the world's population uses English either as first (L1) or second language (L2). According to Crystal (2019), over 3000 million, about 40 percent of the world's population, is exposed to English in their daily routine. The numbers are significant as they reflect the relentless expansion of English around the globe.

To understand the language distribution globally, Kachru (1992) devised a model that differentiates between English users around the globe. The representation of English

speakers is demarcated by circles. Each circle identifies the English language situation of countries in the world. These circles are 'inner', 'outer', and 'expanding'. The inner circle refers to countries where English is a native language. The outer circle is used to represent a linguistic situation in some countries in which English is spoken together with local languages. The expanding circle stands for the linguistic situation where English is used as a foreign language. Using Kachru's model to identify English language status in our country, it is evident that Morocco belongs to the expanding circle of countries.

In addition to its being a widely spoken language, this number is constantly increasing as a result of political, economic, and socio-cultural implications. Crystal confirms that *"everywhere we see an increase of those studying English in schools and using it in business circles"* (2019, p.115). He also sees that this growth is natural since people around the globe depend on English for their economic and social welfare. The language has invaded different domains namely politics, business, communication, entertainment, the media, and education.

English has been given an official status in over seventy countries. In all these places, it is used alongside the countries' native language (L1). In some other countries, it has taken precedence as it has been given the position of a foreign language that is taught in schools but has no official status. Over a hundred countries (e.g., China, Russia, Germany, and Egypt) adopted English as a foreign language. There are a number of factors that are responsible for choosing English as a foreign language. Crystal outlines the following: *"historical tradition, political expediency, and the desire for commercial, cultural, or technological contact"* (2003, p.5).

A language is claimed to be powerful and influential not usually due to the number of its users or for its aesthetic features or simplicity of grammar but mainly as a result of the political, military, and economic dominance of its native users (Crystal, 2003). The emergence of the United States of America as the first power in the world superseding British imperialism after World War II and the Cold War has been a key element in the rapid increase of English language speakers around the globe.

English has reached the status of universality and, to deploy a sociolinguistic term, has become a Lingua Franca. The concept, according to Longman Dictionary of Teaching and Applied Linguistics, refers to a language that is used for communication between different groups of people, each speaking a different language. It is a language that meets a constantly growing need of international relations and communication. For Crystal, *"several domains have come to be totally dependent on English – the computer software industry being a prime example"* (2003, p.30). Due to this far and wide outspread of the language, different terms have been coined by applied linguists to describe this linguistic situation. English has been referred to as 'World Englishes' (Kachru, 1994), 'English as a global Language' (Crystal, 2003), 'Worldliness of English' (Penneycook, 2017), and 'English as a world English' (Mair, 2003). This constitutes ample proof that the universality of English Language is no longer an issue of intellectual debates, but a physical and objective reality acknowledged across the world.

3. The linguistic landscape in Morocco

The linguistic situation in Morocco is a bit complex. It has been characterized by the presence of bilingualism, diglossia, and several languages and dialects used for everyday interactions (Ennaji, 2005). In the Second World War, English emerged in the Moroccan society with the establishment of military bases (e.g., Benguerir, Ben slimane and Kenitra military bases). It has been used as a second language after French which is the language of the colonizer. French was the official language of Morocco before the independence. Since then, it has had no official status but remains prestigious and is used in different key sectors like business, finance, science, and technology (Errihani, 2017). In this global world, French has been gradually losing ground and English has taken over. *“English has supplanted Spanish in economy and education and is competing with French in education. English is the fastest growing European language in Morocco”* (Sadiqi, 2003, p.50). The outspread of English in Morocco has been strongly influenced by its status in the world. It is regarded as the language of science and technology, business, international communications, and research. Other factors such as the internet, movies, music, and tourism have also helped to promote English in the Moroccan linguistic landscape. Sadiqi confirms that *“the presence of English has been greatly enhanced by tourism, the movies, music, and now globalization”* (2003, p.50). For most Moroccans, English is regarded as the language of the future.

Recently, Morocco has taken a quantum leap in its attempt to develop the educational system. These endeavors are nevertheless deemed unsatisfactory since they could not culminate in altering the language of instruction in tertiary education. To keep up with world advancements, it is necessary to look into the possibility of adopting English as the main language of instruction. A number of Moroccan researchers have expressed their discontent with the current policy with regard to the status of English in Moroccan higher education. Belhiah and Abdelatif (2016), based on a study that targeted doctorate students in science and technology, concluded that students were in favor of adopting English as the language of instruction. That seems logical because the big bulk of scientific, technological, and academic data is written in English (Jenkins, 2009). In alignment with this, Loutfi and Noamane specify some areas in which English is by and large the most prevalent. They point out that *“English is undoubtedly the language of science, technology, global business, and international relations”* (2018, p.4). Its presence in educational settings is however weak and does not reflect students' expectations. Belhiah and Abdelatif (2016) endorse the idea of using English in higher education and dispensing with French language that stands in the way. French has never ceased to exist as a medium of instruction in colleges of science and technology although there is a pressing need for using English as the language of instruction. It is deeply rooted in the Moroccan educational system and shows resilience in the face of its opponents.

In 2021, Omnibus Marketing Research and Consultancies, commissioned by the British Council, investigated the attitudes of Moroccan youth towards the English language. According to the study, English is quickly spreading among the youth, aged

15 – 25, and that is due to its instrumentality and practicality. It was pointed out that the mastery of English in the Moroccan context is affected by age, socioeconomic factors, and level of education. The investigation aroused our curiosity to test further the credibility of the premise and seek evidence for the claim among master's students at the University of Science in Marrakesh. In this regard, the current research aimed to gather data on the subject matter to either approve or disapprove the result obtained from previous investigations.

4. Research methodology

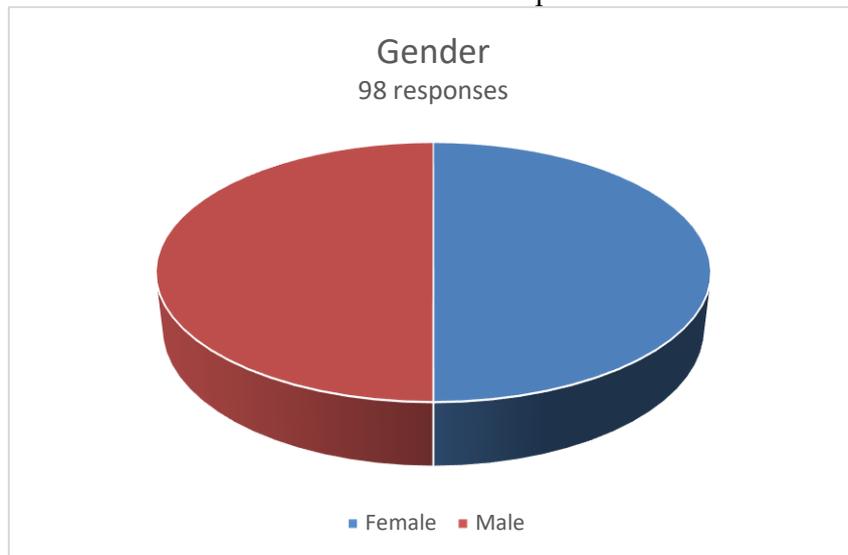
The present study aims to examine the attitudes of master's students towards the language of instruction in higher education. It seeks to collect quantitative data from the target population on the possibility of altering the current language of instruction and using English instead. To this end, a survey questionnaire which comprised eleven questions created to gather factual and attitudinal information about the subject matter was specifically designed. It was intended to reach out to a large number of participants currently enrolled in master's programs at the University of Cadi Ayyad in Marrakesh. Convenience sampling was adopted as a sampling strategy to choose only participants who were willing to participate in the study. Additionally, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic language to ensure that students understood the content well, thereby enticing students to easily respond to the questions and increasing the validity criterion. To also maximize validity, a link to a Google form survey was shared via text messages and WhatsApp. The questionnaire was therefore visible to all postgraduate students on social media special groups. It is worth noting that students in each master's program created a WhatsApp and Facebook group account to share updates and disseminate information among themselves. Once the survey questionnaire was posted on social media platforms, ninety-eight master's students (n = 98) submitted their answers. The process of data collection took about four months; it began on June 2nd, 2022 at 10:00 pm and ended on October 31st.

In order to understand students' attitudes towards using English Language as the medium of instruction in higher education, master's students in different scientific majors were surveyed. As the survey demonstrated, participants specialized in chemistry, biology, artificial intelligence, computer science, biochemistry, geology, physics, electrical engineering, agri-food science and technology, agronomy, and biotechnology. The decision behind targeting postgraduate students in the study emanates from the level of intellectual maturity they might possess. They are considered as novice researchers and on the threshold of specialization in scientific domains. Their experience in the context of academia though short can be a determining factor in the realization of whether there is a pressing need for making English the language of instruction in higher education, or there is no interest in such a change at the present time.

Ninety-eight university students decided to willingly answer the survey questions. Not planned in advance, but by a fluke, an identical number of respondents of

both genders answered the questionnaire. This means that 50% (44) of each gender equally participated in the study. To the advantage of the present work, this variable, due to this unexpected outcome, could be examined to find out the effect of gender differences on the attitude of the sample towards the subject matter. Nevertheless, the inclusion of such a variable did not seem to create any effect on the overall result of the current study. Additionally, the vast majority of respondents about 93% (92) belonged to the 20-25 age range, followed by five students who were between 25-30 and only 1 student chose 35 and above. Relying on the age factor, it might be assumed that the big portion of participants who replied to the questionnaire were full-time students and not professionals. 22.5% of them just started the master's program, and 29.2% were about to complete the second semester of the 2021-2022 academic year. Approximately, 17% of respondents were in the third, and the majority (31.5%) were finishing their final. The linguistic factor, based on the collected data, can be affected by age and the number of semesters completed. Students who are about to finish the program might be better placed to understand the value of using English as the language of instruction in higher education. Having presented demographic information about participants in the study, the analysis of data and discussion will be the focus of the subsequent sections

Chart 1: Male and female representation



5. Data analysis

In order to come to grips with the linguistic situation in the Moroccan university, close-ended questions were formulated. The intended goal is to measure attitudes towards using English as the language of instruction in higher education among Master's students. Ninety-eight students from the University of Cadi Ayyad pursuing different scientific majors willingly responded to the questionnaire. To unravel the confusion looming around the topic, students were asked whether they associate English with the language of the future.

Table 1: English is the language of the future

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
Is English the language of the future?	2%	1%	3.1%	35.7%	57.1%	1%

Not surprisingly enough, 57.1% of students strongly agreed that English is the language of the future. About thirty-five confirmed their agreement with the statement. However, only three students could not decide and chose neutral as a response. Another three totally disagreed with equating English with the language of the future. Almost 92 % of respondents believed that English is the language of the future. The data showed that the vast majority of university students held the same opinion about the prospect of English in Moroccan higher education. To confirm or disconfirm this claim, another question was addressed to students to find out which language might make a difference when used as the language of instruction in tertiary education. Six languages that are widely spoken and highly popular in the world were put to the test. These languages are Arabic, English, Spanish, German, Chinese and French.

Table 2: Shows the language of instruction in higher education

Language of Instruction	Percentage (-- %)
Arabic	12.2%
English	80.6%
Spanish	0%
Chinese	2%
German	2%
French	3.1%

The numbers are revealing as they leave no room for uncertainty or confusion. As Table 2 shows, the big bulk of the pool of students claimed that English would definitely make a difference once used as the language of instruction in tertiary education. 12.2% of respondents selected Arabic as the language instruction, only four chose German and Chinese, three checked French, and unexpectedly no one saw that Spanish could change things positively in higher education. Interestingly enough, almost three-quarters of participants believed that English would make a difference as a language of instruction in academic settings. It is evident that none of the languages above, as the survey demonstrated, could go neck and neck with English not even the Arabic language which is the official language of Morocco. The belief that the English language, according to master's students in different scientific disciplines, is the language of the future and that no other language can compete with is prevalent. From the pool of students that responded to the survey questionnaire, 74.5% confirmed that university students in master's program are well-aware of the role of English as the language of the future. Only 4 students out of 98 did not share this opinion. That proves that English is equated with the future since the vast majority of students claimed that it would be useful in their future studies.

In addition to its being the language of the future, over half of the participants associated the language with progress and prosperity. Its use all over the globe is not by fluke but merely determined by the function that it plays in altering an individual's socioeconomic situation.

Approximately, 57% of respondents upheld the idea that English is the language of progress and prosperity. 22.4% could not decide, but only a few students disagreed with the statement. English is therefore mentioned in the same breath as the gateway to development and social welfare. To take this further, our sample was asked whether it is possible to replace the French language currently used in academic settings and rubber-stamp the use of English instead. The answers were not contradictory to what was previously discussed but in fact, remained coherent and logical responses. Almost seventy percent of participants saw no reason why Morocco should not replace the language of instruction. For them, there is nothing that stands in the way of its implementation. Only 9 students thought the opposite as they believed that French as a language of instruction in higher education could never be put to rest. 16 out of 98 partially agreed to the possibility of replacing French with English, and only 4 could not make a decision. Interestingly enough, over 64% of participants admitted that this is the right timing for Morocco to dispense with French in academic settings and use English instead. This is clear evidence that the vast majority of our respondents confirmed that Morocco is in reality ready to make this transition to English. There is nothing that should hold our country back from changing the language of instruction in tertiary education.

In order to understand whether there is a correlation between the use of English in higher education and the enhancement of the quality of education, a direct question was formulated and addressed to university students. Their response made a lot of sense as only 7 students disagreed with the statement, but approximately 67% saw that there is a corollary relationship between the adoption of English and the improvement of the educational system in Morocco.

Sixteen students decided to be neutral as they probably thought that there were perhaps other elements that might be at play when a country wants to improve its educational system. Nine students did not know what to think about in relation to this point, yet it is obvious that there is a huge disparity between the different opinions as the numbers above showed. It is important to note that our respondents when answering the survey questionnaire were consistent. The majority were in favor of using English in tertiary education and that is reflected throughout their responses to the seven questions designed to gauge their attitudes.

Table 3: Displays attitudes towards English

Attitudes towards English	Percentage (-- %)
Language of the future	92.8%
Language of instruction	80.6%
Language of progress & prosperity	57.1%
Dispensing with French	70.4%
The improvement of the educational system	67.3%

Table 3 clearly shows a consistency of responses to the different points raised in the questionnaire.

6. Discussion

Several studies have shown that the English language has achieved complete dominance in the world to the extent that some professional domains entirely depend on English now. No wonder it has reached the status of lingua franca. Morocco is no exception; there has been an upsurge of English users in different arenas. In 2017, according to the Cambridge Encyclopedia of English Language (2019), about 14% of the Moroccan population spoke English fluently. Nonetheless, there has been no sign or reaction from the Moroccan government to make English the language of instruction in higher education although the preponderance of evidence indicates that there is a pressing need for such a decision. The current study thus comes to investigate attitudes towards using English in tertiary education. The numeric information obtained during data collection corroborates the premise that it is to Morocco's advantage to change the language of instruction in higher education.

The vast majority of participants showed a positive attitude towards English. There is no disparity of opinions when it comes to using English as the language of the future. Moroccan students, based on the current study, confirmed that English has the status of a lingua franca, a language that facilitates communication between individuals from different nations. For them, there is a future prospect of making English part of the educational system as it will definitely allow them to connect and communicate with the world better. It is in fact a language that promises a bright future for our target population. Over 92% of them think that English will be the predominant language in the years to come. This result perfectly confirms predictions about the future of English made by renowned scholars like (Crystal, 2003; Kachru, 1994; Mair, 2003).

The neologism of 'World Englishes', 'English as a Global Language', and 'English as a World English' undeniably reflects the extent to which English is gaining more and more ground. This in fact explains that Moroccan students are totally aware of the geographical expansion of English and understand the impact this has on their future and the future of Morocco.

Another element that seems to provide clear evidence for altering the status of English in Moroccan universities is the belief that only English could have a considerable influence in academic settings. The participants were explicitly asked to select one language that they considered invaluable for resuming their university studies from six international languages. These languages are Arabic, French, Spanish, German, Chinese and English. As expected, over 80% opted for English and a few students thought that Arabic could make a difference when used as the language of instruction. It is important to note that only 3.1% chose French. Strikingly enough, this result was beyond imagination since the current language of instruction in higher education is French. Normally, students would feel more comfortable learning in the language they are more

used to. The reality however forces students to think otherwise, considering the pragmatic aspect of the English language. This attitude proves the fact that English is more practical and *"useful than French for the future of Morocco"* (Ennaji, 2005, p. 120).

Additionally, there is a belief among university students that English is equated with progress and prosperity. As the figures showed, over 57% of participants hold this belief. Even those who were reluctant to admit this reality, chose the safe side by selecting 'maybe' as a reaction to this statement. English, according to our target population, promises a brighter future because of its universality and usefulness in various educational and professional domains. Associating English with progress and prosperity seems to provide a motivational force for students to make high academic and professional achievements. The thriving of Morocco therefore depends on altering the language of instruction in tertiary education. Jumping on the bandwagon to keep pace with countries that use English in higher education is fundamental. This was expressed by students in different studies that were carried out in Morocco (Omnibus Marketing Research and Consultancies, 2021; Belhiah and Abdelatif, 2016; Elbiad, 1985).

Changing the language of instruction in tertiary education is not a simple maneuver or an easy enterprise. The process definitely requires careful planning and qualified human resources to cater for a smooth transition. Yet, the vast majority of participants confirmed the possibility of moving forward toward making English the language of instruction. More than seventy per cent of Master's students saw that the time has come to alter to English as they probably took heed of the challenges and obstacles in the way of its implementation. French, which is the language Moroccan universities use to teach different subject matters, does no longer meets the expectations of students. Based on the current study, students are willing to dispense with the language of the colonizer since there is no benefit in supporting its use in academic settings. The survey result reflects this reality. Almost 65% of our respondents agreed to put French language to rest. They were enthusiastic about phasing in English to teach scientific subjects in higher education.

For making this transition, it is necessary to ask ourselves what the added value in changing the language of instruction would be. The quality of instruction matters when making such a decision. The students we asked definitely associated the implementation of English in Moroccan universities with the improvement of the quality of instruction. This among other factors can be the motivational force that entices university students to hold this positive attitude toward English. Generally, the numeric data confirms that university students, based on the current and other studies, insist on using English in academic settings and dispensing with French. The latter is no longer of interest to Moroccan university students.

7. Conclusion

The current study aimed to gauge the attitudes of master's students towards making English the language of instruction in higher education. To this end, quantitative data

was collected from the target population through the use of a survey questionnaire that included demographic information about participants and attitudinal questions about the subject matter. Participants in the study were post-graduate students pursuing their master's degrees in different scientific majors at Cadi Ayyad University in Marrakesh. The vast majority of respondents hold a positive attitude towards the English language since it promises brighter future prospects once used as the language of instruction in Moroccan universities. It was shown that students definitely acknowledge its universality and positive impact on their future. Thus, making it the language of instruction, according to our participants, would certainly bring about beneficial changes on a larger scale. It is therefore essential for Morocco to join other countries which have already made this political decision and dispensed with the language of the colonizers. For students, there is a causal relationship between the implementation of English in tertiary education and the prosperity and progress of the country. Maintaining the status quo would not do us any good, but dramatically slow the pace at which Morocco should progress in the years to come. Hence, the improvement of the educational system hinges on altering the language of instruction in higher education. It is highly recommended that decision-makers in Morocco take into consideration the linguistic factor as a key element in the progress of our nation. Using English in tertiary education should not remain wishful thinking but a reality that needs to be materialized; the sooner the better. The current study thus far presented irrefutable evidence for the claim that English needs to be the medium of instruction in higher education. Nonetheless, there is a pressing need to conduct qualitative research to understand the reasons why Moroccan students hold such a positive attitude towards English. It is important to investigate whether their motivation to dispense with French and use English instead is intrinsic, extrinsic, or simply a fad. We also need to know how English will make a difference in improving the quality of the educational system in Morocco. Additionally, providing evidence for the failure of the French language to maintain its popularity in academic settings can be another area to inquire into. Is this a warning sign that predicts the death of French and thus announces an upcoming linguistic transition in Morocco? The result that the current study yielded was revealing, albeit incomplete. Therefore, looking into the matter from a different methodological perspective will definitely give us a clear picture of the linguistic situation regarding the language of instruction in Moroccan universities.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

By the following, we declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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