Examining Language Policy in Moroccan Public Education: Towards A More Diverse and Socially Equitable Education

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Language policy in Moroccan public education has been a highly debated and controversial issue given the nation’s complex history (Boutieri, 2016; Tomáštík, 2010; Zouhir, 2014). Currently, the Moroccan state recognizes two official languages: Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Tamazight, the local indigenous language. While language instruction at the primary and secondary levels of public education is largely limited to MSA, higher education shows a greater degree of flexibility. Most Moroccan public universities use French as the language of instruction for STEM subjects and MSA for subjects in the humanities and the arts (Spolsky, 2010). This language dichotomy prevails in most of the Moroccan public sector, where French exists as the de facto official language of communication for business, government and science professions (Boutieri, 2016).

This presentation provides a literature review of the history and development of language instruction in Moroccan public education, beginning with the French Protectorate, and ending with the failure of Arabization. This presentation examines the major challenges that have prevented the Moroccan state from adopting a language policy for public education that promotes greater social equity and positive student learning experiences.

Quick Facts: Moroccan Public Education Landscape

Data source: 2018 UNESCO Institute of Statistics

### Compulsory education lasts 9 years from ages 6-14

- **Primary Education (Ages 6-11)**
  - 99.1% total enrollment for students
  - Average pupil to teacher ratio: 26:8
  - Primary language of instruction: MSA
  - French introduced in grade three as a foreign language subject

- **Secondary Education (Ages 12-17)**
  - 64.49% total enrollment rate for students
  - Average pupil to teacher ratio: 19:42
  - Primary language of instruction: MSA
  - French used for technical and scientific disciplines in some secondary schools

- **Tertiary Education (Ages 18-22)**
  - 35.94% total enrollment for students
  - Primary language of instruction: MSA (Humanities & Social sciences)
  - Primary language of instruction: French (sciences subjects)

### Key Dates: Policy Developments & Implementation

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<tr>
<th>1916 - 1956</th>
<th>French Protectorate</th>
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<td>The French Protectorate developed a new system of education in the country that incorporated both French and traditional, (pre-colonial) Islamic elements of education with limited French language instruction as a foreign language (DeGorge, 2002).</td>
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<th>1956</th>
<th>Post- Independence &amp; Arabization</th>
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<td>Higher education in Morocco largely resembled French secondary education with no public universities existing in the modern sense of the institution. The country’s first university (Mohamed V in Rabat) was founded by royal decree in 1957 and used French as its primary language of instruction (Boutieri, 2016).</td>
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<th>2011</th>
<th>Moroccan Constitutional Referendum</th>
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<td>With the introduction of Tamazight as an official language, (in addition to MSA) the government charged itself with the responsibility of adopting an inclusive linguistic policy that recognizes and promotes “diverse Moroccan cultural expressions” (Article 5, Title 1, Moroccan Constitution, 2011).</td>
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<td>His Majesty, King Mohamed VI officially repealed Arabization and bilingual (MSA and French) education was formally recognized at the tertiary level of public education.</td>
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### Policy Challenges

The current language policy does not address the language disconnect between primary, secondary and tertiary education in the public sector. Fatine Guedira (2017) notes that “failure to reform the [Moroccan] education system… led to a loss of trust in public [schooling],” and preference for private schools where greater emphasis might be placed on French and English language proficiency needed to access several popular degree programs in higher education (p. 9).

Quality education in any language is not easily attainable by all Moroccans and attempts at positive reform may have had more negative impacts than positive ones. Standardization of quality education is challenged by social inequalities within the country, a multilingual and multicultural population, and legacies of occupation by outside powers (Boutieri, 2016; Alalou, 2018).

Alalou (2018) points out that while Arabic has a bit more representation in formal education, it is normally limited to a middle register of Arabic that combines elements of MSA with local Moroccan Arabic (Darija). Zouhir (2014) notes that, despite the state’s official recognition of Tamazight and increasing pressure from various cultural movements in the country, the implementation of a multilingual policy remains a large challenge in Morocco.

### Selected References
