Original Research

A constructivist inquiry into English-Medium Instruction in Moroccan higher education

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As Morocco undergoes a shift in its linguistic landscape, English has gained prominence as a key medium for academic and professional mobility, particularly in science, technology, and business fields. This study investigates the recent implementation of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) at tertiary education in a context traditionally dominated by French and Arabic. In particular, it explores the perceptions, experiences, and strategies of Moroccan university students in a private institution in Casablanca regarding the adoption of EMI in Computer Science and Business Administration programmes. Drawing on a qualitative design grounded in constructivist grounded theory, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 35 undergraduate students and analysed through open, axial, and selective coding. Over 300 initial codes were generated, leading to the emergence of key themes such as the global value of English, institutional and pedagogical barriers to EMI, lecturer preparedness, and the need for multilingual balance. Findings reveal strong student support for English as a global language of science, communication, and employment, while also highlighting significant challenges, including limited early exposure, underprepared instructors, and lack of disciplinary language support. Students advocated for the need for early EFL integration at the primary level, EMI-specific teacher training, and the normalisation of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) across all disciplines. Importantly, they also called for the preservation of local languages through a balanced multilingual policy.

KEYWORDS: *English-Medium Instruction, EMI, language policy, higher education, Morocco, student perceptions, multilingualism*

1. INTRODUCTION

English-taught programmes are increasingly being adopted in higher education worldwide (Dearden, 2016) due to English's global rise as a lingua franca in education, science, and the labour market. English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is used to promote internationalisation, enhance students' English proficiency, and boost graduate employability (Galloway & Rose, 2021). Governments and policymakers, particularly in the Global South, are supporting EMI as part of broader educational reforms to align with global standards and improve access to

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international academic and professional opportunities (Dearden, 2016; R'boul, 2024). This global shift toward EMI is also increasingly reflected in Morocco, where language-in-education policy is deeply intertwined with the country's historical and sociolinguistic complexities. Morocco's linguistic landscape has long been shaped by its complex colonial history and post-independence language policies (Sayeh & Razkane, 2022, 2025). Following independence in 1956, the Moroccan state adopted a policy of Arabisation aimed at promoting Arabic as the official language of education and administration (Sayeh & Razkane, 2022). However, French, as the language of the former colonial power, maintained a dominant role in higher education, science, commerce, and governance (Belhiah, 2022; Sayeh & Razkane, 2022, 2025). To this day, French remains deeply embedded in institutional and academic life, particularly in scientific and technical disciplines, effectively functioning as Morocco's *de facto* language of instruction in many university programmes (R'boul, 2024; Sayeh & Razkane, 2022).

In recent years, English has emerged as a language of increasing importance in Morocco. This shift reflects broader global trends in which English functions as a lingua franca across domains such as education, international trade, research, and technology (Kurniawan, 2024; Sofyan, 2021). Within Morocco, English is gaining ground in both policy discourse and public attitudes, particularly among youth and university students who view it as a vehicle for upward mobility, international engagement, and access to global knowledge (Ben Hammou & Kesbi, 2023; Nadri & Hoaucha, 2020). Pilot EMI programmes in secondary schools (Anaam & Kerouad, 2024; Ben Hammou & Kesbi, 2023) and the increasing adoption of EMI in tertiary education reflect a growing recognition of English in Morocco as a strategic asset prerequisite for professional and academic development and global integration (Belhiah, 2022; Nadri & Hoaucha, 2020; R'boul, 2024). Also, the Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education supports the adoption of EMI in tertiary education to increase graduates' global employability and boost their English alongside French, and thus strengthen their multilingual proficiency (Daniel & Ball, 2010).

Despite this rising interest in English, Morocco's educational language policy remains largely anchored in French. This creates a misalignment between traditional institutional structures and contemporary global realities (Sayeh & Razkane, 2022).

While many Moroccan students and educators increasingly favour English due to its international relevance, French continues to be the dominant medium of instruction in higher education, leading to linguistic tension and educational inequity (Belhiah, 2022; R'boul, 2024). Moreover, the introduction of EMI in Moroccan universities in various scientific and technical fields such as maths, physics, biology, Computer Science, and Business Administration, poses a number of pedagogical and infrastructural hurdles. These include inadequate faculty preparation, limited access to EMI-qualified instructors, and gaps between students' linguistic skills and the demands of English-based instruction (R'boul, 2024; Nadri & Hoaucha, 2020). While students may perceive EMI as beneficial for academic and professional development, many report difficulties with comprehension, terminology, and the cognitive load of learning complex content in a non-native language (Ben Hammou et al., 2025).

Although plenty of research has explored EMI in Europe and Asia, few studies have examined the EMI implementation in North African contexts that are largely under-researched (Curle et al., 2024). Many scholars (Curle et al., 2024; Galloway & Rose, 2021; Macaro et al., 2020) call for the investigation of EMI in such multilingual and multicultural settings like Morocco to gain a better understanding of EMI's unique challenges and potential in such contexts. Moreover, while most previous EMI research has examined the transition from L1 instruction to EMI as an L2, this study focuses on the less-explored shift from an L2 French-medium instructional context to an L3 English-medium context in Morocco, a postcolonial, francophone setting where English is neither an L1 nor the traditional L2 of instruction. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how Moroccan university students majoring in Computer Science and Business Administration programmes at a private university in Casablanca perceive the implementation of EMI in higher education. The study also examines these students' attitudes towards EMI and the challenges and opportunities they associate with learning content in Computer Science and Business Administration in English. Additionally, the study investigates these students' language learning strategies and their policy-related suggestions for improving EMI implementation and language education more broadly. Based on these objectives, the following research questions guide the current study:

1. What are students' perceptions of English in Moroccan society and education?

2. How do students experience EMI, and what challenges and opportunities do they associate with it?

3. What strategies do students use to cope with EMI, and what are their policy-related suggestions?

This research contributes to ongoing discussions about EMI and language planning in non-Anglophone contexts, particularly in postcolonial societies navigating between local languages, former colonial languages, and English as a global lingua franca. The novelty of the current research lies in its unique focus on the transition from an L2 (French) to an L3 (English) medium of instruction given that the target students received scientific

courses in French in secondary education. Hence, the study seeks to highlight how these students in a private Moroccan university deal with this shift amid evolving national language policies. By focusing on student voices, the study provides empirically grounded insights into how EMI is perceived and practiced among students studying Computer Science and Business Administration at a private university. These insights are valuable for policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers aiming to implement equitable and effective language policies in Moroccan higher education.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND
2.1. The global importance of English

English has firmly established itself as the global lingua franca that plays a pivotal role in cross-border communication, international business, academia, and technological advancement. It goes beyond its linguistic function and serves as a unifying medium that promotes collaboration, mutual understanding, and efficient information exchange across cultural and national boundaries (Kurniawan, 2024; Shenbagam, 2024). In international discourse, English facilitates communication among speakers of different native languages and emerges as the dominant language in diverse fields such as education, travel, diplomacy, and science (Kurniawan, 2024; Sofyan, 2021).

English is widely used in academia and education as a primary language that fosters intellectual collaboration and the global exchange of knowledge. In this regard, Sofyan (2021) emphasises English's dominant role in delivering content and enabling communication in different disciplines such as medicine, engineering, commerce, tourism, and the internet. This ubiquity not only enhances access to global information but also reinforces English's authority in knowledge production and distribution. Nearly 80% of Scopus-indexed journals are published in English, making linguistic proficiency a prerequisite for participation in global research communities (Márquez & Porras, 2020). Scholars such as Kawakibi and Indrawan (2024) argue that the dominance of English in academia improves the speed and impact of international research exchange, thanks to its grammatical simplicity and digital flexibility. However, this linguistic hegemony creates substantial barriers for non-native English-speaking scholars, who may find their work evaluated more on language proficiency than scientific merit (Baker, 2024). Consequently, diverse epistemologies risk being marginalised, reinforcing global academic inequalities (Baker, 2024; Márquez & Porras, 2020).

In addition to academia, English plays a central role in international business and employment. As the default language in many multinational corporations, English proficiency enables seamless collaboration among culturally diverse teams and supports the operational efficiency of global organisations (Tan, 2024). Proficiency in English is increasingly viewed as a key employability skill, particularly in international contexts, where it enhances access to global opportunities and career advancement (Tomar, 2024). In industries such as hospitality, trade, and

tourism, English proficiency is essential not only for job interviews but also for daily workplace communication (Rido, 2020). In response, universities are intensifying their focus on English language training to better prepare students for the global labour market (Hidayat, 2024; Rido, 2020). English not only fosters effective communication among diverse stakeholders but has also become a critical skill for international business success (Rattan, 2024). However, due to the gap between their English proficiency and employer expectations, many graduates call for curriculum reforms that better align language instruction with professional needs (Hidayat, 2024).

In addition, some scholars, such as Atasheva (2024), contend that learning English in addition to one's first languages can enhance cross-cultural communication, encourage multilingualism, and create a more diverse global workforce. Furthermore, Shenbagam (2024) contends that succeeding in technology-driven businesses entails a mastery of English as it is the primary language used in documentation and conversation. Overall, despite the fact that English promotes international academic participation, professional achievement, and technology integration, its dominance in many fields presents serious questions related to language fairness, access to knowledge, and cultural inclusivity (Márquez & Porras, 2020). Accordingly, some academics support more inclusive laws and teaching methods that honour the importance of English in international institutions while fostering linguistic variety (Atasheva, 2024; Baker, 2024).

However, the overreliance on English in professional settings has raised concerns. While English enhances employability, some argue that exclusive emphasis on this language may marginalise non-native speakers and overlook other valuable competencies (Tan, 2024). Similarly, Otilia (2013) highlights that although English proficiency is linked to access to vital information and economic mobility, its mastery can create a gap between its fluent and non-fluent speakers. Moreover, the global spread of English has often been interpreted through the lens of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2010), which frames its dominance as both a product and a reinforcement of Western economic, political, and academic hegemony. In postcolonial, multilingual settings, however, English is also embraced for its instrumental value, a pathway to education, employment, and international mobility, rather than for its intrinsic cultural or literary significance (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). This utilitarian orientation aligns with neoliberal views of language as a form of human capital, where linguistic proficiency is commodified for its market value (Block et al., 2012). Yet, scholars caution that such apparent empowerment may coexist with, or even mask, structural inequalities and pressures to conform to global linguistic norms (Piller & Cho, 2013). While previous research has focused on various non-anglophone contexts and explored the tensions between the perceived empowerment associated with English as a form of human capita and the reinforcement of underlying power imbalances and linguistic inequality (Dearden, 2014; Ekoç, 2020; Yang et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2020), less

attention has been given to how these dynamics unfold in Moroccan higher education, particularly within self-selected, English-medium programmes. This gap invites a closer examination of whether enthusiasm for English signals a shift in language ideologies in the Moroccan context or reflects the reproduction of existing global hierarchies.

2.2. The implementation of EMI

The implementation of EMI in higher education has introduced many promising benefits, especially in non-native English-speaking contexts. A primary advantage is the development of students' English proficiency that is critical for academic literacy and professional success in a globalised workforce (Alam et al., 2024; Anggraini, 2023; Botha, 2024). By delivering subject content in English, EMI not only fosters language acquisition alongside disciplinary knowledge but also helps students develop essential skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability (Ekoç, 2020; Saldo et al., 2025). Furthermore, EMI aligns with global academic standards and facilitates access to international scholarly materials (Botha, 2024; Özçelik et al., 2024). Researchers also argue that exposure to diverse linguistic environments not only promotes students' intercultural competence but also broadens their global outlooks (Anggraini, 2023).

However, several obstacles face the implementation of EMI. The low proficiency in English among Teachers and students was reported to hinder academic performance and content comprehension (Botha, 2024; Özçelik et al., 2024). Students were also found to struggle with understanding specialised terminology and the lecturer's foreign accent, which often resulted in increased cognitive load and academic stress (Lai & Idris, 2025; Özçelik et al., 2024). Additionally, other studies reported that both students and instructors who preferred instruction in their first languages because of concerns about inclusivity and identity or cultural resistance also undermined the successful transition to EMI (Saldo et al., 2025). These obstacles are not only limited to personal barriers but extend to institutional ones, such as a lack of EMI pedagogy training and insufficient professional development or linguistic support from institutions (Alam et al., 2024; Anggraini, 2023). Institutional issues like insufficient policy frameworks, lack of specialised support services, and lack of cooperation between language and content specialists make it more difficult to maintain successful EMI programmes. In summary, despite its benefits, EMI's success depends on institutional dedication to linguistic and cultural diversity, educator capacity building, and context-sensitive planning.

2.3. EMI in the Moroccan higher education context

In Morocco, the gradual adoption of EMI in higher education reflects a broader effort to align with global academic and economic trends. One of the major factors of EMI integration is its perceived ability to improve students' employability, access to international research, and preparedness for global collaboration. Although the environment of EMI is still developing in Morocco, preliminary findings show that educators and policy-makers are both hopeful and concerned. Pilot programmes in secondary school have shown promising results, with an increase in student engagement and English proficiency, especially in science and math (Anaam & Kerouad, 2024; Ben Hammou & Kesbi, 2023). Recent studies indicate that students in STEM and business-related programmes at the tertiary level see EMI as a way to enhance their academic performance, language proficiency, and prospects for employment in international markets (Belhiah, 2022; Nadri & Hoaucha, 2020). This is particularly important for students majoring in business administration and computer science, who frequently want to work for multinational corporations or take part in cross-border innovation ecosystems.

Notwithstanding these advantages, there are a number of pedagogical and structural obstacles to EMI adoption in Moroccan universities today. According to recent studies, a large number of teachers are undertrained to teach scientific material in English (R'boul, 2024). The sociolinguistic effects of EMI on Morocco's heterogeneous linguistic landscape are also called into question by worries about the marginalisation of Arabic and Berber (R'boul, 2024). These difficulties are similar to those seen in North Africa, where nations like Algeria and Tunisia are moving toward EMI in order to satisfy international demands. However, they are also facing challenges like curriculum adaptation, faculty readiness, and multilingual classroom dynamics (Melliti, 2024). More research that examines how students view and experience EMI in these fields is necessary to ensure its successful implementation in Morocco, especially in fields like computer science and business administration. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to meet that need.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS
3.1. Research design

This study employed Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2017; Glaser & Strauss, 2017) to generate hypotheses inductively, based on participants' real-life experiences and perceptions. In CGT research, data and analysis are co-constructed by participants and researchers. Unlike classical Grounded Theory methodology, in CGT, researchers use their prior knowledge, experiences, theoretical sensitivity, and interaction with the participants to interpret the data, allowing analytic categories to emerge.

CGT is suitable for this kind of study, which explores a new EMI environment where English is introduced into a space which is L2-French dominated. This kind of setting is under-researched in EMI literature. Hence, our aim was not to test predetermined hypotheses, but rather to generate preliminary, data-driven hypotheses that could inform future research in similar EMI contexts.

3.2. Participants

The study recruited 35 undergraduate students from a private university in Casablanca. Participants, majoring in *Computer Science* (CS) or *Business Administration* (BA), were

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selected using a theoretical sampling technique to ensure that emerging concepts and categories from the data were thoroughly explored and developed, as required by grounded theory methodology. The participants' mean age was 19.83 years (SD = 1.54), which indicates a relatively homogeneous age distribution. The sample consisted of 21 females (60%) and 14 males (40%). Regarding academic discipline, 24 participants (68.57%) were enrolled in CS and 11 (31.43%) in BA. Their English proficiency ranged from B1 to B2. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided written consent. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

3.3. Data collection

Following CGT (Charmaz, 2014), data collection and analysis proceeded concurrently and iteratively. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data regarding students' attitudes, experiences, and beliefs regarding the implementation of EMI at their institution. The questions addressed issues like the importance of French, the need for English, EMI preparedness, preferred languages, and language learning techniques. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in English and audio recorded.

Data analysis began immediately after the first interview, following open, axial, and selective coding techniques. Emerging codes and categories were compared constantly across cases to capture potential connections between categories. Accordingly, interview prompts were refined, and new participants were recruited. The same process was followed in each interview until no new codes emerged, signalling theoretical saturation. A total of over 300 initial codes were generated using participants' own words wherever possible.

3.4. Data analysis

To analyse the data, grounded theory procedures were followed (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 2017). First, the researchers started with open coding, where each line of the data was examined and labelled for significant concepts. Transcripts were read line-by-line and coded inductively. A total of over

300 initial codes were generated using participants' own words wherever possible. Examples include *'language of the world', 'scientific research is in English',* and *'English helps my learning'.* Then, axial coding was used to group similar codes and identify relationships between categories, such as *Global Importance of English, Academic Access,* and *French as Historical Dominance.* Finally, selective coding was conducted to identify the core category that integrates all the major themes. Individual participant responses were coded and grouped into subthemes and larger thematic categories. Constant comparison was used throughout the analysis to refine codes and categories and ensure theoretical saturation, which was achieved at the 35th interview as no new concepts emerged.

3.5. Intercoder reliability and validity

Three researchers coded the data independently and compared their findings to guarantee analytical rigor. An adaptation of Allen's (2017) reliability formula for multiple coders was used to calculate intercoder agreement: $3M/(N_1 + N_2 + N_3)$, where M is the number of shared codes among the three coders and N_1, N_2, and N_3 are the total number of codes assigned by each researcher, respectively. The intercoder reliability value of .850 indicated a high level of consistency and agreement in coding among the three researchers.

4. RESULTS
4.1. The ascending role of English in Moroccan society and higher education

Findings revealed that all participants perceived English as a strong instrument that is necessary for international communication, academic access, and economic mobility. Despite their awareness of the historical supremacy of French in Morocco, they exhibited a discernible trend in favour of English due to its greater applicability and importance at the international level. Many viewed French as the traditional foreign language of education and administration, inherited from Morocco's colonial past. As evidenced by some respondents, *'French is more common in Morocco than English since it is the primary foreign language of Morocco'* (R19), and *'It reflects the country's historical, cultural, and global positioning'* (R12). However, despite this legacy, a noticeable shift towards English preference was evident. Some participants noticed that *'French has been the dominant foreign language in Morocco due to historical ties, but English is gaining importance as it is an international language'* (R34) and *'is more globally relevant and should be prioritised for modern needs'* (R25).

As revealed from the responses, the growing tendency towards English is linked to its use in *'global scientific communication, [...], access to advancements and collaboration'* (R26). It is identified as a global language that facilitates communication across borders. Several cohorts perceived it as a necessary skill to interact with people from different countries, especially in multicultural or international contexts. This international status of English was often cited as a primary motive for learning the language, particularly its role in international business and technology. For instance, R6 remarked, *'Yes, because English is the most known language in the world, and some workers or bosses don't speak Arabic or French, so you have to*

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speak English'. Similarly, R12 noted, *'[English] is increasingly necessary due to several reasons like globalisation and international opportunities'*. These informants recognised English as a vital global tool to navigate academic, professional, and international spheres.

Additionally, many participants underscored English's role as the language of academic discourse and scientific research, due to its perceived simplicity and usefulness in academic research and learning. They explained that this shift towards English is mainly due to its dominance and practicality in international research, as one respondent claimed, *'All scientific research is done in English'* (R22). Another added, *'English is the language of technology and science'* (R11). The vast majority of the participants believed that proficiency in English grants access to global knowledge, especially in science, technology, and innovation. Although they acknowledged that while French still dominates in Moroccan higher education, many recognised that English is rapidly gaining ground, in alignment with global trends and the increasing internationalisation of academic discourse. For example, R28 noted that *'In Morocco French remains dominant in higher education while English is rapidly growing in importance reflecting a global trend and shifting educational priorities'*. Participants emphasised that fields such as science and technology are progressively adopting English, with one respondent stating, *'The professional science in Morocco is shifting towards English'* (R18). Others expressed concern about the limitations imposed by the continued reliance on French, which, as noted, is used in fewer countries and thereby restricts access to wider academic and scientific communities: *'Most of the world uses English which limits our research'* (R23). These perspectives reflect a growing awareness among Moroccan university students of the strategic value of English in research and academic advancement.

Moreover, all participants recognised the economic and professional value of English. They strongly associated English with increased career prospects, economic growth, and international employment. They perceived it as a vital tool to access opportunities in tourism, business, and global markets. For example, R2 explained, *'Learning English can be very beneficial; it can help in economic and job opportunities, education, tourism, business'*. This was supported by R25, who stated, *'For Morocco, a country that aims to strengthen its global ties and improve its*

economic competitiveness, English is essential'. However, while some cohorts underlined the usefulness of French for economic growth, others emphasised that this language, unlike English, is globally limited, and that *'English will facilitate economic and educational progress in a fast-digitalised world'* (R25; R32) and *'will allow the country to get ahead of its competitors'* (R4). The use of English in Morocco was perceived as a gateway to keeping track of international developments and engagement in global academic collaboration. Overall, English was seen not only as an academic asset but also as a professional necessity.

4.2. EMI: opportunities and challenges

Findings revealed that although the participants showed strong support for EMI as a modernising force, they also highlighted key challenges related to readiness, comprehension, and infrastructure.

4.2.1. Opportunities presented by EMI

The majority of participants believed that EMI programmes in Moroccan universities were necessary to meet international standards for education. Viewing English was the most widely used language in academia, business, and science, they perceived studying in EMI programmes prerequisite for international employment prospects. R1 thought that *'having more courses taught in English will better prepare students for the international job market and opportunities',* while R3 stated that *'it's a good idea because English is the language of science and business'*. Additionally, EMI was linked to global competitiveness and mobility. According to R8, EMI is advantageous for students who want to pursue higher education overseas. In this regard, EMI programmes were seen as a means of conforming to more general international norms and patterns. Such programmes, for example, *'enhance students' global competitiveness, provide access to international research, and align with the growing importance of English in academia and the job market',* according to R12. Similarly, R30 asserted that the *'introduction of English-taught programmes enhances Morocco's education systems and aligns with international standards'*. According to these replies, EMI is widely seen as a proactive and strategic reform in Moroccan higher education.

Findings also highlighted that the vast majority of participants favoured EMI in science and technical subjects due to its global dominance in research and academic resources. They emphasised that English facilitates direct access to up-to-date scientific literature and online databases. For instance, R35 explained, *'English [is preferred] because most scientific terms are in it'*. R8 added that English is *'more common in research papers and science subjects'*. R28 explained that *'teaching science in English helps students access research and prepare them for international course[s]',* while R3 stated that he would prefer *'English obviously, because most scientific research and books are in English; it will make studying easier'*. Others saw English as the default global language of knowledge exchange. This preference was not merely about academic trends but also about practical access

to knowledge. Some respondents stated that *'you can find a lot of information on the Internet using this language [English]'* (R17) and *'resources [are] available online'* in English (R18). Others expressed a more global perspective, such as R32, who observed that *'in all the countries in the world, you can find scientific people speak and do research in English'*. The overwhelming tendency was to favour English in scientific disciplines, driven by its perceived role as a gateway to current research, academic engagement, and global communication due to its role as the global language of research and knowledge production.

Moreover, participants viewed EMI as beneficial, particularly in enhancing language proficiency and academic development. Several respondents noted that being exposed to English in content subjects helped them expand their vocabulary and practice reading, writing, and communication skills (R1). Others highlighted practical gains, such as being able to locate relevant scientific content more easily: *'English facilitates the learning programmes and you find what you need'* (R32), and *'Yes, I can find the related content in English'* (R15). For some, EMI also improved comprehension and classroom engagement, with R10 stating, *'I understand better that content that is being explained'*, and R8 emphasising that it *'made research in scientific content easier and [improved] understanding'*. Additionally, EMI was perceived as a means of expanding one's linguistic repertoire, as noted by R31: *'You add another language to your knowledge'*.

4.2.2. Challenges in Implementing EMI

Despite overall support for EMI, participants expressed divergent views regarding Morocco's readiness to implement EMI across higher education institutions. Some respondents believed that the current environment in Morocco is gradually becoming more conducive to EMI, citing the growing availability of English-language resources and early exposure to the language through media and schooling. Regarding the country's preparedness, they emphasised the increased availability of English-language resources, the proliferation of English-taught programmes, and the growing influence of English in Moroccan society. As R6 noted, *'There are a lot of English books and universities to learn around Morocco'*, and R29 pointed out that exposure to English through social media and entertainment content has increased students' familiarity with English. R14 stressed that early language exposure to English could accelerate readiness (R14), while others noted that EMI could support students planning to study or work abroad.

However, a significant number of participants raised concerns about insufficient preparation to implement EMI in Moroccan tertiary education. Many were cautious or critical of a full-scale shift to EMI, pointing to multiple systemic limitations, including insufficient teacher proficiency, weak student readiness, and the continued dominance of French in earlier levels of schooling. R15 explained, *'We're not ready yet; teachers need more training'*, a sentiment echoed by R5 and R26. R20 pointed out that *'lower education still uses French more'*, making the transition to EMI difficult. Likewise, R23 expressed concern over the

difficulty students might face transitioning to English at university after years of studying in French. Some felt that implementation was premature, with R16 arguing, *'It is not about being ready; I think they need to start first with public school so that everyone gets used to English'*. Others, such as R25 and R26, emphasised that progress is only partial and that *'more infrastructure, teacher training, and support'* are urgently needed to ensure a smooth transition.

Other challenges underscored by respondents are related to comprehension and cognitive load. Many participants reported that EMI could hinder comprehension, particularly in the early stages of learning when students lack sufficient language proficiency. R12 explained that low English proficiency *'may create difficulties in understanding complex concepts, lead to slower learning, and cause frustration'*, a concern echoed by R19, who found it initially *'challenging to grasp complex topics in a non-native language'*. Others agreed that EMI can slow down the learning process at first, especially in technical or abstract subjects, as noted by R28: *'It can make learning harder if skills aren't strong, especially in complex subjects'*. Similarly, R34 observed that EMI presents difficulties *'especially for students with weak English skills'*. However, several respondents acknowledged that these challenges tend to diminish over time. R1 noted that *'at first it can be challenging but then it becomes easier'*, and both R25 and R26 recognised that, despite early struggles, EMI eventually supports deeper understanding and access to global academic knowledge. As R35 succinctly put it, familiarity with English in advance *'makes learning [scientific terms] easier'*. Overall, while initial comprehension difficulties were a common experience, many participants described EMI as ultimately beneficial with time and exposure.

4.3. Learner preparedness and language planning

Participants revealed a strong awareness of the linguistic demands associated with EMI and shared a wide range of strategies they employ to improve their English skills. Their reflections also included calls for systemic changes to Morocco's language education policies and the need for early English exposure, teacher training, and a rethinking of the French-dominant legacy in the education system.

A key subtheme that emerged was the importance of early preparation to ensure EMI success. Many participants emphasised that English should be introduced in the early stages of education to build a solid linguistic foundation before entering university. Many participants offered policy-oriented recommendations, with a strong emphasis on the early integration of English into Morocco's education system. Several participants advocated introducing English instruction at the preschool or primary levels to ensure long-term proficiency and academic readiness. As R7 suggested, *'English should be taught starting from preschool'*, and R25 explained that early exposure *'improves fluency, enhances global competitiveness, and supports access to knowledge and opportunities'*. They believed that such early exposure would help normalise the use of English across subjects

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and prepare future generations for a globalised world. However, several respondents stressed that early English instruction would only be effective if teachers themselves were adequately trained. R2 noted, *'Train teachers in English'*, while R12 added that without teacher readiness, *'students cannot benefit from early English education'*.

Many participants described proactive and independent approaches to improving their English. A popular method involved consuming English-language media, including movies, music, and YouTube videos. As R1 explained, *'I watch educational videos in English and movies [and] practice speaking with classmates'*, while R3 added, *'Watching movies with subtitles, reading books... even talking to yourself'*. Other participants focused on reading, writing, and vocabulary-building techniques. R2 noted, *'If I come across something difficult, I write it down and look it up later'*, and R7 shared that she reads books and writes essays to reinforce language use. Other respondents stated that they used digital tools, such as language apps, online dictionaries, translation tools, and AI platforms, to help them improve their English proficiency (R5; R23; R34). Another strategy the participants used is interacting with classmates and discussing topics in English to develop fluency and confidence in this language (R14; R28).

Despite their personal effort, the participants identified several key language areas they need to improve to succeed in learning scientific content in EMI. Insufficient vocabulary repertoire, especially in relation to academic and technical terms, was among the most commonly cited language issues they had. In this regard, R1 underscored the importance of expanding vocabulary *'related to [her] study field'*, while others emphasised learning more *'technical words'* (R8), *'advanced English terms'* (R35), and *'academic vocabulary'* (R28). Another language problem the respondents mentioned is a deficiency in English grammar. A few participants said they had trouble writing. They emphasised the necessity of *'focus courses on academic writing and speaking'* (R26) and *'academic skills and technical language practice'* (R25). One of the language problems mentioned by the participants was a lack of effective oral communication abilities. Many students stated that they wanted to get better at public

speaking, pronunciation, and fluency in oral communication. R6 mentioned the need to increase confidence in *'public speaking, eye contact, and communication'*, while R9 wants to improve his English pronunciation. These reflections show a deep understanding of the linguistic requirements of EMI and a proactive approach to meeting them. This implies that confidence-building and presentation skills should be included in EMI preparation in addition to language mechanics.

Many respondents called for systemic changes that prioritise English over French as the primary language of instruction to better align Morocco's language education with international standards. They all agreed that English should replace French and become the main foreign language taught in Moroccan schools. For example, R30 suggested *'replacing French with English'*, arguing that it was essential to modernise Moroccan education. In a similar vein, R32 contended that *'if we want to change our reality, we should change our language from French to English'*. R16 agreed, hoping that this research would *'convince [policymakers] to hear our voice and replaced French with English'*. Many respondents supported starting EMI in elementary school, with R7 saying, *'Start EMI from primary school'*, and R14 stressing the significance of early normalisation of English across subject areas. While promoting English, some participants also voiced concerns about the potential marginalisation of Arabic. They emphasised the importance of maintaining linguistic balance by ensuring continued support for standard Arabic. As R23 cautioned, *'This generation is losing it [Arabic] even though it is supposed to be our language'*. Additional suggestions included expanding language workshops (R5), emphasising lifelong language learning (R6), and fostering bilingual competence in both English and the mother tongue (R29). Overall, students' policy perspectives reflected a desire for a forward-looking, multilingual education system that prepares students for global engagement while preserving their national identity.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. The ascending role of English in Moroccan society and higher education

Findings confirm the increasing importance of English as a foreign language in Morocco despite the historical dominance of other languages, primarily French, the colonial language, and Standard Arabic, the official language. Participants consistently believed that English would continue to grow and possibly become Morocco's primary foreign language, replacing French due to its instrumental use in major domains of life, which resonates with the British Council's report (BC, 2021) about language attitudes and use in Morocco. Students described English as the global lingua franca and an essential tool for accessing scientific knowledge and achieving academic and professional success. These positive perceptions reflect a growing shift in language preferences and ideologies among Moroccan youth, confirming previous findings that reported changes in Morocco's language landscape, influenced by the global hegemony of English and the decline of French in former French colonies (Ben Hammou &

Kesbi, 2025; R'boul, 2024). However, these results must be interpreted with caution, given the study's narrow scope. The sample is drawn from a self-selected programme in a private institution in Casablanca, where students are recruited based on their English proficiency. Hence, the majority of participants possess good to excellent English skills, which may explain their enthusiasm for English and EMI. This suggests that students with inadequate English competence in a different context (e.g., a public university) might hold different attitudes.

Additionally, there are legitimate concerns that the spread of English in Morocco may exacerbate the existing linguistic hierarchies by disadvantaging local languages. R'Boul (2024) warns that calls for replacing a colonial language (French) with another imperial language (English) will perpetuate linguistic and epistemic dependence on the West, leading to neocolonialism. This is consistent with Phillipson's (2010) theory of linguistic imperialism, which posits that the global dominance of English is driven by and reinforces power structures and hierarchies tied to Western economic and academic hegemony. However, participants in this study did not appear to be concerned about this dominance. Instead, they embraced English as a vehicle for self-advancement and empowerment, echoing the notion of instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), suggesting that learners value a language not for intrinsic or cultural reasons but rather for concrete benefits, be it academic access, employment, or international mobility, to name a few. Theoretically, the participants' enthusiasm for English represents neoliberal views of language as a form of human capital (Block et al., 2012), where language mastery is valued for its economic utility. In students' view, English proficiency is an asset to enhance one's economic and social status, demonstrating an instrumental attitude towards language. Similar views were reported in other non-Anglophone settings (Dearden, 2014; Ekoç, 2020; Yang et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2020).

In short, most participants in this private self-selected English-taught programme did not see English as a threat to their cultural identity but rather as an empowering tool that could help them achieve their academic and professional success. This perspective contradicts earlier postcolonial resistance to the spread of English (Philipson, 2012) and with the widespread views of French as a colonial language (Ben Hammou et al., 2025; R'boul, 2024). However, it is not safe to assume that these views suggest a wider change in language ideologies among Moroccan youth, as such an assumption would require large-scale research across public universities throughout the country to assess its extent and variability.

5.2. EMI opportunities and challenges

The data reveal a paradox between students' aspirations and implementation challenges, which reflects the global discourse around EMI in multilingual post-colonial settings. On one hand, students in this specific study supported transitioning to EMI in Moroccan higher education, particularly in fields of science, technology, and business, corroborating the assumption that English has become a de facto language of contemporary science and commerce (Kurniawan, 2024; Sofyan, 2021). They believed EMI would enhance their global competitiveness, help them integrate successfully in transnational markets, and facilitate access to cutting-edge scientific research. While these benefits have been widely documented in EMI research (Anggraini, 2023; Botha, 2024; Ekoç, 2020), the present study adds to the conversation by showing how these aspirations are articulated by students who have come from an L2-French-medium instruction environment. Students did not compare EMI to a national-language medium, but to another foreign language, which is still predominant in Moroccan higher education.

On the other hand, despite widespread enthusiasm for EMI in the Moroccan context (Belhiah, 2022; Ben Hammou & Kesbi, 2023), most participants in this study admitted that a large-scale shift to EMI in Moroccan higher education remains unfeasible under current conditions. Their concerns reflect deeper institutional and pedagogical limitations in addition to language barriers. This finding supports previous research by Ben Hammou and Kesbi (2023), who argue that a successful EMI expansion in Moroccan education is not supported by the country's current educational infrastructure.

In this study, students identified three major barriers that hinder successful transition to EMI in Moroccan HEIs. These obstacles include a lack of trained lecturers to teach scientific and technical content in English, the persistent dominance of French as the traditional medium of instruction in secondary and higher education, and students' and lecturers' poor English language proficiency. Our findings are in line with those of Özçelik et al. (2024), who reported those similar issues that hindered the EMI implementation in Turkey, including insufficient teacher preparation and a lack of institutional support. Our findings also agree with Alam et al. (2024), who emphasised the absence of sustainable professional development frameworks and a cogent EMI framework were among the key hurdles to EMI implementation in Indonesia.

Findings also reveal a crucial yet often overlooked aspect of language policy debates: the language policy continuity from the past to the present. Students repeatedly stated that the dominance of French in Morocco limits the successful adoption of EMI in Moroccan HEIs. This reflects the continuity of previous language policies, colonial legacy, and cultural identification, which all frame current orientations in language reforms. In this sense, the Moroccan multilingual context illustrates how English is adopted as a vehicle for modern aspirations, while it also collides with complex local education ecologies and language hierarchies (Ben Hammou & Kesbi, 2023; R'boul, 2024).

5.3. Learner preparedness and language planning

The study's findings revealed that participants were not only aware of the constraints associated with EMI implementation in the Moroccan context but also proposed proactive strategies to address them. First, they argued that an early, extensive exposure to EFL at primary education is essential to

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prepare for English-taught programmes in both secondary and higher education. This confirms earlier research, which shows that earlier exposure to English can enhance students' fluency, confidence, and ability to cope with academic content in English at higher levels (Galloway & Rose, 2021; Macaro et al., 2020). Yet, for early integration of EFL to be successful, students emphasised the need to prepare trained EFL teachers, corroborating Dearden's (2014) findings that language policy reforms tend to fail the objectives in the absence of adequate preparation and infrastructure.

In addition to early exposure to EFL, students were also aware of the importance of self-directed learning strategies in promoting their English skills and coping with the emerging challenges in EMI settings. Their enthusiasm for improving their English proficiency encourages them to work independently through different media, such as using subtitles, watching educational videos, and keeping vocabulary notes. These autonomous behaviours have been reported elsewhere (Rivero-Menéndez et al., 2018), yet in the context of this study, such agency operates in a context where institutional EMI support is minimal and where most students have transitioned from L2-French-medium instruction. However, the focus on autonomous learning as a strategy to cope with EMI challenges may not be available for all students, which raises equity concerns. As put by Ben Hammou et al. (2025), not all students have the socio-economic conditions to access digital tools that facilitate L2 learning, which risks widening the gap between privileged and disadvantaged students.

Despite their self-directed efforts to successfully integrate into the EMI environment, students admitted encountering language-related difficulties, which can be attributed to the specificity of the disciplinary English used in administration, business, and computer studies. Students reported difficulty mastering technical vocabulary and disciplinary literacy skills. These findings echo previous research on EMI, which calls for accompanying EMI implementation with EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and disciplinary English skills to help struggling students enhance their academic English proficiency and overcome content knowledge development barriers (Galloway & Rose, 2021; Özçelik et al., 2024). The challenges mentioned also reflect the cognitive load that students have to endure in EMI settings. They not only need to develop their content knowledge,

but they are also required to process a foreign language (L2/L3 – English). Sweller (1988) suggests that this dual burden can hinder students' learning unless it is mediated through pedagogical scaffolding and targeted language support.

Beyond their personal gaps and strategies, students called for policy-level reforms that prioritise English as Morocco's primary foreign language instead of French to align with global educational standards. These calls agree with previous findings that highlighted a growing preference for English among youths, a shift that signals a bottom-up shift in language ideologies in Morocco (R'boul, 2024). This bottom-up dimension is significant because it contrasts with Morocco's historically top-down language policy, where decisions about the medium of instruction have traditionally been driven by state-led reforms aligned with political and economic agendas. Participants emphasised the importance of preserving local languages, and, at the same time, advocated for a multilingual approach that both sustains national identity and promotes global openness. These perspectives also align with García and Wei's (2014) translanguaging theory, which frames multilingualism as an integrated communication model, rather than a set of hierarchical languages (Razkane et al., 2025).

6. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that Moroccan students enrolled in a private university perceive English as a powerful vehicle for academic success, professional mobility, and global integration. Despite the entrenched dominance of French in Morocco's education system, participants expressed a strong preference for English because of its utility in science, technology, and access to the international job market. Students also identified notable challenges that hurdle the effective EMI implementation, including limited English proficiency, insufficient EMI training for both students and faculty, inadequate early exposure to English, and difficulties with technical vocabulary and disciplinary content comprehension.

The study's findings offer valuable insights into the ongoing debate around language policy and education reform in Morocco. First, the study underscores the need for policymakers to reconsider the current language-in-education framework, which still heavily favours French. The strong preference for English among students in the current research reflects a growing disconnect between the current language-in-education policy, which continues to prioritise French, and the linguistic realities and aspirations of such students. This tension highlights the need for a policy shift that responds to students' evolving needs and global trends. Students' support for EMI also aligns with the increasing dominance of English in global research and professional fields. This suggests that continued reliance on French may limit Morocco's academic and economic competitiveness. Hence, policymakers and educational leaders should consider adopting a more gradual and context-sensitive approach to EMI implementation, ensuring alignment between language policy, curriculum design, and institutional capacity.

'Moreover, this study highlights the urgent need to introduce English instruction at earlier stages of schooling as many participants called for the introduction of English from the primary level to ensure long-term linguistic readiness. This suggests that language policy reform must not only address the language of instruction at the tertiary level but also re-evaluate the sequencing and intensity of English education throughout the system'

Moreover, this study highlights the urgent need to introduce English instruction at earlier stages of schooling as many participants called for the introduction of English from the primary level to ensure long-term linguistic readiness. This suggests that language policy reform must not only address the language of instruction at the tertiary level but also re-evaluate the sequencing and intensity of English education throughout the system. That is, EFL should be expanded to lower levels of schooling, preferably primary education, to prepare a generation of students who can cope with EMI successfully. At the same time, concerns about institutional unpreparedness, teacher training, and unequal access point to the risks of hasty or top-down implementation of EMI policies without adequate support structures. A gradual and planned transition toward English, particularly in science and technical fields, could better align Morocco's education system with global standards and opportunities.

In addition, effective EMI programmes require lecturers who are not only English proficient but also trained and qualified to teach complex content concepts in English. Thus, investment in EMI-specific training is necessary to enhance lecturers' EMI teaching skills. Also, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) should be integrated in all disciplines in HEIs to help students cope with the language-related difficulties in EMI settings. Finally, while advocating for broader adoption of English, participants also called for the preservation of Morocco's linguistic diversity, supporting a multilingual education model that values both global and local languages.

Finally, the study also reveals student awareness of the importance of balancing multilingualism, especially the need to preserve Arabic while adopting English. This positions students as informed stakeholders in language policy debates, advocating for a forward-looking, inclusive policy that recognises both global engagement and national identity. Overall, our study calls for a comprehensive, inclusive, and phased language education reform that meets all Moroccan students' needs and aligns with both Morocco's sociolinguistic fabric as well as global academic trends.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. It draws exclusively on students' perspectives and does not consider the views of teachers, administrators, and policymakers who are key players in EMI implementation. In addition, the focus on a single private university in an urban setting limits the generalisability of the findings to other contexts, particularly public universities and rural institutions. Finally, the reliance on self-reported data means that perceptions may reflect aspirations more than actual classroom practices.

To address these limitations, future research should expand the scope to include multiple stakeholders and diverse institutional contexts to capture a more comprehensive picture of EMI readiness in Morocco. Also, longitudinal studies could track the effects of EMI over time in classroom-based research to shed light on how multilingual students navigate academic content in English. Such research would deepen understanding of how global language trends intersect with local realities and inform evidence-based, equitable language policy reforms.

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