

EFL Value in Scientific and Commercial Stream Students in Morocco: The Case of Preparatory Classes (CPGE)

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Abstract: *Preparatory Classes for Higher Engineering Schools –CPGE Classes- are limited-access classes belonging to the Department of Education. They enable brilliant students in scientific and commercial streams to follow specialized study after secondary education. The aim is to produce highly-qualified people to effectively contribute to the technological and scientific progress of the nation by putting into practice their skills and know-how in different sectors. French is the language of instruction in CPGE classes, while English is noticeably of much less appeal despite its claimed importance in students’ careers, according to officials, palpable students’ indifference to English Classes.*

This research examines the importance of English in CPGE students’ programmes, the impact the mastery of English has on their professional life, and the extent to which they are satisfied with the way English teaching is carried out in their schools. The official guidelines to English language teaching in Preparatory Classes, in addition to the general official documents relevant to language education comprise the official literature. To complement the official vision and forge a clear conclusive portrait of the subject in question, this research employs questionnaires to collect students’ opinions and attitudes towards English and its worth for their academic and professional careers. The triangulation aims to eventually clear away ambiguity comparison of official information with questionnaire’s findings would lead to the compilation of succinctly valid information.

Keywords: CPGE/Preparatory Classes, EFL, ELT, English Education in Morocco

Background

Foreign language education has become nowadays inevitable, especially for developing countries, for the sake of communication and exchange of ideas and goods. Relentless aspiration for communication, as well as the evolution of educational means and motivations, has urged people to learn powerful foreign languages. For multiple instrumental purposes such as employment and research, mother tongues of economically and politically strongest countries are presently taught all over the world’s education systems. In this regard, English and French as major international languages, make up the essence of instruction media in Moroccan education today. While Morocco’s constitution defines Arabic and Amazigh as the official national languages, it maintains that foreign languages (English and French) have to be considered and promoted (Edisoft, 2011, p. 10). The newly issued official document reflects a new state’s language policy that attempts to keep equilibrium between national language maintenance and foreign language promotion.

Similarly, The National Charter for Education and Training (NCET), promulgated in 2000, undertakes the enhancement of Standard Arabic and the promotion of foreign languages. This catalytic reform plan examined the state of the education system and prescribed a series of actions that aim to remedy this ailing sector. The NCET’s ninth pillar calls attention to the significance of foreign languages, especially in teaching technical and scientific subjects (Commission Spéciale Education Formation, 2000, p. 39). It summarizes the state’s language policy in three major principles: 1) “the reinforcement and improvement of Arabic teaching;” 2) “the diversification of languages for teaching science and technology;” and, 3)

“openness to Amazigh Language” (p. 41). This actually suggests that mixed language education is a major hallmark of the education system nowadays.

Similarly, The White Book, an official document which outlines the principles upon which the education system should base, does not give language reform its fair share in reform endeavour. It goes along with the NCET and briefly states that school education should also aim at the enhancement of students’ communicative competencies through mastering Arabic, understanding and using Amazigh, and learning foreign languages (Comité de la Revision des Programmes, 2002, p. 13). Worthy of note is that the document does not clearly define these ‘foreign languages’. In effect, the last few years have marked heated talks about education system’s apparent degradation or relative disfunction, to say the least.

In the closing months of 2015, the Higher Council for Education and Training and Scientific Research (HCETSR) launched a thorough reform plan labeled “the Strategic Vision 2015-2030”, which is the latest detailed reform plan. The second chapter of this official document rests on the premise of inclusiveness and quality of education; it addresses language education and instruction language in all schooling phases from early schooling to university and undertakes the diversity of languages taught and used and instruction (CSEFRS, 2015, p.37). Interestingly, unlike previous blurred policies, the document endorses the teaching of world’s most spoken languages and their progressive adoption in instruction from secondary school onward. In this respect, it prescribes English as a medium-term instruction language in secondary school for certain courses (p.38). The HCETSR upholds diversifying instruction languages with the aim to equip students with multiple language-based instruction choices.

Obviously, official as well as unofficial data give evidence that English has become a veritable necessity in higher education, scientific research, and employment. From a global perspective, English is the most widely studied and spoken language in today’s globalizing world (Davies & Elder, 2004, p. 386). In a few years’ time English, will be spoken by more people than native speakers, which reflects how education systems all over the world have given rise to English and incorporated it into their language policies. In this respect, Martin Hyde, reports, in his analysis of the Moroccan language policy, that ‘speaking English is the key to employment’, ‘speaking English joins you to the international community’, ‘speaking English makes for modernity’ (p. 297). This only corroborates the tendency of English to become the world’s major means of instruction thanks to its commonly believed advantages professionally.

English in Preparatory Classes

Language is unquestionably an integral part of education, and language policy part and parcel in setting comprehensive education. Thus, it seems that its continuous update is a requirement to keep language education commensurate with the timely trends and challenges nationally and internationally. ‘Now that English is the language of globalization, international communication, commerce and trade the media and pop culture different motivations for learning it come into play’ (Richards, 2002, p. 2). English language education has become compelling truth that occasions its incorporation in the Moroccan education system, especially for advanced technical and scientific studies. Today, that a major tendency in Morocco stands for the promotion of English particularly in education, limited-access science and engineering classes still maintain the “French supremacy”.

Since CPGE Classes give access to Moroccan as well as foreign engineering schools, mastery of foreign languages is a fundamental requirement for all students. Hence, English became the major language in CPGE Classes that students are meant to develop written as well as oral proficiency in as a prerequisite for access to engineering schools. Teaching English in CPGE Classes involves regular oral teacher-student interviewing referred to as ‘Colles’, in addition to ordinary classes, where students engage in interactive activities using authentic textual and audiovisual materials. “The main purpose of teaching English in the Preparatory classes is to foster students’ critical thinking strategies through students’ exposure to authentic and evocative material” (ELT Guidelines, pg. 1-3). Teaching English does not only

aim to enhance students' comprehension and use of language but also boost their personality skills such as eye-contact, self-confidence, oral fluency, critical thinking, and the like.

Commercial streams study English more than Scientific stream students due to the presumed importance of English in the business world. Students take written examinations that test their comprehension, translation, analysis and critical thinking before sitting for oral interview in front of a jury who tests their linguistic, personal, and academic potential. Today, Moroccan educational authorities are cognizant that development in sciences, technologies, and the growing borderless communication entail a need for English. Numerous studies (Coleman, 2011; Allmann, 2009; Maurais & Morris, 2003; Davies & Elder, 2004) have highlighted the multitudinous factors for teaching and learning English. Indeed, there is apparent state's disposition to promote English in higher education in particular and very specifically in scientific and economic streams. Likewise, in Preparatory Classes, stakeholders realized the role of English in future graduates' careers and, henceforth, English is deemed today pivotal in the curriculum.

Methodology

This research attempts to shed light on the underlying reasons for teaching English for higher educational scientific and commercial streams. The survey tries to figure out, through the students' lens, the extent to which English really matters in CPGE students' careers. Hence, this research appeals to language policy and language education in the Moroccan higher education and rests on the premise that English teaching is supposedly worthwhile for students' capacity building. For this purpose, I adopted a mixed-method approach combining opinion survey via a close-ended questionnaire with official literature relevant to English language education in Morocco, such as The Constitution, The Official Guidelines for Teaching English Preparatory Classes, The National Charter for Education and Training, and The Strategic Vision 2015-2030.

The use of the questionnaire aims at the collection of numerical data revealing participants' opinions and attitudes about ELT in CPGE Classes and engineering schools of economics and sciences in order to grab a firm understanding of the problem in question. Attitude study is a practical facet of the investigation, which approaches students' opinions and weigh compare them to reported literature. The population of interest was CPGE and post-CPGE students currently involved in engineering schools. The selection of students was random and overlooked distinguishing variables such as sex or region. Seeking students' responses eventually helps to forge the affinity rate between the state's top-down policies and population's attitudes regarding language education.

The questionnaire asked a number of questions eliciting students' perceptions of the importance of English in their present and future. A random sampling aspires to ensure utmost opinion diversity, which eventually yield 'generalizable' data as CPGE Students follow similar careers overall. The use of the internet has significantly facilitated collection of responses in adequate timeframe and across large population. This practical survey intends to respond to three critical questions: 1-How important is English in CPGE classes in comparison to other courses? 2-How frequently students really need English in their study? 3-To what extent would the mastery of English affect students' careers? Analysis of the findings spotlights the significance of the mainstream views and supports them through genuine students' statement.

Findings

Preparatory Classes and engineering schools' students from Meknes, Nador, El Jadida, Fez, and Oujda took part in the survey. The questionnaires were administered and retained through the use of the internet. Interestingly, females represented the majority and ECT (Economics) featured in the survey and made up nearly two thirds of the total sample. Responses reveal a remarkable equilibrium between first and second year students while upper level occupied a minor portion of 10%.

Table 1: Respondents' background

N° of respondents	72		
Gender	Males 24 (34%)		Females 48 (66%)
Level	1 st yearcpge32	2 nd yearcpge35	Engineering school students 5

The overwhelming majority of participants have approved of teaching English in Moroccan Preparatory Classes and engineering schools as a clear consensus of their views hold that English is extremely functional in their life. Two thirds of respondents maintained that English is *important* (40%) to *very important* (25%) on a scale ranging from *not important at all* to *very important*. Almost unanimously, respondents viewed English as an instrumental tool to facilitating their integration and excellence in the globalizing world. Among all the respondents, only one has labeled English *not important*, while a quarter of the sample votes opted for *fairly important*. Students' Responses of this question suggest that the importance of English is not a matter of doubt and argument.

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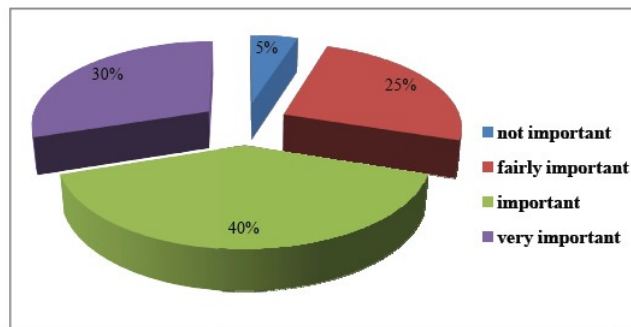


Figure 1: The importance of English compared to other courses

Students' propensity to English manifests plainly in their subsequent responses. The following question, for instance, has been proof of overwhelmingly positive attitudes as a largest majority recommended the teaching of English in Preparatory Classes. 83% voted for 'very necessary' and 17% maintained that it is a necessity. Interestingly, no single participant deemed English 'unnecessary' in Preparatory Classes or expressed doubt and uncertainty about the question.

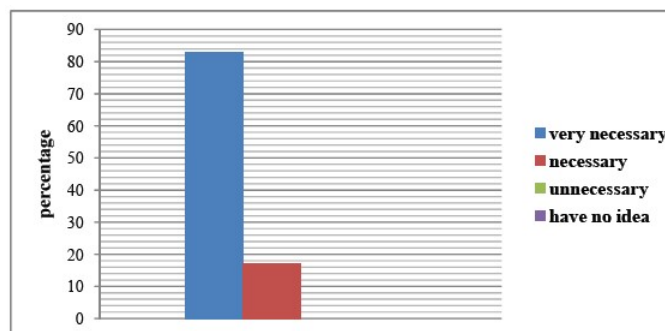


Figure 2: Respondents' views about teaching English in CPGE Classes

In order to ascertain the reality of this presumed importance, the following question inquires whether and how often students really need to employ English to learn (read, listen, and watch materials) about other courses of their major. Herein, respondents acknowledged they resort to written and audiovisual literature in English to gain further or necessary information on varied areas of study.

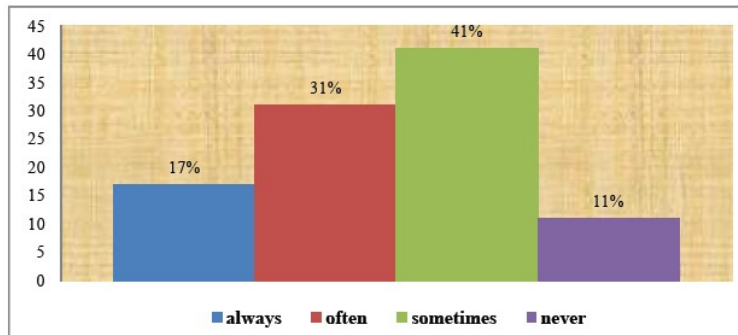


Figure 3: Frequency of consulting English Materials

The largest majority affirmed they *sometimes* read and watch or listen to materials produced in English in order to deepen their understanding and enrich their knowledge of certain subjects in their study such as Physics, Management and Philosophy.

Respondents provided illustrative information to support their responses to prove the veritable need for English in such academic areas. In this respect, a student said that “*a lesson in ‘marketing mix’ and another one on the ‘price strategies’ were so helpful to me*”. Another declared that he “*often consults websites like ‘The Guardian’ to read some economic articles or social articles*”. Furthermore, many respondents maintained that they frequently read even books and literature in English, while significant responses reported that they watch *YouTube* videos and American movies. However, among all the responses, only few opinions that paled into insignificance while reporting that they *rarely* or *never* consulted references in English. This mainstream appreciation of English strongly approves of it and undertakes its importance in enabling students to access handy information in their genuine language.

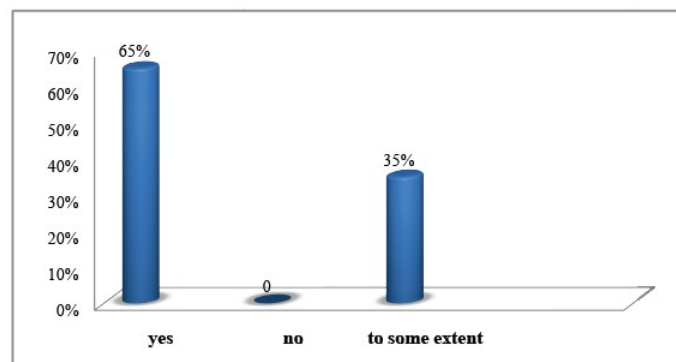


Figure 4: The potential effect of mastering English one's educational/social life

The questionnaire elicits participants' views about the influence and application of English proficiency on graduates' future. This question aims to showcase the prospective position English would occupy in the Moroccan education and job market in the years to come. The chart below starkly reveals students' firm belief that English is very worthwhile and decisive in their careers as future professionals. However, a significant segment of respondents are still not sure whether (their) English would be practically useful in the future. Interestingly, no single respondent claimed that English would be useless or unbeneficial, which conclusively proves how students appreciate English and view it as an added value to their individual worth in education and vocational careers.

A participatory approach to reform dictates an inclusive assessment of students' satisfaction with the overall paradigm of English language teaching in Preparatory Classes. This survey examined the extent to

which English is given an equal share in the official educational programmes. In this respect, more than half the sample maintained that English teaching is satisfactory in regards to its methodology and class time. A comparatively low portion, however, said that they are *not satisfied at all* with the place allotted to English compared to other school subjects. Interestingly, none voted for the *very satisfied* option, which suggests an overwhelming discontent with the worth of English in authorities' perception. Seeing the problem from the students' lens reveals the extent to which their inclusion is important in collecting data for long term reform plans.

Discussion and Conclusions

Results of this study have demonstrated that the English language is highly rated by students. They commonly believe its impact on their educational achievement and professional careers is unquestionable. All students have asserted that English is important in their life; their views only discarded on the degree of its importance. Mainstream views undertake that enhancing the position of English and entrusting it with more functions would certainly make a positive impact on students' training and boost their communicative competence as well as accessibility to authentic data. Some went further and suggested that some subjects such as Economics and Law should be studied in English. Demanding English to mediate instruction implies that students are ascertained of its prospective advantage over their life.

The survey shows a clear consensus among participants on the importance of English in academic as well as professional life. This is corroborated by students acknowledging their resort to English to access authentic references and resource materials and learns more about other specific areas in their majors. Research has shown that English is the language of information in today's globalizing world inasmuch as all types of English-based information have flooded the world (Hyde, 1994; Richards, 2002). Hence, being able to read in English is a valued asset CPGE students and graduates have to be equipped with. Worthy of note is the fact that, this unanimous endorsement of teaching and learning English in CPGE Classes and engineering schools faces an apparent negative outlook prevailing among students on its place and value in the curriculum.

Participants have expressed their disapproval of the methodology of teaching English in Preparatory Classes. A methodology allegedly degrades the value of English in the eyes of students and the system as well. In this respect, a student attributed this state to cultural factors as he maintained that "it is a problem of culture more than it is a problem of system. Two hours or four in a week is not enough for such language as English. Also, we should think again about how we can educate English-language in schools." Students expressed the need for intensive exposure to English courses that is not limited to classes only but extend to other courses and areas of life. Another respondent went along and suggested that they "need more exercises to improve our translation". These remarks referring to methodology, timing, and applicability plainly demonstrate students' concern about the quality of teaching English in their educational majors.

The study was carried out to question and figure out the relevance of language policy in higher education, and the place of English in such policy, more specifically. It investigated Preparatory and post-Preparatory Classes' students' opinions towards English and the impact it presumably makes in their study and work. The results of the study have unmasked the dire need to English in Science and Economics majors. Students' demands go beyond the teaching and learning of English but suggest making it the language of instruction in all Preparatory Classes and engineering schools of Morocco. General results demonstrate that English, reportedly a language of future opportunity, has become a veritable rival of French in the Moroccan schools and universities. Regarding the potential impact of English on students' academic and professional lives, respondents presented illustrative instances substantiating the need for learning this language. Views ranged from being able to access rich English sources, to understanding the world better and opening up to foreign cultures.

By and large, introducing English as a tertiary-level teaching medium seems to be at a stone's throw with the increasing demand for its promotion and enhancement in education. Students have approved of the teaching of English in all CPGE centers and streams through all schooling course and in all the engineering schools. Like a snowball, English is attracting more and more prestige at the educational and professional arenas. A student went along and said: "English became, through years, more and more important, so teaching English may be considered as a solution for many problems that our country's education faces". Thus, in the course of the tense debate on reform, the state has to consider the massive spread of English worldwide in its momentous education policies and adapt its growth to an efficient language vision in the education system in general and in Preparatory Classes in particular.

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