



The challenges of Amazigh in education in Morocco

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ABSTRACT

After a decade of official recognition of Amazigh in Morocco, there are still many structural barriers which impede its widespread implementation in education. Specifically, teachers face a lack of resources to utilise it as the primary language of instruction, some stakeholders are reticent to recognise it as an official language, as well as the resistance from those who favour Standard Arabic (SA) as their preferred language of instruction. This study utilised quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the barriers to the implementation of Amazigh in primary schools and the effects on pupils' academic achievement. Results from this investigation revealed that Amazigh is still not given the same status as SA in education. Therefore, the author recommends a substantial reform of its implementation to improve its use in all education levels and to bridge the achievement gap among its learners.

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Introduction

Amazigh has long been classified as 'the descendant of the Afro-Asiatic Branch which includes Semitic languages, Ancient Egyptian and its "descendant" Modern Coptic, Kushitic languages' (El Aisati 2005, 61). This language has three mutually unintelligible varieties in Morocco: *Tarifit* in the North and North-East, *Tamazight* in the Centre and South-East, and *Tashelhit* in the South-West. Though a rough estimate of Amazigh speakers ranges between 27 and 30% of the total Moroccan population (Belhiah, Majdoubi, and Safwate 2020; Ennaji 1997), there are no official censuses on the exact number of speakers of Amazigh in Morocco.

The status of Amazigh in society has been subject to various changes since the arrival of Arabs from Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century AD. Arabs' settlement in the country introduced Arabic, a more sophisticated language, to Moroccan society, which later utilised local varieties of Amazigh to primarily informal communication among Amazigh families. Arabic relationship with religion and literacy led Amazigh inhabitants to adopt it as a modern language of education and jurisprudence, *fiqh* (Benlahsen 2015). It was not until the French occupation in the twelfth century that debate on the use and status of Amazigh in schools became a subject of substantive conversations by educational leaders. The French administration launched 'the Berber decree of 1914' to encourage its teaching and established the first Amazigh School in Azrou in 1927 (Reino 2007, 8).

Morocco's declaration of independence in 1956 did little to improve the recognition of Amazigh in formal settings such as education. Nationalists, in their attempt to unify the country, launched a hasty Arabization project, which worked against the Imazighens' dream to officially recognise their language. Imazighen had to wait decades to see a glimpse of light in the use of their language in education. King Hassan II proclaimed on 20 August 1994 that Amazigh is a fundamental

component of the Moroccan identity and should be taught for children exactly as the other existing languages. This Royal declaration ‘represents the beginning of a favourable succession of events recognising the historical and cultural importance of Amazigh in Morocco’ (Reino 2007, 21).

In 2011, King Mohamed VI adopted a reformed constitution which recognised Amazigh together with SA as the two official languages of the state. This constitutional reform paved the way for the establishment of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) to support the use of Amazigh in education. The institute worked first on Amazigh corpus using an ancient script, baptised *Tifinagh*, which belongs to the ancient Libyco-Berber script. However, this script received harsh criticism from linguists and many Amazigh activists, who regarded it impractical to standardize Amazigh. Errihani (2006) argued that by choosing *Tifinagh*, IRCAM created a hurdle for the project to succeed in education and complicated Amazigh learning for both Imazighens and Arabs. Studies (Buckner 2006; Crawford 2002; Errihani 2006) showed that teachers find it hard to instruct *Tifinagh* to pupils in primary schools, particularly with the existence of two other scripts, (i.e. SA and French). Other scholars argued that it would be easier for learners and instructors of Amazigh if the IRCAM had chosen SA or Latin alphabets instead of *Tifinagh* (see Juffermans, Asfaha, and Abdelhay et al. 2014).

Some researchers went too far in criticising the IRCAM’s hasty decisions to implement Amazigh by accusing it of plotting with the state to contain Amazigh activism during the Amazigh turmoil in Algeria and the region (Maddy-Weitzman 2011). Buckner (2006), for example, argued that the IRCAM’s foundation had no impact on the promotion of Amazigh status and that its only aim was to silence voices of Imazighen to claim their rights of learning in their own language and to avoid the severe events that the Amazigh regions survived in Algeria.

Currently, reform efforts to integrate Amazigh nationwide remain largely ineffective due to the lack of human and financial resources necessary for its implementation. The majority of teachers of Amazigh complain about the poor conditions of its teaching and the lack of necessary resources to improve its use, particularly in rural regions. These teachers no longer trust the promises of the new liberal government – led by Aziz Akhannouch, an Amazigh Minister – to improve Amazigh status in education and society. Recently, teachers organised a one-day strike to advocate for treating Amazigh on an equal footing with SA and French in education by increasing the amount of time allotted to it in the curriculum and by using it as a medium of instruction of subjects that are relevant to Amazigh history and culture (Kanin 2022). To resolve tensions, the Ministry of National Education in a joint programme with the IRCAM promised to train 4000 teachers of Amazigh for the year 2023 as a way to compensate for the shortage of teachers who are competent in the language. The current Minister of National Education, Chakib Benmoussa, argued in his speech on the 2022–2026 road map of education that Amazigh is facing a problem of human resources. Benmoussa admitted that there is a lack of sufficient competent teachers in Amazigh and that the regional movement of teachers exacerbates its teaching in many rural schools. He confirmed that up to the present day 1900 schools teach Amazigh and that the number is increasing despite the existing problems. However, many proponents of the Amazigh project complain that its implementation has been slow and largely ineffective. These people doubt that there are even 1200 Amazigh teachers in the entire country of Morocco, and they point to the fact that a large number of schools do not use Amazigh as the language of instruction (Kanin 2022).

The present research aims to unveil the main causes of the ineffective implementation of Amazigh in the Moroccan education system, by studying attitudes of teachers and parents, as well as a proficiency test administered to pupils in primary schools.

Review of the literature

In 1987, the UNESCO declared Amazigh as an endangered language¹ (El Hammaoui 2007). The decrease in number of Amazigh speakers through emigration to Arab cities, together with the adoption of a hasty Arabization project after independence, as well as the absence of a practical plan to

preserve Amazigh, caused serious problems for the language to survive in a competitive linguistic atmosphere. The following section provides an overview of the main studies that have dealt with Amazigh in education in Morocco.

In his seminal article on Amazigh, Faiq (1999) unveiled the inconsistency of Moroccan language policy and its effects on the status of Amazigh in education. He revealed the dual discourse of policymakers that recognised Amazigh at the official level while limiting its use in education. Faiq (1999) argued that the plan to teach Amazigh is far from being realised due to the reluctance of stakeholders to offer the necessary resources, particularly in rural cities. In this regard, Shohamy (2006), in her work 'Language Policy and the Hidden Agenda', questioned the intentions of stakeholders in adopting language policies that serve their nations. She stated that language policies are not always innocent, as they are more than often used to control groups of people for particular reasons. Such criticism of language policies and their aims to promote certain languages at the expense of other indigenous ones aligned with Errihani (2006), who doubted the explicit intentions of the Moroccan state to implement Amazigh in education. Errihani (2006) argued that by dividing roles between the IRCAM and the Ministry of Education, where conflicts of interest destroy all efforts to push the project forward, the state was unintentionally setting up the implementation of Amazigh for failure. For him, the recognition of Amazigh was nothing but a political movement to placate Imazighens' and to discourage protests to control the nation and to make the problem go away.

Built on Errihani's study, Buckner (2006) conducted a qualitative study to examine the case of a Tamazight speaking village in the South of Morocco to see how Tamazight is taught to elementary school pupils. She discovered that Moroccan language policy is value-laden and a fragmented process. She supported Errihani's idea that the separation of decisions on Amazigh between two national institutions (i.e. IRCAM and Ministry of Education) leads to conflicting practices, which impedes the effective implementation of Amazigh in education. Buckner also argued that by politicising the Amazigh project, the government overlooked the benefits of its teaching to increase social equality and develop the education and economic conditions of Imazighen. She stated that forcing Imazighen to learn solely via SA would only reduce their status in society. Buckner's view on the importance of teaching pupils in their mother tongues is advocated by a remarkable number of studies conducted on minorities' language learning in different countries (Bensoukas 2010; Delpit 1995; Skutnabb Kangas 2006; Faiq 1999). Bensoukas (2010), for instance, affirmed in his work on mother tongues' education that pupils who learn in their home languages show higher educational achievement and stay in school longer than their counterparts who do not.

Based on Haugen's concept of *language ecology*, which is defined as the interaction between languages and the environment to see how they evolve or decline (Hornberger 2002, 32 in Buckner 2006, 422), Amazigh seems to struggle with the hegemonic relationship French has to both SA and MA in the Moroccan multilingual context. Boukous (1979) considered the use of Arabization as the main hurdle for the progress of Amazigh in education. He argued that the current policy of Arabization does not reflect the linguistic and cultural heritage of Moroccans and is far from being democratic. For him, the influence of French and Arabization leave no chance for Amazigh to thrive in education, particularly in urban regions. These imperfections in Moroccan language policy will later lead to the birth of several movements to support Amazigh in education, such as the Association of Moroccan Amazigh Culture (MCA), the Popular Movement Party (PMP) and the Association of Moroccan Imazighen in Europe (Crawford 2004). Activists in these associations spared no effort to convince stakeholders of the importance of Amazigh to the unity of society. Their endeavours provoked a heated debate on the role of Amazigh in enriching Moroccan culture and identity. In his study of the Amazigh identity movement and the challenges it posed for Moroccan governments, Maddy-Weitzman (2011) claimed that Imazighen were forced over the course of history to be part of the *Other*, as they have been bilingual and bicultural, but to the detriment of their original identity as Imazighen. He pointed out that formulas of state building in both Algeria and Morocco

failed to address the needs of Imazighen in a way that promotes the overall comity and strengthen society; hence, the raise of many movements among Imazighen, who always see themselves outside the game and subdued by others, be they Arabs or French.

Nowadays, despite the attempts to accommodate Imazighen by the government through the passage of laws that preserve their linguistic and cultural rights and the authorisation of Amazigh associations and political parties in the country (Lauremann 2009), the status of the language remains weak. Schwed (2017) revealed in her study of *The Dynamics of Language: an Analysis of the Positionality of Amazigh Language in Morocco* that the Amazigh project is still impeded by the negligence of society itself, not just officials. She argued that Moroccans perceive Amazigh as an oral language that is utilised only for informal communication, rather than a language with similar status and utility as SA.

In short, the above studies bring to light some of the main sociopolitical obstacles that faced the implementation of Amazigh in education. There is, however, a dearth of research on the effects of the status and input of Amazigh on its learning by pupils in primary schools. The present research study, therefore, aims to examine the attitudes of teachers and parents on pupils' learning of Amazigh, its input in and outside of schools and pupils' achievement in it.

Research methodology

This study is rooted in the field of macro-sociolinguistics. It aims to uncover the attitudes of teachers and parents towards the status of Amazigh in the Moroccan educational system and to evaluate pupils' proficiency in it through written tests. The study attempts to examine the following questions:

- What are the attitudes of parents towards Amazigh in education?
- What are the attitudes of teachers towards both their pupils' competency in Amazigh and the project as a whole?
- To what extent do the status and input of Amazigh affect its acquisition by pupils?

To answer these three focal questions, it was necessary to locate a number of appropriate informants and design a standard set of appropriate tests, questionnaires and interviewing instruments. The following discussion provides an overview of the range and number of informants examined and the instruments used.

Participants

Parents

Four hundred and forty five participants were involved in this study. One hundred and forty three parents were chosen to explore their views on the use of Amazigh in education. There were ($n = 93$) males and ($n = 50$) females. Their ages ranged from 25 to 69. These parents were randomly selected from Amazigh regions, but only ($n = 87$) considered themselves as Amazigh while ($n = 56$) regarded themselves Arabs with an intermediate level of speaking Amazigh. They belonged to different social classes, as their occupations ranged from civil servants to liberal workers, or even housekeepers for some women. Twenty-five of these participants had a BA degree, ($n = 41$) had a baccalaureate degree, ($n = 58$) had a primary school level, and ($n = 19$) were illiterate.

Amazigh teachers

Thirty-one teachers were randomly selected to participate in this study. Twenty were males and ($n = 11$) were females. Twenty-three confirmed that they were Amazigh speakers by origin while ($n =$

8) stated that they were Arabs though they mastered Amazigh pretty well. Their ages ranged from 21 to 56. Teachers were selected from five public primary schools in Beni Mellal-Khenifra, a middle-Atlas region, where both Tamazight and MA are spoken, and Agadir, a Sous region, where Tashelhit is widely used. They taught in different levels: ($n = 17$) in 1st and 2nd grades while ($n = 14$) in 3rd and 4th grades.

Pupils

Two hundred and seventy-one pupils participated in the written test. One hundred and seventy-four of them were females while ninety-seven were males. As declared by their teachers, ($n = 180$) of the pupils were Amazigh natives while ($n = 91$) were Arabs speaking Amazigh. Their ages ranged from 7 to 12 years. They belonged to the middle and lower social classes, as inferred from their parents' jobs. Pupils were selected from five schools in Beni Mellal and Agadir. They all followed their studies in the third year of the primary school system.

Instruments

Questionnaire

To examine the attitudes of parents, a written questionnaire was used. The questionnaire included questions related to demographics data, questions about views on the status of Amazigh, children's learning of it and ways to improve it in education. The questionnaire consisted of yes/no questions, open-ended questions and questions which utilised Likert scales to categorise responses. The questionnaire was given to the informants in SA because it was noticed in the pilot-testing phase that not all of them speak Amazigh and master *Tifinagh* script. The parents were met individually. They were first given the necessary oral instructions and details about the content of the questionnaire and, then, offered around thirty minutes for each to accomplish the task. This model of questionnaires utilised here has been routinely used in sociolinguistic studies (Purschke 2020; Sewbihon Getie 2020) and yielded both valid and reliable results.

Interview

The use of an oral semi-structured questionnaire-based interview in this study was to account for the attitudes of teachers towards the obstacles facing Amazigh use in schools, the level of pupils in learning it, and its future status in education, in general. The interview with teachers includes open-ended questions, hypothetical questions and Likert Scales. The interview was conducted in MA. It took approximately 43 min to conduct with each interviewee. The interviewees met with the researcher in different places such as schools, cafés and other public spaces. The data of the interview were collected by means of a tape recorder. Then, they were transcribed, structurally coded and inductively analysed, focusing on major themes.

Written tests

Two written tests were used to evaluate students' receptive and productive language proficiency in Amazigh. These tests helped to assess students' competency in comprehending Amazigh vocabulary and in writing in *Tifinagh*. The first test consisted of Multiple-Choice, Filling Gaps and Matching Words tasks to gauge pupils' mastery of vocabulary while the second one relied on a Dictation activity, which consists of dictating words and full expressions, to evaluate their writing productive skills. The choice of these tests and the amount of time allotted to each one respected pupils' age and level of education. The Multiple-Choice task took 15 min, Gaps' Filling exercise 20 min and Words' Matching 15 min, whereas the Dictation task required 65 min, that is, a total of 115 min. The tasks

were pilot-tested on a class of 27 pupils who studied Amazigh to see their validity in gauging their competency in the language, and they led to few modifications concerning the tempo of delivery and the instructions teachers gave to pupils. It was, for example, helpful in adapting the pace and tone of the teacher's speech in the Dictation task with the use of a tape recorder to avoid any effects of accents on the quality of the test. Before starting any test, the teacher of Amazigh explained the task and gave the necessary instructions that pupils have to follow. The two written tests later received a double correction process by two teachers of Amazigh, and the results were analysed by means of SPSS. The [Table 1](#) below provides an overview of the tests used in this study along with the number of items and time limits for completion.

From a methodological standpoint, this study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to have a clear assessment of Amazigh status in education in Morocco. However, caution is always necessary with respect to the applicability and the generalisability of the research findings, given the number of schools and informants investigated.

Data presentation

Parents' responses

This section provides the results of the data collected from ($n = 143$) parents who responded to the written questionnaire. It gives an overview of their attitudes towards Amazigh, its learning by their children, and its future status in education.

The general attitude inferred from the parents' responses on Amazigh is quite positive. Ninety-eight thought that their children's learning of Amazigh should be mandatory to preserve the heritage of their ancestors and to strengthen Moroccans' identity, whereas the remaining respondents ($n = 45$) were split between 'quite positive' and 'indifferent' opinions. Some respondents related learning Amazigh to the spread of the culture of tolerance, understanding and respect of the Other. One parent said 'Amazigh is a symbol of openness and peace; teaching it to our children will make them grow in a peaceful environment, where all ethnic groups are mutually respected and valued'. This idea of cultural openness of Amazigh is frequently used by its supporters to advocate for its use in educational settings. Benlahsen (2015), a Moroccan Amazigh historian, argued that Amazigh culture is very open, as throughout history its people accepted other nations and civilisations to live with them in peace and harmony. He made reference here to Arab, African and Western immigrants who settled the country thousands of years ago. Acid (2013) goes too far in supporting Amazigh by stating that Imazighen have accepted Arabs for centuries and learned their language, religion and culture; therefore, it's time now for Arabs to accept Amazigh and teach it to their children.

On the other hand, opponents of using Amazigh in Moroccan classrooms generally justify their views by its weakness in sciences and the job market. They argued that their children need Western languages to improve their ability to enter the job market. One respondent captured this sentiment by stating 'Amazigh is a breadless language; our children need French and English to have a good

Table 1. Overview of the written tasks with their time limit.

Mode	Tasks	N items	Time (min.)
Receptive	Multiple-Choice	16	15
	Filling Gaps	21	20
	Matching Words	9	15
Productive	Dictating Words	20	30
	Dictating Full Expressions	10	35

future'. Those who were against Amazigh teaching regarded it as folklore rather than an instructional language, which is needed only in artistic and cultural spheres. It is worthy to note here that none of the parents who responded to the study perceived Amazigh as a scientific language, for even its supporters still consider that its weak status in education impedes its use in scientific fields. 'Amazigh needs much work on both its corpus and planning levels; it cannot compete with other languages such as SA and French', reported respondent ($n = 5$). Some respondents even referred this negative view on the use of Amazigh in sciences to the 'unsuccessful choice of the *Tifinagh* script' (respondents 5 and 11). Eighty-five of the respondents claimed that neither they nor their children could write in *Tifinagh*. Some of the parents justified this by the fact that Amazigh is an oral language and the choice of *Tifinagh* only complicates its learning. 'The alphabets of *Tifinagh* are very hard to grasp; I can't even remember them, let alone teach them to my children', said respondent ($n = 9$).

Unexpectedly, the majority of the respondents showed positive views on the adoption of Amazigh as a language of instruction when asked whether they would prefer its use just in schools of Amazigh regions or all over the country. Ninety-six of the respondents agreed on its generalisation to cover all Moroccan schools. They believed that it is the heritage of all Moroccans and, therefore, should be taught to both Arab and Amazigh children. 'We are all Amazigh, whether we speak the language or not', said respondent ($n = 2$). This view, actually, aligns with Hart (2000) who claimed in his ethnographic research on Amazigh, entitled 'Scratch a Moroccan, find a Berber' that the process of emigration and intermarriages with Arabs made it impossible to find a pure Arab who doesn't have Amazigh blood in his veins. Yet, those remaining respondents ($n = 47$) who stated that Amazigh teaching has to be reserved only to children of Amazigh regions seem to be more inclined to Arabic, which they see as a language of Islamic religion, contrary to Amazigh, the language of a profane world (Sadiqi 2011). The relation between Islam and Arabic seems to exert a strong influence on their preference of SA over Amazigh.

Amazigh also suffers its lack of use in the job market, which negatively influences its status among Moroccans. The majority of the respondents foresee no positive impact of Amazigh on their children's social status. Respondent 11 reported, 'Amazigh people work only in small grocery shops or restaurants owned by Amazigh investors. The language is not used outside this closure'. Except for Amazigh regions where the use of language is very common, the only places where one may hear Amazigh in Arab urban cities are small *Hanuts* (groceries) or restaurants owned by Amazigh, who usually employ their relatives.

Another impediment to the widespread use of Amazigh is its lack of visibility in audiovisual media. It is only lately that the government has agreed to create an Amazigh public TV channel and few radio stations, which are unfortunately not widely listened to, even among the Amazigh population. Respondent ($n = 6$) reported that his children show no interest in these channels and prefer Arabic and Western ones, instead. Moreover, despite the increase of Amazigh printed newspapers and magazines in the last decade, such as *Tsafut*, *Tifawt* and *Amsied*, few Moroccans purchase these periodicals, thus causing them to not be read widely. Amazigh media, therefore, needs a significant reform to improve the quality of its programmes and make them more attractive and instructive for Moroccans.

The informants also showed no faith in the future status of Amazigh. They all foresee its decline in the coming years if not serious measures are taken to save it. 'The decrease in number of Amazigh speakers is remarkable; our children are now more familiar with MA use than Amazigh', reported respondent ($n = 6$). This fear for the loss of Amazigh is also demonstrated by some Amazigh activists and scholars such as Ennaji (1997), Errihani (2006) and Acid (2013). Yet, it is astonishing that despite all critics and calls to save Amazigh from decline, IRCAM members and the Ministry of Education have not yet taken real steps to expand its use in education. Unless there is an official will to implement Amazigh in all education levels, the language will not receive any interest from the coming generations, hence its demise (Errihani 2006).

In brief, the examined respondents showed mixed views on Amazigh use in education, but they all agreed that the shortage of human and material resources, together with the lack of compromise on its role in society, is a real barrier to its learning by children.

Amazigh teachers' responses

This section sheds light on the responses of ($n = 31$) primary school teachers to the interviews. It explores their views on their mastery of Amazigh, their pupils' learning of it and its status in education.

The interviewees were first asked about their competency in Amazigh, and they all confirmed a good mastery of it. However, they were not quite satisfied with the shortage of qualified teachers to instruct the language, particularly in rural regions. They argued that school directors, in their attempt to cope with this shortage, often resort to voluntary Amazigh teachers from other disciplines to provide pupils with minimum classes of Amazigh. The interviewee ($n = 21$) pointed out, 'some teachers are not even specialized in Amazigh, but they volunteer to give their pupils few classes in it'.

When asked about their pupils' mastery of the language, the majority of interviewees were not satisfied and showed few concerns. They argued that pupils still face difficulties developing both their writing and oral skills. The interviewee ($n = 16$) stated, 'Pupils can read and write Amazigh alphabets, but they have problems in understanding their meanings and in producing clear expressions, particularly those pupils who do not practice the language at home'.

Additionally, the interviewees were asked about the resources they use in Amazigh instruction, and ($n = 11$) of them confirmed that they relied on few textbooks designed by the Ministry of Education to teach Amazigh while ($n = 20$) stated that they used also other personal materials in their instruction. One of the interviewees ($n = 11$) complained of the dearth of textbooks: 'The IRCAM should supply us with the needed books to teach Amazigh. There is a shortage of textbooks in bookshops and libraries, and we are forced to rely on our competencies to design courses'. This shortage of textbooks complicates the task for Amazigh teachers: 'Teachers cannot be consistent in their instruction of Amazigh unless books are available for all', argued the interviewee ($n = 16$). It is obvious that this problem causes much nuisance for teachers, particularly novice ones.

Yet, when asked about the utility of the *Tifinagh* script in teaching, teachers showed positive attitudes. The majority ($n = 22$) were satisfied with its choice for Amazigh instruction. They also claimed no difficulty using it in instruction at all levels. 'Every language has its alphabets; *Tifinagh* existed since thousands of years, and it is the best script to teach the language', argued one interviewee ($n = 5$). Another interviewee ($n = 30$) stated, 'The choice of any other script to instruct Amazigh would not be practical. *Tifinagh* is part of our identity'. Teachers also denied the complexity of the *Tifinagh* script. Yet, they all believed that its success depends on the work of teachers and linguists to simplify it and adapt its use to pupils' needs. One of the interviewees ($n = 30$) reported, 'Hebrew had the same experience of *Tifinagh*. It was a dead language, but due to the hard work of its linguists, its script is now revived and perfectly used in education'.

It is also clear from the interviewees' responses to the question about their attendance of trainings in Amazigh that there is a shortage of pre- and in-service training offered to novice teachers. The majority ($n = 24$) reported receiving only six months of pre-service training in Amazigh instruction, while ($n = 7$) confirmed attending three days of in-service training in methods and approaches of teaching. 'Apart from the education we got at university, we received no professional training on language pedagogy and Amazigh teaching', pointed out respondent ($n = 5$). He is referring here to few universities that started to offer students BA and Master programmes in Amazigh, as is the case in Agadir, Nador and Oujda. This, however, is not enough for teachers to keep them on track with new methods of language teaching. This leads teachers to improvise in their teaching, which might not be effective to ease pupils' learning of the language. The interviewees referred this shortage of training to the lack of human resources at the IRCAM institute and the Ministry of

Education. The interviewee ($n = 10$) reported, 'There is a significant need of inspectors to assist novice Amazigh teachers. It is absurd to appoint one inspector over more than 6 schools'. It seems that this shortage of training and sufficient resources does not only affect teachers' ways of teaching but also reduces their self-esteem as teachers of Amazigh compared to their colleagues who teach other subjects. This is clearly seen in the responses of the interviewee ($n = 18$) who stated: 'I don't think the Ministry cares about the needs of Amazigh teachers; the entire project is politicised. To be honest, I am not satisfied with my teaching of the language under these conditions. I am doing my best to change my profession'. What is astonishing is that the interviewee admitted that his college degree was in History, not Amazigh, and his appointment as a teacher was based on his ability to speak Tashelhit as a native.

To pin down more in teachers' views on Amazigh as a feasible language of education, they were asked about its role in acquiring knowledge. Here, ($n = 27$) of them saw that Amazigh could play a significant role in teaching pupils not only their culture and history, but all sorts of knowledge as well. 'Learning could be much easier for pupils in their mother tongues. Using Amazigh will reduce the issue of language barriers for learners', stated interviewee ($n = 5$). However, all the interviewees agreed that the present status of the language does not help to use it in science instruction due to its weak science terminology and scientific research, in general.

Concerning the interviewees' perception of the future status of the language in education, ($n = 17$) agreed that it is improving in a very slow pace, ($n = 11$) of them thought that it is static, if not to say declining, while only ($n = 3$) believed that it is improving at a reasonable pace. 'The current situation of Amazigh is critical in education. If there are no immediate measures to solve its problems, the language will become extinct in the coming years', responded interviewee ($n = 3$). This fear for the decline of Amazigh, as also inferred from the responses of parents, stems from its inability to compete with the existing languages and to keep up with the progress in new media of communication and technology.

The interviewees also showed different reasons for the current problems facing Amazigh in education. Seven of them believed that the reason is linguistic, ($n = 14$) saw that it is political while only ($n = 10$) thought that it is social. The previous interviewees believed that the corpus of Amazigh still needs much work to adapt it to the requirements of education. One of the respondents ($n = 9$) claimed, 'There should be dictionaries, textbooks and a rich literature to ease the learning of the language'. Yet, those interviewees who opted for the political obstacles argued that Amazigh suffered for so long from the Arabization project, which excluded it from the educational scene. They also believed that the language is still hampered by the decisions of Arabists who see in it a threat to SA. 'Linking SA to Islam and Amazigh to the secular world is a successful ideology which many Arabists still use today to confine the role of Amazigh to folklore and culture', said respondent ($n = 20$). Errihani (2006), in this regard, condemned policymakers for their negligence of Amazigh in education and argued that their recognition of the language was nothing but a political movement to face the rise of Islamism. Concerning the interviewees who cited social reasons, it was noticed that they put much blame on Amazigh planners, particularly members of the IRCAM, who failed to take into account the attitudes of Moroccans before implementing the project in education. 'We need to see whether all Moroccans want their children to learn the language or just Amazighphones', said the interviewee ($n = 4$). This seems to be true, as nearly all researchers who worked on language policy (Cooper 1989; Shohamy 2006; Skutnabb-Kangas 2006; Spolsky 2004) argued that for sake of democracy, planners of any language have to take into consideration the opinions of people who will use it otherwise its effective implementation is doomed to fail.

Further, to improve the teaching of Amazigh in Moroccan schools, the interviewees suggested that there should be a kind of horizontal and vertical implementation of the language in classes. They even recommended that Amazigh should be taught both as a subject and a medium of instruction. Some interviewees ($n = 15$) also stated that there should be a separation of Amazigh language from all what is political, religious or ethnic, by seeing it as an added value to the existing languages. 'Amazigh belongs to all of us; we have to look for ways to make it effective in education and society',

argued interviewee ($n = 5$). Another interviewee ($n = 2$) claimed: ‘All Moroccans are Amazigh by origin, whether they liked it or not; it is a reality. We have to revitalize the language and its cultural heritage by valorizing it and recognising the importance of its cultural aspects’. It is worthy of notice here that the respondents still see the manifestation of Amazigh in society and cultural scenes as weak. Despite the attempts to include Amazigh in streets’ billboards, highways’ signs and institutions’ panels, the language has not yet found its way to all Moroccans, according to them.

In brief, the study of the interviews with teachers shows that there is a positive attitude towards the implementation of Amazigh in education, despite the existing obstacles. However, the respondents think that Amazigh has not yet escaped the vicious circle of endangered languages and that strict measures should be taken to implement it in schools. For the sake of studying whether this status of Amazigh in education has any impact on its instruction, the following section examines pupils’ achievement in it.

Results of the achievement study

The following section provides the results of two written tests administered to ($n = 271$) pupils who were following their studies in the third grade of primary school level. Its aim was to examine pupils’ competency in Amazigh. The results of this study are organised under two headings: the first one gives an overview of the data of the Vocabulary Test and the second presents the results of the Dictation Test.

Vocabulary test

The above data in Table 2 shows that 51,7% have a score less or equal to the mean five. It is worthy of notice here that the majority of the pupils who have low scores (less than five) were Arabs. This shows that vocabulary problems increase more among Arab learners of Amazigh than their native counterparts do. Pupils still have difficulties differentiating between Amazigh words that have similar phonemes such as /ⵎ/ [z^h] and /ⵎ/ [z] (Figure 1).

These results seem predictable, particularly for pupils who do not use Amazigh outside school. The weak exposure to the language and the shortage of materials reduce the improvement of their vocabulary system. Moreover, the wide use of MA outside school exerts a strong influence on their learning of Amazigh.

Dictation test

The above data in Table 2 shows that 50% of the pupils have obtained a score less or equal to the median value seven while 50% of the pupils achieved a score superior or equal to it. Additionally, the value 2,14 of the standard deviation indicates that the scores of the pupils are spread out from the mean 6,3127 (Table 3).

The data in Figure 2 shows that 38,4% have a score less or equal to the mean 6,31. It is clear here that pupils showed slightly better results in the dictation test. Those who are less than median seven showed many spelling problems in their writings. They still confuse certain sounds such as / ⵟ/ [s^h] and /O/ [r], /ⵏ/ [ʔ] and /ⵡ/ [ɣ], /Z/ [q] and /ⵝ/ [k/ç]. Sometimes, they confuse the pronunciation of

Table 2. Correct Mean and Std. Deviation for students’ scores on Vocabulary Test.

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median
Vocabulary Test	271	4,00	8,75	5,4686	1,16485	5,0000
Valid <i>N</i> (listwise)	271					

The above data shows that 50% of the pupils have obtained a score less or equal to the median value 5, while 50% of the pupils have a score superior or equal to 5. Since the standard deviation is equal to 1,16 one may deduce that the scores of the tested pupils are clustered around the mean 5.

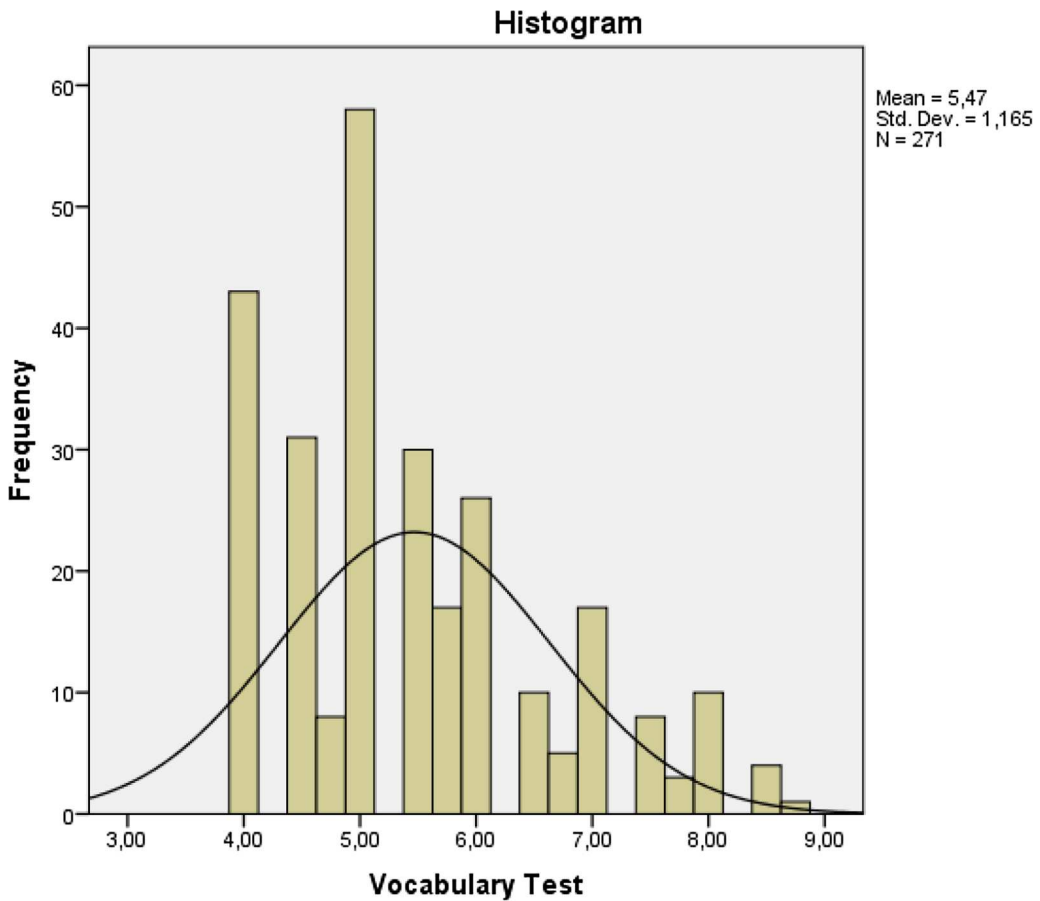


Figure 1. Frequency distributions of scores on Vocabulary Test.

Table 3. Correct Mean and Std. Deviation for students' scores on Dictation Test.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median
Dictation Test	271	,75	9,00	6,3127	2,14654	7,0000
Valid N (listwise)	271					

Amazigh sounds with those of MA. This of course concerns pupils from both origins, Arabs and Amazigh.

In brief, the Dictation test unveils some of the difficulties pupils face in learning Amazigh. It showed that they still have problems interpreting sounds of Amazigh and spelling them. Such obstacles in learning the language might indeed question the utility of the methods used in teaching *Tifnagh* at the first levels of the primary school system.

Discussion

The present study has shed some light on the sociolinguistic and pedagogical challenges impeding Amazigh in education. It has revealed that though the attitudes of teachers and parents are quite positive towards Amazigh instruction, much work is needed to improve its learning by pupils. The results of the written tests have not reached the expectations of both the IRCAM and the Ministry of National Education to advance the use of the language in all education levels.

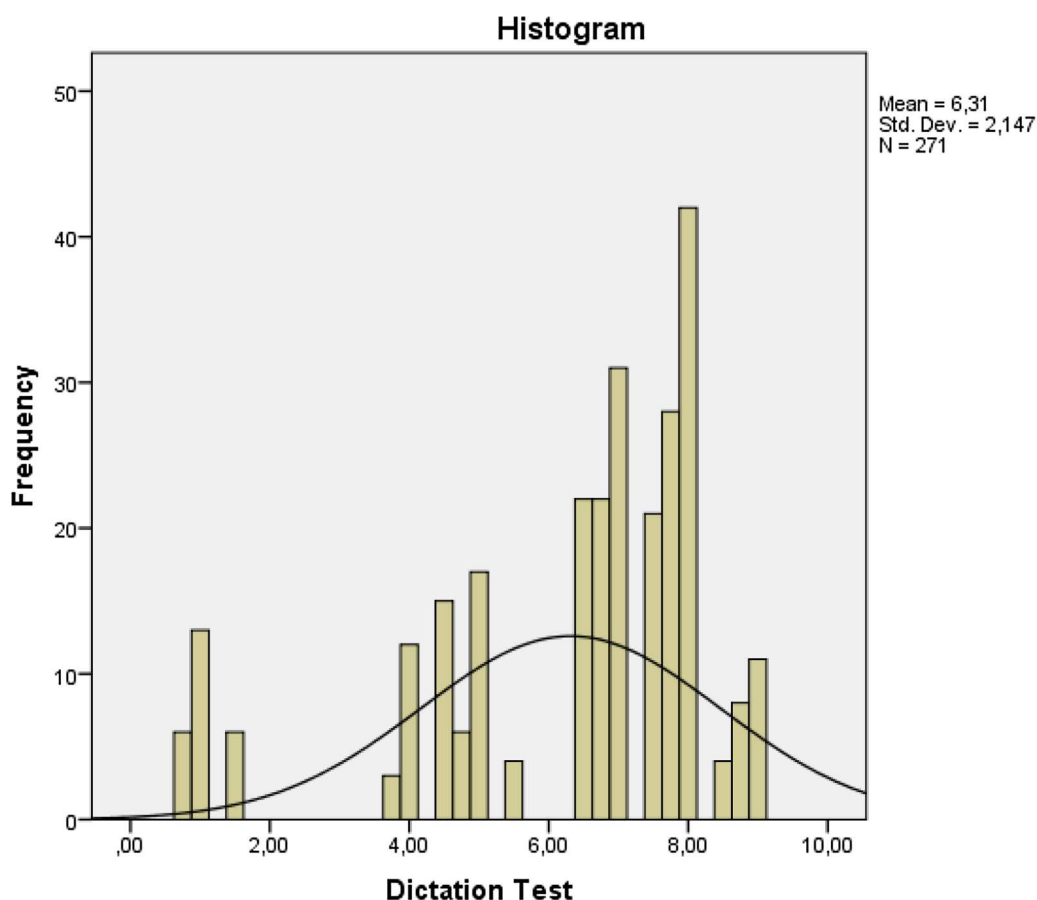


Figure 2. Frequency distributions of scores on Dictation Test.

These results indeed align with previous studies (Boukous 1979, 2010; Gravel 1976; Sadiqi 1997) of Amazigh, which revealed that the implementation of the language faces many difficulties. Amazigh instruction in primary school does not exceed three hours per week, which is not enough to foster it in education. Even the number of teachers appointed to teach it is not enough to offer effective instruction in all Moroccan schools. The average of one teacher per a school is too low to be effective. The IRCAM and the Ministry of National Education committed to provide 4000 teachers of Amazigh by the year 2023. This number might seem encouraging, but in reality could not cover all schools to make it accessible to even a minority of Moroccan pupils.

Another issue that hinders Amazigh use in education is the weak pre and in-service training offered to its teachers. The interviewed teachers confirmed receiving only six months of pre-service training and three days to two weeks of in-service training on methods and approaches of teaching Amazigh. This of course cannot help to improve their language teaching methods, particularly that some of them do not have Amazigh BA. There should be a constant effort on the part of inspectors to offer weekly in-service training to novice teachers to help them update their methods of teaching.

The teachers who participated in this study also complained a lot about the lack of sufficient textbooks to teach Amazigh. It seems contradictory that the IRCAM aims to reach all Moroccan pupils without designing Amazigh books for all education levels and providing teachers with the necessary materials. There should be a joint effort to collect all oral Amazigh heritage and publish it in order to enrich its literature and motivate young Moroccans to learn it. With weak materials and insufficient resources, Amazigh can never attract pupils to learn it. Sadiqi (2011, 14) mentioned that ‘The

inclusion of the pre-Islamic history textbooks that valorize anti-Islamic Amazigh history could be an important tool to change Moroccan pupils' and their parents' attitudes towards it'.

Researchers (Shohamy 2006; Spolsky 2004) argued that a language policy that ignores the needs of people generally fails. 'The top-down implementation of the project of Amazigh failed to take into account the very different needs of the rural, poverty-stricken Amazigh speaking regions, where real living in the children's mother tongue might well contribute to a closing of the persistent and profound educational and social gap between Morocco's urban and rural areas' (Maddy-Weitzman 2011, 171–172). The success of Amazigh depends also on the development of Amazigh regions in economic and social status, not only in cultural one. Pupils, as seen in the study, wouldn't be fully interested in studying a language that they do not need in the job market or only contributes to their marginalisation in society. Every language has a symbolic capital which positions it within the stratification of the linguistic market. Confining Amazigh to a mere folkloric capital will not motivate children to learn it and will, on the contrary, weaken its status in education, particularly with the hegemony of Western languages.

The Ministry of Education and the IRCAM cannot teach Amazigh to all Moroccans without a national consensus on its project. The choice of the *Tifinagh* is still controversial. Researchers like Errihani (2006) argue that it is one of the obstacles impeding Amazigh in education, whereas its supporters in the IRCAM defend its use as an original script which is already existing. Perhaps, the use of SA script in the first year of primary school to learn the basics of Amazigh before shifting to *Tifinagh* could be fruitful, first to attract both Arabs and Amazigh to learn the language, second to attenuate the linguistic tensions existing between the two languages (SA and Amazigh), and third to ease pupils' learning of the language in a script they already master and use since preschool education. Instead of politicising the language, stakeholders should rather look for ways to foster its use as a national heritage for all Moroccans. Moreover, a joint action of all social actors, activists and politicians is necessary to change the attitudes of Moroccans towards Amazigh and its importance to the national unity of the country. Playing the victim card by some activists and evoking the old story of Arab's invasion with the negative upheavals of a politicised Arabization era will serve to exacerbate the gap between Arabs and Amazigh.

Hart (2000) pointed out that Moroccans are a combination of Amazigh and Arab origins. This is unquestionable since no Moroccan may deny the absence of an Amazigh DNA in his blood. The exogamous marriages and the long era of cohabitation make it difficult to differentiate between Arabs and Amazigh origins in Morocco. This is a *raison de plus* to make Amazigh learning a priority for all Moroccans and to craft a more balanced policy which makes all existing languages work within a continuum that advances the education system. Books' designers should include, in addition to the pre-Arabs history of Amazigh, successful stories of peaceful eras such as those of *Almuravids* and *Almuwahids* empires, which witnessed the cohabitation of both Imazighen and Arabs in serenity and tolerance, and how both ethnic groups served the progress of national unity and identity. By creating a warm atmosphere of tolerance and mutual respect and by making an end to radical voices, which only worsen the relationship between Arabs and Imazighen, parents will be encouraged to teach their children Amazigh.

Finally, the adoption of a regionalisation policy in Morocco in 2001 provides a suitable environment for Amazigh to flourish in the country. The Amazigh regions can now manage their cultural, economic and linguistic affairs in a way that better serves their inhabitants' needs. The inclusion of Amazigh both in the public and private sectors in these regions may offer Amazigh graduates opportunities to integrate the job market. Amazigh regions could also use Amazigh as a medium of instruction by widening its use in all education levels, including university. It would be more democratic to treat Amazigh, SA and French on equal footing even in higher education. A university of health studies or a school of engineering which uses Amazigh as a medium of instruction might seem impossible for some, but a more practical and a fair decision for Amazigh speakers.

Conclusion

The implementation of Amazigh in education still faces many difficulties. What the future will carry for it depends on the ability of policymakers to give it more importance in their projects and to mediate the political and linguistic tensions impeding its progress in education and society. The efforts of the IRCAM, the Ministry of Education and all associations supporting the Amazigh reason are appreciable, but a national compromise is needed to improve its social status. Morocco is known for its tolerance and openness to foreign languages and cultures. It would be a great loss if a national language, which bears a rich traditional heritage and an open mode of thinking, could not reach all Moroccans through education.

Note

1. 'Amazigh and all its major varieties extending over North-Africa have a whole provisional existence thus vulnerable and threatened of extension.' (UNESCO 1987).

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