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Paradoxes of Language Policy in Morocco: Deconstructing the Ideology of Language Alternation and the Resurgence of French in STEM Instruction

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Abstract: Language-in-education policies often serve hidden political and economic agendas, and thus language policy research must examine policies beyond official state discourse. This article critically analyzes Morocco's Language Alternation Policy (LAP), introduced in 2019, using the historical–structural approach. It examines the broader historical context and structural factors that shape the adoption and implementation of LAP. While the official policy discourse frames LAP as an egalitarian reform aimed at promoting balanced multilingualism by alternating instructional media in science education, its de facto implementation reveals a stark contradiction. The ideological underpinnings of LAP are the resurgence of French as the exclusive medium of instruction in science and technology classrooms. This policy undercuts a decades-long Arabization of science and the promotion of the Amazigh language, as well as denying Moroccans the potential advantages of learning English. The disparity between official policy discourse and implementation reveals the influence of France's neocolonial agenda, exercised through Francophonie, international clientelism, and financial patronage. Through implementing LAP to align with France's interests in Morocco, French-trained political actors undermine the country's decolonization efforts and preserve the long-standing socioeconomic privileges of the francophone elite. We analyze how LAP functions ideologically to resolidify France's cultural and linguistic hegemony and reinforce pre- and post-independence linguistic and social inequalities.

Keywords: Arabic-medium instruction; Arabization; Francophonie; language alternation; language ideology; language policy; Morocco; neocolonialism



Academic Editor: Khaled Al Masaeed

Received: 14 October 2024

Revised: 5 May 2025

Accepted: 15 May 2025

Published: 9 June 2025

Citation: Chakrani, B., Ziad, A., & Lachkar, A. (2025). Paradoxes of Language Policy in Morocco: Deconstructing the Ideology of Language Alternation and the Resurgence of French in STEM Instruction. *Languages*, 10(6), 135. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages10060135>

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1. Introduction

Language education policy plays a crucial role in shaping social, economic, and political reality, especially in postcolonial contexts where linguistic hierarchies often perpetuate inequalities (Brock-Utne, 2002; Tollefson, 2002; Tollefson & Tsui, 2004). In Morocco, language planning has historically been shaped by power dynamics, particularly those rooted in Morocco's history of French colonialism (Gill, 1999; Haeri, 2000; Mansour, 1993; Segalla, 2009; Viguié, 2020). After Morocco's independence, the French-speaking class, who replaced the colonial rulers, pushed for language policies that promoted French at the expense of Arabization policies (Hammoud, 1982; Elbiad, 1991; Sirles, 1999; Kesbi, 2012; Sayeh, 2013; Jaafari, 2019; Viguié, 2020; Batakji Chazy, 2023). Convinced of its capital and motivated by

its socioeconomic gains, Moroccan elites promoted French as the language of instruction, especially in French mission schools, private schools, and higher education programs of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Consequently, Morocco's francophone ruling elite perpetuates the bifurcated, class-based education system established by colonial administrators in the protectorate. Seven decades after independence, the Moroccan government, led by French-trained technocrat ministers, introduced the Language Alternation Policy (LAP), with the claim to foster balanced multilingual education through diversifying instructional media across various academic disciplines ([The Strategic Vision of Reform, 2015](#); [The Framework Act 51.17, 2019](#)). National and foreign languages will be alternately used in teaching science, mathematics, biology, physics, and technology. The stated goal of the new policy is to equip students with proficiency in official and global languages, thereby improving the quality of education and ensuring equal educational opportunities. The reform also aims to improve the status of national languages through corpus and acquisition planning.

Despite the goals of LAP, the reality of its implementation reveals a different language policy (LP) that promotes exclusive French medium instruction (FMI) in science and mathematics classrooms at the expense of Arabic, the official language ([Ben Hammou & Kesbi, 2024](#); [Laanani & Fathi, 2024b](#)). In this article, we deconstruct the ideological intent behind the framing of this incongruous policy. In analyzing this, we draw on the historical–structural approach (HSA) ([Tollefson, 2015](#)) to uncover the ways in which colonial legacies, neocolonial forces, and socioeconomic structures shape Morocco's language policies. Specifically, we examine how and why the execution of LAP deviates from its stated goals. Our analysis corroborates the findings in a few recent studies on LAP. The implementation of LAP reveals a de facto Francization policy, which conflicts with official policy discourse. The implementation of LAP has allocated the role of the medium of instruction (MoI) in secondary science and mathematics education exclusively to French. Furthermore, HSA provides a useful tool to uncover the historical and socioeconomic factors that have led to the de facto language policy and the agents who adopt and implement it independently of the official de jure policies promoting authentic multilingualism and developing and preserving Morocco's official languages. This study addresses two central questions: (1) What are the goals and principles of LAP, and how do they compare with its implementation? (2) What social and political structures and ideologies influence the policy's implementation? By addressing these questions, we show the processes through which French influence in Moroccan education persists and consequently undermines the country's constitution and official language planning efforts.

The article begins with a historical overview of the interplay between language and education in Morocco. After unpacking the key tenets and goals of LAP, we examine the disparity between the policy's goals and implementation. Finally, we discuss the factors leading to the contradictory LAP and the gradual return to a de facto Francization policy, as well as its implications on educational equity and quality.

2. Literature Review

Education systems have long been recognized as reinforcing social hierarchies ([Collins, 1979](#); [Becker, 1964](#); [Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990](#)). They do so primarily through language-in-education policies (LEPs) ([Romaine, 2024](#); [Nishioka & Durrani, 2019](#); [Barrett DeWiele & Edgerton, 2021](#); [Heller, 1996](#)). A foreign language as the medium of instruction (MoI) often poses a barrier to educational equity ([Milligan et al., 2020](#)). This is especially evident in postcolonial nations, such as Morocco, which maintained ex-colonial languages as MoIs during the decolonization period ([Haugen, 1966](#); [Fishman, 1968](#); [Kloss, 1969](#); [Rubin & Jernudd, 1971](#)). Early LP research assumed that language planning initiatives were ideolog-

ically neutral and aimed at democratization, modernization, or efficiency (Ricento, 2000; Tollefson, 2015). This perspective, shifted with the emergence of critical language policy and planning (Cooper, 1990; Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Mühlhäusler, 1996; Pennycook, 1998; Tollefson, 1991, 2002; Ricento, 2010; Norton, 2013), which revealed that language planning decisions are often ideologically driven and aim to maintain socio-economic privileges. MoI policies, in particular, play a central role in maintaining educational, economic, social, and political inequalities (Brock-Utne, 2002; Tollefson & Tsui, 2004).

The shift towards a critical perspective is particularly relevant in Morocco, where educational stratification both shapes and reflects the stratification of the country's linguistic landscape (Ennaji, 2005; Baghana Baghana & Tupeyko, 2015; Jaafari, 2019). As in the rest of the Maghreb (Kerras, 2023), French-taught programs, French diplomas, and by extension French language skills hold a higher value in Morocco's education system (Bentahila & Stevens, 1985; Marley, 2004; Ennaji, 2005; Ben Hammou & Kesbi, 2021; Chakrani, 2020; Kerras, 2023; Chakrani & Huang, 2014; Kesbi, 2012). The linguistic hierarchy, in turn, reinforces social and economic inequalities (Chakrani, 2017; R'boul, 2024). French proficiency remains a key determinant of Moroccans' educational and professional success, as well as their social mobility (Majdi, 2016; Redouane, 2016; Najab, 2004). While LP research provides a rich description of the country's linguistic landscape and its disparate linguistic dynamics, some scholars, such as (Boutieri, 2012), argue that the symbiotic relationship between French and science education as a mechanism for social stratification has not been adequately elucidated.

Studies examining the importance of French in education and the employment market often highlight the need for pedagogical changes to improve French instruction in public schools and mitigate "the problems of Arabic-French bilingualism" (Kesbi, 2012) or call on private companies to invest in their employees' French language skills (Bensfia et al., 2013). The issue of MoI policy in Morocco has also been framed within an ideological conflict between conservative Arabists and reformist elites (Ennaji, 2005; Alalou, 2017; Redouane, 2016). Other studies focus on the "competition among local languages" over domains, yet overlook the dominance of French altogether (Moustaoui, 2018).

After enacting LAP, a growing body of research began to explore the new multilingual education policy. Jamaati et al. (2024) noted LAP's incongruity, in which planning (implementation) is disconnected from policy (e.g., the Framework Act). While policy recommends the diversification of MoIs, planning designates French as the sole MoI in science education (Ben Hammou & Kesbi, 2024). This is not unique to LAP; Morocco's language planning has long suffered from inconsistency and lack of a clear vision, leading to incoherent educational approaches (Loutfi & Noamane, 2020). Ben Hammou and Kesbi (2024) identified several critical flaws in LAP, including students limited French proficiency and its impact on content learning, insufficient teacher training for content instruction in foreign languages, and minimal teacher involvement in policy development. Their study highlights how French maintains a privileged position over both national languages (i.e., Arabic and Amazigh).

Using a critical discourse analysis approach, Laanani and Fathi (2024a) revealed how official texts employ discourses of crisis, urgency, quality, equity, and equality to justify and legitimize the discrepancy that research above corroborates—the continuing eminence of foreign languages (French in particular) at the expense of national languages. To gain deeper insights into the incongruous nature of LP in Morocco, research requires an explicit critical theoretical framework such as critical language policy (Spolsky, 2004; Canagarajah, 1999; Tollefson, 2002), critical pedagogy (Darder et al., 2023), and critical policy discourse analysis (Mulderig, 2024), alongside HSA (Tollefson, 1991). A critical framework can

provide a stronger tool for analyzing the power dynamics, historical context, neocolonial impact, and socioeconomic forces that shape LP and sustain the role of French in education.

We contribute to the emerging critical research by further investigating the incongruity of LEP discussed above. In adopting the explicitly critical HSA, we examine implicit factors that have led to such a contradiction, including neocolonial forces, socioeconomic power dynamics, and the agents behind the formulation and implementation of LAP. The following section elaborates on HSA and its significance for studying language policy in Morocco, particularly the relationship between French-based science and technology education and socioeconomic stratification.

3. Language and Education in Morocco: A Historical Overview

Following Morocco's 1912 colonization by both France and Spain, LP played a central role in Morocco's decolonization process. During the French protectorate, both powers enacted educational reforms that promoted their languages at the expense of Arabic, which had been the language of instruction in the Arab world since the 7th century. France, in particular, recognized that "the main tool of ideological control is language—the language chosen to be the official language and the language of education" (Mansour, 1993). To deepen its cultural influence, France engineered an educational system designed to fragment Moroccan society along socioeconomic and ethnolinguistic lines (Gill, 1999; Haeri, 2000).

Central to France's strategy was the creation of a French-educated group loyal to French language and culture. They were initially educated in European-style schools, which continue to operate today as French government schools attended by children of French expatriates and affluent Moroccans. These schools function as centers of French cultural assimilation, which promote a sense of alienation from broader Moroccan society. In parallel, the French administration built a class-based educational system, which served its own administrative and economic interests, furnishing the government with the manpower necessary to manage Morocco's resources for the benefit of France (Mansour, 1993; Segalla, 2009).

France also pursued an ethnic divide-and-rule strategy through education, particularly in Amazigh-speaking areas. Institutions such as the College of Azrou, for example, were established with the intention of partitioning the population along ethnic lines, encouraging the use of the Amazigh language and limiting the function of Arabic (Payet, 1957). However, this policy was met with resistance, as area Quranic schools continued to provide instruction in Arabic and ultimately compelled French authorities to reinstate Arabic in the curriculum.

Opposition to French educational policies primarily came from the Moroccan nationalist movement, which established free schools that taught all classes in Arabic. The schools aimed not only to preserve the Arabic language but also to promote it as a language of modern knowledge and a vehicle for national identity (Tazi, 1986). Tazi further argued that free schools became an important site for disseminating nationalist ideas and promoting Arabic as a central component of Moroccan culture and intellectual life.

After gaining independence, Morocco faced significant challenges in building a cohesive national education system (Hammoud, 1982). The Arabization policy aimed to replace French with Standard Arabic as the medium of instruction (MoI) (Bentahila, 1983; Hammoud, 1982), but French remained prevalent in higher education, technical fields, and private schools.

Critics of Arabization argue that it has lowered science education quality due to gaps in scientific and technical vocabulary in Arabic, the scarcity of scientific materials and reference books, limited publications and research in Arabic, and the discontinuation of Arabic MoI in higher education (Sayeh, 2013; Alalou, 2017). However, other scholars

contend that the shortcomings of Arabization stem not from inherent linguistic issues but from political and structural factors (Hammoud, 1982; Elbiad, 1991; Sirles, 1999; Kesbi, 2012; Sayeh, 2013; Jaafari, 2019; Viguiet, 2020; Batakji Chazy, 2023). Factors include inconsistent political commitment, inadequate funding, outdated teaching methods, a prominence of French in Morocco's socioeconomic landscape, and resistance from the francophone lobby to Arabize higher education.

As a result, Arabization was never fully implemented, and the colonial-era division between French as the language of science and Arabic as the language of the humanities persisted in post-secondary education (Kaye & Zoubir, 1990). Recently, the Moroccan government ended the 30 year long, partially implemented Arabization policy by extending French MoI to secondary science and math education. This further marginalized Arabic in key fields of science and in knowledge production and exacerbated the divide between the French-speaking ruling class and the broader Arabic-speaking population.

4. Materials and Methods

HSA provides a critical framework for analyzing language policies by examining how historical contexts and societal structures shape policy formation and implementation (Tollefson, 2015). The primary aim of HSA research is to uncover the historical and structural factors that lead to policies which perpetuate systems of inequality. This approach is particularly valuable because it moves beyond viewing language planning as an ideologically neutral, technical process that is based on cost/benefit rationales; instead, it critically examines how such policies reflect broader power structures. HSA focuses on two key sets of factors. First, it examines the historical sources of disparate costs and benefits in language use and learning across different groups, the historical context of language planning decisions, and the formation of planning agencies and their interests. In post-independence contexts such as Morocco, colonialism serves as a central historical factor, and thus, it is essential to consider language policies and their lasting impact when examining current language planning initiatives. Just as language policies in the United States and Canada must be understood within the context of European settler colonialism (McCarty, 2013; Crawford, 2000; Del Valle, 2003; Wiley, 2012, 1998), Morocco's language policies must be examined through the lens of French imperial influence and its continuing manifestations.

Furthermore, HSA focuses on structural factors, particularly socioeconomic class dynamics, and examines how language policies function as mechanisms for maintaining class-based power and inequality. In the Moroccan context, this perspective is particularly relevant as it reveals how the francophone upper class has preserved their political and economic privileges through LPs pre- and post-independence. Additionally, HSA sheds light on how language policies intersect with class structures and social mobility, explaining the discrepancies between stated policy goals and their implementation.

4.1. Understanding Language Alternation: Goals, Principles, and Measures in Morocco's 2019 Educational Reform

Throughout the numerous educational reforms since independence in 1956 (Vicente Llorent-Bedmar, 2014), MoI policies have remained consistent with the constitution, which designates Arabic as the official language and mandates "protecting, developing, and promoting its use" (The Moroccan Constitution, 2011, Article 1, Section 5). The National Charter of Education Reform (1999), for example, mandates Arabic modernization and instruction across all educational levels (Article 111), including higher education and scientific research (Article 112). Similarly, while The Strategic Vision of Reform (2015) recommends a multilingual education, it reasserts Arabic as "the main language of instruction". It also calls for modernizing Arabic language programs and establishing the Mohammed

VI Academy for the Arabic language. In this regard, the 2019 Framework Act 51.17 is no exception.

What makes this policy particularly consequential is that it constitutes a legally binding, comprehensive framework, regulating all aspects of education. At this point, the government has implemented FMI in secondary levels with the aim to extend it to elementary education. According to its preamble, the Framework Act 51.17 aims to ensure equity and equal educational opportunities, and to improve the quality of education for all Moroccan students (p. 3). To achieve such ambitious goals, the act stipulates a range of provisions, including “*atannawub allughawi*” (“language alternation”), which forms the basis of a long-term policy for language education. The Framework Act defines LAP as:

“a pedagogical approach that gradually invests in multilingual education, with the aim of diversifying the languages of instruction in addition to the two official languages of the state, by teaching. . . scientific and technical subjects, or parts of certain subjects, in a foreign language or languages, alongside the official languages”. ([The Framework Act 51.17, 2019](#), p. 3)

This document is arguably the first text to use the term “language alternation” in the context of language policy and planning. Language alternation usually refers to codeswitching in the literature, and thus, we cannot rely on external definitions or existing language planning literature to interpret the concept as presented in this context. Moreover, the provided definition lacks sufficient detail for a clear and complete explanation of the concept. For instance, while the policy mentions what languages are to be alternated, it does not specify who (the government, the district, the school, or the teacher) undertakes the task of alternating languages and how they will be alternated (based on subjects, a geographical location, or a time period). However, we can infer the characteristics of LAP from its goals and principles outlined in sections 31 and 32 of the Framework Act and summarized as the following.

LAP is anchored in a practical orientation towards language education. It primarily aims to cultivate the practical outcomes of language acquisition (e.g., proficiency in the target languages, entrenching national identity, etc.). A key goal of LAP is to establish multilingual education in a gradual and balanced manner to ensure that high-school graduates are proficient in the two official languages and at least two foreign languages. The main strategy to foster a multilingual education model is to diversify language options in all majors, specializations, vocational training, and research at the level of higher education. While promoting multilingualism, the Framework Act designates Standard Arabic as the primary language of instruction and emphasizes enhancing its acquisition through updated programs, teaching methods, and techniques of evaluation.

Three characteristics of LAP stand out. First, LAP is intended to develop into a gradual, balanced model of multilingualism. No single language should hold the exclusive function of MOI in any academic track or subject area, particularly in science and technical classrooms. Second, diversifying MoI is an integral tenet of LAP that the government must uphold, and without which language reform cannot achieve its goals. Third, LAP must improve the status, the corpus, and acquisition of official languages. Specifically, Arabic must function as a central language of instruction, especially in such contexts (Article 3, Section 31). Reducing the role of Arabic in terms of instructional hours or subject content (e.g., subjects in the sciences or humanities) would contravene a fundamental tenet of LAP as outlined in the official document, and measures must be undertaken to develop the Amazigh language. In the next section, we show how the implementation of LAP has deviated from each of these central goals and principles.

4.2. The Reality of Reform

The actualized model of LAP diverges from the goals and tenets of the official policy. Examining how LAP has unfolded in schools, one finds a significant mismatch between the policy discourse summarized above and its implementation. In the next section, we highlight two critical ways in which LAP has deviated from the goals and measures set forth in the strategic vision and the Framework Act. Before addressing this issue, however, it is important to consider the rate and scope with which the language reform has been executed.

4.3. The Implementation of Language Alternation

Unlike many bilingual education reforms globally, implementing LAP in Morocco occurred on a large scale and without pilot experiments, which usually precede reforms of this scale. Additionally, no formal evaluations of its impact on students' educational experience or on the overall quality of education have been conducted at the time of writing. Although the reform promised a "gradual" and "balanced" transition to multilingual education, its execution has been expeditious.

In 2017–2018, the government introduced the "*Bac Internationale Option Français*", commonly referred to as BIOF, a bilingual track in which science or technical classes (e.g., mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and earth science) are taught in French, while classes in the humanities track (e.g., social studies and philosophy) are taught in Arabic. However, given their limited proficiency in the French language, the majority of students initially did not enroll in the former track: only 4673 students enrolled in the 2017–2018 academic year ([Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2024](#)). Following the approval of the Framework Act 51.17 in 2019, the ministry of education expanded the French option across the country, and by the 2023–2024 academic year the number of French-taught high schoolers rose to 119,344. Despite the label "option", BIOF has become compulsory in most high schools, essentially supplanting Arabic-medium instruction (AMI) in science and mathematics. It is noteworthy that such a rapid implementation contrasts sharply with the protracted implementation of the Arabization policy ([Hammoud, 1982](#); [Sirles, 1996](#)).

4.4. Discrepancies in Policy Implementation: LAP or French Resurgence

The policy of language alternation, as outlined in the Framework Act, emphasizes diversifying languages of instruction, particularly in scientific and technical subjects. It does not assign any particular language the main role in teaching science and mathematics, nor does it allocate more instructional time for one language over others. Instead, the policy calls for a balanced approach, alternating Arabic, French, English, and Spanish to achieve a truly multilingual education. Despite the policy's goals, the government directed schools across the country to adopt French as the sole MoI in science and technical subjects. Four years into implementing language alternation, French has entirely replaced Arabic in science and mathematics and the English and Spanish tracks remain limited to a marginal number of pilot programs which may end because of the discontinuity of the MoI ([Ben Hammou & Kesbi, 2021](#)). What was intended as a model of balanced multilingualism has instead resulted in the exclusive use of French, which is a clear and significant departure from the main tenet of the policy to diversify MoIs.

Despite the official recognition of Amazigh as a second official language in the 2011 constitution, as well as its codification in 2003, the implementation of FMI in the science classrooms undermines efforts to promote and develop Amazigh and its presence in education. Currently, Amazigh is limited to some public elementary schools. The allocation of resources to FMI undermines these efforts, especially in private schools where the capitalization of French as the language of instruction translates to the absence of Amazigh there. In fact, many families in the private sector, due to the burden of learning four

languages (Arabic, Amazigh, French and English) and three scripts (Arabic, Tifinagh and Latin) in public schools, opt for private schools in order to avoid learning the Amazigh language and Arabic and to capitalize more on French, the language of the job market (Chakrani, 2017). Since its recent introduction to education, according to a 2023 study, Moroccan respondents do not perceive Amazigh as a language of instruction (4% 2016 and 4% in 2023, respectively). However, capitalizing on French in private education is more likely to undermine the promotion of Amazigh language instruction and presence of Arabic in science education.

The term “language alternation” has an ideological function, as it creates a false perception that Arabic and the three foreign languages—French, English, and Spanish—are equally alternated in science and math instruction. Exclusive FMI not only undermines the goal of balanced multilingualism and the principle of diversification, but it is also unlikely to improve educational quality given the ever-weakening status of French globally. French has endured significant domain losses in the field of scientific publication, the number of speakers, and international trade (Desrochers & Lariviere, 2016; House, 2018; Koskela et al., 2012, p. 21). This explains skepticism surrounding FMI, especially when compared to English, as the latter offers broader educational and professional opportunities (Viguié, 2020).

4.5. Incongruity in Policy Implementation

Another critical way in which the government’s implementation of LAP diverges from policy goals relates to the status and the role of the Arabic language in the new school model. In theory, the official policy calls for promoting the status of Arabic by designating it as a primary language of instruction across all subjects. Additionally, it mandates enhancing its corpus and expanding its use into university-level STEM courses, historically taught in French. In practice, however, few efforts have been made to effectuate these goals. Instead, the role—and consequently, the status—of Arabic in the educational system has diminished in favor of French, both in private and public schools. The number of instructional hours in Arabic has significantly decreased from 6290 h prior to the implementation of LAP to 3468 h after this reform (Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, 2024). Conversely, French instruction hours have almost doubled, rising from 2788 to 5610. In secondary education, Arabic has been relegated to the ‘adab’ (humanities and social science) majors, which students and parents view as having limited prospects in the job market. While various factors contribute to weakening the use of the Arabic language in the Arab world, the competition from foreign languages represents a significant challenge to Arabic language education (Amara, 2018; Kabel, 2023; R’boul, 2024).

Excluding Arabic from science and technical classrooms has other, far-reaching consequences. One concerns the effects of students’ education through a foreign language without adequate proficiency (Pennycook, 1994; Heugh, 2007; Brock-Utne, 2000; Ouane & Glanz, 2010; Laanani & Fathi, 2024b). Indeed, many Moroccan parents, teachers, and students have reported a decline in academic performance since the introduction of LAP because students struggle to comprehend material delivered in French (Ziad & Chakrani, 2024). The de facto FMI policy does not account for the research findings, which consistently show the educational advantages of teaching in a language that students are proficient in (Ferguson, 2006, pp. 179–196; Benson, 2004; Heugh, 2011).

In the next section, we focus on the historical context and the structural factors that account for the observed discrepancy between official MoI policies and their actual implementation.

5. Discussion

Language policies often serve political and economic interests rather than their stated objectives by employing ideology (Ricento, 2006). HSA helps reveal such implicit political and economic objectives by examining broader political and economic contexts that shape such policies. To understand LAP, we must examine who benefits from reinstating French and consolidating its position in Morocco's education. In this section, we examine France's neocolonial interests in its former colonies and how France has mobilized Francophonie, international clientelism, and financial patronage to achieve such interests. Equally essential to understanding LAP is examining the local agents behind the formulation of LAP, and more importantly, its divergence from a balanced multilingual policy to an exclusive FMI.

France's neocolonial strategy is three-pronged, as it mobilizes the ideology of Francophonie plurielle, establishes a network of international clientelism through education, and perpetuates ex-colonial states' dependency through financial patronage. The history of Francophonie as a language ideology is argued to emerge in the 18th century (Salhi, 2002; Vigouroux, 2013; Kasuya, 2001; Erfurt, 2018; Chakrani, 2021). The post-revolutionary state imposed the French language by marginalizing local languages within its territory (Salhi, 2002). With the rise of the British empire in the 19th century and the American empire in the 20th century, France has made its mission to arrest the spread of anglicism worldwide through political intervention. Namely, France's intrusion into the Quebec province reinvigorates the language debate (Heller & Bell, 2012), thus undermining the spread of anglicism (Vigouroux, 2013). Vigouroux (2013) and Salhi (2002) argue that the spread of Francophonie has led to the formation of the Organization of International Francophonie (OIF), an institutional and geopolitical entity that promotes the myth of French as a universal language.

To gain a strong footing internationally, "Francophonie has also taken a new direction, in contradistinction to its traditional approach, that is the marginalization of other languages. Instead, it has recognized linguistic diversity in francophone spaces and promoted African and Creole languages as part of Francophonie plurielle" (Chaudenson, 2001). Moving from an ideology based on marginalizing regional languages in metropole France and as the national language overseas, the Francophonie ideology has metamorphosed into Francophonie plurielle, especially in a globalized world. This is particularly salient in the case of Africa, a continent projected to contain 90% of the world's French speakers by 2050 (Combe, 2013, p. 8). Recognizing plurilingualism in many countries does not translate into local languages accruing capital as they are not allocated to important domains; rather, they are compartmentalized to specified domains of use, while French remains the single prevailing language in important domains (Mufwene & Vigouroux, 2014). The history of France is one of a colonial power whose control over its former colonies outlasts its political colonization. This explains France's interest in reinvigorating the French language in Morocco. Given the intricate relationship between France's economic and cultural interests, Francophonie aims at more than just promoting the French language and culture; it is a structural tool for economic exploitation.

France maintained control over its former African colonies long after granting them political independence (Chafer, 2005). Through several cooperation accords, France maintained close military, political, and economic ties with African countries (Bovcon, 2013). An implicit yet significant mechanism behind France's continuing influence, which outlasts its political colonization, is the cultural and educational influence it exerts, primarily through Francophonie. France also uses financial and technical patronage to exercise continued impact on recent educational reform. As recently as March 2024, the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) offered Morocco an EUR 130 million loan and EUR 4.7 million in technical support, which "vise à renforcer la qualité des apprentissages via l'amélioration

du et en français au collège” (aims at reinforcing the quality of learning through improving French in secondary school) (Maroc Diplomatique, 2023). Such influence on Morocco’s language policy is carried through the international clientelism of Francophiles, which uses French as the main vehicle of communication (Mufwene, 2008). As Medard (2004) argues, the relationship between France and Africa is that of neocolonialism and that this relationship is “rooted in and strengthened by strong interpersonal ties between the members of the ruling classes of France and Africa, transcending the political cleavages in both places” (p. 29). The francophone elite class in Africa see modeling their states’ education on the French model as “the best and only means of their advancement” (Yates, 2018, p. 132).

Implementing French projects in Morocco, or any former French colonial country, requires local agents who facilitate the projects. By promoting the French educational model through French MoI, French curricula, mission schools, and satellite campuses, France facilitates selective mobility (Bobée & Kleibert, 2022) and thus creates a French-educated class who are loyal to France and will promote policies aligned with French interests. In the case of Morocco, the role of policymakers who belong to such a class has been instrumental in composing and implementing LAP. Said Amzazi, the former minister of education, is an example of many appointed education ministers. He is a francophone technocrat and ardent proponent of French mission schools in Morocco (Le Desk, 2024). Amzazi unilaterally mandated the exclusive use of French in all science education (Ibrahimi, 2019). His successor, Chakib Benmoussa, is another French-educated minister and a long-time ambassador to France. Until recently, Benmoussa served as the president of the conference of ministers of education of French-speaking states and government (COMFENMEN), an offshoot of the organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF). The main task of COMFENMEN is to “seek to influence the educational policies of member states and governments in favor of the French language” (Government of New Brunswick, 2024).

To further the stronghold of French in Morocco, the government appointed Abdellatif Miraoui as the Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation. Miraoui is known for his loyalty to French education and a strong proponent of the IOF. The minister presided over the Francophone University Agency (AUF) from 2013 to 2017, which has an advisory role to higher education heads of French speaking states for “Sa mission principale est de penser mondialement la Francophonie scientifique et agir régionalement en respectant la diversité” (Its main mission is to think globally about the scientific Francophonie and act regionally, while respecting diversity) (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2024). Funded by the IOF, the agency is tasked with using French in global research and strengthening cooperation between universities in the French speaking states.

As Morocco attempted to introduce Arabic for teaching scientific subjects in higher education, and promote access to scientific research in English, the above-mentioned political actors set LAP that undergirds French hegemony in higher education. In fact, Hassan Aourid, the renowned political scientist and Moroccan historian, argues that effective implementation of educational policies requires expertise in both education and language planning, yet the appointed technocrats often possess neither, which leads to the deterioration of education sectors in Morocco and the Maghreb (Aourid, 2024).

By promoting French in key sectors such as education, this category of state agents are also able to perpetuate the power status quo and undermine decolonization efforts. Indeed, LEPs often function as a gatekeeping tool for economic resources, widely known as ‘elite closure’ (Wright, 2016; Spolsky, 2018; Kamwangamalu, 2013; Ramanathan, 1999). Elite closure is a social mobilization strategy, whereby members of a country’s affluent class maintain and reinforce their power and privilege through official language policy (Myers-Scott, 1993). All the conditions necessary for accomplishing elite closure have been present in Morocco’s sociolinguistic context. First, Moroccans generally attach differing

values to French and Arabic (Bentahila, 1983; Bentahila & Stevens, 1985; Marley, 2004; Ennaji, 2005; Chakrani & Huang, 2014; Chakrani, 2017; Ben Hammou & Kesbi, 2021). Also, French dominates vital domains including the STEM programs in higher education, business, the private job market, and diplomacy. Finally, only members of the upper class typically have access to acquire advanced proficiency in French. Maintaining French elitism through language stratification is doubly rewarding for the upper class as it channels access to employment opportunities not only through French fluency but also French acculturation (Cohen, 2004). Moroccans refer to the access to high-paying employment, which members of the upper class exclusively enjoy, as “parachuting” into job positions. It also creates a venue for commodifying French fluency and instruction by the ruling class through an increased investment in French-taught private schools. This is a further benefit of language commodification, making policy reforms subject to market rationale (Chakrani, 2017) and further excluding access to quality education from the reach of the Moroccan middle and working classes.

The weakening position of French in African countries (Avi-Yonah, 2023) may threaten members of upper classes, for whom French is tool of gatekeeping and a means of self-enrichment (Vigouroux, 2013). This is plausible given the increasing spread of English in education. In the case of Morocco, LAP can be understood as an effort to resolidify the market value of French and arrest the spread of anglicism in the Moroccan sociolinguistic space. Indeed, recent research documents a preference of EMI over FMI among teachers and students who recognize the potential benefits of English for international communication and economic development (Belhiah & Abdelatif, 2016; Ben Hammou & Kesbi, 2021, 2023; Sekkal et al., 2023). This is why several studies, such as Ben Hammou and Kesbi (2024), recommend English for science instruction and relegating Arabic and French to the humanities. However, such a decision could eventually replicate the same issues as FMI in linguistic and social stratification (Anaam, 2022). In fact, just as FMI poses a barrier to science education for working-class students because of their low French proficiency (Laanani & Fathi, 2024b), English can pose an even more significant barrier. If English proficiency becomes more important in school entrance exams and in the job market, those who have lower-quality language instruction could be further marginalized. English proficiency, thus, would become the new gatekeeper of the privileges for the affluent segment of society.

Such challenges that stem from adopting English medium instruction are common in other Arab and North-African educational systems (Curle et al., 2022). The promotion of the use of English for instruction, as well as the movement for English as a Lingua Franca, overlooks the nature of neoliberalism and “the unequal manner in which it allocates economic and linguistic resources across social classes, and gendered and racial groups, within nations and within the world-system” (O’Regan, 2014, p. 548). Adopting exogenous codes as instructional media also has a hegemonizing impact on Moroccans’ identity (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Ziad & Chakrani, 2024). R’boul (2024) argues that the discourses of the Moroccan state in enacting language policies do not address the “structural inequalities and unsystematic language policies that precipitate possibilities of re-colonization through another language/system” (p. 202).

Given the class-based distribution of foreign language learning in Morocco, mandating French or English as the language of education is bound to perpetuate inequality. At the present time, LAP appears to serve the mutual interests of France and its francophone ruling class in Morocco by cementing the already powerful position of French in Morocco’s education. A genuinely egalitarian solution must consider language policy that promotes national languages that are familiar to students, will facilitate knowledge access, and will democratize educational and economic opportunities. Sirles (1996) argues that instruction

in Arabic is much less challenging for Moroccan students than instruction in foreign languages. Of import is that removing Arabic from the science classroom means that the government cannot undo the effects of FMI for the next generation (Alwadghiri, 2019). Arabizing science poses less of a linguistic challenge than does instruction in a foreign language.

6. Conclusions

This article critically analyzes LAP in light of the historical context and structural factors that led to its adoption. What emerges from the analysis of LAP in the official discourse and its current implementation is a clear discrepancy between *de jure* and *de facto* policies. The goals that the Moroccan state outlined in the educational Framework Act are sidelined by a an entirely different *de facto* policy, which reinstates French as the exclusive language of instruction in science classrooms. The government presents LAP in official documents as an egalitarian reform, which aims to promote balanced multilingualism and enhance the status of national languages through diversifying instructional media. In practice, LAP allocates the role of MoI in scientific and technical education to French, thus contravening the tenets of the constitution in at least two major ways. LAP weakens the status of Arabic by relegating it to the humanities and social sciences and further marginalizes the promotion of the Amazigh language. Second, LAP, in its current format, denies Moroccan students the potential benefits of learning English.

Utilizing HSA helps us unpack the observed discrepancy and the Moroccan policy-makers' commitment to French, despite the constitution and the official policy discourse. The resurgence of French in the *de facto* policy is not the result of ineffective language planning or what Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) called "policy without planning". Rather, it reflects geopolitical interference and local socioeconomic structures, both of which are rooted in France's history in Morocco. France's neocolonial agenda, exercised through Francophonie, international clientelism, and financial patronage secures LEPs that consolidate the position of French in Morocco's education, sidelines the promotion of official languages, and limits the spread of anglophone language and culture. By reinstating the FMI policy, Morocco's ruling elite not only reinforce France's economic and cultural influence in the country but also embed the role of the French language as an exclusionary code in knowledge access and socioeconomic mobility.

By examining the historical, political, and socioeconomic factors behind language alternation as an ideologically laden policy, it becomes clear that Morocco's language planning is an elite-engineered sociopolitical act. Morocco's language-in-education policy remains deeply impacted by France's neocolonial obtrusion, which aligns with the interests of the country's francophone establishment. The interlacement of these forces accounts for the stark divide between the state's proclaimed policy and its actual implementation.

For an egalitarian reform, policy implementation should align with its goals and ensure that the adoption of French, or any other foreign languages, must not undermine Morocco's national languages. Without addressing the entrenchment of French, as well as the question of the agents who legislate such policies and for what economic and political ends, Morocco will further perpetuate existing social inequalities through LEP.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, B.C., A.Z. and A.L.; methodology, B.C., A.Z. and A.L.; formal analysis, B.C., A.Z. and A.L.; investigation, B.C., A.Z. and A.L.; writing—original draft preparation, B.C., A.Z. and A.L.; writing—review and editing, B.C. and A.Z.; supervision, B.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: The data is publicly available.

Acknowledgments: We extend our sincere gratitude to the three anonymous reviewers and the article editor for their invaluable feedback and constructive suggestions on earlier drafts of this manuscript. Their insightful comments significantly strengthened the final version of this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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