

# From Margins to Mainstream: Probing the Amazigh-in-Education Policy in Morocco

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Article information	Abstract
DOI : 10.25077/jds.2.1.41-57.2025 Correspondence : Brahim.aitlaaguid@gmail.com	The teaching of Amazigh has been celebrated by plenty of activists as a cornerstone toward revitalizing the Amazigh language and culture. Grand efforts have been made to ameliorate both the process and product of this policy. However, several issues persist, raising questions about officials’ political will and the full engagement of educators, learners, and their families. The present paper delves into Moroccans’ attitudes and views on the Amazigh teaching experience. It adopts a qualitative approach, as data were collected using a questionnaire and analyzed through thematic analysis. Results show that Moroccans generally perceive the teaching of Amazigh as an essential step toward reconciliation with the Amazigh identity. The 21-year-long experience is, however, regarded by the majority of participants to be a fiasco for several reasons, including lack of resources and educational staff and the incessant insignificance and carelessness associated with Amazigh. Most of the respondents, nevertheless, strongly support the adoption of the Tifinagh script, suggesting that it is a requisite part of Moroccan history and culture. The future of the Amazigh language is yet held with great pessimism, especially due to the fierce competition of other languages. The study calls for working on changing Moroccans’ negative attitudes and beliefs on Amazigh, arguing that without a solid social foundation, neither activists’ militancy nor constant political changes would be of any value.
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## INTRODUCTION

Amazigh people (also known as Berbers and Imazighen) are the indigenous people of North Africa with an affluent history tracing back thousands of years. Amazigh’s ancient origins are confirmed by recent archeological and genetic research (Lucas-Sánchez et al., 2020; Moussa, 2013). Evidence provided includes rock art, cave paintings, and artifacts. The latest research also endorses the antiquity of Amazigh’s written heritage, unraveling an enormous corpus of “arraten” legal documents in Amazigh (Elbahraoui & Kliakhandler, 2024). This discovery offers noteworthy insights into the identity and history of North Africa, as well as Amazigh’s literacy and culture.

Islam and Arabic were introduced to the Amazigh community through the Arab conquest in the 7th century. However, Imazighen maintained their linguistic and cultural identity and formed powerful Islamic dynasties, namely the Almoravids and Almohads. The Amazigh are recognized for their fierce resistance to foreign invasions, especially during the Ottoman era and European imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries. An instance that has been imprinted in the Amazigh collective memory is the Rif War (1920-1927) which was fought by the Amazigh tribes led by Abdelkarim El Khattabi in the Moroccan Rif Mountains against the Spanish and French colonial powers both of which incurred significant defeat. The Rif’s strategic success has been exemplary to all anti-colonial movements in the world, particularly in North Africa.

After the independence of Morocco in 1956, nevertheless, the promotion of Arabization policies by several North African countries, influenced by the pan-Arabism tide in the Middle East, calling for linguistic, cultural, and political unity, the Amazigh language and identity were massively marginalized.

However, several cultural revival movements emerged advocating for linguistic and cultural rights and official recognition in the late 20th century. Consequently, in October 2001, the Royal Institute of the Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) was founded by a Royal Dahir (decree) issued by King Mohammed VI. The institute has greatly contributed to the promotion and preservation of the Amazigh language and culture; it is credited for the development of the Proto-Tifinagh script, aiming to standardize and revitalize the Amazigh language. IRCAM has also created dictionaries, databases, and educational materials to enhance Amazigh education (Born, 2012), as well as it has engaged in the arena of artistic and technological innovations, seeking to foster creativity and exert technology for a better presentation and representation of traditional Amazigh cultural expressions (Remusik, 2022).

In September 2003, the Amazigh language (also referred to as Tamazight) was introduced into Moroccan primary schools, signaling a new era of Amazigh maintenance and development. Among several other fiascos, Amazigh has not been generalized, remaining limited to primary education only.

The Tamazight TV channel was launched in 2010. It broadcasts content in the three varieties of Amazigh (Tachelhit, Tarifit, and Tamazight) to raise awareness about the Amazigh culture and heritage and promote the language. This initiative is considered a significant milestone in the development of Amazigh, given that media plays a pivotal role in improving a language's sociolinguistic situation.

Eventually, the Amazigh language was recognized as a co-official language besides Arabic in the 2011 constitution (Ait Laaguid, 2022). Since then, Amazigh's situation has witnessed ups and downs. Recently, in May 2023, the royal institution acknowledged the Amazigh New Year (also called *Id Yennayer*) as a national paid holiday, celebrated by all Moroccans.

After the independence of Morocco in 1956, the country was characterized by two well-grounded ideologies: the Francophonie and Arabization. The latter was the new language policy subscribed to by conservative parties and religious leaders. It was claimed to be the approached strategy to gradually minimize the presence of the French language, reinforce the use of Arabic, and therefore maintain Morocco's national unity (Marley, 2004; Sadiqi, 2011). Besides the remarkable dependence on the French language, Arabization proved to be disadvantageous to Morocco's linguistic diversity. The Amazigh language and identity were consequently subject to various forms of disregard and exclusion.

For decades, the Amazigh language was excluded from Moroccan schools. In 1994, King Hassan II acknowledged the symbolic importance of the Amazigh language and culture and that it is part and parcel of Moroccan national identity when he called for the incorporation of Amazigh into the educational system. Nevertheless, such a process required years of planning and preparation. In 2001, King Mohammed VI issued a royal decree to establish the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM), which has since served as the cornerstone of Amazigh revival and development. The institute was tasked with preserving and promoting the Amazigh language and culture by incorporating it into various aspects of public life, particularly education (El Aissati et al., 2011).

Amazigh ultimately entered the public sphere for the first time in its history in September 2003 as it began to be taught in Moroccan schools. In addition to the work of academics and intellectuals as vital catalysts for Amazigh teaching, it was principally thanks to the King's will and efforts that the teaching of the language became a reality (Sadiqi, 2011).

The process of teaching Amazigh in 317 elementary schools in 2003 was characterized by thoughtlessness and lack of coordination. By 2008-9, Amazigh was expected to be taught in all public schools. But, by the end of the year, only 3,470 schools had signed up for Amazigh language instruction, which varied depending on the primary dialect spoken in each region (U.S. Department of State, 2010). The language has not thus been generalized to all public schools.

On the other hand, besides the training centers of some institutions which have integrated Amazigh into their degree courses, an independent Amazigh studies discipline has also been created in some

universities (Boukous, 2012).

2011 marked a historical transition in the status of Amazigh. Morocco's new constitution recognized Amazigh as a co-official language along with Arabic. It was thought that "this recognition opens up considerable prospects towards the revitalization of the Amazigh and impulse decisively the process of institutionalization of the language and the culture" (Boukous, 2012, p. 266).

According to the U.S. Department of State (2016), Amazigh was taught in 5,151 schools in 2015, accounting for almost 30 % of all schools. It is worth noting that Amazigh education has never expanded beyond the primary level. This has been justified by a lack of trained teachers. Although the royal institute has established a university-level teacher-training program to address the problem, the course of generalization has yet been stagnant. In this light, Idhssaine (2020) states that broadening the breadth of the Amazigh teaching experience in the Moroccan educational system and raising its social standing among Moroccans necessitate its vertical and horizontal generalization, i.e., throughout the country and at all levels of the curriculum, respectively.

Several challenges have contributed to the regression in the teaching of Amazigh. The first one is treating Amazigh as an optional language (El Aissati et al., 2011). This was initially clear in the National Charter for Education and Training in 2000 where Amazigh was restricted to facilitating the learning of Arabic in primary schools. As a result, this misrepresentation of the language has caused great practical and attitudinal effects.

Granting that the royal institute could fulfill the allocated language planning tasks of codification, elaboration, curriculum development, and implementation in a very short period, its presence and cooperation with the ministry of education have noticeably been weak. Yet, the standardized Amazigh being taught in school does not match any spoken variety (Silverstein & Crawford, 2004). Given their linguistic background, this may cause confusion and difficulty for the learners.

Compared to teachers of Arabic, teachers of Amazigh have not appropriately benefited from the ministerial training sessions. Despite IRCAM's attempt to provide continuous teacher training, the time dedicated to the process has been inadequate. Teachers have had to resort to auto-didactic learning since their pedagogical needs have not been properly met. There are also very few specialized supervisors. Most often, teachers of Amazigh are supervised by other school subjects' superintendents.

The time allotted to the Amazigh subject, which is no more than 3 hours a week per level, has also been noticed to be weak. These few hours are sometimes devoted only to teaching the alphabet, or the very teaching of the language gets replaced by other school activities. This is essentially the consequence of a lack of motivation of the school staff or lack of teachers, to begin with.

Regarding the alphabet, before its adoption as a political compromise solution by IRCAM and the acceptance of the International Organization for Standardization in 2003 as the official script for writing Amazigh, the newly adapted and innovated form of Tifinagh has caused contentious debates in Morocco (see Appendix E for IRCAM's neo-Tifinagh alphabet). This has in effect been against expectations since most Amazighophones use Arabic and Latin to write in Amazigh (Bahri, 2019; Soulimani, 2015). The event is reported by Silverstein & Crawford (2004) as follows:

The 2003 decision was highly contested within IRCAM, decided by only a handful of votes according to one of the members of the administrative council, and derived in large part from members' fears of threatened Islamist reprisals should the Latin script have been adopted. (p. 46)

The members' fears can be justified by their support of the use of the Arabic script (the Islamic movement and the Independence Party) and the Latin script (part of the Amazigh movement) (Masbah, 2011). The latter was preferred on the basis that it would serve the purposes of modernization and globalization, in the sense that it would facilitate the digitalization and technological advancement of the Amazigh language (Cornwell & Atia, 2012). The former, on the other hand, was favored on political

and ideological grounds. The Party for Justice and Development (PJD), for instance, fervently called for excluding Tifinagh from the language policy act, to the point that the leader of the party, Abdelillah Benkirane, equated the Amazigh script to Chinese in 2011 during a campaign rally (Belhiah et al., 2020).

Since the ultimate objective has been the constant empowerment of the Amazigh language for its revitalization, fears should have been triggered by the challenges of Neo-Tifinagh's implementation, especially in the educational sector. The adopted script has however been criticized as being a burden on Moroccans and unfeasible for teaching literacy (Belhiah et al, 2020; Soulaïmani, 2015).

Accordingly, Belhiah et al (2020, p. 123) argue that “the development of Standard Amazigh has also been met with staunch resistance for linguistic and sociopolitical reasons”. The Amazigh varieties (TashleHITE, Tamazight, and Tarifit) are extensively discrete from one another and thus mutually unintelligible. Consequently, the standardization of both grammar and dictionaries will greatly take from one of the three dialects or equally from all of them, bringing about a language that lacks native speakers (Belhiah et al., 2020). The current state is nonetheless expected to create a diglossia, whereby the superposed variety enjoys prestige and high status, whereas the three native varieties are exclusively limited to low-status domains.

The movement from orality to official and standard orthography was however not an easy change to take at the beginning. Amazigh instruction using Neo-Tifinagh has proven to be problematic in primary schools, specifically after the second year, as it is hard to read a long text in Tifinagh (Sadiqi, 2011). There is also a lack of suitable teaching materials, which can play a major role in making children, Amazigh and non-Amazigh, love learning Tifinagh. In this context, the great individual efforts some Amazigh instructors make are instrumental to students' acceptance of Amazigh as a language of identity.

The intensive language contact in Morocco places Amazigh in a critical situation. The status of Amazigh in multilingual Morocco has yet different impacts on important domains, such as education and training. Rational, functional, and fair management of the current linguistic pluralism is therefore called for (Boukous, 2012).

For a language that was overlooked for decades, while Arabic and French dominated the Moroccan sociolinguistic landscape, the teaching of the new/old language is challenging. Socio-culturally, the Amazigh language has long been acknowledged in Imazighen's (plural for Amazigh) group consciousness as a sheer vernacular that is inferior to Arabic. Its role has been argued to be mainly functional, only for oral communication. The Amazigh language has also been exclusively connected to the production of different cultural forms, such as music, cinema, and art. Politically, Arabic has been embraced as the 'legitimate' national language, while economically, French has been approached as the language of 'true' modernity, social prestige, and professional success (Reino, 2007). There is still a minimal presence of Spanish too, particularly in the North, and the increasing emergence of English as the language of globalization, international communication, and modern culture (Boukous, 2012).

These social representations of Amazigh and its minimal political and economic status have been quite detrimental to the facilitation of the process of Amazigh teaching, which can certainly be ameliorated by proper media follow-up, as it requires tremendous and continuous media support.

On the whole, the Amazigh teaching progress in Morocco has been challenged with various hindrances since its initial implementation. It has been suggested that the current regression is a direct result of the lack of sincere political will (Marley, 2004; Errihani, 2006; El Kirat & Boussagui, 2018; Idhssaine & El kirat, 2019; Idhssaine, 2020).

As an evaluation of Amazigh's status-quo, it has also been maintained that the official recognition of Amazigh and its teaching in particular as a mother tongue are inadequate since Moroccans' attitudes are discouragingly negative (Errihani, 2008; Loutfi, 2020; Loutfi & Noamane, 2020). There have generally been efforts to institutionalize Amazigh right before its constitutionalization, but the adopted language

policy has all along proven to be a total fiasco (Loutfi & Noamane, 2020).

Following Zouhir (2014), the real question that should be raised is not ‘what’ or ‘how’, but rather ‘why’ the Moroccan language policy and, in part, the Amazigh-in-education policy, have been a failure. This could perhaps be connected to the increasing presence of English as a symbol of openness and neo-liberalism and the continuous adoption of Arabization, though only partly since French has recently been reinstated as a medium of instruction in Moroccan public schools (Alalou, 2018).

The present study explores Moroccans’ attitudes and perspectives on the Amazigh teaching experience in Morocco. It particularly aims to profoundly investigate the extent to which Moroccans are satisfied with the Amazigh-in-education policy, and whether it matches their stances on how the language should be educationally approached. The study, therefore, attempted to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are Moroccans’ attitudes and perspectives on the Amazigh teaching experience?
2. How do Moroccans perceive the adoption of the Tifinagh script and the future of the Amazigh language?

## METHODS

### *The Research Approach*

The qualitative approach was essentially pursued to answer the research questions, exerting primary data. It was intended to gain critical insights into Moroccans’ attitudes, experiences, and perspectives on Amazigh. Thematic analysis was chosen to examine the data, aiming to principally provide descriptions and categories (words) revealing Moroccans’ experiences and realities from their personal perspectives (Palmer & Bolderston, 2006).

### *Data Collection*

A survey, in the form of an online questionnaire, was designated for gathering primary data about Moroccans’ perceptions and attitudes towards Amazigh, given its assistive properties, including easiness of application, saving of time, and productive results. It was simply the technique through which the researcher would obtain meaningful and rich information using the participants’ own knowledge and stances.

The questionnaire was administered in both Arabic and English so that the participants would choose the language of their preference. The majority of the respondents however chose the Arabic version. The questionnaire was designed on the Google forms platform. Once prepared and piloted out, it was shared with people through direct contact. Eventually, the researcher was able to receive 150 responses from the target population (Moroccans).

Besides the demographic information, the survey consisted of 21 items, seven Likert-scale, and 14 open-ended. It was divided into two sections. The first section was devoted to Amazigh as a language, culture, and identity including five items; two were seven-point Likert-scale statements (from strongly agree to strongly disagree with the neutral option) and three were open-ended.

The survey started with the statement “Amazigh as an identity, language, and culture should be preserved” as a lead-in to help the respondents understand the topic under investigation and get them mentally ready to properly interact with the rest of the questionnaire. Exploring the general perspective on Amazigh as a complex construct was considered the right beginning to later examine the experiences and attitudes of the informants, a goal sought to be accomplished through the subsequent items.

The second section was assigned to Amazigh in public life and was itself split into four subsections, namely Amazigh in education (six items, only one was seven-point Likert), Amazigh in media (three

items, two were Likert; one of them was seven-point scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, and the other one was six-point: excellent, good, average, poor, extremely poor, and neutral), Amazigh in administration and public spaces (two items, both were open-ended), and Amazigh in politics and civil society's engagement (four items, two of which were seven-point Likert).

The researcher sought to make the questionnaire less condensed so that the respondents would be at ease and willing to fill it out. The exploratory character of the research tool, nevertheless, demanded the presence of diverse points that would tackle various aspects of the subject.

In this paper, however, only the analysis of the items pertaining to Amazigh education as a primary sphere of public life is included, given that the study's focus is particularly the Amazigh teaching experience.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

The responses to the survey's items were analyzed employing thematic analysis. There were however some attitudinal items that were descriptively analyzed through basic quantifications. They were supportive of the thematic analysis which yet remained more exhaustive.

Thematic analysis is one of the most powerful and flexible methods adopted for qualitative data analysis within several epistemological frameworks (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). It is deemed appropriate when a researcher aims to understand experiences, thoughts, perspectives, and behaviors across a data set. It specifically allows for identifying, analyzing, and reporting repeated patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Besides describing the data, this method also includes interpretation, basically at the level of coding and constructing themes.

Thematic analysis is not only confined to ethnography as claimed by Aronson (1995), or to phenomenology as argued by Joffe (2011); instead, it is an independent analytic method that is foundational for other methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, the choice of this particular method should be motivated by the research objectives.

The researcher opted for thematic analysis as it is intended to find common or shared meanings within the survey's responses. This practical consideration was congruent with the present study's purposes. Thematic analysis was also chosen since it would greatly help account for the patterns found in the respondents' attitudes and opinions. The researcher would be able to ultimately state the gathered data as expressed, mostly, within the limits of the participants' own words, avoiding therefore a superfluous interpretation of the findings. The method would more or less assist in the organization of the data sets in a way that would serve to reach well-grounded conclusions.

In addition to its relevance to answering the research question by examining the responses to the survey's open-ended questions, thematic analysis was also chosen for its ability to provide a summary, highlight key features, and interpret an extensive array of data sets (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Most prominently, this method of analysis was chosen for its flexibility in terms of adaptation to the research question, the sort of data analyzed, the quantity of this data, and the different approaches it offered.

Delineating what a theme means is necessary before immersing in how the method is applied. Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 82) defines a theme as "a patterned response or meaning" that stems from the data informative of the research question. It is distinct from the category that presents a description and interpretation of the shown content of a data set (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Themes can be identified notwithstanding the recurrence level of an idea or item. Yet a theme can be central and indispensable to answering the research question although it does not highly frequently appear within the data set (Braun & Clarke 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

There are essentially two approaches to identifying themes: inductive and deductive (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). The inductive approach generates themes based on the gathered data. These themes

might not exactly reflect the questions asked of participants and might not obligatorily be based on the researcher's interests and beliefs (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The deductive approach, on the other hand, relies on an established theory or framework to identify desired themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Varpio et al., 2019). The inductive approach is thus more comprehensive, tending to provide a thorough analysis of the overall body of data, whereas the deductive approach is quite limited to a specific aspect or finding that would be better explained in the light of previous theories, frames, or research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The current study adopted the thematic method as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) since it is the most adopted version in the qualitative research literature (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Their account of the method consists of six steps, which are not to be necessarily linearly followed as it is set to be recursive. In other words, the researcher can go back and forth between the six steps based on the revelation of new data or the emergence of new themes requiring more investigation (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Following are the six steps of the thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) and as adopted in the present study:

#### Step 1: Familiarizing oneself with the data

The researcher is to be first acquainted with the data set through an active and recurrent reading to have a meaningful immersion into the raw data and be prepared for the next stages.

#### Step 2: Generating initial codes

This is the initial analytic step in the process. The data is organized through the coding process. The researcher at this level can take notes of possible data items he is interested in, links between the items, and other basic ideas (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Primarily, the researcher creates codes, not themes. In this respect, a code is "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). Caution is demanded, however, concerning the identification of each code so that it would not overlap with other codes. This is rather carried out by following an established coding framework. The present study undertook an inductive coding framework that mirrored the relevant issues exclusively raised by the data. The initially generated codes were frequently revised by going over and over the recorded ideas and observations. This was necessary to back the researcher's interpretations and analysis.

After forming the coding framework, the researcher generalized the same codes across the data set by categorizing the survey's responses with pertinent codes, taking note of any likely patterns and connections that could notify the development of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process was done manually, while the coded extracts included large texts to allow for enough context. There were also extracts associated with multiple codes.

#### Step 3: Searching for themes

In this stage, the researcher starts looking for themes. This is essentially an active and interpretive process. Themes are not simply shown through the coded data; they are rather constructed through a meaningful analysis, combination, comparison, and graphic representations of the connections between codes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Since the present study followed an inductive exploration, the researcher developed themes directly from the coded survey responses. The identified themes were therefore closely related to the original data. The researcher, overall, noted down all the potentially significant themes regardless of their close relation or irrelevance to the study's question, or the large quantity of the data set. There were, however, (orphan) codes that did not fit within the formed thematic structure (Braun & Clarke, 2006), so they were integrated into one varied theme.

#### Step 4: Reviewing themes

This stage comprises two levels of analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher first makes sure that the coded data are situated within fitting themes. He reviews all the pertinent codes and data extracts relevant to each theme, emphasizing that there is sufficient supporting data for each constructed theme, that there is coherence between the data and the relevant theme, and that there is a systematic categorization of these themes in the sense that they should not exceed an agreeable amount and degree of diversity. Importantly, there should be a commonality between data within each theme, and conversely, the data between the themes should be distinct to show differentiation and separation (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006). There is however the possibility of re-categorizing the data extracts and modifying the constructed themes to be even more representative of the coded data. Themes can therefore be supplemented, joined, or even cast off (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

This first level of analysis was thorough once the researcher made sure that the revised thematic map included all of the coded data that would later be incorporated into the final analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher, throughout this process, kept detailed notes of every change made to better ensure logical sequencing and link between the generated set of themes and reinforce the trustworthiness of the findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

The second level of analysis was more of a revision of the previous revision; the researcher went back to the entire body of data. He re-read it, re-scrutinized the themes, and re-coded any other data that might have been relevant to the newly constructed or modified themes. The thematic map was thus revisited to show the interrelatedness of themes and how they were significant to the research question.

As previously stated, the process of thematic analysis is linear. This is quite manifest at this point of examination: re-reading and revising codes and themes. For the present study, nevertheless, the revision process was ended once the researcher felt confident that all the data items closely attached to the research question were included in the coding framework, that the themes were logically intertwined, and that the accomplished adjustments were not causing any weighty changes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

#### Step 5: Defining and naming themes

In this phase, themes are defined and narratively described. The names of the selected themes to be integrated into the final report are also reviewed to verify their brevity and descriptive character (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher further creates a systematic narrative of how and why the coded data within each theme are highly insightful, contributive to the understanding of broader questions, and interrelated with other themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

At this level, the researcher is attentive to areas of intersection between themes, identifies emergent sub-themes, and gives a clear demarcation of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To support the story each theme tells, appropriate data extracts are selected to be included in the final report as evidence and illustration of the theme's crucial features (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

#### Step 6: Producing the report/manuscript

This step concerns the writing up of the final analysis and description of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is indeed an extension of the prior steps since the researcher has at his disposal meticulous notes, a narrative description of themes, and representative data extracts (King, 2004). The final report is therefore a concise and coherent narrative account of the researcher's description, interpretation of the findings, and explanation of relevant choices.

The application of the thematic analysis method was challenging on certain levels. Maintaining a rigorous examination of the data in view of the method's flexibility required great attention and caution to little details, starting from the very first observations to the production of the findings report. It should be noted that the detailed conducted analysis took on a constructivist perspective, ensuring that the reported meanings and insights resulted from a systematic process of knowledge construction. The researcher

sought to give special focus to the interpretive facet of the findings instead of mere descriptions of the data extracts. The goal was to provide a well-thought-out examination of every possible aspect.

## RESULTS

### Attitudes towards the Integration of Amazigh into the Educational System

The incorporation of Amazigh into the Moroccan educational system raised the question of how Moroccans view such a huge step in the history of Amazigh in Morocco. It should be noted that the scope of Amazigh in this respect refers to the standardized variety taught in public schools. The participants were asked whether the teaching of Amazigh in Moroccan schools was important or not to initially explore their attitudes towards the very act of teaching the language. The question's structure required originally only two possible answers, yes or no. But the respondents were requested to provide a proper justification in either case.

The participants could hence be divided into two broad categories, each of which had its own justifications for the given answer. These are principally the themes that invite our attention to better understand Moroccans' beliefs on the importance of teaching Amazigh. The vast majority said yes, counting for 85.33 percent, whereas only 12.66 percent said no. The remaining 2 percent did not provide an answer. This may be viewed as a positive sign for the social approval of the Amazigh language whose very presence in school appears to be crucial in proving open-mindedness and acceptance of diversity. Six themes were accordingly constructed to generally demonstrate Moroccans' favorable attitude towards the importance of teaching Amazigh, while 3 others justify its unimportance (look at Table 3.5).

**Table 1. Views on the Importance of Teaching Amazigh in Morocco**

Categories	Themes	Frequency
YES	1. Activating the official character of Amazigh 2. Having knowledge of Moroccans' identity 3. Saving the language from endangerment 4. Learning Amazigh exclusively for communication 5. Teaching Amazigh for linguistic and cultural equity 6. Learning mother tongues for nations' development	128
NO	1. Not a thought and science language 2. Not necessary 3. Having multiple varieties	19

A group of participants in the first category claimed that Amazigh should be taught in Moroccan schools, *"since it is the official language"* (extract 16, item 5). It is through its integration into the educational system that its official character would be activated. Another group emphasized the fact that teaching the language would help Moroccans, especially non-Amazighs, have knowledge of their identity. It is also maintained that the Amazigh culture *"should be definitely taught so that students would be acquainted with their origins and culture"* (extract 30, item 5).

Most of the participants ensured that school is the best place to reconcile with Amazighity (i.e. the quality and feeling of being Amazigh) and *"If this language is not taught, it will eventually die"* (extract 48, item 5). This shows that these people are most likely concerned with the language in itself, regardless of what its teaching could yield and what could be done with it. What counts is to save it from any form of endangerment, seek to revitalize it, and maintain its identity status through strategic visions such as teaching.

Several participants held that just like any other language in the country used for social and professional communication, Amazigh should also be taught in school for the same end, especially since there is a culturally independent community speaking the language. Within the same realm, the teaching of Amazigh was regarded by another group as a symbol of linguistic and cultural equity. Conversely,

*“not teaching the Amazigh language is itself an act of exclusion and marginalization”* (extract18, item 5).

It was furthermore believed that Morocco can only develop if it prioritizes Amazigh, which is the mother tongue of most people. This is an explicit denial of other foreign languages which are used in other countries more or less for openness and global communication and not as a requisite for progress and development. This may also be a call to rely on science that has shown the high significance of mother tongues in education.

Contrariwise, a couple of participants considered the teaching of Amazigh to be a waste of time, preferring learning the *‘languages of science’*. They argued that sciences are to be learned in their original languages so that they could be easily understood, instead of resorting to translation *“which loses the initial meaning”* (extract 15, item 4).

Some other respondents contended that the teaching of Amazigh is not at all necessary and they had mainly two motives for their claim. First, Amazigh is only limited to a particular group of people and it is not universal. Second, it is only a burden to students who are already required to learn at least two other languages in primary school, namely Arabic and French.

Another reason that makes teaching Amazigh unimportant was a few participants’ assertions that it is not yet a full-fledged language but one that is divided into three different, almost unintelligible, varieties. It was believed that *“the current form of Amazigh being taught in school is useless and it would be better if each variety was taught in the region where it is spoken”* (extract 126, item 5).

This negative attitude towards Amazigh’s presence in education has more likely stemmed from the practical considerations that people usually expect from the language, taking no notice of the cultural symbolism and identity expressions it represents.

### **The Amazigh Teaching Experience in Morocco (2003-2024)**

The experience of teaching Amazigh in Morocco required some reflection and evaluation by Moroccans based on their common sense and personal and professional practices. The sample was thus inquired about their opinions on the 21-year-long experience. The responses, generally, ranged between two broad thinking patterns: the failure of the experience and its success. The justifications supporting the common opinions shaped the explored themes within each category (see Table 3.6).

**Table 2. Opinions on the Experience of Teaching Amazigh in Morocco**

Categories	Themes	Frequency
Failure	1 Scarcity of resources	97
	2 The insignificance of Amazigh	
	3 Lack of generalization	
	4 The optionality of Amazigh	
	5 The ministry’s carelessness	
Success	1 Relief and decrease of ethnic racism	34
	2 Gains	
	3 Social approval	

A large number of participants, notably, believed that the teaching experience of Amazigh has failed. The reasons for this failure differed. It was for instance expressed that the concerned experience *“has not been satisfying as there is lack of resources and educational staff”* (extract 8, item 6) specialized in Amazigh, as a school subject. It was also held that *“there are other school subjects that are more important than Amazigh”* (extract 19, item 6) which is not embraced as primary or having an added value to the Moroccan school.

This lack of importance was additionally thought to not allow *“Amazigh’s generalization to all the other educational levels”* (extract 20, item 6), besides *“treating the subject as being optional”* (extract

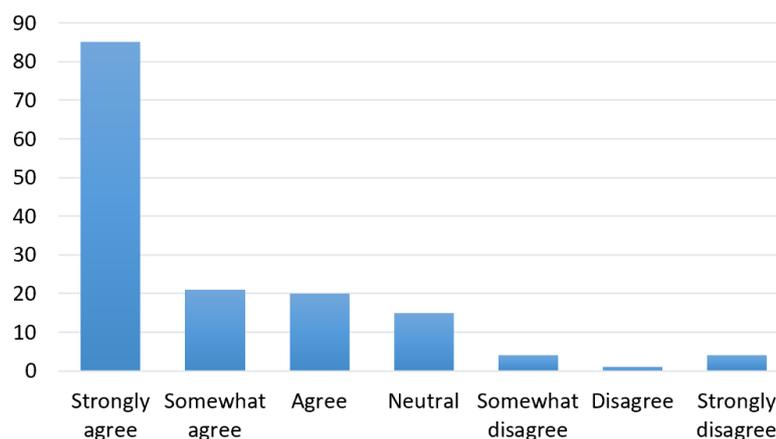
28, item 6) by not extending its teaching time length and allowing other teachers, rather than Amazigh's teacher, to teach the language. The first category, however, also pointed out that "*the continuous dereliction*" (extract 41, item 6), "*marginalization*" (extract 47, item 6), and "*negligence of Amazigh*" (extract 81, item 6) have originally been the main source of the current state of affairs.

On the other hand, the respondents within the second category regarded the ongoing experience of teaching Amazigh as a success. They fundamentally had three reasonable grounds for their claim. The experience has created "*a sense of relief and reduced ethnic racism*" (extract 37, item 6). This positive outcome and the very teaching of Amazigh in many primary schools are considered signs of improvement.

The majority of these informants, nonetheless, asserted that the experience has at least resulted in a couple of tangible enhancements, comprising "*a standardized language, dictionaries, and highly qualified staff*" (extract 84, item 6). There was yet, in this context, reference to the need for more scientific research "*so that there would be reconsideration and development of textbooks and curricula in a way that they would not go through what Arabic (the school subject) is going through, including its dead curricula and old textbooks*" (extract 84, item 6). Another indication for the experience's success, alleged by the participants in the second category, was the immense social approval it has gained, given "*the great positive feedback it has had from parents and students*" (extract 141, item 6).

Amazigh has so far been limited to primary education. As shown in Table 2, the teaching of Amazigh was viewed by some participants to be a failure since it has not been generalized to secondary and high school levels of education. A specific question was therefore intended to explore the participants' attitudes towards the need for the generalization process.

As displayed in Figure 3.4, almost the entire sample (84 percent) regarded the generalization process as necessary; 56.66 percent strongly agreed, 14 percent somewhat agreed, and 13.33 percent agreed. On the other side, only 6 percent of the overall sample perceived the process as needless, 2.66 percent of which strongly disagreed, 0.66 percent disagreed, and another 2.66 percent somewhat disagreed. A telling number, precisely 14 percent, nonetheless, preferred neutrality, maybe they found the topic uninteresting, or they simply did not know which decision would be the best.



**Figure 1. Generalizing Amazigh to other Educational Levels**

The positive attitude of the majority towards the necessity of the concerned process was somewhat congruent with the general attitude identified before towards the whole teaching experience of the language. In other words, since the teaching of Amazigh was viewed as insufficient and limited due to the lack of generalization among other reasons, it makes perfect sense why the majority would view the generalization process as a requisite. The six percent who expressed that the process is unnecessary perhaps refuse the very idea of teaching Amazigh, or they are the exact people who previously claimed that it was unnecessary and unimportant.

## The Adoption of Tifinagh for Writing Amazigh

It has been 21 years since Tifinagh has been recognized as the official script for writing Amazigh. Moroccans' perspectives on this alphabet, however, seem to vary, split into opponents and proponents of its use. The answers of the designated sample could be essentially categorized into five themes, demonstrated as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Moroccans' Perspectives on the Adoption of Tifinagh**

Category	Themes	Frequency
Advocacy	1. A good step ( <i>no justifications provided</i> )	81
	2. An indispensable part of the Moroccan history and culture	35
	3. Easy to learn	11
Opposition	1. An obstacle against learning and teaching Amazigh	5
	2. The preeminence of other alphabets	9
Neutral		9

Table 3 shows that most of the expressed perspectives were favorable. Substantially, the participants highlighted the fact that Tifinagh is an Amazigh idiosyncrasy, representing a symbol of a long-established history and originality. Adopting Tifinagh is thus supposed to protect and revitalize the Amazigh component. This could be an opinion made based on knowledge of the historical peculiarity of the Amazigh identity and the cultural authenticity of its symbols. The participants also stressed the alphabet's simplicity and "*easiness to learn*" (extract 92, item 8). These respondents probably relied on direct observations; otherwise, it would be difficult to make sure whether or not learning Tifinagh was challenging.

The opposing side, nevertheless, focused on the communicative aspect of the language, assuring that Tifinagh has been an obstacle to effortlessly communicating in the Amazigh language whose sounds "*could be written in Latin or Arabic*" (extract 134, item 8). These alphabets were believed to be the best choice as they are ready-made and comprehended by most people, a choice which the advocates of Tifinagh argued would not help Amazigh have "*an independent status*" (extract 49, item 8) and be distinct from other languages. Some respondents, however, chose not to give an opinion, stating that they did not know, or preferred not to say. Perhaps they did not know the matter, or they tried to be politically correct, or simply because it felt too personal to voice out their standpoint.

## The Future of the Amazigh Language in Morocco

Given the challenges identified and discussed throughout the previous subsections, it was imperative to investigate the participants' feelings about the future of Amazigh in Morocco. Generally, the sample's responses revolved around two dissimilar views, one was *optimistic* and the other was *pessimistic*, each of which, accordingly, was reinforced by certain arguments, as presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Views on the Future of Amazigh in Morocco**

Category	Themes	Frequency
Optimistic	The unity and persistent work of the Amazigh speakers	61
Pessimistic	Inability to cope up with other languages' development	81
Neutral		8

Most of the respondents felt pessimistic about any possibility for Amazigh to have a prosperous future in light of other languages' dominance of the linguistic market in Morocco. These languages, particularly English, were claimed to be the backbone of today's economy. The participants with the negative attitude also maintained that local languages such as Amazigh cannot reach a high level of competition at this time of globalization's invasion when "*peoples pursue unity under the same label*

*and glorify a culture of fluidity and consumption*” (extract 41, item 9). The economy is, therefore, the determinant of any language’s power, and since Amazigh is not used for economic purposes, it cannot have an influential socio-economic status.

More importantly, these participants emphasized the point of linguistic equity in Morocco, stressing that since there is no prospective language policy that seeks *“to maintain and manage diversity in a way that secures justice and provides Amazigh with the prestigious status it deserves”* (extract 105, item 9), it would be irrational to talk about a future for this language.

The other group of respondents confirmed that Amazigh could have a bright future. Essentially, they thought that would be achievable only if Amazighs themselves unite to do so. It was suggested that with incessant attention and support from all parties, for instance *“by spreading the Amazigh language and culture through publishing in Amazigh”* (extract 49, item 9) and *“assimilating the scientific advancement through research”* (extract 53, item 9), Amazigh would slowly and steadily develop.

Among responses in this regard, some highlighted the role of intellectuals and the Amazigh associations to protect the language and therefore contribute to its development. Eight participants of the entire sample avoided expressing their standpoints, thinking probably that the issue is not subject to expectations, or they were unable to make a decision.

## DISCUSSION

The sample’s attitudes towards the incorporation of Amazigh into Moroccan public schools were generally found to be positive. The great majority of participants maintained that teaching Amazigh is important, mainly as a way of activating the official character of the language and contributing to its promotion. This finding is dissimilar to Loutfi’s (2020) results which revealed that the majority of his respondents did not favor learning Amazigh.

The present study’s finding, on the other hand, is consistent with Afkir’s (2012) and Idhssaine’s (2020) results which showed that introducing Amazigh to Moroccan schools could be an added value. This may simply stem from the idea that the teaching of a language can promote and develop its status.

Another surprising finding from this study is that almost the entire sample regarded the generalization process of teaching Amazigh as necessary, supporting the same result arrived at by Afkir (2012), while disconfirming Idhssaine’s (2020) result which showed that Moroccans believe that the Amazigh teaching experience should not be generalized. This distinction in results probably originates from focusing on different regions. There are grand socio-economic and socio-cultural peculiarities between people in the Rabat-Sale region (the focus of Idhssaine’s study) and people in Sous-Massa (where the majority of the current study’s respondents are from), especially that they speak the Amazigh language, Tachelhit, specifically.

It was also found that Moroccans viewed the overall experience of teaching Amazigh as a failure, fundamentally due to the scarcity of resources, treating Amazigh as optional, and not being given equal importance, compared to the other languages, specifically Arabic and French. This finding supports Idhssaine and El Kirat’s (2019) and Marley’s (2004) results which revealed that the status of teaching Amazigh would be problematic essentially due to the shortage of qualified teachers. However, as Errihani (2008) stated, it would be hard to predict success for teaching Amazigh since the socio-political importance of the teaching experience is not acknowledged and addressed.

The findings also indicate that the foremost part of the surveyed Moroccans supported the adoption of Tifnagh as the official script for writing Amazigh in all domains, particularly education. These participants emphasized the fact that Tifnagh is an Amazigh idiosyncrasy signifying a symbol of a long-established history and originality. This finding resonates with Idhssaine’s (2020) findings which similarly affirmed that there is a favorable perspective on the matter. This could be realized as a conscious

recognition of the cultural authenticity of the Amazigh identity, especially since Tifinagh stands as an identity marker of the Amazigh community.

It should be highlighted that the opposing respondents contended that Tifinagh is an obstacle to effectively communicating in the Amazigh language. They inversely thought that Amazigh “could be written in Latin or Arabic” (extract 134, item 8). Preferring these alphabets most likely emanates from the participants’ belief that the two writing systems are ready-made and can be easily grasped. Tifinagh is hence regarded as a burden on Moroccans who have yet to learn a third script (Belhiah, et al., 2020).

One more highly significant finding from the current study, as regards the teaching of Amazigh and its weight in society, is the point that most of the participants felt pessimistic about the future of Amazigh. They argued that Amazigh cannot challenge the other languages’ dominance of the linguistic market in Morocco. These languages, especially English, were regarded as the vehicle of today’s economy. In this age of globalization, and with the lack of an influential status, Amazigh was thus believed to be far off any prospects. This finding corroborates Errihani’s (2006) and Errihani’s (2008) conclusion that unless both the average person and the government institutions have positive attitudes towards Amazigh, it would be difficult to expect a rewarding future for the language.

The teaching of Amazigh alone therefore cannot yield any successful results as long as there are negative perceptions and prejudices about Amazigh in Moroccan society. In the same vein, this study’s participants also put stress on the centrality of sociolinguistic equity in Morocco, ensuring that the absence of a language policy that aims “to maintain and manage diversity in a way that secures justice and provides Amazigh with the prestigious status it deserves” (extract 105, item 9) makes the idea of a future for Amazigh unrealistic.

The optimistic respondents, on the other hand, contended that Amazigh could have a bright future if Amazigh people are united for this purpose. One of the provided suggestions was the effective intervention of the various responsible parties by, for example, “spreading the Amazigh language and culture through publishing in Amazigh” (extract 49, item 9) and “assimilating the scientific advancement through research” (extract 53, item 9). This is perhaps a reference, for the most part, to the need for well-grounded anthropological research as the foundation for accurate and rigorous documentation of Amazigh’s modern and ancient history and literature. The Amazigh language should exclusively then be used to write literary and scientific works so that it can prove its singularity and uncompromising value.

Attaining a radiant future for Amazigh was also suggested to be possible upon the intellectuals and Amazigh associations’ accomplishment of their pivotal role of protecting and promoting the Amazigh language and culture. This may be realized by well-organized social and educational activities aiming to introduce ignored aspects of the Amazigh component.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, two fundamental findings could be emphasized: firstly, the Amazigh teaching experience is viewed as a fiasco, and secondly, the future of the language is held with great pessimism. However, to genuinely promote the Amazigh language and identity through its integration into the sphere of education, it is essential for decision-makers, teachers, professors, educators, and textbook developers to work on shifting Moroccans’ attitudes toward Amazigh in a more positive direction. This could be accomplished through the implementation of engaging course-books, workshops, conferences, and study days to raise Moroccans’ awareness of Amazigh’s prominence.

Students should be motivated to learn the language through the use of creative methods and strategies. They should also be made cognizant of the indispensable character of the Amazigh component in the Moroccan identity, which is to be absorbed as an epistemic stance, and not as a folkloric element used for media advertising, marketing, and materialistic gains. They should be sensitized to the usefulness of

the Amazigh language, and how its learning and constant presence can contribute to Morocco's national development in several various ways. This is further validated as the findings indicated that the teaching experience of Amazigh has been held as a failure by the majority of the survey respondents, principally due to the lack of resources and the inequality with which Amazigh is treated. Sociolinguistic equity is thus to be attained through a well-thought-out language policy and planning. Necessities as such should be provided so that Moroccans can hope for a well-developed Amazigh language in the future.

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