

BEYOND FRANCOPHONIE: UNDERSTANDING THE RISE OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING PREFERENCES FOR MOROCCAN STUDENTS IN MANAGEMENT.

Dr. Karim DARBAN

University Hassan II, Casablanca. Morocco
e-mail: dr.karim.darban@gmail.com,

Dr. Smail KABBAJ

University Hassan II, Casablanca. Morocco,
e-mail: kabbaj_69@yahoo.fr

Abstract

This study investigates the transition of Moroccan students from French-speaking to English-speaking destinations and programs for studying abroad. Employing quantitative research methods, trends and patterns in destination preference over time are identified. The results unveil a notable shift in destination preferences among Moroccan students, moving from French-speaking countries to English-speaking ones in recent years. The implications of these findings offer valuable insights and enhanced utility for stakeholders, particularly universities and governmental entities aiming to allure international students from North Africa.

Key words: Study abroad, French to English transition, language preferences.

JEL Classification: M310, M380, I23.

Introduction

Maghrebian North Africa, comprising nations like Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, is renowned for its rich history and cultural amalgamation shaped by diverse civilizations across centuries, including the Amazigh, Romans, and Arabs (Camps, 1983). The region, predominantly Arab-speaking with a shared religious heritage, fosters a collective cultural identity, further strengthened by historical influences (Camps, 1983). French colonization during the 19th and 20th centuries significantly impacted the region, imparting the French language, legal systems, and institutions, fostering a cultural exchange that persists today (Tarwater & Salih, 2005). Despite gaining independence, the French legacy remains integral to the cultural fabric of these nations, reflected in language, education, and administration (Tarwater & Salih, 2005).

Studying abroad has long been a favored pursuit for North African students, particularly Moroccans, seeking educational enrichment and global exposure. Motivations vary, ranging from accessing superior academic and research opportunities to immersing in diverse cultural environments (Tamas, 2014). International study equips Moroccan students with language proficiency, cross-cultural competencies, and networking opportunities crucial for their professional growth (Gérard, 2008). In recent years, there has been a discernible shift in Moroccan students' destination preferences, moving from traditional French-speaking destinations like France and Belgium towards English-speaking countries such as the United States, Canada, as well as English-taught programs across Europe (Mathilde & Bernard, 2015). This shift is influenced by factors including the global prominence of English, perceived career prospects, and financial considerations (Toncar, Reid & Anderson, 2006; Cheng, 2014; European Commission, 2021). Despite the perceived higher tuition costs in English-speaking countries, the allure of enhanced English proficiency, greater employment opportunities, and available financial aid incentivizes Moroccan students to reconsider their destination choices (European Commission, 2021). This paper aims to investigate the transition in destination preferences among Moroccan students, from French-speaking to English-speaking countries and programs. By delving into the underlying motivations driving this shift, this research intends to offer insights beneficial for universities and governments seeking to attract international students from Morocco and the wider Maghreb region. Additionally, this study contributes to the existing literature on studying abroad destination preferences, offering valuable insights for students, educational institutions, and policymakers alike.

Literature Review

There exists an expanding corpus of literature examining the myriad factors influencing destination preferences among students undertaking study abroad programs, with language proficiency, cultural appeal, employment prospects, and financial considerations emerging as primary determinants.

Language proficiency stands out as a crucial factor shaping destination preferences, particularly evident among Moroccan students. Previous studies highlight the significance of language acquisition in enhancing the study abroad experience (Freed, 1995; Kinginger, 2011). Notably, Moroccan students traditionally favored French-speaking destinations, given the country's colonial history and the emphasis placed on French language acquisition (Marchandise, 2013). However, the global ascendancy of English as a lingua franca may prompt a shift towards English-speaking countries (Crystal, 2003). Culture plays a pivotal role in influencing students' destination choices (Watson & Wolfel, 2015). The allure of immersing oneself in a different cultural milieu often guides students' decisions, with preferences shaped by the desire to explore and understand diverse cultural landscapes (Choudaha & De Wit, 2014). For instance, the rich artistic

heritage of Italy may attract students interested in art, fostering a deeper engagement with the host culture and facilitating the development of intercultural competence. Consideration of employment prospects and career opportunities weighs heavily in students' decision-making processes (Prazeres, 2013). Moroccan students, in particular, perceive study abroad as a pathway to acquiring international work experience, honing skills, and establishing professional networks (Prazeres, 2013). The allure of multinational corporations and organizations further incentivizes study in English-speaking countries, where proficiency in English confers a competitive advantage in the global job market. Financial considerations, notably tuition costs and scholarship opportunities, significantly influence destination preferences (King & Young, 1994). While countries like the United States and the United Kingdom may entail higher tuition fees, they often provide extensive financial aid and scholarship options for international students (Kent, 2018). Notably, data from prominent Moroccan study abroad platforms and government sources underscore the predominance of scholarships from English-speaking countries, reinforcing their attractiveness as study destinations (Tawjih Consulting, 2022; mabourse.enssup.gov.ma).

Results

The results of this research endeavor illustrate a noteworthy transition among Moroccan students in their preference for French-speaking versus English-speaking destinations and programs for studying abroad. Employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, this study aimed to discern patterns and trends in destination preference over time and elucidate the underlying rationales guiding students' selection of specific countries for their study abroad ventures. The quantitative analysis revealed a significant shift in Moroccan students' destination preferences, indicating a marked inclination towards English-speaking countries/programs over French-speaking counterparts in recent years.

Over the period spanning from 2016 to 2022, a discernible trend emerged in students' selection of program languages (PL), highlighting a progressive increase in the number of students opting for English-speaking programs vis-à-vis French-speaking ones. In 2016, out of a total of 177 students, 83 opted for English-speaking programs, while 94 chose French-speaking programs. By 2022, this trend persisted, with 109 students electing English-speaking programs compared to 66 opting for French-speaking ones, out of a total of 175 students. This observed shift entails a 26% increase in the number of students favoring English-speaking programs, juxtaposed with a 31% decrease in those opting for French-speaking programs. Notably, this trend remained consistent across the years, with English programs consistently attracting a larger cohort of students, indicative of a burgeoning interest in international mobility among Moroccan students.

Chi-square test results further substantiated the aforementioned trends, revealing a statistically significant evolution in students' preferences for English

and French programs. The computed Pearson Chi-Square value of 27.310 with 4 degrees of freedom, coupled with an Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) of 0.000, underscores the robustness of this shift. Likewise, the Likelihood Ratio, yielding a value of 27.362 with 4 degrees of freedom and an Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) of 0.000, lends further credence to the statistical significance of the observed differences. Notably, the sizable sample size of 1061 students ensures the reliability and validity of the chi-square test results, with the minimum expected count exceeding the requisite threshold of 78.51. Consequently, these findings provide compelling evidence supporting the discernible trend towards an increasing preference for English over French programs among Moroccan students, underscoring a pivotal shift in their study abroad aspirations.

Turning to an examination of the relationship between students' grades (AG) and their choice of study abroad program language (PL), a comprehensive data analysis was conducted. Results revealed a statistically significant difference in mean grades between students opting for English and French programs. Specifically, the mean AG for students in English programs stood at 13.9359, with a standard deviation of 2.11679, while their counterparts in French programs exhibited a mean AG of 13.1724, accompanied by a standard deviation of 1.99576. Notably, variations in grades were observed across different countries within both English and French programs, with discernible discrepancies in mean grades between nations. A chi-square test corroborated the observed differences in mean grades, further affirming the statistically significant nature of these findings.

Furthermore, an exploration of the relationship between average grades and motivation grades among Moroccan students applying for study abroad opportunities revealed a highly significant correlation, as evidenced by an ANOVA test yielding a p-value of less than .001 and a substantial F-statistic of 700.640. These findings underscore a strong positive association between academic performance and motivation levels among students pursuing study abroad endeavors. Additionally, the regression model employed in this analysis yielded significant results, elucidating that a considerable proportion of the variation in motivation grades can be attributed to variations in average grades. The high R-squared value of .398 underscores the substantial explanatory power of average grades in predicting motivation levels, thereby emphasizing the pivotal role of academic performance in shaping students' aspirations towards international study opportunities.

In conclusion, the findings of this research underscore a notable transition among Moroccan students towards English-speaking destinations and programs for studying abroad. Through robust quantitative analyses, coupled with qualitative insights, this study delineates the underlying dynamics steering students' preferences and underscores the pivotal role of academic performance in shaping their study abroad aspirations. These findings hold significant implications for universities and governmental entities seeking to attract international students from North

Africa, providing valuable insights into evolving trends and preferences among this demographic cohort.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to delve into the transition of Moroccan students from French to English Speaking Destinations and Programs. Our aim was to discern trends and patterns in destination preference over time while also garnering detailed insights into the rationale behind students' choices of specific countries for their study abroad endeavors.

The quantitative research findings unveiled a notable shift in destination preferences among Moroccan students opting to study abroad, with a discernible movement away from French-speaking countries and programs towards English-speaking counterparts in recent years. These findings present valuable insights into the evolving priorities of Moroccan students aspiring to pursue higher education overseas. By delineating trends and patterns in destination preference over time, we have garnered a more comprehensive understanding of how perspectives on studying abroad within the North African context are evolving.

An intriguing observation arising from our study is the propensity of students not only to gravitate towards English-speaking countries but also to favor programs conducted in English more generally. This implies that universities offering programs in English may enjoy a competitive edge in attracting international students from North Africa. Furthermore, our investigation revealed compelling correlations between students' academic performance and their choice of countries and languages. Notably, high-achieving Moroccan students tend to opt for study abroad programs in countries renowned for their esteemed education systems, such as Finland, Canada, and the UK. Additionally, we unearthed a correlation between students' average grades and their motivation levels, suggesting that students with commendable academic records present more robust and well-conceived study abroad and immigration plans.

These preliminary findings carry significant implications for universities and governments striving to entice international students from North Africa. They empirically underscore a discernible shift in Moroccan students' preferences concerning the languages of study programs and the countries they opt to pursue their education in. By comprehending the evolving priorities of Moroccan students aspiring to study abroad, universities can tailor their programs and services to better cater to the needs of this burgeoning demographic. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that our quantitative research phase offers only a superficial understanding of these results. To garner a deeper insight into the factors influencing students' decisions regarding study abroad and their country selection process, we embarked on a qualitative research phase employing focus groups with students applying to study abroad.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper delves into the evolving journey of Moroccan students as they transition from French-speaking to English-speaking destinations and programs for their studies abroad. Employing quantitative research methods, this study has unearthed notable trends and patterns in destination preferences over time. The results underscore a substantial shift among Moroccan students, moving away from French-speaking countries towards English-speaking ones in recent years. These findings offer significant insights and practical implications for stakeholders, particularly universities and governments aiming to attract international students from North Africa. Such insights can inform strategic decisions and initiatives geared towards enhancing the appeal of educational opportunities in English-speaking destinations for Moroccan students and beyond.

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