

Framing the Digital Turn: Rosetta Stone and the Contested Enactment of Language Policy in Moroccan Higher Education

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Abstract

Language-learning platforms are increasingly adopted within national education systems as instruments of language policy, promising rapid, scalable gains in proficiency, yet how such mandates are received by the students subject to them remains little examined. This article addresses that gap by analysing the mandated introduction of the Rosetta Stone language learning platform across Moroccan universities under the PACTE ESRI 2030 reform. Combining a framing analysis of a trilingual corpus of institutional and media communications with a survey of affected students, it traces the reform from its projection in official discourse to its reception at the point of use. The study reveals that the projection discourse is divided into a dominant frame, which named a linguistic deficit and prescribed the platform as its remedy, and a counter-frame, carried in the Arabic language press, which cast the reform as an imposition. Students endorsed the reform's diagnosis while refusing its remedy, and a majority did not complete the required hours. Reception was patterned by the language of response, with students answering in Arabic the most critical, mirroring the counterframe in the press. The study argues that the reform failed at the point of enactment rather than conception and that in a language policy, language is not only the object of reform but also the medium through which it is contested.

1. Introduction

In 2022, Morocco's Ministry of Higher Education introduced the language learning platform Rosetta Stone into the national reform agenda known as the PACTE ESRI 2030 (Plan for Accelerating the Transformation of the Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Innovation Ecosystem). The reform was presented as a roadmap drawn from Morocco's New Development Model aiming to insert the country into the knowledge society and raise its universities to international standards. Among its priority worksites for early implementation were the launch of fully anglophone programs and, of direct relevance here, the establishment of language platforms and language positioning tests across the university system. (Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation [MESRSI], 2022). It is within this language pillar, the strengthening of foreign-language provision as a lever of employability and international openness, that Rosetta Stone was adopted. However, the language provision was not an optional supplement but a graded requirement of the curriculum. Licenses were distributed across public universities, and students were required to complete a fixed quota of 30 hours split between two languages, fifteen hours for French and the other fifteen for English. The measure was presented as a response to a linguistic deficit. Moroccan graduates, the reasoning went, lacked the language proficiency in languages demanded by the local and global labor market, and a commercial immersion platform would supply it at scale. This paper takes that presentation as its object, and it advances a specific argument about students sharing the reform's diagnosis while refusing the remedy's conditions; thus, the reform's fate was decided not at the level of its idea but at the level of its enactment.

The adoption of the Rosetta Stone platform was not merely a pedagogical decision but a policy act, and like all policy acts, it carried within it a framing. This decision defined a problem, named a cause,

assigned a remedy, and moralized uptake as national ambition. But a frame is only the first half of a policy; the second half is enactment, in which the reform's fate was decided. Language is enacted as much through discourse as through statute (Ball, 1993; Johnson, 2013). How a reform is framed with which problem, which future, shapes the terms in which it can be received, complied with, or resisted. Policies are often not received by passive subjects that official discourse imagines; they are interpreted and translated by those meant to enact them, and this is often related to the conditions in which they land (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). When a mandate is imposed onto conditions it does not provide for, translation can tip into refusal. This study examines both halves of the enactment for a single case. It starts by asking how Rosetta Stone is framed in Moroccan institutional and media discourse and how the university students meant to use it, received it, and, in large part, refused it. The two are analytically inseparable because a framing analysis conducted alone would describe the state's reform ambitions without testing if they hold, whereas a reception study conducted alone would only record student complaints. Read together, they show students accepting the reform's diagnosis and refusing its imposed remedy with the refusal not through open confrontation but through the everyday forms of non-completion, withdrawal, and circumvention.

The case matters beyond Morocco because the pattern it exposes is not only Moroccan. Commercial educational technologies are more and more adopted as instruments of language and education policy infiltrated into public systems beneath a shared vocabulary of access, mobility, and competitiveness while advancing commercial and data extractive logics (Poell et al., 2019; Williamson, 2017). Spain's Escuela 2.0 program placed laptops with some 400,000 students and equipped thousands of classrooms before a change of government abolished it in 2012, leaving debt and obsolete equipment, and because of the absence of evaluation, there's no knowledge of whether it had worked (Mora, Escardíbul, & Di Pietro, 2018). By contrast, the same platform mandated across Moroccan universities was taken up by the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma through community-led co-design. The language platform was adopted to revitalize the threatened indigenous language *Chahta*, under Rosetta Stone's Endangered Languages Program. This illustrates how far a single reform can be taken up for different purposes and implemented under distinct conditions (Liese, 2025), underscoring that such platforms are not neutral software but policy artifacts that depend on divergent policy ends.

Language policy scholarship has traced how English travels as policy (Phillipson, 1992) and how in Morocco, official discourse rationalizes the advance of foreign languages over national ones (Laanani & Fathi, 2024), yet the framing of a digital language tool as policy and its reception by students subject to it has received little sustained attention. Prior Moroccan research on the Rosetta Stone adoption has investigated the platform's usefulness, ease of use, and overall satisfaction (Houmane et al., 2024; El Idrissi & Larhrissi, 2025), while this study reads it as a policy artifact.

The analysis draws on Entman's framing theory (1993) to identify how a reform is constructed in discourse, on Ball, Maguire, and Braun's theory of policy enactment (2012), building on Ball's earlier distinction between policy as text and as discourse (1993) to interpret how it is received, on Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital (1991) to specify what the reform circulates as value, and finally on Scott's

theory of everyday resistance (1985, 1990) to read the refusal that the imposition provoked; thus, a frame is projected, enacted, valued, and resisted. The study proceeds in two phases: a framing analysis of a trilingual corpus of media and institutional texts in Arabic, French, and English languages and a survey of 147 university students who were required to use the platform as part of their curriculum. It is guided by the following three research questions:

RQ1: How is Rosetta Stone framed in Moroccan institutional and media discourse under the PACTE ESRI 2030 reform, and what counter-framing circulates alongside the dominant construction?

RQ2: How do Moroccan university students receive the dominant framing, and through what forms of compliance and refusal do they enact or resist it?

RQ3: Where does student reception diverge from the institutional frame, and what accounts for that divergence?

The timing of the episode warrants a brief note before the analysis begins, since the events studied here belong to a bounded period. In 2026, the ministry introduced a domestically developed platform as a national successor, and enforcement of the Rosetta Stone requirement appears to have quietly lapsed, though no formal termination was announced. Together, these suggest that the Rosetta Stone episode is effectively closed. This study reads that episode not as an ongoing arrangement but as a completed policy experiment whose trajectory, from confident projection to contested imposition, can now be traced in full.

2. Literature Review

This paper reads the PACTE ESRI 2030 reform, mainly its linguistic component, through four concepts, each doing a distinct job at the different levels of the policy. The first one being framing theory, which explains how the adoption of Rosetta Stone was constructed as the ultimate solution but contested as an imposition at the bottom. Policy enactment theory explains why that construction fractured on contact with the conditions of Moroccan universities. Linguistic capital explains what was at stake in the particular languages the reform sought to distribute. And the theory of everyday resistance reveals the forms that the refusal took. The four strands do not make a loose toolkit but generate a sequence: a frame is projected first, it is enacted, it circulates a value, and where imposition exceeded consent, it is resisted. The following section sets out each concept, situating it against the relevant scholarship and showing what that scholarship leaves open.

2.1 Framing and the discursive form of policy

To frame an issue is to foreground some of its features at the expense of others and, in doing so, to advance one definition of the problem and one response as the natural ones (Entman, 1993). A frame is not a distortion laid over neutral facts, it is the operation through which facts are made to mean something. Entman (1993) specifies four functions a frame performs developed in communication

research. First, it defines a problem: fixing what is at issue, naming a condition as a problem of a particular kind, and thereby ruling out the ways it might otherwise have been understood. The second is causal diagnosis, where the frame identifies what produced the problem and, in doing so, locates the responsibility and points toward the kind of intervention that will seem to fit. The third is moral evaluation, where the frame attaches a judgement, making the condition as bad and the proposed response as good, and it is here that a policy acquires its charge of urgency and virtue. The fourth and final one is treatment recommendation. This is where the frame prescribes what should be done, and because the first three functions have already been performed, they lay the groundwork for the recommendation proposed as the natural conclusion of an argument the audience has been led through rather than being exposed to as a contestable proposal. Taken together, the four functions are less a description of an issue than a machinery for constructing one, and how that machinery is put to work depends on what the analyst asks of it.

That machinery has most often been studied for its effects as a means by which the presentation of an issue shifts what audiences believe about it (Scheufele, 1999; Chong & Druckman, 2007). In that tradition, the object of study is the audience, and the question is causal: whether framing a matter one way rather than another changes what people think, feel, or are willing to support. This paper asks something different of it and of a different object. Its concern is not the effect of the frame on students' opinions but the construction of the reform itself, what the policy becomes, as a public thing, once it has been framed. It treats framing not as a mechanism of persuasion whose effect on opinion is to be measured, but as the discursive form a policy takes, the means by which a reform is not merely announced but constituted as an object with a particular shape; thus, the frame's power lies precisely in making a contingent policy choice appear as the self-evident response to an objective need. This converges with a longer tradition in policy analysis that treats the setting of a problem, rather than the solving of it, as the primary political act (Schön & Rein, 1994).

The functions are analytically separable but rhetorically fused. In practice, they arrive together and reinforce each other so that the problem, its cause, its moral weight, and its remedy present themselves as a single coherent account rather than as four distinct claims that might each be questioned. They are also often carried less by explicit assertion than by selection, emphasis, and omission, a deficit implied by a statistic, a remedy naturalized by the absence of any other alternative, and a cause left unstated because it is treated as obvious. What a frame leaves unsaid does as much work as what it states, and it is in those silences that the distance between what the reform promised and what it required begins to show. Yet, a frame is rarely uncontested, and treating framing only as the state's work would miss half the discourse. The media that amplify a reform can also carry its critique, so that problem definition, causal attribution, and moral evaluation become sites of struggle rather than settled ministerial property. Within Moroccan language-policy scholarship, critical discourse work has read reform in this light. Laanani and Fathi (2024) analyze the macro structures that frame language policy in Morocco, unravelling a discourse of crisis, quality, and modernization that is used to legitimize the advance of foreign languages over national ones. This work establishes that Moroccan language policy is a discursive contest, not a settled administrative fact. What it does not examine is the framing of digital

language tools specifically, nor the reception of that framing by the students who are its object. This study treats the dominant frame and its counter-frame as two halves of a single discursive field.

2.2 Policy enactment and the contexts of reception

A frame projected from the centre does not always determine what happens at the point of use. Between the policy as a written text and the policy as lived experience lies enactment, where this study locates the reform's real content. Ball (1993) draws the distinction the analysis rests on, and that is policy is both text and discourse, not simply implemented but read and acted upon. Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) develop this into an account in which policy is interpreted and translated by the actors who must put it into practice. Interpretation is the initial reading of what a policy requires, and translation is the messier labour of turning that reading into practice in a specific setting, with resources that setting affords, and it can be extended to the possibility of refusal. This insistence that a policy is remade at the point of delivery has a longer lineage in the study of implementation. Lipsky (1980) demonstrated that frontline actors are not passive executors of policy but de facto policymakers that shape reform through the discretion they exercise when they are met with it. When these policymakers are faced with mandates issued without the resources to meet them, they adapt, ration, and quietly withhold compliance in ways that can bend a policy away from its stated intent. Lipsky's actors are the workers who deliver public services rather than those who receive them; however, this study extends the same logic to the recipients of a mandated reform, treating students not as an audience on whom a policy simply lands but as agents whose interpretation and refusal are themselves part of how the policy is enacted.

Enactment is conditioned by context, and that context is material as well as ideational. Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) identify four dimensions of the contexts in which policy is enacted. Situated contexts are the local features that shape how a policy lands: an institution's locale, history, and student intake. Professional cultures are the values and commitments of those who enact them and how staff understand their work and its purposes. Material contexts are the physical and resource conditions, budgets, staffing, and buildings. External contexts are the wider pressures and expectations that bear on the institution, from ministerial targets to economic demands. This study draws chiefly on two of these. The material context is decisive, since a platform presuming reliable connectivity and personal devices enacts very different things where those are scarce, and in Moroccan higher education those conditions are unevenly held. Studies of e-learning integration report on the marked urban-rural divide in the availability and quality of internet connectivity and digital devices, so the same platform reaches students under materially different conditions (El Ghazali & Benbrahim, 2024). The gap this produces is not implementation failure in the technical sense, but the predictable outcome of a frame that legislates for conditions it does not supply. Next, the external context matters as the source of the mandate itself, a reform pressed onto universities to a national timeline. The situated and professional dimensions remain in view, but it is the meeting of an externally imposed mandate with uneven material conditions that this analysis foregrounds. This enactment perspective has a direct counterpart in language policy scholarship. Policy is understood not as a text that determines practice but as something appropriated, negotiated, and reworked by the educators and students who are its agents (Johnson, 2013; Menken &

García, 2010). Reading Moroccan students as agents rather than recipients places this study within that tradition.

That tradition, however, assumes that policy is enacted by people, where teachers interpret and students appropriate. Here one of the actors is not a person but a platform, and that difference is consequential. Platforms render learning as trackable, comparable data, and the progress dashboards that present this as feedback can also function as instruments of monitoring, displacing the agency of the learner they claim to serve (Kerssens & van Dijck, 2022; Zuboff, 2019). Reading Rosetta Stone as a policy artefact means attending to this design, which is that the platform is not a neutral conduit for a language policy but carries a policy of its own in what it tracks, what it requires and which languages are required from it. Empirical literature on language technology in Moroccan higher education anticipates the tension between promise and condition without naming it. Studies of students' attitudes toward learning technologies report broad receptivity alongside persistent infrastructural constraint (El Bettoui, 2016; Faizi, 2018; Hafa et al., 2023). Research on Rosetta Stone specifically is more pointed. Houmane et al. (2024) find that Moroccan students judged the platform useful and easy to use yet regarded it negatively overall, and El Idrissi & Larhrissi (2025) report high satisfaction in a blended setting. These studies evaluate the platform for its functionality and students' preferences. None reads it as a policy artefact, and none tests the reform's framing against the conditions of its reception.

2.3 Linguistic capital and the value of foreign-language proficiency

Together, framing and enactment explain how the reform was constructed and where it fractured, but neither explains what the reform sought to distribute. The answer is not language in the abstract but specific languages positioned as valuable. Here Bourdieu's account is the necessary lens. For Bourdieu (1991), linguistic competence is not only a means of communication but also a form of capital that is often unequally distributed and convertible into social and economic advantages. These advantages often exist within a market that assigns languages differential worth. Command of the legitimate language is a resource, but its absence is a disadvantage that the education system tends to reproduce even as it claims to remedy. Thus, the reform's promise of foreign language proficiency is a claim about capital. The reform mandated two foreign languages, French and English, but they are charged differently. French is the established language of Moroccan higher education and administration, an inherited form of capital already unevenly held. Then, English is positioned by the reform as the emerging language of global mobility and competitiveness that's the capital a graduate is now said to require. Neither claim arrives in a neutral setting because of Morocco's already stratified linguistic market. Arabic, French, Amazigh, and English occupy unequal positions, and the reform's elevation of English as the language of international openness enters and reshapes that hierarchy rather than standing outside it (Phillipson, 1992). This is also supplemented in critical work in the Moroccan context, which has also revealed how a neoliberal policy discourse commodifies education and entrenches hierarchies that favour foreign languages over national ones (Kabel, 2023; Laanani & Fathi, 2024).

The Rosetta Stone platform's own design also carries the question of distribution. Its interface that addresses its users operates in over a dozen languages, yet it doesn't in Morocco's official languages: Arabic and Amazigh. This can be questioned as not a neutral default of an immersion method but a selection about which linguistic markets are worth building for (Poell et al., 2019). The consequence is a form of what Zaugg (2017) terms digital disadvantage, in which a language's provision in the tools people use falls short of its standing among speakers, a condition that reaches beyond small or endangered languages to national and official ones when commercial priorities do not favour them. As referred to previously in the Moroccan case, the exclusion compounds an existing hierarchy where Arabic and Amaizgh already occupy subordinate positions to the foreign languages in the domains of higher education and the economy (Laaraj & El Kirat El Allame, 2024). So, a platform that addresses students in every language except their official ones does not meet that hierarchy neutrally but reinscribes it. When, in addition, students without devices or reliable connectivity are excluded from the platform altogether. Linguistic capital thus allows the study to read the languages' findings, the interface's exclusion of the official languages, the survey-language patterns, and the differential access as evidence about the reform's distributive logic rather than as isolated usability complaints. The lens is applied where it earns its keep, in the analysis of those findings, and is not imposed on the whole.

2.4 Everyday resistance and the forms of refusal

Enactment theory establishes that policy can be translated as well as refused, but it does not theorise refusal itself, and the refusal this study documents has a particular character that requires its own account, which Scott's work on everyday resistance supplies. In Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), he argues that people subject to a power they cannot openly oppose turn to disguised, low-visibility forms of resistance such as foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, feigned participation, and quiet evasion. In such a context, open defiance is costly and often impossible because the weapons of the weak work by avoiding direct confrontation while withholding compliance with the powerful demand. de Certeau (1984) describes the same asymmetry in different terms, distinguishing the strategies available to the powerful, who act from an established position, from the tactics of the weak, who cannot redesign the system they inhabit and so make do within it by poaching, diverting, and evading.

A distinction is needed before the whole framework is applied, because Moroccan students were not without public means of contestation. The reform drew open collective contestation on social media, petitions to deans, and critical coverage in the press, which is analysed elsewhere in this study as counter-framing. Scott's account speaks to the other register, which was available to a student facing a module deadline who can neither file a parliamentary question nor readily protest, only quietly decline to comply. It is this individual register that the reception data most directly captures, and it is one that Moroccan reforms have historically met. Studies of the country's higher education reforms describe a recurring pattern in which ambitious plans, once promulgated, meet a less than enthusiastic reception and implementation on the ground rather than open defeat (Mansouri, 2023).

This framework reads the study's reception as politics rather than dissatisfaction. When a language module's validation depends on completing a platform quota, open refusal carries real cost, and resistance migrates into forms that impose none. Together, the four concepts furnish a single argument (see Fig. 1). A frame constructs a reform as the equitable distribution of valued languages; enactment conditioned by material context determines who receives it and who declines it; linguistic capital names what is distributed and to whom; and everyday resistance names the forms that declining takes when the reform is imposed rather than negotiated. The thread that runs through all four reveals that the register in which it was refused is not the same, and that divergence, visible in both the press and the students' own responses, is where the analysis arrives.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study follows two distinct phases, with a strong qualitatively led design guiding the overall approach. It combines framing analysis of institutional and media discourse with a survey of the students subject to the reform. The two phases answer different but connected questions. The first phase examines how the adoption of Rosetta Stone was constructed in public discourse and the counterframe that contested it, speaking to the first research question. The second phase examines how students required to use the platform received, interpreted, and, in large, refused it, speaking to the second and third research questions. The design is sequential in logic rather than in strict temporal order. The framing analysis establishes the policy as it was lived so that the distance between projection and reception becomes visible.

The weighting of the two phases is qualitative. The survey yields quantitative data, but these are treated descriptively as a structured account of how a defined population of students responded, not as a basis for inferential generalization to all Moroccan students. This choice follows from the study's object, which is to understand how a policy was framed and how its reception diverged from that framing. The analytic weight falls on the interpretation of discourse, the conditions of enactment, and the meaning students attached to their compliance or refusal, with the survey providing the shape and scale of that reception rather than testing hypotheses. The two phases are also analytically integrated rather than merely juxtaposed. The framing analysis does not simply precede the survey; it supplies the categories against which reception is read. The dominant frame's specific promises of advancing global engagement, distributing valued language skills, and modernizing the university become the reference points for the survey's account of where students concurred and where they diverged. In this sense, the study does not run two parallel investigations but a single one in two movements, using the projected policy as the measure against which its enactment is assessed.

3.2 Phase 1: The framing analysis

The first phase analyzed a corpus of 31 documents in Arabic, French, and English to trace how Rosetta Stone was constructed in Moroccan institutional and media discourse. The corpus was a purposive

collection for close qualitative framing analysis. The aim was to capture the range of ways the platform was presented and contested across the reform’s public life, not to measure the frequency of frames in a population of texts. For this purpose, the relevant standard is coverage of the discursive field rather than sample size. The 31 documents span the field’s principal sites, which are national and regional press in three languages, university communications, ministerial and official coverage, and platform-facing promotional material.

The corpus was retrieved during an active search conducted between March and May 2025. Retrieval combined systematic keyword searching with manual selection using terms like “Rosetta Stone,” “e-learning,” and “ESRI 2030” in each of the three languages. Selection was inclusive rather than filtered to a single document type, on the principle that a policy frame is not built in on register alone but assembled across every kind of text that circulates it. A small number of adjacent texts that frame the wider reform without naming the platform directly, such as coverage of the PACTE ESRI 2030 worksites and official statements on digitization, were retained on the same principle since the platform’s frame was constructed partly through the reform discourse that surrounded it, and detaching it from that context would misrepresent how it was made to mean. Where a single item appeared in more than one outlet, as with a wire report syndicated from one publication to another, both instances were kept in the corpus but treated as one framing source in the analysis, so that syndication was not counted as independent circulation. Media comprises news and press coverage, while institutional comprises university pages and ministerial and official communications. The corpus composition is given in Table 1.

Table 1
Corpus composition by language and document type

Language	Media	Institutional	Total	Share
French	9	5	14	45%
English	7	4	11	35%
Arabic	6	0	6	19%
Total	22	9	31	100%

The composition of the corpus is itself a preliminary finding rather than a neutral byproduct of retrieval, which will be discussed further in the findings section. Across document types, it divides into press coverage, which carries the bulk of the public debate, and institutional communication carrying the reform’s official self-presentation. Framing was analyzed using Entman’s (1993) four functions: problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. Coding followed a hybrid-inductive deductive procedure. Entman’s four functions supplied the initial deductive categories and repeated close reading of the corpus then operationalized them for this case, specifying what counted as a problem definition or a treatment recommendation in the particular discourse of this reform. Each document was read for how the four functions were realized in it, and the analysis tracked their distribution across the three languages and across the two document types so that the dominant

frame advanced in official and promotional discourse could be distinguished from the counter-frame that ran through the press, and each could be located by language and source. Because framing is carried as much in implication, emphasis, and omission as in explicit statement, coding was conducted in the original languages rather than in translation so that framing choices were neither introduced nor lost in a translational step, which is a consideration of particular weight in a trilingual corpus where the three registers do not map neatly onto one another. Throughout, the analysis attended to what the texts did not say as closely as to what they asserted, on the principle that a frame's silences, the conditions left unmentioned, and the alternatives foreclosed carry as much of its work as its claims.

3.3 Phase 2: The student survey

The second phase surveyed the students subject to the reform in order to establish how the platform was received at the point of use and where that reception diverged from the dominant frame projected in the first phase. The survey was administered through an online questionnaire in May 2025 when the Rosetta Stone requirement was in force so that responses reflected a lived experience of the mandate rather than an impression of the news. The questionnaire was trilingual. Three parallel versions in English, French, and Arabic was prepared so that respondents could answer in the language they were comfortable with, and each respondent completed one version. This design suited a student population that works across the three languages, and it made the language of response its own analyzable variable rather than a fixed condition of participation. Recruitment was through two online channels: professional posts on LinkedIn and a faculty WhatsApp group through which the questionnaire reached students directly. The sample is therefore a convenience sample in that it comprises those students who encountered the questionnaire through these channels and chose to respond, and it does not claim to represent the national student population or to support inferential generalization to it. It is purposive also in that the channels were selected to reach the specific population the study concerns, which were students enrolled in Moroccan universities during the period the Rosetta Stone mandate was in force rather than students in general.

The questionnaire returned 154 responses. Of these, four were blank beyond the opening field and were removed as non-responses, and a further three were submitted by respondents at two private institutions not subject to the public-university mandate, which were excluded so that the analysis would concern the mandated population only. This yielded a final analytic sample of 147 respondents. The composition of the final sample is given in Table 2. Respondents were drawn from across the Moroccan public university system, spanning the three degree cycles and thirteen institutions, with the largest single group enrolled at Mohamed First University in Oujda. This concentration reflects the recruitment channels, and it is one reason the survey figures are read as descriptive of this body of respondents rather than estimates for the national student population. Most respondents chose to answer in English, with smaller groups answering in French and Arabic.

Table 2
Composition of the final sample (N = 147)

Characteristic		n	%
Academic level	Bachelor's	62	42.2
	Doctorate	46	31.3
	Master's	39	26.5
Language of response	English	91	61.9
	French	32	21.8
	Arabic	24	16.3
Institution	Mohammed First University, Oujda	62	42.2
	Mohammed V University, Rabat	12	8.2
	Moulay Ismail University, Meknes	11	7.5
	Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Fes	10	6.8
	Hassan II University, Casablanca	9	6.1
	Abdelmalek Essaâdi University, Tetouan	8	5.4
	Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra	8	5.4
	Ibn Zohr University, Agadir	7	4.8
	Hassan I University, Settat	6	4.1
	Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech	6	4.1
	Chouaib Doukkali University, El Jadida	5	3.4
	Sultan Moulay Slimane University, Beni Mellal	2	1.4
	Unspecified	1	0.7
	Total	147	100

3.4 Analysis

The two phases were analysed by methods suited to their material and then read against one another. The framing corpus was analysed as described in 3.2 through the hybrid coding of Entman's four functions to establish the dominant frame and the counter frame and to locate each by language and document type. The survey was analysed in two registers (quantitative and qualitative), and neither of which is subordinate to the other.

The closed items were analysed descriptively. Though frequencies and percentages were computed for each item overall and disaggregated by academic level, institution, and language of response, no

inferential statistics were applied. As set out in 3.1, the survey does not support generalisation to the national student population, and the figures are read as a structured description of this body of respondents' answers. Differences between subgroups are reported as patterns within the sample to be interpreted alongside the qualitative material, not as statistically tested effects.

The agreement items were central to the analysis and were handled in a way the framework dictates. The six statements rated on the five-point agreement scale divide into two groups that correspond to the distinction between a reform's diagnosis and its proposed remedy. Two items concern the reform's general diagnosis, that language skills are essential to compete in the global economy, and that digital platforms and international collaboration enable a new academic model. Four of them concern its specific remedy, the platform itself: how the Rosetta Stone partnership enhances digital and language literacy, that it offers genuinely interactive lessons, that it supports skills for international collaboration, and that it positions students in the global knowledge economy. Grouping the items this way and analysing two groups separately allows the analysis to test whether students received the reform as a single undifferentiated object or, as proved to be the case, endorsed its diagnosis while declining its remedy. The two groups were compared overall and within each subgroup so that the stability of any gap between diagnosis and remedy could be examined across academic levels and across languages of response. The remaining closed items, concerned with the platform's perceived helpfulness, the perception of its presentation by universities, media, and social media, the alignment of experience with official communications, and the reported completion of the required hours, were analysed as individual reception measures, again descriptively and with subgroup breakdowns where informative. Because several of these items use different response scales from one another and from the agreement items, each is reported on its scale rather than compounded into a composite, so that no metric is imposed across items that were not measured alike.

The open-ended responses were analysed through reflexive thematic analysis in the sense developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). Themes were not treated as pre-given units to be counted but were constructed through repeated engagement with responses, with the researcher's interpretive position understood as part of the analysis rather than a source of bias to be eliminated. Coding proceeded in the language of response across all three languages so that meaning was interpreted before, not after, any translation. The themes that resulted were the endorsement of the reform's aims, the objection to its abrupt imposition, the explicit demands for its withdrawal, and the accounts of conditions that made compliance difficult, which were then read against the closed items and against the phase 1 frame, so that the survey's two registers and the study's two phases informed one another rather than standing as parallel results.

The analysis rests on one interpretive decision that the theoretical framework requires and that governs how the central data are read. A student who was bound by the mandate but did not complete the required hours can be treated in two ways. On a conventional reading, such a case is missing data or an absence of engagement to be set aside or logged as attrition. On the reading adopted here, it is a datum in its own right showing an instance of the everyday refusal the framework anticipates, in which a

mandate that cannot be safely opposed in the open is met with quiet noncompliance. Non-completion is therefore analysed not as a gap in the record but as a form of reception, and the open responses of non-completing students are read as evidence of how the mandate was refused rather than mere explanations of non-use. The decision follows from the enactment and resistance framework set out in 2.2 and 2.4, and it is what allows the study to read the reform's low completion not as a measure of the platform's usability but as the visible trace of its contested enactment. The distinction is stated here so that the reading of non-use as refusal is understood as a considered analytic position and not an assumption introduced silently into the findings.

4. Findings

4.1 The dominant frame and its counter-frame

The corpus resolves into a dominant frame and a counterframe that contests the same reform through the same discursive functions turned to opposite ends. The dominant frame is assembled across the institutional and promotional texts and the coverage of official events, and it performs the four functions as a single coherent account. It defines the problem as a linguistic deficit: Moroccan graduates are cast as lacking the language proficiency that employability and international participation now demand. It attributes that deficit to a gap that technology can close, the absence of scalable, standardised language provision, so that a digital platform appears as the fitting response. It evaluates the reform in the register of national ambition, presenting the adoption of Rosetta Stone as a contribution to competitiveness and international openness at the ministry's launch coverage as an offer of 25 languages in the service of employability, and it prescribes the platform as the treatment embedded in the curriculum as a graded requirement. Across these texts the reform is constituted as necessary, beneficial, and beyond reasonable dispute, and the conditions its success would require, the devices, the connectivity, and the institutional support go largely unmentioned.

The counterframe runs through the Arabic language press, and it does not merely disagree with the reform but redescribes it. Where the dominant frame names a deficit to be remedied, the counterframe names an imposition to be endured: the coverage documents login failures and a time-counting system that credited a fraction of the hours worked, the burden of a 30-hour quota tied to module validation, and the collision of the requirement with in-person classes and examinations. The moral charge is reversed, the reform appears not as ambition but as a mandate issued without the means to meet it, and the treatment is contested directly, in demands to repair the platform's faults, to reduce the required hours, or to replace the requirement with conventional assessment. This conversation escalated into the formal political arena, where written parliamentary questions were put to the ministry by three members from three parties between December 2024 and January 2025, citing imposition, technical failure, and absent infrastructure in open-access institutions. Alongside the grievance coverage, press reporting also carried the first traces of a market in circumventing the requirements, individuals offering to complete or inflate students' hours, whose skill is considered in 4.3, and one investigative account alleged that marks were

awarded for the platform without corresponding use, an allegation reported here as the outlet's claim rather than an established fact.

The two frames do not occupy the corpus evenly, and their distribution is itself part of the finding. The reforms' official self-presentation is carried almost entirely in French and English, which are the languages of institutional communication and international projection. Every institutional and promotional document in the corpus is in one of these two languages, and none addresses the public in Arabic. The counterframe, by contrast, is carried in Arabic, the language of widest domestic reach; the Arabic language documents in the corpus are, without exception, press items, and they are the ones in which student grievances and parliamentary contestation concentrate. The frame and its counterframe do divide not only in their content but also in their language. The reform is promoted in the registers of institutional and global aspiration and contested in the register of the national public. This divergence of registers, visible here at the level of discourse, recurs at the level of student reception, where it is taken up in 4.3.1

4.2 Accepting the diagnosis, rejecting the remedy

This subsection carries the study's central number-based finding. Students agreed with the reform's goals but rejected the platform meant to deliver them. On the six agreement items that all respondents answered (the 147 in the final sample), the two items about the reform's general aims drew strong agreement, an average of 4.24 out of 5, with about 80% agreeing. The four items about Rosetta Stone itself drew much weaker agreement, with an average of 3.19, with about 43% agreeing. That is a gap of just over one full point on the same scale, from the same people answering in the same sitting, and the gap appears in every academic level and every language group, so it is not the reaction of one subset of students but a pattern across the whole sample. The sharpest rejection falls on the platform's global-engagement claims, with only 29% agreeing that it builds skills for international collaboration. Other reception questions point the same way: only about 7% felt their actual experience matched what official communications had promised, while about 44% said it did not match at all, and more students described the platform's public presentation as negative (39%) than as positive (35%). Every figure here comes straight from the survey and is reported as a plain description of how these students answered, with no statistical testing or claims beyond the sample. The refusal registered in these judgements was also enacted in behaviour. Among the respondents bound by the mandate, 64.3% reported that they had not completed the required thirty hours, and only 35.7% had. This non-completion was not concentrated in any one group: completion rates were almost flat across academic levels, at 37.1% for bachelor's students, 35.1% for master's students, and 34.1% for doctoral candidates. The withholding of compliance was general, not the burden of a particular cohort.

4.3 The patterning of reception

The third research question concerns where student reception diverged from the institutional frame and what, in the data, accompanies that divergence. Two patterns are reported here: a clear one in the survey,

that reception varied by the language in which students chose to respond, and a much weaker one, that a small number of students described conditions of access as shaping their use of the platform.

4.3.1 Reception by language of response

The diagnosis and remedy figures reported in 4.2 were not uniform across the three language groups. Respondents who answered in Arabic were the most critical on both measures. Their agreement with the reforms diagnosis was 65%, against 84% among those answering in English and 80% among those answering in French. When it came to their agreement with the platform-specific claims, the remedy was 29%, against 45% in English and 48% in French. On both the general premise and the platform itself, the Arabic-speaking group agreed least, and by a substantial margin: some 19 points below the English group on the diagnosis and 16 below it on the remedy. The alignment measure shows the same ordering. Asked whether their experience matched official communications, 54% of Arabic responding students said it did not align at all, against 45% of English responding and 31% of French respondent students. Across the survey's attitudinal measures, the language in which a student chose to answer coincided with the stance that student took: the Arabic responding group was consistently the most skeptical, the French responding group the least, with the English responding group between them.

4.3.2 Conditions of access

A second pattern appears faintly in the open responses, and its evidential basis must be stated plainly. A small number of respondents describe their use of the platform as constrained by the material conditions of access rather than by choice. In their own words, these students reported having no laptop at home and a phone on which the application runs poorly, or living in a place where there was no reliable internet connection, or belonging to a household where older devices could not run the application at all. These are individual accounts, not a measured variable; the questionnaire included no direct item on device ownership or connectivity, and a keyword search of the open responses for references to internet, devices, or connectivity, it returned only two of the 147 respondents. The survey therefore does not establish how widely access shaped participation; it records that access was raised unprompted by a small number of students. The corroboration for this pattern lies outside the survey, in the phase 1 corpus, where press coverage and parliamentary questions documented faculties enrolling many students with only a handful of equipped terminals and itemized the absence of infrastructure in open access institutions. The access pattern is thus reported as volunteered testimony, consistent with the phase 1 material, and not as a survey-measured effect.

5. Discussion

5.1 Summary of key findings

This study asked how a commercial language-learning platform, mandated across Moroccan universities as an instrument of the PACTE ESRI 2030 reform, was framed in public discourse and how the students subject to it received that framing. Three findings emerged. In the discourse, the reform

was constructed through a dominant frame that named a linguistic deficit, prescribed the platform as its remedy, and moralized uptake as national ambition, while a counter frame, carried almost entirely in the Arabic language press, re-described the same reform as an imposition issued without the means to meet it. In the survey, students endorsed the reform's diagnosis, that language skills matter and that digital provision is needed, while refusing its remedy, the platform and its specific claims, and a majority did not complete the required hours. Reception was patterned by language, where students who answered in Arabic were markedly the most critical, on both the reform's premise and the platform itself.

5.2 Interpreting the findings

The central pattern is not a story about software. Read through the enactment framework (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012), the gap between the reforms' diagnosis and its remedy is not a measure of the platform's usability but a distinction students themselves drew between an aim they shared and an instrument imposed upon them. This distinction has a precedent in the international literature on language policy reception. Kim (2017) found that an English-medium policy was received successfully only where its goals were genuinely shared with the stakeholders expected to enact it and encountered difficulty where they were not, so acceptance of an aim does not transfer to acceptance of the instrument or the manner of its imposition. The Moroccan students in this study made precisely that separation; they endorsed the proposition that language skills matter, at rates approaching the reforms' own confidence, while refusing the platform-specific claims. The reform did not fail because its idea was rejected; rather, it faltered at the point of enactment, where the mandate framed at the center met the material, temporal, and institutional conditions under which students were actually required to fulfill it, conditions that in Moroccan higher education are unevenly distributed (El Ghazali & Benbrahim, 2024).

The reform's deficit frame warrants closer scrutiny than its own terms invite, and the framing lens (Entman, 1993) draws attention to what the deficit definition leaves unsaid. Through naming a linguistic deficit in higher education students and prescribing a platform to remedy it, the frame locates the problem at the point of intervention, as though the deficiency originated with these students and could be corrected by 30 hours of software. This definition abstracts the deficit from its history. Moroccan language and education policy has long been characterized as inconsistent and lacking a clear vision, producing incoherent approaches across levels of schooling (Loutfi & Noamane, 2020, as cited in Chakrani et al., 2025), and critical scholarship argues that the discourse through which the state enacts such policies does not address the structural inequalities and unsystematic planning that generate the very deficits the reforms then claim to solve (R'boul, 2024, as cited in Charkani et al., 2025). The platform is positioned to resolve at the tertiary stage a problem whose origins lie upstream, in the very policy architecture the reform does not address, and this displacement is compounded by the manner of enactment, since large-scale Moroccan language reforms have characteristically been imposed rapidly and without the piloting or evaluation that reforms of such scope normally require (Chakrani, Ziad, & Lachkar, 2025). This does not diminish the reality of the deficit students and employers perceive; it relocates its causes and questions whether any tertiary-level instrument, however designed or enacted, could carry the burden the frame assigns it.

Additionally, the mandate's indifference to the proficiency it sought is visible too. The requirement was applied without regard to whether a student's program already centered on the languages the platform taught. Students enrolled in university departments of English or French, whose degrees consist of the study of those very languages in their literatures, were required to complete the same 30 hours of general proficiency instruction as students who lacked the proficiency in them. Read through the enactment framework (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012), a policy is realized through its meeting with differentiated local conditions, and a mandate attentive to those conditions would have distinguished among the students it bound. This reform is consistent with a pattern Moroccan scholarship has identified in the country's recent language reforms, in which policies are designed and imposed with minimal attention to the proficiency, circumstances, or involvement of those expected to enact them (Ben Hammou & Kesbi, 2024). The mandate's operative logic was the completion of hours rather than the attainment of a standard, and its uniformity was the sign of that logic. This observation is offered as field-based rather than survey-established and noted as such. It converges with the survey's central finding that what students refuse was not the goal of proficiency but the terms on which the platform's completion was imposed.

The behavioral finding follows the same logic and is best read through the resistance strand of the framework. Non-completion by nearly two-thirds of the mandated respondents, distributed almost evenly across academic levels, is difficult to read as ordinary disengagement. Interpreted through Scott's (1985, 1990) account of everyday resistance, it appears instead as the quiet, low-cost refusal available to those who cannot safely oppose a requirement in the open. This reading aligns the case with a wider turn in language policy scholarship that treats student resistance as an object of analysis rather than a residue of failed implementation. Huang (2018), studying learner resistance to an English medium policy, similarly found that non-participation functions as contestation rather than mere absence and was legible only when read as a response to how the policy was imposed. These findings clarify what early Moroccan research on the platform recorded but did not explain. Studies evaluating Rosetta Stone as software found students judging it useful yet regarding it negatively overall (Houmane et al., 2024); thus, the negativity that usability research registered as an attitude toward a tool is better understood as a response to a mandate. What looked like a puzzle about a product resolved into a question about policy.

One finding that was not anticipated by any usability account and is the study's most distinctive result is the stance students took and tracked the language in which they chose to respond, and it did so in a way that mirrored the discourse. The Arabic language press carried the reform's counterframe, and the Arabic-responding students were its most critical audience. Read through Bourdieu's (1991) account of linguistic capital, and through Moroccan scholarship on the country's stratified linguistic market, this convergence is intelligible rather than incidental. In Morocco, French and English proficiency function as forms of capital that condition educational and professional mobility, while Arabic occupies a subordinate position in precisely the domains, higher education and the labor market, that the reform invoked (Chakrani, 2017; Kabel, 2023). A policy that distributes access to the foreign languages is, in this light, a policy that redistributes a stratified capital, and the students positioned furthest from that capital, those engaging the reform in Arabic, had the least reason to accept its promise at face value. Their

skepticism is not a linguistic accident but a reading from a particular location in the market. The critical scholarship on Moroccan language policy names the mechanism of foreign language requirements as instruments of elite closure, through which access to valued languages is regulated in ways that reproduce existing advantages (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Chakrani, 2017). Seen thus, the register in which the reform was contested and the position from which it was refused are the same, and the survey's language finding and the corpus's language finding are two views of a single structure.

5.3 Implications

Up until now, it can be observed that at each point of the reform's self-description, it was met with a reception it had not accounted for, and the distance between the two was the study's object. The study's central contribution shows how a digital language policy can be defensible in its aims and still fail in its enactment, and the two are separable both analytically and in the judgement of those subject to it. The Moroccan students in this study made that separation themselves, endorsing the reform's diagnosis while refusing its imposed remedy. The failure this study document is therefore one of enactment, not conception, and its mechanism was imposition: a mandate pressed abruptly, with a quota and a deadline, onto material and linguistic conditions it did not supply and across a student body whose differences it did not recognize. Underlying this is an observation that gives this case its particular character and marks the study's conceptual contribution. In a language reform, language is not only the object of policy but also the medium through which policy is received and contested. In Morocco, the reform was promoted and refused in different registers, so that divergence between projection and reception is itself linguistic, a dimension that the framing and enactment literatures, concerned respectively with discourse and with practice, do not by themselves capture, and which the analysis of a trilingual policy episode is distinctively able to bring into view.

5.4 Limitations

Several limitations bound these conclusions. The survey is a convenience sample and does not support generalization to the national student population. The concentration of most respondents at one institution and the small Arabic responding subgroup mean the comparison by language of response is a pattern within the sample, not a population estimate. The framing corpus, small and purposive, supports interpretive rather than frequency claims. Two peripheral findings rest on weaker evidence and are marked as such throughout. First, access to devices and connectivity was volunteered by a few respondents and corroborated by the press rather than measured, and the market in completing the required hours is documented in media and field observation but almost absent from the survey. The case of students required to complete the hours despite testing at the platform's ceiling is likewise a field observation. However, none of this unsettles the central result, which is the diagnosis remedy gap that holds across every academic level and language of response.

5.5 Future research directions

The bounded character of the Rosetta Stone episode opens a comparative question. The platform's requirement has since been effectively succeeded by a domestically developed platform, and the terms

on that successor have been introduced, whether again from the center or with the consultation and attention to conditions that reform lacked would test directly the argument advanced here: that the enactment of a digital language policy, more than its concept, determines whether it is received or refused. More broadly, the study suggests that the analysis of language-policy reforms has something to gain from reading non-compliance not as an implementation failure to be corrected but as a form of reception to be interpreted, since it is often in refusal, rather than as a stated attitude, that the meeting of a policy with its subjects becomes most legible.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to understand how the mandated adoption of a commercial language-learning platform in Moroccan higher education was framed in public discourse and how the students subject to it received that framing. It found a reform constructed, in institutional and promotional texts, as the equitable distribution of a valued proficiency, and contested, in the Arabic language press, as an imposition issued without the means to meet it. It found that students endorsed the reform's diagnosis, that language skills matter, and that provision should be modernized, while refusing its specific remedy, and that a majority did not complete the requirement. And it found that this reception was patterned by language, where those who engaged the reform in Arabic, furthest from the French and English, in which it presented itself, were its most critical audience, in the survey as in the press.

Read through a framework that follows a policy from its projection to its refusal, these findings support a single conclusion. The reform did not fail because its goal was rejected; its goal was widely shared, and it failed at the point of enactment. The case carries a further implication for how such reforms are studied. Because the reform was promoted in one set of languages and refused in another, its contestation was not only about language but also conducted through it, so that the register of a response was itself a datum. Language policy, this episode suggests, is received in the same medium it seeks to govern the divergence between how a policy speaks and how its subjects answer, which may be the clearest evidence of what has gone wrong. Attending to that divergence, rather than to stated approval alone, offers a way of seeing not merely whether a language policy was accepted or refused, but why.

Declarations

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article. They did not receive support from any organisation for the submitted work. This study did not require formal ethics committee approval under the institutional regulations applicable to anonymous, voluntary survey research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and of their right to decline or withdraw. The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author Contribution

B.E.M. conceptualized the study, developed the methodology, conducted the data collection and analysis, and wrote the main manuscript text. M.G. supervised the research, contributed to the study design and theoretical development, and critically reviewed and revised the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Data Availability

The survey data generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly available in order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request. The framing corpus analysed in this study consists of publicly available media and institutional texts; the full list of sources is provided in the supplementary material

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Figures

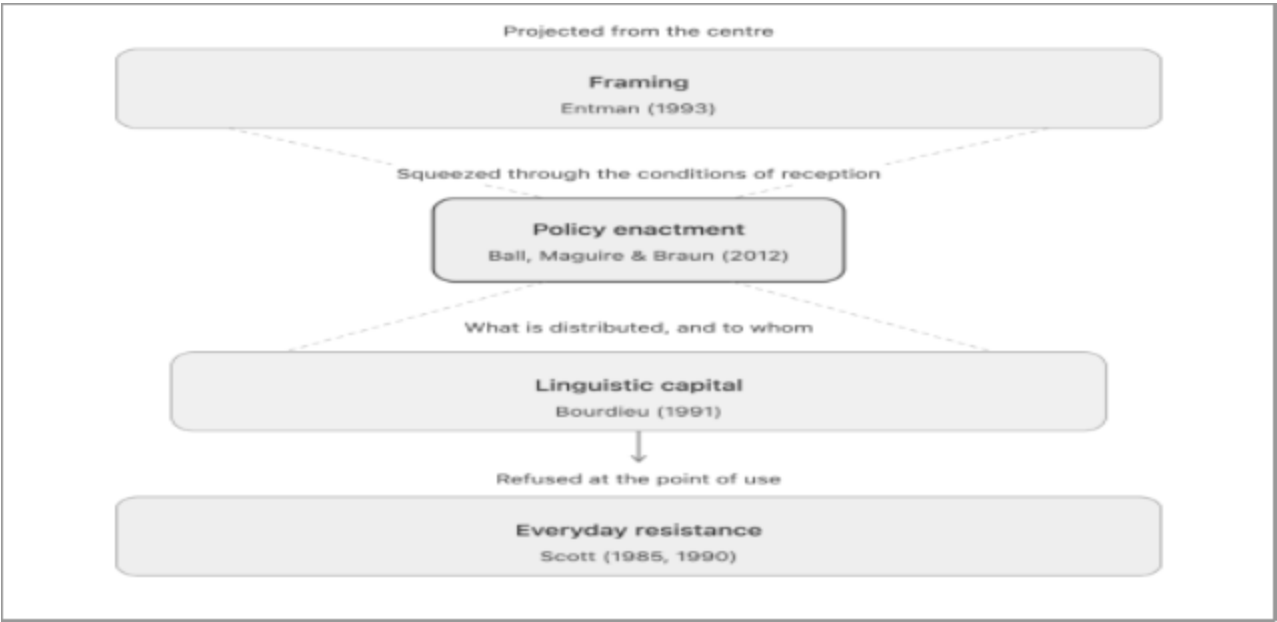


Figure 1

The theoretical framework: from projection to refusal.