


Chapter 11

Exploring the Social Justice Potential of Learning Foreign Languages: The Case of Tétouan

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an empirical study exploring the motivations of learners from Tétouan for studying foreign languages. Given the specific context of this northern Moroccan city, the study focuses on the Spanish language and constitutes one of the first attempts to research into the reasons why North Moroccans are motivated to learn this language. To this end, three research questions were formulated. They addressed the participants' linguistic profiles, their emotional connection to Spanish, and their practical motivations. The results confirm the heterogeneous linguistic backgrounds of these students, with Spanish holding a prominent place, although English is increasingly gaining ground. The study also reveals that the status of Spanish as a heritage language in the city is a key factor for students, who view learning it as a means of pursuing better life opportunities. The chapter concludes by presenting pedagogical implications and recommendations for future research.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-0040-5.ch011

INTRODUCTION

In Morocco, foreign language learning is influenced by a complex combination of historical legacies, socio-economic dynamics, and educational policies (Ennaji, 2005). The search for better job opportunities abroad also emerges as an important factor behind Moroccans' interest in learning foreign languages. This instrumental approach to learning is commonly driven by the desire to advance professionally, improving economic prospects, and gaining access to new opportunities (Sayahi, 2005). In this sense, learning a foreign language is not only seen as a linguistic tool but also as a means to achieve broader objectives related to personal and professional development heavily influenced by factors related to social justice.

Among the foreign languages used in the country, mainly French, English, and Spanish, the latter holds a distinctive position, particularly in the northern regions. This prominence stems from the period of the Spanish protectorate (1912-1956), during which Spanish was not only widely spoken but also institutionalized in the administrative, educational, and cultural domains (González González, 2010). Although nationally, the number of Spanish speakers has declined in favor of French and English, Spanish continues to be influential in specific northern areas such as Tétouan and Nador. This presence can be attributed to the region's historical and cultural ties to Spain and its geographical proximity, which facilitates cross-border exchanges in tourism, trade, and education (Redouane, 2016; Slimani & Iguider, 2018). In this context, Spanish persists as both a cultural legacy and a valuable practical asset within these communities.

Despite the apparent importance of Spanish in the northern areas of Morocco, there is a lack of empirical research which has examined the motivations of northerners to study Spanish. To address this research gap, the present study explores the motivations of a group of students at the Cervantes Institute. More specifically, this study seeks to examine three dimensions which might affect these Tétouani students' engagement with Spanish: their foreign language profiles and preferred methods for learning Spanish, the nature of their emotional relationship with the language, and the practical, future-oriented reasons driving their decision to study Spanish. Collectively, these objectives seek to illuminate the personal, affective, and social-justice-related factors that influence students' experiences in learning Spanish within a multilingual context. Exploring these factors offers a valuable contribution to understanding Morocco's multilingual landscape, as the Tétouani context may present unique nuances not found in other regions of the country.

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