

# TEACHING AND TESTING GRAMMAR IN MOROCCAN DEPARTMENTS OF ENGLISH STUDIES ACROSS REFORMS

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**Abstract.** This article purports to examine how the expectations of the educational reforms in Moroccan higher education have impacted the teaching and testing of tertiary level grammar. In particular, the hypothesis we defend here is that teaching and testing tertiary level grammar remain constant; therefore, the impact of the various reforms on tertiary level testing is of little consequence. In pursuance of this aim, this paper uses a qualitative approach and content analysis method of the course descriptions of the grammar courses that were suggested across the various reforms. The course descriptions we attempt to analyze are adopted in the English Studies tracks of four major departments in Moroccan universities. The main dimensions that we look at and examine here as the measures for our comparative evaluation are; course objectives, time allotted, the syllabi they contain, teaching methodology, and evaluation modes. The findings confirm that the various reforms, have had little impact on the teaching and testing of grammar in higher education. The paper concludes by suggesting a few pedagogical recommendations vis-à-vis the teaching and testing of grammar in Moroccan Departments of English studies.

**Keywords:** Educational reform; grammar; testing; syllabus; grammatical competence.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Morocco has declared education to be in crisis since late 1970's (Ennaji, 1997). Ever since and until 2000, many attempts to reform have been put in place, but they all fell short of delivering the intended outcomes, to the extent that some have gone as far as to call these reforms a failure (see El Kaidi, 2018 for example). The most important reform was launched in education in 1999-2000. It received the national consensus, and many mechanisms of application at both teaching and testing, particularly in foreign languages, were implemented, but their effects were far from being significant. Particularly in languages, the reform as introduced in the National Charter of Education and Training evolved around three poles that needed urgent reform. These are (1) reinforcement and improvement of Arabic teaching, (2) diversification of languages for teaching science and technology, and (3) openness to Amazigh (The National Charter of Education and Training, 1999). The Charter has also suggested using the appropriate media to teaching science and

technology by stressing on the importance of improving the quality of teaching foreign languages.

Of interest to the present paper, the implementation of the Charter, in the tertiary level, which started in 2003, have received its share of criticism from students, teachers, professors, and stakeholders (Marley, 2004; Boubkir & Boukamhi, 2005; Errihani, 2017; Mansouri & Moumine, 2017, amongst others). As a result, another reform was called for, a state of affairs which resulted in the so-called 'the reform of the reform'. This is incarnated in the Emergency Plan of 2009, whose impact is yet to be measured. This article looks into a small part of the reform to check the different changes that the three versions of reform have brought to the teaching and testing of one important component of languages, i.e. grammar. To this end, this paper compares the contents of these different versions with reference to objectives, time allotted to the teaching of grammar, and the testing modalities.

The main impetus for carrying out this research stems from several important factors. First, any educational reform is supposed to bring about changes and transformations that "could affect the scholastic system in relation to such factors as educational philosophy, student policy, curriculum, pedagogy, didactics, organization, management, financing and links with national development in this century" (Martinez et al. 2013: 245). As far as grammar is concerned, these changes are lacking. Second, grammatical competence is

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an essential component in second language acquisition and learning (Wang, 2010). For the departments of English studies in Morocco, and worldwide, this is crucial for two reasons. For one thing, after students finish their semesters 1 and 2, they are expected to write essays that require an advanced level. In reality, however, students' performance is not up to par, as shown in Nemassi (1991), Bouziane (2002), and Dahbi (1984). Students still produce erroneous structures, both in their spoken and written productions (Bouziane & Harrizi, 2014). For another, English language plays a central role in Moroccan higher education<sup>1</sup> and in the job market, as the two demand some sort of mastery of English. If lacking, this could hinder students' chances to blend in, so to speak (see, for example, Chbani & Jaouane, 2017).

Under this light, the present paper attempts to examine how the expectations of the educational reforms in Moroccan higher education have impacted the teaching and testing of tertiary level grammar. It is worth mentioning that the content of grammar has undergone changes three times in the hope of improving the input. One version had been adopted before 2003, the second came with the introduction of the Licence, Master, Doctorate (LMD) system in 2003, and the third was introduced a decade later when the contents of Semester 1 to Semester 4 became the national common core of the Departments of English studies<sup>2</sup>. This paper compares the contents of these different versions with reference to objectives, time allotted to the teaching of grammar, and the testing modalities. It attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent have the different reforms changed the teaching and testing of grammar in the English Departments in Morocco?

2. Have these 'ostensible' changes brought about substantial changes to the teaching and testing of grammar?

The paper is structured as follows: the section that immediately follows, Section 1 starts with a brief overview of the status and the introduction of English in higher educa-

tion. This is then followed by Section 2, which consists of a survey on the major reforms that took place in Moroccan higher education. Section 3 then presents our adopted methodology and the rationale for choosing grammar and the departments of English studies under study. Section 4, fleshes out the main findings. Section 5, provides a discussion of these findings and the implications that they ensue. This is coupled with suggesting a few pedagogical recommendations, recommendations which we argue are germane to the success of any reform in higher education in Morocco. Section 6, consists of the overall conclusion.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. English in Higher Education

Since its independence, Morocco has focused on developing the national educational system by offering 'Post-Secondary education'. The first Moroccan modern university was created in Rabat in 1957. Since then, 14 public universities have been established. However, the rise of unemployment in the last decade has resulted in the growing offer and demand in the parallel private higher education. The first private university established in Morocco is Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane in 1995. Al Akhawayn University is the first university in Morocco that offers a curriculum modeled on the American model, using English as the medium of instruction. 15% of all students enroll in private non-university higher education programs ([www.enssup.gov.ma](http://www.enssup.gov.ma)), but most of them use French for academic input.

Universities in Morocco used to offer a Bachelor's degree in English with two options, Linguistics and Literature. For the purposes of the present research, it is worth drawing a comparison between the Bachelor's programs offered both before the National Charter reforms and after the implementation of these reforms. The objectives of the B.A. programs offered by English departments across the Kingdom up to 2003 were to offer an academic, linguistic, literary, and cultural background in English. Students were expected to excel academically by successfully passing the four year program (Assad, 2007). The language of instruction in English departments was mostly English. The academic model offered by Moroccan universities was similar to models in universities in many countries such as Poland. The program, which lasted four years, was divided into two cycles. Both cycles were in turn

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<sup>1</sup> Several departments of English studies have been created in the Faculty of Letters in Morocco, and English has become a mandatory requirement to succeed at university. This is incarnated in the Strategic Vision 2015-2030 reform that requires the mastery of foreign languages, of which English is the leading one.

<sup>2</sup> See section 2 for a survey on the major reforms in Moroccan higher education. See also Diyen (2004). Karami (2014) puts forth a general overview of the challenges of reforms in the Arab world.

divided into the first year and second year. In the first year of the first cycle, the following subjects were offered: Grammar, Composition, Comprehension and précis, Spoken English, and Guided Reading. In the second year of the first cycle, the following subjects were taught: Grammar, Composition, Comprehension and Précis, Spoken English, and American and British cultures.

The second cycle was divided into a first and second year. The first year of the second cycle offered foundation courses in both literature and linguistics. These foundation courses were Introduction to Linguistics, Drama, and British and American Survey, to name but a few. The second year of the second cycle is the specialization phase where students opt for either Literature or Linguistics. For the Literature option, subjects offered included Novel, Poetry, and Stylistics, etc. For the Linguistics option, subjects offered included Phonetics and Phonology, Semantics, Syntax, and Stylistics.

The teaching methodology in departments of English studies in Morocco was lecture-based. Professors for decades were the source of information, while students were recipients of such information. From the 60s until the late 90s, the teaching methodology was based on handouts, assigned textbooks, and professors' explanations. Evaluation throughout the four years was usually divided into subjects that were administered in written or oral modes. The evaluation, whether oral or written, covered the entire syllabus. The final written exams were scheduled at the end of the academic year. Students were given a second chance in the subjects they failed in a second session, usually scheduled a month later. The successful students in the written exams sat for oral exams, and the results were posted after a general deliberation session. It is worth mentioning that the professors in the 'old system' were very selective, and the rate of success was substantially lower than that of the reforms.

## 2.2. Recent Educational Reforms in Morocco

### 2.3. The National Charter

In higher education, the implementation of the National Charter was launched in 2003. The adoption of the 01.00 Law was the basis for the implementation of the Charter. In fact, the decision about the implementation of the

reform was made in terms of BA/BS first, then Master's, and finally Doctorate. Phase one of the National Charter lasted from 2003-2009, the second phase lasted from 2009-2012, and the third phase from 2013 to 2016. The National Charter aimed at renovating higher education by setting up a new architecture of the undergraduate and graduate levels. The remodeling of higher education had to follow a set of requirements, one of which was to 'restructure the teachings' (National Charter for Education and Training: Governance). The National Charter also addressed the issues of assessment and evaluation by adopting a series of principles such as credibility, objectivity, and fairness. Generally, the National Charter mainly focuses on improving the quality of education and training through a revision of programs, methods, textbooks, and teaching materials.

To implement the Charter, the Ministry of Higher Education designed a template to guide the architecture of the different tracks (filières) of the departments of English studies in the Kingdom. By adopting this template, the departments of English studies in various Moroccan universities were granted the accreditation of several undergraduate and graduate programs. The graduates from the aforementioned departments receive training that would enable them to act as intermediaries between Moroccan decision-makers and their American counterparts, namely in tourism (as was the case in Ben M'sik, El Jadida, and Rabat), higher education, and English Language Teaching (El Jadida, Rabat, and Marrakesh), translation and interpreting (El Jadida, Rabat). Students can also specialize in cultural studies (as was the case in Ben M'sik, Marrakesh, Rabat) or media studies (Marrakesh, Rabat), join international trade and diplomacy (Ben M'sik), work in communication professions and tertiary sector (Marrakesh) or in international organizations (El Jadida), or enroll in Master's in Applied Linguistics or Literature (Rabat).

## 2.4. The Emergency Plan: Reform of the Reform 2009-2013

The implementation of the LMD pedagogical structure has been a slow process and was not without challenges. After a six-year period following the implementation of the National Charter of Education and Training between 2003 and 2009, the evaluation reports carried scathing criticism, especially with re-

gards to the methods of implementation and teaching, and learning outcomes<sup>3</sup>. The National Charter did not achieve the desired results, and the Ministry of Higher Education with the help of its European partners, namely the Tempus Program, implemented a program referred to as the Emergency Plan.

The scope of the Emergency Plan does not concern the present research in that it has had little if no impact on the teaching or testing of Grammar at the university level. However, in December 2012, departments of English Studies received accreditation papers regarding any adjustments the staff deemed necessary. For example, the professors at the department of English Studies, Ben M'sik, voiced their concern regarding the 'level' of students. Coordinators of modules worked on 'adjustments' regarding the teaching of grammar, writing, and literature. All the professors were asked for suggestions in the form of course descriptions. For instance, in the spring semester of 2014, departments of English Studies across the kingdom received a version of the 2014 reform that had to be amended, filled out, and returned to the Ministry by the 21st of March 2014. Since the general descriptions of the whole track are beyond the scope of this research, we have only included the general objectives of the tracks and the grammar course descriptions, as amended in the new reform of 2014. It should be specified, however, that S1 through S4 are considered common core and therefore identical across departments of English Studies in the Kingdom.

The general objectives as defined by the BA in English Studies (Licence Fondamentale Etudes Anglaises) are the following: Reading Comprehension is given priority in order to help students not only master basic reading skills but also overcome lexical, idiomatic and structural difficulties in order to enhance reading skills and develop literary competence. Listening and communication are also targeted by providing the students with opportunities to practice and improve both skills. The competencies targeted by the BA are reading and comprehension skills, note-taking skills, listening, and the necessary learning strategies to enable students to become independent learners. Students are also introduced to Cultural Studies, Business English, and Translation.

Of interest to our present purposes, the grammar courses in the 2014 are: Grammar 1, Grammar 2, and Grammar 3. The time allotted

to all the three courses is between 40 and 50 hours per semester<sup>4</sup>. The teaching objectives and methodology for Grammar 2 as suggested in the course description are based on studying the rules of grammar 'in-depth'. Special attention is given to the relationship between grammar and the concepts of time and tense and their cultural meaning. Those of Grammar 2 specify the use of 'drilling in generating complex sentences with multiple tenses and sophisticated punctuation'. Noteworthy is that each course description mentions the assessment methodology and learning outcomes.

A quick comparison between the suggested objectives and syllabi of the 2014 reform and previous ones is in order here. As stated in the course description of 2014, the objectives of Grammar 3 are "to enable the students to have a good grasp of the structure of English by giving them a reasonably careful and precise account of major areas of English grammar that will provide a foundation for the study of linguistics". It is worth noting that besides a reference to the passing mark, which is 10/20 and the use of a mid-term and a final exam, there is no reference to the method used to evaluate any of the grammar courses mentioned.

### 3. METHODS

In order to check the effects of the aforementioned reforms, four departments of English studies have been selected to serve as the sample of the study. These departments are located in Rabat, Casablanca (Ben M'Sik)<sup>5</sup>, El Jadida, and Marrakech<sup>6</sup>. The choice of these four departments is justified because they vary in numbers of students, geographical distribution, their history, and their different perspectives of the teaching of English. This is also paired with the fact that the selection of these four departments can be insightful about what is happening in the remaining departments. If there are substantial changes in these departments, such changes should reach other departments that adopted the reform; however, if there are changes within individual depart-

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<sup>4</sup> The syllabus of each one of them is shown in the Appendix.

<sup>5</sup> In Casablanca, there are two departments of English studies: Ben M'Sik and Ain Chock. Another department belonging to Hassan II University, though not located in Casablanca, is that of Mohammadia, a city near Casablanca.

<sup>6</sup> From now on, these departments will be referred to as the name of their cities.

<sup>3</sup> See the report of the Reform Evaluation 2003-2013.

ments, the most plausible explanation can be that improvements are more idiosyncratic to that specific department than related to the different reforms under study.

The choice of grammar is not arbitrary. As stated earlier, grammar is one of the most important components of language acquisition (Wang, 2010); it guides the accuracy of production skills and helps with the understanding of receptive skills. Besides, grammar is one of the basic elements that constitute the common core subjects of the four semesters in the department of English studies in Morocco. This is coupled with the fact that the syllabi of grammar before and after the reforms are the subjects of study in this article. The course descriptions of grammar as produced or distributed by each department are scrutinized and analyzed for the sake of comparing the content of the curricula before and after the reforms, in terms of objectives, syllabi they contain, time allotted, methodology, and evaluation modes.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Grammar before the reform

The objectives of teaching grammar at the university level were aligned with the general objectives of the Bachelor's program offered by the departments of English studies across the country. The general objectives were to give students not only a linguistic but also a literary and cultural background from both the American and the British heritage. BA holders with an option in either Linguistics or Literature were expected to have a good solid grounding in grammar to be able to read and comprehend different types of writings and to produce academic writings. The focus was mostly on accurate writing, whereas speaking (pronunciation and oral fluency) was not given the same attention.

For decades, English grammar was, and in many cases still is, taught according to the structural framework, which was used by many English departments in universities around the world (Klugrewska, 2008). The most widely used book for the teaching and studying of grammar at the university level was *A practical English Grammar* (Thomson and Martinet, 1986). The authors introduce it as:

‘... a comprehensive survey of structures and forms, written in clear modern English and illustrated with numerous examples.

Areas of particular difficulty have been given special attention. Differences between conversational usage and strict grammatical forms are shown, but the emphasis is on conversational forms.’ (Preface to the 4th edition)

The syllabus of English grammar in the first year of the first cycle covered articles, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, interrogatives, possessives, relative pronouns, prepositions, verbs, tenses, passive voice, indirect speech, clauses, spelling rules, phrasal verbs, and a list of irregular verbs. The methodology adopted for teaching first-year grammar varied from one professor to another but fell in line mostly with the traditional deductive approach. Professors would present the rules of grammar, explain them, and then assign in-class practice and homework from the exercise books. In-class exercise correction usually played the role of further practice and feed-back. The length of the syllabus made it in many cases impossible to cover it all; however, students were expected to study all the material in the syllabus. The second-year grammar syllabus, on the other hand, included varieties of English, elements of grammar, verbs and verb phrases, nouns, pronouns and the basic noun phrase, adjectives and adverbs, prepositions and prepositional phrases, the simple sentence, sentence connection, the complex sentence, to mention but a few. The methodology used by professors was the same as the one adopted in the previous year.

Evaluation in both years was a written exam scheduled at the end of the academic year and lasted three hours. Grammar exams had to be ‘original’ and were designed by professors who had to follow a particular format. The items contained mostly fill-in or complete items either in separate sentences or in paragraphs such as those of tenses. The exams on the whole were cumulative and were designed to test the students’ knowledge of the grammar in the syllabus. Test administration and correction were rigorous. Students’ names were confidential, and so were the marks<sup>7</sup>.

In addition, the grammar courses were all divided into Grammar 1 to 3, except for the department of English at Ben M’sik, which offered a Grammar 4 course. Grammar 1, a 48-hour course in semester 1 (a format adopted in Ben M’sik, El Jadida, and Rabat), aimed at giving students a good grounding in Modern English, while introducing the essentials

<sup>7</sup> It was commonly believed at that time that the harder the test, the better it was. For the anecdote, students believed second-year grammar was the greatest challenge to overcome; they believed that passing second year grammar guaranteed their B.A.

in sentence coherence and accuracy. It also aimed at fostering cultural and grammatical awareness in English language use (Ben M'sik (both Grammars 1 & 2), El Jadida and Marrakesh). It focused on use, rather than on theory, so as to prepare students to use English accurately in both spoken and written forms. This was achieved through equipping students with a certain familiarity with the different uses of English grammar and syntax (as was the case in Rabat). Grammar 2 was an extension of Grammar 1 in that it strengthened previously studied structures, introduced more complex sentence structures, and examined the rules of English grammar in more depth (El Jadida, Marrakesh). Grammar 2 also sought to help students gain formal accuracy in both writing and speaking by expanding their appreciation of the various uses of English grammar and vocabulary.

Grammar 2, a 32-hour course in Ben M'sik, El Jadida, and Marrakesh, and a 48-hour course in Rabat, was the last advanced English grammar course (Marrakesh, El Jadida, and Rabat). This class aimed at further consolidating students' knowledge of grammar and logical structures (El Jadida, Marrakesh, and Rabat). To this end, Grammar 3, on the other hand, was intended to enable students to handle longer texts with complex grammar structures and generate correct sentences with a reasonable degree of fluency (Marrakesh). It was also an introduction to English syntax (as was the case in Ben M'sik and Rabat), with the aim being to provide students with a sound awareness of sentence structure and a deeper insight into the grammatical relations and functions that would lead to an adequate understanding of English syntax. Grammar 4 was offered by Ben M'sik, and was allotted 32 hours. It built on Grammar 3 and provided students with thorough descriptions of some linguistic structures, their meanings, and their uses in English. (For details about each university, see Appendix A).

## 4.2. Grammar teaching methodology

Departments differ in the frequency of grammar tests. Only three departments give information about the frequency of the tests in Grammar 1: Ben M'sik (a mid-term and a final exam), El Jadida (a mid-term of 2 hours and a final of 2 hours), Marrakesh (a minimum of two in-class oral or written tests). Rabat, on the other hand, gives the time allotted to exams and quizzes, 6 hours, without any reference to

their frequency. They also differ in counting the final mark, validating the module, and the eligibility to sit for the retake (make-up) exam.

The evaluation of Grammar 2 is described as follows: Rabat devoted 6 hours to quizzes and exams, Marrakech had a minimum of 2 in-class written tests. Ben M'sik, on the other hand, gave details as to how the Grammar 2 mark is calculated: continuous assessment 30%, classroom activities 10%, and the final 60%. To validate Grammar 2, a student should score at least 10/20. El Jadida uses attendance, homework, mid-term (2 hours), and a final (2 hours, if needed) to work out the final mark.

For the evaluation of Grammar 3, Marrakesh offered no specification, and Rabat specified the time devoted to evaluation (6 hours for quizzes and exams). El Jadida, on the other hand, specified that attendance, homework, classwork, and a mid-term exam (1.5 hours) were used to calculate the final mark of the students. They also specified that a final exam (1.5 hours) may be administered if need be. Ben M'sik states that two exams were given, a mid-term (25% of the general mark) and a final (50% of the final mark); class contribution (25% of the general mark) also contributed to the final mark. As for Grammar 4, Ben M'sik mentioned the frequency, number, and percentage of each written test in the final mark: 50% for the mid-term and 50% for the final exam.

The first comparison to be drawn is between the general objectives of the common core of the English Studies BA program of 2014 and its predecessors. As stated previously, the objectives of the tracks offered by the various universities are to prepare the students for the job market, this includes fields that range from education to journalism. The 2014 reform seems to focus more on reading skill and literacy competence. The general objectives also target culture, business, and translation as areas of focus. The second comparison is the time devoted to grammar teaching. There is no difference between the previous reforms and the 2014 reform. The 48-hour usual time is still devoted to teaching grammar in each semester. One difference worth mentioning is that, in the 2014 reform, Grammar, like all other courses, is the only course taught in its respective modules. In the past reforms, Grammar was one of the two or three courses in the same module. A third comparison to be drawn is the syllabi of all the three grammars. Despite the continuous attempts at refining tertiary level grammar syllabus, there

seems to be a general consensus that it should always include the same structures, namely tenses, modals, conditionals, reported speech, passive voice, adjectives and adverbs, prepositions, and articles, not in any specific order. These are the structures that have been taught in semesters 1 and 2 in the previous reforms. Sentence structures such as phrases and clauses are taught in semester 3, as they have been since the beginning of the reform in 2003.

The last comparison to be made is the teaching and testing methodology. The 2014 reform makes no reference to the teaching or testing methodology, much like the previous reforms. In fact, apart from the reduction of courses to one course per module, the focus is on more reading, and the possibility of re-taking exams in the catch-up session to all students who score below the standard 10/20 passing mark; the 2014 reform offers no consequent change regarding tertiary level grammar. However, comparing the objectives, teaching and testing methodologies is of paramount importance, the focus of the subsections that immediately follow.

### 4.3. Objectives

The objectives of the tertiary level grammar as stated in the course descriptions of the tracks offered by the departments of English Studies are as follows: on the one hand, they aim at inculcating English grammar to university students to enable them to use the language accurately in both their speaking and their writing while focusing on language use, cultural and grammatical awareness. On the other hand, they aim at fostering a certain familiarity with the different uses of English grammar and syntax in order to help students gain formal accuracy in both writing and speaking. They also aim to expand the students' appreciation of the various uses of English grammar and vocabulary and to consolidate the knowledge of grammar and logical structures, with the hope being to reconcile the gaps students might have in grammar. As stated in section 4.1., repeated here for expository reasons, tertiary level grammar should enable students to handle long texts with complex grammar structures and generate correct sentences with much ease and fluency. It is also an introduction to English syntax, and aims to provide students with a sound awareness of sentence structure and a deeper insight into the grammatical relations and functions that would lead to an adequate understanding

of English by means of thorough descriptions of some structures, their meanings and their uses in English. In a nutshell, tertiary level grammar aims at teaching university students the English language.

### 4.4. Time allotted

According to the course descriptions, the time devoted to tertiary level grammar was three hours a week sessions, for two consecutive semesters (14 weeks per semester), and two hours a week sessions for one semester (as is the case of El Jadida, Rabat, and Marrakesh), or two semesters (as is the case of Ben M'sik). Every semester, two sessions at least were devoted to mid-terms and finals. The total number of hours within the BA program is either 120 hours (when grammar was taught for three semesters) or

150 hours (when grammar was taught for four semesters). In the current version of the reform, the number of hours devoted to grammar in the English Studies B.A. ranges from 120 to 150 hours.

### 4.5. Teaching and testing methodology

As reported by the course descriptions, English Studies department Grammar course descriptions do not provide adequate information about the methodology of teaching, evaluation, books/ course packs. In fact, in the current version of the reform, no references regarding the three grammar courses are suggested either, just the course title. Regarding the evaluation of Grammar 1 and according to the grammar course descriptions, only three departments of English Studies gave information about the frequency of the tests: Ben M'sik (a mid-term and a final), El Jadida (a mid-term (2 hours) and a final, if needed (2 hours)), Marrakesh (a minimum of two tests in-class oral or written). Rabat, on the other hand, gave the time allotted to exams and quizzes, 6 hours, with no reference to their frequency. Ben M'sik and El Jadida outlined how the final mark was calculated. For Ben M'sik, students should score at least 10/20 in both the mid-term and the final exam to validate Grammar

1. El Jadida use attendance, homework and mid-term (a final if needed) to work out the final mark. As far as the retake session is concerned, only Ben M'sik made a reference to the mark that allowed a student to take the catch-up session (05/20).

The evaluation of Grammar 1 is described as follows: Rabat devoted 6 hours to quizzes and exams, Marrakesh had a minimum of 2 in-class written tests. Ben M'sik, on the other hand, gave details of how the Grammar

2 mark was calculated: regular assessment 30%, classroom activities 10%, and the final 60%. To validate Grammar 2, a student should score at least 10/20; otherwise, they may have to sit for a retake exam if they score less than 6/20. El Jadida use attendance, homework, mid-term( 2 hours), and a final (2 hours, if needed) to work out the final mark.

For the evaluation of Grammar 3, Marrakesh offered no specification, and Rabat specify the time devoted to evaluation (6 hours for quizzes and exams). El Jadida, on the other hand, specified that attendance, homework, classwork, and a mid-term exam (1.5 hours) were used to calculate the final mark of the students. They also specified that a final exam (1.5 hours) may be administered if need be. Ben M'sik specified that two exams were given, a mid-term ( 25% of the general mark) and a final (50% of the final mark); class contribution (25% of the general mark) also contributed to the final mark.

Ben M'sik, being the only department that had a Grammar 4 course, mentioned the frequency, number, and percentage of each written test in the final mark: 50% for the mid-term and 50% for the final exam. The current version of the reform makes no reference to the testing and/or the grading criteria; it does, however, stipulate that all students may sit for the retake session, irrespective of the marks they get, and that includes the formerly eliminating mark of 00/20.

## 5. DISCUSSIONS

### 5.1. Course objectives and teaching methodology

The course descriptions provided by the relevant departments give the general objectives. The latter are summarized as follows: they aim to prepare graduates who have acquired writing and speaking skills in English, to enter the job market. These skills are to enable them to land jobs in various fields, namely tertiary level education and English language teaching, tourism, translation, diplomacy, international trade, culture, and media. The course descriptions also give a detailed description of the grammar syllabus and, in

some cases, the list of references to use for this particular course. The teaching methodology put forward by the departments varies from one department to the other. For Ben M'sik, for example, the teaching methodology uses a diagnostic test to find out the needs of the students and then uses context to focus on grammatical structures, and uses exercises and tests to clarify the way language works in order to make understanding and learning easier. The course is based on practice and therefore exercises follow explanations.

The English Studies department in Marrakech, on the other hand, focuses on grammatical rules and structures. The methodology used in teaching tertiary level grammar is based on grammar drilling in generating complex sentences with multiple tenses and 'sophisticated' punctuation. The other English Studies departments such as El Jadida and Rabat, offer a detailed description of which structures are to be taught, and the amount of time devoted to each structure weekly without any reference to the methodology used to teach these structures.

The teaching of English grammar at the tertiary level is not designed according to the purpose for which it is taught; a working knowledge that would enable the students to speak as well as write accurately, and effectively in English. The general objective of the English Studies track, in English departments across the kingdom, is to provide the students with linguistic knowledge. This includes; both spoken and written, in order for them to join the working force as translators, teachers, or mediators. Yet the methodology used is that of traditional grammar, which has proven to be unrealistic and ineffective in recent years. It is a methodology faithful to the tenets of the structural / behaviorist model of learning.

Students in English Studies departments learn within an environment that provides them the stimuli necessary to validate the modules in order to graduate. The environment is controlled in the sense that the stimuli is the driving force behind the students' motivation, that is, 'if a student knows that they will be tested on the information they are given in class the response will be to acquire this knowledge in order to successfully pass the exam' (Cunningham et.al. 2007: 6). The method of learning in the departments of English Studies in Moroccan universities is based on the active role of the professors and the passive role of the students.

## 5.2. Testing methodology

As far as the testing methodology is concerned, it is of great importance to administration, curriculum designers, professors, students, and parents alike. The marks that students obtain are indications of whether they have learnt what they have been taught. For administration, test results show whether students have validated a module or not. For curriculum designers, test results should indicate the degree of success of the curriculum. For professors, test results show the extent to which the teaching has been effective. For the students, test results are an indicator of their progress in language learning. For parents, test results are an indicator of their children's efforts and whether and when they are going to graduate and get a job.

However, considering the importance of testing, it is unclear why none of the course descriptions gives details of the types of exercises used in tests, the types of tests used, or the methodology adopted. The Grammar course descriptions provide information about the frequency and duration of tests. Information about the passing mark is provided, and so is the mark for the catch-up sessions. There is a reference to regular assessment and classroom activities, and attendance as being part of the continuous assessment scheme. The percentage of each mark is also given (40% for the mid-term and 60% end of term exams, or in some cases 50 %for each exam).

The growing interest and the even greater appeal that washback has gained in teaching and testing in general, and in language teaching and testing in particular, seem to have no effect on teaching and testing tertiary level English and tertiary level grammar. Both university reforms (2003 and 2009) mentioned the changes in testing from the end of year tests to continuous assessment. The lack of clear specifications as to how this continuous assessment is to be implemented has resulted in using the same traditional methods of testing that have always been used in higher education. No matter how communicative a program claims to be, or aims to be, testing is that component of the language framework that is the hardest to change for several reasons. The first reason is that tests are powerful tools that professors use not only as a means of measuring the students' progress, but also as a tool for discipline in class and even as a tool for motivation when students show signs of boredom or lack of concentration. Internal testing has always been the prerogative of the teach-

ers. Tradition has it that the more challenging the test, the better. Therefore, suggesting that professors' tests may not be effective may not be welcomed by professors who have been enjoying this prerogative for decades.

The second reason is that despite the importance of tests and their impact on individuals, institutions, and societies, very few professors who teach tertiary level English skills and/ or content courses in English take into account the new testing theories and methodologies in the English Language Teaching field, a state which is conspicuously indicated in the different reforms that have been suggested thus far. This is largely due to the fact that the reform does not have a clear theoretical basis for the testing approach that should be adopted in order to achieve the learning outcomes it has set as its objectives. The National Charter has mentioned the general communicative tendency that English Studies departments have to adopt, but the implementation of such communicative tendency has not been specified. All these reasons have resulted in a tertiary level grammar testing situation where the aims of the curriculum and the aims of the syllabus are not served by the testing practices. These testing practices may instead be an impediment to the teaching and the learning of tertiary level grammar. If the testing of tertiary level grammar is done according to the general tendency '... to test what it is easiest to test rather than what it is most important to test' (Hughes, 1989, p. 44), then the washback from such tests would not be benefited from.

University grammar testing measures grammatical ability at given points in time, namely the first mid-term (after six or seven weeks of instruction) and the final exam (after another six weeks of instruction). However, the tertiary model of grammar is not clearly defined and neither is the theoretical background on which it is based. The objectives of the grammar course make a vague reference to the communicative nature of the teaching objectives. However, there is no specification as to what role grammar is supposed to have, what type of grammar is to be taught, which methodology is to be followed, and how grammar should be tested.

Tertiary level grammar in Moroccan universities is taught according to the grammatical structural syllabus.

It is a 'Formal grammar' which is usually university professors' first choice (Makodia, 2008: 21). The gradation of tertiary level Grammar syllabus as outlined in the course

descriptions of the English Studies departments is linearly organized. The tertiary level Grammar syllabus is organized along the lines of what Wilkins (1976) calls the 'archetype of a synthetic approach to syllabus design: the grammatical syllabus'. A synthetic syllabus is '...one in which the different parts of language are taught separately and step-by-step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of the parts until the whole structure of the language has been built up' (Wilkins, 1976: 2). The list of structures presented in the tertiary level grammar syllabus is the traditional list found in any old or new grammar or English language book. It is based on what Wilkins (1976) refers to as the criterion of 'generalizability' rather than on significance for communication.

In point of fact, the tertiary level grammar syllabus in Moroccan English Studies departments is not the most effective syllabus for the objectives that the National Charter has outlined. It is a syllabus that is graded to foster an understanding of the grammatical structures in the syllabus, rather than promote the communicative competence that is professed by the Bologna Process, the CEFR, and the National Charter of Educational Reform and Training. The reform has been set forth based on the international changes and needs for more communicative skills in all European languages.

The obvious similarity between the grammar syllabus before the reforms and the one taught after the reforms means that little has been done to foster the communicative aspect of language teaching in general and tertiary level Grammar teaching in particular. One explanation for this state of affairs is that it is safer to follow what has been done (Ellis, 2006). In the absence of clear-cut guidelines and instructions, professors teach the same grammar that has always been taught as tertiary level grammar because that is what they were taught, and that is how it has always been taught. Experience has shown that teaching the same syllabus does not yield the same results, quite the opposite (Bouziane & Harrizi, 2014). Other factors determine the teaching and learning of the grammar syllabus.

The primary aim of the syllabus is, to give students a good solid grounding in English grammar. The problem with grammatical syllabi is that they do just that, it provides students with knowledge of the structures, and the rules of a language. Our teaching of grammar also bears striking similarities with the grammar-translation method that has been

used since the 1840s (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). The focus of university teaching is to teach students about grammar and vocabulary in order to enable them to 'read the literature' in English (Larsen Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The focus of this teaching is on accuracy. The activities and exercises that are used in Moroccan universities are conspicuously similar to the traditional Grammar-Translation method (blank-filling exercises, for example). Grammar is taught deductively, and the role of the teacher is a traditional one, 'that of authority whereas the students follow the teacher's instructions.' (Larsen-Freeman, 2000)

The differences between the methodology used in the departments of English Studies in Moroccan universities and the Grammar-Translation method reside in the medium which, in the Grammar-Translation method, is the native language while in the Moroccan context is English. Another difference between the Grammar-Translation method and the methodology used in our English Studies departments is that translation is not used as a medium to teach the language but is taught as a separate course.

Because the teaching of tertiary level grammar is test-oriented, the syllabus is divided into two main sections: the pre-mid-term section, and the post-mid-term section. This is because the teaching is more often than not geared towards preparing the students to take the tests (including continuous assessment quizzes, mid and end-of-term tests). The testing of grammar should be included in the course description. The latter should have clear guidelines regarding the types of tests used, the types of activities used, and even a marking scheme to make testing grammar at university level 'a tool to facilitate curriculum innovation' which should be in harmony with the other elements of reform such as curriculum, teaching, testing procedures, and materials design (Andrews, 1994:78).

## 6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis and discussion of the findings of the course descriptions have clearly shown that, in fact, grammar teaching and testing at the university level have been constant, and therefore the reforms have not had any impact on changing or improving grammar provisions. The analysis has shown that the same syllabus has been used to teach tertiary level grammar before and after the re-

forms. It has also shown that the teaching and testing methodology have not undergone any changes, and therefore are the prerogative of the teachers. The sole difference the analysis has identified is that, the same structures are targeted within a shorter time span in the new reforms. Lastly, the most important finding that the results have yielded is the clear disparity between the objectives and the teaching and testing practices to achieve them. This suggests a need for clearer and comprehensive course descriptions, especially that the country is planning to launch yet another reform in higher education dubbed “The Bachelor”<sup>8</sup>.

### Conflict of interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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<sup>8</sup> We do not comment on this reform because the Ministry of Higher Education is yet to provide concrete details on this new reform.

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## APPENDIX A

University	Cadi Ayyad, Marrakesh
<b>Objectives of the Course of Study (Filiere)</b>	The training offered by the course of study allows graduates to enroll in: - Areas relative to English teaching - Media - Communication professions - Areas relative to culture- Tertiary sector
<b>Objectives of the Grammar course</b>	Grammar I -Introduce students to basics of English grammar and the mechanics of sentence logic, and the connection between grammar and cultural meaning Grammar II -Builds on Grammar I -students study rules of English grammar in more depth -focus on more complicated sentence structures and logic in English, and the connection between grammar, tense/time and cultural meaning. Grammar III (32hrs) -teach advanced English grammar -consolidate the knowledge of grammar and logical structures -last grammar course, students must even up all gaps on this area -students should be able to handle long texts with complex grammar structures and generate correct sentences with much ease and fluency.
<b>Course Content</b>	Grammar I - parts of speech -verbs: tenses and aspects (present tenses; past and perfect tenses; the future; conditional; subjunctive -verb patterns (gerund, infinitive, participle) Grammar II - modals; reported speech; passive; relative clause; adverb position; articles; quantifiers; prepositions; phrasal verbs; verb patterns; spelling; punctuation etc. - verb patterns Grammar III (32hrs) -simple sentence typology: subordination -complex sentence typology: case, agreement, voice, mood, reported speech, verb complementation, coordination, compound sentence
<b>Teaching methodology</b>	Grammar I Grammatical rules and structures -grammar drilling Grammar II and III -drilling will be in generating complex sentences with multiple tenses and sophisticated punctuation.
<b>Testing methodology</b>	Grammar I continuous assessment: a minimum of 2 in class oral or written tests Grammar I and III A minimum of 2 in-class written tests

University	Cadi Ayyad, Marrakesh
<b>Objectives of the Course of Study (Filiere)</b>	The training offered by the course of study allows graduates to enroll in: - Areas relative to English teaching - Media - Communication professions - Areas relative to culture- Tertiary sector
<b>Objectives of the Grammar course</b>	Grammar I -Introduce students to basics of English grammar and the mechanics of sentence logic, and the connection between grammar and cultural meaning Grammar II -Builds on Grammar I -students study rules of English grammar in more depth -focus on more complicated sentence structures and logic in English, and the connection between grammar, tense/time and cultural meaning. Grammar III (32hrs) -teach advanced English grammar -consolidate the knowledge of grammar and logical structures -last grammar course, students must even up all gaps on this area -students should be able to handle long texts with complex grammar structures and generate correct sentences with much ease and fluency.
<b>Course Content</b>	Grammar I - parts of speech -verbs: tenses and aspects (present tenses; past and perfect tenses; the future; conditional; subjunctive -verb patterns (gerund, infinitive, participle) Grammar II - modals; reported speech; passive; relative clause; adverb position; articles; quantifiers; prepositions; phrasal verbs; verb patterns; spelling; punctuation etc. - verb patterns Grammar III (32hrs) -simple sentence typology: subordination -complex sentence typology: case, agreement, voice, mood, reported speech, verb complementation, coordination, compound sentence
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<b>Testing methodology</b>	Grammar I continuous assessment: a minimum of 2 in class oral or written tests Grammar I and III A minimum of 2 in-class written tests

University	Mohamed V; Rabat
<b>Objectives of the Course of Study (Filiere)</b>	Preparing students for - literary, linguistic, and cultural research - Master's programs in applied linguistics, culture, literature etc. - a career in translation and interpreting - careers in media - careers in English language teaching - careers in tourism
<b>Objectives of the Grammar course</b>	Grammar I - aims at enabling the students to achieve formal accuracy in both spoken and written English by increasing their awareness of different uses of English grammar and syntax. -The focus is on use rather than theory Grammar II - aims at enabling the students to advanced achieve formal accuracy and diction in both spoken and written English by increasing their awareness of different uses of English grammar and vocabulary. -The focus is on use rather than theory Grammar II -aims at providing the students with a sound awareness of sentence structure and a deeper insight into the grammatical relations and functions that would lead to an adequate understanding of English syntax.
<b>Course Content</b>	Grammar I (48 h): Articles: 6 hs; Quantifiers: 4 hs; Preposition : 4hs ; Relative pronouns and clauses: 4 hs ; Verb tenses: 12hs ; The infinitive and the "-ing" form: 2hs ; Modals: 6hs ; Linking words: 4hs Grammar II (48hs) Prepositions and phrasal verbs(4h) ; Relative pronouns and clauses (2hs) Verb tenses (10hs) ; Adverbs (types and placement (2h) ; Conditional sentences (4h) ; Time clauses expresing wishes, 'as if' 'as though' (4hs) ; The passive (4hs) Reported Speech speech (4hs); Modals (8hs) Grammar III (48) Introduction (2 hs) ; The Noun Phrase (6 hs ) The Verb Phrase (6 hs) ; The Adjective phrase (6 hs) The Adverb Phrase (4 hs) ; The Prepositional Phrase ('4hs) Clause structure and clause types (10 hs) ; Clause combination and Sentence types (10)
<b>Teaching methodology</b>	<b>Not mentioned</b>
<b>Testing methodology</b>	Grammar I - Evaluation (quizzes, exams etc): 6hs Grammar II Evaluation (6hs) Grammar III Evaluation (quizzes, tests, exams) 6hs

University	Mohamed V; Rabat
<b>Objectives of the Course of Study (Filiere)</b>	Preparing students for - literary, linguistic, and cultural research - Master's programs in applied linguistics, culture, literature etc. - a career in translation and interpreting - careers in media - careers in English language teaching - careers in tourism
<b>Objectives of the Grammar course</b>	Grammar I - aims at enabling the students to achieve formal accuracy in both spoken and written English by increasing their awareness of different uses of English grammar and syntax. -The focus is on use rather than theory Grammar II - aims at enabling the students to advanced achieve formal accuracy and diction in both spoken and written English by increasing their awareness of different uses of English grammar and vocabulary. -The focus is on use rather than theory Grammar II -aims at providing the students with a sound awareness of sentence structure and a deeper insight into the grammatical relations and functions that would lead to an adequate understanding of English syntax.
<b>Course Content</b>	Grammar I (48 h): Articles: 6 hs; Quantifiers: 4 hs; Preposition : 4hs ; Relative pronouns and clauses: 4 hs ; Verb tenses: 12hs ; The infinitive and the "-ing" form: 2hs ; Modals: 6hs ; Linking words: 4hs Grammar II (48hs) Prepositions and phrasal verbs(4h) ; Relative pronouns and clauses (2hs) Verb tenses (10hs) ; Adverbs (types and placement (2h) ; Conditional sentences (4h) ; Time clauses expresing wishes, 'as if' 'as though' (4hs) ; The passive (4hs) Reported Speech speech (4hs); Modals (8hs) Grammar III (48) Introduction (2 hs) ; The Noun Phrase (6 hs ) The Verb Phrase (6 hs) ; The Adjective phrase (6 hs) The Adverb Phrase (4 hs) ; The Prepositional Phrase ('4hs) Clause structure and clause types (10 hs) ; Clause combination and Sentence types (10)
<b>Teaching methodology</b>	<b>Not mentioned</b>
<b>Testing methodology</b>	Grammar I - Evaluation (quizzes, exams etc): 6hs Grammar II Evaluation (6hs) Grammar III Evaluation (quizzes, tests, exams) 6hs

## APPENDIX B

The contents of Grammar I, II, and III are displayed in the following tables.  
 Table 1. Grammar I

Content	Ben M'Sik	El Jadida	Marrakech	Rabat
Parts of speech			✓	
Articles	✓	3 hours		
Nouns	✓			
Adjectives	✓	3 hours		
Adverbs	✓	3 hours		
Prepositions		3 hours		4 hours
Conjunctions		3 hours		
quantifiers				4 hours
Verbs	✓		✓	
Tenses	✓	✓	✓	12 hours
Present tenses	✓	✓	✓	
Present simple and continuous	✓	3 hours	✓	
Present perfect and continuous	✓	3 hours	✓	
Past perfect simple and continuous		3 hours	✓	
Future time		6 hours	✓	
Conditionals		4.5 hours	✓	
Relative pronouns and clauses				4 hours
Linking words				4 hours
Modals				6 hours
Verb patterns: subjunctive			✓	
The infinitive and 'ing' forms			✓	2 hour

Table 2. Grammar II

Modals: present form		6 hours		
Modals: past time reference; Continuous form	✓	3 hours	✓	
Modals: perfect forms		7.5 hours		8 hours
Negation of modality		3 hours		
Changes in modals (passive)			1. hours	
Passives	✓	3 hours	✓	
Reported speech				4 hours
-Reported speech: changes in tenses, time, place; -reporting declaratives; yes/no questions; wh-question; imperatives. -reporting exclamatives	✓	✓	4 hours	1.5 hours 4.5 hours 1.5 hours
-Relative clauses -Relative pronouns and clauses -Relative clauses -Defining/non-defining clauses - Time clauses expressing wishes			✓	2 hours 1.5 hours 4.5 hours 4 hours
Adverbs: - position - types and placement			✓	2 hours
Prepositions			✓	
Prepositional phrases				4 hours
Spelling			✓	
Punctuation			✓	
Phrasal verbs			✓	
Articles			✓	
Quantifiers			✓	
Verb patterns: Gerund, infinitive, participle			✓	

It should be noted that the departments of English Studies in Chouaib Doukkali, EJadida and Mohamed V, Rabat are the only departments to have provided the time devoted to teaching each structure in the syllabus, while BenMsik is the only department that offered a Grammar IV course.

Table 3: Grammar III

Content	Ben M'Sik	El Jadida	Marrakech	Rabat
sentence hierarchy	✓			
simple sentence			✓	
complex typology			✓	
sentence types				10 hours □ □
parts of sentence types and fragments		12 hours		
words	✓			
phrases	✓			
phrase types and functions	✓	✓		✓
noun phrases	✓			6 hours
verb phrases	✓	✓		✓
participial phrase		✓		□ 6hours
gerund phrase		✓		
infinitive phrase	✓	✓		
adjective phrases	✓			6hours
adverb phrases	✓			4hours
agreement			✓	
mood			✓	
case			✓	
verb complementation			✓	
clauses				
clause structure				
subordination		15 hrs		
coordination				10 hours
compounding				

Table 4: Grammar IV

Content	Ben M'Sik	Rabat	El Jadida	Marrakech
phrasal verbs	✓	Non Applicable		
prepositional verbs	✓			
clause functions	✓			
faulty sentences	✓			
coordination	✓			
subordination	✓			

Table 5: Grammar I, II, and III in 2014

<b>Semester 1</b>	<b>Semester 2</b>	<b>Semester 3</b>
Articles	Modals	Sentences
prepositions	Passive voice	Noun phrases
Tenses	Reported speech	Verb phrases-participial phrases
Conditionals	Relative clauses	Gerund phrases
Tenses and conditionals in context		Prepositional phrases
Conjunctions		Infinitive phrases
Adjectives		Noun clauses
Adverbs		Adjective clauses
		Adverbial clauses

