Promoting ELT Practitioners Readiness and Engagement

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Abstract

The rhetoric of top-down decisions continues to raise questions about practitioners’ realities. During COVID-19, many educational systems adopted context-driven policies. Morocco implemented an alternation-based education which is a marriage between self-directed learning (SDL) and classical education. Self-directed learning policy focused on increasing off-school learning time to alleviate the repercussions of health crisis dissonance. The paper analyzed data to explain practitioners’ readiness across the scales of Moroccan educational language policy at three levels. At a higher scale, the study used a structural-historical approach to code themes about self-directed learning in policy texts. At an intermediary level, we administered five semi-structured interviews with ELT inspectors. At a lower scale, the study designed a participatory action research with five English language teachers to observe policy in action and piloted a study to validate research instruments. Data-driven results show that top-down decisions neglect teachers’ key concerns about inadequate policies, the absence of efficient training, and limited pedagogical support. Until these concerns are addressed, practitioners’ interpretations of central policies remain ambivalent.

Introduction

In the context of educational language policy, the traditional linear approach has faced strong criticism from advocates of community-based policy. A new trend that has been gaining significance is the adoption of a bottom-up approach, commonly known as collaborative language planning. Scholars such as Baldauf (2006), Liddicoat (2014), and Liddicoat and Leech (2021) have extensively discussed and promoted this approach. The essence of this approach lies in fostering increased collaboration and engagement between policymakers and the stakeholders involved in micro-level policy implementation. The ongoing debate highlights the need to prioritize collaboration and inclusivity in educational language policy and constrain top-down planning that tends to favor and perpetuate dominant discourses and policies, thereby marginalizing and overlooking the voices of underrepresented communities.

The epistemological turn towards collaborative language planning signifies a departure from the traditional linear model of educational language policy; and emphasizes the key factors of bottom-up planning such as collaboration, inclusivity, and the meaningful involvement of all stakeholders. Unlike Tollefson (2006) who argues that policies “[…] often create and sustain various forms of social inequality, and that policy-makers usually promote the interests of dominant social groups” (p. 42), we believe that the process of policymaking in education is a complex one, where top-down decision-making represents only the tip of the iceberg. In line with this perspective, our study aims to investigate the preparedness of English language teaching (ELT) practitioners during the COVID-19 pandemic and the factors that influenced their engagement or disengagement in policy implementation.

This study endeavors to contribute to the existing literature on policy analysis and educational practice by providing insights into the lived experiences of ELT practitioners during a crisis period. By capturing their
perspectives and experiences, we hope to generate knowledge that can inform future policy planning and improve the implementation of education policies.

**Previous research**

In their work, Shouhui and Baldauf (2012) put forward a model referred to as the five 'I' model (figure 1), which aims to address the interplay between micro and macro levels in educational policy. This model suggests examining the connections that exist across five different stages of policy development. However, the real strength of the model lies not in its stage-based approach, but rather in its bottom-up perspective. Shouhui and Baldauf (2012) argue that instead of solely focusing on the macroscopic aspects of Initiation, Involvement, and Influence within educational policy, it is crucial to recognize and emphasize the significance of individual agency at three primary levels: expertise, influence, and power.

This perspective highlights the critical role that individuals play in shaping and influencing policy outcomes. It recognizes that policy decisions are not solely determined by top-down processes but are also shaped by the agency and actions of individuals at various levels of the education system. By considering the diverse perspectives and agency of individuals involved in policy implementation, the model adds value to our understanding of educational policy development.

**Figure 1:**

*Actor Stage Model of Influence for LPP Actors.*

Shouhui & Baldauf (2012:10)

Grounded in a concern for change, the model affirms the complexity of educational policy but produces alternatives with a nexus of fifteen agency relationships. Previous literature explored ways to understand the fabrics of the educational nexus. Scollon (2004) suggested ‘circumferencing’ “[…] which, for us, means simply making sure that the study does not become obsessively narrowed to single moments, speech acts or events, or participants without seeing how these connect to other moments, acts, events, and participants which make up the full nexus” (p.09). In this regard, the study transcends the emic dimension of policies to an etic examination. The aim of this study is to delve into the layers of language policy and planning, using the metaphorical onion (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). By examining each layer, which includes Initiation, influence, and implementation, we seek to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in language policy and planning.

At the level of policy initiation, the macroscopic discourse continues to promote top-down leadership and subjugate practices at lower levels. The literature indicates (Ricento, 2000; Tollefson, 1991) that historical-structural factors govern discourse in LPP. Therefore, it is evident that social formations reproduce rhythmic discourse in educational language policy.

At the level of policy influence, the role of interpretive discourses is often under-emphasized. The transition from policy to practice undergoes ambivalent interpretations reflecting competing voices. For example, in Morocco, ELT inspectors issued overlapping interpretations of self-directed learning policy because official
laws constrain their role of mediation (Moummou, 2023). Therefore, educational inspection reproduces macroscopic discourse through regional policy texts; but advocates teachers to assume leadership roles in recontextualizing the policy.

The weakening of the ELT inspectorate leadership role emphasizes teacher’s agency at the level of policy implementation. Teachers differ in their recontextualization of top-down policies. Liddicoat (2014) explains that “the silence about pedagogy in language policy may itself cover inconsistencies in implied pedagogies in different aspects of policy” (p.125). Therefore, policy implementation in many cases depends on practitioners’ readiness and raises questions about how practitioners accommodate emerging policies. In this case “the two major components of readiness are ability and willingness” (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969, p. 175). Ability defines knowledge, experience and the skills required to accommodate the policy and willingness indicates practitioners’ confidence, motivation, and commitment. The paper explores practitioners’ readiness for self-directed learning policy during Covid 19.

Methods

This study employs a nexus analysis approach to explore the different layers of language policy and planning. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding by “zooming in and out” and examining the interactions and dynamics across various scales. Nexus analysis, as proposed by Scollon (2004), views educational language policy as a social action that encompasses policy discourses manifested in various contexts. These contexts include official meetings, governmental reports, local memoranda, and schools.

Figure 2:

*Model of Nexus Analysis*

![Figure 2: Model of Nexus Analysis](image)

(Scollon, 2004, p.20)

Following the nexus analysis model, the study thematically analyzed discourses about self-directed learning in different contexts (policy texts, political speeches, official reports, local guidelines, and teachers’ classrooms). The classical top-down order of interaction is maintained in our analysis. Our first data is national policy texts. We used grounded theory coding strategy to build themes from the National Charter of Education (1999), The White Book (2002), the Emergency Program (2009), The Strategic Vision of Reform (2015-2030) and Framework Law 51-17. Using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas. ti, we were able to move from initial coding to constructing categories. Based on these categories, we examined international policy texts about education in Morocco (World bank report: Morocco,2015; Education For All,2015; The African
Bank Union, 2013). The aim is to find some interdiscursive and intertextual connections between national and international policy texts.

The second set of data is from meso-level social actors. In Morocco, educational inspection mediates between central decision-makers and teachers. The agentive role of educational inspectors continues to draw researchers’ attention. In the study, we examined some policy texts issued during covid 19 and administered semi-structured interviews with five ELT inspectors. Data from the interviews and the policy texts are triangulated to compare results.

The third set of data is from schools. To investigate teachers’ readiness for self-directed learning, the study designed participatory action research. First, we validated our instruments using Guglielmino (1979) readiness scale and a pilot study. Guglielmino and Roberts (1992) suggested eight factors for measuring readiness, “openness to learning opportunities, self-concept as an effective learner, initiative and independence in learning, informed acceptance of responsibility for one’s own learning, love of learning, creativity, future orientation, and ability to use basic study skills and problem-solving skills” (265). In the pilot study, we used the factors to design a questionnaire for a population of 64 teachers. The aim is to measure teachers’ preparedness. Results show that teachers with less than 05 years of experience are more likely to accommodate policy changes. Therefore, we recruited a sample of five young teachers to examine self-directed learning with reading. The choice of reading is explained by self-directed learning policy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a shift in classroom practices towards assigning reading comprehension tasks as self-directed learning activities.

**Figure 3:**

Reading Performance and Coverage of 15-year-olds Population.

The participating students were in their final years of high school with a median age of 18.5 years old. The same population of students participated in the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) triennial survey in 2018. The survey is a two-hour computer-based test of students’ reading performance. Figure (2) shows that almost 65% of students reading performance in Morocco is limited with an average score of 356 points. At this point, there are analytical questions to ponder:

Why did teachers assign students to self-directed learning with a skill where they perform the least?
Results

In this section, we analyze data to explain the cultural premises, values and contexts that justify the implementation of self-directed learning. Since data is drawn from different perspectives, we expect to find conflicting voices. The study explores practitioners’ readiness through an examination of how different actors negotiate their identity across the levels of policy initiation, influence, and appropriation.

Policy texts initiation

The data from policy texts indicate that we can predict future policies using Bloomaert TneSpace scale (2007). The analysis of policy texts revealed that self-directed learning was evoked in early educational policies and imposed during Covid 19. The 1999 policy text (National Charter of Education) justified the need for self-directed learning to position Morocco in a volatile economy where the modern learner should promote “…self-reliance, openness to self-initiative with confidence, faith and optimism” (Excerpts from the Royal speech of his majesty Mohammed 6th in the inaugural ceremony of Fall term of the third legislative year about education, 1999). Two decades later, a new policy text (Framework Law 51-17,2019) stated that Morocco needs to respond to universal values of democracy, freedom of choice, and self-sufficiency. Therefore, the educational system in Morocco needs to enact self-directed learning to ensure the teaching of “values and principles of human rights as stated in the constitution and the international agreements which the kingdom had participated in especially the one concerned with education, training and scientific research” (Official Journal, 2019:5625). Nevertheless, from 1999 to 2019 the policy was not implemented. On a temporal dimension, the same pattern governs the creation of a self-directed learning policy. On a spatial dimension, policy discourse navigates across the regular institutional authority. The two dimensions show how the TimeSpace scale predicts fractals in policy discourse at the central level. The complexity of self-directed learning and its adoption as a top-down policy, without considering other policy arbiters, confirms that educational language policy is a nexus of leveled agency where the top-down logic fails.

Policy text influence

The need to understand how discourse navigates the transition from policy to practice invokes the existence of an actor who mediates the influence across the scales. In other words, looking at the duality of collective (policies) versus individualized (practices) interpretations may lead to understanding how new identities are negotiated in some English language classrooms. The results of the semi-structured interviews indicate that there are two aspects of mediation. The first one is curricula development. Curricula are the springboard for policy dissemination on a national scale. The second one is human agency. In Morocco, educational inspectors continue to play an interpretive role in policy texts. Regional inspectorates recognize their agentive role in policy interpretation. We triangulated the semi-structured interviews with regional policy texts analysis to understand how ELT inspectors interpreted self-directed learning policy. The regional policy texts show remarkable inconsistencies in policy interpretation. Some ELT inspectors define self-directed learning as autonomous learning. Others consider self-directed learning as self-study or independent learning. Therefore, the interpretive role of ELT inspectors is marked by ambivalence. To overcome the issue of ambivalent interpretations, some ELT inspectors suggested that policy texts should not be as gospel.

Policy text implementation

In a pilot study, 64 secondary school teachers of English responded to a questionnaire about readiness for a self-directed learning policy. The results show that teachers with less than five years of experience are more prepared to appropriate the new policy. Policy appropriation can either be through policy adoption or policy resistance in practice.

Table 1:
Demographics of Secondary School Teachers (n= 64)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean in years</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To understand how self-directed learning policy is enacted, we recruited five young teachers to join self-directed learning action research. In the study, we used self-selected reading as an instrument to introduce self-directed learning to 79 students aged 17-19 years old. From the Guglielmino readiness scale (1979), we used the factor of avidity for learning to design a test about reading avidity. The results compare the central tendency of both the experimental and control groups.

**Figure 04:**
Comparison of Central Tendency of Reading Avidity Pre-test

The results of the pretest indicate that the experimental group shows more preparedness for reading with an adjusted mean of 2.1 compared to 1.86 for the control group (1 = not ready, 2 = ready, 3 = very ready). After 13 weeks of the experiments, the same students responded to a post-test.

**Figure 05:**
Comparison of Central Tendency of Reading Avidity Post-test
The hypothesis suggests that students who will read in a self-directed environment will improve their reading avidity more than the control group. The data show unexpected outcomes. The adjusted mean for the experimental group improved with a mean difference of 0.06; while the control group who reads in a teacher-directed environment improved with a mean difference of 0.31. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that self-selected reading can improve students’ self-directed learning is rejected and the null hypothesis confirms that self-selected reading has a minor effect on students’ self-directed learning.

Discussion

The findings of the study reveal a significant disparity between self-directed learning policy and its implementation in secondary schools. Despite the policy’s intentions, there was a noticeable discrepancy between teacher-directed learners and self-directed learners in the observed classrooms. In the experimental group, students demonstrated resistance to the individualistic aspect of self-directed learning. Instead, they negotiated their institutional identity by working collaboratively in groups. On the other hand, the control group displayed a different pattern. Students in this group worked individually under the guidance of their teachers, without any signs of rejection or resistance towards the teacher-directed approach.

In this section, we discuss the role of identity in sustaining or constraining practitioners’ preparedness and engagement. Data indicates that identity factors have a fluctuating influence on policy discourse. At the macro-level, policy discourse maintains the status quo where “choices are constrained by systems that reinforce and reproduce the existing social order, which of course favor particular languages in particular contexts for particular sociopolitical ends favored by interested parties, usually dominant elites (or counter elites), (Ricento & Hornberger,1996: 407).

Markers of identity highlight the importance of religious, cultural, and ideological principles in every policy text. One explanation is of political aspect. The governing authority gains its legitimacy from religious foundations; for example, the monarch is the leader of believers, the royal family is descendant of the first religious pioneers and the country is the land of the Cherifians. Therefore, the need to respond to the emerging needs of modern society never escaped the classical trinity of God, the Nation, and the monarch. Identity factors are temporal bottlenecks in the process of policy creation.

At an intermediary level, the agentive role of ELT inspectors shows the limited presence of inspectorates’ identity in policy interpretation. The semi-structured interviews suggest various reasons for the widespread dissatisfaction of ELT inspectors from central policies. However, in practice, regional policy texts mimic central discourses. In fact, the examined policy texts failed to provide recontextualization to macroscopic
decisions. Most attempts to interpret self-directed learning policy created ambivalent meanings; and instead
of reducing the scope of confusion, these interpretations enlarged the unbridgeable gap between policy and
practice. I am not suggesting that ELT inspectors are not aware of their constrained role. Indeed, some of the
interviewed inspectors justified the need for local policy texts as a means to overcome the limited supervision;
“[1] . . . that’s why we plan to aid and provide them with similar guidelines. But the final . . . I mean . . . the
decision must be taken by the teacher themselves (para.100). It is safe to say that ELT inspectors negotiate
their identity in policy discourse in a way that reduces their accountability which makes the micro-macro
linkages more complex.

Classroom observations indicate individualized interpretations of self-directed learning policy. We aim to
discuss how teachers in the sample (n=5) negotiate their identity using the Staged Self-Directed Learning
Model (Grow, 1991).

Table 2:
The Staged Self-Directed Learning Model (Grow, 1991:128)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>Authority Coach</td>
<td>Coaching with immediate feedback. Drill. Informational lecture. Overcoming deficiencies and resistance.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>Interested</td>
<td>Motivator, Guide</td>
<td>Inspiring lecture plus guided discussion. Goal setting and learning strategies.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>Involved</td>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>Discussion facilitated by a teacher who participates in equal seminars. Group projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>Self-directed</td>
<td>Consultant, delegator</td>
<td>Internship, dissertation, individual work, or self-directed study group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the participatory action research, teachers were observed in a reading class about Women’s Day. Two
female teachers from the sample used group work to sustain self-directed learning. The first teacher, Nora,
used open and closed-ended questions to introduce the topic. However, in other reading stages (pre and while
reading) teachers’ instructions are mainly directive teaching methods. According to Grow model (1991), this
teacher is an example of teacher-centered learning where students are dependent learners, and the teacher
is an authority with the role of coaching students. 72% of teachers in the pilot study (n=46) share similar
views. They argued that students are not prepared for self-directed learning and therefore, teachers need
to design instructions where students get immediate feedback and drill information. In addition, teachers
explained that some context-driven challenges discourage self-direction, for example, large classes, lack of
pedagogical equipment, and lack of training.

The second teacher, Kamilla, maintained a question-based instructional design. In the post-observation
discussion, the teacher explained that students need to engage in meaningful dialogues with teachers. She
suggested sharing lesson objectives with the students and introducing the topic with an inspiring lecture.
The three remaining participants (males) used more balanced instructions. They facilitated a discussion
about the social role of women and simultaneously teach key terms. The second teacher is according to
Grow (1991) a guide/motivator, while the remaining teachers are examples of stage 3 in the model.

In the study, we compared data from two groups of students. A control group (n = 34) reads in a teacher-directed environment and an experimental group (n = 45) self-directs the reading program. Our data indicate that students in both groups have limited readiness for self-direction (Knowles, 1972; Benson, 2007). Previous studies (Garrison, 1997; Long 1989) examined students’ readiness for self-direction under the auspices of autonomous learning. In this study, we explore self-directed learning in combination with teacher-directed learning. In this regard, Garrison (1997) proposed a three-dimensional model to assess students’ preparedness to self-direct. The first dimension is the ability to self-manage the learning process, in other words, the ability to set learning objectives, monitor the learning outcomes and procedures. In the control group, students were provided with learning contracts to provide a roadmap of learning goals, strategies, and outcomes. The experimental group had to self-manage the processes. The post-test results of the control group (from a mean of 1.82 to 2.25) outperformed the experimental group in self-management from (2.48 to 2.21). In this regard, we can argue that external instruction sustains young learners’ self-management.

The second dimension is the ability of students to self-monitor the learning process. It is principally informed by the ability to use reflective thinking to compare the defined learning goals and the achieved outcomes. For the control group, the learning contract explicitly guides students through self-monitoring. Most students in the group graded their learning outcomes on a grid out of five and were able to assess their reading progress. The experimental group did not provide evidence for reading progress. This fact had a negative impact on the third dimension in Garrison’s model (1997) students’ motivation. After 13 weeks of the reading intervention, students’ engagement in the experimental group dropped in comparison with the control group. Both groups responded to post-test questionnaires where the answer rate was 100% in the control group and 78% in the experimental group. The data means that teacher-directed students are more likely to stay on task and persist, while young learners lose task motivation in a self-directed context.

Classroom realities show that students are in stage 01 (dependent learners). However, teachers negotiate their identities in different ways. The finding means that teachers need to be aware of students’ preparedness for self-directedness and adapt to an adequate identity. Therefore, the findings suggest a strong correlation between students’ and practitioners’ readiness. Unless teachers recognize the learning stage of their students, we will continue to reproduce inefficient practices.

The paper contributes two major findings. First, to increase practitioners’ readiness, educational language policy should expand the space for pedagogy in policy texts. In many cases, educational policies fail to explicitly state implementational practices (Moummou, 2021). The current practice shows large inconsistencies across layers of educational policy. To reduce the scope of confusion, we suggest either empowering regional policymaking or centralizing policy interpretation. In other words, policy texts need to be coupled with prescriptions for policy implementation with hands-on tasks for classroom practice. Therefore, transition policy from abstract terms into more pedagogy-oriented discourse.

The second finding shows that practitioners’ engagement offers an immediate evaluative toolkit for policies. In the study, teachers’ engagement in research shows the inadequacy of macroscopic policies and suggests alternatives. Instead of self-directed learning for young learners, results indicate that ‘learning contracts’ (Knowles, 1975) and ‘staged self-directed learning model’ (Grow, 1991) promote students’ readiness for self-directed learning. Although Grow’s model has been fiercely described as simplistic and lacking consistency (Tennant, 1992), it provides a solid background for practitioners interested in self-direction and learners’ autonomy. Besides, the model is a springboard for staged readiness with clear directives and when combined with learning contracts it promises to strengthen the micro-macro linkages.

**Conclusion**

This study examines practitioners’ readiness and engagement with government policies. The findings suggest that macro-level policy arbiters primarily focus on reproducing ideological discourses influenced by global factors. The analysis of two decades of policy texts for example indicates a regular pattern in policy discourse. Unfortunately, the lack of mediation in English language teaching fails to benefit from this pattern and exac-
erbates the disconnection between macro policy and micro-practice. The role of mediation is delegated to the ELT inspectors. Interestingly, they exhibit ambivalence and mirror central powers in their discourse. Further research is required to understand the intended/unintended disempowerment of educational inspection in Morocco.

The study also highlights that teachers are not adequately prepared to implement self-directed learning policy in English language classrooms. Findings suggest that teachers have a limited understanding of the principles and strategies of self-directed learning, and therefore cannot design and implement appropriate learning activities. Furthermore, data indicates that the absence of the necessary pedagogical tools and support materials makes the engagement of students in self-directed learning ineffective. It is important to address these issues in future studies to enhance the successful implementation of self-directed learning policies. This may involve providing professional development opportunities and engaging teachers in policy discourse.

References


