
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

English-Medium Graduation Research and Perceived Employability: Exploring Skills Development and Confidence Building among Moroccan Business Students

Aghlalamnate Belglaiiaa¹✉ and **Noureddine Azmi²**

¹ Ph.D student, Research Lab: Language, Culture & Text: Multidisciplinary Approaches, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech, Morocco

² Associate Professor of communication and education, ENCG Business School, Marrakech, Morocco

Corresponding Author: Aghlalamnate Belglaiiaa, **E-mail:** aghlalamnate.belglaiiaa@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

The role that English plays in higher education in preparing students for their future careers has increased in recent years. In this respect, the main focus has always been on English as a medium of instruction, and little to no attention was given to English-medium research. This study aims to investigate Moroccan business students' perceptions of the impact of completing their research projects in English on their employability, confidence building, and skills development. We gathered the data using a mixed-methods approach. We administered a questionnaire to 288 participants and conducted six semi-structured interviews with students who completed their graduation research projects in English. To analyze the quantitative data, we used descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and correlation analysis. As for the qualitative data, we used thematic analysis. Overall, the study's findings demonstrate that students associate conducting research in English with positive outcomes. They link it to improvements in academic writing, communication skills, critical thinking, and employability-related skills. They also reported a high level of confidence. We found positive correlations between perceived employability and skills development. Having said that, interviews also highlighted that English-medium research can improve professional vocabulary, communication skills, and employment prospects. This study intends to contribute to the existing body of research on English-medium research by suggesting that conducting research in English can help students develop transferable skills and boost their employability prospects.

| KEYWORDS

English-medium research, employability, skills development, confidence, higher education, Morocco.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Over the years, English has increasingly gained worldwide prominence in higher education within the non-Anglophone context. Notably, in the academic setting, as a medium of instruction and research (Belhiah, 2016). Many educational institutions are integrating English into their teaching curricula and research practices to cope with the increasing demand of the global employment market and maintain their competitiveness (R'boul, 2024).

In Morocco, French has always been the official language of instruction in education. In recent years, Morocco has undergone a shift from French to English in many educational institutions (Sayeh & Razkane, 2022). Due to this shift, institutions across Morocco are slowly but surely implementing English for specific purposes across different fields, especially those that were conventionally predominantly instructed in French, such as business and management. This pedagogical development of adopting English as a medium of instruction and research constructs an important transition, shaping the future of academia. This encourages students to interact and engage in academic discourse in a different language, which may also promote

outcomes that go beyond language proficiency and expand to other areas. As such, students may notice an influence on their research skills, professional confidence, and perceptions of employability.

Employability is, nowadays, at the forefront of higher education policies. The readiness of graduates to enter the employment market depends on a combination of skills, qualities, and knowledge that determines their ability to successfully secure a position in the job market (Scandurra et al., 2023). Language practices – especially English use – have become a subject of interest to better understand how it impacts students' academic experiences and future employment prospects. While English medium instruction EMI has been thoroughly studied, English medium research has been under-explored and requires further investigation to establish an understanding of its role and impact on students' perceived employability.

The way we aim to address this gap in this study is through examination of how students perceive the impact of English-medium research on their Employability, transferable skills, and confidence. Adopting a mixed methods approach and focusing on Moroccan students at the ENCG Business School.

Research questions

The following research questions are used for a better articulation and organization of the research study:

1. What is the students' perceived impact of English-medium research on their employability?
2. To what extent do students believe English-medium research contributes to their transferable skills?
3. How does English-medium research influence students' confidence?

2. Literature review

The use of English in higher education has become widely popular across the world. This phenomenon has been well documented, especially in non-Anglophone countries. This shift is due to internationalization and global competitiveness (Belhiah, 2016). According to Lai and Idris (2025), there are a number of things that contribute to the growing popularity of EMI, including the attraction of foreign faculty and students, which boosts the internationalization and competitiveness of educational institutions and improves job opportunities for graduates. But the growing use of English in academic settings has also sparked concerns about how it genuinely affects language practices, equity, and learning processes. English is essential for professional careers and worldwide business in addition to academia. Competence in English can facilitate smooth collaboration between culturally varied teams and enhance the operational effectiveness of global organizations, as it is the default language in many multinational firms (Razkane et al., 2025).

The role of English in research-related activities, especially at the undergraduate and graduate levels, has received less attention than the majority of current research. Most research concentrates on classroom education. There is an underexplored part of English use in higher education, which is English as a medium of research. Students may face greater linguistic and cognitive challenges when conducting research in English, but they may also have more possibilities to connect with academic conversation and material. Razkane et al. (2025) have found that students favor English Medium instruction in scientific fields because it allows them full access to more up-to-date academic resources, thanks to its global dominance.

2.2 English and Graduate Employability

Most people understand employability to be more than just landing a job after graduation. It includes a variety of knowledge, abilities, character traits, and competencies that help graduates get better job opportunities, adjust to shifting workplace needs, and advance in their professions. According to Lai and Idris (2025), Students are well aware of the importance and necessity of English-medium instruction for career prospects. Similarly, Razkane et al. (2025) have found that most students believe English to be an essential instrument for international communication, academic access, and economic mobility, especially at the international level. Morocco has reported similar views. According to research by Sara and Abdelkader (2022), students often selected English as their major in college because they thought it would increase their chances of finding work, enable them to travel abroad, and give them access to a greater variety of professional options. These results imply that in the Moroccan labor market, English is becoming more and more valued as a type of linguistic capital.

Moreover, a study in China conducted by Huang and Curle (2021) concluded that students have a positive attitude towards EMI and career prospects. They emphasize that English is essential for employability due to the fact that it expands their career choices, which increases their chances of landing a job. In addition to that, students also noticed that EMI can help boost their chances of studying and working abroad. This also aligns with results from a Turkish study by Sahan and Şahan (2021) where students reported perceived benefits associated with EMI, where students believed that investing in their English skills would lead to better job prospects, but the relationship between EMI and professional gain is not simple.

Since English is considered the lingua franca worldwide (Belhia, 2016), which links it to international trade, research, and professional communication, it is important for students to have a certain level of language proficiency to allow professional mobility and increase their career prospects. Erling (2015), on the other hand, argues that employment is not a direct result of

English proficiency alone, but rather the value of English is determined by how it is integrated with more comprehensive skill development, learning opportunities, and chances to use those abilities in academic and professional settings. According to this viewpoint, the transferable abilities and self-assurance gained by studying and working in English may be just as important to employability as language acquisition itself. Qostal et al. (2024) further support this viewpoint; evidence from their study on Moroccan Engineering students revealed that students believed personal management skills to be the strongest indicator of employability, followed by teamwork and basic skills. The importance that students place on transferable abilities in addition to technical expertise is demonstrated by the special priority placed on competencies like flexibility, ongoing learning, teamwork, communication, and information management. These results show that employability is influenced by a wider range of professional and interpersonal skills in addition to discipline knowledge and language ability.

2.3 Skills and Confidence Development Through English-Medium Research

Higher education institutions have been making more effort in recent years to equip students with transferable skills, including communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, adaptability, and self-confidence. These skills are frequently seen as crucial markers of graduate employability and are widely acknowledged as necessary in today's labor markets. Conducting academic work in English can help students build transferable skills that are useful in both academic and professional contexts. Beyond language skills, students can also develop a variety of skills by working in English for academic purposes, such as critical thinking, effective communication, increased learner autonomy, adaptability, and confidence (Karim et al., 2023; Moudden & Lamkhanter, 2023). Moroccan graduates employed abroad have reported similar results. According to Belkbir (2019), graduates believed that communication-focused courses like Business English, Public Speaking, Oral Communication, and Translation were the most beneficial for their future employment. The importance of speaking, listening, and professional communication skills in the workplace was emphasized by the participants, who also suggested that academic experiences related to English could help with professional integration and career preparedness. These acquired skills are highly valued by employers who are looking to hire graduates who are capable of quickly adapting to fast-paced working environments and can work independently. This is in line with research from Morocco, where employers found that the most crucial abilities required of recent graduates entering the workforce were adaptability, problem-solving, teamwork, accountability, and analytical skills Tejan and Sabil, (2019). The importance of such competencies is also reflected in Moroccan research. Qostal et al. (2024) found that personal management skills, teamwork skills, communication, adaptability, and continuous learning were among the strongest predictors of perceived employability among Moroccan engineering students. According to a study conducted at the ENSAM School of Engineering in Rabat, to successfully navigate a highly competitive global STEM labor market and secure professional integration, Moroccan engineering students need specialized training in vocational English and technical language content, despite their strong potential in soft skills (Ajraoui & Naciri, 2025). In the Moroccan context, employability is increasingly associated with a combination of hard, soft, and life skills, as well as adaptability to changing work environments. Recent findings highlight that employers value communication, teamwork, adaptability, and technical competencies, in addition to digital and entrepreneurial skills. These skills are considered essential for successful integration into the labor market, particularly in sectors affected by technological change and globalization (Nouib et al., 2025).

2.4 The Moroccan Context

In Morocco's higher educational system, French is the most dominant language in the scientific, technical, and business-related fields compared to Arabic and English. Despite English gradually gaining increased importance over recent years, French continues to a certain level dominate in the professional sector and universities (Sayeh & Razkane, 2022). Consequently, students often find themselves studying in a multilingual environment where Arabic, French, and English coexist. Having said that, interest in English has grown considerably among Moroccan students. Many students consider English as the language of international communication, scientific research, and, especially, better career opportunities. According to recently conducted studies in Morocco, English is more and more associated with academic success, increased access to information, and professional mobility both inside and outside Morocco (Belhiah, 2020; R'boul, 2024). This growing interest has prompted educational institutions to opt for the expansion of English-medium programs as a response to the greater demand for English language learning at different levels of education (R'boul, 2024).

The Moroccan labor market is increasingly connected to the international economic and commercial networks. Due to this connection, it has become inevitable for employers to put an emphasis on transferable skills and abilities that support global communication, multilingualism, teamwork, and adaptability. (Tejan & Sabil, 2019; Qostal et al., 2024). These changes have put into perspective questions about the role and importance of English in preparing students for future careers. English as a medium of research has received far less attention than English medium instruction. Several studies have been conducted in Morocco on English medium instruction and attitudes. But so far, nothing is known about students' perceptions of English-medium research on their employability, confidence, and skill development.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods approach to investigate how students' perceptions of their employability are affected when graduation research is conducted in English at Moroccan Business schools. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data allowed a more comprehensive understanding of students' experiences and perspectives. An online questionnaire was administered to assess students' preferred research language and its effect on their perceived employability.

To provide a more in-depth understanding of the underlying reasons for these perceptions, six semi-structured interviews were conducted with students completing their graduation research projects in English at the National School of Commerce and Management, Marrakech (ENCG).

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study are current students enrolled in Moroccan business schools and graduates who have completed their graduation research projects. A total of 288 students responded to the questionnaire. These participants were divided into two groups:

- Students who conducted/are in the process of conducting their research in English (n=48)
- Students who conducted/ are in the process of conducting their research in French (n=240)

Although the English- medium group represents a small proportion of the sample compared to the French-medium, this is a reflection of the current reality of Moroccan higher education.

Six students from ENCG Business School in Marrakech who chose English as the language of their research participated in semi-structured interviews. The participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to share their experiences.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

3.3.1 Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data on students' perceptions of employability, language use, and research experiences. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions using Likert-scale items, as well as a few multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions divided into five main sections. The first section addressed the demographics and screening. Age, gender, institution, current status (Student, Employed, looking for work), research language of choice (French/English).

The second section focused on skills and career confidence. The third section addressed students' perceptions of English-medium research on their employability. The fourth section is the challenges faced when using English-medium research.

The last section was addressed to the students/graduates who conducted/Are conducting their research in French. This section was only shown if the language of choice was French at the beginning of the questionnaire.

The survey was administered among three categories of students: Students in the process of completing their graduation research project (Or expect to work on their graduation research project soon), Students who have already graduated and are currently looking for employment, and students who are already employed. The questionnaire was created using Qualtrics and distributed online. Participants were invited to complete the survey voluntarily.

3.3.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into students' experiences with English-medium research. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom with six students from ENCG Business School in Marrakech who chose English as the language of their graduation research project. The interview questions focused on students' perceived benefits and challenges, development of language and research skills, and their perceived impact on employability. The interview duration ranged between 20 and 30 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent. The appendix includes the questions that were asked in these interviews. A thematic analysis approach was adopted to analyze this qualitative data. The interview recordings were transcribed, and recurring themes were identified and categorized. These themes were then used to support and explain the quantitative findings.

3.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were used to identify general trends in students' responses. We also used Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the scale used to ensure reliability. To examine the relationships between employability perceptions, skills development, and confidence, we used inferential statistics implementing Pearson's correlation.

The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The interviews were transcribed and coded thematically to identify the overarching themes.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Participants

The first section is devoted to the demographics of the participants. The total number of participants in this study is 288. 92.7% of the sample is between the ages of 18 and 23 years old. The next portion is between 24 and 29 years, which makes up 6.9%. While the remaining 0.3% were above the age of 30 years old. As for the distribution of gender, 71.5% of participants were female, and 28.5% were male. As for the language selected for the graduation research project, the majority of participants (83.3%) chose French, whereas only 16.7% selected English.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics (N = 288)

Variable	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18–23	267	92.7%
	24–29	20	6.9%
	30–35	1	0.3%
Gender	Female	206	71.5%
	Male	82	28.5%
Language of the Research Project	French	240	83.3%
	English	48	16.7%

As shown in the table above, the majority of the students selected French as their language of choice for their graduation research project. Having said that, this study focuses on the perceptions of the students who chose English as the language of choice for their graduation project (n=48). The small number of students choosing English-medium instruction is a strong indication of the French dominance within the Moroccan higher education, but at the same time, it also reflects a growing interest among students in English for academic and professional purposes.

4.2 Reliability of scales

The internal consistency of the three scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

Table 2. Reliability of Scales

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Employability	5	0.79
Skills	7	0.84
Confidence	4	0.87

The employability scale shows acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.79$), while the skills development scale shows good reliability ($\alpha = 0.84$). Lastly, the confidence scale shows high reliability ($\alpha = 0.87$). This means that the scales used were sufficiently consistent for further analysis. The survey was well-designed, and the answers were consistent.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Employability	3.86	0.65
Skills	3.92	0.65
Confidence	4.20	0.79

Based on these statistics, students seem to have a positive view of English-medium research in all three elements: Employability, Skills, and confidence. The mean score for employability is 3.86 (SD = 0.65), indicating a moderate agreement that doing research in English increases the chances of securing employment after graduation. The skills development score is slightly higher (M = 3.92, SD = 0.65), indicating that students see there are significant gains in their transferable skills. The highest mean is found for confidence (M = 4.20, SD = 0.79), indicating that there is a strong agreement that English-medium research can lead to a substantial boost in confidence in the professional and academic environments. This pattern indicates that the main impact of English-medium research might be to enhance internal competences, especially confidence, rather than to generate immediate perceptions of improvements in employability.

Moving to the qualitative analysis of the interviews, which provides even more support for this interpretation. Several participants have mentioned that they noticed a significant shift in their confidence and sense of mastery. One student described a massive spike in self-assurance by stating that their confidence became “*over the roof*” after completing their research project in English. Other students expressed feelings of reduced anxiety as they felt more prepared for the future interviews and felt proud because conducting their research in English was a way for them to prove their multilingualism.

4.4 Correlation analysis

Table 4. Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3
1. Employability	-	.292*	.227
2. Skills	.292*	-	.674**
3. Confidence	.227	.674**	-

Note. N=48 *p < .05, **p < .01

We used a Pearson correlation analysis to examine the relationship between employability, skills, and confidence. This analysis showed a significant statistical positive correlation between skills development and employability perceptions ($r = .292$, $p = .044$). Based on this result, students who perceived an improvement in their transferable skills also reported positive perceptions of employability. There is also a strong positive correlation between skill development and professional confidence ($r = .674$, $p < .001$), which means that students who reported an improvement in their skills also had high scores for professional confidence. However, the correlation between confidence and employability is rather weak ($r = .227$, $p = .121$). This suggests to us that

students may connect their employability more to transferable skills and less to confidence, despite confidence being an important outcome of English medium research.

4.5 Development of Employability-Related Skills

Students reported that they noticed their skills had improved after conducting their graduation research projects in English. More importantly, skills that are related to their employability, such as communication, critical thinking, and academic writing. This perceived improvement is reflected through the relatively high mean score for the skills development (M=3.92).

The interviews also shed light on students' perceived employability skills and the impact that English-medium research has on these skills. Students reported that there is an evolution in their abilities beyond linguistic fluency. A recurring sentiment was that students were able to “translate” five years of French education into English, gaining and expanding their terminology in their field of study, which allowed them to structure their ideas more effectively. Students also reported improvements in their communication skills and public speaking as well we academic writing. Furthermore, some students believe their internal monologue has been impacted, so they are now thinking in English. One student stated, “since I started doing my research in English, I started thinking in English. So basically, instead of using Arabic or French, I started using English vocabulary.”

These results suggest that doing graduate research in English seems to benefit students' academic and cognitive development in addition to their language development. The qualities that Moroccan businesses are increasingly looking for in graduates align with the skills that participants indicated, such as communication, critical thinking, adaptability, and autonomous learning. For instance, Tejan and Sabil (2019) discovered that among the most crucial employability skills required of new hires were adaptability, problem-solving, teamwork, and analytical capabilities. In this way, research conducted in English may serve as a dual-purpose tool that helps students improve their language skills while also enhancing employable skills. These results are in line with Belkbir's (2019) findings that Moroccan graduates employed overseas considered communication-oriented English courses to be the most beneficial aspects of their higher education. Speaking, listening, and professional communication abilities in particular were thought to be crucial for effective job integration, underscoring the value of English-mediated educational experiences outside of the classroom.

4.6 Employability Perceptions and Contextual Constraints

Table 5. Employability Item-Level Analysis (n = 48)

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
Completing my project in English improves my employability	3.75	.978
It increases my interview invitations	3.67	.834
It helps me stand out to employers	3.75	.911
It signals strong research skills to employers	3.73	.844
It increases access to international roles	4.40	.818

In general, students perceived that English-medium research has a positive and beneficial impact on their employability. The results show that there is a moderate level of agreement compared to confidence and skills. Table 4 shows that students believe conducting their research in English increases their chances of accessing international roles and opens their employment prospects on the international level. We also see that their perceptions related to securing interviews and their attractiveness to employers are comparatively lower. This result is in line with earlier Moroccan studies that indicate students frequently link English to better job prospects and more career mobility (Sara & Abdelkader, 2022).

Similarly, the qualitative data provides important insights in this regard. A common theme in all interviews was that students described English as a “global language” and mentioned the importance of mastering the English language in order to access the international job market. We can link this to R’boul’s (2024) findings, where he concluded that English as a global language is a gateway for the international job market. In a way, English-Medium research was viewed as a form of proof of their abilities and competencies to work in English for the international employer. In addition, students noted what may be described as the “Moroccan paradox”: a clear dominance of French in the job market despite the dominance of English as a global language. The local Employer prioritizes French, regardless of the language used for the academic graduation research. English is considered “*a huge plus*” according to some students. It’s highly valued for international mobility but not influential enough for the local employer.

In a nutshell, these findings suggest that the perceptions of the impact of English-medium research are viewed through a duality. A long-term effect tied to the international employment market and global opportunity, and the dominance of the French language within the local professional setting. To an extent, this results in a positive and context-dependent perceived impact.

4.7 Integrated Interpretation of Findings

Our findings of both the quantitative and qualitative data support that English medium research can primarily contribute to students' professional confidence as well as their skills development and perceived employability. This implies that English-medium research gives students a sense of self-assurance in their skills and readiness to integrate into the job market. Having said that, we can conclude that both perceived professional preparation and academic experience are heavily impacted by students' confidence.

The Pearson correlation results allowed us to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between Skills development, employability perceptions, and professional confidence. Employability and skills development are positively correlated. This positive correlation means that students who reported improvement in their skills also reported feeling more employable. We also found a strong correlation between confidence and skill development. This strong correlation could mean that confidence helps improve students' skills, which, consequently, influences their perceived employability. This leads us to conclude that students connect employability to transferable skills and don't rely on confidence alone.

According to these findings, we can say that English-medium research is viewed as a tool or a mechanism for development on certain levels. It allows students to improve in terms of communication skills, critical thinking, and international engagement. The competencies gained through English-medium research impact how students perceive their employability. So it is safe to say that English-medium research is not considered a clear path to employment, but rather a boost in that direction.

Finally, the findings also highlight the contextuality aspect, which is an important factor determining how students view their employability. The dynamics of how English and French are used in the local job market dictate how students make career choices and perceive their future employability chances. Students are well aware of this dynamic and have understood how to navigate the expectations of the local employer and meet their requirements.

4.8 Limitations

It is important to take into consideration the limitations when interpreting the findings of this study. One of these is the fact that the study relies on the students' self-reported perceptions of their employability, confidence, and skills. So, the results purely reflect the opinions and experiences of the participants and how they believe English-Medium research impacts them, which is not an objective indicator of how the job market and employability work.

Another limitation is that only a small number of students chose English as a medium of research in this study (n=48) compared to those who chose French. This created an imbalance in the sample collected (total number of participants is 288). This imbalance limited the possibilities for comparative statistical studies as well as the possibility of some inferential tests we could implement. This means that we only present these findings as students' perceptions and beliefs, and not a comparison between English and French.

Finally, the sample collected in the context of Moroccan higher education is focused on Business Schools (ENCG), excluding students from different academic fields. This means that we may not be able to generalise the findings. A broader and more diverse sample could be utilized in future research.

5 . Conclusion

The present study looks into Moroccan business students' perceived impact and effects of English-medium research on their employability, skill development, and professional confidence. English-medium research is considered by most students as a useful academic experience that benefits them in ways that extend beyond the linguistic gains. The participants in the study reported positive opinions that included impact on employability, transferable skills, academic writing, and effective professional communication skills, as well as more confidence in their abilities in using English in their future professional and academic settings.

Overall, positive perceptions of the three components investigated in this study-employability, skills development, and confidence-were revealed through the quantitative results. The correlation test results showed that students who noticed a development in their transferable skills also had the tendency to report stronger employability perceptions. These findings were further supported by the qualitative data. The interviews complemented the results as the students showed a high tendency to believe that English-medium research expanded their knowledge in their specific disciplines, which made them more confident.

The contribution this study makes to the existing body of research is by concentrating on an area that has received little to no attention in English in higher education, which is English-medium research. as apposed to the mojority of research so far which focuses on English-medium instruction, zooming in on this specific area, our study emphasizes the potential benefits of adopting English-medium research as a way to build transfereble skills and professional preparedness.

The findings of the study imply that English-medium research could empower students to gain skills and competencies that are pertinent to their academic and professional success. The current Moroccan educational scene, despite the French dominance, is slowly shifting towards putting more effort into EMI and supporting students who prefer English. This may be a pivotal step in Moroccan higher education, as universities continue to respond to the changing demands of the globalized world.

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