

A Glance into the Status of English Language in the Algerian Higher Education Context



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Abstract:

The present paper is an action research that attempts to investigate the effectiveness of adopting English language in the Algerian university level. Undeniably, the English language is perceived as a significant tool to possess an international understanding of the different life issues and world's various regulations. To gain empirical data, an online questionnaire was administered to a sample of 89 teachers of different subjects at three distinct faculties: Social and Human Science, languages, and Science and Technology at 20 Algerian universities. The selection of the sample was based first on the simple random selection and then on the non-probability linear snowball technique. Notably, the questionnaire aims at revealing the participants' viewpoints, perceptions and expectations of embracing English as a formal language. The analyses of the obtained data reveal that the university teachers believe that the endorsement of English in education will promote the learning process and its quality. Ultimately, this paper elucidates some recommendations to facilitate such endorsement and make it more beneficial.

Keywords: Algerian universities; effectiveness; English language adoption; perceptions; university teachers.

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Introduction :

The spread of English as an international language can be regarded as one of the various metamorphoses that globalization initiates in today's world. It is regarded as the international common tongue. Indeed, this language proved its efficiency in all domains: technological and scientific inventions, medical development and even to set a global understanding of different situations, phenomenon and issues. Being one of the most important sources of knowledge, academic research and change, the Algerian universities should not be immune from such beneficial adaptation and should highly consider the use of this language

Viewing the recent changes that impact almost every domain in Algeria and particularly with the growing proclaims on the English language use; the ministry of higher education was the pioneer official administration that orders its different administrative sectors to embrace the use of this international language. Similar to the French language, it is worthy to mention that the English is not officially declared as an official language to be used in official texts, legal and administrative transactions unlike both Arabic and very recently Amazigh language. This decision was highly appreciated by Algerian population in general and most of the university community in particular for specific reasons. Importantly, this decision was set relying on the results obtained from the poll posted on the ministry of the Higher Education and Scientific Research's official Facebook page. Regarding the fact that any individual can get access to this page, the majority of users and not specifically university teachers and learners selected the use of the English language in formal communications besides the Arabic language. Though this initiation. i.e. the use of such poll is regarded as beneficial and novelty in the Algerian setting as it bridges, to some extent, the communication between the Algerian government and population, many Algerian intellectuals, to not mention policy thought makers, may wonder if such decisive decision could be taken relying just on some results of Facebook page's poll. This can rely and consolidate the fact that the followers of the official page of this ministry may not have any relation with the higher education domain.

On the other hand, using English at the university level for instance may prove that such sudden adoption could create a platform that may fuel certain problems of gap information and lack of maintaining the effective functioning at different levels in the real context. Logically, any quick substitution without taking the appropriate precautions/ measures and settling the needed parameters could lead to a total chaos and disastrous outcomes. Yet, little empirical researches have been conducted into why and how could English be effectively implemented in Algerian universities. The inevitable questions that emerge regarding the delicate situation are: to what extent do the university teachers, who can be at the same time administrators, believe that using English would be effective in the Algerian educational level?

1. Hypothesis:

The humble experience obtained from being an Algerian university teacher of English in different sections and at the same time an academic researcher partially assists to formulate the following hypothesis: the gradual integration of the English language in the Algerian university level would have a positive and beneficial impact on the Algerian academic context/universities.

2. Aim of the Study:

Investigating the effectiveness of introducing the English language in the Algerian university level is set as the primarily and broad aim of this investigation. Also, we would like to reach, among other points, a number of objectives such as:

1. Exploring the prospective positive/ negative impacts of using the English language on both scientific as well as academic research, and the international ranking of the Algerian universities.
2. Offering some suggestions that may assist the practical implementation of English in the higher education level.

3. Methodology:

The current paper uses one online questionnaire to collect the needed data. The questionnaire was translated in three languages: English, French and Arabic to ensure that teachers will answer in the language they feel best. Also, this questionnaire was sent to other teachers to provide us with the necessary feedback before administering it. The questionnaire consists of nine questions that attempt to reveal participants' view points and perception about the integration of the English language in the Algerian university context. Additionally, the questionnaire's answers provide a sum of valuable constructive recommendations suggested by the participants. To measure the reliability of Likert scale questions in the questionnaire, the questions were treated depending on the Cronbach's alpha. This questionnaire was administered to a sample that consisted of 89 Algerian university teachers. The selection was based on two sampling techniques. First, the probability selection and then on the non-probability sampling. From the total of 106 institutions of the Algerian higher education, we randomly selected 20 university. Second, from the selected universities, we selected 89 teachers depending on the linear snowball sampling techniques. The obtained data was coded and treated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The participants' answers in addition to our analysis and comments would serve as a valuable source of information that would importantly describe the situation and suggest some effective measures. It is important to mention that one limitation can be considered in this research. In this vain, the sample size can be regarded as insufficient. This is related to the fact that some of the invited teachers have missed answering the questionnaire, particularly as it was an online questionnaire.

In this respect, we invite future researchers to use larger sample and depend on non- online form of questionnaires.

4. Historical Background of English:

Languages are the medium of growth and the perseverance of the intellectual life. Besides communication, it is evident that the language is used to pick up information and gain knowledge. Moreover, languages are used to retain, recall and/or acquire new information during learning. At a higher level, such as university case, language is used as a mean to provide a free and fresh thinking and research (Dill and Van Vught, 2010).

The English language gained considerable importance as it is the most used language in the world especially during the globalization era (Short et al,2001). Its adoption continues to grow especially with the extensive use and spread of new technologies (Alfitri, 2012).

Specialists in the field such as Baugh,et. All (1993) divide the history of the English language into three main common eras: Old, Middle and Early Modern one. For them, the Old English phase is dated back to the middle of the 5th century mainly with the settlement of Germanic tribes in England. Following this are, the Middle English phase starts after the Normans' conquest of England as a result of the English defeat in the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Ultimately, the Early Modern period is estimated to be started in the 16th century. This phase is exclusively characterized by a great expansion in vocabulary.

Along centuries of development and spread, multiple reasons assist this language to be a worldwide mean of communication in different fields such as the economic, political, and educational.

4. a. Major Reasons of the Spread of the English Language:

Literature in the field denotes that the noticeable spread of English, which started in the 17th and 18th centuries, is a result of the British colonialism. Particularly, because of the English empire's policy that tried to spread its culture and language all over its colonies such as Canada, south Africa, The Caribbean, Australia, South Asia and New Zealand. Moreover, this spread was more effective in the 18th and 19th centuries due to the British leadership in the industrial revolution. In the 19th, 20th, and up to now the American economic superiority, political leadership and technological domination are considered as the main reasons that fuel the English language spread around the globe.

Besides these major reasons, many other factors can be highlighted. For instance, music and travel are seen as important reasons that may motivate individuals to embrace the use of English and thus spread this use in addition to travel, internet content, advertisement, education, Motion Picture particularly Hollywood industry and productions.

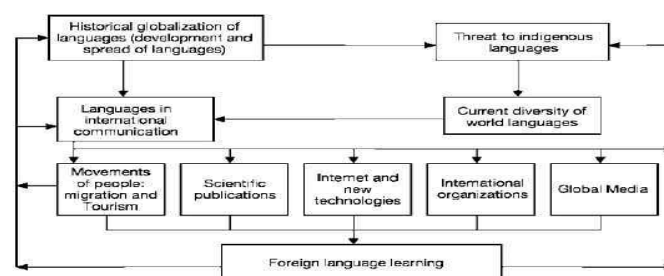
4. b. English language and Globalization

Globalization definition has been debated by many researchers from different perspectives. Wu and Dan (2006) for instance, defined globalization as it follows:

Today's definition of the term comprise factors that have contributed to globalization including increasingly sophisticated communications (in all levels), transportation technologies and services, mass migration and the movement of people and languages. It comes to define a level of economic, social and cultural activities that have outgrown national borders and markets through either industrial combinations and commercial groupings that cross national frontiers, international agreements that reduce the cost of doing business in foreign countries, or cultural influences of certain societies on others. (p;13)

In this respect, the phenomenon of globalization refers to various types of exchange: economic, cultural and social ones. These exchanges paved the way to English to be the mean of the interaction and interference of different nations with their distinct cultures and languages in an international context. Therefore, the English language dominance is regarded as an important globalization's outcomes, the urged need for an international language of communication and global interaction is viewed as the most crucial result. Consequently, individuals from all over the globe have stimulated demand for a language that could serve a pacific territory to facilitate communication. Knowing that the most technological inventions, advancement and discoveries were results of English language research, English has been adapted as a universal tongue.

The following diagram elaborates and summarizes how English has succeeded to be a globalized language.



The globalization of languages.

Source: Adapted from Globalization Research Center at the University of Hawaii-Manoa, www.globalhawaii.org.

Figure N° 1: reasons that lead to a globalized language
Source: Adapted from: www.globalhawaii.org.

4. c. The English Language and the University Sector:

Using English in the higher education's institutions and universities for research and educational purposes is seen as an inevitable path that should be highly considered by policy makers in all over the world. In this respect, Balan (2011) notes that the process of using English in higher education is regarded as "a parallel and unavoidable process resulting in improved international academic communication worldwide" (p.15). The same researcher holds that the benefits of this adoption can be clearly noticed in the exchange program between universities where learners do not face any linguistic hindrances when they are doing their research as they master English.

Moreover, technological advancement has revolutionized teaching and learning English. Being the context where the extensive use of different technological tools and invention is required, the higher education level's institutions need to consider the adoption of English. This use can be related to either facilitate learning or assist in providing new opportunities for inventions or discoveries. Some researchers like Moursund and Bielefeldt (1999) believe that the main significance of technology is boosting individuals' lives. Consequently, researchers and academicians need to embrace English to use appropriately these technologies since the majority of technologies are result of studies and research in English language.

Moreover, English is a mean of accessing to academic and scientific knowledge. Undeniably, the majority of academic, scientific, medical and technological journals are published in the English language such as: Elsevier, Nature, Science, and Tylor & Francis. Also, mastering English assist learners from different fields to have more opportunities all over the globe to expand their research. Mastering this language offers more chances for those graduate learners to get a job in different sectors: medical, industrial, and technical particularly even in foreign companies.

4.d. Internationalization of Higher Education:

According to Cambridge dictionary, internationalization is term that refers to becoming or making something become international. The internationalization of the university levels needs the use of the English language as the international language and a mean of communication. This internationalization bridges institutions and universities of the same interests all over the world, and it highly assesses in the improvement of universities' quality factor through international publications and discoveries that should impact their international ranking. This concept may be introduced in countries whose educational infrastructures do not

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encourage the use of English as a foreign language. As a medium of instruction, English should be presented in the different world's universities. Courses such as: General English (GE), English for academic purposes (EAP), and English for specific purposes (ESP) should be injected in the university different stages: undergraduate, graduate and even post graduate levels to assist learners and researchers in learning this language and fit their educational needs. Motteram (2003) reports that such courses prove their efficacy in improving the students and teachers' English level in many countries such as European Union countries, Republic of Korea, Turkey, Malaysia, China, Taiwan, Vietnam. Universities In these countries insist on the learners to submit their English language proficiency exam scores, TOEFL, IELTS scores, to enroll and be accepted in one of their programs.

5. Field Work Results:

The analyses of respondent's questionnaire are collected and represented as follow.

Section one: It aims at gathering general information that would serve better at the understanding of the real situation. The obtained results reveal the following:

- Teachers belong to different universities in Algeria namely: (25)Batna-1,(17) Batna-2, (10)Biskra, (9)Constantine, (8)Setif, (7)Skikda, (4)Oum el bouaghi, (3)Ouaragala, (3)Tlmeccen (3)Algiers, (2)Bejai universities.

Table 1
Teachers and their affiliation (universities)

Participants Number	Their Affiliations	Participants Number	Their Affiliations
25	Batna-1 University	03	Oureguela University
17	Batna-2 University	03	Telemcen University
10	Biskra University	03	Algiers University
08	Setif University	02	Bejai University
07	Skikda University	09	Constantine University
04	Oum Elbouaghi University		

- The participants belong to different departments and taught different subjects. Broadly, they were foreign language teachers: French and English (26%), Social Human Sciences SHS (50%) and technology teachers (24%)

Table 2
Teachers and their affiliation (faculties)

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Faculties	Foreign languages	Social and human sciences	Technology
Teachers` percentage	26%	50%	24%

- All participants have a considerable teaching experience which ranges from 5 years (10%), 10 years (50%), more than 15 years (40%).

Table 3

Teachers teaching experience

Teaching experience	5 years	10 Years	15 Years
Percentage	10%	50%	40%

- They have different educational backgrounds.
- A great proportion of them (45%) assigned an administrative task in the university.

What can be concluded from the analysis of these data is that these diversities in teaching experiences, faculties and departments, educational background would lead to different and constructive viewpoints and perceptions about the use of English in Algerian university. Also, having some teachers who are part of the administrative stuff will add more insights.

Section Two: This section aims at collecting teachers' viewpoints, perception and suggestion about the endorsement of English. Item six, which targeted the teachers' evaluations of their English language mastery, mainly in the four skills, prove that the majority of teachers have a considerable accommodation of this language (82%). This question is made of a 5-points Likert scale. The mode of this answer was (=1) which indicates that the considerable number of respondents' four skills is Excellent(37%), while (21%) assert that their skills are Good. A range of 24% of teachers' responses was fair compared to 11% and 1% of the teachers who rated their four skills capacities as poor, and very poor respectively. What is noticed is that teachers who have selected (Poor and Very Poor) mastery of English belong to the category that has more than 15 years of Experience. This can be related to the fact that teachers receive their learning in either Arabic or French.

Table 4

Teachers mastery of English

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
37%	21%	24%	11%	1%

Also, the analysis of the results of this item reveals that besides the English language teachers, the teachers who teach in department of technology seem to have great mastery of this language rather than the teachers of both French and SHS. Teachers at the technology department relate their mastery of this language

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to its importance in their field. They add that English is a great source of knowledge: the reliable journals, magazines and books are produced in English.

On the other hand, a considerable number of French and SHS teachers report that their modest accommodation of the English language is seen normal as they use this language just in case of tourism or rare independent reading. They add that the majority of books and articles in their domains are translated in the language they need .i.e. Arabic or French.

What attracted our attention is that most of teachers of psychology claim that most of the books that they use are found only in English. For them, this fact hardens their learning and even teaching and obliges them to receive some kind of courses to master the basics of the English language. Also, they mention that they use Google translator to assist them but it was not sufficient and the results are not satisfactory. In the same spectrum, teachers from the department of French and SHS show their readiness and motivation to receive any tutorial sessions/trainings that would improve their English language skills.

When asked the teachers about their agreement of using the English in the Algerian university for academic purposes in item 6. The mode of 5 likert scale question was (=1) which denotes that the great proportion of respondents (80%) Strongly Agree. They report that such initiation is needed viewing the globalized era. They add that Algeria universities cannot be immune from the different impacts of this globalized era including the use of English not only to understand the surrounding world but also to keep themselves and their students updated to all what is new in the world in general, and in their field work in particular. 19 % of them reported that they Agree to use English in the universities while only 1% rated undecided. Interestingly, none rated Disagree nor strongly disagree the use English in the Algerian universities. Teachers' beliefs confirm with Balan's (2011) findings which indicate that embracing English in higher education improves learning, reinforces its quality and bridges the world of knowledge together.

Table 5

Teachers agreement about the use of English in Algerian universities for academic purposes

Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
80%	19%	1%	00%	00%

The results obtained when asking teachers about the importance of the endorsement of English in both pedagogical and administrative sections in item 7 differ. A considerable number of respondents rated 43% and 35% not beneficial and slightly beneficial respectively. These results demonstrate that teachers' refusal of this adoption in both pedagogical and administrative sectors. Only 20% of them believed that this endorsement in universities' administrations is Moderately Beneficial. None of them rated extremely beneficial and only a minority (2%)

believe that such use is beneficial. The teachers who are working either in their university, faculty or department administrations they note that such adoption is definitely a non-productive path as it would generate disastrous outcomes basically because the workers in such administrations have very little, to not say no knowledge and accommodation of English. They maintain that the quick shift in the language used for instruction without a well-studied strategy, nor a good preparation of administrators, would negatively affect the good implementations of English.

Table 6

Teachers perceptions about the importance of the endorsement of English in both pedagogical and administrative sections

Extremely beneficial	Beneficial	Moderately Beneficial	Slightly Beneficial	Not Beneficial
00%	2%	20%	35%	43%

When asking teachers about their perceptions about learners' reactions towards such adoption the majority of the respondents hold that this endorsement and shift will be easily accepted among learners who are viewed as a young generation that favors the use of English. They add that this generation is a digital generation who demonstrates a predisposition to embrace this new and promising educational journey.

Ultimately, when asking teachers about any futuristic vision about the whole situation and to provide us with some practical recommendations we received the following.

Teachers from the different departments acknowledge the beneficial outcomes of adopting English in the university level. They hold that these positive outcomes can be directly noticed on the quality of the future scientific research and the improvement of the higher educational system. This change can be noticed in no more than five years mainly because the Algerian universities, in such case, will follow the common international standards of the higher educational systems and scientific research. Also, teachers believe that this endorsement would assist in eliminating some linguistic barriers among learners that, to some extent, used to block and slow down the scientific research or even make it hard. They continue that even in case of scholarships in different international universities, learners were obliged to submit a good/ excellent English language proficiency test's score.

Importantly, teachers believe that the great benefits will be generated on the international ranking of Algerian universities. They maintain that the number of the published articles will certainly raise their classification if these articles will be published in English rather than Arabic or French.

Teachers provide us with some suggestions.

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- The majority of them request to schedule English courses designed to teachers to improve their English language in the four main skills.
- A minority suggest having what is called extensive English courses to fasten the process of this shift.
- Moreover, they note that teachers should not be the only ones who should receive these types of courses but also all the administrative staff should be concerned and they accentuated on introducing ESP courses for them.
- Some teachers note that to encourage teachers as well as administrators to join such courses, responsible should make these courses free.
- Also, they suggest that some financial rewards could be praised to those who succeed to improve their English language skills in short period of time to make it more competitive.

On a more pedagogical side, teachers from the different departments hold that:

- Viewing its paramount importance, the English subject courses' allocated time in all departments would be extended more than one hour and a half per week. They add that the duration of the English subject in different department except for the department of English should be raised at least to 4 or 6 hours per week.
- Also, they maintain that the course of English subjects should be mandatory from the first year of the undergraduate phase to the last year of the Master degree knowing that the responsible of Doctoral phase already considered this measure.
- They continue that decision makers should raise the English subject coefficient in the different fields to insist on its importance when teaching and learning for both learners and teachers. For them, this measure would sensualize learners about the importance of this language as they have the tendency to not giving it much importance particularly in the undergraduate phase.
- Teachers insist on the gradual and systematic adoption of English to avoid any undesirable outcomes.
- Teachers suggest that the ministry of Higher education should create some distinctive commissions to supervise the adoption of English in the different 106 Algerian universities. These commissions should follow a set of parameters, recommendations, organizational or pedagogical guidelines set by some national and international experts in such field.
- Also, Algerian Higher education ministry should consider some previous experiences of other countries in similar case and rely more on some annual reports about using English as Medium of Instruction (EMI) as it represents a global phenomenon.

Conclusion:

This present research work attempts to study and explore the current situation of adopting the English language in Algeria, particularly in the higher education level and context. Understanding the real situation would assist policy makers, thought leaders and responsible to be aware of the importance and the prerequisite of this transitional period. The higher education level is considered as a sensitive domain that provides the society with future national professions in all domains. Being part of this globalized world, Algeria should not be immune from the use of English as an international mean of communication. Teachers' responses in this research denote their readiness, and upraising of using English in the Algerian universities. Also, teachers insist on the fact that the gradual integration of the English language rather than surprising one in Algerian universities and institutions would have numerous positive and beneficial and encouraging impacts. Teachers note that this measure is regarded as a way of connection that will bound the Algerian universities to similar international institutions of research and universities, and raise their international ranking. Still for them, adopting the English language will improve research and even refine the quality of learning. On the other hand, teachers recommend and suggest some practical measures to make this endorsement smooth and beneficial. Their recommendations were based on their teaching experiences, and remarks that were obtained as a result of being in real contexts while teaching. All in all, there is an urgent need for a research-driven approach to understand and be more knowledgeable about such adoption, and its possible outcomes.

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