# The Needs and Attitudes of Disciplinary-Based Teachers in the Pursuit of an English Language Reform in Algerian Higher Education

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**Abstract**

Future change is urged by the Algerian Higher Education and Scientific Research. This includes introducing English as a language of instruction at the tertiary level due to the critical importance of this target as a language of science and technology. The purpose of this study is to investigate how university teachers perceive this shift and its primary potentials, attitudes, and needs. To this end, an exploratory case study was conducted with 66 disciplinary teachers and 4 administrative responsible from the University of Tlemcen and the Higher School of Management. The data collection was conducted using a questionnaire and semi-structured interview. Results revealed that this current reform would be of great benefit to the Algerian university and scientific research, as most of the teachers expressed their positive attitude due to the various opportunities and benefits it would create for the teacher as a researcher.

*Keywords:* Algerian education; language reform; needs, teachers' attitudes.

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## 1. Introduction

Due to the process of globalization, different historical reasons, and various academic and occupational requirements, English has established itself as a global language of communication, science, research, business, and technology for many countries around the world (Karim et al., 2023). This has become a mass requirement as asserted by Rahmani (2021); "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". Therefore, recognizing its growing significance, it has become an essential part of instruction in various fields, and a main growth industry in our world today (Crystal, 2003).

Algeria as one of the developing countries responds positively to the globalization process, and English is taught at all levels of education. Moreover, Algerian decision makers including Tayeb Bouzid the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, call for the introduction of that global language as a primary medium of instruction in universities. Teaching in English is meant to achieve the purposes stated below:

- To improve English-language education (Bensouiah, 2019).
- To increase educational opportunities for overseas students who desire to undertake their research in the target language or work in an international country (Bensouiah, 2019).
- To bridge the gap between the Algerian university and internationalization (Kadi, 2022).
- To raise the student's motivation to learn and master English (Ruiz-Garrido & Palmer-Silveira, 2008).
- To help learners be more competitive in their future careers (Ruiz- Garrido & Palmer-Silveira, 2008).

There is a growing body of literature that addresses the language teaching situation in Algeria and issues from various perspectives including investigations in linguistics, sociolinguistics, and didactics. Additionally, the existing research on TEFL suggests its importance as a language of science and technology for pupils, learners, and workers at the national and international levels (Zarrinfard et al., 2021). However, the concern of teaching content through languages or Content-based Instruction (CBI) has been a controversial and much-disputed subject within the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and its sub-branch English for Academic Purposes (EAP), which requires sharing roles and responsibilities between decision-makers, ESP practitioners, learners, and content teachers (Yu & Kaur 2024). Nevertheless, little attention was paid to the use of English as a substitution for French and Arabic in Algerian Tertiary Education.

For this reason, this research paper primarily revolves around the introduction of English as a foreign language in Algerian tertiary education. Generally speaking, this growth business requires decision-making upon education, language policy, and planning which are conceived to be delicate and challenging tasks because have always been influenced by a variety of considerations and language policies that cannot be set apart from the Algerian nation's sociolinguistic reality.

### 1.1. Conceptual background
#### 1.1.1. The linguistic teaching situation in Algeria

This current investigation is about introducing English as a Language of Instruction in Algerian Higher Education. It is significant to provide contextual information regarding the linguistic teaching situation in Algeria at the university level.

##### 1.1.1.1. The status of languages in Algeria

The Algerian linguistic situation is very rich and quite complex, being considered a monolingual state by politicians, a bilingual country by some linguists, and a multilingual nation by others (Benmoussat, 2022), moreover, it is described as having "a history of linguistic diversity" (Belmihoub, 2018) due to a set of geographical, political, historical, linguistic, and cultural factors. In this vein, it is

to be noted that the Algerian dialectal Arabic or Berber is the Primary Language or the Mother Tongue. Standard Arabic is the first, official, national language of constitution and education (Benmoussat, 2022), followed by French as the Second Language, and English as a Foreign Language or a Third Language according to the British Council (1984). Additionally, it gains the status of a Second Foreign Language, though it does not have a big impact on the national and social lives of Algerian people (Slimani, 2016).

### 1.1.1.2. The linguistic situation at the Algerian university level

The introduction of English does not come out of the blue, it is used as a reaction to the situation where French has lost much of its place in the socio-cultural and educational contexts of Algeria, including economic, technological, and educational ones (Meliani, 2000). To bridge the gap between the academic target and learning needs, and cope with the students' lacks, wants, and necessities, different types of ELT courses have been enrolled in all departments, universities, university centers, and Higher, and National schools in Algeria.

Throughout the history of Higher Education, English has been gradually acknowledged and encouraged to be used for both occupational and educational purposes to meet the various needs of learners who need English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and professionals or would-be workers who require English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). To this end, Belmihoub (2018) considers that in addition to formal instruction, English is also taught to workers to assist their staff overseas.

ELT teaching is offered in the department of English or Foreign Languages where English is used as a medium of instruction. Courses are tailored to include Phonetics, Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Applied Linguistics, Literature, Civilization, ESP, Research Methodology, and oral and Written Expressions. Its main aim is to provide learners with the necessary skills to master and communicate with that foreign language. As for the other departments, it is very important to highlight that French is used as the language of instruction to teach scientific and technical streams such as medicine, science, biology, technology, and so on. While, Arabic is used as a medium of education for the fields of social sciences notably Psychology, Sociology, Law, Political Sciences, Economics, Commercial Sciences, and other fields of study (Benabdallah, 2012; Mebitil, 2015)

It is to be noted that thanks to the trend of globalization, the newly adopted LMD system (Licence-Master-Doctorat) as an alternative in all universities and across all disciplines and various departments was implemented during the academic year 2004/ 2005. This latter is regarded as a revolutionary and innovative shift in pedagogical emphasis, teaching backgrounds, and practical outcomes in Algerian higher education. It is a noticeable shift that endeavors to match the university training courses and develop a framework of qualifications recognized on an international basis and, therefore, fit the actual gaps between academic and professional learners' lives (Al-thresher & Alkursheh 2024). Accordingly, this reform addresses several features, notably the instructional methodologies, approaches, techniques, and administrative practices and actions as asserted by Belmekki (2022):

> This new orientation in perspective was intended to help guarantee quality assurance, relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the national higher education system; in other terms, promote the quality of teaching approaches and methodologies to better tutor our learners' skills and competencies through diversified and personalized training courses.

Additionally, much more concern was oriented toward ESP enterprise and various specialized courses have been gradually offered, and sometimes launched across various educational organizations, sectors, and departments to fit the linguistic requirements of the learners and achieve, what is known as, communicative competence in the target language, such as those illustrated in table 1 below:

**Table 1**

*Types of ESP courses offered in higher education*

| Field of Specialty | Types of ESP Course |
|---|---|
| English for Science and Technology | • English for Chemistry<br>• English for Mathematics<br>• English for Information and Communicative Technologies<br>• English for Biology<br>• English for Medical Purposes.<br>• English for Engineering so on; |
| English for Economics and Commercial Sciences | • English for Business Purposes<br>• English for Management Purposes<br>• English for Finance and Accounting<br>• English for marketing<br>• English for Tourism and so on. |
| English for Social Sciences | • English for Psychology<br>• English for Sociology<br>• English for Law<br>• English for Political Sciences<br>• English for History<br>• English for Philosophy and so on. |

As part of harmonizing and converging the Algerian Educational system, the government is calling for future reform and striving to improve the status of its universities abroad by introducing English as a global language of education in Higher Education. In this respect, teachers are invited to increase their language skills to make them more capable of using this target language to teach their content. Therefore, they are encouraged to undergo educational training in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the Extensive Teaching Center of Languages to better assist the teachers' skills and capabilities (correspondence sent on the 28th of September, 2022).

In fact, 'teaching in English' is not a recent activity as it was adopted in Europe in several countries and fields of study and resulted in valuable experiences. It is considered another system of European higher education and one of the goals of what is labeled the 'Bologna process',

### *1.2. Purpose of the study*

Based on what has been discussed previously, one would say that the main objectives of this current investigation are to explore the extent to which university content-based teachers accept or resist this change and reform. It also sets out to identify the main challenges and the various opportunities it offers Algerian Higher Education and Scientific Research. This current investigation, as a result, offers some important insights into ELT education in general, and ESP in particular. It is intended that this research paper will contribute to a keen understanding of the status of languages in Algeria and provide an overview of the use of English in tertiary education.

To achieve this purpose, two research inquiries have been put forward:

Q1: What are the university disciplinary-based teachers' attitudes towards the introduction of English as a language of instruction in Algerian Higher Education?

Q2: What are the needs of the teachers to meet the challenges of introducing English as a language of instruction in Algerian Higher Education?

In an attempt to provide reliable answers to the research questions, the following assumptions are reformulated:

H1: University disciplinary-based teachers may have a positive attitude towards the introduction of English as a language of instruction in the Algerian university due to the various opportunities it may offer to the Algerian Higher Education and Scientific Research;

H2: University teachers may fit their needs by developing their language skills and abilities through pedagogical language training sessions and self-development.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This section provides an overview of the research methodology and highlights the research design, data collection methods, analysis, and discussion of the results. Due to the nature of this investigation, research questions, and hypothesis, an exploratory case study was conducted at the end of the first semester of the academic year (2022-2023) at the University of Tlemcen and Higher School of Management to obtain an environmental triangulation (Norman & James, 2020). It is set out to collect preliminary information about the forthcoming reform in Algerian Higher Education.

### 2.1. Participants

Two sampling techniques were used for selecting the participants. The first category was based on a simple random technique where a large number of disciplinary-based teachers were randomly nominated to take part in the study by sending invitations to either their personal or professional email addresses figured on the website of each department, thus, "each member of the population under study has an equal chance of being selected and the probability of a member of the population being selected is unaffected by the selection of other members of the population"(Cohen et al., 2007). However, due to time constraints and the difficulty of getting access to a large population, the sample size was reduced to 66 volunteer practitioners. They are men and women of different ages, grade levels, disciplines, departments, and academic institutions notably, the University of Tlemcen and the Higher School of Management, Tlemcen, their First language is Standard Arabic while French and English are correspondingly their Second and Foreign languages.

However, purposeful sampling was relied on for the selection of the second category of participants. Four teachers voluntarily agreed to participate. They are recruited based on the field of study they belong to and the administrative responsibility they are in charge of in both academic institutions.

### 2.2. Data collection instruments

The data collection process was carried out by means mixed methods approach. Therefore, a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches was opted for the triangulation of data sources, cross-checking the results, increasing strength, and eliminating the weaknesses of a single method (Dorney, 2007). To achieve this, two research methods were used namely, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview.

### 2.3. Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to 66 content-based teachers to identify their needs, opportunities, and perceptions towards the use of English as a language of instruction in Algerian Higher Education. This data-gathering tool is very popular in social sciences due to its ability "to construct, extremely versatile and uniquely capable of gathering a large amount of information quickly" (Dorney, 2007).

For the same purpose semi-structured interview, was also conducted with 4 teachers who are in charge of administrative responsibility. The choice of this research tool is widely used in educational research for its ability "to provide guidance and direction (hence the 'structured' part in the name) but is also keen to follow up interesting developments and to let the interviewee elaborate on certain issues" (Dorney, 2007). It is composed of an introductory statement aimed at welcoming the participants and explaining the interview's objectives. Then, the first two questions collect general

knowledge about the interviews. The rest of the questions focus fundamentally on identifying their perceptions and attitudes toward this current reform under investigation.

As for the design of the questionnaire, it begins with a title that provides a glance at the underlying knowledge of the current investigation. Then, it is followed by the opening statement where the main purpose is explained and instructions are described.  It consisted of 14 items which were framed into three rubrics. The first one is respectively about the instructors' bio-data. The second part, however, is fundamentally about their requirements and attitudes. The final part of the questionnaire allows teachers to reflect upon the opportunities of CBI. To meet this end, it is composed of factual, behavioral, and attitudinal questions to gather various types of data.

As for the pre-distribution stage, and to check the validity and reliability of both the questionnaire and interview, they were initially piloted to 2 language practitioners to check its translation and obtain feedback as far as the language, the length, and the general outline of the questionnaire. In the second piloting stage, assistance was also requested from third-party colleagues who were requested to provide criticism about the difficulty of items, the clarity of the instruction, and the time allotted for its completion, they were also invited to provide further suggestions to make this data collection tool more effective. The piloting stage or in Dorney's words, 'field testing' is very significant in helping the researcher "to determine whether the items measure what they are intended to measure" (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Based on the participants' comments from the two piloting phases, some irrelevant items were omitted, confusing ones were reformulated, others were added, and some were replaced to avoid any ambiguity and misunderstanding.

Regarding the questionnaire administration, it is worth mentioning that it was carried out through an electronic self-completion method which was conducted online via Google form by sending a URL or web address of the questionnaire to the teachers' mail as the first attempt. Then, the heads of departments were contacted to solicit participants to respond to the questionnaire. The use of web-based questionnaires is widely acknowledged nowadays as a procedure of data collection and analysis that permits the researcher to reach a large number of participants and collect data in due time (Cohen et al., 2007), it is also known for its ability to record responses and allow the respondents to take part through self-completion of part or all of the questionnaire (Brace, 2018).

Participants, accordingly, were invited to click the cursor on the suitable box in case of close-ended items notably, yes/ No and multiple-choice items. As an example of multiple-choice types:

➢ Which skills do need to be trained for in English?
- Reading
- Writing
- Speaking
- Listening

As for the open-ended questions, they are required to provide answers and express their personal opinions as far as some specific situations as illustrated in the example below:

➢ As a teacher, what opportunities can the introduction of English as a global language in Higher Education create for you?

Meetings, for the administration of the semi-structured interview, were made convenient for each participant. It lasted about twenty minutes and, therefore, the process of data collection took about two weeks due to the interviewees' commitments and administrative obligations. Additionally, the researcher used two ways of data recording, namely, a digital audio recorder and note-taking tools for the sake of avoiding any potential flaws in the technology. To get further information and explanation, the investigator used some probes.

### 2.4. Ethical consideration

Seeking informed consent, maintaining anonymity where needed, and avoiding harming individuals, groups, or the environment are ethical standards that the study, its conclusions, and its reporting all complied with.

## 3. Results

To fit the purpose of this current study, data collection instruments, and the choice of items, the investigator opted for qualitative and quantitative methods in analyzing both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. Moreover, the findings were then summarized and presented under the following headings:

### 3.1. University disciplinary-based teachers' attitudes towards the introduction of English as a language of instruction in Algerian higher education.

In the light of the results obtained from the two research tools, findings revealed that more than two-thirds of the teachers (72 %) were aware of the importance of English as a global language. Moreover, the majority of the respondents (95 %) were in favor of 'teaching in English' to bridge the actual gap between pedagogy and research. Additionally, to determine their attitudes towards this process, practitioners were asked about the benefits, opportunities, and challenges of the process of Englishization at the Algerian university. The overall response to this question was very positive. Recurrent themes in the responses were sense amongst the majority of them who believed that it enables them:

- To learn and do research in English as being a language of science,
- To communicate more with foreign colleagues and share experience in higher education,
- To enhance their quality of teaching,
- To have access to different resources,
- To develop their English skills, to be updated with recent bibliography in their fields of study,
- To attain good achievements and keep up with modern science.

They also stated that CBI is very beneficial for both teachers and researchers. The majority of them reported that it can create opportunities for them to collaborate with international colleagues, access a larger pool of research resources, attend international meetings, make oral presentations at conferences, improve the educational level of students through reading updated papers, publish in high- ranked journals, and present their findings to a wider audience. Additionally, it can open up opportunities for them to pursue research projects in other countries and gain insights into different cultures and perspectives.

Findings also unveiled that the minority of the participants (5%) who were unaware of the importance of this process were those teachers who use either Arabic as a language of instruction and scientific research or have limited linguistic ability. Additionally, the age factor was also reported among the issues teachers might face. Old teachers believed that learning the English language would be a challenging task for them at that old age and translating their various courses would also be time and energy-consuming.

### 3.2. Teachers need to meet the challenges of introducing English as a language of instruction in Algerian higher education

To examine the teachers' needs and challenges, they were requested to identify their language of instruction. The results revealed that less than half of the teachers (41 %) use French, a combination between Arabic and French (43 %). However, the minority (16%) seem to use only the Arabic language. Moreover, teachers were asked if they possessed the necessary English language skills to teach

content-based knowledge. Findings unveiled that only half of them (54, 5 %) can do so. What is more, the majority of the practitioners (84, 8%) believed that pedagogical training, in this respect, becomes a necessary ingredient for the success of this process as they prefer to enhance their language ability through self-development at the highest percentage (71, 2%), followed by Online Learning Platform at the second rate (30, 3%), and finally ESP at the final position (27, 3%).

Results also suggested that pedagogical training sessions should focus on productive skills, namely, speaking at the highest score (87, 9 %) followed by writing (60, 6 %). Receptive skills are placed in the second position, Listening and Reading which respectively represent (34, 9 %) and (24, 4 %). As for the aspects of language, teachers reported covering the communicative aspects at the first rate (81, 8%), followed by Pronunciation and Terminology at the second frequency (45, 5%), while Grammar is placed at the bottom of the list (47%).

## 4. Discussion

The initial objective of this study was to identify the university disciplinary-based teachers' perceptions of introducing English as a language of introduction in Algerian Higher Education. It was found that the linguistic situation at the University is very rich and multifaceted at the same time. Arabic was used as an official language of instruction for Social Sciences, Economics, and Commercial Sciences whereas French was used as a medium to teach scientific and technological disciplines. English, however, was used only for terminology teaching and academic research.

Moreover, the most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis of both research instruments is that the majority of these content-based teachers, who were from different backgrounds and had different professional grades, and teaching years of experience, were in favor of the vital importance of English as a global language in both teaching and academic research. Moreover, the majority of them were aware of the significance of the process of teaching in English and the various opportunities it offers to Algerian Higher Education and Scientific Research. Prior investigations have also noted the importance of this target language as a language of business, science, and technological advancement (Crystal, 2003; Rahmani, 2021; Chimalakonda & Nori 2020).

One unanticipated finding was that teachers who had a negative attitude toward the use of that target language at the tertiary level had either a limited linguistic ability or were mainly those from the departments of the Humanities and Social Sciences such as Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy, etc. A possible explanation for this might be related to the fact that in these teaching environments, Arabic is used as a medium of education and as a tool to publish scientific papers. Whereas for the other fields of study, notably, economics, commercial sciences, scientific, and technical streams, the practitioners' attitudes were very positive. These results are likely to be related to the view that research in these contexts was already conducted in English in many aspects, such as searching for updated bibliography, writing scientific articles, and making oral and poster presentations at international conferences, and a tendency was also oriented toward publishing papers in high-ranked international journals.

This supports evidence from a previous study conducted by Belmihoub (2018) on English users among Algerian students who believe that even though French is the dominant language in business and is even used as a tool for achieving scientific knowledge, English is the language that Algerian scientists use to publish with the most professionalism. In the light of the results gathered from the two research tools, one may state that the first hypothesis is confirmed which assumes that university disciplinary-based teachers may have a positive attitude towards the introduction of English as a language of Introduction in Algerian Higher Education.

Concerning the second research question which sought to determine the teachers' needs to meet the challenges of introducing English as a language of instruction in Algerian Higher Education, findings from both data collection tools revealed teachers were not yet ready to teach in English due to several factors. Though the majority of them (84%) were conscious of the importance of teachers' preparation to develop their language skills and abilities through undergoing several pedagogical

training sessions, notably, through online learning platforms, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and self-development. Additionally, they called for developing their productive skills (speaking and writing) and stressing more on the communicative aspects of language, such as communication and pronunciation.

The most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis is that the age factor plays an important role in language learning and acquisition. Doctorate students, part-time teachers, and even novice instructors were identified as more interested and motivated to be prepared for the future reform that entails learning and using English as a tool to deliver content. This also accords with several investigations that confirm the association between learning languages at early ages and performance (Hu, 2016; Mortford & Mayberry, 2000).

In light of the findings obtained from the two tools, one may say that the second hypothesis is also confirmed, which states that university teachers should fit their needs by developing their language skills and abilities through pedagogical language training sessions and self-development (Khanshan & Yousefi 2022).

5. **Conclusion**

The current research work examines university teachers' attitudes toward the implementation of English as a medium of instruction in Algerian Higher Education. The second aim of this study was to explore the main challenges and opportunities this reform may offer. An exploratory case study has been conducted in two institutions namely: the University of Tlemcen and the Higher School of Management with 66 content teachers and 4 teachers performing administrative responsibilities. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that the majority of the teachers from different disciplines expressed positive attitudes to this current reform. As a result, several efforts were devoted to meeting the challenges such as training and self-development.

Overall, this study strengthens the idea of 'teaching in English' and the findings suggest the role of this target language as a global means of getting access to the field of science and technology in promoting content and language-based instruction, practitioners' quality teaching, self-development, language education, language planning, policy, and scientific research.

A key policy priority should therefore be to plan for the long-term care of integrating content and language in higher education that requires a systematic linking of subject matter and language in the context of language acquisition. In other words, specialized English for Specific Purposes courses (ESP) should be, thus, designed to have a dual function of matching the students' field of research to their linguistic requirements. A possible implication of this approach is to adopt one of its different models of instruction, notably the theme-based model, the adjunct model, and the sheltered model. As a result, continued efforts are needed to improve Algerian Higher Education by sharing roles and responsibilities between ESP practitioners, content teachers, and also learners who are considered a source of knowledge in the process of Needs Analysis and Identification and active participants in the teaching and learning process.

Since this current investigation is limited to a set of constraints. Data collection methods, sampling size, the time factor, and the difficulty of having access to the entire sample population are among the main limitations. Further research may contain other research tools and enlarge the scope of the study by including ESP teachers and students to explore their attitudes towards such a future reform and investigate the future of ESP courses.

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