

Languages of Instruction at the University: Toward a Coherent Language Policy

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Abstract:

The present study is set within the context of the generalization of English in Algerian universities and seeks to analyze the perspectives and linguistic survey related to the use of French and English. The research is based on a questionnaire survey conducted among university professors. The objective is to explore reflections on the linguistic future in teaching and research. The results demonstrate the necessary coexistence of the two languages and advocate for institutional bilingualism that ensures academic and scientific continuity.

Keywords: French-English, teachers, university, transition, survey

1. Introduction:

The teaching of the French language has always been a significant challenge for Algeria. The French language plays a central role not only for its academic value but also for its cultural and historical significance. As the language of diplomacy, arts, and literature, it is essential for the construction of a scientific identity specific to Francophone communities, fostering the emergence of distinct critical and analytical thinking. Its use ensures a pedagogical approach that respects linguistic diversity. Higher education in Algeria is exclusively conducted in French. The university has always placed great importance on the French language and its teachers, and it is

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constantly seeking to improve teaching methodologies while meeting the specific needs of its students and teachers.

In this regard, the introduction of the English language in higher institutions has shaken its system. After the generalization of English instruction from the third grade onward, this language was officially introduced at Algerian universities as the language of instruction for scientific and technical fields at the start of the 2023-2024 academic year. The decision by the Ministry of Higher Education to gradually replace French with English has sparked numerous reactions within the academic community. In this context, the Minister of Higher Education issued a directive to the heads of institutions on July 1, 2024, calling on them to implement the necessary measures before the closure of the previous academic year. In order to support this transition, the ministry had already planned the training of 80% of teachers in scientific and technical fields in English, as well as 100% of teachers in humanities and social sciences, through the establishment of a platform dedicated to this task. Yes, for the English language? But what about the French language? The gradual integration of English as the language of instruction in scientific and technical fields inevitably raises the question of the future of the French language, as well as Arabic and their teachers.

If this reform aims to strengthen the country's integration into global academic and economic dynamics, it raises questions about the future of French in higher education and the repercussions for the teachers who ensure its transmission.

It is in this context that our study is situated, which aims to identify and understand the challenges and prospects of introducing English as the language of instruction at Algerian universities. It is essential to analyze how university teachers perceive this transition, what challenges they face, and what strategies could be implemented to ensure complementarity between the two languages rather than substitution.

To address this issue, we chose to adopt a mixed approach based on a qualitative survey and a quantitative survey in order to take advantage of the adoption of the English language and its impact on French education. To do this, a questionnaire aimed at university professors to gather their perceptions and opinions on the integration of English as the language of instruction in scientific and technical fields,

as well as its implications for the place of French at the university. Our investigation into this dilemma allowed us to identify the following research questions that guided this work:

- What measures are planned to support this transition without marginalizing French language teachers?
- Will this language reform lead to a reconfiguration of linguistic practices at the university or will French be maintained in certain fields?
- Finally, what will be the impact of this policy on the professional opportunities of French teachers and on the place of this language in the Algerian academic perspective?

This study aims to better understand the challenges related to this transformation and to anticipate its consequences on the teaching of French at the university. Before conducting our research, we first offer an overview of the sociolinguistic and institutional situation of French in Algeria, as well as its evolution over time.

2. The status of French in Algeria: between usage and learning

Algeria occupies a unique position in the global linguistic perspective, marked by a complex colonial history and fluctuating post-independence language policies. If Arabic and Tamazight are the two official languages of the country, French remains a privileged language in academic, scientific, and administrative fields. Let us also note the increasing prominence of English in higher education, particularly in scientific and technical fields, which raises questions about the future of French and its status in Algerian universities.

Since independence, French has enjoyed an ambivalent status. On one hand, it is perceived as a colonial heritage, sometimes contested; on the other hand, it constitutes an essential vector for accessing knowledge, professional opportunities, and international exchanges.

According to the French Language Observatory (2010), Algeria ranks third among French-speaking countries with approximately 11.2 million speakers. Although its teaching remains general, particularly in higher education and scientific disciplines, its influence is gradually being questioned.

Several factors contribute to this questioning. First, an Arabization policy that has reduced its role in secondary and university education. Next, an uneven presence of the French language according to regions and social classes, with a more pronounced mastery in urban areas than in rural areas.

And finally, a contrasting perception between those who advocate for its preservation and those who advocate for a broader opening to English.

In the context of globalization, linguistic diversification becomes a major challenge for the educational system. The Algerian university, in full transition, is adapting to international academic and professional requirements by gradually integrating English as a language of instruction.

In this sense, it should be emphasized that in the phase of globalization, multilingualism is emerging as a crucial factor in educational systems, particularly at the university level. Languages play a key role in access to knowledge, academic mobility, and employability. Alongside French, English is emerging as a pivotal language in higher education, facilitated by the increasing internationalization of academic institutions.

This evolution, which reflects the increasing predominance of English in global scientific production (Crystal, 2003), nevertheless raises significant challenges as it questions, in particular, the sustainability of French as a language of education and research, as well as the place of Arabic, the national and official language, in higher education.

3. Toward a progressive strengthening of English language teaching in universities

Today, we are facing a linguistic revolution that is affecting Algerian universities. Is this a revitalization of the "*language war*" in Algeria?

On July 8, 2019, the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Bouzid Tayeb, announced the need to "*establish the necessary mechanisms to consolidate the use of English at the university.*" This statement comes in a context where, although schooling in Algeria is provided in Arabic, French remains the dominant language of higher education, particularly in scientific and technical fields.

As Abdenour Arezki points out, "*Algeria, like many countries, offers a rather rich panorama in terms of multi- or plurilingualism*" (Arezki, 2008). Moreover, Algeria is pursuing a policy aimed at gradually replacing French with English, an orientation that has accelerated with the start of the 2022-2023 school year with the introduction of English learning from primary school. For President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, this reform aims to facilitate access to university and strengthen the country's integration into global scientific and economic dynamics, with English being considered the ultimate international language. In this perspective, the linguistic transition calls for a debates. If some see it as a pragmatic necessity for the academic and professional future of students, others believe it is primarily an ideological approach. The allusion made by President Tebboune to the university implicitly refers to the famous statement by the writer Kateb Yacine, according to which "*French is our war booty*." This reference highlights the historical and political issues related to linguistic choices in Algeria, where French, despite its colonial heritage, remains a vector for teaching and knowledge production. English appears as an alternative likely to reposition the country on the international academic stage, but its implementation raises numerous challenges in terms of teacher training, educational resources, and societal acceptance.

We gather from the above that the issue of establishing English in higher education has led to debates among university professors. From then on, a central question arises: How can the Algerian university reconcile international openness and the preservation of linguistic diversity without marginalizing one of its languages of use?

4. Research Methodology

The dynamics of linguistic restructuring of the Algerian educational system, as well as the gradual adoption of English at the expense of French, sets major challenges. In the context of this study, it is about examining the perceptions and attitudes of university professors toward the officialization of English as the language of instruction in higher education in Algeria. This linguistic transition, although motivated by the imperatives of academic globalization and employability, raises debates about its effects on the status of French in higher education.

To achieve this objective, we chose to conduct a mixed investigation, focusing on both qualitative and quantitative analysis through a questionnaire aimed at university teachers including assistant lecturers, lecturers, and professors from various disciplines and fields: biology, chemistry, architecture, political science, and physics.

The teachers are from different generations (aged 32 to 68). This difference in specialty, age, seniority, and rank has enriched our survey. The investigation was conducted at the level of the Mentouri Brothers University Constantine 1 and at the Salah Boubnider university hub, as well as the Assia Djébar ENS of Constantine 3 University.

Our research is based on an exploratory and descriptive approach aimed at analyzing teachers' perceptions regarding linguistic transformations in higher education. The exploratory approach allows for the identification of the main issues and challenges related to this reform, while the descriptive dimension aims to highlight the general trends that emerge from the teachers' perceptions.

The sampling of French language teachers was conducted using a non-probabilistic method through reasoned choice, targeting teachers specialized in various disciplines such as language didactics, literature, language sciences, and translation. The objective is to gather varied perspectives to better understand the impact of the reform on pedagogical and academic practices.

In total, 70 usable responses were collected through the questionnaire, including 50 from university professors in scientific fields and 20 from French teachers. The choice to include them in the survey is explained by the special place that French occupies in the Algerian university point. Indeed, the gradual introduction of English in scientific fields inevitably raises the question of the status of French, long used as the language of training and higher education. French teachers through provide an essential perspective: both as practitioners of a discipline directly concerned by this linguistic reconfiguration and as privileged observers of the transformations in academic language practices. In order to go deeper into certain aspects that the questionnaire did not allow for, a supplementary interview was also conducted with these teachers.

4.1. Presentation of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed taking into account the established hypotheses, which will be presented and examined during the analysis of the results. In principle, each hypothesis guides the formulation of one or more questions, depending on the objectives pursued by the survey. The arrangement of the questions was thus designed to ensure a logical correspondence with the hypotheses and allow for the collection of relevant and usable data.

Each question was designed with the aim of collecting specific information on a precise aspect of the subject of the survey. Thus, when drafting the questionnaire, our priority was to ensure the precision and clarity of the questions, while ensuring their coherence and thematic organization. A survey cannot be effectively conducted with a heterogeneous set of questions disconnected from each other.

Our questionnaire, distributed online and in paper version, includes 22 questions (19 closed questions and 3 open questions), divided into 5 sections:

- **General information:** this section aims to create a profile of university teachers from different disciplines (gender, age, seniority, taught specialty).
- **Perception of the use of English at the university:** this section aims to clarify how teachers perceive the transition to English in scientific and technical fields (opinions on the introduction of English, perceived motivations behind this reform).
- **Consequences for French language teaching and its teachers:** this section examines the current position of French in the university and its future in a context of linguistic change (the future of French, consequences on the place of French in teaching and research).
- **Teacher training and adaptation:** this section explores how teachers adapt to these changes and whether they receive training to enhance their linguistic skills (access to English training, scientific publications in English, difficulties encountered in teaching or publishing in English).
- **Uses and challenges related to the transition to English:** this last part seeks to identify the shortcomings in the adoption of English as the language of teaching and academic research (lack of teacher training, lack of educational resources, difficulty adapting to change).

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Teacher Profile

The hypothesis that allowed for the formulation of questions related to this first component is that the disciplinary composition and seniority of university teachers influence their perception of the reform and lead them to evaluate the transition to English thru the lens of French teaching and pedagogical practices. The responses to the first question show that the respondents are predominantly women (66.7%), which could reflect a broader trend in French language teaching in Algeria, where women are often overrepresented in the field of literature and languages (Benrabah, 2013).

We have 50% of respondents who belong to the 41-50 age group, and 70% have been teaching in French for 11 to 20 years, which indicates an experienced population, likely to have an informed view on linguistic issues in higher education. The predominance of French teachers specializing in language sciences (46.7%) and language didactics (30%) is particularly significant in the context of this survey. These two disciplines, which account for 76.7% of the respondents, are directly concerned with the issues related to linguistic policies and the dynamics of language contact in higher education.

Language science teachers, who represent the largest portion of respondents, are generally trained to analyze the transformations of language practices and the sociolinguistic implications of educational reforms (Calvet, 2002). Their expertise allows them to assess the impact of English not only as a language of instruction but also as a factor influencing the hierarchy of languages in the Algerian academic context.

Language didactics teachers, representing nearly a third of the participants, are also well-placed to assess the pedagogical implications of the transition to English. Their role is essential in supporting students and in developing learning strategies adapted to a multilingual environment (Moore & Gajo, 2009).

On the other hand, the low representation of literature teachers (20%) and translation teachers (3.3%) could limit the expression of a perspective more focused on the cultural and heritage dimension of French at the university. This could partly explain

why the responses focus more on the challenges of internationalization and professional adaptation rather than on the identity and historical aspects of French in Algeria.

5.2. Perception of the use of English at the university

The second part concerns the perception of the use of English at the university. Our hypothesis is that the use of English is perceived as a lever for internationalization and modernization of the university system, although concerns remain about its repercussions on the linguistic balance at the university. The perceived motivations behind this reform vary: while some teachers consider it an academic necessity, others see it as an attempt to gradually marginalize French in higher education. The responses reveal a rate of 96.7% of teachers who express a "favorable" opinion of this reform, with 60% of responses being "very favorable." This majority acceptance contrasts with concerns about the effects on French language teaching (63.3% believe the impact will be negative).



Figure 1: Perception of the use of English

In the interview, the teachers fear the future of French:

- « *Je pense que l'avenir du français à l'université en Algérie est en marginalisation par rapport à l'anglais surtout avec la nouvelle génération qui est en faveur pour l'anglais* »
- « *En dégradation par rapport à la nouvelle politique linguistique du pays* »
- « *Il me semble que le français perdra peu à peu du terrain dans la société algérienne, tiendra à tête en moins utilisé comme langue* »

- « *Il est en péril, à cause de la politique de la marginalisation qu'il subit depuis des années* »
- « *Le français serait de moins-en-moins utilisé dans l'université algérienne surtout pour les branches scientifiques* »
- « *D'ici dix ans, le français va perdre sa place étant donné que la nouvelle génération opte pour pratiquer l'anglais beaucoup plus* »
- « *Je pense que le français n'a plus d'avenir en Algérie* »
- « *Incertain !* »

This contradiction reveals a tension between adhering to the imperatives of academic globalization and the fear of marginalizing French.

Among the justifications advanced for the use of English, academic globalization is recorded with a rate of 73.3%, which comes out on top, followed by the modernization of the university system (43.3%). In the interview, science faculty members argue that:

- « *Selon moi, l'anglais pourrait être bénéfique dans l'enseignement, si l'on tient compte de l'évolution des termes appartenant à cette langue* »
- « *La documentation en anglais est plus riche* »
- « *La maîtrise de l'anglais est devenue nécessaire, surtout pour lire des travaux en rapport avec nos contenus enseignés. Nos étudiants gagneraient énormément à maîtriser l'anglais. Il y a beaucoup d'auteur qui publient en anglais dans le domaine des sciences du langage. Donc, le recours à l'anglais est presque inévitable* »
- « *À travers la traduction on pourrait créer des ponts entre deux langues notamment dans la recherche documentaires* »

However, 26.7% of teachers also see it as an attempt to reduce the influence of French, confirming the hypothesis of a linguistic shift perceived not only as progress but also as a geopolitical reconfiguration of languages in Algeria. If 93.4% of respondents consider French to be an important or very important language in higher education, English enjoys even broader support, with 100% of respondents rating it as important or very important.

This implicit hierarchy between languages reflects a growing recognition of the role of English, but also the persistence of French in academic and scientific practices.

The students' poor command of English constitutes a significant obstacle, noted by 26.7% of the respondents. This data highlights a pedagogical difficulty, as the introduction of English as the language of instruction assumes a smooth transition for students. However, several studies (Grin, 2016; Coleman, 2006) show that the effectiveness of teaching in a foreign language strongly depends on the linguistic level of the learners, otherwise it risks exacerbating inequalities and hindering the understanding of disciplinary content.

5.3. Consequences for French language teaching and its teachers

By asking the questions in the third section, we want to know if the transition to English risks having a negative impact on the place of French at the university, particularly by reducing the number of teaching hours and professional opportunities for French teachers. This reform could lead to a reconfiguration of the status of French in teaching and research, with a risk of long-term marginalization. The responses indicate an overwhelming majority (76.7%) who fear a reduction in hours and positions allocated to French, reinforcing the idea that the reform is perceived as a threat to the status of French in Algerian universities. However, 43.3% believe that French will remain an important language for teaching and research, as some teachers point out:

- « *Même si l'anglais est introduit dans l'enseignement/apprentissage à l'université algérienne, le français demeure une langue de rayonnement culturel et scientifique* »
- « *J'estime que la langue française a occupé depuis des années une place cruciale dans tous les domaines en Algérie notamment le domaine scientifique, donc sa présence reste primordiale en Algérie et en parfaite complémentarité avec la langue anglaise* »

While 40% predict a gradual decline. These results reflect uncertainty about the future of French in a context of linguistic reforms.

The main obstacle identified is the lack of teacher training (80%), which underscores the need for institutional support to ensure an effective linguistic transition. Moreover, 33.3% of teachers mention difficulty adapting to new practices. This result reflects an institutional and professional challenge, as the adoption of a language of instruction is not limited to a matter of individual linguistic competence but involves a complete

overhaul of pedagogical practices, evaluation methods, and classroom interactions. Finally, 26.7% of the teachers surveyed mention the historical influence of French, as two biology teachers confide:

- « *Le français est l'héritage de l'Algérie, je pense qu'il reste une langue très importante et pourrai servir la science* »
- « *Le français sera toujours présent, en réalité je ne crains rien sur son avenir parce que je pense qu'on ne pourra jamais se séparer d'une langue qui fait partie de notre dialecte et de notre identité. Je pense que l'intégration de l'anglais favorise encore plus la recherche scientifique et nous permet de s'ouvrir sur le monde d'être* »

These responses illustrate the complexity of transitioning to an English-speaking university system and the need for a progressive and inclusive approach.



Figure 2: Consequences for French language teaching and its teachers

5.4. Teacher training and adaptation

For the questions related to the fourth section of the questionnaire, the hypothesis is that, although some teachers have benefited or wish to benefit from English training to adapt to the changes in the academic evolution, a significant portion of them still face difficulties teaching or publishing in English. This situation is explained by the absence of a systematic training program and the lack of institutional incentives to strengthen teachers' linguistic competence.

The answers provided thru these questions confirm our hypothesis. Indeed, only 13.3% of teachers have already received training to adapt to this new context, but 53.3%

would like to receive one. This shows a willingness to adapt, although resistance exists (26.7% state they do not feel the need for training).

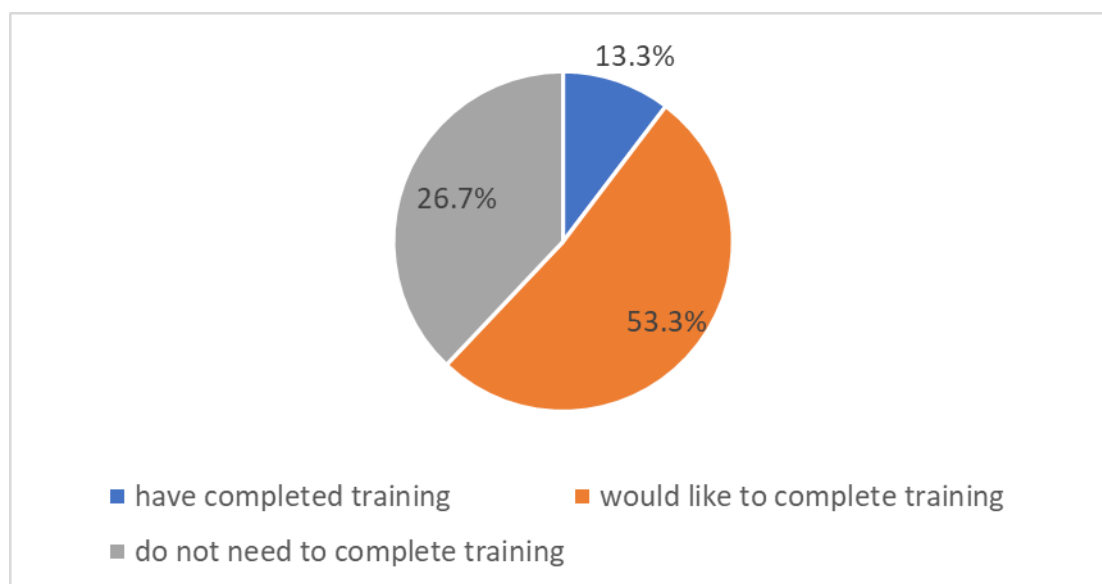


Figure 3: status of English language training

Among those who are considering training, 46.7% want to improve their English level and 26.7% wish to publish in English. These data confirm the importance of English as a tool for scientific enhancement, but also the challenges it represents for teachers primarily trained in French.

5.5. Uses and challenges related to the transition to English

We opened the fifth section to verify the hypothesis that the adoption of English as the language of instruction and research is hindered by several major obstacles: the lack of teacher training, the insufficient availability of educational resources in English, as well as the difficulty of students and teachers adapting to this change. These challenges could slow down the effective implementation of the reform and limit its short-term effects.

The results of the questionnaire highlight several major obstacles to the adoption of English as the language of instruction and research at the university. The lack of teacher training appears to be the main obstacle, for 80% of university teachers, highlighting this deficiency. A chemistry teacher explains: " *Pour mener à bien la transition du français à l'anglais il faut mettre en place un plan bien étudié surtout en termes de formation*". Another architecture teacher expresses, stating: " *Cette transformation bute sur plusieurs plans: ça nécessite une formation adéquate*

pour les enseignants, une infrastructure mise à la disposition des enseignants et aux étudiants". Another teacher adds: " L'ouverture sur le monde en sciences sociales et humaines nécessite la maîtrise et l'accès multilingue aux sources d'information et de recherche, le meilleur moyen serait la traduction. Pourquoi une transition ? plutôt une coexistence."

According to a ST (Science and Technology) teacher: *" La transition se fera par une bonne formation des enseignants d'abord."*

This recorded rate confirms the absence of a structured institutional framework to support teachers in acquiring linguistic skills adapted to the demands of higher education in English. As Hamel (2008) points out, the transition to a foreign language in an academic setting requires a significant investment in training, both to ensure pedagogical quality and to ensure sufficient linguistic proficiency among teachers. In equivalent, the lack of pedagogical resources in English is reported by only 10% of teachers, which indicates that the challenges related to the integration of English are not primarily material. However, this low proportion can also be explained by a lack of awareness or underutilization of existing resources, requiring better support for teachers to identify and leverage the available English-language educational tools.

5. Conclusion:

The present study highlights the perceptions and attitudes of university professors toward the linguistic transition Algeria is experiencing, marked by the introduction of English in scientific and technical fields. The results reveal a tension between a majority adherence to English, perceived as a tool for modernization and international academic integration, and persistent concerns about the future of French, which have been the reference language in higher education. If a majority of teachers recognize the strategic importance of English, many fear a gradual marginalization of French and an imbalance in the university linguistic sight.

It emerges from this survey that the question is not to substitute one language for another, but to think of a complementarity that values institutional bilingualism. The Algerian university must position itself as a multilingual space, capable of reconciling international openness and pedagogical continuity, without neglecting Arabic and Tamazight, which contribute to cultural and national identity. In this sense, the success of the reform will depend on the

implementation of a progressive transition, inclusive and accompanied by adapted mechanisms for teachers and students.

In light of these results, several recommendations are necessary. First of all, continuous teacher training appears essential to strengthen mastery of academic and disciplinary English. Next, the provision of bilingual educational resources would facilitate a gradual introduction of English, while maintaining French as a heritage and academic language. Moreover, targeted support systems should be offered to students to reduce access inequalities related to linguistic skills. It would also be appropriate to consider a functional distribution of languages according to disciplines, allowing for the exploitation of complementarities between English, French, Arabic, and Tamazight.

Finally, the promotion of multilingualism must be at the heart of university policies, not as a constraint but as a strategic resource for international openness and the identity anchoring of the Algerian university.

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