

**The Utility of Using English in Business Companies:
A Case of the Algerian Context**

أهمية استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية في الشركات التجارية: حالة من السياق الجزائري

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Abstract:

Over the last few years, many studies have dealt with the place of English in the workplace. In this regard, this paper aims to explore the use of English language in the Algerian multinational companies and how it impacts the business deals with foreigners. A quantitative study was carried out to collect data through a questionnaire given to the administration staff. The questionnaire contained a set of open-ended and multiple choice questions. The data were analyzed through the procedure of tabulation statistics. The study revealed three main findings. First, the English language is mostly used with foreigners for communication purposes especially via E-mails. Second, the use of English is more influenced by prior language knowledge than by gender since the results revealed that females are more competent and advanced in English than males. Moreover, prior language knowledge impacts employees' performance at the workplace in terms of misunderstanding and anxiety when using English through business communication (meetings, telephone calls and presentations) with foreign counterparts. Third, the use of English has a positive impact on the company's business deals with foreign partners. The results demonstrated also the employees' needs to improve their four language skills.

Keywords: Algerian business companies; Business English; English for Specific Purposes; English in the workplace.

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ملخص:

على مدى السنوات الماضية، عالجت العديد من الدراسات مكانة اللغة الانجليزية في مكان العمل. في هذا الصدد، يهدف هذا المقال إلى استكشاف استخدام اللغة الانجليزية في الشركات الجزائرية متعددة الجنسيات ومدى تأثيره على الصفقات التجارية مع الأجانب. تم الاعتماد في هذه الدراسة على المنهج الكمي لجمع البيانات من خلال تقديم استبيان إلى موظفي الإدارة. احتوى الاستبيان على مجموعة من الأسئلة المفتوحة والأسئلة متعددة الاختيار. تم تحليل البيانات من خلال إجراء جداول الإحصاء. أظهرت الدراسة ثلاث نتائج أساسية: أولاً، تستخدم اللغة الانجليزية في الغالب لأغراض التواصل خاصة عبر البريد الإلكتروني. ثانياً، يتأثر استخدام اللغة الانجليزية بعامل معرفة اللغة السابقة أكثر من عامل الجنس بحيث بينت النتائج أن الإناث يتميزن بالكفاءة اللغوية أكثر من الذكور. لهذا تؤثر معرفة اللغة السابقة على أداء الموظفين على شكل سوء الفهم والقلق عند استخدام اللغة الانجليزية من خلال الاجتماعات والمكالمات الهاتفية والعروض التقديمية مع نظرائهم الأجانب. ثالثاً، استخدام اللغة الانجليزية له تأثير إيجابي على الصفقات التجارية للشركة مع الشركاء الأجانب. زيادة على ذلك، أوضحت النتائج حاجة الموظفين إلى تحسين مهارات اللغة الأربعة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: شركات الأعمال الجزائرية؛ اللغة الانجليزية للأعمال؛ اللغة الانجليزية لأغراض خاصة؛ اللغة الانجليزية في مكان العمل.

1. Introduction:

The English for Specific Purposes (ESP) literature shows that numerous studies have focused on the use of English in the workplace and this is mainly due to the important status of English in different fields. Therefore, many multinational companies in the world adopted English as a corporate language to enter the world of job market. Algeria, as a rich country regarding its natural resources such as oil and natural gas, is currently trying to consider English as a common language in the workplace. In this sense, many studies have been carried out on English in the workplace through discussing different points of view as (Al Khatib, 2005; Al-Buainain, 2011; Kubota, 2013; Hiranburana, 2017; Paolo & Tansel, 2019).

With the spread of English as a global language (Crystal, 1997), business organizations in the world started using English to accomplish their

communication and business transactions in the workplace. As a result, businessmen were attracted to learn English because of the growing demand of ESP especially in the Business English area due to its significance and acceptance as a worldwide language. However, many studies found inadequacy between learners' desires and the courses offered by course designers because of the continuing change of English language needs.

2. English in the Algerian Workplaces:

The use of English in business settings became widely increased particularly in multinational companies around the world. As a result, Algeria adopted English as the corporate language in its business contexts and its utilization was extended to the domain of oil industry led by the British and American companies located in the south of Algeria. Therefore, the demand for English was increasing especially in business workplaces due to its important role as a lingua franca in global business. Additionally, English was demanded as a crucial language for employees working in multinational enterprises such as Sonatrach, because it has become the language that is used by “secretary, manager and directors...” (Belmihoub, 2017, p. 06).

Nowadays, English is not only a foreign language taught in the Algerian schools and universities, but it also occupies different positions in many other domains such as Oil and Maritime industries, Marketing and Media. There are studies that focused on the standing of English in the Algerian workplaces such as Beddiaf (2018) and Benrabah (2013) through which it was found that English has a valuable status on the one hand and on the other hand, employees noted that mastering English is very essential for their professional career as well as for getting better job positions. Furthermore, Benrabah (2013) deduced that the participants were conscious of the significance of English as a vital tool of successful communication in the globe.

The utilization of English in Algeria was chiefly based on accomplishing the different activities related to day-to-day business communication such as emails, presentations and meetings. Hence, several

business workplaces regard employees' English abilities and competencies as a needed condition to fulfill a job (Djaileb, 2012). In addition to the role of English in enhancing the country's economy as stated by Hutchinson & Waters (1987) who argued that English was the key to accelerating the flow of funds to the oil-rich countries. The focal point of this current study is to examine the use of English in the Algerian workplaces through exploring the key variables that may impact the use of English in business settings. Even though there are various articles that have shown considerable results related to the use of English in the work environment, this research aims to accomplish the gap of knowledge of many studies undertaken in Algeria that haven't been dealt with gender and prior language knowledge variables, and to explore new aspects regarding the use of English in the business context. The reasons behind drafting this research are manifold. First, the mismatch between the trainees' needs at the workplace and the courses offered at the universities in Algeria. Second, it is clear that the use of English by Algerian employees affects their performance in one way or another at the workspace. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the factors that may impact an employee's performance. Third, most of employees in the Algerian multinational companies use English for communication purposes. It is requisite, then, to explore the language skills that are required and should be improved for effective communication.

3. Literature Review:

Recently, numerous studies have been done regarding the use of English at the workplace. In this respect, Kubota (2013) investigated the use of English language by Japanese expatriates and Chinese office workers at work. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews in 6 manufacturing companies in Japan, and 3 in China. These studies revealed that English was used as a lingua franca at workplaces in China. Indeed, the language choice depended on the nature of work, tasks, linguistic background and individual subjectivity. Moreover, English language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) were important and extensively used at the workplace. On the other hand, He (2017) checked the use of English by Chinese professionals at the workplace. The

data that was collected through a questionnaire and online interview in three types of organization showed that participants utilized both of Chinese and English languages equally at the place of employment. Furthermore, the frequency of English wasn't significantly used at the workplace; however, it was important for communication purposes. In addition to the use of English among three kinds of establishment (Government, public service and company), the company rated the highest frequency use of English skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) followed by government (writing) and public service (reading). In opposite context, Beddiaf (2018) found that English gained important value in the Algerian oil-industry context compared with French language. Accordingly, Belmihoub (2017) pointed out that English language utilization increased due to the oil- gas industry among Algerians. Both of these studies focused on the use of English at the work site and adopted approximately the same data gathering means, but they attained different results.

Clement & Murugaval (2018) found that English is demanded in workplaces through interviewing employees about the importance of English in ensuring effective performance within different companies around India. The findings indicated that speaking was rated as an important skill in the working area. Conversely, Hiranburana (2017) discussed the important situations where English language was practiced in business communication in the Thai workplace. A questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were used to collect information from 100 Thai companies, 5 letters and 81 e-mails. The results demonstrated that written English was mostly (66.7%) used at the workplace rather than the spoken form (47.2%). The most used skills by Thais at the workplace were reading and writing. Additionally, it was observed that English was present in memos (66%), meetings (65.3%) and written reports (63.9%). Concerning the obstacles, speaking and listening were the most difficult skills faced by employees at the workplace.

Al-Khatib (2005) dealt with a different aspect of English in the workplace through investigating the communication needs of tourism and banking personnel in Jordan by adopting Hutchinson & Water's (1987) and

Dudley-Evans & ST John's (1998) work of target needs/ situation. The data was collected through questioning and interviewing workers. The results showed that employees (tourism and bank) made use of English for communication objectives in the workplace, especially travel agency workers. Moreover, reading was rated as the most used skill followed by writing, speaking then listening which was considered as the most necessary competence that needed to be enhanced. Indeed, tourism employees showed a favorable attitude towards English more than their counterparts of bankers. Conversely, Mohan & Hariharasudan (2020) obtained different findings regarding the needs of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) in terms of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW) for Indian managers in printing industries through questioning employees. The results denoted that listening outstripped speaking, then came writing, and finally reading was the least demanded. What is more is that speaking was the most crucial skill for external communication followed by listening, reading and writing. The studies mentioned above targeted different sides of English language communication needs, attitudes and skills by adopting the same data collection instrument; however, they achieved divergent outcomes concerning English skills (Al-Khatib, 2005; Mohan & Hariharasudan, 2020).

Zourgui (2018) shed the light on English as a Lingua Franca in terms of communication needs for hotel receptionists in Algeria. A questionnaire was administered to the informants to assemble the data. It was pointed out that participants were facing difficulties in speaking and mainly pronunciation and had a positive attitude towards non-native accents of English. Indeed, a major gap and insufficiency showed up regarding the training offered by the hotel. In a similar context, Benrabah (2013) noted that "Graduate students and researchers feel an urgent need for English language proficiency to reach important personal and/or professional goals (e.g., raising student achievement, increasing employment opportunities at home and abroad)" (p.124). Camps (2019) found through a semi-structured interview of three professionals that oral activities, telephone conversations were among the most encountered barriers by professionals when making use of English at the workplace in Mexico. For that reason, he suggested

that living abroad experiences are beneficial and contribute to solving oral activities problems.

Al-Buainain (2011) discussed the needs and use of English by graduates of Qatar University in their workplace by administering a questionnaire to these participants. It was stated that English language skills were extensively used by graduates in civil service. Further, the use of English skills revealed a variation from one context to another. Also, the frequency of English use rated a high percentage. Thus, the study unveiled that this type of job has an effect on the use of English at the workplace. Similarly, Djaileb (2012) dealt with the performance of university students in terms of English language four skills and issues faced by them and suggested to focus on selecting authentic materials in teaching/learning English that allow students to implement their knowledge in the real world.

Paolo & Tansel (2019) dealt with the effect of the level of English skills on the labor outcomes of Turkish women. A quantitative study was undergone through an Abivariat Equation Framework. The study demonstrated that the use of foreign languages, especially English, reported high earning returns for male rather than females. Moreover, the knowledge of a foreign language is fruitful and positive for the job market performance of women in Turkey.

This paper attempts to examine new aspects of English at the work location that haven't been addressed before in Algeria. The work focuses on the basic variables that may have an effect on the use of English in the working environment. Abundant researches emphasized the use of English in the workplace by dealing with skills, attitudes, ELF, BELF, communications needs and use; but they neglected to discuss gender or prior language. This quantitative survey will try then to offer some details on these elements and their major role.

4. Research Methodology:

The main purpose of this article is to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do employees use English in their workplace?
2. What could be the key variables that may impact the use of English in the workplace?
3. How could the use of English impact the company's business deals with foreign partners?

This study adopted a quantitative research methodology to investigate the use of English, and to determine the key variables that may impact the use of English in the workplace. It relied on the theory of Hutchinson & Waters (1987) on "target situation analysis". Quantitative data was gathered from an Algerian company. The sample comprised 22 Algerian participants who occupy different positions. The questionnaire was addressed to the administration staff (all the employees). It included three parts. The first part focused on the personal information of the employees (gender, age and job position). The second part covered the employee's English background (learning English). The third section concentrated only on the use of English in the workplace or professional information (frequency, language choice, skills and situation where English is used). Over a period of 30 days, data has been selected, categorized and organized according to English use, language background, language choice and frequency, gender, and skills. The analysis was performed through a tabulation statistical process.

Ten of the participants (10) were males, twelve (12) of them were females. They held various positions in the company as (commercial agent, team leader, Electro-mechanic engineer, human resources responsible, sales and purchase assistant, executive assistant, HSE engineer, accountant and purchasing manager).

5. Data Analysis:

The collected data was analyzed through a tabulation process.

01. Question One: What are the languages used in the company?

Option	Arabic	French	English	Ar/Fr	Fr/Eng	Total
Number	01	02	03	03	13	22
Percentage	04%	08%	12%	12%	64%	100%

Table.1 Languages Used in the Workplace

The table above shows that English (12%) is the most used language in the workplace compared to Arabic (04%) and French (08%). However, French and English (64%) are used extensively compared to Arabic and French (12%). The results show that the choice of languages used in the workplace (French and English) is mostly based on foreign languages rather than local ones.

02. Question Two: English is mostly used at the workplace by:

Option	Male	Female	Both	No answer	Total
Number	03	09	09	01	22
Percentage	14%	41%	41%	04%	100%

Table.2 The Use of English by Gender

The table above indicates that the English language is mostly used by females (41%) at the workplace rather than males (14%). However, the table illustrates that only one case (01) did not answer the question. Moreover, it is clearly demonstrated that females outnumber men, and females are more advanced in terms of English competence. Also, English is equally (41%) used by males and females in the workplace.

03. Question Three: How often do you use English at the workplace?

Option	Daily	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
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Number	09	02	09	01	01	22
Percentage	41%	08%	41%	05%	05%	100%

Table.3 The Frequency of English Language Use

The table illustrates that English is used equally by both employees both (males and females) on a regular basis (41%). That is to say, employees need English daily for accomplishing different business communication activities such as writing emails. As it is displayed in the table, only one case among the employees who rarely (05%) uses English in the workplace. Moreover, another employee declares that he never (05%) uses English. As a result, it is clear that English is used everyday in the enterprise.

04. Question Four: how do you evaluate your English language level?

Option	Number	Percentage%
Beginner	09	36%
Intermediate	07	28%
Upper-intermediate	03	18%
Advanced	03	18%
Total	22	100%

Table.4 Employees’ English Language Level

The table above stands for the employees’ English language level, both males and females. It is evident that the majority of the workers are beginners (36%) followed by intermediate level (28%). Moreover, (18%) of them have an upper-intermediate level in English. The minority of employees, especially women (14%) are described as being advanced in English.

05. Question Five: What are the activities that require the use of English with your foreign partners?

Option	Number	Percentage%
Emails	06	27%
Meetings	04	18%
Reports	04	18%
Presentations	04	18%
Telephone calls	02	09%
Conferences	01	05%
Negotiations	01	05%
Letters and Faxes	0	0%
Total	22	100%

Table.5 The Activities that Need the Use of English

Table 5 informs that employees need English language massively for email transactions (27%). However, meetings, reports and presentations are less required in the workplace (18%). Telephone calls and negotiations (05%) rarely demand the use of English in the workplace.

06. Question Six: Which language skills do you think are most needed at the workplace?

Option	Number	Percentage%
Reading	01	05%
Writing	10	45%
Listening	03	14%
Speaking	08	36%
Total	22	100%

Table.6 Employees’ Needed Skills in the Workplace

As it is noticed, writing rated as the most required skill (45%); followed by speaking (36%), listening (14%) and reading (05%).

07. Question seven: Do you think that the use of English in the workplace can increase the company’s business deals globally?

Option	Number	Percentage%
Yes	20	90%
No	02	10%
Total	22	100%

Table.7 Impact of English Language Use on Company’s Business Deals

The findings illustrate that English language use has a positive (90%) impact on the company’s business deals globally which leads the employees to believe that English is the language that can help their business advance and extend on an international scale.

08. Question eight: Do you think that employees’ lack of English mastery can impact the company’s business deals with foreign partners?

Option	Number	Percentage%
Yes	19	86%
No	03	14%
Total	22	100%

Table.8 The Negative Impact of Employees’ Lack of English Mastery on a Company's Business Deals with Foreign Partners

Table 8 shows that the majority of employees (86%) agree that the lack of English mastery impacts their performance in the workplace and influences negatively the company’s business deals with foreigners.

6. Results and Discussion:

According to the results, three capital points have been revealed. First, English is extensively used in the workplace for communication transactions, especially emails. Second, the pivotal factor that affects employees' accomplishment in the workplace is prior language knowledge. Third, the consequence of the English language use on the company's business deals with foreign partners is twofold (positive and negative).

The present research's results showed that English is used regularly in the Algerian workplaces in particular multinational companies and its subsidiaries for communication aims. Moreover, the choice of language in multinational settings depends on foreign languages rather than local languages to achieve communicative goals. In other words, the use of foreign languages particularly (English) is associated with the nature of activity that needs the implementation of English as a communication medium within the company's headquarters. It is concluded through the research that French and English (64%) are mostly used in the job site compared with Arabic and French (12%). On the other hand, the majority of the company's clients are local which in one way or another contributed to the continuity of using French language in the Algerian business contexts. Concerning the use of English by gender, the results reflected that females use English more frequently (41%) than males (14%). Furthermore, the number of women (12) is higher than men (10) in the workplace and this explains the wide use of English by females. Another aspect that describes the extensive use of English by females is the language background and the job position that requires the use of English such as (purchasing manager, sales assistant and marketing manager). In addition to that, employees use English daily to sometimes in terms of frequency (41%) in order to accomplish their quotidian activities. Regarding employees' English language level, the results demonstrated that the greater numbers of employees were beginners (36%) and only (18%) were advanced, mainly females. However, (28%) of them were intermediate and (18%) were both upper-intermediate and advanced. According to results, there is a noticeable correlation between employees' level and English language background.

This implies that employees' English language level varied from one category to another. That is to say, employees' level is evaluated in accordance to each one's English language background which may have an approving or disapproving effect on their performance.

The obtained findings indicated that prior language knowledge is described as being the primary variable that marks the use of English in the workplace. Concerning gender, it was confirmed that females (41%) are more motivated to learn a foreign language than males (14%) and they do have better language aptitudes. Thus, gender can negatively impact the use of English in terms of unbalanced and inequality in English use between males and females in the workplace. It was also noticed that females were seen more competent in conducting different communication transactions easily, quickly and efficiently. This can allow them to reach better levels in English, and therefore promote them to higher job roles. Contrariwise, males are regarded as less motivated to learn English; subsequently, it prevents them from carrying out communication activities successfully. Males' performance could be negatively influenced by the lack of motivation in terms of limitation in ability compared with females while using English. As a result, this can create miscommunication hindrances that can harm the job career. However, the results conceded that prior language knowledge is the principal variable that affects both male and female employees' English use, in terms of misunderstanding and anxiety. Therefore, employees feel anxious while using English with their foreign partners due to the fact of being misunderstood and of misusing appropriate technical terms in oral exchanges. As a result, prior language knowledge may not have unsatisfactory repercussions only on the employees' performance in the workplace, but also on the company's business deals. It can be deduced that employees' English prior knowledge is inadequate due to the Algerian educational curricula that seem to not equip the learners with the indispensable abilities to enter the world of labour market.

It can be mentioned from the interpretation of the results that the use of English can strengthen the ties between the company and other organizations throughout the world. A great number of employees (90%)

agreed that English has a substantial role in raising the company's profits globally because of its momentous status. Moreover, workers described English as the most required language to conduct business and view it as the lingua franca that connects headquarters to its subsidiaries around the world. They also asserted that almost all forms of communication; in particular the written ones are conducted in English. Therefore, all respondents claimed the necessity of mastering English in order to facilitate daily business activities, improve the company's image across the globe, and increase its advancement and prosperity. The participants stressed also the importance of English in opening up a multitude of job opportunities and developing careers as proclaimed by Sebda (2012) who stated that learning English contributes to the workers' career advancement.

Moreover, the results indicated that the use of English can negatively impact the company's business deals with foreign partners, as (86%) employees declared that the lack of English mastery affects the company's worldwide business. Thus, employees believe that a bad command of English can result in misunderstanding problems and difficulties in transmitting the right information. In the same vein, Clement & Murugavel (2018) affirmed that holding weak English skills affects the career prospects of a considerable number of young graduates. Besides, the deficiency in oral communication skills needed to be boosted because this inadequacy may prevent the workers from conducting efficient oral activities such as presentations, meetings, and marketing operations that require the use of speaking abilities, and may consequently act negatively on the firm's partnership with alien clients.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations:

This article highlighted the use of English in the Algerian work sites as well as the role of weighty variables in affecting this use. The study came up with three major findings. First, English is used regularly in the Algerian workplaces essentially for written communication intentions. Second, prior language knowledge is regarded as the most powerful variable that may impact the use of English in the working space as compared to gender. Yet,

gender is seen as an element that can affect the use of English as regard to the inequality between language qualifications of both males and females. Further, prior language knowledge as well has an influence on the use of English in the workplace in terms of misunderstanding and anxiety due to employees' educational level disparity and language learning background, since employees expressed a feeling of unease when performing some tasks in English. In a similar way, some difficulties were confronted by the workers such as misunderstanding, most importantly when they utilized inappropriate terms when sending electronic mails to their foreign partners. Third, being equipped with strong English competencies can make potential customers feel more confident and make the business function as smoothly as possible. However, the lack of English can prevent the personnel from operating successfully across national and international boundaries and from getting ahead in their job career. It was also found out that English was mostly produced in written documents rather than in spoken forms. Equally, the same results have been obtained by Hiranburana (2017) and Moody (1993). The employees said that they desire to focus on all four language skills, and they prioritize them as follows: writing, speaking, listening and reading. Yet, speaking was rated as the most important skill needed to be developed. In a similar sense, a lot of studies revealed that employees agree that speaking is the most difficult skill required to be enhanced in the workplace as affirmed by Zourgui (2018) and Camps (2019).

Finally, the participants contended that learning business English is paramount for them and they stated that speaking is the most crucial language skill that has to be strongly reinforced, since many tasks demand a sound control of oral capacities such as delivering presentations, taking part in business encounters, negotiating, and leading meetings. It should be noted that having personnel equipped with good business English skills enables the employees to become linguistically and interculturally competent and helps organizations to reach agreements smoothly and meet goals efficiently on local and global levels. It is recommended that Algerian multinational companies should cooperate with universities to provide their workers with

relevant English courses ensured by qualified ESP teachers to better satisfy the employees' desires and meet the companies' expectations.

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