



## ***ESP and Business English at University in Algeria***

Abdelkader BEDDIAF\*

University of Khenchela, (Algeria)

[abdelkader.beddiaf@univ-khenchela.dz](mailto:abdelkader.beddiaf@univ-khenchela.dz)

Abderrazak BEDDIAF

University of Khenchela, (Algeria)

[beddiaf.abderrazak@univ-khenchela.dz](mailto:beddiaf.abderrazak@univ-khenchela.dz)

### **Abstract**

*This scientific paper provides a comprehensive analysis of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at Algerian universities, with a specific focus on Business English. It aims to examine the current state of ESP programs in Algerian higher education institutions and the relevance of Business English skills in the Algerian context. The paper explores the challenges, strategies, and future prospects for implementing ESP and enhancing English proficiency in Algeria.*

### **Article info**

Received

July 13.2023

Accepted

May 02.2024

### **Keyword:**

- ✓ ESP
- ✓ Algeria
- ✓ Globalization
- ✓ University
- ✓ linguistic skills:

<sup>A</sup>author corresponding

## 1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, English has significantly evolved in status in Algeria, both in the educational and economic spheres, among others. The language started gaining historic momentousness roughly during especially the last five years when the government decided it is high time a shift in policy from both a rentier-ruled to emergent investment-based economy and a French-dominated to English-based education was adopted. Self-expressive and evident a significant role assigned to the English language in the country is its vehemently swift integration in higher education, following official directives resulting from the strategic linguistic orientation built on the place of choice granted to English as the language of training and teaching; i.e., the language of quality and efficiency to thrive and go global. This approach targets a qualitative improvement of the academic sector towards reorganizing and strengthening Algerian higher education, subsequently bringing to the fore core issues pertaining to the dimensions that need to be delineated and carefully defined in ESP, or otherwise EMI, training to foster its contribution, maximize its outcomes, and concretize its assessment by practically weighing the methodology adopted and the complementarity of the linguistic and curricular dichotomy. Basturkman (2010), in this particular

direction, refers to the difficulties teachers may encounter when faced with didactic sequences that require prerequisites.

## 2. Algeria's Linguistic State of Affairs

While Algeria, like some other countries, has been under the pressure of finding out appropriate contemporary ways of installing a globalized economy in preparation for the post-modern era (Jones, 2000), the implantation and distribution of foreign languages (FL) at all levels in the Algerian society requires adequate integration of the necessary mechanisms for the purpose; this is especially with regard to the linguistic demands of the present-day internationalizing labor market, where English language skills prove every day more a necessity rather than an option. This is more so considering the plentiful wealth in natural resources Algeria abounds with that attracts foreign companies specializing mainly in the exploitation of gas and oil. This perspective greatly encourages investment in English as a foreign language (EFL). It should be noted, for that matter, that the frequency of English use in large enterprises exceeds, on average, a third of overall written and oral communication (Laur, 2003).

Indeed, and as far as the Algerian context is concerned, this universal dimension offers one more reason for the education

system to take charge of these considerations on the ground, and therefore to train staff in these sectors that are part of a dynamic determined by a global economy. Subsequently, the education system is a hub for the training of potential and active professionals to match international socio-economic competitiveness. As a matter of fact, the 2019 marked the dawn of a new era in the history of the Algerian linguistic policy and education system, the Algerian authorities are using British and American institutions to support this linguistic transition.

English has been gaining importance in Algeria regarding its global entrepreneurial and economic worth. Long before, it was only general English (GE) that people sought to acquire regardless of the purpose; recently, however, people have become more aware of the English for specific purposes (ESP) they should pursue to meet their needs in the least time possible. For that, promotion of ESP in education system is deemed of unquestionable merits and potential benefits.

### ***3. The Status of English in the FL Market in Algeria***

The French language is the first foreign language in the Algerian school system. A desire to integrate the teaching of English into schools has been expressed since the reforms instituted by the Bendjedid

government (1979-1992). As a result, the teaching/learning of English as a first foreign language took shape, but as an option in 1993. And it was in 1995 that the Algerian government decided to make a change to the school curricula developed with a view to ousting French and adopting English in elementary education.

Parents of pupils therefore had the option to direct their children in the proposed language choice. They had to choose between English and French as the first FL in their basic school curriculum. It was then found that French prevailed as shown by the national statistics released by the Algerian Ministry of National Education in 1996 and 1998 (Derradji, 1999). Derradji reports these results from a number of surveys on the positioning of English in relation to French in the second cycle, conducted by specialists and supervised by the Ministry of National Education (1999). Indeed, during the 1995/96 school year, among the 4,617,728 registered pupils, the choice of the English language as a first language was only 1.27%. The primacy was clearly to the French language as the first FL.

The maintenance of the status of French in the school system was thus confirmed in the face of a hesitant interest in English. In the same line of argument, Queffélec et. al. reports an ingrained presence of French in both its written and oral modes both formally and informally in different

domains in Algeria; such formal fields where the French language is found of firm place include administrative documentation, the economic sector, and the national press (2002). The anchoring of English, the author further sustains, is comparatively quite limited because English remains less imposing in education, and even less so in terms of documentation, but with a slight gradual increase socio-economically. Subsequently, it seems indisputable that the language needs of the Algerian population, most especially in relevance to English, will before long be swiftly changed in view of the modern internationalization trends imposed by the necessity of the inclusion of the country in the global system. This linguistic-economic perspective will give a strong and solid advantage to English to access modernity and the updating of Algeria's education system and economic development by opening up to the world.

To this end, we can read in a ministerial report written in 2005, under the direction of secondary education and the National Commission of Algerian Programs, that the aim to be achieved with regard to the teaching of English as a second FL would be to harmonize the integration of society into modernity by mastering this medium language code which is omnipresent and is considered a prerequisite in any type of interaction. This will include the full participation and sharing of scientific and

cultural as well as civilizational ideas and experiences from a universal perspective.

From this point of view, Algeria's official bodies came to the conclusion that it is high time they measured the symbolic, functional and pragmatic value of English by redistributing the roles of importance assigned to FL. English occurs to predominate, deservedly, on this FL spectrum of precedence. Consequently, this linguistic alternative, seen from a parametric perspective and from a linguistic awareness standpoint in a multilingual context involving English as a global and hyper-central language (Graddol, 2006), brings forth the potential of promoting educational improvement and socio-economic progress in Algeria. The growing inclusion of English in the school system can safely be deemed promising to alter the FL market in Algeria.

Accordingly, the dissemination of English through increased insertion and teaching in the Algerian national space and in its educational system plays a crucial role anchoring its value of utility and worth of practicality and effectiveness that will rise in proportion in accordance with its diffusion homogeneity. The spread of the language depends, from this point of view, on the permeability of the different levels of the Algerian sociolinguistic situation; namely, whether or not the status of English, considering its relevant pragmatic

aspect, would allow its integration into the linguistic configuration of the country as the first FL in the same way, or even in place of, French (Arabic and French being considered super-central languages in Algeria). As a result, the influence of English in Algeria pertains to territorial parameters and local factors that are likely to favor, eventually, its implementation at the super-central level as schematized by De Swaan (2001)'s gravitational model where peripheral languages are scattered individually speaking but become conjoined to a central language by speakers of more than a single particular language (Calvet, 1999).

#### **4. FL Teaching in Algeria**

In order to open up to the world, not to mention integration into the global market where economic factors play a major role in creating linguistic needs, Algeria invests in the teaching of FL by seeking to develop multilingual and multicultural skills. However, this investment in languages varies from language to language, and the degree to which they are integrated into the education system determines the progress of their teaching, a progression that remains dependent on the place allocated for each of these languages as a FL. It should be noted, however, that French continues to occupy a privileged position among the languages in question. The French language is still taught as from the primary school as the

first FL; followed by English which was previously taught in middle school, but started to be taught in primary as from the school year of 2022-2023, as a second FL; then finally Italian, Spanish or German in secondary school (high school) beginning in the second year, more precisely in the specialty of Letters and Foreign Languages.

The linguistic situation in Algeria is similar to a laboratory in the sense that multilingualism, and code-mixing/switching, is a part of the language uses of Algerians. As a result, the coexistence of several languages that characterizes this country constitutes a linguistic richness. At present, English is introduced as early as third year elementary education while the use of the French language is widespread. At least that is what Ibrahimy observes, noting that the acuity of the use of French remains significant (1997), and would persist for yet more years ahead.

It was in 2005 that the ministerial bodies commissioned a team of specialists to make educational changes through their expertise. In fact, these experts came from a variety of backgrounds (from the US, India, and Jordan) to seize the state of play to better understand the teaching of English in Algeria and try to overcome the shortcomings and propose better solutions in this area. Thus, Algerian-American cooperation agreements have been signed,

with a commitment on the part of the United States to graciously fund this educational reform to the benefit of Algeria, including the design of English textbooks, but also and above all ensure the training of trainers. It is also important to note that another area of cooperation emphasizes the introduction of new technologies within the classroom.

The very essence of such an agreement is expressed earlier on by Bizet and Bigaud (1986) in writing that the traditional means of documentation (books, different school materials, etc.) are means of autonomy by allowing more controlled learning, which escapes, or rather remains less graspable, while modern "new means" would bring a plus to the benefit of students, like computers or the media.

## 5. *EFL Teaching*

In the context of globalization, classrooms become an area where teachers should diversify their teaching skills, because it is claimed to consolidate and secure interaction with speakers from different backgrounds. When EFL teachers are regarded as key players in implementing teaching objectives, they are expected to have cultural awareness, to act accordingly in the modern education systems with different gender, experiences, and backgrounds. The Algerian education system is a multilingual system that includes teaching two official mother tongues: Arabic and

Tamazight, and foreign languages: French and English from the primary school, and other languages from secondary school.

Teaching English as a foreign language does not mean just teaching how to speak English, it is rather about guiding the learners to approach its culture, values, and ways of life from a linguistic perspective. For that, EFL teachers can present a sustained source by accepting differences among cultures. EFL teachers are expected to have an open mind that can lead them to have a high intercultural sensitivity (IS) level, which can help their students engage in a multicultural context.

Studies demonstrated that EFL teachers proficient in more than two languages possessed confidence in interaction. Interaction confidence is defined as the confidence of the individual to interact effectively with others in an intercultural context, which relates to three aspects of communication: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. These aspects are more applied by EFL teachers in Algeria. Hence, the model serves as a basic framework to explain and measure the IS of teachers who teach foreign languages and are affected by foreign cultures.

A qualified ESP teacher requires, besides efficacious classroom management, ability to tailor effective syllabi, materials, and teaching methodology as well as learning assessment adequate to meet learners' needs (Richards, 2001). Dudley-Evans and

St John (1998) are of the view that considering that an ESP teacher, in practice, does much more than just teaching, the term 'ESP practitioner' turns out more expressive and inclusive than 'ESP teacher', especially because the role of this ESP classroom actor crystalizes more the more specific the field is. Be that as it may, cross-national experiences of ESP teachers, who possess cultural knowledge and norms towards the target language, have not been sufficiently researched in Algerian settings.

## **6. ESP in Algerian Universities**

Numerous are the studies that emphasized the link between academic programs and ESP. They are not meant to be separated (Bacha, 2003; Bhatia & Candlin, 2001). ESP focuses on providing learners with language skills specific to their field or profession. It tailors their language skills (engineering, medicine, tourism, and IT). It equips students and professionals with the necessary English language proficiency to excel in their respective domains, and enhances their employability prospects by equipping them with the specialized linguistic abilities demanded in the job market.

In the Algerian context, ESP plays crucial roles in the country's educational and economic landscape. As mentioned above, Algeria, as a multilingual country with Arabic as its official language, recognizes the importance of English as a global

language of business, science, and technology. The country has recently more than ever been working extensively on actively promoting the learning and usage of English, particularly in specialized domains, to enhance academic and economic development. It is dynamically seeking foreign investments and engaging in international trade partnerships. Proficiency in Business English is vital for Algerian professionals to effectively engage with international clients, negotiate contracts, and participate in global business activities. English proficiency gives them a competitive edge and facilitates economic growth, foreign direct investment, and job opportunities.

Thus, ESP, including Business English, provides Algerian professionals with specialized language skills tailored to their respective fields. Whether it is engineering, finance, tourism, or technology, English proficiency allows individuals to access international knowledge, research, and expertise. It enables Algerian professionals to participate in conferences, collaborate with foreign counterparts, and stay updated with global academia and industry trends. Effective communication in English bridges the language gap, facilitates knowledge transfer, and promotes Algeria's integration into the global economy.

## 7. Business Education and Curriculum

The ESP curriculum in Algerian universities, theoretically speaking, typically focuses on providing English language skills and knowledge tailored to specific professional domains or disciplines. The goal is to equip students with the necessary English language proficiency and specialized vocabulary relevant to their future careers. The specific structure and content of the curriculum may vary depending on the field of study, such as engineering, medicine, or business.

As a matter of fact, Algerian universities have now launched on extensive initiatives to offer programs in various fields and at all levels, and English has become a vital medium of instruction in higher education and research. Proficiency in English enables students to access international academic resources, participate in exchange programs, and pursue higher studies abroad. It also facilitates research collaborations with foreign institutions, allowing Algerian researchers to contribute to global scientific advancements.

Algerian educational institutions and professional development programs have recognized the importance of Business English proficiency. Many universities and training centers now offer courses and programs specifically designed to enhance English language skills for business

purposes. These initiatives aim to equip students and professionals with the necessary language abilities to excel in the global business environment.

Considering the crucial roles of ESP –and thus Business English– in the Algerian context, with its significant implications for academia, industry, and the economy, implementing ESP programs at Algerian universities can present several challenges; including, among others, teacher training and professional development that play a crucial role in enhancing ESP provision in Algerian universities as well as ESP focus on teaching English language skills in specific contexts relevant to students' academic and professional goals. In view of such these challenges, improving ESP in Algerian universities pertains to teacher training and professional development; and this includes:

- The availability and quality of business English courses in Algeria can vary, depending on the institutions offering such programs.
- These courses may be provided by language schools, universities, or private training centers.
- The effectiveness of business English programs would rely on factors such as the qualifications and expertise of instructors, the relevance of course content to real-world business scenarios, and the

opportunities for practice and application of skills.

### ***Relevance of ESP in Algeria***

Algeria is part of the global economy (especially with its striving to join in economic partnership bodies and organizations such as BRICS) and is increasingly engaging in trade and business relationships with individuals and organizations from different countries. English is widely used as a common language in international business communication, enabling effective collaboration, negotiations, and exchange of information. English language skills prove to be globally crucial in the world of business and employment, and so is the case turning out to be in today's Algeria, especially in the context of large-scale cross-border business. These enterprises often require employees who are proficient in English to communicate with their global counterparts, participate in international conferences, and handle documentation and reports in English.

This condition is often considered a serious and operational component in big enterprises, or in other economic sectors where the "service" requires multiple linguistic skills (Roy, 2003; Lamarre & Lamarre, 2006); the juxtaposition of languages transpires manifestly for writing, or linguistic convergence in writing and speaking.

Thus, the objectives in question are multivarried:

- To assess the current state of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs in Algerian universities.
- To investigate the effectiveness of ESP instruction in developing English language skills among Algerian university students.
- To identify the challenges and obstacles faced by Algerian universities in implementing ESP programs.
- To explore the role of ESP in preparing Algerian students for professional and business contexts.
- To propose recommendations for improving ESP instruction and integration in Algerian universities.

Aiming to establish a scientific and systematic process typical of the new era, an effective implementation of an up-to-date ESP course allows for five dimensions: ESP teacher training, students' needs, the global context, the concerned academic and/or research field, and pedagogical constraints. At the level of university, there is an emerging adequate environment and an increasing interest of positive attitudes towards ESP and English-based education at all levels: bachelor of art, master of art, and PhD

studies. This demonstrates the importance of ESP to Algerian universities and reveals its significant relevance in academia.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In order to meet the growing demands of academics, multiple considerations (pedagogical, linguistic, academic or others) are implemented within the framework of the implications of ESP in the Algerian university. The objective being the urgent training of teachers to enable provision of specific English courses that align with the new expectations projected. These new measures, which aim to promote ESP, certainly deserve further research. The action plan adopted by the Ministerial Council for this purpose has become essential. The analysis of the situation overall is expected to be significant as it would contribute in assisting ESP teachers in Algeria to overcome challenges, provide them with foundation for proper support in the teaching process, and explain how EFL teachers perceive the ESP equation. Besides, teachers are required to rethink how to cope with specific purposes, address didactic interaction, foster their level and establish an authentic productive environment regarding the Algerian context to gain more insights on the topic.

## 9. Bibliography List :

1. Bacha, N. N. (2003). English Across Academic and Professional Communities: A Study of EFL Learners'
2. Basturkman, H. (2010). Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes. Basing Stone: Macmillan.
3. Bhatia, V. K and Candlin, C. (2001). Teaching English to Meet the Needs of Business Education in Hong
4. Calvet, L-J. (1999). *Pour une écologie des langues du monde*, Paris, Plon.
5. Derradji, Y. (1999). Le français en Algérie : langue emprunteuse et empruntée. Le disciplinary approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
6. Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M.J. (1988). Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multi-français en Afrique, 13, pp. 71-82.
7. Heller, M. (2007). « Bilingualism as Ideology and Practice », in M. Heller (ed.), Bilingualism: A Social Approach. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1-22.
8. Henderson, W., Dudley-EVANS, T. and Backhouse, R. (1993). Economics and Language. London: Routledge.
9. Hutchinson, T. & Waters, A. (1987). English for Specific Purposes: a learning centered approach. International Colleges and Universities, 2, 33 – 62.
10. Jones, E. (2000). The case of a shared world language. In M. Casson and A. God-

ley (eds.), *Cultural factors in economic growth*. Berlin: Springer, pp. 210–235.

11. Jones, E. (2000). The case of a shared world language. In M. Casson and A. Godley (eds.), *Cultural factors in economic growth*. Berlin: Springer, pp. 210–235.

12. Queffélec, A., Derradji, Y., Debov, V., Smaali-Dekdouk, D., Cherrad-Benchefra, Y. (2002). *Le français en Algérie: Lexique et dynamique des langues*. De Boeck Supérieur.

<https://doi.org/10.3917/dbu.cherr.2002.01>

13. Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University

14. Roy, S. (2003). « Bilingualism and standardization in a Canadian call center : Challenges for a linguistic minority community », in Robert BAYLEY and Sandra R. SCHECTER (dirs), *Language Socialization in Bilingual and Multilingual Societies*, Multilingual Matters, p. 269-285.

15. Bhatia, V. K and Candlin, C. (2001). *Teaching English to Meet the Needs of Business Education in Hong*

16. Calvet, L-J. (1999). *Pour une écologie des langues du monde*, Paris, Plon.

17. Derradji, Y. (1999). *Le français en Algérie : langue emprunteuse et*

*empruntée. Le disciplinary approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

18. Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M.J. (1988). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multi-français en Afrique*, 13, pp. 71-82.

19. Heller, M. (2007). « Bilingualism as Ideology and Practice », in M. Heller (ed.), *Bilingualism: A Social Approach*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1-22.

20. Henderson, W., Dudley-EVANS, T. and Backhouse, R. (1993). *Economics and Language*. London: Routledge.

21. Hutchinson, T. & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: a learning centered approach*. International Colleges and Universities, 2, 33 – 62.

22. Jones, E. (2000). The case of a shared world language. In M. Casson and A. Godley (eds.), *Cultural factors in economic growth*. Berlin: Springer, pp. 210–235.

23. Jones, E. (2000). The case of a shared world language. In M. Casson and A. Godley (eds.), *Cultural factors in economic growth*. Berlin: Springer, pp. 210–235.

24. Queffélec, A., Derradji, Y., Debov, V., Smaali-Dekdouk, D., Cherrad-Benchefra, Y. (2002). *Le français en Algérie: Lexique et dynamique des langues*. De Boeck Supérieur.

<https://doi.org/10.3917/dbu.cherr.2002.01>