

Impact of the introduction of English in economic studies on improving students' mastery of this language: The case of 1st year students at HSMDE in 2024

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Abstract:

In this article, we aimed to analyse the impact of the introduction of English as a language of study in economic fields in 2023/2024 on improving students' level in this language. We carried out a questionnaire study among first-year students at the HSMDE, which enabled us to observe the positive impact of this integration on improving both their receptive and productive skills, giving them greater confidence in using this language and the desire to progress in its learning.

Keywords: Language of instruction; English integration; Receptive skills; Productive skills.

Jel Classification Codes: A230, A29, Y9.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Today's world is increasingly interconnected thanks to technological advances and globalisation, and a strong mastery of English has become essential for communicating on an international scale. The English language also offers privileged access to a wealth of intellectual and academic resources. In fact, many academic and scientific documents are published in English, which makes understanding this language essential for research and innovation and for staying up to date in one's field of study. It is therefore undeniable that English plays a vital role in global learning and continues to be an essential skill for university students and professionals to ensure effective learning and active participation in the global academic community.

Aware of this challenge, the current Algerian Government has launched a series of initiatives aimed at reinforcing the learning of English. Firstly, with the generalisation of its teaching from the third year of primary school from September 2022 (Ouali, 2023) and then the obligation for universities to include it as a teaching language in science departments, from the first year, from the start of the 2023/2024 academic year (Djekhar, 2023; Acherchour, 2023).

The study question:

In this context, the question that arises is : *What impact did the introduction of English in economic studies have on improving students' mastery of this language?*

This question raises the following issues:

- What are the students' perceptions and attitudes towards this reform?
- What factors help or hinder their adoption of English?

Hypothesis:

To answer these questions, we put forward the following hypotheses:

- The majority of students are in favour of English compared to French, which they are rare in mastering.
- The integration of this language will force students to access contents exclusively in English, which will inevitably improve their skills.
- Students' curiosity and desire to succeed will be a favourable factor for learning, but their direct immersion in teaching entirely in English may frighten them and slow them down.

The Objectives of the study:

Our present study aims to :

- Offer a critical perspective on the teaching of English at university, highlighting both the opportunities and the challenges of such integration.
- Shed light on the challenges of teaching English in Algeria, both for students and for teachers.
- Highlight the difficulties of early teaching of the language and direct immersion of students and teachers.
- Analyse the extent to which the decision to include English as an exclusive language of instruction from university entrance onwards has prompted students to make efforts to improve their level of English.

The importance of the study:

Our interest in this subject is justified by:

- The growing importance of English as a language of knowledge and the need for students and teachers to master it.
- The topicality of the subject, with the efforts of the Algerian

authorities to switch universities from French to English.

- The interest shown by students in this language, which more and more of them have mastered and want to learn, compared with French, which has been losing ground in our country for some years now.

Methodology:

Given the nature of our subject and the data we wish to collect, we will rely on the descriptive method in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. We are going to use both secondary information, through the exploitation of various writings on the subject in order to understand the context, and primary information, which we are going to collect using a questionnaire. This will enable us to answer our questions in the best possible way, to test hypotheses and draw conclusions.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Historical development of language teaching in Algeria

Language planning in Algeria has been strongly influenced by colonial history and the struggle for independence. The French occupation introduced French as the language of administration, education and culture. This had the effect of eclipsing indigenous languages and creating a linguistic hierarchy in which French was perceived as the language of modernity and progress and dominated the education system (Benrabah, 2007).

After independence, the Government implemented policies to promote Arabic as the main language of instruction, reflecting a desire to reassert national identity (Maamri, 2009). Thus, the 1976 education law emphasised teaching in Arabic, with efforts to Arabise school and university curricula (Taleb-Ibrahimi, 2015), but French remained widely used in scientific and technical subjects because of the colonial legacy and the need to access academic resources

(Benrabah, 2007). This coexistence between the two languages has always been a source of tension over their status and use (Boumaza & Haddouche, 2022).

English began to emerge as a language of instruction in the 90s, in response to globalisation and the need to integrate Algeria into the world economy. The Ministry of National Education introduced English as a first foreign language in 1993, to replace French, but the project failed in the face of opposition from parents (Belkaim, 2023), and the teaching of English remained limited and often regarded as secondary to Arabic and French (Benrabah, 2013).

The 2000s marked a turning point in language teaching in Algeria. Faced with growing pressure to improve proficiency in English, the Government launched several educational reforms (Madani, 2018). In the current global context, English has become an essential language, particularly in the fields of science, technology and business. At national level, fluency in English is now seen as an essential asset for students and professionals. Companies are increasingly looking for candidates who can communicate in English, which has led to an increased demand for English language teaching programs. Aware of the growing importance of this language, the Government has launched a number of initiatives to promote its teaching, and the Ministry of Higher Education requires it to be included as a language of instruction in universities from the start of the 2023-2024 academic year (Ouali, 2023). The aim of this decision is to strengthen Algeria's position in the international education landscape and to prepare students for the demands of the job market.

2.2. The basics of language learning

Learning a language involves developing a number of linguistic skills, which are grouped into two categories: receptive

skills and productive skills (Davies, 2011; Richards, 2015; Masduqi, Fatimah, & Chotib, 2023).

2.2.1. Receptive skills

They consist of listening and reading. Both are essential for understanding and interacting in the target language (BritishCouncil, n.d).

***Listening**

Listening plays a key role in the development of communicative competence by enabling learners to understand and interpret oral messages (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). Active listening involves according to Magyar & al. (2022) not only receiving sounds, but also understanding the meanings, intonations and emotions conveyed by the speaker.

It allows learners to gain exposure to authentic language, acquire vocabulary and become familiar with grammatical structure (Richards, 2015; Magyar, Habók, & Molnár, 2022; Masduqi, Fatimah, & Chotib, 2023). According to Rost & Brown (2022), listening is a complex process that requires cognitive skills such as attention, memory and inference; learners need to be able to process information quickly while considering context.

***Reading**

The other key receptive skill in language learning is reading, which enables learners to understand and interpret written texts (Grabe & Stoller, 2019; Magyar, Habók, & Molnár, 2022) as well as to acquire knowledge and develop critical thinking skills. Effective reading requires a combination of linguistic and cognitive skills (Davies, 2011; Masduqi, Fatimah, & Chotib, 2023) to access a wide range of information, ideas and perspectives. It thus promotes vocabulary growth and understanding of grammatical structures. According to Grabe & Stoller (2019), it is an interactive process in

which readers construct meaning by integrating their prior knowledge with the information provided by the text.

2.2.2. Productive skills

In the process of learning a language, productive skills enable learners not only to express and communicate their ideas clearly and effectively but also to interact with others and engage in meaningful conversations (Golkova & Hubackova, 2014). These skills consist mainly of writing and speaking.

***Writing**

It is a skill that enables learners to express themselves in writing, to structure their thoughts and to communicate ideas clearly and coherently (Payne, 2020). It is essential not only in an academic context, but also in professional and personal life by facilitating the transmission of information, opinions and emotions (Riswanto & Khaled, 2023). It also encourages reflection and the organisation of ideas and follows a complex cognitive process that requires the mobilisation of linguistic, cognitive and metacognitive skills (Abdelaty, 2023), as it requires learners to be able to plan, write, revise and edit their texts.

***Speaking**

This is the skill of communicating verbally. It is important for social interactions, presentations and discussions and requires according to Tiu & al. (2023) to practice the pronunciation, intonation and rhythm of the target language as well as real-time interaction with interlocutors. It also involves listening skills, as learners must be able to respond appropriately to comments and questions (Kehing & Yunus, 2021; Ghafar & Raheem, 2023). Several forms of oral expression are described in the literature (Cohen & Henry, 2020). Informal everyday conversations, which allow learners to practice the language in a relaxed way, encouraging the use of everyday vocabulary and idiomatic expressions. Formal

presentations which require preparation and organisation. Debates and discussions where learners have to defend their opinions, listen to the arguments of others and formulate responses, using specific vocabulary.

3. Field study

3.1. The research procedures

Following the Government's decision to introduce English as a language of instruction from the start of the first year of university, we wanted to find out whether this direct immersion had any impact on improving students' level of English. Our study focused on first-year students entering to the Higher School of Management and Digital Economy (HSMDE) in 2023/2024. For the academic year under review, the HSMDE received 12 first-year classes, each made up of 30 to 35 students. We randomly selected a class of 33 students (23 girls and 10 boys), all of whom we interviewed by e-mail between May 15th and 22nd 2024. Our sample is non-probabilistic but it allows us to understand the phenomenon.

We used the questionnaire as a data collection tool. In fact, it is the most suitable means of obtaining information directly from the population concerned by the study.

Our questionnaire consists of 17 questions divided into 4 themes as follows:

-Theme 1: Initial level in English (6 questions) the aim is to assess students' level of English on arrival at university in terms of both receptive and productive skills.

-Theme 2: Integration of English (3 questions) the aim of these questions is to assess the new students' apprehension about studying in English and their opinion about this initiative.

-Theme 3: Evaluation of improvement in English language skills (6 questions) the aim is to find out whether this integration has played a role in improving students' receptive and productive English language skills and whether it has given them confidence.

-Theme 4: Future perspectives (2 questions) the aim of these questions is to know if students wish to continue their studies in English and if this encourages them to invest more time in learning this language

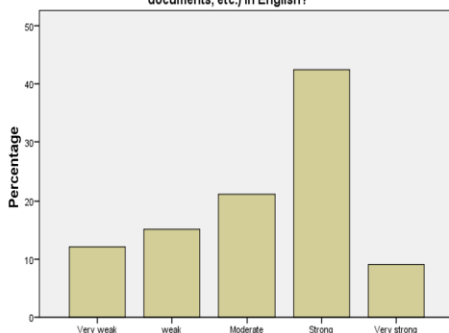
3.2. Results and discussion

We analysed the data using SPSS 24. The tables and graphs that provide answers to our questions are presented and discussed as follows:

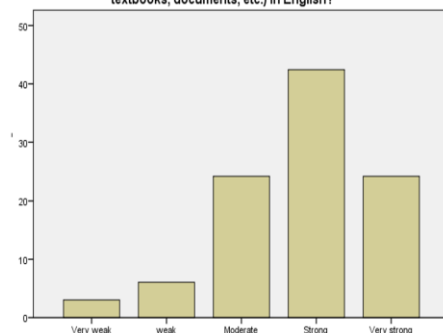
-English receptive skills at the entry to university and after a year of studying in English

Figure.1. Reading skills improvement

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very weak, 5=Very strong) how would you rate your ability, at the beginning of the year, to understand academic texts (articles, manuals, documents, etc.) in English?



On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very weak, 5=Very strong) how would you rate your current ability, after a whole year, to understand academic texts (articles, textbooks, documents, etc.) in English?



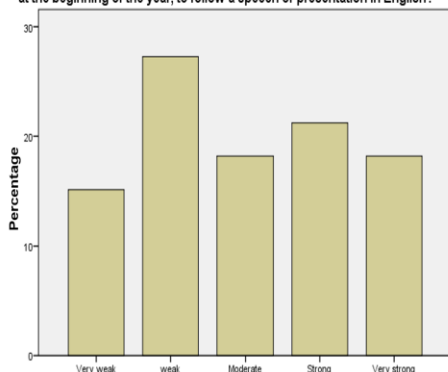
Source: SPSS analysis

We observe that at the beginning of the year, 48.5% of students are average or below average in terms of comprehension when

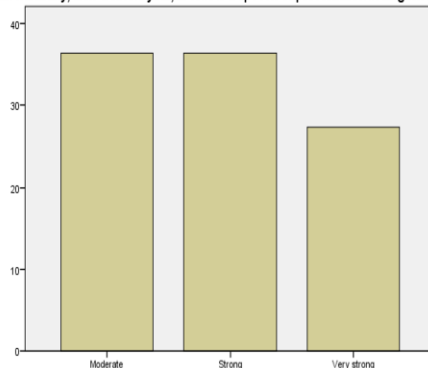
reading English texts, but after a year of teaching, this rate has dropped to 33.3%, which reflects an improvement on this point.

Figure.2. Listening skills improvement

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very weak, 5=Very strong) how would you rate your ability, at the beginning of the year, to follow a speech or presentation in English?



On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very weak, 5=Very strong) how would you rate your current ability, after a whole year, to follow a speech or presentation in English?

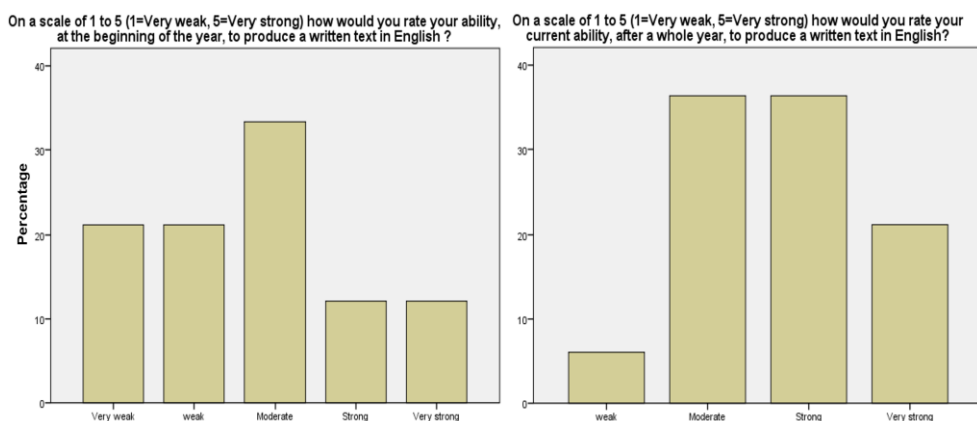


Source: SPSS analysis

We can see that 60.7% of students had difficulty following a presentation in English when they arrived at university. After a year of studying in English, this rate dropped to 36.4%.

-English productive skills at the university entry and after a year of studying in English

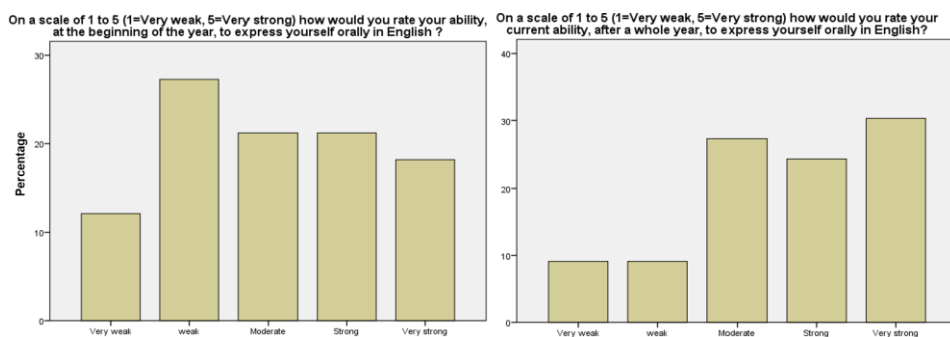
Figure.3. Writing skills improvement



Source: SPSS analysis

The figure shows that 75.7% of students had weaknesses in writing in English at the beginning of the year. By the end of the year, this rate had dropped to 42.5%.

Figure.4. Speaking skills improvement



Source: SPSS analysis

We observe that when they arrived at university, 60.6% of students were unable to express themselves correctly in English; this rate had fallen to 45.5% by the end of the academic year.

-Confidence in the use of English

Confidence in the use of English has increased among students. Although, as Table 1 below shows, 69.7% of them were in favour of this initiative to integrate English, 54.5%, as Table 2 below shows, were apprehensive about studying exclusively in English when they arrived at university.

Table 1. Rating of the initiative to integrate English at university
On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very bad, 5=Very good) how would you rate
the initiative to introduce English as a language of study at
university ?

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Very bad	4	12,1	12,1	12,1
	Bad	1	3,0	3,0	15,2
	Moderate	5	15,2	15,2	30,3
	Good	3	9,1	9,1	39,4
	Very good	20	60,6	60,6	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

Source: SPSS analysis

Table 2. Students' apprehension about studying in English
At the beginning of the year, were you worried about the idea of studying in English?

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	No	15	45,5	45,5	45,5
	Yes	18	54,5	54,5	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

Source: SPSS analysis

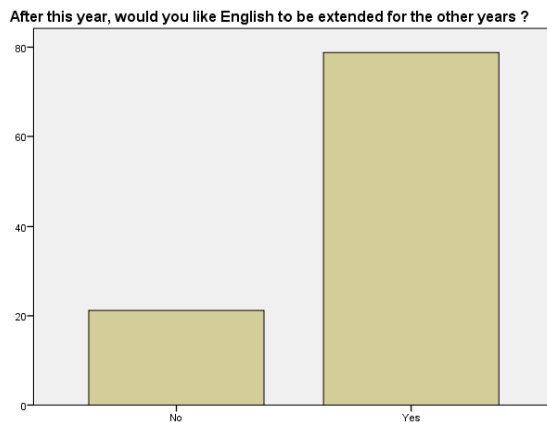
However, after a year of studying in English, 75.8% of them were more confident in their English skills, as shown in following figure 5, and 78.8% wanted to continue studying in English for the rest of their university course, as shown in figure 6.

Figure.5. Confidence evolution in the use of English



Source: SPSS analysis

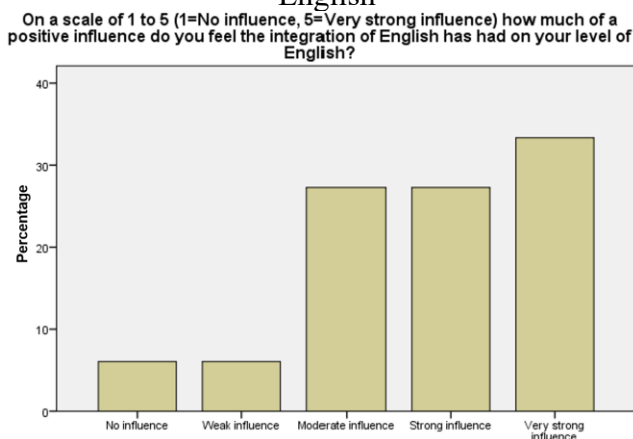
Figure.6. Students' willingness to continue studying in English



Source: SPSS analysis

- Impact on students' level in English

Figure.7. Evaluation of the positive influence on the students' level in English

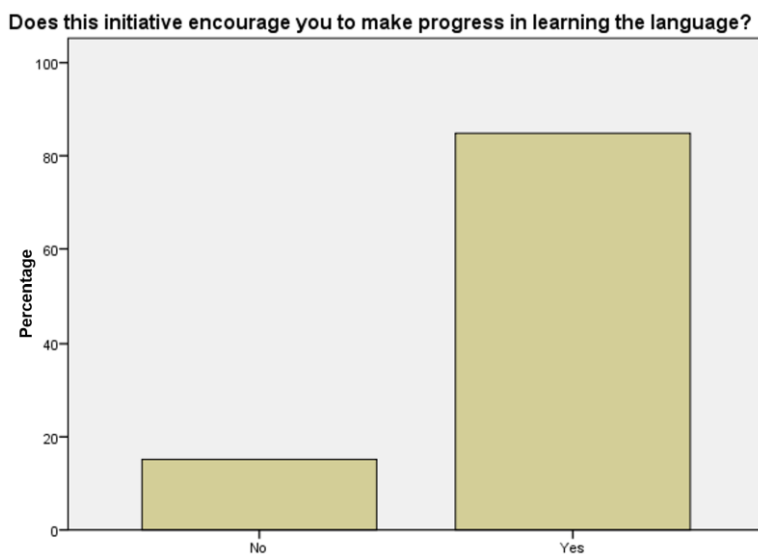


Source: SPSS analysis

We note that 60.6% of the students questioned consider that this integration of English as a language of learning has had a strong or

very strong positive influence on the improvement of their level in this language.

Figure.8. Willingness to make further progress in English



Source: SPSS analysis

The figure shows that 84.8% admit that this integration encourages them to make efforts to progress further in this language.

4. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to analyse the impact of the decision to introduce English as a learning language at the university from the first year of study, on students' level in this language. Our field study, conducted by means of a questionnaire among a first-year class at the HSMDE, showed that the students had succeeded in improving both their receptive (reading, listening) and productive (writing, speaking) skills after only one year of study in English, which may presage a greater improvement in the next few years of studying.

We also found that, despite their apprehension at the beginning of the year, the majority of students welcomed the decision to replace teaching in French with teaching in English, and that most of them wished to continue this learning process for the rest of their studies.

Furthermore, the majority of students interviewed acknowledged that the initiative to introduce English as the language of instruction had had a positive impact on improving their level of English and encouraged them to make efforts to improve their English skills further.

We therefore recommend that the Government continues this integration and implements effective language policies capable of further enhancing the skills of both students and professionals. Raising citizens' awareness of the benefits of multilingualism could also lead to the widespread use of this language in the country and provide access to a wide range of knowledge. Finally, investment must be made in teachers training to keep pace with this trend and to meet the need for advancement and the best possible follow-up for students.

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Appendix

Survey on the integration of English at university and the improvement of English language levels among students

Theme 1: Initial level in English

You are: *

☐ Male

☐ Female

Before coming to university, were you used to accessing resources in English (books, movies, articles, etc.)? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very weak, 5=Very strong) how would you rate your ability, *
at the beginning of the year, to understand academic texts (articles, manuals, documents, etc.) in English?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very weak	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very strong

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very weak, 5=Very strong) how would you rate your ability, *
at the beginning of the year, to follow a speech or presentation in English?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very weak	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very strong

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very weak, 5=Very strong) how would you rate your *
ability, at the beginning of the year, to produce a written text in English ?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very weak	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very strong

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very weak, 5=Very strong) how would you rate your *
ability, at the beginning of the year, to express yourself orally in English ?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very weak	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very strong

Theme 2 : Integration of English

At the beginning of the year, were you worried about the idea of studying in English? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very bad, 5=Very good) how would you rate the initiative to introduce English as a language of study at university? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very bad	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very good

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very insufficient, 5=Perfectly sufficient) how would you rate the degree of integration of English at university? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very insufficient	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Perfectly sufficient

Theme 3: Evaluation of improvement in English language skills

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very weak, 5=Very strong) how would you rate **your current ability, after a whole year, to understand academic texts** (articles, textbooks, documents, etc.) in English? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very weak	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very strong

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very weak, 5=Very strong) how would you rate **your current ability, after a whole year, to follow a speech or presentation** in English? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very weak	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very strong

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very weak, 5=Very strong) how would you rate **your current ability, after a whole year, to produce a written text** in English? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very weak	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very strong

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Very weak, 5=Very strong) how would you rate **your current ability, after a whole year, to express yourself orally** in English? *

1 2 3 4 5
Very weak ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very strong

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1=No influence, 5=Very strong influence) how much of a positive influence do you feel the integration of English has had on your level of English? *

1 2 3 4 5
No influence ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very strong influence

Do you feel that your confidence in your English skills has increased? *

☐ Yes
☐ No

Theme 4: Future perspectives

After this year, would you like English to be extended for your other university years ? *

☐ Yes
☐ No

Does this initiative encourage you to make progress in learning the language? *

☐ Yes
☐ No

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