

Higher Education Policies in Algeria: Promoting English as a Strategic Choice

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Abstract:

Higher education plays a central role in national development by supporting economic growth, social progress, and scientific innovation. In the context of globalization and the growing need to align university training with labor market requirements, many countries have reconsidered their higher education policies. In Algeria, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research introduced a new reform strategy in the academic year 2022–2023 that promotes the use of English as a key language of instruction, particularly in scientific and technological fields. The aim of this study is to analyze this policy reform and assess its potential contribution to improving the quality and international orientation of Algerian higher education. The study adopts an analytical approach based on policy analysis and the review of official documents and recent academic discussions. The findings suggest that the integration of English is expected to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and scientific research by facilitating access to international academic resources and global knowledge production. It also contributes to better alignment between university training and the requirements of the international labor market. Moreover, the promotion of English in higher education may strengthen international research cooperation, university partnerships, and the global visibility of Algerian academic output. While the reform is still in its early stages, the study indicates that the strategic integration of English represents a significant step toward the modernization and internationalization of the Algerian higher education system.

Keywords: Higher Education, English language, Scientific Research, Labor Market, Education Policies.

1- INTRODUCTION:

Higher education is considered one of the essential pillars of sustainable development, contributing significantly to the social and economic progress of nations. It is not merely a means of transmitting knowledge but serves as a powerful tool for building individuals' capacities and developing their skills to align with the needs of local and national markets. By fostering critical thinking, innovation, and specialized expertise, higher education institutions help produce a workforce capable of driving economic growth and adapting to evolving industry demands.

Furthermore, higher education plays a vital role in preparing generations capable of facing current and future challenges. Digitalization and accelerated globalization require institutions to stay updated with advancements in technology, international standards, and best practices. These shifts necessitate a dynamic and interconnected approach to education, where students and faculty alike must be equipped to engage with and contribute to the global knowledge economy. Ensuring that educational outcomes align with the changing demands of

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the labor market helps bridge the gap between academic training and practical skills, making graduates more employable and better prepared for professional challenges.

These challenges have led to the adoption of new strategies in higher education. In response, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Algeria has initiated a strategy to strengthen the role of English in university education. Recognizing the global dominance of English as the lingua franca of science, technology, business, and international diplomacy, this strategy aims to enhance the global competitiveness of Algerian graduates. Starting with the 2022/2023 academic year, English instruction has been reinforced across disciplines, promoting its use in research and publications, and providing resources to improve proficiency for students and faculty.

In summary, adopting English in Algerian higher education is a strategic move to enhance educational quality, improve research outcomes, and better prepare students for the demands of the global labor market, while aligning with international trends and promoting cooperation opportunities.

Based on these developments, our research problem revolves around the following questions:

- To what extent does teaching English in Algerian universities contribute to enhancing students' competencies?
- Does this approach help improve job opportunities in the labor market?

Study Objectives

- Analyze the effectiveness of generalizing the use of English in Algerian universities.
- Assess the extent to which the widespread use of English contributes to improving the quality of higher education.
- Highlight the role of English in higher education and its contribution to promoting economic and social development.
- Emphasize the role of English in enhancing university partnerships and international cooperation in the field of scientific research.
- Determine the role of English in marketing Algerian university research and improving its visibility.

2- Study Concept Definitions

1.1. Strategies

The term "strategy" originates from the Greek word "Strategos," which translates to the art of leadership. It refers to "a set of organized methods and rules designed to achieve specific goals" (Hamlaoui & Bouaziz, 2018). Additionally, it can be described as "the art of leadership in facing challenging circumstances and choosing the appropriate means to resolve problems" (Hidayah, 2019). Historically, the concept was used before World War II to describe the application of military tactics to accomplish objectives, particularly in defeating the enemy.

From these definitions, we can deduce that strategy involves comprehensive, well-structured plans and actions aimed at achieving long-term goals. These strategies utilize

resources and capabilities in a systematic way, while accounting for both internal and external factors influencing the process. In the context of this study, this strategic approach is intended to analyze the effectiveness of generalizing English in universities, enhance the quality of higher education, promote economic and social development, strengthen international research cooperation, and improve the visibility of Algerian university research.

1.2. Higher Education

Higher education refers to the educational programs offered by post-secondary institutions, whether in physical or virtual settings. This includes universities, colleges, technical and vocational institutes, and specialized schools. The main objective is to provide knowledge through structured educational programs, involving three key components: faculty, administrative bodies, and students (Ouedia, 2019).

In the context of this study, higher education serves as the framework through which the integration of English is analyzed, aiming to enhance the quality of academic programs, support economic and social development, strengthen international research collaboration, and improve the visibility of Algerian university research.

3- Literature review

The literature review and previous studies provide a foundation for understanding the trends in current research and recognizing the scientific contributions made in the field. These reviews are essential for identifying the strengths and limitations of prior research, which, in turn, assists in developing a robust theoretical and methodological framework. Such frameworks are instrumental in enriching the current study and enhancing its scientific integrity.

3.1. Study by Sudatta Ranasinghe (2012) titled "Perceptions of University Students on the Role of English Language Proficiency in Career Choice and Mobility"

This study seeks to explore the perceptions of undergraduate and graduate students about the impact of English language proficiency on their career decisions. Conducted at two leading national universities in Sri Lanka, the study involved a sample of 96 students, including 81 undergraduates, 11 master's students, and 4 doctoral candidates. To collect data, the researcher used a survey method with a questionnaire consisting of 18 questions. While the study provides detailed descriptive data, the limited sample and focus on only two institutions may restrict the generalizability of the findings. The findings of the study were as follows:

- a. **Positive Attitudes Towards English:** the participants in the study exhibited a strong belief in the value of English proficiency. They view English not just as a subject, but as a vital skill that contributes directly to academic success and future career opportunities. This highlights the growing recognition of English as a global language in academia and the workforce. However, the study does not critically examine how these attitudes translate into measurable academic or professional outcomes.
- b. **Impact on Graduate Studies and Job Opportunities:** the high percentage of students (93%) who agreed that English proficiency is necessary for excelling in graduate studies underscores the academic importance of the language. In today's globalized world, English is the medium of instruction in many graduate programs and is often a prerequisite for admission and success. Yet, the study does not investigate potential

differences between students of varying backgrounds or disciplines, which could affect perceptions.

- c. Private Sector and Career Advancement: the findings that 98% of the sample agrees that English proficiency enables better competition in the job market, particularly for high-paying positions, reinforce the idea that English is seen as a crucial skill for professional success. In addition, the 75% who recognized its role in career advancement points to the growing understanding that English is essential not only for obtaining jobs but also for progressing within those jobs. The research could be strengthened by examining whether such perceptions align with actual employment outcomes, which is not addressed here.

Overall, the data strongly indicate that English is perceived as a key to opening doors in the job market and advancing professionally. The students in the study recognize the competitive advantage that fluency in English provides, especially in the private sector, where international communication and collaboration are often necessary. This awareness aligns with global trends where English is increasingly seen as a gateway to both academic and career success. Nevertheless, the study's findings should be interpreted cautiously due to its contextual limitations and lack of longitudinal or comparative analysis.

3.2. Study by Priya Sharma and Akhilesh Kumar Dwivedi (2024) titled "The Significance of English in Education for the Effective Development in Today's Generation"

This study aims to highlight the importance of the English language in the field of education to promote development. It also seeks to identify the relationship between English and higher education, English and cultural awareness, and English and career prospects. The study sample consisted of 50 individuals, selected using simple random sampling. The researchers employed a qualitative method and used SPSS software to analyze the results.

While the study provides useful insights, the small sample size and limited scope may reduce the generalizability of the findings. The study found the following:

English is the most important language among other languages, as it is used both internationally and globally. However, the study does not explore differences in perception across age groups or academic disciplines, which could influence the relevance of English in various contexts.

Most technologies rely on English, and its importance in the fields of travel, tourism, and cultural exchange cannot be overlooked. Yet, the study does not critically assess how proficiency in English translates into practical outcomes in these sectors.

Both studies emphasize the importance of the English language in promoting individual, social, and economic development in academic and professional contexts. The results suggest that English proficiency is a key to accessing educational and employment opportunities. Furthermore, English plays a role in reducing social and economic gaps and fostering global cultural interaction. Still, the conclusions are largely descriptive, and the study could benefit from analyzing causal links or contextual differences relevant to other countries, such as Algeria.

Based on these findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- As a social tool, language serves as an influential factor in accessing economic and social opportunities and contributes to achieving social and professional identity.
- Students with English language skills are more competitive in the job market, while those with weaker English proficiency may face limitations.
- The role of English in higher education is crucial for academic achievement and access to prestigious academic and scientific journals. It also contributes to the internationalization of higher education, improving university visibility, and achieving global rankings in scientific research.
- The two studies also highlight the significance of English in the era of technology and digital communication, reflecting how language impacts access to information and interaction with the digital world. Nevertheless, the findings remain context-specific, and their direct applicability to Algerian universities requires further investigation.

4- The Importance of the English Language

English is originally a West Germanic language from the Indo-European language family. Its speakers are called "English speakers," and the name "English" is derived from the Angles, one of the ancient Germanic peoples who migrated to Britain.

From an Islamic perspective, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) encouraged learning other languages, emphasizing that "whoever learns the language of a people is safe from their harm." Islam also urges the pursuit of knowledge, and with the advancements in technology and sciences, it is essential for Muslims to keep up. English is widely recognized as the dominant language in scientific research and is the primary medium for communication and interaction among nations (Hassan, 2012).

English holds significant importance in international relations, being one of the official languages recognized by the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Council of Europe, the European Union, NATO, and major economic organizations like OPEC and the European Trade Organization. Additionally, many reports and recommendations issued by international security or political organizations are drafted in English.

Its importance is also evident in global media, as well as in scientific and academic research journals, where English is used in approximately 80% of publications. The language plays a critical role in international security, being the standard language for pilots and air traffic controllers at airports worldwide. Most communication via wireless devices between pilots and control towers is conducted in English to ensure all relevant parties, not just specific pilots, understand the message (Reima, 2005).

In this context, English, spoken by around 360 million people globally and taught in over 118 countries, is of immense value. It allows individuals to communicate effectively with people from various communities and plays a vital role in the business world, where it is the most commonly used and demanded language by many employers.

5- The Historical Context of the English Language

Many people often wonder what factors have made English a global language and what key elements contributed to its widespread use. To address these questions, two main reasons

can be identified: one in the historical and geographical context, and the other in the sociocultural context.

From a historical perspective, by the end of the 18th century, the British Empire had spread English through its colonies and geopolitical dominance. Commerce, science, technology, diplomacy, the arts, and formal education all played roles in making English the leading global language. English facilitated international communication across the globe, being adopted in parts of North America, Africa, Oceania, and many other regions. When newly independent countries gained sovereignty, some of these countries, which had multiple indigenous languages, chose to continue using English as an official language to avoid the political and other difficulties associated with promoting one native language over others.

In the sociocultural context of the 20th century, many people relied on English for their economic and social well-being, particularly in business, communication, and education (Reima, 2005). The global broadcasting of English by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and other stations accelerated its spread, and English became more widely used through official media such as public education and state-supported publications. In 1755, Samuel Johnson published his *Dictionary of the English Language*, providing standardized spellings and usage rules. In 1828, Noah Webster published the *American Dictionary of the English Language* in an effort to establish a standard for American English distinct from British English. In Britain, non-standard dialects or those associated with lower social classes began to lose prominence, leading to the rapid spread of prestigious dialects among the middle classes.

6- The Shift Towards the English Language in Algeria

Independent Algeria inherited the French language as a result of French colonial rule, which lasted from 1830 to 1962. This period was long enough to embed the language deeply within Algerian society, making it a central part of various aspects of cultural and social life. French was widely used in schools, research centers, state administrations, and both government and private media, whether written or broadcast.

In early 2019, Algeria adopted a new policy in its education system, at both the primary and university levels, aimed at strengthening the role of English. This strategy represents a significant challenge and a major shift towards modernizing the educational system as a whole. It reflects new orientations that strive to meet the demands of the era and enhance the competitiveness of the new generation.

The government's interest in English became particularly evident in the political sphere, especially with the election of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune. The government's intention to promote English education became more explicit, seeking to elevate its status as a global language. This effort aims to reduce reliance on the French language, reflecting a sociological shift towards engaging with globalization and the international job market (Al-Quds Al-Arabi, 2022).

6.1. English in Primary Education

Previously, English was taught to students starting from the first year of middle school. However, the Algerian government adopted a new approach by introducing English into

primary education. This decision is considered historic since independence, as President Abdelmadjid Tebboune announced a substantial budget to hire approximately 30,000 specialized English teachers at this level, reflecting the state's commitment to enhancing English language education in Algerian schools as an alternative to French.

The focus on teaching English in Algeria began in 2015 when the National Organization of Parents launched an online campaign urging the government to introduce English in primary schools as an alternative to French. This campaign later developed into an online petition, reflecting the societal inclination towards promoting English language education. The petition stated: “As a parent of a primary school student, I request the government to teach my child English instead of French, which is no longer suitable for science, commerce, or tourism.”

This shift gained further momentum through a CNN Arabic survey conducted in August 2016, where 96% of participants supported replacing French with English in primary schools. President Abdelmadjid Tebboune officially confirmed this decision, starting from the 2022-2023 academic year, by incorporating English into the third year of primary education, declaring: “English is the language of science,” while referring to French as “the spoils of war” (Moustafa, 2023). This statement by the president can be understood as a reflection of a broader reevaluation of Algeria’s cultural identity post-colonialism, where French is viewed as a tool adapted for building a modern Algerian identity, signifying a tension between colonial heritage and the desire for a national identity independent of colonial influence.

In the 2023-2024 academic year, English teaching was expanded to the fourth year of primary education, based on Ministerial Decree No. 216/WTW/MAA/23 issued by the Ministry of National Education on August 21, 2023. This decision highlights the importance of English at the primary level and aims for gradual expansion, enabling students to develop learning skills, acquire knowledge, and improve their communication abilities, while fostering openness to the world.

Moreover, in Circular No. 215/WTW/AA/ issued by the Ministry of National Education on February 8, 2024, the teaching of English was further expanded to the fifth year of primary education. This move demonstrates an increasing recognition of English as a tool for global communication, which enhances the new generation’s ability to engage with diverse cultures and communities.

6.2. Promoting English in Higher Education

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research implemented an urgent strategy in the 2022/2023 academic year to adopt English as a teaching language in universities, research centers, institutes, and higher schools. This decision represents a sociological shift towards the advancement of English, moving away from the historical reliance on French, which had dominated Algeria for over sixty years. The move also reflects a desire to modernize the educational system and meet the demands of the global labor market, enhancing students' ability to interact with new knowledge and contributing to shifts in the country’s cultural and educational identity.

6.2.1. Higher Education Strategies to Promote English

The decision to introduce English as a teaching language in Algerian higher education marks a pivotal moment in the country’s education policy. For decades, French has been the

dominant language of instruction, a legacy of Algeria's colonial past. The shift toward English is seen not only as a move to distance the country from its colonial history but also as a response to globalization and the changing demands of the modern world.

By adopting English in universities, research centers, and higher institutions, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research aims to enhance the country's engagement with the global community, particularly in scientific and technological fields, where English is the dominant language. The introduction of English is also in line with broader educational reforms that focus on improving the quality of higher education, making graduates more competitive in the global labor market, and encouraging international collaboration in research and innovation.

This strategy is part of a larger effort to modernize Algeria's educational framework, enabling students to access global knowledge and participate in international academic and professional networks. It also reflects a desire to position Algeria as a country that can foster modern, internationally minded individuals capable of contributing to and benefiting from global economic and technological advancements.

6.2.1.1. Training Teachers and Researchers

As part of the Ministry's efforts to enhance the role of English in higher education, several strategies have been implemented to develop the competencies of teachers and researchers and expand the use of English: (Nadia, 2024)

- a. Training teachers and researchers, including newly recruited professors, to reach B2 or C1 levels through intensive learning centers at universities.
- b. Scheduling lectures and practical sessions in fields related to science and technology.
- c. Creating groups where subjects are taught in English while continuing to teach humanities and social sciences in English.
- d. Establishing a study environment that encourages the use of English.

Simultaneously, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research initiated the following actions (Algerian Radio., 2024):

- a. Training 58,000 teachers in English teaching techniques.
- b. Organizing weekly regional workshops for university professors.
- c. Holding a training workshop at Houari Boumediene University of Science and Technology in Algiers for 1,000 researchers from central region institutions.
- d. Organizing a training workshop at Oran2 University for 150 researchers from the western region.
- e. Conducting training workshops for 150 researchers from eight universities: Ouargla, Biskra, M'sila, Tamanrasset, Adrar, Ghardaia, and Illizi University Centers.

These initiatives reflect a strategic orientation by the Ministry toward promoting English in higher education, not only improving the proficiency of teachers and researchers but also opening new avenues for academic interaction and scientific research. Through advanced language training, the ability to access modern knowledge and global practices across various scientific fields will be enhanced.

6.2.1.2. Decision 1419 dated December 24, 2022

Decision 1419, dated December 24, 2022, issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, further strengthens the ministry's efforts to promote the English language in research fields, particularly for graduate students, and to support training in interdisciplinary disciplines at the third level.

Based on Annex 01, "Skills Development Network," the English language training aims to:

- a. Develop critical thinking in doctoral students, enabling them to participate effectively in community development.
- b. Cultivate an open-minded attitude and respect for others.
- c. Enhance oral and written comprehension and production.
- d. Strengthen analysis, summarization, and evidence presentation skills.
- e. Foster independence by developing self-assessment skills.
- f. Encourage entrepreneurial spirit and leadership among doctoral students.

Annex 02, "Supplementary Training Program," outlines the general objectives of English language training for graduate students:

- a. Enable doctoral students to participate in conferences and publish research internationally.
- b. Improve the visibility of higher education institutions.
- c. Enhance critical thinking in doctoral students.
- d. Consider the role of ethics in scientific research.
- e. Promote critical assessment in research.

This approach adopted by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research aims to develop the skills of students and researchers, enhancing their proficiency in English. It enables them to engage in national and international events and achieve visibility for national universities and research centers, facilitating communication with the external world.

The introduction of English into higher education represents a significant step toward blending local culture with global sciences. This integration contributes to expanding the knowledge base and increasing employment opportunities for university graduates. Additionally, the creation of a study environment that encourages the use of English enhances the interaction of students and professors with modern literature and global practices, thus contributing to the production of a new generation of qualified academics and practitioners.

Consequently, these initiatives can lead to the development of higher education institutions in Algeria and facilitate integration into the global economy. However, these efforts must be accompanied by strategies to ensure that local languages and national cultures are not marginalized in the process.

7-Conclusion

In light of the findings from this research paper, the integration of English into the educational system, particularly in higher education and scientific research, emerges as a pivotal transformation. This shift transcends linguistic preferences, positioning English as a cornerstone for elevating the quality and international relevance of academic and research

outputs. The dominance of English as the global language of science and technology ensures that embracing it is not merely an option but a necessity in an interconnected and highly competitive world.

By equipping students and researchers with proficiency in English, we unlock unparalleled opportunities for global collaboration, access to cutting-edge publications, and contributions to groundbreaking discoveries. This linguistic adaptation empowers individuals to navigate the ever-evolving job market with confidence and adaptability, positioning them as valuable assets in both local and global contexts. Moreover, the ability to engage with the vast corpus of international knowledge accelerates academic development, enhances critical thinking, and fosters a culture of continuous learning.

On a broader scale, this transition strengthens the capacity of local universities and research institutions to participate actively in the global academic arena. It nurtures a fertile environment for innovation, bridging gaps between local expertise and international advancements. In embracing English, educational systems not only prepare future generations for the demands of globalization but also lay the groundwork for sustainable scientific and economic progress. This transformation is a step toward a future where knowledge transcends borders, empowering individuals and institutions to contribute meaningfully to a world that thrives on shared understanding and collective growth.

Recommendations:

1. **Greater Emphasis on Teaching and Enhancing English in Universities:** as this study emphasizes, English proficiency is no longer a luxury but a necessity in modern education and research. Universities should focus not only on basic language skills but also on advanced English, particularly academic English, which is essential for scientific communication. Strategies such as specialized language training programs, professional development for faculty, and creating environments that encourage the use of English could help embed it more effectively in the academic culture. This can involve partnerships with international institutions or experts to enhance the quality and scope of English language teaching in universities.
2. **Integrating English into Research Paths, Beyond Remote Courses or Language Proficiency:** while remote courses and self-paced language learning can play a role in improving language proficiency, the real challenge lies in embedding English into students' research processes. Universities should ensure that English is used as the primary language for research projects, theses, and academic presentations. This would help students acquire not only the language but also the specific academic vocabulary and structures needed in their fields. Creating research courses that require English as the medium of instruction or providing dedicated research resources in English can also support this integration. By adopting this approach, universities will ensure that students are ready for international academic and professional environments.
3. **Encouraging the Use of English in Scientific Research and Thesis Work:** promoting the use of English in students' graduation theses and scientific research is a powerful strategy for enhancing the visibility of Algerian research globally. Encouraging students to publish their research in English in international journals can help showcase the innovative work coming from Algerian institutions to the global academic community. Universities can support this by creating platforms or funding opportunities for students

to present their research at international conferences or submit articles to reputable journals. This not only helps increase the visibility of Algerian research but also attracts potential collaboration with international researchers, further enhancing the academic stature of these institutions.

In summary, prioritizing English in higher education and research is not just about linguistic advancement but about positioning universities and their students on the global academic and professional stage. By embedding English into teaching, research, and scientific communication, Algerian institutions can enhance their global visibility, foster international collaborations, and equip graduates with the tools needed to thrive in a competitive, interconnected world.

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