



**Towards Generalising the Use of the English Language at the Algerian University
A Critical Study of Teaching “Media and Communication Studies” in English and its
Impact on Achieving the Principles of Media Public Service and the Right to Information**

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Abstract:

This research paper will dissect the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research's project to generalise the use of English in Algerian universities and its positive and negative impact on some disciplines, among them “Media and Communication Studies.” Because of its global importance and prominence, English has become an essential language. However, its generalisation may be incompatible with the local community's ideals, as well as its linguistic and cultural peculiarities.

“Media and Communication Studies” is considered one of the most important university disciplines that will inevitably benefit from the generalisation of English language use, but in specific contexts, it is more related to scientific research and the training of future journalists in a way that will help them practice their journalistic work, especially in terms of obtaining information from original sources through international news agencies, conducting press interviews, and attending international press conferences without the need for translation. Moreover, Algerian media in English may contribute to giving the actual image of Algeria to a Western audience. However, marginalising national languages, their dialects, and the Algerian vernacular may have a negative impact on the principles of media public service and the right to information.

Keywords: English language; Algerian university; Media and communication studies; Public service; Right to information.



1. INTRODUCTION

The English language is the most commonly spoken around the globe. It serves as a lingua franca (ELF), or a universal language for intercommunity communication. It is also a scientific language, so Algeria, like other countries around the world, seeks to generalise its use in its various institutions, especially in critical sectors such as higher education and scientific research. The purpose behind this is to improve connections with Western research and the visibility of Algerian universities abroad, as well as move towards a knowledge economy in conjunction with the Algerian state's recent digitization policy.

Accordingly, this transition will have an impact on numerous academic disciplines, including “Media and Communication Studies.” The latter is one of the vital majors that aim to prepare researchers and equip future journalists to gain access to diverse audiovisual, written, and digital media institutions in order to serve society and citizens by delivering information and raising issues. University education and training in English may help future journalists perform their journalistic duties more effectively, such as gathering credible information directly from original sources and various international news agencies rather than relying on translation, which can distort the news and lead to misinformation. Additionally, because English is considered an international language, it enables journalists to conduct press interviews with individuals from diverse cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds.

However, media practice in Algeria may encounter obstacles due to the language and the extent to which it represents society, which requires objective and complete information in a language that is commonly used and understood by most people. Based on this, we ask the following question: What is the status of media public service and the right to information in Algeria if English is completely integrated into media and communication education at universities?

2. The main reasons for expanding the usage of English in Algeria

All the languages of the world are important to this extent or that by virtue of the fact that the language, whatever it is, is only a means of communication and the exchange of messages and meanings between individuals within society, especially if we know that many languages in the world have been influenced by each other due to wars, trade, and migration, all of which contributed to the emergence of what is known as the phenomenon of cultural cross-fertilisation. The latter, in turn, contributed to the emergence of what is known in linguistics as linguistic loaning (Dunand, 2005).

However, it is important to recognise that the rise of one language over another is impacted by a number of political, historical, religious, and scientific factors. There are languages that



benefited from the military and economic power of their countries, and we find that they spread rapidly thanks to the colonial policy aimed at imposing and implanting their languages on vulnerable peoples and working to standardise, unify, and homogenise the cultures of the world according to what is compatible with their ideas and the template that they want to be common. As a result, the increasing risk of uniformity endangers some local languages under the shadow of the dominant one in the context of globalisation. This alludes to the increasing interdependence and connectivity of global institutions and individuals. Consequently, allowing cultural hybridization (Nederveen, 2009).

This was one of the main reasons for the upgrading of colonisers' languages and the obliteration of many local languages around the world. Various religious missionaries also contributed to the emergence and widespread use of languages. Not to neglect the importance of the linguistic work of researchers in developing some of the dialects and languages to which they belong and making them not only languages of communication but also languages of science. Accordingly, the mastery of the English language opens diverse possibilities for the acquisition of knowledge and information (Crystal, 2003).

Nowadays, the English language has become the most important language in the world. Around 400 million people speak English as their mother tongue across several countries. Besides, English is spoken by about 2 billion people worldwide, making it the third most common language after Chinese and Spanish. It is worth mentioning that the main reason why English has become so popular today is the British Empire. Through its colonies and geopolitical dominance, English had been disseminated by the late 1700s (Why English Is a Global Language?, 2024).

After World War II, the English language kept spreading around the world thanks to the United States of America, which became a major political superpower and an economic giant. Similar to what Great Britain had done a century earlier, American businesses were thriving and started trading globally. Because of this, English is now widely used in trade. Moreover, the US is considered the cradle of technology and science since it is the origin of the Internet. Worldwide, English is used on computers and other modern devices. This explains why science, too, uses English as its primary language. Given the enormous influence that science and technology have on our daily lives, English will always be important (Why English Is a Global Language?, 2024).

It is worth noting that soft power, either in the US or the UK, has played a significant role in disseminating English. The rise of popular music, including jazz, rock 'n' roll, and Hollywood films, made English a common language for the masses. Not to forget, BBC journalism contributed to making English the language of international news and communication. Thanks to it, English became a familiar language to a large audience worldwide.



In the same sense, English has emerged as the world's "lingua franca" due to the need for a common language for communication. It has influenced the corporate world, the media, the educational system, and many other facets of people's lives (Javier, 2022). Therefore, Algeria, like the rest of the world, seeks to enhance the use of the English language, especially in the field of education, higher education, and scientific research, given that the English language has become the language of science—scientific publications, international conferences, collaborative academic or research projects, student or researcher exchange programmes, and so on. All of these allow for advances in science, technology, and education that benefit the entire world (Javier, 2022).

English, as a worldwide academic language, promotes international mobility for young researchers. In this regard, Algeria's Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research aims to attract foreign students to its institutions, as it is a global criterion used to determine university rankings around the world; it can only be attained by generalising the usage of the English language. Furthermore, using English in the teaching and learning process will boost the visibility of Algerian universities, which is a key priority of the Ministry.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning some of the political and ideological factors that contributed to the emergence of this new trend towards enhancing the use of the English language in Algeria. The most important one is the wide-ranging use of French in Algerian society and its influence on people's culture and spoken language.

The French language took root in Algeria and extended across society as a result of French colonisation, which lasted around 132 years (1830–1962). Accordingly, French is now the country's first foreign language and, after Arabic, the most extensively used language in public administration and higher education. In this context, the French language is considered by many to be a spoil of war.

Language conflict and rivalry are prevalent in postcolonial settings. Human contact leads to language rivalry. The term "language rivalry" refers to conflict between a society's principal languages. For example, language rivalry exists between French and English in numerous nations, including Algeria and Tunis (Guemide, 2023). Actually, the English-French linguistic conflict began on an international scale, dating back to British-French rivalry during the Seven Years' War (1756–1763). As a matter of fact, the French invasion of Algeria is rooted in the rivalry (Seven Years' War).

It can be said that French President Emmanuel Macron's statements about Algerian history gave a strong impetus to Algerian officials to move towards strengthening the English language in Algeria.



Tayeb Bouzid, the former minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, announced a project in 2019 aimed largely at expanding the use of English in universities, particularly in scientific and technical fields. So he stated that the French language would lead us nowhere and directed the country's universities, schools, and institutions to use English instead of French (Guemide, 2023).

3. Title strategy of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to enhance the use of the English language

The growth of the English language and its importance today have motivated the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to make it the language of university teaching in the near future. The ministry has begun to adopt the following measures:

- The English language module (which is considered a secondary module) is included in each major's annual programme. As a result, the ministry now proposes that it be taught remotely using the Moodle platform as an experimental stage before applying the process (distance learning) to all modules in the coming years.
- All professors, regardless of their domains, are required to improve their English language skills through Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research-supervised training sessions.
- Allowing professors who want to improve their levels to enrol in the university's English language department. If a professor successfully completes his/her three years of learning, he/she will be able to earn a BA in English language. This is in addition to the Centres for Intensive Language Teaching at several universities, which enable professors and students to develop their proficiency in a variety of languages.
- In collaboration with the University of Massachusetts (MIT), the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has put up a digital platform to train about 30,000 professors in English remotely. It consists of four MOOC courses spread over 16 weeks.

It is worth noting that the purpose behind this initiative is to train at least 80% of professors in the field of science and technology and 100% of professors in the humanities and social sciences.

4. Media and Communication Studies in Algeria

The teaching of “Media and Communication Studies”, often known as “Information and Communication Sciences”, began in Algeria on December 21st, 1964, when the National Higher School of Journalism was founded. It sought to provide instruction in both French and Arabic, but after that, education was almost limited to Arabic.



Then, “Media and Communication Studies” has taken off and developed rapidly, with most higher education institutions now offering this specialisation. However, training and education in this research area remain a subject of accountability from academics and specialists, particularly in terms of teaching techniques, topics covered, and curriculum. The shortcomings include, but are not limited to:

- There is a lack of diversity in instructional languages nowadays. Using Arabic exclusively without relying on other languages, even though foreign languages can benefit students during their university studies and in their professional lives after graduation,.
- The instruction in “Media and Communication Studies” is theoretical, with little emphasis on field work. This is due to a lack of conventions between universities and media outlets. The number of students is also relatively high in comparison to the number of media institutions, which is regarded as limited, especially audiovisual ones (radios and televisions). As a matter of fact, the field trainings are few and difficult to get, particularly for students attending universities far from the capital, Algiers.
- The lack of sub-disciplines in “Media and Communication Studies” prevents researchers and students from specialising in a particular zone of research.
- One of the weaknesses of “Media and Communication Studies” in Algeria is the uniformity of scientific research methods and data collection tools, in addition to the lack of a combination of quantitative and qualitative research (بوجلال، 2009). Moreover, the dependence on outdated and useless concepts that are no longer used, even in the countries where they were developed. This implies a lack of theoretical and cognitive grounding, reliance on ready-made Western notions, and disengagement from historical and cultural reality. However, Abderrahmane Azzi's Theory of Value Determinism, which he developed in reaction to Marshall McLuhan's Theory of Technological Determinism, deserves to be recognised.

5. English for Specific Purposes in Media and Communication Studies

Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in “Media and Communication Studies” can help students grasp and absorb the courses better, considering that the majority of pioneers in this research area are Westerners who write in English. Accordingly, it stands to reason that the most relevant references and books are written in English. In the same context, information sources and digital content are mostly in English. Therefore, in this digital age, it has become important to have a good command of the language of Shakespeare, particularly as artificial intelligence advances.

Mastering English can help students enrol in international universities and apply for scholarships to further their education overseas. Moreover, their proficiency in English and being familiar with journalism-related vocabulary would undoubtedly assist them in performing their



journalistic duties to the best of their abilities, such as gathering credible information straight from original sources and numerous foreign news agencies. This could help prevent disinformation from being spread through translation. Not to mention the possibilities of media coverage of worldwide events and conducting interviews with people from various cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds, given that the English language is considered a bridge for global communication.

Although it is critical to teach Media and Communication Studies in English, there is a gap between aspirations and actual implementation. There are numerous hurdles, including:

- Actually, neither professors nor students master the English language. For historical and political reasons, English was not widely used in Algeria for many years. Algeria was colonised by France, which resulted in cultural and linguistic dependency, with French being the first foreign language spoken in the country.
- The precipitation of decision-making and the ambiguity of implementation mechanisms. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research intends to put this decision into effect as soon as possible, but this is unreasonable. How can a professor who has never used the English language in his career study “Media and Communication Studies” in English overnight? There are some initiatives mentioned above regarding mechanisms for improving the professor's level, but it is difficult for him or her to master the language so quickly, especially since the target level is at least B2 or C1! All of this may result in poorly delivered lessons and a lack of control over them because the focus is on the language itself rather than the content presented in the journalism, communication, and media fields. The same is true for present students, who did not acquire English extensively in their early years of education (primary, middle, and secondary) because it was their second foreign language. So, comprehending lessons and lectures in English right now is necessarily tough for them, and the consequences could be severe. Accordingly, it is necessary to prepare a new generation of students who are familiar with the English language, which can only be accomplished from a medium- or long-term perspective, especially given that the adoption of the English language in primary schools in Algeria only began in 2022, requiring at least 9 years to wait until this generation arrives at university.

6. Teaching “Media and Communication Studies” in English, and the difficulty of achieving the principles of the right to information and media public service

The information presented above shows that using English in journalism instruction and media practice has become critical to staying current with global trends. However, we must shed light on the issue of generalising English use and its impact on national languages, as well as the relationship between this and the principle of the right to information and media public service in



Algeria, particularly given the country's geographical breadth, cultural and linguistic diversity, and social heterogeneity. Therefore, the officials should take all these things into consideration before proceeding with their strategy of generalising English use.

It's worth mentioning that the notion of the right to information first emerged in Western countries following World War II. Today, it refers to the right of the media to provide people with information that is neutral, honest, complete, loyal, balanced, and democratic (Brahimi, 1990). Also, the audience has the right to get objective, complete, clear, simplified, and understandable information and media content.

In the most important references to the right to information in Algerian media legislation, we find Article (1) of the 1990 Media Law, which recognised the right to information in its first article (قانون رقم 90-07 يتعلق بالإعلام، 1990). As for Article (2) of the same law, it explicitly states that the right to information is embodied in the right of the citizen to be fully and objectively informed of the facts and opinions of interest to society at the national and international levels and the right to participate in the media as basic freedoms of thought, opinion, and expression in accordance with Articles 35, 36, and 49 of the Algerian Constitution (قانون رقم 90-07 يتعلق بالإعلام، 1990). In what concerns Organic Media Law No. 12-05, it is also indicated in its Article (1) that the aim of its appearance is “to determine the principles and rules that govern the exercise of the right to information and freedom of the media.” (قانون عضوي رقم 05-12 يتعلق بالإعلام، 2012). As for Article (2), it sheds light on the citizen's right to complete and objective information (قانون عضوي رقم 05-12 يتعلق بالإعلام، 2012).

These articles, to which we have referred, are regarded as among the most important ones that expressly mention the Algerian citizen's right to complete and objective information. Furthermore, Algerian media legislation has underlined in some other articles the importance of accomplishing and implementing the principle of media public service. In this context, Article (2) of Organic Media Law No. 12-05 refers to the tasks and obligations of the public service (قانون عضوي رقم 05-12 يتعلق بالإعلام، 2012), whereas Article (59) affirms that audiovisual activity is a public service task and the methods of public service are determined by regulation (قانون عضوي رقم 05-12 يتعلق بالإعلام، 2012).

According to the eighth article of the Audiovisual Activity Law, the public audiovisual sector is made up of other bodies and institutions in which the state holds all shares and which perform public service responsibilities in the context of public benefit (قانون رقم 04-14 يتعلق بالنشاط السمعي البصري، 2014). To improve the performance of the public service in the field of audiovisual activity, Article (10) emphasises that legal persons who use the public sector's audiovisual communication services within the scope of their duties for the public service must prepare programmes directed to society with all of its components to contribute to meeting

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its needs in the fields of media, education, culture, and entertainment (قانون رقم 04-14 يتعلق بالنشاط السمعي البصري، 2014).

The set of conditions, published by decree in response to the audiovisual regulatory authority's opinion, includes the general rules that apply to all television and radio broadcasting services. Particularly the requirements that allow for the preservation of national unity and the presentation of various and high-quality programmes, as well as the development and promotion of creative audiovisual and cinematographic production. Furthermore, it places a high value on strengthening national cohesion by preserving the national cultural heritage, promoting the national languages, Arabic and Tamazight, and preferring to use them in programmes and advertising messages, regardless of the method of broadcast or distribution, with the exception of cinematographic and audio-visual works in their original text and original works. There is a situation where the text has undergone complete or partial modification in a foreign language, necessitating dubbing or subtitles (قانون رقم 04-14 يتعلق بالنشاط السمعي البصري، 2014).

The preceding shows the importance that Algerian media legislation places on media public service, namely the Organic Media Law of 2012 and the Audiovisual Law of 2014. They emphasised public service through the production of varied programmes aimed at all parts of society without exclusion or marginalisation and to suit people's information, cultural, and recreational needs. Not to forget, there is a focus on the usage and promotion of the national languages, Arabic and Tamazight, which are understood and spoken by the majority of Algerians.

Based on that, we see a kind of contradiction. On the one hand, the authorities are working to establish the principle of right to information and public service, while on the other, they are attempting to generalise the use of English at universities, including faculties and departments of journalism and media studies.

If this generalisation strategy is applied, media students will be logically prepared to use the English language in their professional lives because it was the language used in their university instruction, where they studied the ABCs of journalism and media practice. In this framework, we address the following question: How can future journalists provide a media public service in English directed to an Algerian audience that is mostly unfamiliar with the English language? Or will they use national languages despite the fact that Arabic and Tamazight are not part of their university education path?

Algeria is distinguished by cultural diversity and linguistic variety. The most commonly spoken languages are Algerian vernacular and several Amazigh variations. We also see the French language in certain areas of society, particularly in major cities. Classical Arabic, while being the



language of administration, education, and media, is hardly used in Algerians' daily lives, and it is not widely understood. The same is true for the Amazigh standard language, especially as its use in education and media is extremely limited, limiting its use in daily life to a few educated groups.

Algerian society, where illiteracy persists among some groups, particularly the elderly, requires comprehensive, easy, and understandable media that communicates citizens' concerns and adds to their awareness while also providing entertainment and leisure services. According to Belkacem Mostefaoui and Abdelmoumene Khelil, public service values are achieved when media outlets offer programmes that meet the informational, educational, and entertainment needs of their diverse audience, including children and youth, while also respecting ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities (Mostefaoui & Khelil, 2012). As a result, the national languages Arabic and Tamazight, Algerian vernacular, and Amazigh dialects are the most appropriate languages for realising the values of media public service within society. Promoting Arabic and Amazigh languages in national media is crucial, as mentioned in Article 48 of the Audiovisual Law of 2014 (قانون رقم 04-14 يتعلق بالنشاط السمعي البصري، 2014).

We suppose that media practice in Algeria will be in the local languages, despite the fact that journalists received their university education in English. In this instance, another issue will arise regarding the quality of the media content delivered to the audience. Even though the fundamentals of media editing are the same everywhere, the linguistic style, sentence structure, and word and concept selection differ depending on the language. Thinking in English and practicing in Arabic or Tamazight will unavoidably influence the media content.

This problem may only affect journalists who are, at least, fluent in their national languages, but they face difficulties switching from their academic language training (English) to Arabic or Tamazight. For those who do not master these national languages, the problem is more serious, as it will lead to journalistic decadence and perpetuate mediocrity and unprofessionalism, even if the media content is objective and credible. A sound, clear, and intelligible language is the basis of an effective media process.

Accordingly, the positive aspects of media practice in English may only appear in some particular contexts; among them are:

First, it may assist some specific audience but not the broader and more general one. For example, but not limited to, a sample of researchers and graduate students in the field of journalism, communication, and media studies confirmed to me, about 7 years ago, in a study on "journalism students' attitudes towards Algerian television channel programmes," the importance and necessity of broadcasting in foreign languages, particularly English. They emphasised the critical need for diverse national audio-visual media in several languages to help them enhance



their communicative skills and linguistic abilities, which are vital in their daily lives and in scientific research (تواتي، 2016).

Second, aside from the implications of English-language media practice on the Algerian audience "locally" and the extent of its impact on achieving the principles of public service and the right to information, English-language media, if it occurs, may play a significant role at the international level because it is Algeria's external facade. It has the potential to help change the traditional perception of Algeria that international media promotes, particularly in terms of the black decade and security situations.

The media is currently regarded as a soft power tool that governments use to protect their interests and mobilise worldwide public opinion on subjects that they support. Therefore, it would be ideal if Algeria had a robust media network in English so that it could use it to serve its people and foreign policy, as well as to export its real image without waiting for others to do so in their own manner.

Third, English-language media can contribute to tourism promotion in Algeria if there is a political intention to invest in this sector. In terms of potential, Algeria possesses all of the qualifications required to excel in tourism. It is Africa's largest country, and it has a rich history and diverse cultural and natural resources.

Fourth, English-language media may help to provide a media public service to the Algerian community abroad, particularly their children of the new generation, by transmitting all information and news about Algeria and strengthening their spirit of belonging.

4. CONCLUSION

This research paper revealed the Algerian state's desire, as represented by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, to promote the use of English at the university. This trend extends across all areas, including "Media and Communication Studies". This may appear to be a great step forward and a way to stay current with the world since English is the first global language for scientific research and a bridge towards global communication.

In this regard, Redouane Touati stated that, while English-based journalism may be beneficial, especially on an international scale, it should not be prioritised over local journalism, which may be in Arabic, Tamazight and its different variants, Algerian vernacular, or French and is more accessible and representative of local populations (Vilkof, 2023). However, if this project of generalising English language use at faculties and departments of journalism is implemented, it



may also have a negative impact on media outlets, journalists, and audiences since achieving the principles of media public service and the right to information in that setting will be difficult. If those two principles have not been fully realised in the past due to the spread of illiteracy and the lack of use of the Algerian vernacular and the various Amazigh varieties, they will inevitably be harmed in the future by the exclusion or misuse of national languages and dialects.

We say this at a time when another tendency among scholars has emerged calling for the decolonizing of societies and countries from Western dependency in education and scientific research. According to John Traxler, Marguerite Koole, and Shri Footring there is an urgent need to problematize the research methods utilised to effectively and appropriately analyse the needs, wants, and aspirations of communities who are marginalised by dominant socio-political powers at the local, national, and international levels. It is vital that such communities use their own collective critical, meta-cognitive, and conceptual skills in order to safeguard and improve their future learning and livelihoods (Traxler, Koole, & Footring, 2022). Accordingly, decolonization of research and learning is based on collaborating with communities to collect, critique, and adapt research tools and techniques from various disciplines, as well as to identify non-Western research methods that are more appropriate to individual communities and will reduce barriers to language, literacy, culture, history, power, and infrastructure (Traxler, Koole, & Footring, 2022).

Finally, while it is important to be open to the world and keep up with its advancements, this should not come at the expense of the unique characteristics of local societies and their components. In this perspective, Gandhi wanted each nation adopt the excellent traits of others without losing its own soul or genius. He asserted: “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed; I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible; but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.” (Gandhi, 1921, p. 170).



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