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Entrepreneurial Theses in Letters and Foreign Languages: Two Pioneering Startup Projects at the University of Oran 2

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ABSTRACT: *Two defences at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of the University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed show that language-department students can present a startup project instead of a conventional thesis. In December 2023 Saaid Younes, a doctoral student in the didactics of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), defended DZ Scientific Publishing, an open-access digital publishing house. In September 2024 Benhamou Soumia and Zeggai Aicha, Master's students in French Language, defended Nadjahi.dz, an AI-based mobile app for learners with autism, as a Master's thesis and a startup project in one document. Drawing on the two project files and on the national framework (Ministerial Decree No. 1275), the article describes both ventures and compares them. It argues that specialized-language expertise is an entrepreneurial asset: it identifies underserved language-related needs and shapes products and services. The article ends with implications for curriculum design and supervision.*

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurship; ESP; FOS; Startup Thesis; Decree 1275; Innovative Project Label; Algeria; Letters and Foreign Languages; Inclusive Education

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1. Introduction

Language departments rarely appear in discussions of entrepreneurship, yet their students master skills that the new ventures need; analysing the needs of a target public, producing precise, specialized discourse and working across languages. ESP has always started from needs analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998), and French for Specific Objectives (FOS) follows the same logic, moving from a demand to a programme (Lehmann, 1993; Mangiante & Parpette, 2004). Entrepreneurship education research likewise stresses learning by doing real projects (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015).

This article, written as part of the thematic issue *Specialized Languages (ESP / FOS) in Entrepreneurship*, sheds light on two startup projects from the Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Oran 2. Both were defended under the national scheme that allows final-year students to submit a startup project in addition to the traditional thesis. The first project originates from English Language (ESP didactics), the second from French Language (didactics and inclusive education). Worth noting, Saaid Younes is the founder of the first project, and Dellalou Naouel is the supervisor of the second. Dellalou has also acted as assistant supervisor of the first. The account is therefore a participant case study based on the projects' own files, and the claims of priority below are the authors' own.

The research questions are:

1. How did each project turn a language-related need into a viable venture?
2. What role did specialized-language expertise play?
3. What do the two cases suggest for language departments?

2. Regulatory Context

The two national texts that frame both projects are, first, the Ministerial Decree No. 1275 (2022), which allows students to defend a startup or innovative project alongside their academic thesis, second, the Executive Decree No. 20-254 (2020), which sets up the labelling of startups, innovative projects and incubators. According to a university incubator's summary of Order No. 1275, The academic degree remains unchanged and is awarded on the basis of the traditional thesis. However, students who undertake a startup project receive an additional certificate, awarded upon validation of a business creation file. It covers final-year Licence (L3), Master 2 and engineering students, in addition to the doctoral students, as demonstrated in the doctoral guide used in Case 1. The team consists of one to six students and is supervised by a teacher and an incubator mentor, the department's scientific council that approves the topic beforehand, and the defence, which is a pitch before a mixed jury of academics and economic actors with a prototype or mock-up. The incubator summary dates the order to 27 September 2022 and names the first beneficiaries as the June 2023 graduates (Saida incubator; Sidi Bel Abbès incubator). The secondary summaries are as follows:

Label	Who can apply	Key conditions	Duration
Innovative Project	Individuals or groups, before a company exists	Project presentation, growth potential, team's qualifications	2 years, renewable twice
Startup	Company under Algerian law	At most 8 years old, innovative business model, turnover cap, at most 250 employees	4 years, renewable once
Incubator	Public, private or mixed structure	Hosting, training, advice or financing for startups	5 years, renewable

At university level, the National Coordinating Committee for Innovation Follow-up and University Business Incubators (CNCSIIU) supports this track. The guide is organised in six sections: project presentation, innovative aspects, strategic market analysis, production and organisation, financial plan, and prototype, with a business model canvas as annex. Practically, both projects adhere to this structure.

3. Case 1: DZ Scientific Publishing (English Studies, Dr. Saaid Younes)

DZ Scientific Publishing is a digital, open-access publishing house for scientific e-books, edited volumes and conference proceedings, whose founder defended it in December 2023. The project was supervised by Prof. Benhattab Abdelkader Lotfi (English language, Sociolinguistics) and Dr. Adnani Nazar Djalal Eddine (Business, Marketing), with Dellalou Naouel (French language, Didactics) as an assistant supervisor.

3.1. Genesis: A Language Professional's View of a Market Gap

The idea grew out of the founder's own trajectory as a doctoral student in the didactics of English for Specific Purposes. He worked as secretary of scientific journals, supporting editors-in-chief on technical matters, which gave him hands-on editorial and technical skills. He also completed training as an ambassador for Crossref, the DOI registration agency, in summer 2023, and received entrepreneurship training from the university's business-house (Maison de l'entrepreneuriat) at the University of Oran 2. The pitch observes that most Algerian scholarly books are not available online, that university libraries rarely stock them, and that proceedings are often published without any digital trace. The proposed solution is a platform where authors submit online, manuscripts are peer-reviewed, and accepted works receive an ISBN and a DOI.

3.2. The offer, the Market and the Economic Model

The business model canvas targets researchers, doctoral students and institutions, with open access, quality assurance through peer review and author support as the value proposition. Revenue comes from publication fees paid by authors or their institutions, in addition to language services (translation, proofreading, copy-editing, cover design) and sponsorship linked to DOI services.

3.3. A Working Prototype built on Public Infrastructure

The prototype is already online at dzscpub.com. It runs on a virtual private server (2 vCPUs, 4 GB RAM, 80 GB disk, Ubuntu 22.04) granted by CERIST, the National Research-Information Centre, through the DGRSDT platform for projects registered under Order 1275, free of charge until 31 December 2023 and renewable. The founder installed and handled design and programming himself.

3.4. Recognition

The author reports that this was the first defence of a startup project by a doctoral student in Algeria under Decree 1275, and that the project obtained the Innovative Project Label

4. Case 2: Nadjahi.dz (French Studies, Benhamou Soumia and Zeggai Aicha)

Nadjahi.dz is a mobile application, based on artificial intelligence, that supports the learning of pupils with autism; it was defended as a Master's thesis and a startup project in a single thesis**.** The authors report that it is the first project nationally in the field of Letters and Foreign Languages to merge the two. The two Master's students, Benhamou Soumia and Zeggai Aicha, worked under the supervision of Prof. Dellalou Naouel. The thesis title is *Développement d'une application mobile innovante pour l'accompagnement pédagogique des apprenants autistes*.

4.1. Problem and Solution

The pitch identifies four main problems which are, first, parents who are under heavy stress to secure adapted schooling and avoid dropout. Second lies in isolation and low classroom motivation among autistic children. The third concerns teachers who lack training and resources to adapt their methods. The last has to do with the absence of personalised follow-up. The solution is an app that offers inclusive, personalised content with three kinds of visual adaptation (images and drawings, reformulated texts, animated games and interactive activities), progress tracking with feedback, and lessons adjusted to each user's needs. The working prototype covers one subject for the fifth year of primary school. More subjects and levels are planned after the Innovative Project label is obtained.

4.2. Market, Competition and Team

The deck cites 520 children diagnosed with autism at the paedopsychiatry service in Oran in June 2024. It also cites Pr. Tabti, head of paedopsychiatry at the EHS of Cheraga, who puts autism-related disorders in Algeria at 400,000 to 500,000 cases, about 1 in 100 inhabitants. The survey of potential users shows 64% parents, 25% educators, 9% autism specialists and 2% others. Direct competitors are specialised schools (limited capacity, high cost); indirect ones are general educational apps, YouTube tutoring channels and autism platforms that lack pedagogical adaptation and personalised follow-up.
The two co-founders split the work; while Zeggai Aicha leads the technical phase and the building of the solution, Benhamou Soumia leads marketing, partnerships and investor relations. The planned workforce adds a project coordinator, an AI engineer, a special educator, an autism expert and an accountant.

4.3. Economic Model

Revenue is planned from a freemium model (quarterly or annual subscriptions for advanced features), paid downloads after a free trial, advertising, and contracts with charitable associations that work with autistic children.

5. Discussion: Similarities and Differences between the Two Cases

Both ventures start from an unmet need that the founders could see because of their language training, and both use the startup format to turn a thesis into a deliverable.

Dimension	DZ Scientific Publishing	Nadjahi.dz
Field	English, ESP didactics (doctorate)	French, didactics (Master)
Format	Startup Project	Master's thesis and startup project in one document
Need addressed	Scholarly books and proceedings from Algeria are hard to find online, with no DOI or digital platform	Pupils with autism lack adapted content and follow-up; teachers and parents lack tools
Product	Open-access publishing platform with peer review, ISBN, DOI and language services	AI-based mobile app with adapted, personalised lessons
Language role	Academic English and editorial services are the product	Language adaptation (images, reformulation, animation) is the pedagogical core
Team	Sole founder, two supervisors plus assistant	Two co-founders, one supervisor
Revenue	Fees from authors and institutions	Freemium, paid downloads, advertising, association contracts
Public infrastructure	Free CERIST server via the DGRSDT platform	Prototype built by the team
Status	Defended December 2023; Innovative Project label in March 2024	Defended September 2024; label presented as next step

5.1. Specialized Languages as an Entrepreneurial Resource

In the first case, ESP expertise explains the choice of market (academic authors), the quality-control logic (peer review, copy-editing) and the paid language services. In the second, the didactic training in French underlies the three types of adaptation that define the product, and a specialised public (autistic learners) calls for what FOS describes as adapting a language programme to a precise audience (Mangiante & Parpette, 2004). In both, the starting point is a needs analysis, which the startup guide formalises as market analysis.

5.2. The Pioneering Projects through the Eyes of Algerian Press:

Soon after the implementation of the ministerial decree n° 1275, the humanities in general, and the departments of languages in particular, were thought unlikely to effectively put this new concept into practice. What initially sounded far to obtain, however, the two language projects from the department of foreign languages at the University of Oran 2 could make it true, ushering a new perception of language and traditional thesis writing. The Algerian press documented these initiative projects, shedding light on their paramount importance. According to Sofiane, M (2023), Saaid's open access platform will not only serve in augmenting visibility of academic research, but will also enhance social collaboration. Additionally, he (2024) finds that Nadjahi.dz is a practical exemplar of the ability of the Algerian university to solve real-life issues. Traditional theses used to offer basic knowledge that risks remaining on paper with no hope to become tangible solutions to academic prospects and socio-economic needs. Entrepreneurial oriented higher education, on the other hand, successfully bridges the gap between university and community and nurtures a culture of initiative and social responsibility. Students are no longer passive receivers of knowledge, but active participants in the making of their job opportunities and futures.

5.2. Implications for Language Departments

By exploring the relationship between the field of Languages and Startups, this comparative study sheds light on a wide range of implications for language departments that lie in,

1. Introducing needs analysis and project work in ESP and FOS courses as an entry point to entrepreneurship.
2. Pairing language supervisors with business and incubator mentors, as in Case 1.
3. Allowing the combined thesis-and-startup format in Letters and Foreign Languages, as Case 2 did, with clear assessment criteria for both the academic and the business parts.
4. Training students in digital tools and in basic finance, which both teams had to learn on the job.

The article hence highlights the strategic role of languages in empowering entrepreneurship to solve learning problems, offer academic services and to make higher education more entertaining and promising.

6. Conclusion

DZ Scientific Publishing and Nadjahi.dz show that a thesis defended in a foreign-languages faculty can also be the first version of a company. One started from the gap between Algerian research output and its online visibility; the other from the gap between inclusive education needs and available tools. In both, specialized-language training supplied the needs analysis, the content expertise and the product logic. Further research should follow the two ventures after their defence (labels, users, revenue), compare them with startup theses in other language departments, and test the proposed curriculum changes.

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