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From Linguistic Competence to Entrepreneurial Capital: A Critical Synthesis of Identity, Investment, and Structural Gaps in Algerian Business English Education

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ABSTRACT: *This paper offers a critical conceptual synthesis of Business English education in Algerian tertiary institutions, arguing that prevailing approaches treat English primarily as a communicative competence, a bundle of skills to be acquired and assessed, while overlooking its function as a form of linguistic capital whose social and economic value is negotiated within unequal professional fields. Drawing on theory of symbolic capital and Norton's (2000, 2015) framework of identity and investment, complemented by Darvin and Norton's (2015) expanded investment model, this article integrates three strands of scholarship: contemporary ESP and Business English literature, entrepreneurship education research, and sociolinguistic identity studies. A systematic review of Algerian empirical studies reveals three interlocking structural gaps: the generalist practitioner problem, the absence of standardized Business English curricula, and assessment regimes that reward grammatical compliance over professional participation that collectively prevent English from functioning as the entrepreneurial capital it could be. The paper proposes an alternative pedagogical framework grounded in the cultivation of entrepreneurial identities, imagined professional communities, and the deliberate accumulation of linguistic capital. It concludes by calling for curriculum reform that moves beyond needs analysis toward identity investment as the organizing principle of Business English education in Algeria.*

KEYWORDS: Business English, linguistic capital, language investment, entrepreneurial identity, ESP, Algeria, Bourdieu, Norton.

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1. Introduction

The relationship between language and economic life has never been straightforward, and nowhere is this tension more visible than in the contemporary intersection of Business English education and entrepreneurship. Pierre Bourdieu (1991, 40) captured the essence of this complexity when he argued that "one cannot understand the symbolic effects of language without making allowance for the fact, frequently attested, that language is the exemplary formal mechanism whose generative capacities are without limits". This statement invites educators and researchers to look beyond the communicative surface of language and attend to its deeper social functions—its capacity to position speakers within hierarchies of legitimacy, to open or foreclose participation in professional communities, and to transform itself into a resource whose value is determined not by grammatical correctness alone, but by recognition within specific social and economic fields. It is precisely this generative dimension of language that Business English education, particularly in the Algerian context, has largely failed to theorize and, consequently, to cultivate.

Contemporary entrepreneurship research has established, with increasing empirical consistency, that English is not peripheral to entrepreneurial activity but central to it. Ahmad and Yusof Khan (2023) demonstrated, through a mixed-methods study of undergraduate entrepreneurship students in Malaysia, that learners themselves perceive English as an essential professional resource enabling them to communicate business ideas, negotiate successfully, resolve conflicts, and build productive international relationships—functions that go well beyond anything a grammar syllabus could address. This finding is not geographically isolated. Rajović Jelena, Milivoje Jovanović, Nebojša Denić, and Ivana Bulut Bogdanovic (2024) argued, in a Serbian conceptual study, that English language proficiency has become one of the fundamental entrepreneurial competences required for participation in global markets, placing it alongside leadership, innovation, and intercultural communication as a core entrepreneurial capability. Abro Ali Mustafa, Abdul Razzaque Bhutto, Indra Mughal, Faiza Abro, and Shagufta Saleem Shaikh (2025) extended this perspective further by demonstrating that communication is foundational to entrepreneurial performance across all business functions, from negotiating with investors to managing international supply chains. Taken together, these studies paint a consistent picture: English is, increasingly, entrepreneurial currency.

What is striking, however, is the gap between this recognition and the theoretical frameworks through which Business English education continues to be organized. The dominant approach, rooted in the tradition of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), conceptualizes language learning primarily in terms of communicative competence: the acquisition of professional vocabulary, genre conventions, oral communication skills, and context-specific linguistic accuracy. Shalash (2024) described this orientation clearly, presenting ESP as a specialized educational approach guided by needs analysis, authenticity, and learner-centeredness—principles that are theoretically sound but whose implementation stops, almost invariably, at the level of skill acquisition. Even Hyland (2022), one of the most authoritative voices in contemporary ESP scholarship, acknowledged that the field must move beyond treating learner difficulties as "a linguistic deficit which can be improved by remediation in a few language classes" (205), framing language learning instead as the acquisition of situated discourse practices within professional communities. Yet despite this more sophisticated theoretical orientation, Hyland's framework remains primarily discourse-based: it explains how language is used within professional communities but does not fully account for why learners invest in acquiring it, how language functions as a resource for constructing professional identities, or what social and symbolic returns learners anticipate from language learning. This is not a criticism of ESP as a discipline but rather it is an observation about the conceptual territory that the discipline has not yet fully occupied.

The history of ESP itself bears this out. Anqi, Sweeheng, and Thein (2024) in a comprehensive semi-systematic review tracing the discipline from its origins in the early 1960s to the present, demonstrated that ESP began with register analysis and the teaching of decontextualized technical vocabulary—an approach driven by the practical demands of post-war globalization and the oil industry rather than by any theory of language, identity, or social participation. While the field subsequently evolved through discourse analysis, genre theory, and needs-based curriculum design, its foundational orientation toward language as a collection of professional skills has proven remarkably durable. Undoubtedly, the persistence of this orientation is not incidental; it reflects the deeper institutional logic of language education, which has historically been more comfortable measuring what learners can do with language than asking who they are becoming through it. This distinction: between performance and identity, between competence and capital, lies at the heart of the present paper.

Nowhere is this conceptual limitation more consequential than in Algeria, where the relationship between English education and economic development has become a matter of increasing national concern. Mehdaoui and Benabed (2023), in a comprehensive content analysis drawing on national academic research, doctoral dissertations, and British Council reports, demonstrated that despite sustained governmental efforts to position English as a strategic economic resource, the educational system has failed to translate language instruction into meaningful labor-market outcomes. Only a small proportion of Algerians achieve intermediate English proficiency through formal education, and major economic sectors, including the strategically significant oil and gas industry, continue to provide in-house language training because university graduates lack the communicative competence required in professional settings. This is a damning assessment, and it raises a question that the existing literature has not adequately answered: why does prolonged exposure to English instruction produce such limited professional outcomes? The answer, this article argues, lies not primarily in curriculum design or pedagogical method, though both require reform, but in a deeper conceptual failure to understand what English actually is and what it can do for learners who invest in it.

The most recent comprehensive study of Business English provision in Algerian universities, conducted by Aleb (2026) across institutions in Tlemcen and Oran, confirms that this conceptual failure has material consequences. Business English instructors teach without specialist preparation, courses proceed without standardized syllabi, assessment privileges grammar and translation over professional communication, and collaboration between language departments and business faculties is virtually absent. What is being produced, in other words, is not entrepreneurial capital but rather it is examination compliance. The gap between what Business English education is currently delivering and what it could deliver, if organized around a richer understanding of language as capital and identity investment, is indeed the gap this study seeks to address.

To address this conceptual gap, this paper brings three bodies of scholarship into systematic conversation: contemporary ESP and Business English literature, entrepreneurship education research, and sociolinguistic theories of identity and investment. Its theoretical framework draws centrally on Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital and Norton's (2000, 2015) theory of language investment and identity, extended through Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of identity, capital, and ideology. By integrating these perspectives, the article seeks to move beyond a competence-based understanding of Business English education and develop an alternative pedagogical model that recognises English as a resource for professional identity construction and entrepreneurial participation.

1.1 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following three research questions:

1. How is the role of English conceptualised across contemporary Business English and entrepreneurship-oriented literature? Is it treated primarily as an instrumental skill or as a sociolinguistic resource associated with power, identity, and market positioning?
2. What structural, institutional, and methodological gaps emerge from the literature on Business English education in Algeria, particularly in relation to preparing learners for professional and entrepreneurial communication?
3. How can sociolinguistic frameworks of identity, linguistic capital, and investment inform the development of an alternative pedagogical model for entrepreneurial ESP in the Algerian context?

2. Literature Review

2.1 ESP, Business English, and the Dominance of the Needs-Analysis Paradigm

English for Specific Purposes has, since its emergence in the 1960s, organized itself around a deceptively straightforward premise: that language instruction should be shaped by the communicative demands of the learner's target professional or academic community rather than by the conventions of general language pedagogy. Dou, Chan and Win (2023) traced this disciplinary history in detail, demonstrating that ESP moved through four broad developmental phases, from register analysis and technical vocabulary teaching in its earliest period, through discourse and genre analysis in the 1980s and 1990s, toward the contemporary emphasis on learner-centered needs analysis and intercultural communication. The significance of this trajectory lies not only in what it shows the field has accomplished, but in what it reveals about the assumptions it has carried forward. Even as ESP evolved theoretically, its central organizing question remained consistent: what does this learner need to be able to do? This is a productive question, it generated the needs analysis methodology that continues to shape Business English curriculum design, but it is not the only question worth asking.

Moreover, Shalash (2024) articulated the contemporary consensus clearly, presenting ESP as a learner-centered approach that identifies specific communicative purposes through systematic needs analysis and organizes instruction around authentic professional communication rather than general language proficiency. This framework is theoretically coherent and, when properly implemented, pedagogically effective. The three core principles Shalash identified, needs analysis, authenticity, and learner-centeredness, are not in themselves inadequate; the problem lies in the way they have been interpreted and implemented in practice. Needs analysis, in the majority of ESP contexts, has come to mean the identification of target communicative tasks: the genres, registers, and interactional conventions that learners will need to navigate in professional life. What it has rarely meant is an examination of who learners are becoming through language learning—the identities they are constructing, the professional communities they imagine joining, and the social returns they anticipate from English proficiency.

Subsequently, Sofia (2026), in the most recent comprehensive synthesis of ESP principles, confirmed this orientation. Even in 2026, mainstream ESP discourse frames English consistently in terms of skills, proficiency, accuracy, and functional outcomes. When more sociologically resonant concepts appear—learner autonomy, intercultural communicative competence, adult learning—they are domesticated back into the language of individual skill acquisition. Autonomy, for instance, is defined as

"the ability of learners to take charge of their own education, including goal-setting, strategy selection, and progress evaluation" (Sofia 2026, 8), a definition that frames self-determination as a learning management strategy rather than as a negotiation of identity within an unequal linguistic market. The concept is useful, but it operates at a different register from the one this article proposes.

More significantly, Hyland (2022) represents the most sophisticated articulation of contemporary ESP theory, and his framework comes closest—without quite arriving—at the sociolinguistic territory this article occupies. Drawing on genre analysis, ethnographic inquiry, and social constructionism, he argued that ESP should move beyond treating communicative difficulties as linguistic deficits and instead support learners in acquiring the discourse practices of their target professional communities. Clearly, this is a meaningful advance: it shifts attention from forms to practices, from accuracy to participation, from grammar to membership. Yet even Hyland's framework, despite its social-constructionist orientation, does not engage with Norton's theory of investment, Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital, or the question of how language functions as a resource for social positioning and professional legitimacy. The concept of community membership appears in his work, but it is theorized through discourse rather than through capital—a distinction that, as this article will demonstrate, has significant implications for how we understand the relationship between language learning and entrepreneurial opportunity.

Kim (2023) added a further dimension to this picture by examining how ESP functions not only as curriculum but as professional practice. Through a longitudinal study of an ESP teacher's identity development, Kim demonstrated that becoming an ESP practitioner is an evolving process requiring continuous negotiation between pedagogical principles, subject-matter knowledge, and institutional expectations. The study illuminated a tension that runs through much of the ESP literature: the practitioner is expected to function simultaneously as a language expert, a curriculum designer, a materials developer, and a subject-area informant—roles that, in the absence of institutional support and disciplinary preparation, rarely coexist comfortably. This tension has particular relevance for the Algerian context, where it will be examined in more structural terms in Section 2.4.

Anqi, Sweeheng, and Thein (2024) provided a useful contemporary illustration of where the needs-analysis paradigm stands in practice. Their qualitative study of stakeholder perspectives on ESP for student-athletes in China demonstrated convincingly that general English alone is insufficient to meet learners' academic and professional needs, and that stakeholder-informed needs analysis can drive meaningful curriculum reform. What is particularly revealing for present purposes, however, is a terminological choice the authors made almost in passing: they described the growing importance of ESP as reflecting "the increasing value placed on learning ESP as linguistic capital" (Anqi, Sweeheng, and Thein, 2). The term appears without theoretical development, without reference to Bourdieu, and without examination of how capital operates differently from competence within social fields. We draw attention to this moment not to criticize the authors—who were not writing a theoretical paper—but because it illustrates something important about the current state of the field: the vocabulary of capital has entered ESP discourse without the sociology that gives it explanatory power. The present article aims to supply what is missing.

2.2 Business English, Entrepreneurship, and the Competence Ceiling

When Business English and entrepreneurship education are brought into conversation, as they increasingly are in contemporary applied linguistics and management research, the result has been a literature that is empirically richer but theoretically constrained in the same way as its parent disciplines. The studies that populate this intersection have demonstrated, with considerable consistency, that English matters for entrepreneurial success; they have been considerably less successful at explaining what kind of resource English is and why learners invest, or fail to invest, in acquiring it.

Furthermore, Ahmad and Yusof Khan (2023) offered one of the most empirically grounded accounts of this intersection, demonstrating that entrepreneurship students themselves identify communicative practices such as presentations, negotiations, conflict resolution, relationship management, and cross-cultural interaction as the communicative core of entrepreneurial life. Crucially, these are not the practices that traditional grammar-based Business English instruction cultivates. They are interactive, identity-laden, and relationally complex, requiring learners to project competence, credibility, and professional confidence rather than merely grammatical accuracy. What Ahmad and Yusof Khan's study establishes, in other words, is a mismatch between the communicative demands of entrepreneurship and the communicative practices that conventional English instruction develops. What it does not explain is why this mismatch persists—or what it would mean to organize language education around the identity dimensions that entrepreneurial communication requires.

Rajović Jelena, Milivoje Jovanović, Nebojša Denić, and Ivana Bulut Bogdanovic (2024) approached the same intersection from a Serbian entrepreneurship education perspective, arguing that English has become an indispensable professional resource enabling entrepreneurs to conduct negotiations, participate in international meetings, write professional correspondence, present companies internationally, and interact with foreign partners. Their discussion is useful for establishing that this understanding of English is widespread across contemporary entrepreneurship literature. Yet, like Ahmad and Yusof Khan (2023), the framework remains oriented toward competence development: English is valuable because it enables entrepreneurs to do more; the question of what English enables entrepreneurs to become—what professional identities it affords, what symbolic recognition it confers—is left largely unexamined. Abro Ali Mustafa, Abdul Razzaque Bhutto, Indra Mughal, Faiza Abro, and Shagufta Saleem Shaikh (2025) extended this practical argument by positioning English as the language of global commerce, essential for collaboration, partnership-building, and professional credibility across national borders. Together, these studies confirm the instrumental case for Business English; the conceptual work of this article is to move beyond that case toward a sociological one.

The most reductive version of this instrumental framing appears in Akfan (2025), a sociolinguistic case study of Indonesian entrepreneurs that reduces the question of English in entrepreneurship almost entirely to grammatical error analysis. The study documents Indonesian entrepreneurs' difficulties with plural markers, auxiliary verbs, definite articles, and phoneme articulation, concluding that targeted training in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary is the appropriate response. We find this framing not wrong, exactly, but radically incomplete. The entrepreneurs in Akfan's study are bilingual professionals operating in international commercial environments; their linguistic resources—including code-switching, translanguaging, and the deployment of contextually appropriate registers—constitute entrepreneurial assets. To frame them primarily as bearers of grammatical deficiency is to adopt precisely the deficit model that Hyland (2022) himself cautioned against, and to miss the more interesting question of how these entrepreneurs use their full linguistic repertoire to construct professional legitimacy and navigate international relationships.

A more instructive counterpoint is provided by Toma and Rasul (2023), who examined the impact of Content-Based Instruction within an entrepreneurship education module at Salahaddin University in Iraqi Kurdistan. Their findings were striking: when language instruction was organized around authentic entrepreneurial content—business plans, invoices, meeting minutes, case studies—students reported significant improvements in entrepreneurship-specific vocabulary, reading, writing, and speaking, and substantially increased motivation. Grammar gains were comparatively limited, which the authors treated as a mild limitation but which we would argue is a revealing finding in its own right. It suggests that communicative development in an entrepreneurial context does not depend on explicit grammatical instruction; it depends on giving learners the opportunity to use language for purposes they find meaningful

and professionally authentic. Toma and Rasul explain this primarily through the lens of content-based instruction; this article proposes that the mechanism driving these outcomes is better understood through Norton's (2015) theory of investment—the authentic entrepreneurial tasks allowed learners to begin imagining themselves as future entrepreneurs, thereby deepening their investment in the language learning process.

Donoso-González, Pedraza-Navarro, and Palferro-Fernández (2022) provided a complementary argument from within entrepreneurship education itself. Their study of pre-university entrepreneurship programs in Spain demonstrated that entrepreneurial education, at its best, does not simply transmit business knowledge but cultivates an entrepreneurial identity: a way of perceiving oneself as creative, agentic, socially responsible, and capable of professional self-determination. The authors argued explicitly that "entrepreneurial education must go beyond the traditional acquisition of knowledge and skills... promoting an entrepreneurial culture... where the person unites his identity and his business identity into one entrepreneurial identity" (Donoso-González, Pedraza-Navarro, and Palferro-Fernández, 11). What is striking about this study, from the perspective of the present article, is the complete absence of language from this framework. English proficiency, multilingual competence, and communicative identity are nowhere in the picture, despite the fact that the international business environments these students are being prepared for are deeply linguistically structured. This omission is not the authors' failure—it reflects the disciplinary boundaries between entrepreneurship education and applied linguistics. Bridging those boundaries is precisely what this article proposes.

Randerson (2023) added a useful forward-looking dimension to this discussion by arguing that business schools must move beyond neoliberal models toward fostering "futures literacy"—the capacity to envision and actively construct alternative professional and social futures rather than merely preparing students to fit into existing systems. The concept of futures literacy resonates with Kanno and Norton's (2012) notion of imagined communities, developed in a language-learning context: in both frameworks, the educational relationship between the present learner and the imagined future self is what motivates engagement, investment, and identity development. That these two bodies of literature, entrepreneurship education and applied sociolinguistics, have arrived independently at the importance of future-oriented imagination suggests not only that they are addressing related problems, but that they have the conceptual resources to address them together. The theoretical framework developed in Section 2.3 constructs that synthesis.

2.3 Identity, Investment, and the Sociological Reframing of Language Learning

2.3.1 Imagined Communities and the Origins of Language Investment

Any serious attempt to explain why learners invest in language learning must begin not with the classroom but with the imagination—specifically, with the professional communities that learners aspire to join and the future selves they aspire to become. Kanno and Norton (2012), in a foundational article introducing imagined communities to language education research, argued that individuals belong not only to communities in which they currently participate but also to communities they aspire to join in the future—communities that "are not immediately tangible and accessible" but are made real "through the power of the imagination" (241). These imagined affiliations, they demonstrated, exert a powerful influence on present educational decisions, motivating learners to invest time, effort, and identity in learning experiences that bring desired futures closer.

The relevance of this framework for entrepreneurial ESP is considerable. Business English learners in Algerian universities are not merely students of English, they are aspiring economists, future managers,

nascent entrepreneurs, and potential participants in international commercial networks. The imagined communities that organize their professional aspirations, whether multinational corporations, international startup ecosystems, foreign investment partnerships, or export markets, are, without exception, English-mediated environments. When these students invest in English, they are not simply acquiring a language skill; they are positioning themselves in relation to a future self that belongs to a community whose membership is partly constituted through English. As Kanno and Norton (2012) argued, "a learner's imagined community invites an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the target language must be understood within this context" (Norton, 2001, as cited in Kanno & Norton, 2012, 243). This is the starting point for understanding what Business English education should be doing—and why it currently falls short.

2.3.2 Norton's Theory of Investment and Identity

Norton's (2015) theory of investment offered a decisive conceptual reorientation for language education research. Rather than asking why learners are motivated to study a language—a question that, as Norton observed, has traditionally been answered through psychological models of individual aptitude, attitude, and integrative or instrumental orientation—investment theory asks what learners hope to become through acquiring it. This shift from motivation to investment is not merely terminological; it reflects a fundamentally different understanding of the learner. In the investment framework, learners are not psychological subjects with relatively stable motivational traits but social actors whose identities are "multiple, a site of struggle, and changing across time and space" (Norton 2015, 377). They invest in language learning because they anticipate gaining "symbolic resources" and "material resources" that increase their cultural capital and expand their opportunities for social participation (Norton, 377).

Applied to Business English education, this reconceptualization has profound implications. The question is no longer whether students are sufficiently motivated to engage with ESP content, but whether the educational environment they inhabit creates meaningful opportunities for them to construct valued professional identities through English. Norton's (2015, 389) insistence that effective classroom practice should "draw from and legitimize learners' cultural capital". while affirming their imagined identities suggests that Business English courses should not begin with a vocabulary list or a genre convention but with an honest engagement with who these learners are, what communities they aspire to join, and what resources—linguistic, social, cultural—they already bring. This is a very different starting point from the one that Algerian ESP currently occupies.

Manan and Hajar (2025) deepened this framework by examining English language academies in Pakistan through the lens of Norton's investment theory, introducing the complementary concept of disinvestment. Their study demonstrated that learners frequently invest in English at the cost of their existing multilingual identities: English is framed, ideologically, as requiring the abandonment of home languages and the adoption of a neoliberal professional self-oriented toward mobility, status, and economic success. This notion of disinvestment is critical for the Algerian context, where learners already navigate a complex multilingual landscape—Arabic, Tamazight, French, and English each carry different symbolic weights in different social fields. When Business English instruction positions English as the unambiguous language of professional success while implicitly devaluing learners' existing linguistic repertoire, it may inadvertently reproduce the ideological structures that Norton herself critiques. The alternative, an approach that recognizes multilingual competence as a form of capital rather than as an obstacle to English acquisition, is both theoretically preferable and pedagogically more productive.

The empirical robustness of investment theory is established across several studies in this review. Zhang and Yang (2025) followed a single learner, a multilingual pre-service teacher, across three distinct

educational environments over seven years, demonstrating that investment fluctuates as identity is negotiated across different institutional contexts and social relationships. The study confirmed that investment depends not on fixed individual motivation but on the extent to which learners' identities and linguistic resources are recognized and valued within their educational environment. Wang and Jiang (2025), examining Chinese students in English-medium instruction, found that learners prioritize disciplinary capital over linguistic capital—a finding that reveals the contextual specificity of investment decisions and challenges any assumption that exposure to English automatically produces entrepreneurial identity development. Sung (2019), through a case study of a Hong Kong undergraduate student whose investment in English varied markedly across university classrooms, workplaces, and international study programs, demonstrated that learners invest actively in English when they perceive it as enabling access to valued professional identities and withhold investment when it does not. Collectively, these studies confirm that investment is not a stable individual trait but a dynamic social process shaped by opportunity, recognition, and anticipated return.

Gil and Oliveira (2014) added a further dimension of particular relevance to the Algerian situation. Their study of Brazilian student-teachers found that institutional curriculum design inadvertently privileges one learner identity over another: most participants developed identities as future English teachers rather than as confident users of the language, because the curriculum rewarded pedagogical knowledge rather than communicative participation. The structural parallel with Algerian Business ESP is precise: when curricula organize themselves around examination performance rather than professional communication, they reward compliance identity rather than entrepreneurial language-user identity. The problem is not the individual learner's commitment; it is the institutional signal about what English is for.

2.3.3 Darvin and Norton's Expanded Investment Model

Darvin and Norton (2015) developed the investment framework into its most comprehensive theoretical formulation by proposing a three-dimensional model in which investment emerges from the interaction of identity, capital, and ideology. This expanded model addressed a limitation in earlier investment research: by focusing primarily on individual learners' aspirations and social relationships, it had underemphasized the structural and ideological conditions that shape what investment is possible in the first place. Darvin and Norton (2015) argued that language learning always occurs within ideological structures that determine which languages, identities, and speakers are considered legitimate—structures that reflect and reproduce broader relations of power.

The incorporation of ideology into the investment model has significant implications for Business English education in Algeria. When assessment practices signal that grammar and translation are what English is for; when institutional structures assign Business English to generalist instructors without business expertise; when the curriculum reproduces the assumption that learners are deficient linguistic vessels rather than social actors with existing resources and professional aspirations—these are not neutral pedagogical choices. They are ideological practices that construct a particular version of what English learning is, who its legitimate practitioners are, and what returns it is reasonable to expect. Darvin and Norton's (2015) framework makes it possible to name these practices as ideological and to ask what alternative ideological conditions might produce different patterns of investment.

Most recently, Darvin (2025) extended the investment model into the era of generative artificial intelligence, demonstrating that identity, capital, and ideology continue to operate within human-AI language interactions. The predominance of English as a high-resource language in AI training data, the reproduction of Western communicative norms in AI-generated outputs, and the unequal access to premium AI services across income groups all constitute ideological conditions that shape whose language

investment is facilitated and whose is constrained. For Algerian entrepreneurship students increasingly using AI tools for English practice, business correspondence, and pitch preparation, these ideological dimensions are not abstract. They are immediately present in every interaction with a system whose defaults were not designed with Algerian learners in mind.

2.3.4 Bourdieu's Linguistic Capital and the Market for English

The theoretical foundation for understanding English as capital rather than competence was laid by Bourdieu (1991), whose sociology of language provides the conceptual architecture for the present article's central argument. For Bourdieu, language is not simply a medium of communication but a social practice through which speakers position themselves—and are positioned by others—within existing social hierarchies. As he wrote, "to speak is to appropriate one or other of the expressive styles already constituted in and through usage and objectively marked by their position in a hierarchy of styles which expresses the hierarchy of corresponding social groups" (Bourdieu 1991, 54). Speaking, in other words, is never a neutral act. It simultaneously communicates content and signals social identity, positioning the speaker within recognized hierarchies of legitimacy, competence, and authority.

Linguistic capital, in Bourdieu's framework, refers to the social value attached to particular ways of speaking within specific social fields—value that is recognized not because of intrinsic linguistic merit but because of the power relations that structure the field in question. In the global field of international business and entrepreneurship, English, particularly certain prestigious varieties of English, delivered with the fluency, register-sensitivity, and interactional confidence that signal professional credibility, functions as a form of capital that enables entry into valued networks, investment relationships, and commercial partnerships. This is why the entrepreneurs in Ahmad and Yusof Khan's (2023) study, and the professionals in Mebitil's (2024) study, speak of English not as a subject they studied but as a resource they need: they have, implicitly, understood what their educational systems have not always taught them, that English is capital, not merely competence.

Zhang (2025) provided the most operationally sophisticated recent application of this Bourdieusian framework to language education, proposing English as Intercultural Capital (EIC) as a framework for English-medium instruction and ESP. Rather than framing the goal of language education as correctness, accuracy, or native-speaker approximation, Zhang argued that the appropriate educational goal is recognition: "the capacity to achieve credible uptake of ideas across linguistic and cultural borders where legitimacy is unevenly distributed" (p. 6). This reframing has direct implications for Business English: an entrepreneur who can make her business proposal credible—who can project expertise, reliability, and professional authority to an international investor—possesses English as intercultural capital even if her grammar is imperfect. The reverse is also true: grammatically polished English that fails to achieve recognition within the professional community in which it circulates has not been converted into capital. Zhang's six operational dimensions—symbolic literacy, positional reflexivity, plurilingual agility, negotiation strategies, affective resilience, and ethical stance—provide, we would argue, one of the most practically useful frameworks currently available for curriculum design in entrepreneurial ESP contexts.

The bridge between Bourdieu's capital framework and Norton's investment theory is not constructed by this article alone; it is already present within Norton's own theoretical architecture. As Norton (2015) explicitly acknowledged, the concept of investment is grounded in Bourdieu's theories of capital, language, and symbolic power. What the present article proposes is a deliberate extension of this relationship into the pedagogical domain of entrepreneurial ESP: a curriculum organized not around what learners can do with English, but around what they can become through it—and what forms of capital they can accumulate and

convert in the process. It is within this theoretical space that the Algerian evidence reviewed in the following section becomes most legible.

2.4 The Algerian Case: Structural and Institutional Gaps

2.4.1 The Macro-Level Disconnect

The relationship between English education and economic development in Algeria remains marked by a gap between educational provision and the demands of professional life. Mehdaoui and Benabed (2023) discuss this problem in the context of Algeria's growing recognition of English as a strategic resource for economic diversification. Although English instruction has expanded within the educational system, exposure to the language does not necessarily translate into the ability to use it effectively at work. This distinction matters in sectors where employees communicate with international partners and must use English to carry out specific professional tasks. Therefore, the challenge is not simply to increase access to English education, but to ensure that what learners acquire corresponds to the communicative demands they are likely to encounter after graduation.

Research conducted in Algerian professional settings highlight this problem. Houti's study of English use at the ENG Directorate of SONATRACH examined the needs of 30 engineers who communicate with foreign business partners. The findings indicated that participants needed to develop their speaking and listening skills, particularly when discussing specifications, deadlines, and planning. The study consequently highlighted the need for tailored Business English courses that give greater attention to meetings and negotiations. These findings suggest that general language instruction may not adequately prepare employees for the communicative situations encountered in their particular professional fields.

A comparable problem arises in entrepreneurial education. Benali Reguieg (2025) investigated the English-language needs of 37 startup holders at Chlef University within the framework of Ministerial Decision 1275. The study identified gaps in the language skills needed for business planning, pitching ideas to investors, and networking. It recommended specialised ESP courses, flexible training formats, and closer integration between language instruction and entrepreneurial mentoring. This research is particularly relevant because it considers English in relation to the practical activities through which emerging entrepreneurs develop and present their projects. Knowing English in general does not automatically mean being able to explain a business model, present a proposal persuasively, or communicate confidently with potential investors.

Moreover, the demands of professional communication are also changing with the increasing use of digital tools in international commerce. Aliouche and Nesba (2025), drawing on in-depth interviews with representatives from four Algerian import–export companies, found that the use of English depended more on the linguistic profiles of trading partners than on company size. Email and instant messaging in English were common; however, websites, social media, and video conferencing were used less frequently. Participants recognised English as important for market access, business credibility, and communication efficiency, but also reported difficulties with specialised vocabulary, confidence in spontaneous speaking, and the use of interactive digital tools. The researchers did not identify

infrastructural barriers; instead, participants emphasised the need for training that combines technological skills with context-specific business communication. Their findings show that the value attached to English in commercial settings does not necessarily mean that employees can use it confidently and effectively across different professional situations.

Overall, these studies point to a problem that extends beyond language proficiency alone. They identify specific communicative demands in corporate employment, startup development, and international trade, while highlighting areas in which additional training is needed. The broader institutional context also deserves attention. Mehdaoui and Benabed (2023) discuss structural difficulties associated with English education in Algeria, including the continued position of French in commerce and higher education, inconsistencies in university curricula, overcrowded classrooms, examination-oriented teaching, and the limited institutional status of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Such conditions help explain why the presence of English in the educational system does not necessarily ensure that learners are prepared to use it in specialised professional contexts.

The distinction between linguistic competence and linguistic capital provides a useful way of interpreting this gap. From Bourdieu's (1991) perspective, linguistic resources acquire value within particular social fields. Their possession alone does not guarantee that speakers can convert them into professional or economic advantages. Also, Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of identity and investment adds another dimension by drawing attention to the relationship between language learning, identity, and learners' perceptions of available opportunities and resources. Applied to Business English education in Algeria, these perspectives shift attention from what learners know about English to how they understand its value and whether they are equipped to mobilise it in professional and entrepreneurial settings. Therefore, the central question is not only how much English graduates have learned, but also whether their educational experiences prepare them to use it as a meaningful resource in the fields they hope to enter.

2.4.2 Institutional Barriers and the Generalist Practitioner Problem

At the institutional level, the most consistent finding across the available Algerian literature is the mismatch between the specialist knowledge required to teach Business English effectively and the generalist preparation of the instructors assigned to do so. Aleb (2026), in the most recent and methodologically comprehensive study available, interviewed five Business English instructors teaching in economics and management faculties at the Universities of Tlemcen and Oran 2. All five lacked formal ESP or Business English training; all described syllabi that were self-assembled from general English resources; none reported systematic collaboration with economics or business faculty; and assessment practices uniformly privileged grammar and translation over professional communication. What is particularly significant about Aleb's (2026) study is that it reveals how instructors recognize and attempt to compensate for these limitations through self-developed materials, incorporation of authentic business texts, and independent professional development—while remaining structurally constrained by institutional conditions that neither support nor reward such efforts.

Moreover, Khalili (2025), examining seven ESP instructors at Ahmed Draia University of Adrar, corroborated this picture with particular forcefulness. Most instructors had received no specialized ESP training, yet were simultaneously responsible for course design, materials development, delivery, and

assessment. Instruction defaulted to grammar explanation. Student motivation was perceived as predominantly examination-driven. One teacher described the situation as "an endless and useless circle" (Khalili, 2025)—an assessment that, while frank, is also analytically precise. When the institutional signals that reach learners communicate that English is a compliance requirement rather than a professional investment, examination performance will be the predictable outcome. Khalili's findings are not, critically, a criticism of individual teachers; they are a diagnosis of a system that places impossible demands on underprepared practitioners without providing the structural conditions for effective ESP delivery.

Khadam (2023) extended this analysis to the doctoral level, examining first-year doctoral students in the Departments of Management, Finance, and Marketing at Tahri Mohamed University of Bechar. The findings were structurally consistent with those of Aleb and Khalili: one and a half hours of English instruction per week, no dedicated Business English syllabus, a single instructor without specialist preparation, and no collaboration with faculty in the relevant disciplines. What distinguishes Khadam's study is its documentation of a paradox that the existing framework cannot explain: every student identified passing the examination as their primary motivation for studying English, yet many simultaneously expressed aspirations to participate in international academic conferences and professional networks. These students know, at some level, that English is important for the professional futures they envision. They have simply not been given the educational conditions to invest in it as if it were.

Benzerdjeb (2021), through a triangulated needs analysis drawing on students, teachers, and banking sector employers at Abou Bekr Belkaid University of Tlemcen, provided some of the most compelling empirical evidence of the consequences of this institutional configuration. Despite years of English instruction, most students remained at intermediate proficiency and experienced significant difficulties with oral communication, professional writing, cohesion, and grammatical accuracy. More revealing than the proficiency gaps, however, were the employer data: banking managers reported that graduates were expected to handle international documentation, business correspondence, telephone communication, and interactions with foreign clients—tasks for which they were demonstrably unprepared. The convergence of perspectives across three different stakeholder groups strengthens this finding considerably: the gap between what the educational system produces and what professional environments require is not a matter of perception but of documented performance.

Maouche (2021) added important regional depth by examining ESP provision in the Bejaia region, where questionnaire data from EFL teachers, private language school administrators, and economic sector stakeholders revealed that teachers themselves acknowledged limited subject-matter knowledge in economics and business—a finding that is theoretically significant because it demonstrates that the practitioner gap is recognized from within the profession. Maouche's proposal of the TEGCOM (Teaching English for Globalized Communication) model, which emphasized authentic communication, intercultural awareness, and learner participation, represented a genuine attempt to move beyond structural analysis toward curricular reform. Yet even this proposal, which invoked Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital as its theoretical anchor, did not fully develop the investment dimension that would explain why learners have not already invested in English as a professional resource despite years of instruction. This theoretical limitation is precisely the one the present article addresses.

2.4.3 The Persistence of the Instrumental Model and the Private Sector Evidence

The institutional portrait assembled by Aleb (2026), Khalili (2025), Khadam (2023), Benzerdjeb (2021), and Maouche (2021) might appear to be a collection of institutional case studies rather than evidence of a systemic pattern. But their convergence across different universities, regions, and levels of study suggests otherwise. In each context, the same features repeat: generalist instructors, improvised curricula,

examination-dominated assessment, and student motivation oriented toward credential acquisition rather than professional communication. This is not coincidence; it is the product of an institutional logic that has organized ESP as an academic requirement rather than as a professional investment opportunity. When students receive consistently the same signal—that English is for passing examinations—they invest accordingly.

Mebitil (2024) provides a further perspective by shifting attention from university students to professionals already participating in the labour market. The study examined twenty experienced Algerian professionals enrolled in a private language school in Mascara. All were graduates of economics and business programmes with between five and fifteen years of professional experience, and they had enrolled to receive Business English instruction that they had not received during their university education. Despite their years of formal English study, most of them had only beginner-to-intermediate proficiency. The professional goals they expressed, including negotiating with international partners, communicating confidently with foreign clients, and presenting business projects, reflect the communicative demands that Ahmad and Yusof Khan (2023) associate with global entrepreneurship. The fact that these professionals sought Business English training at their own expense, years after graduation, points to a gap between their university education and the language skills required in their working lives. From an investment theory perspective, their decision to pursue further training is also significant. It suggests that, despite the limitations of their previous educational experiences, they continued to see English as a resource that could help them access wider professional and entrepreneurial opportunities. Thus, their willingness to invest in learning English reveals both the limitations of their earlier education and their continued aspirations to participate in international business communities.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design: Critical Conceptual Synthesis

This paper is grounded in a critical conceptual synthesis, a qualitative, non-empirical research design that constructs theoretical arguments by systematically analyzing, comparing, and critically evaluating an existing body of published scholarship. Unlike systematic reviews, which follow a replicable protocol primarily aimed at aggregating empirical findings, critical conceptual syntheses are concerned with the construction of new theoretical frameworks from the productive tension between existing bodies of literature (Randerson, 2023; Anqi, Sweeheng, and Thein 2024). The design is particularly appropriate when the aim is to identify conceptual gaps, reframe established assumptions, and propose alternative models that cut across disciplinary boundaries—all of which describe the purpose of the present article.

The decision to adopt this methodology was not incidental. It reflects the nature of the problem itself. The structural gaps in Algerian Business English education, the incomplete theorization of English as capital rather than competence, and the disconnection between entrepreneurship education research and applied sociolinguistics are not gaps that can be addressed by collecting new data from a single institution. They are conceptual and systemic problems that require a methodology capable of synthesizing evidence across multiple disciplines, contexts, and theoretical traditions simultaneously. A critical synthesis is, in this sense, the appropriate instrument, not a substitute for empirical work, but the necessary prior step that makes such work theoretically coherent.

Critical conceptual synthesis has an established precedent in applied linguistics and educational research. Darvin and Norton (2015), whose expanded investment model underpins the present article's theoretical framework, was itself a conceptual and theoretical review synthesizing more than two decades of identity and investment research into a unified tripartite model. Dou, Chan and Win (2023) employed a semi-systematic literature review to trace the historical evolution of ESP over six decades and identify emerging disciplinary directions. Hyland (2022) offered an authoritative conceptual overview of contemporary ESP that synthesized genre analysis, needs analysis, and ethnographic traditions without primary data collection. Sofia (2026) similarly drew on a comprehensive literature review to examine the relationship between ESP and General English. Closer to the Algerian context, Mehdaoui and Benabed (2023) conducted a content analysis of national academic research, doctoral theses, and institutional reports to produce the most comprehensive available account of the relationship between English education and employability in Algeria. Zhang (2025) and Randerson (2023) each presented conceptual articles proposing new theoretical frameworks, English as Intercultural Capital and futures literacy, respectively, without empirical data collection. The present study situates itself within this recognized tradition of conceptual scholarship while extending it through the systematic integration of three bodies of literature that have rarely been brought into dialogue.

3.2 Source Selection and Scope

The paper draws on thirty-two sources assembled through purposive, theoretically guided selection rather than through keyword-driven database searching alone. Purposive selection is appropriate in critical synthesis when the research aim is not to achieve exhaustive coverage of a field but to identify the most conceptually significant contributions across multiple disciplines that together bear on a specific theoretical problem (Darvin & Norton, 2015). The selection criteria were both substantive and methodological: sources were included if they addressed at least one of the three research questions directly, if they represented the most recent or most cited scholarship within their respective subfields, or if they provided contextually specific evidence about Algerian Business English education that would otherwise be unavailable from international literature.

The corpus spans four distinct disciplinary domains, each selected for its contribution to a different dimension of the argument. The first domain is English for Specific Purposes and Business English, represented by foundational and contemporary works including Hyland (2022), Dou, Chan and Win (2023), Sofia (2026), Shalash (2024), Kim (2023), and Anqi, Sweeheng, and Thein (2024). These sources provide the disciplinary and historical context for understanding how Business English has been theorized and delivered, and they allow the article to characterize the dominant competence-based paradigm from within the field rather than from outside it.

The second domain is entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education, encompassing Ahmad and Yusof Khan (2023), Rajović Jelena, Milivoje Jovanović, Nebojša Denić, and Ivana Bulut Bogdanovic (2024), Abro Ali Mustafa, Abdul Razzaque Bhutto, Indra Mughal, Faiza Abro, and Shagufta Saleem Shaikh (2025), Akfan (2025), Donoso-González, Macarena, Inmaculada Pedraza-Navarro, and Leonardo Palferro-Fernández. (2022), Randerson (2023), Toma and Rasul (2023), and Sica, Spiniello, Palazzo, Lusini, and Micozzi (2026). This domain provides the empirical and conceptual evidence for the claim that English is increasingly understood as central to entrepreneurial activity, while simultaneously revealing the theoretical limitations of how entrepreneurship education has framed the relationship between language and professional identity.

The third domain is the sociolinguistics of identity and investment, which constitutes the theoretical core of the article. This domain includes Norton (2015), Darvin and Norton (2015), Kanno and Norton (2012), Manan and Hajar (2025), Zhang and Yang (2025), Wang and Jiang (2025), Sung (2019), Gil and Oliveira (2014), and Darvin (2025), complemented by Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital and Zhang's (2025) framework of English as Intercultural Capital. These sources are not merely cited in support of existing arguments; they supply the conceptual vocabulary—investment, imagined communities, linguistic capital, ideology, disinvestment, recognition—through which the article constructs its alternative reading of Business English education.

The fourth domain is Algerian educational research, which provides the regional empirical grounding essential to ensuring that the theoretical argument addresses a real, documented situation rather than a hypothetical one. This domain includes Aleb (2026), Khalili (2025), Mehdaoui and Benabed (2023), Khadam (2023), Benzerdjeb (2021), Maouche (2021), and Mebitil (2024). The selection prioritized studies that employed primary data collection from multiple stakeholder groups, teachers, students, and employers, and that spanned different universities, regions, and educational levels, thereby producing a body of evidence that, while not statistically representative of the national system, is sufficiently consistent in its findings to support structural rather than merely institutional conclusions.

In terms of temporal scope, the corpus intentionally includes both seminal theoretical works and the most recent available scholarship. The inclusion of foundational texts like Bourdieu (1991), Kanno and Norton (2012) reflects the fact that the theoretical frameworks they introduced remain the most influential available and have not been superseded. The inclusion of sources published in 2025 and 2026 reflects the paper's commitment to engaging with the current state of each field rather than relying on established consensus that may no longer accurately represent where the scholarship stands.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

The analytical process proceeded in three stages, each corresponding to one of the article's three research questions. In the first stage, sources from the ESP, Business English, and entrepreneurship domains were read with the specific aim of identifying how the role of English is conceptualized: whether it is framed primarily as a communicative competence, as a form of capital, or through some combination of the two. This involved close attention to the theoretical vocabulary employed by each study—the presence or absence of terms such as capital, investment, identity, recognition, legitimacy, power, and ideology—as well as to the assumptions embedded in methodological choices, research questions, and curriculum recommendations. Studies that used the term "linguistic capital" without engaging with Bourdieu's theoretical framework were distinguished from those that drew on it substantively, a distinction that proved analytically significant across multiple sources.

In the second stage, the Algerian empirical literature was analyzed with the aim of identifying structural patterns rather than isolated institutional findings. Each study was examined for the specific institutional conditions it documented, teacher preparation, curriculum design, needs analysis practices, assessment frameworks, and university–industry collaboration, and findings were compared across studies to determine whether observed shortcomings were institution-specific or systemic. The convergence of findings across seven studies spanning different universities, regions, and educational levels (from undergraduate to doctoral programs, and from public universities to private language schools) provided the basis for the structural argument advanced in Section 4.2.

In the third stage, the theoretical and Algerian empirical strands were brought into productive dialogue with the aim of constructing an alternative pedagogical model that addresses the identified gaps.

This stage involved not only identifying points of alignment between theoretical frameworks and empirical findings but also attending to productive tensions and limitations. For instance, Gil and Oliveira's (2014) finding that institutional curriculum design determines which learner identity gets reinforced was read alongside the Algerian evidence not because their Brazilian context is directly comparable, but because the structural dynamic they identified, a mismatch between curriculum design and intended educational outcome, is precisely the dynamic that the Algerian data illustrates independently. This kind of analogical comparison across contexts is a recognized feature of theoretical synthesis in qualitative educational research (Mehdaoui & Benabed, 2023; Darvin & Norton, 2015).

3.4 Positionality and Reflexivity

A critical conceptual synthesis is never theoretically neutral. The selection of sources, the framing of research questions, the choice of theoretical framework, and the interpretation of findings all reflect particular intellectual and professional commitments. This article takes an explicitly critical sociolinguistic standpoint, one that treats language education not as a politically innocent transmission of skills but as a socially embedded practice through which power relations are reproduced, identities are constructed, and access to professional communities is facilitated or foreclosed. This standpoint is not adopted arbitrarily; it is motivated by the observation, consistent across the Algerian literature reviewed, that competence-based approaches have produced demonstrably insufficient outcomes for learners whose professional aspirations exceed what those approaches were designed to cultivate.

The choice to privilege Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital and Norton's (2000, 2015) investment framework over other available theoretical perspectives, cognitive theories of second language acquisition, communicative competence models, genre-based approaches, reflects a considered judgment that these frameworks best explain the specific phenomenon under investigation: the persistent gap between prolonged exposure to English instruction and effective professional participation, in a context where the educational system's ideological construction of English as an examination requirement actively works against learners' own professional aspirations. This judgment is argued for throughout the paper rather than simply asserted, and the reader is invited to evaluate it on the basis of how well it accounts for the evidence assembled.

It should also be acknowledged that critical conceptual synthesis, by its nature, cannot claim the kind of external validity that large-scale empirical studies may aspire to. The Algerian studies reviewed in this article were conducted in specific institutions, with specific participant groups, at specific moments in time. They do not constitute a nationally representative sample. What they do constitute, and what makes their convergent findings analytically significant, is a consistent body of evidence from multiple independent investigations that identified the same structural conditions across different institutional settings. The theoretical framework proposed in this article is intended to explain that convergence, not merely to describe it. Its ultimate validation will require the empirical work that Section 4.4 calls for: longitudinal investment studies, identity-focused curriculum evaluations, and needs analyses that attend to learners' imagined communities as seriously as they attend to their target communicative tasks.

3.5 Limitations

Three limitations of the present approach deserve explicit acknowledgement. First, as a critical conceptual synthesis rather than a primary empirical study, this article cannot produce findings about specific learners, classrooms, or institutions. Its contribution is theoretical, it proposes a reconceptualization and an alternative framework, and its claims require empirical testing before they can be translated into specific

curriculum recommendations with confidence. This is not a weakness unique to this article; it is a characteristic of the research genre; whose legitimate function is to establish the conceptual conditions for subsequent empirical inquiry.

Second, the Algerian literature available at the time of writing is geographically concentrated in particular regions, notably Tlemcen, Bejaia, Bechar, Oran, and Mascara, and does not include equivalent evidence from all of Algeria's wilayas or from all types of higher education institution. While the consistency of findings across these diverse settings provides reasonable grounds for structural generalization, the possibility that other institutional contexts may present different configurations cannot be ruled out. The paper's claims about structural conditions should therefore be understood as well-supported hypotheses rather than established facts.

Third, the theoretical framework employed in this article draws heavily on research conducted in contexts very different from Algeria such as Hong Kong, Brazil, Canada, China, Pakistan, Japan. The application of frameworks developed in these contexts to the Algerian situation requires interpretive caution. Norton's (2015) investment theory was initially developed through research on immigrant women learning English in Canada; Bourdieu's (1991) theory was grounded in French sociological analysis; Gil and Oliveira's (2014) findings concern Brazilian teacher education. The present article argues that the structural dynamics these frameworks illuminate—the relationship between institutional conditions, learner identity, and investment—are sufficiently general to apply across contexts, but it does so analytically rather than empirically. Future research should test this claim directly through studies that apply these frameworks to Algerian learners and practitioners in their own institutional settings.

4. Discussion

4.1 Beyond Competence: Reconceptualizing English as Entrepreneurial Capital

The first research question asked how the role of English is conceptualized across current Business English and entrepreneurship-oriented literature—whether it is treated primarily as an instrumental skill or as a sociolinguistic asset tied to power and market positioning. The answer that emerges from the preceding review is unambiguous: the dominant framing is instrumental. From Ahmad and Yusof Khan's (2023) emphasis on communicative performance to Rajović, Jovanović, Denić, and Bulut Bogdanovic's (2024) competence-based taxonomy, from Shalash's (2024) needs-analysis framework to Sofia 's (2026) synthesis of ESP principles, the literature consistently positions English as a bundle of professionally relevant communicative skills whose value is determined by accuracy, fluency, and functional task performance. Even studies that use the term "linguistic capital", including Anqi, Sweeheng, and Thein (2024) and, in the Algerian context, Maouche (2021), do so without engaging with Bourdieu's sociological framework, effectively using the vocabulary of capital to mean something closer to "valuable skill."

This is not an insignificant difference. When English is conceptualized as competence, the curriculum responds with skills training: the identification of target tasks through needs analysis, the design of authentic language activities, the development of professional vocabulary and genre knowledge. This is genuinely useful work, and the present article does not argue against it. What it argues is that competence-based curriculum, on its own, cannot explain why learners invest—or fail to invest—in the language learning process, cannot account for the symbolic and economic dimensions of language proficiency that determine whether competence is converted into professional opportunity, and cannot design educational environments that actively cultivate entrepreneurial identity and professional legitimacy. For that, a different theoretical register is required.

Bourdieu (1991) provided the conceptual tools to understand why English is not simply a competence but a form of capital whose value is socially determined and unequally distributed. Norton (2015) explained why learners invest in language learning in terms that go beyond motivation—in terms of identity, aspiration, and anticipated symbolic and material return. Darvin and Norton (2015) demonstrated that investment is shaped not only by individual agency but by the ideological structures that determine whose language counts, whose voice is recognized as legitimate, and whose investment is rewarded. Zhang (2025) translated these theoretical insights into an operational pedagogical framework—English as Intercultural Capital—organized around the concept of recognition rather than correctness. Together, these frameworks provide what the competence-oriented literature cannot: a sociological account of what English is, who it serves, and what it would mean to organize education around its capital dimensions rather than its skill dimensions.

The answer to RQ1, then, is that English is overwhelmingly treated as instrumental competence in the existing literature, and that this framing—while not wrong—is incomplete. The conceptual shift from competence to capital, from skill acquisition to identity investment, from needs analysis to recognition, is not a rejection of ESP but an extension of it into the sociological territory that the discipline has long approached but rarely fully entered.

4.2 Structural Constraints in Algerian Business English Education

The second research question asked what structural, institutional, and methodological gaps emerge when generalist ESP practitioners implement business-oriented language curricula within the Algerian tertiary education context. The Algerian evidence assembled in Section 2.4 makes it possible to identify three interlocking structural gaps with considerable precision.

The first is the practitioner gap. Business English instruction in Algerian higher education is routinely assigned to instructors who possess qualifications in General English or literary studies rather than in ESP, Business English, or related professional disciplines. As Aleb (2026), Khalili (2025), Khadam (2023), Benzerdjeb (2021), and Maouche (2021) collectively documented, these practitioners are expected to function simultaneously as language teachers, curriculum designers, materials developers, and subject-area informants—roles that require both disciplinary expertise and institutional support that the system does not provide. This finding is consistent with Kim's (2023) demonstration that ESP practitioner identity is developmental and demanding, requiring continuous negotiation between subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical expertise; and with Gil and Oliveira's (2014) insight that institutional curriculum design determines which learner identity gets produced. When Business English is delivered by instructors whose own preparation was in general language teaching, the identity they model and the curriculum they design will, inevitably, reflect that preparation. The entrepreneurial language-user identity that Business English education is nominally designed to cultivate is structurally foreclosed before it begins.

The second gap is the curriculum gap. The absence of standardized Business English syllabi, the failure to conduct systematic needs analysis aligned with professional sector demands, and the minimal collaboration between language departments and business faculties collectively produce curricula that are improvised, inconsistent, and unresponsive to the communicative realities of entrepreneurial practice. Mehdaoui and Benabed (2023) situated this curriculum gap within a broader national pattern of policy fragmentation, noting that the absence of strategic coordination between language policy, higher education, and labor-market needs has produced a system in which the official importance of English coexists with educational practices that consistently undervalue it. The international contrast provided by Anqi, Sweeheng, and Thein (2024), who demonstrated how stakeholder-informed needs analysis can drive curriculum reform in response to changing professional demands, illustrates what is possible when

institutional conditions support needs-based curriculum design. That this is not the norm in Algeria is a structural choice—a consequence of how universities are organized and what they reward—not an inevitable feature of the educational landscape.

The third gap is the assessment gap, which may be the most ideologically consequential of the three. When assessment practices reward grammar knowledge and translation accuracy, they send an unambiguous signal to learners about what English is for. Darvin and Norton (2015) argued that ideology operates through institutions—that the messages embedded in curriculum design, assessment criteria, and institutional expectations shape what investment is thinkable and what returns are imaginable. In the Algerian context, examination-driven assessment reproduces an ideology of English as academic compliance rather than professional capital. The professionals in Mebitil's (2024) study, who returned to education years after graduation to acquire the Business English they never developed at university, are the product of this ideological configuration: their universities taught them to pass English examinations, not to invest in English as a resource for professional participation. That these individuals retained the imagination to do so, at their own initiative and expense, is a testament to the resilience of human aspiration in the face of institutional inertia.

4.3 Toward an Investment-Oriented Pedagogical Framework

The third research question asked how sociolinguistic frameworks of identity negotiation and language investment can be integrated to construct an alternative pedagogical model for entrepreneurial ESP. The theoretical synthesis developed in Section 2.3 and the structural diagnosis offered in Section 4.2 together provide the basis for such a model. Rather than proposing a prescriptive curriculum framework—which would require empirical grounding beyond the scope of a conceptual synthesis—the following discussion identifies the organizing principles that should underpin any serious alternative.

The first principle is the shift from needs analysis to identity investment as the organizing logic of Business English curriculum design. This does not mean abandoning needs analysis; it means expanding it. Hyland's (2022) discourse-based approach provides the methodological scaffolding—genre analysis, authentic professional tasks, ethnographic investigation of target communities—while Norton's (2015) investment framework adds the dimension that mainstream ESP has consistently underemphasized: an explicit engagement with who learners are, what professional communities they aspire to join, and what forms of linguistic capital they need to accumulate in order to participate legitimately in those communities. Sofia 's (2026) discussion of the learning contract as a negotiated agreement between learner and instructor provides a useful mechanism here: reframed as an investment contract, it would engage learners in explicit reflection on their imagined professional futures, the forms of English they need to develop, and the identities they are working to construct—not merely the communicative tasks they need to perform.

The second principle is the cultivation of entrepreneurial identity as an explicit educational outcome. Donoso-González, Macarena, Pedraza-Navarro, and Palferro-Fernández (2022) demonstrated that entrepreneurship education, at its most effective, does not transmit entrepreneurial knowledge but cultivates an entrepreneurial identity—a way of perceiving oneself as creative, agentic, and professionally self-determining. Business English education can and should contribute to this process. This means designing learning environments in which students can imagine themselves as future entrepreneurs and begin to construct the communicative dimensions of that identity: the ability to present business proposals persuasively, to negotiate partnerships credibly, to network across cultural boundaries, and to project professional legitimacy to international audiences. Toma and Rasul (2023) demonstrated empirically that authentic entrepreneurial content—business plans, meeting minutes, case studies, investment pitches—substantially increases learner engagement and communicative development. The investment theory

explanation for this finding is that authentic content enables learners to begin inhabiting their imagined professional identities rather than merely studying language in the abstract.

The third principle is the recognition of learners' existing linguistic and cultural resources as forms of capital rather than as obstacles to English acquisition. This principle draws directly from Manan and Hajar's (2025) critique of disinvestment and from Darvin and Norton's (2015) attention to ideology. Algerian entrepreneurship students arrive in Business English classrooms with multilingual competence in Arabic, Tamazight, and French; with knowledge of local business cultures, family networks, and regional market structures; and with professional and social experiences that constitute genuine entrepreneurial resources. A capital-oriented pedagogy would acknowledge these resources explicitly, helping learners understand how their existing forms of capital can be complemented and leveraged by English rather than displaced by it. Zhang's (2025) concept of plurilingual agility—one of the six dimensions of English as Intercultural Capital—is particularly relevant here: it frames multilingualism not as a problem to be overcome but as a strategic entrepreneurial asset in multilingual commercial environments.

The fourth principle, which follows from Darvin and Norton (2015), is an explicit curriculum engagement with ideology: with the social and institutional conditions that determine whose English counts, whose professional identity is recognized as legitimate, and how the linguistic market for Business English operates in specific professional fields. This is not an invitation to political pedagogy, but it is an invitation to critical literacy—to help learners understand that English proficiency does not automatically convert into professional opportunity, that the value of linguistic capital is field-specific and recognition-dependent, and that developing the strategic, identity-aware use of English that Zhang (2025) describes is more valuable than grammatical accuracy in isolation. The professionals in Mebitil's (2024) study who returned to education after years in the workforce had, implicitly, understood this. The educational system that prepared them had not.

The fifth principle concerns institutional conditions, which are ultimately what determines whether any of the preceding principles can be implemented. Sica, Spiniello, Palazzo, Lusini, and Micozzi (2026) demonstrated, in a study of community-led entrepreneurship in Italy, that entrepreneurial success depends not only on economic resources but on social, cultural, and symbolic capital, on the relational networks, community trust, and cultural legitimacy that sustain entrepreneurial activity over time. The parallel for Business English education is this: the linguistic capital that entrepreneurship students need cannot be produced by isolated instructors working without support; it requires institutional investment in specialist teacher preparation, collaborative curriculum development, university–industry partnerships, and assessment frameworks aligned with professional participation rather than grammatical compliance. This is, ultimately, a policy argument as much as a pedagogical one. The reforms required are systemic.

To synthesize the findings of the reviewed literature, the present study proposes an integrated conceptual framework illustrating the progression from Business English instruction as communicative competence to entrepreneurial capital. Rather than presenting these constructs as isolated variables, the framework conceptualizes them as an interconnected developmental process shaped by pedagogical practices, identity

negotiation, language investment, and the institutional conditions of Algerian higher education.

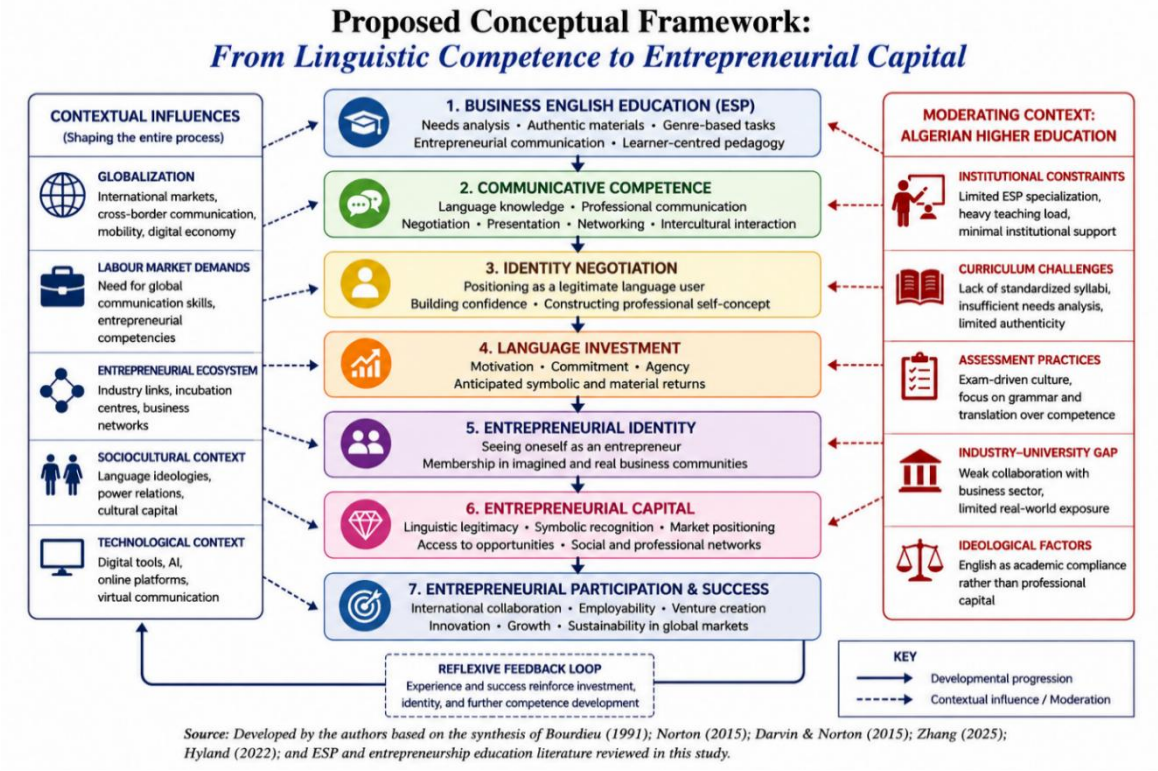


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework: From Linguistic Competence to Entrepreneurial Capital

As illustrated in Figure 1, Business English education constitutes the starting point of the proposed framework. Grounded in ESP principles such as needs analysis, authenticity, and learner-centred pedagogy, it provides the conditions through which learners first develop communicative competence. However, the framework argues that competence alone does not explain entrepreneurial participation. Instead, competence becomes meaningful only when it contributes to identity negotiation and sustained language investment, ultimately leading to the development of entrepreneurial capital.

4.4 Implications and Future Directions

The conceptual synthesis developed in this article carries several implications for research, pedagogy, and policy. For researchers, the most pressing need is empirical validation of the investment framework within Algerian entrepreneurial ESP contexts. The studies reviewed in Section 2.4 are, without exception, grounded in needs analysis and curriculum design; studies that examine Algerian learners' identities, imagined professional communities, investment decisions, and patterns of engagement with Business English are conspicuously absent. This is a significant research gap, and one that could be addressed through the narrative inquiry methodology employed by Gil and Oliveira (2014), the longitudinal case study design used by Zhang and Yang (2025), or the mixed-methods investment-focused approach developed by Wang and Jiang (2025). The conceptual framework proposed here is intended, in part, as the theoretical scaffolding for precisely such empirical work.

For practitioners, the implications are more immediately practical. The evidence reviewed in this article does not suggest that Algerian Business English instructors are failing because of individual inadequacy; it suggests that they are operating within institutional conditions that preclude success. The response to this situation is not more of the same—more grammar instruction, more vocabulary lists, more

examination preparation—but a different conversation about what Business English is for and what it can do for learners who are given the educational conditions to invest in it genuinely. That conversation begins with the questions Norton (2015) asked twenty years ago and that the field has still not fully answered: what imagined communities are these learners constructing? What symbolic and material resources do they anticipate from English proficiency? Whose voice, in the professional communities they aspire to join, will recognize their English as legitimate capital?

Darvin (2025) reminded us that as generative artificial intelligence becomes embedded in language learning and professional communication, the investment framework extends into new configurations of identity, capital, and ideology. For Algerian entrepreneurship students who are already using AI tools to draft business correspondence or practice English interactions, the ideological defaults of these systems—their Western communicative norms, their English-language dominance, their implicit assumptions about what professional communication looks like—are not neutral. A pedagogy organized around investment and capital would include critical digital literacy: the capacity to use AI tools strategically while recognizing their ideological architecture and maintaining authorial agency over the entrepreneurial identities being constructed. This is a dimension of Business English education that current Algerian provision, focused as it is on grammar and examination compliance, is not equipped to address. It is, however, a dimension that the framework proposed here is designed to accommodate.

5. Conclusion

This paper began with Bourdieu's (1991) observation that language possesses generative capacities without limits—that it is not merely a vehicle for carrying information but a social mechanism through which identities are constructed, legitimacy is negotiated, and capital is accumulated and converted. It ends with the argument that Business English education in Algeria has, systematically, treated English as if its generative capacities were precisely limited: limited to grammatical forms, professional vocabulary, communicative tasks, and examination scores. The consequence is a workforce whose English proficiency, such as it is, functions as a credential rather than as capital—a demonstration of educational compliance rather than a resource for entrepreneurial participation.

The literature reviewed in this article suggests that this outcome is not inevitable. The investment framework developed by Norton (2015), Darvin and Norton (2015), and extended by Manan and Hajar (2025), Wang and Jiang (2025), Zhang and Yang (2025), Sung (2019), and Gil and Oliveira (2014) provides a theoretically grounded alternative: an understanding of language learning as a social investment in future professional identities, driven by imagined communities (Kanno & Norton, 2012), shaped by ideological conditions, and producing—when the educational conditions are right—forms of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Zhang, 2025) that enable genuine participation in entrepreneurial communities. Toma and Rasul (2023) demonstrated empirically that authentic entrepreneurial content can catalyze this process; Donoso-González, Macarena, Inmaculada Pedraza-Navarro, and Leonardo Palferro-Fernández. (2022) demonstrated that entrepreneurial identity is an achievable educational outcome; the Algerian evidence from Aleb (2026), Khalili (2025), Mehdaoui and Benabed (2023), Khadam (2023), Benzerdjeb (2021), Maouche (2021), and Mebitil (2024) demonstrated that the structural conditions for this kind of education do not currently exist—but also that the aspiration among learners persists.

What is needed is not a new textbook or a revised syllabus, though both are necessary. What is needed is a reconceptualization—of what English is in the context of entrepreneurship, of what language education is for, and of who Algerian entrepreneurship students are and can become through it. This paper has attempted to provide the theoretical foundation for that reconceptualization. The empirical and practical

work of building it—curriculum by curriculum, classroom by classroom, learner by learner—remains ahead.

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