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Enhancing ESP/EMI Training for Algerian University Teachers Across Disciplines: English as a Medium of Instruction vs. Communication Skills

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Abstract

This paper examines the current state of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training for university teachers in Algeria, with particular focus on the tension between English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and communication skills development. Through an analysis of existing programs and a survey of 20 university teachers from various disciplines, this study identifies significant gaps in current training approaches. The findings reveal that while initiatives like CEIL and FAD have established foundational English language instruction, they inadequately address discipline-specific needs and classroom engagement strategies. This paper proposes an integrated framework that balances technical content delivery with effective communication skills, providing practical recommendations for comprehensive ESP training that meets the evolving demands of Algerian higher education in a globalized academic landscape.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, English as a Medium of Instruction, Communication Skills, Teacher Training, Algerian Higher Education

1. Introduction

English has firmly established itself as the global language of academic studies and professional exchange. In response, Algerian universities are progressively implementing English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and expanding English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs to align with international requirements. Yet, this transition presents a number of challenges: teachers are expected to teach complex disciplinary content in English without necessarily having the linguistic or pedagogical tools to do so effectively. As a result, student engagement often suffers, and the intended learning outcomes may not be fully achieved. This paper explores how existing ESP/EMI training in Algeria addresses these demands of content delivery and communicative competencies.

University teachers in Algeria are trying to face a dual instructional challenge: they must teach subject-specific content in English while also engaging through effective communication with students. They are increasingly expected to deliver specialized content in English despite varying

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levels of language proficiency and pedagogical preparedness for EMI contexts. This paper examines this critical juncture between ESP and EMI by putting forward the following research question: How can ESP training programs effectively bridge the gap between EMI competencies and communication skills for Algerian university teachers across disciplines?

This research is significant in that it addresses a growing concern within Algerian higher education: the significant gap between subject matter proficiency and the ability to convey it effectively through the English language. Through the present investigation we aim to contribute to the development of an integrated framework for ESP/EMI training that may contribute to find solutions to the dual challenges faced by university teachers in Algeria.

2. Literature Review

2.1 ESP Training in Algeria: Current Landscape

English for Specific Purposes has evolved significantly since its emergence in the 1960s, developing into a learner-centred approach that addresses particular professional or academic language needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). In the Algerian context, ESP initiatives have significantly gained ground in Algerian universities, particularly following educational reforms that emphasized the importance of English proficiency across disciplines.

Current ESP training programs in Algeria, such as CEIL (Centre d'Enseignement Intensif des Langues) training programmes and FAD (Formation à Distance) offering academic licence programmes, have provided valuable general English instruction for University Teachers. However, these programs often employ generic approaches that fail to address requirements of the target situations: discourse features and communicative skills necessary for teachers to address their specific academic and professional disciplines. Furthermore, many of these programs focus predominantly on language as a system rather than as a tool for effective teaching and research skills in academic contexts.

2.2 EMI: Challenges and Opportunities

English as a Medium of Instruction represents both an opportunity and a challenge for non-Anglophone educational systems. Dearden (2017) defines EMI as "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English" (p. 4). EMI offers access to global academic resources and enhances the internationalisation of the nation’s higher education, especially for universities looking for global recognition. It allows professional growth especially the interactive pedagogical skills. It also affects students’ careers in terms of employability and academic advancement. On the other hand, its application presents significant linguistic and pedagogical challenges especially in the Algerian context.

Benrabah (2014) identifies several obstacles to effective EMI implementation, including inadequate linguistic readiness of educators and a lack of organizational or pedagogical frameworks conducive to effective EMI teaching and learning These challenges are compounded by what Macaro (2018) terms the "content-language balance dilemma," where teachers struggle to maintain academic rigor while navigating linguistic limitations. EMI is therefore applied without adequate teacher training or encouragement and with a significant lack of support systems.

2.3 Communication Skills in Academic Contexts

Beyond EMI competencies, effective teaching in English-medium environments requires robust communication skills. These encompass not only general linguistic proficiency but also discipline-specific discourse features, classroom management strategies, and cross-cultural communication abilities (Basturkmen, 2014).

Habermas's (1981) theory of communicative action provides a useful framework for understanding the importance of these skills, emphasizing that effective communication requires not only grammatical competence but also sociolinguistic appropriateness and strategic competence. In academic settings, they translate to the ability to explain complex concepts clearly, facilitate discussions, provide constructive feedback, and create an inclusive learning environment across cultural divides (Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990).

Hence, effective teaching through the medium of English in EFL contexts is not only a matter of knowing the language. It requires the mastery of communication skills specific to academic environments and the teaching profession. It includes language fluency the ability to use discipline specific content, manage the different types of classrooms and an awareness of the strategic use of the language (Habermas 1981), i.e. to be able to comprehend complex ideas, guide classroom communication issues and foster students' engagements

2.4 Integrating EMI and Communication Skills

Studies are increasingly recognizing the need for integrated approaches that address both the technical aspects of EMI and the communicative dimensions of effective teaching. Dafouz and Smit's (2016) ROAD-MAPPING framework offers a conceptualization for examining EMI in university settings. They emphasise the necessity for interconnecting the roles of the different actors in the teaching learning process, academic disciplines, language management, agents, practices, internationalization and 'glocalization' of processes in EMI contexts.

However, as noted by Bradford (2016), many EMI training programs continue to focus on language proficiency at the expense of pedagogical and communicative skills. This gap is particularly pronounced in contexts like Algeria, where resources for teacher training and teacher development

may be regarded as limited and fragmented. It becomes then essential to move beyond narrow language focused training. Instead a more systemic approach is needed to equip teachers not only with English language proficiency but also with the pedagogical and communicative skills required to teach through the medium of English. EMI training processes need to be based on interdisciplinary collaboration that responds to a glocalised yet globalised higher education

3. Methodology

To provide an answer to the previously mentioned research question, we have tried to investigate the challenges faced by Algerian university teachers in implementing EMI and developing effective communication skills. Through the present study, we employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative elements.

3.1 Participants

The study involved 20 university teachers from various disciplines across multiple Algerian universities. All participants had prior exposure to EFL training through programs such as CEIL and FAD. The employed research instruments aimed at providing a foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of existing approaches to EFL training processes. The sample included participants from disciplines such as medicine, engineering, computer science, economics, and natural sciences, allowing for cross-disciplinary comparisons.

3.2 Data Collection

In order to collect the necessary data, the researcher used a comprehensive survey instrument containing:

1. Likert-scale questions that aim at measuring teachers' perceived competencies in EMI/ESP and communication skills
2. Open-ended questions that aim at exploring specific challenges and teaching educational development needs
3. Scenario-based questions that include questions that evaluate strategies for managing language tasks related to classroom contexts

The interdisciplinary approach to data collection ensures data collection on what teachers know about the language and how they may use the language in context

The Survey was conducted after participants completed their EFL training. It was designed to capture fresh perspectives as teachers applied their training in academic settings, in order to understand the

real-world applicability of EFL training programs, and to identify specific challenges for improving ESP and EMI-focused teacher training.

3.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from Likert-scale responses were analysed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns and trends across the sample. Qualitative data from open-ended questions and interviews underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach, enabling the identification of significant challenges, an identification of teachers' needs , and recommendations of the participants.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Teachers' Challenges in EMI/ESP Implementation

Analysis of survey responses revealed significant challenges in using English as a medium of instruction among participants. 90% of respondents reported difficulties in using English effectively for teaching technical content. They faced difficulties and challenges in:

- Explaining complex disciplinary concepts (87%)
- Responding to student questions spontaneously (82%)
- Adapting specialized terminology for student comprehension (76%)

These findings align with Dearden's (2014) observation that subject specialists often lack training in language pedagogy, creating a disconnect between content knowledge and language implementation. This also reflects what Pun and Li (2024) have advocated in terms of "disciplinary discourse competence," as the ability to communicate effectively within the specific linguistic conventions of one's field

4.2 Communication Challenges Beyond Language Proficiency

Beyond EMI implementation, 60% of teachers reported challenges in managing classroom communication effectively. Half of these highlighted the absence of cross-cultural communication training. Key areas of difficulty included:

- Facilitating interactive discussions (68%)

- Providing clear instructions for academic tasks (53%)
- Managing classroom dynamics in English (71%)
- Navigating cultural differences in academic expectations (64%)

These findings suggest that communication challenges extend beyond essential language proficiency. It encompasses broader pedagogical competencies that enable effective teaching through the medium of English in EFL contexts. Linguistic competence EFL does not automatically lead to pedagogical effectiveness in teaching content through the medium of English. This analysis aligns with Canale and Swain's (1980) framework of communicative competence, which encompasses grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic dimensions. The data suggest current ESP/EMI training programs emphasize grammatical competence while neglecting these equally crucial components

The results of the survey have also shown that university teachers face a number of challenges faced in EMI and ESP contexts. Among the key challenges lack language proficiency in addition to a lack of tailored instructional resources, and the difficulty of balancing content delivery with language development. This issue is due to the lack of ESP materials that align with the specific needs of varied academic and professional domains, making it harder for teachers to contextualize language use within their disciplines. Additionally, teachers face the ongoing challenge of delivering complex subject matter while simultaneously supporting students' English proficiency. This task is difficult because it requires both pedagogical know how and linguistic awareness. Beyond EMI-specific concerns, 60% of teachers highlighted broader communication challenges, including managing classroom interactions and facilitating meaningful discussions in English. Additionally, half of the participants identified the absence of cross-cultural communication training as a significant gap that hinders communication in the classroom and in conference contexts, i.e., in both academic and professional domains. This issue is of growing importance in increasingly internationalized academic environments. These challenges reflect broader issues within ESP instruction as well. The lack of alignment between teaching materials and academic content often forces instructors to navigate the dual burden of delivering subject matter while simultaneously supporting students' language development.

4.3 Gap Analysis: Current Training vs. Needed Competencies

Comparing participants' experiences with existing training programs reveals significant gaps between provided training and required competencies. While programs like CEIL and FAD have established foundations in general English proficiency, they fall short in addressing:

1. Discipline-specific language needs (cited by 85% of participants)
2. Pedagogical strategies for EMI contexts (78%)

3. Interactive classroom communication techniques (72%)
4. Cross-cultural communication skills (67%)

These findings show that ESP training in Algeria often employs generic approaches that fail to acknowledge the specialized needs of different disciplines across the different faculties of the university.

This perspective highlights the importance of adopting what Basturkmen (2014) describes as a "narrow-angled" approach to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). this principle focuses on the linguistic and communicative needs of learners within specific disciplinary contexts. Such a type of instruction goes hand in hand with the major principles of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) that emphasize discipline-specific language use and content integration. By tailoring language instruction to the academic and professional demands of particular fields, a narrow-angled ESP approach supports EMI major goals of fostering subject mastery through English, while also enhancing learners' ability to engage meaningfully with specialized content.

When integrated with EMI principles, narrow-angled ESP approaches create a powerful educational convergence. While EMI provides the broader framework for accessing global knowledge systems it often lacks the disciplinary linguistic specificity that students require for the learning process. By incorporating narrow-angled ESP elements into EMI contexts, institutions can address the language barriers and potential content assimilation.

5. Proposed Framework: Integrating EMI and Communication Skills

The findings previously stated have proved that, narrow-angled ESP approaches create a powerful educational convergence When integrated with EMI principles. While EMI provides the broader framework for accessing global knowledge systems it often lacks the disciplinary linguistic specificity that students require for the learning process. By incorporating narrow-angled ESP elements into EMI contexts, institutions can address the language barriers and content assimilation. This section proposes an integrated framework for ESP training and developing EMI competencies together with communication skills development. This framework includes four key dimensions:

5.1 Integrated Syllabus Design

In order to overcome the challenges faced by teachers in the process of using English language in their disciplines it has become essential to design a thoughtful syllabus. The proposed syllabus needs to integrate EMI, ESP and communication skills components tailored to allow the development of both the academic and professional careers of university teachers. The two disciplines share common foundations. ESP is considered a precursor because it prepares students linguistically for EMI by

teaching technical terms and communication skills, and EMI is considered as a context since it provides real-world applications for ESP skills. In terms of purpose, EMI focuses on subject content in English, while ESP builds discipline-specific language skills. Together, they address both academic and linguistic needs. The syllabus includes the following essential elements:

- Discipline-specific terminology and discourse patterns
- Explanation strategies for complex concepts
- Classroom management language
- Discussion facilitation techniques
- Cross-cultural communication awareness

This approach aligns with Dafouz and Smit's (2016) ROAD-MAPPING framework, acknowledging the interconnectedness of academic content and communicative practices. The integrated syllabus should be developed collaboratively by language specialists and subject-matter experts to ensure relevance and accuracy.

5.2 Practical Training Approaches

Effective ESP training requires the practice of the language by simulating authentic contexts. It allows ESP learners to perform the language skills and tasks in real life scenarios for this reason The framework for the training process proposes:

- Simulated teaching scenarios addressing common EMI challenges
- Micro-teaching sessions with peer feedback
- Team-teaching opportunities pairing language specialists with subject experts
- Reflective practice protocols for continuous improvement

These practical components address participants expressed need for learning through real life opportunities. This approach bridges the gap between theory and practice. Coyle (2010) argues in the context of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), effective integration of content and language requires "learning to use language appropriately whilst using language to learn effectively" (p. 105).

This dual process puts stress on the importance of aligning language objectives with content mastery, thereby fostering both academic competence and communicative confidence. such an approach supports teacher professional development, enabling them to satisfy the demands of EMI with greater fluency, pedagogical know-how, and contextual relevance.

5.3 Resource Development

The implementation of the syllabus that ensures teachers' development in ESP/EMI skills needs to of emphasize the creation of tailored resources that support ESP/ EMI implementation across disciplines:

- Discipline-specific academic phrase banks
- Glossaries of specialized terminology with explanatory strategies
- Communication templates for common classroom interactions
- Case studies of effective EMI practices in similar contexts

These resources should be developed through collaborative efforts between language specialists, domain experts, and Digital learning developers to ensure both linguistic accuracy and pedagogical effectiveness.

5.4 Ongoing Support Mechanisms

Recognizing that effective ESP/EMI development requires sustained engagement; it extends beyond training or language proficiency. The framework includes continuous support mechanisms to develop pedagogical linguistic and intercultural competencies that enable teachers' professional development. It includes:

- Regular workshops addressing emerging challenges
- Mentorship programs pairing experienced EMI practitioners with novices
- Professional learning communities for sharing effective practices
- Regular assessment of training impact on teaching effectiveness

These mechanisms may ensure the idea that developing integrated EMI and communication skills is an ongoing process rather than a finite training outcome since sustainability of engagement in EMI need to evolve at multiple levels: ongoing professional development that fosters reflective practice, and access to resources that align language use with disciplinary content in addition to the necessary support on the part of decision makers.

6. Implementation Recommendations

To implement this integrated framework that focuses on the co-existence of EMI and ESP principles effectively in the Algerian context, the following recommendations can be offered:

6.1 Institutional Support

For successful and sustainable EMI and ESP training processes, institutional commitment is essential. Universities should take a proactive role by establishing dedicated centres focused on the development of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). These centres can serve as routes for pedagogical innovation, collaboration, and continuous professional development. It is equally important to offer sufficient financial, technological and human resources to support training programs that are tailored to the specific needs of university teachers across disciplines.

6.2 Collaboration with national and international Partners

In order to ensure successful Teacher's educational development in ESP/ EMI training processes Algerian universities would benefit from:

- Partnerships with universities experienced in EMI implementation
- Exchanges with national and international EMI experts
- Participation in global networks focused on ESP and EMI
- Adaptation of already existing models to Algerian context in EMI and ESP in teacher training processes

Through these strategies, universities can build a robust foundation for empowering university teachers to enhance the quality of English-medium instruction across disciplines. However, the implementation should be guided by: Ongoing needs analysis across disciplines; Action research investigating effective practices and a regular evaluation of training outcomes.

6.3 Technology Integration

In a digital era, it is worth mentioning that training programs should integrate digital and automated tools such as Digital platforms for resource sharing and collaborative learning virtual simulation environments for practice Recording and analysis tools for reflective practice and online communities of practice extending beyond institutional boundaries

7. Conclusion

This study has identified significant gaps in current ESP and EMI training for Algerian university teachers, particularly regarding the integration of communication skills in both areas. The findings reveal that while teachers recognize the importance of English proficiency for academic purposes in

their professional settings, current training approaches inadequately prepare them for the dual challenges of content delivery and effective communication in English language contexts.

The proposed framework advocates the adoption for an integrated approach that balances technical language proficiency with broader communicative competencies. By implementing this framework, Algerian universities can enhance the quality in higher education and prepare students for global yet 'Glocal' academic and professional environments, and therefore contributing to the ongoing internationalization of higher education.

Future research should examine the implementation and impact of integrated training approaches, particularly regarding student learning outcomes and teacher professional development trajectories. Additionally, comparative studies across different national contexts could provide valuable insights into effective practices that might be adapted to the Algerian setting.

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