

Received 27/12/2024

Accepted: 15/05/2025

Published: 20/08/2025

Breaking New Ground in LSP Education: The Algerian Experience of ESP Teacher Development at the University of Tlemcen

Hafida HAMZAOU-ELACHACHI¹

Department of English, Abou Bekr Belkaid University of Tlemcen, Algeria

hamzaouihafida@yahoo.fr

Abstract

The integration of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) into Algerian higher education has marked a transformative shift in language policy and pedagogical practice. Rooted in broader national efforts to globalize education while preserving cultural identity, the ESP movement has grown from a literary focus in the 1960s to a strategic response to globalization in the 2000s. This article explores the development of ESP teacher education at the University of Tlemcen as a case study in Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) advancement. It examines institutional efforts, teacher preparation programs, and the challenges of aligning local needs with international expectations. The study highlights the University's critical role in preparing a new generation of LSP teachers, shaping a locally grounded yet globally relevant model for ESP education.

Key words: ESP Teacher Development, LSP Education, Higher Education Reform, Language Policy and Planning, Globalization and localization.

Résumé

L'intégration de l'anglais de spécialité dans l'enseignement supérieur algérien a marqué un tournant décisif dans les politiques linguistiques et les pratiques pédagogiques. Ancré dans les efforts nationaux visant à mondialiser l'éducation tout en préservant l'identité culturelle, l'enseignement de l'anglais est passé d'une approche littéraire dans les années 1960 à une réponse stratégique à la mondialisation dans les années 2000. Cet article explore le développement de la formation des enseignants d'ESP à l'Université de Tlemcen comme étude de cas des avancées en Langue de Spécialité. Il analyse les efforts institutionnels, les programmes de préparation des enseignants et les défis liés à l'alignement des besoins locaux sur les attentes internationales. L'étude souligne le rôle clé de l'Université dans la formation d'une nouvelle génération d'enseignants de langue de spécialité, proposant ainsi un modèle d'éducation à la fois ancré localement et pertinent à l'échelle mondiale.

Mots-clés : Formation des enseignants d'anglais de spécialité, enseignement des langues de spécialité, Réforme de l'enseignement supérieur, Politique et planification linguistiques, Mondialisation et localisation.

¹ Auteur correspondant : Hafida HAMZAOU-ELACHACHI, hamzaouihafida@yahoo.fr

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, the English language has evolved into a global tool of communication, exerting a profound influence across domains such as technology, science, commerce and education. As the language of the internet, international conferences, academic publishing, and global trade, English has become an indispensable asset for nations seeking to integrate more effectively into the global knowledge economy. The unprecedented acceleration of globalization has further intensified the need for English proficiency, not only as a linguistic skill but as a strategic resource for national development.

In this context, the demand for specialized English instruction, i.e., English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has surged across higher education institutions worldwide. ESP programs are uniquely designed to address the linguistic needs of learners operating in specific professional and academic fields, ranging from engineering and medicine to business and information technology. In Algeria, this global trend has been mirrored by a growing emphasis on English language education, especially within the scientific and technological sectors. This shift represents both a response to international pressures and an acknowledgment of the limitations of prior language policies rooted in postcolonial linguistic structures.

Within the Algerian job market, English proficiency is increasingly regarded as a gateway to employment, especially in sectors that require collaboration with international partners or engagement with global research. Employers across disciplines prioritize candidates who can operate confidently in English, recognizing it as the language of innovation and transnational exchange. For students and professionals alike, mastery of English has become a key factor in academic and career advancement.

In this context, from the early 21st century onward, Algerian universities have been urged to modernize their language education strategies, with particular attention to the training and development of ESP teachers. The University of Tlemcen stands as a prominent example of this effort. As part of the national strategy to reform higher education and respond to global communication needs, it has played an important role in developing and supporting ESP teacher education.

This paper explores the evolution of ESP teacher development at the University of Tlemcen as a case study in Algeria's broader effort to advance Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) education. It highlights the institutional responses to national and global demands, the historical trajectory of English language policy in Algerian higher education, and the pedagogical innovations that continue to shape ESP instruction today.

2. Language Policy, Higher Education Reform, and ESP in Algeria

The evolution of English language teaching in Algeria is shaped by its colonial legacy, post-independence identity policies, and contemporary globalization. After independence in 1962, Algeria launched an Arabization campaign aimed at restoring Arabic as the language of national identity and instruction. However, French retained a dominant role, especially in science and technology, resulting in a fragmented linguistic environment that challenged learners navigating multiple codes across educational levels.

By the late 20th century, the global rise of English as a language of science, commerce, and international collaboration compelled Algeria to reconsider its linguistic priorities. In 1988,

the Ministry of Higher Education initiated the establishment of ESP centers to equip postgraduate students and researchers with the English skills needed for academic exchange, particularly with institutions in the UK. The Algerian ESP project emerged through close collaboration between the Ministry of Higher Education and several prestigious British universities, such as Manchester, Glasgow, Leeds, Sheffield, Nottingham, and Salford (Tihal, 2023). The initiative sought to strengthen English language teaching in Algerian universities and promote academic excellence and international cooperation. Selected Algerian students were sent to these British universities for full-time postgraduate studies. In exchange, the British institutions supported academic collaboration, particularly in science and technology, at the magister and doctoral levels. Each British university was partnered with a specific Algerian institution (Benyelles, 2009; Bouabdallah - Bouyacoub, 2017). Though the ESP project had a limited lifespan, this marked a shift from viewing English as a literary foreign language to recognizing its instrumental value in higher education and professional domains.

In fact, the 2000s marked a turning point in Algeria's approach to English language instruction, driven by the growing influence of the global knowledge economy and the increasing demand for English proficiency in scientific and professional fields. In response, national reforms were introduced in alignment with the LMD (Licence–Master–Doctorate) system, positioning Algerian universities as active agents in developing ESP programs tailored to the needs of scientific disciplines. This shift paralleled international trends in ESP, which advocate for learner-centered methodologies, disciplinary specificity, and context-sensitive pedagogy, as noted by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Basturkmen (2010), and Hyland (2006). In this context, institutions like the University of Tlemcen have taken significant steps by launching ESP teacher training workshops, developing specialized teaching materials, and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. These initiatives aimed not only to enhance students' English proficiency but also to equip educators with effective strategies for teaching scientific and technical content in English.

It should be noted that in the Algerian context, ESP and LSP development must also account for linguistic plurality and structural constraints. Local research stresses the importance of needs analysis, interdisciplinary cooperation, and teacher training adapted to the realities of multilingual students. As such, the University of Tlemcen's initiatives represent an important case of contextualized ESP development within a dynamic and linguistically complex educational landscape.

3. Methodology: A Descriptive and Experiential Perspective

This study uses a qualitative descriptive methodology, drawing on principles of reflective practitioner research and case study inquiry (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014) to explore the development of ESP teacher training at the University of Tlemcen. Rooted in the interpretivist paradigm (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020), the research is informed by the author's professional experience as both practitioner and observer within the ESP framework.

Rather than relying on quantitative data, the study is based on first-hand observations, reflective teaching practices, informal interviews and discussions with colleagues and students, and engagement in institutional initiatives aimed at improving ESP instruction.

By combining descriptive narrative with experiential insights, the study aims to provide a nuanced, context-specific account of how ESP teacher training has evolved, highlighting both

challenges and promising practices. This experiential lens allows for an in-depth understanding of the practical realities of implementing ESP in a multilingual university context marked by linguistic shifts, policy reform, and the growing demand for English in scientific domains.

4. Institutional Initiatives for ESP Teacher Preparation at the University of Tlemcen

As part of its commitment to advancing ESP education, the University of Tlemcen has launched targeted initiatives to build local capacity in ESP teaching. There are particularly two impactful training pathways that were developed to address the need for qualified ESP educators: ESP teacher Development at the **Magister-level** and the **doctoral ESP pathway within the LMD system**.

4.1 The ESP Magister Program: Bridging Disciplines and Language

The Magister program in ESP (2009- 2012) was a significant early investment aimed at equipping future teachers with the skills necessary to teach English in discipline-specific contexts. This program emphasized preparing educators capable of moving beyond the confines of general English instruction. Trainees were introduced to the principles of specialist language instruction in disciplines such as medicine, engineering, economics and the social sciences. A key component of the program was its interdisciplinary focus; participants were encouraged to explore the content and discourse patterns of various academic and professional domains. This exposure laid the foundation for a generation of teachers who could communicate effectively with subject-matter specialists and design relevant learning materials for diverse learner populations.

4.2 ESP Doctoral Training under the LMD System: Building Research and Pedagogical Competence

The introduction of the LMD system brought with it a more research-oriented approach to ESP education. The doctoral ESP pathway included modules on **research methodology, information and communication technologies (ICTs), seminars on ESP contexts and current issues**, as well as **introductory courses on pedagogy and didactics**. These components collectively fostered a holistic view of the ESP teaching profession. The focus on research methods encouraged students to engage with the field as practitioner-researchers, while the pedagogy and ICT modules prepared them to use digital tools and learner-centered strategies in teaching.

4.3 Course Description

The course was designed to prepare future instructors to teach English across a range of scientific disciplines. Rather than targeting a specific field, the program emphasized cultivating a broad understanding of various subject areas, thereby enabling teachers to adapt to diverse academic and professional contexts. The training program was organized around three key components:

a. Theoretical Knowledge

Students were introduced to essential foundational concepts, including needs analysis, syllabus design, adaptation and creation of appropriate teaching materials, and the application of research methods. This theoretical base was intended to equip future ESP teachers with the skills necessary to design and deliver effective language instruction tailored to specialized learner needs.

b. Introduction to Pedagogy and Didactics

This component provided participants with an overview of core pedagogical principles and teaching methodologies, with particular attention to strategies relevant to ESP contexts. The aim was to develop informed, reflective practitioners capable of integrating subject-specific content with sound teaching practices.

c. Teaching Practice

Practical teaching sessions formed an integral part of the course. Through supervised practice, trainees had the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge, experiment with a variety of instructional techniques, and receive constructive feedback, fostering the development of effective classroom skills.

These two pathways—the Magister and the Doctoral LMD training—have significantly contributed to the emergence of a locally trained cohort of ESP professionals. While challenges persist in terms of infrastructure and continuity, these initiatives mark an important step forward in Algeria’s effort to cultivate specialized English educators who are attuned to both disciplinary and linguistic demands.

5. Reflections from the Field

The journey of preparing future ESP teachers has been both transformative and complex, shaped by on-the-ground practitioner experiences and institutional realities. This section synthesizes key insights from practitioners navigating the challenges and opportunities of ESP integration.

5.1 Challenges in ESP Implementation

During the organization of a curriculum for ESP teachers, a series of complex pedagogical and linguistic challenges quickly emerged. One of the primary difficulties lied in the diversity of learner needs. ESP students came from different Algerian Universities. While their foundational education in English studies provided a common starting point, their prior learning experiences, pedagogical exposure, and specialization areas often differed significantly. One key challenge was accommodating these diverse academic backgrounds. Some students had strong theoretical training in linguistics or literature, while others focused more on applied language skills or general education. This variation affected their readiness

for ESP instruction, which requires both specialized language knowledge and practical teaching competencies.

Additionally, ESP instruction must strike a balance between theoretical knowledge and hands-on teaching skills. Unlike English students pursuing an academic degree, future ESP practitioners often prioritize real-world applicability over abstract linguistic concepts. This necessitated a strong emphasis on practical training, including lesson planning, material development, and discipline-specific teaching methodologies.

To overcome these obstacles, ESP educators had to employ flexible, learner-centered strategies to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, acquire the necessary skills to succeed in their future roles as ESP practitioners.

5.2 Institutional Support and Emerging Practices

Over time, positive developments emerged. The University of Tlemcen began investing more deliberately in ESP teacher development through short-term training workshops, peer-led seminars, and collaborative curriculum planning. A series of in-house workshops focused on needs analysis, task-based teaching, and materials design was organized. These sessions, while modest in scope, proved invaluable in fostering a sense of community among ESP practitioners.

Another critical development was the shift toward interdisciplinary collaboration. Working closely with subject-matter experts in fields such as biology, engineering, and computer science allowed co-designing authentic learning tasks. These collaborations not only enriched the content of courses but also helped students see the relevance of English to their field of study. Indeed, increased student motivation was observed when lessons incorporated real-world texts or simulations reflective of their academic environment.

5.3 Evolving Roles and Teacher Empowerment

One of the most transformative aspects was the shift in the teacher's role from knowledge transmitter to facilitator and course designer. Teaching ESP required stepping out of traditional comfort zones to embrace a role that included researcher, collaborator, and innovator. It also required a deeper understanding of learners' needs—both linguistic and cognitive.

The development of custom materials became a key strategy. In collaboration with colleagues, I contributed to the creation of contextualized modules for medical and engineering students, including glossaries, simplified research articles, and speaking activities based on real-world professional scenarios. These efforts, although time-consuming, greatly enhanced the classroom experience.

6. Course Outcomes and Impact of Training

The ESP teacher development programs at the University of Tlemcen have yielded promising outcomes at both the individual and institutional levels, contributing to the overall advancement of ESP practices within the university. These outcomes reflect meaningful progress in teacher preparedness and program implementation, as will be explained in the following sections.

6.1 Academic and Professional Success of Graduates

Nearly all participating students successfully obtained their postgraduate degrees and were subsequently recruited as faculty members across Algerian universities and national high schools. Their academic training equipped them with foundational content knowledge and practical ESP teaching skills, enabling them to operate effectively from the outset of their careers.

6.2 Adaptability across Disciplinary Contexts

Despite occasionally being assigned to teach in scientific domains unfamiliar to them—areas where concepts and terminology differed from their initial training—these graduates demonstrated the adaptability to transfer and expand upon their core competencies. Their capacity to navigate new disciplinary contexts was a testament to the solid pedagogical and linguistic foundation provided by the program.

6.3 Institutional Impact and Integration of ESP

Importantly, as part of their research and course projects, most of these students developed ESP syllabi tailored to various scientific disciplines, including engineering, economy and law and administrative sciences. These course designs were not merely academic exercises; they were actively adopted by the relevant departments, signaling both the practicality of the training and the growing institutional recognition of the value of ESP. This alignment between teacher preparation and departmental needs represents a significant step forward in integrating language support into content-based instruction within Algerian higher education.

7. Conclusion

Reflecting on this experience, it becomes evident that while ESP teacher development in Algeria still contends with systemic challenges, it has made notable progress thanks to local initiative and the dedication of educators. At the University of Tlemcen, the growing institutional recognition of ESP as a pedagogical necessity has fostered the development of a more skilled and responsive teaching body.

However, persistent gaps remain. There is an urgent need for well-structured, continuous training programs tailored specifically to the demands of LSP contexts. At the same time, national language policies must evolve to better reflect and support Algeria's multilingual landscape—especially in the light of the recent decision to adopt English as a medium of

instruction in higher education. This shift significantly raises the stakes, making effective ESP training not just beneficial, but essential for academic success and international engagement.

Personal experience underscores that transformative change in ESP education stems not only from top-down policy but also from committed educators working collaboratively within their institutions. By embracing locally grounded strategies, prioritizing professional development, and encouraging interdisciplinary exchange, Algerian universities are well positioned to lead meaningful innovation in LSP education.

REFERENCES

- Alharahsheh, H. H. & Pius, A. (2020). A Review of key paradigms: Positivism VS interpretivism. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(3) 39-43.
- Basturkmen, H. (2010). *Developing courses in English for specific purposes*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Benyelles, R. (2009). *Teaching ESP at post-graduate level: the case of first-year post graduate students of economics at Abou Bekr Belkaid university- Tlemcen*. Doctoral Thesis. University of Tlemcen: Algeria.
- Bouabdallah- Bouyacoub, N. (2017). The ESP teaching and learning situation in the Algerian universities with reference to psychology students at Tlemcen University. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, IJCI 9(2), 217–227.
- Hutchinson, T. & Waters, A. (1987). *ESP: A Learner-centered Approach*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Hyland, K. (2006). *English for Academic Purposes: An Advanced Resource Book*. Routledge.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications.
- Tihal W. (2023). Breaking Barriers: Challenges of Integrating Content and Language in Algerian Higher education. *Afak for Sciences Journal*, 8 (5), 100-113. <https://asjp.cerist.dz/en/PresentationRevue/351>
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.