جامعة الأمير عبد القادر للعلوم الإسلامية قسنطينة – الجزائر
ISSN: 1112-4377, EISSN: 2588-2384
المجلد: 30. العدد: 04. السنة: 2026.
مجلة المعيار
EL MIEYAR

Teaching English to Teachers of Arabic at Higher Education: Why Does It Matter?

تدريس اللغة الانجليزية لأساتذة اللغة العربية في التعليم العالي: ما أهمية ذلك؟

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Received: 31/03/2026 ***published: 15/09/2026***
تاريخ الاستلام: 2026/03/31 تاريخ النشر: 2026/09/15

Article abstract:

While the utility of mastering the English language is obvious for teachers of scientific and technical subjects, the purposes for teaching it to teachers of other languages is not so clear. This article investigates the attitudes of teachers of Arabic language and literature at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Constantine toward the English teaching program we designed within an action research framework. The program aimed at enhancing teachers' specialized vocabulary, reading and writing skills, and the potential to publish their research in English. The survey results indicate the procedure's success in raising teachers' awareness of the necessity of learning English and in setting specific learning goals.

Key words: *English for Academic Purposes; higher education teachers; action research; learning technical terminology*

ملخص المقال:

بينما تتجلى أهمية تدريس اللغة الانجليزية لأساتذة المواد العلمية والتقنية بوضوح، تبقى أهداف تلقينها لأساتذة اللغات الأخرى يكتنفها الغموض. يستكشف هذا المقال مواقف أساتذة اللغة العربية وآدابها بالمدرسة العليا للأساتذة بقسنطينة تجاه برنامج تدريس اللغة الانجليزية، الذي صممناه في إطار بحث إجرائي. وقد هدف البرنامج الى تحسين المفردات المتخصصة، مهارات القراءة والكتابة وامكانية نشر الابحاث باللغة الانجليزية لدى الأساتذة المشاركين. خلصت نتائج الاستبيان الموجه للأساتذة الى نجاعة الاجراءات المتخذة في تحسين وعي الأساتذة بضرورة تعلم اللغة الانجليزية وكذا وضع أهداف تعليمية محددة.

كلمات مفتاحية: اللغة الانجليزية لأهداف أكاديمية، أساتذة طور التعليم العالي، البحث الإجرائي، تعلم المصطلحات التقنية.

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Introduction

Teaching English at the university level has become one of the top priorities of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Algeria. This growing interest has been crowned by the recent ministerial decision to use English as a medium of instruction in all Algerian universities and in almost all study fields. The process has started by engaging all university teachers in English training programs which would help them fulfil this mission. While the utility of mastering the English language is evident for teachers specializing in scientific and technical fields, the rationale for teaching it to teachers of humanities, particularly those teaching languages other than English, is not so clear. Indeed, many of these teachers could not understand why they were obliged to be involved in the English training program since they are not required to teach any of their subjects in this foreign language, unlike those in scientific and technical fields. The experience of being an instructor in this English training program motivated us to think about the objectives of teaching English to the teachers/researchers affiliated with the Department of the Arabic Language and Literature, with particular attention to their role as researchers. Moreover, as a reviewer in some Algerian journals, we witnessed the difficulties faced by researchers specialized in literary and linguistic Arabic studies when writing the abstracts of their articles in English. The abstracts, almost all translated through Google Translate, showed that their authors did not focus on their translations and, consequently, were not aware of the possible visibility of their research findings through these translated abstracts. This article highlights the main findings of an action research procedure conducted to help teachers of Arabic language and literature at the Ecole Normale Supérieure – Assia Djebbar – in Constantine develop technical terminology, reading and writing skills, and international publication visibility. It begins by reviewing the most relevant theoretical concepts used as a framework for the study, describes the adopted methodology, and discusses the main research findings.

1. Literature Review

This section reviews research on teaching English in Algerian higher education with focus on the latest ministerial decision and procedures to generalize the use of English across Algerian higher education institutions.

1.1 English as a Medium of Instruction in Algeria

In 2023, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Algeria announced the shift toward using English instead of French in teaching different content subjects, especially in scientific and technical fields. This shift in policy was followed by ministerial initiatives to reinforce teaching English in higher education institutions across Algeria. This rapid and significant change led to an increasing interest in the field known as English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) which is commonly defined as "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects, other than English itself, in settings where English is a foreign or second language" (Dafouz & Gray, 2022, p. 1; Pecorari & Malmström, 2018, p. 503).

Since 2023, many Algerian researchers (such as Ghouali & Haddam Bouabdallah, 2024; Khenioui & Boulekroun, 2023; Ouarniki, 2023; Ouarniki et al., 2025) published papers in which they investigated the attitudes of the different stakeholders, mainly teachers and students, highlighting the challenges met by the latter, and suggesting best practices that would enhance the use of EMI in Algeria. However, a close examination of these studies reveals a prominent and justifiable focus on EMI in scientific and technical fields, since they represent the main target of the policy shift. For instance, Bouzidi (2024) focused on non-English teachers in technical fields; additionally, Harroug (2025) and Malki (2025) studied EMI use in science and technology faculties. In contrast, very little attention was attributed to EMI in humanities, with either mixed-discipline groups (Cherik, 2025) or explicitly comparing attitudes of science and technology teachers with

those of humanities subjects (Ouarniki, 2023). However, none of the reviewed studies have addressed teaching English to teachers of languages other than English (such as Arabic and French). Even though these teachers are not directly involved in using EMI, they were included in the national English teaching program initiated by the ministry, and they represent an understudied population segment. Moreover, engaging language teachers in English courses could significantly enhance their academic careers and increase their research visibility through international publications, predominantly published in English. This study is an attempt to address this research gap by reporting on action research that was conducted with teachers of Arabic at the Ecole Normale Supérieure – Assia Djebbar – in Constantine.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The participants in this study include twelve English language learners who work as university teachers of Arabic language and literature at the Ecole Normale Supérieure – Assia Djebbar – in Constantine. They belong to two main streams: literary and linguistic, yet their teaching and research subjects cover a wide range of areas including criticism and discourse analysis, Arabic literary and critical studies, literary criticism, modern and contemporary literature, Algerian popular literature and culture, didactics, semiotics, and phonetics. Although they were not expected to use English in their teaching, these participants were actively engaged in the ministry's English training program.

2.2 Research Method

Aiming at improving educational practices and enhancing the participants' learning experience and outcome, we adopted an action research framework for the English program. The procedure began with conducting a needs analysis through a survey and interviews, followed by selecting a teaching methodology based on the results, constantly adapting educational practices whenever learning issues emerged, and finally evaluating the procedure through a survey administered at the end of the English language program.

The needs analysis relied on a questionnaire which investigated the learners' English proficiency levels, their major weaknesses in the language, and the areas and the skills they expected the program to help them develop. The questionnaire was written in English with each question accompanied by an Arabic translation. The respondents were also encouraged to use the language that best enabled them to express themselves

Based on the findings of the needs analysis, the teaching procedure adopted a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) framework, an approach in which the target language is learnt through curricular content (Marsh, 2002). This approach provided us with practical techniques to improve learners' language skills, while focusing on teaching content, thereby achieving two complementary goals. It also promoted collaborative work which gave the learners a clear purpose and the motivation to learn and complete the task to the best of their ability. Thanks to this procedure, we introduced technical terminology within meaningful content and encouraged learners to work in groups to share knowledge about their specialization areas using the English language. The procedure relied also on the integration of language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and taught language aspects (such as grammar and vocabulary) which directly relate to the learners' productions.

The final stage of the action research consisted of an evaluation of the instructional procedure and learning outcomes. It was achieved through a survey in which the learners provided feedback on the adopted procedure, thereby leading to the improvement of future learning cycles.

3. Results

3.1 The Needs Analysis Questionnaire

The questionnaire, administered at the start of the course yielded significant data on the learners' profiles, needs, and expectations regarding the English language program. The following are the main results obtained from the needs analysis.

- **The Participants' Fields of Research**

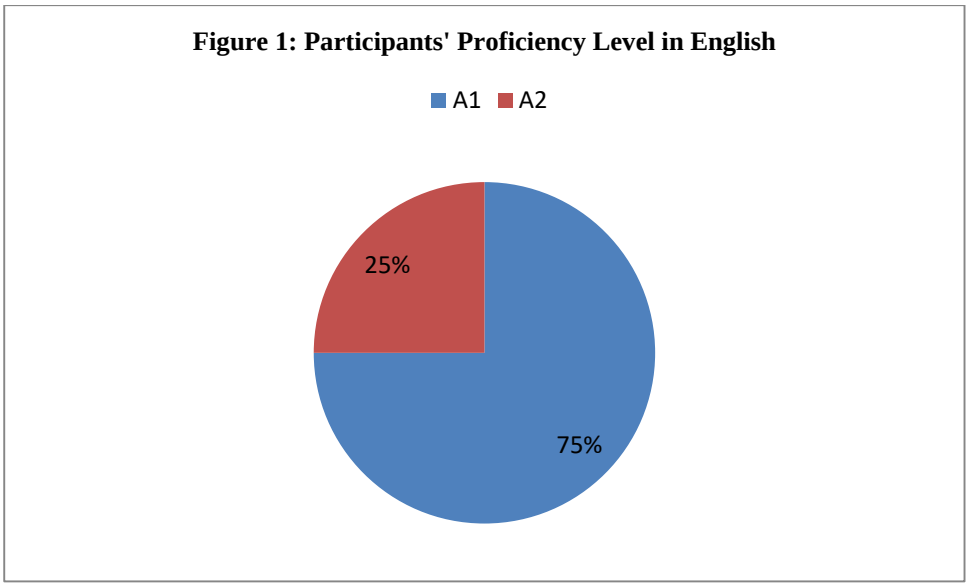
The group may be considered homogeneous in terms of academic field since all the learners were teachers at the Department of Arabic Language and Literature. However, the participants had diverse research interests and study areas spanning the following domains:

- Arabic language and literature
- Linguistics and Arabic language
- Criticism and discourse analysis
- Didactics
- Educational psychology
- Comparative literature
- Algerian literature

- **Participants' Proficiency Level in English**

Most participants reported they had beginner level in the English language (A1) while a minority indicated having an A2 level in the language. The results are illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 1: Participants' Proficiency Level in English

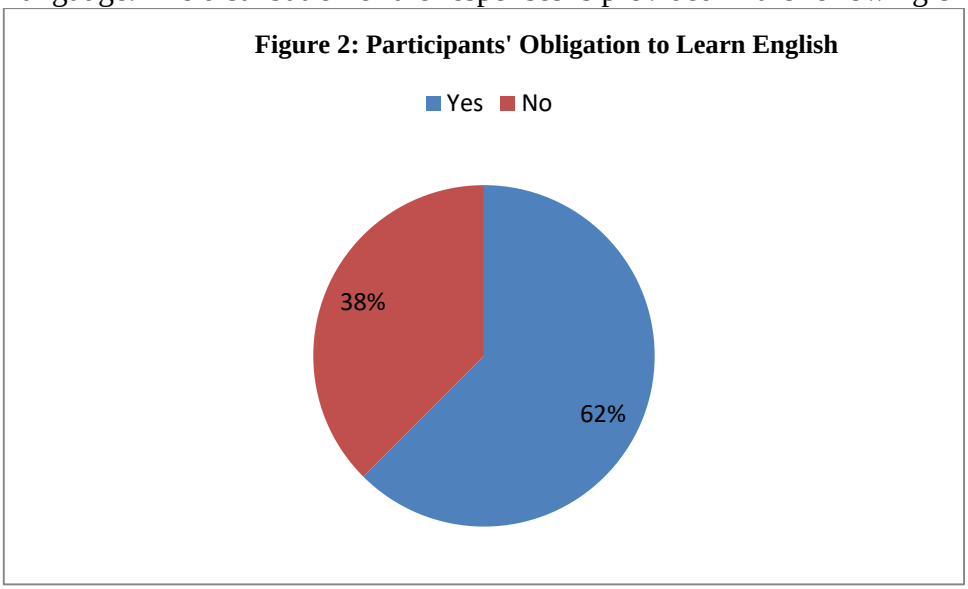


The data on students' proficiency level were highly significant in guiding the selection and design of the instructional materials and activities. Since almost all participants reported having a beginner level in the language, we were able to design and implement uniform lessons and activities across the group for the English language program.

- **Participants' Motivation for Learning English**

When asked whether they were motivated to take the English course, all participants responded affirmatively. This means that each of them had a reason to participate in the English program. However, in order to determine whether they were intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to study English, we further asked them if they were obliged to take the course or if they willingly enrolled in the English program. Their responses revealed that most of them were extrinsically motivated to take the English program because they were mandated by the administration while only a few enrolled because they were intrinsically motivated to learn the English language. The distribution of the responses is provided in the following chart.

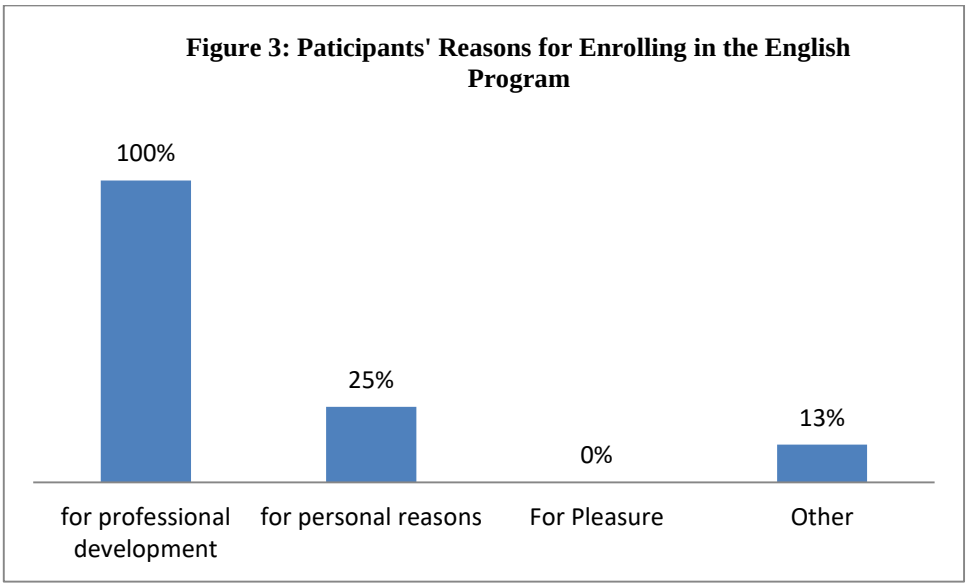
Figure 2: Participants' Obligation to Learn English



- **Participants' Reasons for Learning English**

To further investigate the participants' motivation for enrolling in the English program, we asked them to select the reasons that motivated their decision. All of them selected professional development as their primary motivation for learning English. A few respondents selected, in addition to that, the option "for personal reasons"; and one respondent added the option "other" for a reason that was not included in the list of provided options.

Figure 3: Paticipants' Reasons for Enrolling in the English Program

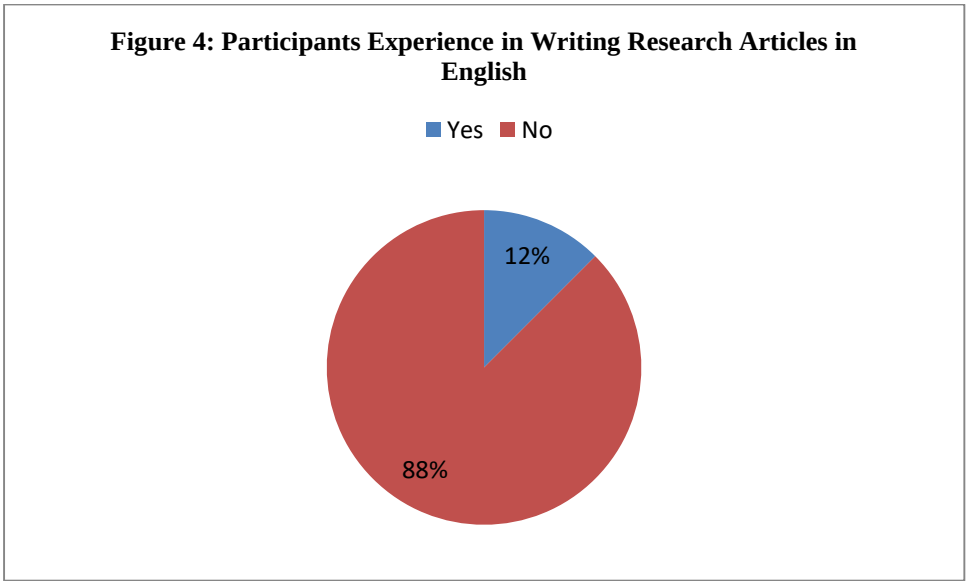


Since professional development emerged as the main reason for learning English among the participants, the course was mainly oriented toward English for Academic Purposes (EAP) where the focus was on developing academic skills such as reading discipline-related materials, discussing career and research projects, writing abstracts, and producing research papers, etc.

- **Participants' Experience in Writing Research Articles in English**

To obtain data on the participants' use of English for career goals, they were asked whether they had ever attempted writing a research paper in the English language. Their responses revealed that the majority had never engaged in publishing their research in English.

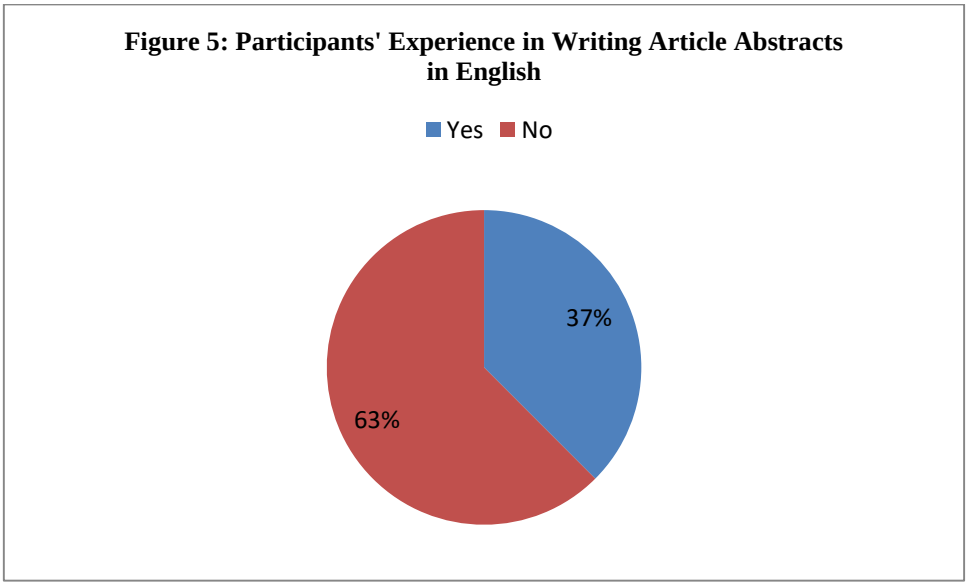
Figure 4: Participants Experience in Writing Research Articles in English



The results are not surprising and can be explained by two major factors. First, all the teachers involved in the program specialized in Arabic language and literature; therefore, it was expected that they would publish in Arabic and not in English. Second, lacking proficiency in the English language discouraged them to engage in writing in English for international publication. The English program should then aim to enhance both learners' language skills and their motivation to publish at an international level in English.

- **Participants' Experience in Writing Article Abstracts in English**

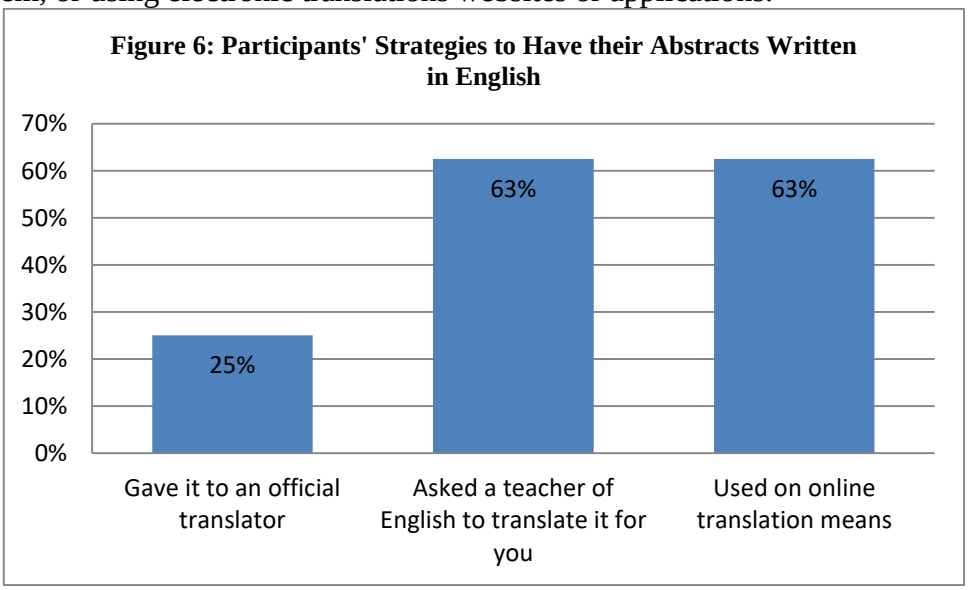
Unlike writing full research articles, the participants revealed better engagement with writing article abstracts in English. Being a requirement for most academic journals in all fields, the participants likely felt obliged to write their own article abstracts using the English language. Nevertheless, the majority indicated they had never actually written an abstract in English.



The participants' responses regarding abstract writing led us to select it as a central activity in the program since some of them had prior experience to write abstracts for their research papers. Moreover, abstract writing is less demanding and time-consuming than writing full articles in English, making it a more suitable task for beginner learners.

- **Participants' Strategies to have their Abstracts Written in English**

This was a follow-up question to the previous question on whether the participants had ever tried to write abstracts in English. The respondents who answered 'No' were asked to provide the strategies they used to have their abstracts written in English. Most of them reported they combined different strategies to get this task done. These include: submitting the abstract to a professional translator, asking a teacher of English to translate it for them, or using electronic translations websites or applications.



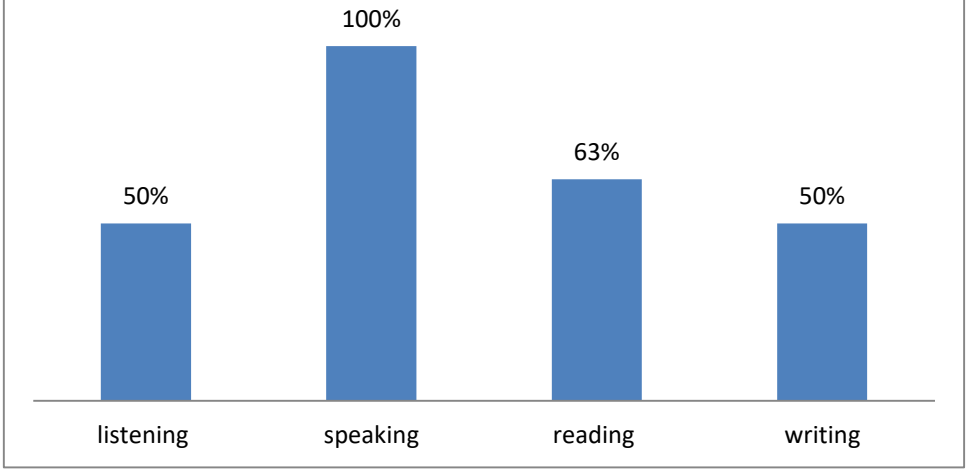
The participants' responses revealed asking a teacher of English and using online translation means were their preferred strategies to have their abstracts written in English, while official translators were the least favored option. The results can be explained by the convenience of consulting a colleague or submitting the abstract to an online translation tool compared to the less convenient and probably expensive option of the official translation. Even though these strategies might provide the teacher researchers with easy and quick

solutions to the translation problem, learning to write their abstracts by themselves would be a much better option since it will allow them to express their ideas and publish them to a wider audience than the ones they generally write for.

- **The Language Skills that the Participants Need to Develop**

To further tailor the English program to the participants' needs, they were asked to identify the language skills they needed to develop the most. They could select one or more of the following traditionally recognized language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Figure 7: Language Skills Participants Need to Develop



The chart demonstrates that all participants needed to develop their speaking skill. This suggests that English programs in the Algerian schools prior to tertiary education place a secondary role to speaking compared to reading and writing. Therefore, all participants agreed that they needed to develop their ability to speak in English. Reading ranked second, likely because participants needed to comprehend books and articles in their research fields in English, which is why the majority feel the need to develop the reading skill. Moreover, half the respondents selected listening and writing in addition to speaking as the skills they needed to improve. The lack of attention given to these skills might be explained by the fact the participants did not feel the necessity to understand oral forms of English or to write in English as Arabic is the main composition and publication language for these teachers. In order to meet those needs, speaking activities were placed at the core of the English program. Nonetheless, a more balanced approach was adopted in order to help the participants develop all the language skills in parallel.

- **How the English Program Would Benefit the Participants' Career**

This was an open-ended question in which the respondents were asked to list the ways in which they believed the English program would benefit their careers. It is worth noting that most of them (except for one respondent) answered this question in Arabic; therefore, their answers were provided in Arabic and subsequently translated into English and listed as follows:

- Easing the research process
- Expanding the resources, diversifying scientific publication, and improving the quality of my lectures by consulting resources in their original language instead of translated resources
- Improving writing and speaking skills
- Providing students with terminology in English instead of French since English is a more living language
- Translating technical terms correctly

- Translating books from English to Arabic
- Enhancing communication during international training trips
- Writing research papers and abstracts in English
- Benefitting from research published in English
- Studying foreign texts in their original language
- Participating in international conferences in our field of study which require the use of English

The participants' responses proved valuable in guiding the selection of educational materials and activities that would suit the specific learning goals stated by the learners. They also helped the learners, who first could not determine the relevance of studying English, to set specific goals for learning it by identifying how this language could support their career advancement as teachers and researchers.

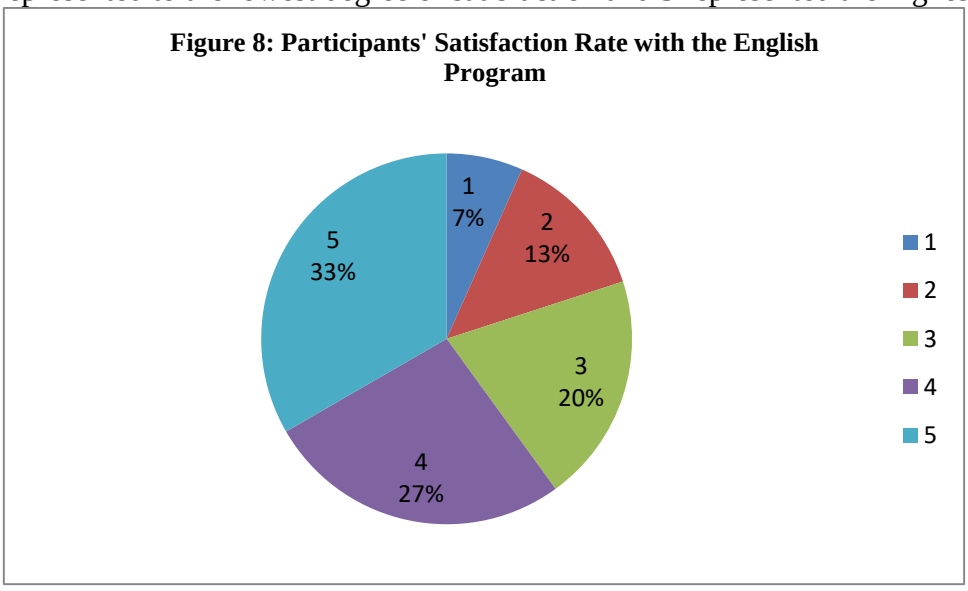
3.2 Evaluation Form for The English Program

To evaluate both the instructional procedure and the learning outcomes and to improve future learning experiences, participant teachers completed an evaluation form at the end of the English program. The form was designed and administered online through Google Forms. The following section presents the main findings from the participants' responses.

- **Participants' General Appreciation of the Course**

The participants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the English program using a five-point scale where 1 represented to the lowest degree of satisfaction and 5 represented the highest.

Figure 8: Participants' Satisfaction Rate with the English Program



As the chart indicates, more than half the participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the English program, a fifth of the respondents were moderately satisfied, while the remaining fifth reported low satisfaction. On the whole, it can be claimed that the program can be considered as successful in meeting the expectations of most participants, while lower satisfaction ratings appear to reflect higher expectations than those the program was designed to fulfil.

- **Participants' Willingness to Take the Training Again**

Any educational program cannot be regarded as fully successful unless it manages to engage the learners to continue their training and engage in higher levels of learning. To evaluate whether the teachers were willing to take the program during the next academic year, they were required to select 'Yes' or 'No'.

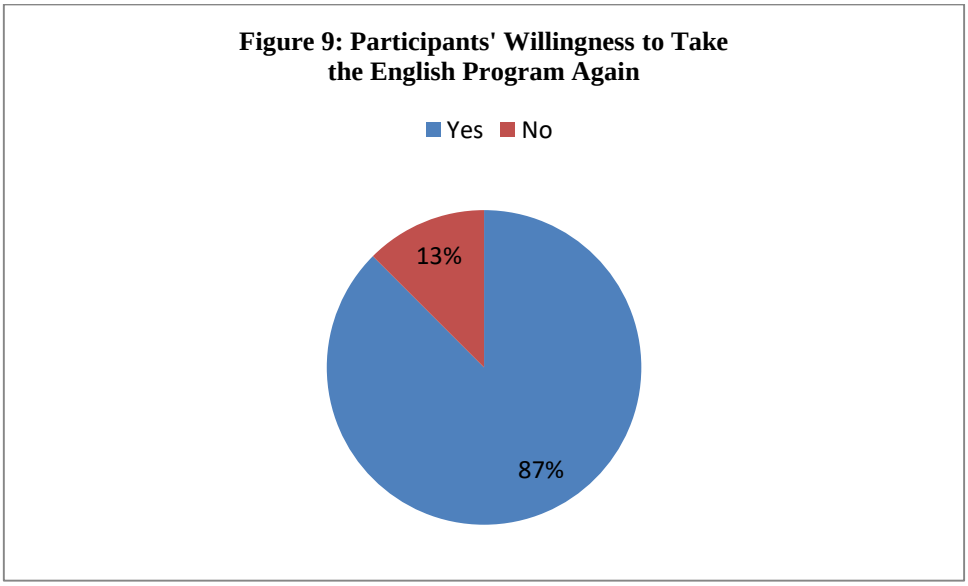


Figure 9: Participants' Willingness to Take the English Program Again

The participants' responses to this question confirm the positive rates they provided for the program. Since the vast majority were willing to take the program again, it means that they were convinced to achieve their learning goals with further training.

- **Challenges Met by the Participants during the Training Program**

As any language program, facing challenges is a normal and indispensable aspect of learning. Therefore, the participants were provided with an open-ended question in which they had to list the challenges that faced them during the training period. Most responses were written in Arabic and they are reported as follow:

- Lack of time
- Failure to remember words when speaking in English
- Difficulty to construct sentences while speaking
- Inability to find a group with a suitable schedule
- Not being able to communicate using the language
- Condensed information presented in a fast pace
- Difficulty to learn the language per see

The responses to this question represent valuable data on the real difficulties met by the learners during the training and provide excellent opportunities for the trainers to revise the English program and the instructional procedures so they can help the learners overcome those challenges.

- **Suggestions to Improve the English Program**

Since action research relies on reflection and places the learner at the heart of the learning cycle, the participants were finally requested to provide some suggestions that would improve the program. As with all open-ended questions, most of them answered in Arabic. Their suggestions are reported as follows:

- Focusing on reading and writing skills
- Integrating specialized content, even though partially, in order to master the technical terminology related to our majors
- Offering diversified and different programs
- Providing more sessions and using the language immersion method
- Reconsidering training time, which is really insufficient
- Scheduling more in-class sessions
- Providing a syllabus that would facilitate learning and revising

- Adapting the lessons to the learners' specialization
- Simplifying and presenting the content gradually to improve our understanding

It can be clearly notice that the participants provided very insightful and pertinent suggestions to improve the course. Being themselves higher education teachers, they possess both conceptual knowledge and terminology to describe the learning difficulties and point to the solutions. These suggestions would be very helpful in designing future programs, starting, thus, a new learning and action research cycle.

4. Discussion

The results provided insightful data on ways in which teachers of languages other than English can be involved in the national English program at Algerian higher institutions, making English learning meaningful for this understudied category. The needs analysis questionnaire helped us determine clear instructional aims for the English course and provided the participant teachers with an opportunity to reflect upon their own needs and the potential benefits the program might bring. Their objectives to improve both their English language and widen the scope of knowledge in their research fields led us to adopt a CLIL approach within the action research framework. Since all learners expressed their needs to develop the speaking skill, speaking activities were at the core of the communicative activities. Moreover, their limited linguistic competence and their reluctance to write in English justified the choice of writing abstracts as a main writing activity. The participants' reactions to the instructional procedure we adopted equally yielded significant implications. The English training program they received was satisfactory for most learners, who expressed the need to benefit from more instruction hours in the upcoming semesters. In addition, the learners highlighted numerous challenges which impeded their linguistic development, such as limited learning opportunities, heavy content to be met within tight schedules, and other cognitive learning difficulties related to language learning such as memorizing and grasping language content.

Conclusion

Despite the rich and diverse research conducted on EMI in the Algerian higher education context, this study was an attempt to address a research gap in which the population of language teachers other than English was overlooked. The action research procedure adopted with teachers of Arabic language and literature at the Ecole Normale Supérieure – Assia Djebbar – in Constantine demonstrated that although these teachers would not use EMI, they could obtain significant benefits from the English language program if it carefully meets their needs. Being the language of most recent studies in linguistic and literary studies, improving English skills can help those teachers broaden their academic scopes, learn technical vocabulary related to their study areas, and potentially engage in international publication writing in English, boosting both their career and the visibility of their institutions. The results obtained from the study demonstrated that with careful planning and successful implementation the English language program for language teachers could really matter.

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