

## English Learning Process in Algerian Higher Education

### عملية تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في التعليم العالي الجزائري

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#### Abstract

After describing the reality of everyday foreign languages use, among Algerian students in National Higher Veterinary School, by means of questionnaires, this study attempts to highlight the main obstacles that hinder foreign language learning, in higher education level. The interpretation of the results shows how adaptation, as a means of globalization has affected Algerian foreign languages learning, in addition to other bad learning habits. The study emphasized the absence of efficient foreign languages learning strategies, in the curriculums of different education levels, which is reflected in higher education level. The paper concludes with some recommendations to improve English learning strategies, in Algerian schools.

**Keywords:** learning; language; strategy; English; higher; education; adaptation.

#### المخلص

تحاول هذه الدراسة أن تسلط الضوء على أهم العراقيل التي تعيق تعلم اللغات الأجنبية، وبالأخص اللغة الإنجليزية في التعليم العالي، وذلك بعد عرض حقيقة استعمال اللغات الأجنبية لدى الطلبة الجزائريين في المدرسة العليا للبيطرة، من خلال الاستبيانات. تبين نتائج الدراسة أن الاقتباس كوسيلة للعولمة قد أضر بعملية تعلم اللغات الأجنبية، في الجزائر إضافة إلى عادات التعلم السيئة الأخرى، كما أكدت الدراسة غياب الإستراتيجيات الفعالة لتعلم اللغات الأجنبية في برامج مختلف الأطوار التعليمية والذي يعكسه مستوى التعليم العالي. تختتم الدراسة ببعض التوصيات من أجل تطوير استراتيجيات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس الجزائرية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التعلم؛ اللغة؛ الاستراتيجية؛ الإنجليزية؛ التعليم؛ العالي؛ الاقتباس.

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## Introduction

English learning process in Algeria lacks efficiency due to many factors from both sides : learners and teachers. On one side foreign language learners show low motivation, and bad learning habits over the years, on the other side foreign language teachers are confused about curriculums changes and new teaching methods they are facing each year. The consequences led to weak foreign languages performance in all Algerian education levels.

### 1. The reality of English Language Learning in Algeria :

Concerning the literature devoted to teaching English as a foreign language in Algeria, two interesting studies related to this topic have been found. In the first study the author argued that :

« Algeria is still lagging behind in developing efficient curriculums, because the designers of these curriculums were doing most of the work without being aware of the pupil's realistic socio-cultural milieu, and without involving experts in the educational field ». ( Slimani, 2016, p 43)

In the second study four factors that impeded English language acquisition have been found out: The learners' negative attitude, the complexity of some metalinguistic terms, the lower profile given to English, and the teachers' false assumptions about teaching the target language. (Senoussi, 2012, p 129).

As a teacher of English Language<sup>2</sup>, I can add to these hindering factors the fact that students acquired bad learning habits through their curriculums. In addition to the lack of English practice environment, the students are studying English by means of translating to other languages such as French and Arabic. A good example to illustrate this phenomenon is the use by the students of bilingual dictionaries, such as : English / French or English /Arabic instead of using English / English dictionaries. Furthermore, I have noticed that every year, during my last ten years of teaching, I am used to give the students English communicative tasks that they should present orally, at the end of each academic year. The tasks are not obligatory, but by performing them the students can get a plus in their exam marks. Few of the students (between 10 to 15 %) did accomplish the tasks because they were willing to do so. From this percentage, two or three students did a very good oral presentation, the rest of them made good or average ones. What I aimed to, through these tasks is to work with motivated elements who really want to learn without constraints of any kind. Unfortunately, the majority of the students were not motivated to do efforts..

### 2- Data collection Method:

To achieve the goal of this research paper, and be in touch with the real gaps that impede foreign languages learning process in Algeria, I have conducted a qualitative and quantitative survey at National Higher Veterinary School (ENSV), on October

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<sup>2</sup> I have started teaching English at the university, as a substitute teacher since 1997. Now, I am a lecturer in English Language at the ENSV, since 2009.

2018, by means of a questionnaire<sup>3</sup> through which I focused on the students quality language<sup>4</sup> use.

I have prepared 200 questionnaires to be distributed, but only 143 copies were submitted, 138 retained, and 5 dismissed. The research population concerned students of five levels (50 male students and 88 female students)<sup>5</sup> who are requested to answer the following question :

- « *How do you communicate or interact in your everyday life when using instant social networks ( messenger, instagram, facebook, viber, whatsApp, phone messages, etc ...)* ?

When giving the answers the informants had to answer a table of three columns: the way(s) of communication, from a suggested list, then to order the ways of communication in relation to the frequency of use, that is to say from the way the most used to the less one, as well as to give the reason of such specific use(s) especially.

Data collection time took me one month, due to the students busy timetables .

The aim of the submitted questionnaire is to triangulate the real ways of communication among the students, who are considered as intellectuals and supposed to have studied, at least two foreign languages : French from the third primary class, and English from the first middle school class. The questionnaire was targeted towards collecting reliable information about foreign languages use among students category.

### 3- Data analysis and interpretation of results:

As mentioned above, 138 questionnaires were retained for this study, to investigate the quality of the students language use, as well as the reasons behind such use(s) .The analysis and interpretation of such «collected data are allowed to speak for themselves. » (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014).

#### 3-1 Students ways of communication:

After counting the answers, the statistical analysis revealed the following results, as shown in the table below :

**Table 1 : Ways of communication among Students**

Ways of communication	Rate of informants
Algerian Slang in Latin Alphabet	58,99 %
Standard French	19,42 %
Algerian Slang in Arabic Alphabet	15,11 %
Standard English	6,47 %
Emojis	5,04 %

<sup>3</sup> See a copy of the questionnaire in annex I.

<sup>4</sup> A language in this survey doesn't mean specifically foreign languages, but « a system for the expression of thoughts, feelings, etc., by the use of spoken sounds or conventional symbols ». <https://www.reverso.net>. ( seen on 22/10/19).

<sup>5</sup> The difference between the number of male students and female students was involuntary due to the students availability in the the school library and amphitheatres when the questionnaires were distributed.

More than half of the informants are using Latin Algerian slang, that is to say Algerian slang written in Latin alphabet, which comes in the first position represented by around 59 %, followed by the second way which is Standard French, represented by 19.42 %. The students rarely use standard English which is represented by 6.47 % and Standard Arabic represented by only 0.72 %, although teaching in all Algerian Education Levels is performed in Standard Arabic .

The survey showed that the milieu has a great impact on students ways of communication, even if students started learning foreign languages, since primary school when interacting with each other, they prefer using the easiest way to be understood by others which is mostly Algerian Slang, a sort of a mixture of Arabic words and some French words.

### 3-2 The reasons behind languages uses :

To well understand the students' language behaviour, the study must be supplied by the real reasons behind using specific communication ways instead of others.

The following table gives the main reasons according to the collected answers .

**Table 2: Reasons of languages use**

Way(s) of communication	Reason of use	Reason Rate of use
Algerian Slang in Latin Alphabet	Fashion	62,1 %
Emojis <sup>6</sup>	Funny	49,2 %
Standard French	Intellectual	45,9 %
Standard English	Receiver	30,8 %
Algerian Slang in Arabic Alphabet	Receiver	27 %

The most significant reasons had been retained in accordance with informants rate answers , as shown in table 2 . Fashion was the main reason behind using Algerian Slang by means of Latin alphabet , which means that the students are influenced by their environment, they prefer to interact by means of common language used by the majority of people around them, rather than to impose their intellectual status. I think that this reason deals with *social influence* which « involves intentional and unintentional efforts to change another person's beliefs, attitudes, or behavior » (Gass, 2015).

Almost half of the Emojis users found them funny, others thought that Emojis were more expressive. This reason implies that the students tend to use the easiest communication ways offered by technological devices which make life more easier and enjoyable at the expense of foreign languages learning .

The students using Standard French language gave the reason of being intellectual, may be this was the only reason which reflected the real status value to be a student. There are some students who are using Standard English because the people interacting

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<sup>6</sup> Emojis are small digital images or icons used to express or convey an idea, a mood or an emotion in an electronic communication device. [https:// www.reverso.net](https://www.reverso.net). ( seen on 11/02/20).

with them are using it, which means that the Standard English usage is imposed by the receiver, rather than being the own students' choice. Algerian Slang in Arabic alphabet is less used, it is just used, in some specific situations when the students for example, interact with their mothers who are illiterate.

The students use of communication ways depends mainly on the community individuals and the new technologies, which affect significantly the foreign language learning process.

#### **4- Adaptation as an easiest communication way :**

Unfortunately, Algerian young learners are acquiring wrong assumptions that using Standard French is old use and can't be understood by the majority of receivers, which explains the reason of using adaptation, that is translating foreign languages into Arabic, when surfing the internet. This bad practice has notably affected foreign language learning process, for both French and English. That is why Algerian Foreign language teachers should be aware about the long term impact of adaptation on foreign languages acquisition.

Adaptation is seen as a weak translation method which started in France during the seventeenth and eighteenth century by the apparition of the « Belles infidèles ». At this period, the literal or word-for-word translation was favoured to adaptation which was most used to translate drama plays. (Bastin, 2008, p 3-4).

Nowadays, adaptation is revived by the phenomenon of localization due to the commercial need to sell goods and services via the internet. Localization is a linguistic and cultural adaptation of digital content of a foreign market to satisfy a locale one, or « the process by which digital content and products developed in one locale ( defined in terms of geographical area, language and culture ) are adapted for sale and use in another locale » ( Dunne, 2006, as cited in Shäler, 2008, p 157).

The process of localization began in the mid 1980's, by software publishers such as Microsoft Incorporation, to sell their products consisting of spreadsheets applications for foreign markets. Then they felt the need to target virtual customers all over the world through adaptation process of digital content into different languages to reach a great number of potential customers (Shäler, 2008, p 155-158).

So, localization is considered as an important means of globalization. Each individual can have access to digital products via the internet connection, which widened social relations by linking different areas. This process led to deep changes in economies, cultures and life styles from the twentieth century until now. Globalization gave rise to a new global economy based on informational market, that is to say producing, selling and buying knowledge in an efficient way to gain time and save money by reducing distances and inequalities between different localities.

The Global Economy operates in a multilanguage world which requires the process of translation, especially adaptation from and into different languages through localization industry. This is the main reason that highlighted the importance of adapting economy market where information becomes the basic raw material to be conveyed at a large scale (Cronin, 2008, 126).

Adaptation becomes a useful tool to surf through the world web to be informed, as well as to be served in means of any chosen language which constitutes the positive side of adaptation. But unfortunately, there is a negative side hidden by the positive one. Most people are using adaptation when surfing the internet, which means that they chose their local language instead of any foreign language. In Algeria, people especially the young ones become lazier to learn foreign languages, because it is easier to get information in a local language.

Localization is practical for business to develop widely in a rapid and efficient way, but foreign language learning process is affected by this phenomenon which is gaining importance day after day.

### **5- Learning strategies :**

In my ten years experience of English teacher, at the National Higher School of Veterinary Sciences, in addition to what have been exposed above, I have noticed that first year students are not motivated to study English, even if they are showing signs of interests. Students don't want to make efforts to acquire new English language knowledge. But we can't throw the blame on the learners only because the learning process is deficient as well. An efficient learning process lies on strategies which can be defined as « specific actions, behaviors, steps or techniques - such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task - used by students to enhance their own learning » (Oxford, 2003). Another definition states that « Learning strategies are techniques which students have to comprehend, store and remember new information and skills » (Chamot & Kupper, 1989).

Learning language strategies vary in accordance with the influence of context on strategy use as discussed by Griffiths who recommended two approaches :

« - adaptation according to the needs of the particular learner, situations, goals and research purpose ; and

- construction of a new instrument specifically designed to accomodate the unique characteristics of the situated research population » (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014).

It's clear then teaching English as a second language, in Algeria requires to look for strategies that fit Algerian learners living in an environment different from other populations. To bring ready-made strategies is not a good solution. Algerian language teachers should work together to think over and share their experience in forging appropriate strategies according to Algerian context and environment.

### **6-Recommendations :**

To conclude this issue, I would like to make the following recommendations to reinforce English language acquisition, in the Algerian environment:

- Priority must be given to language specialists and educational psychologists in order to review and reinforce foreign language learning, through National programs that meet young learners expectations,

- foreign language teachers should correct bad learning habits, such as rare use of unilingual dictionaries instead of bilingual ones in class-room sessions,
- enhancing language learning process by means of projects or extra- work such as exposés based on personal work rather than copy and paste from the internet, and monitoring the students' projects by using a project diary <sup>7</sup> a kind of auto evaluation (Fedoul,2015, p 73).
- language teachers should follow up their students and encourage them to make efforts even if they are making mistakes : Teachers are responsible in guiding and assisting the learning process, especially in the Elementary and middle cycles,
- encouraging students to start an English school review, under teachers supervision,
- organizing annual prizes for good English oral presentations : such as plays, poems and short stories.

This study is just an introduction to make further research, in the language learning strategy field. Language researchers and educational psychologists should pay close attention to Algerian students psychology and the influence of the environment on foreign languages acquisition. It's time to change outdated assumptions about learning process, inside closed conference rooms, and look for practical solutions by making a link between the research results and the real learning ground.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See a model in annex 2.  
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