



*English as a Medium of Instruction in Algerian Higher Education:  
Lecturers' Attitudes towards Learning English in Blida 2 University*

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**Abstract ;**

*The promotion of English in Algerian higher education has generated debates within the Algerian academic community. Of paramount significance is the adoption of English as a medium of instruction in Algerian higher education and the training of lecturers in English to achieve such an objective. In this context, this study aims to investigate the attitudes of lecturers studying English in the department of English at Blida 2 university. For this end, an online questionnaire is administered and the 49 completed questionnaires are analyzed. The findings show that participants have a very positive attitude towards their learning experience, but also reveal a mismatch between the content trainees are exposed to and their learning needs and objectives.*

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## 1. Introduction

English continues to gain popularity as the language of choice for people who do not share the same native language to interact and communicate. The position of English as an international language of technology, business and scientific research has also incentivized policy makers in higher education to adopt it as the medium of instruction. The expansion of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is also thought of as the best route to internationalize higher education to attract foreign faculty and students, encourage academic mobility and exchange, and give students the competitive edge in a globalized job market.

In this context, Algeria is no exception to this trend. The promotion of English in primary and higher education has garnered support from both the public and many among decision makers. One of the most consequential decisions by the Algerian government in the field of education was the adoption of English as a foreign

language starting from third year primary education. In higher education, the Algerian authorities have also taken a number of decisions to promote the use of English in academia, especially its adoption as a means of instruction starting from academic year 2023-2024. The motivations behind such change in policy are varied, but they principally aim to give the Algerian university more visibility on the international stage and to equip students with the necessary skills to better compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

For this end, the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (AMHESR) has embarked on an English training program for university lecturers across the country. This training is taking place at the centers for intensive language learning that exist in universities or in English departments when possible. As an attempt to gauge the direction of this training program, this study aims to investigate the attitudes of lecturers enrolled in first year undergraduate English program in the English department of Blida 2 University. The

paper will start by mapping the trends and challenges of EMI implementation globally and will then discuss the recent initiatives to promote the English language in Algerian higher education, especially in relation to the adoption of English as a medium of instruction. The results of the questionnaire administered in the study will be presented and discussed and some recommendations will be suggested in the conclusion.

## **2. Literature Review: EMI around the World: Trends and Challenges**

EMI continues to expand in many higher education institutions around the world. The reasons for this range from the need to internationalize higher education to attract foreign faculty and students to the desire to give students the needed skills to thrive in a competitive job market. But this process is fraught with challenges, especially those related to English proficiency and English training for lecturers and students.

### **2.1 Global Trends**

In the last two decades EMI has largely expanded in higher education institutions in non-native English speaking countries. In a study conducted by the British Council in collaboration with The Center for Research and Development in EMI of

Oxford University which covered 55 countries, 62 percent of the respondents reported the adoption of EMI policies in the countries they represent in the last decade (Dearden, 2014). The study also concluded that EMI has been adopted by more private institutions than public ones, and initiated by the top management rather than by stakeholders.

The literature on EMI aims often to address the drivers behind the expansion of university programs taught through English. Although researchers differ in their explanations, there seems to be an agreement on the role of globalization and the internationalization of education. One central objective for adopting EMI is to internationalize university to attract more international students and international faculty. But more importantly, it aims to make home students better prepared for a globalized environment (Dearden, 2014). The position of English as an international language has much to do with its adoption as the means of communication in academic context to enhance students' career prospects and to develop their ability to communicate and interact in a globalized world.

### **2.2 Challenges to EMI**

One of the focal research themes in EMI has been the challenges faced by stakeholders when implementing EMI. Bradford (2016) identified three types of challenges that may face people involved in the delivery of courses through English which include linguistic, cultural and structural challenges. Linguistic challenges pertain to the difficulties lecturers and students face when they teach or study in a language that is not their native language. Cultural challenges arise when teachers and learners do not share the same culture and norms and would therefore have different expectations. Structural challenges relate to issues of administration and management like the recruitment of qualified teachers, admission of students and the development of academic programs.

In a study conducted by the British Council in 2020 on EMI implementation in 52 countries that are recipient of Official Development assistance, the research found that linguistic challenges represent a principal obstacle to the implementation of higher education programs taught in English. The study notes that mostly teachers do not feel they are linguistically qualified enough to

deliver content in English and they have therefore to “dig deep to find the linguistic resources to adequately convey information to students who themselves may have low levels of English proficiency” (Sahan et al, 2020, p11) Despite such linguistic barriers, the study found that there is limited professional development offered to lecturers of EMI subjects, except some training in general English but not in the skills needed to teach in English or in multilingual or bilingual contexts.

Linguistic challenges have to do not only with the linguistic competency needed to comprehend and communicate in English but also with the skills needed to complete academic assignment. The majority of foreign participants in a study that involved EMI lecturers in an international college in Thailand reported that students’ ability to complete written assignments and reports is limited (Tang, 2020). Uys et al (2007) argue that the indifference to training students in the four skills by subject teachers is a principal reason for the lack of academic achievement of students. Such indifference to the teaching of the four skills may arise from the teachers’ deficiency in such skills and their inability to identify the right

strategies to use L2 as a medium of instruction.

### ***3- English in the Algerian Context***

English is gaining more popularity with the Algerian public and this translated in official policies to promote its use and learning. One policy in this direction was the government's decision to teach English to pupils of third year primary education. In higher education, a number of initiatives have been taken to promote the use of English in Algerian academia, especially the use of English as a medium of instruction. The training of university lecturers in the English languages constitutes a significant step towards this objective.

#### ***3.1 Growing support for the Promotion of English in Education***

There has been growing support at the public and official level to promote English both in elementary and higher education. This trend started as early as 2015 when the Algerian Organization of Pupils' Parents launched an online campaign demanding the introduction of English in elementary schools as a second language instead of French (CNN Arabic, 2015). The campaign developed into an online petition that attracted former officials and prominent political figures.

The statement put to a vote reads: 'I am the parent of a pupil in elementary school, I ask the government to teach my kid English instead of French which has become the language of neither science, nor commerce or tourism' (CNN Arabic, 2016). The campaign came as a reaction to a decision by the ministry of education to allow the use of the Algerian dialect to teach content in Algerian schools.

In an online poll administered by CNN Arabic website in August 2016, 7636 (96%) of the 7951 participants agreed with the proposition that English should replace French as the first foreign language in primary schools (Arabi21, 2016). A published study conducted by Raouia Manseur & Mohammed Nassim Negadi (2019) confirms the same positive attitudes of parents towards English. Among the 275 respondents, more than 85 percent expressed their agreement (45.05) or strong agreement (40.29) to the exposure of their children to English in elementary education. These parents think English would promote their children's future career and would give them a competitive edge in a fast-changing world. Such public demands were translated into an official decision when the Algerian president announced the introduction of

English in third year primary school starting from September 2022. Abdelmadjid Tebboune explained that English is the language of science nowadays (Algerie360, 2022). With reference to the French language which has long been the only foreign language taught in the Algerian primary schools the Algerian president commented that 'French is a spoil of war, but English is an international language' (BBC, 2022). The president's comments have much to say about the government's willingness to reform the Algerian education system and to give younger generations the tools to excel in a globalized world.

Such a move has not gone without criticism. While many among the public and in the government see this as a necessary step to modernize Algerian education, some look at it as a hastened move and expressed their reservations. In response to the public demands to introduce English in primary schools, Zouhir Ait Mouhoub, a journalist in ElWatan newspaper, commented that such direction would add to the challenges of the Algerian education because such decision requires years of training and might hinder pupils' learning process and educational achievement (CNN Arabic,

2016). Massoud Boudiba, the leader of one of the biggest trade unions of education believes that the decision to teach English to Algerian kids from the age of 8 should not be applied partially in an education system that needs reform and update based on a diagnosis on the field (Aljazeera, 2022). He also noted that such reform should follow a holistic approach that involves specialists, training of teachers, and the needed financial and human resources.

### ***3.2 English in Algerian Higher Education***

The promotion of English in Algerian Higher Education seems to follow the same trend of public support and official backing. In July 2019 the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research led by Taib Bouzid launched an online poll for the Algerian academic community to trace the degree of support for the promotion of English in higher education. Among the 94741 polled, 94.3 percent agreed with the idea of enhancing the use of English in the field of higher education and scientific research (Echoroukonline, 2019). In an interview with the Algerian radio, the minister explained that for a better ranking of the Algerian university, it needs to have

more visibility on the international stage, and that this is not attainable without publishing in English, especially in science and technology (Radioalgerie, 2019).

In an initiative to enhance the use of English in Algerian universities, the minister ordered in 21 July 2019 that all official documents should have Arabic and English headings for more visibility of the educational and scientific activities of higher education institutions in Algeria (Elbilad, 2019). Besides this stated objective, the move seems to break with the use of French in official documents of universities in Algeria. In another initiative, the ministry called in August 2019 for the creation of 'brain trust' that includes six experts in linguistics and people from the senior management of the ministry to plan for a roadmap to promote the use of English in Algerian higher education (Maghrebvoices, 2019). The aim was to promote the use of English in scientific research and publishing to generate a more international image for the Algerian university.

The subsequent minister Abdelbaki Benzian announced in October 2021 that the newly-established school of mathematics and the school of artificial

intelligence would adopt English as a medium of instruction and will welcome foreign teachers to deliver courses through English. The minister explained that there is a need for the Algerian student to have a command of the English language to integrate in his economic environment and for the Algerian university to be open to its international environment for better exchange of knowledge and expertise (alaraby, 2021).

The current Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Kamel Baddari, took some of the most consequential decisions to promote the use of English in the Algerian academic system at large. The senior management of higher education seems to have a holistic approach to increase the learning and teaching of English in higher education institutions across the country. The aim is to train all those involved in the education process, including teachers, doctoral students and new undergraduate students. For this end, all the centers for intensive language teaching in universities, English departments and newly created online platforms are involved in the process. Also, the objective is not only to learn English but also to acquire the skills that English can facilitate to achieve.

The ministerial decision 1419 of 24 December 2022 (Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (AMHESR, 2022a) created what is termed a complementary training that all doctoral students need to complete in their first year of study. This training includes the didactics of scientific research and pedagogy, philosophy, the English language, and information and communication technology in scientific research and pedagogy. These modules are believed to give new doctoral students the necessary skills to complete their research. The basic requirement in learning English is achieving B2 or C1 level of the Common European Framework of reference (CEFR). However, the larger objective is to enable these researchers to acquire the necessary skills that the learning of English can facilitate. Examples of these include critical thinking; openness to and respect of the other; analysis and argumentation; self-criticism along with leadership and entrepreneurship.

The other significant ministerial decision to promote the use of English in academia concerns the training of all lecturers in English to the extent that enables them to deliver courses in English. The

correspondence 1433 of 28 September 2022 (AMHESR, 2022b) from the Secretary General of the ministry gives further details about the decision. The document explains that to attain the objective of opening Algerian higher education to the outside world, there is a need to use the English language as the medium of instruction across higher education institutions in Algeria. For this end, the training of all teachers in English is indispensable. The ministry set level B2 or C1 of CEFR, especially in English for specific purposes (ESP), as the target of this training. Such training should be delivered either in the centers for intensive language learning or in the English departments in universities. The principal objective is for each higher education institution to start delivering courses in English starting from the academic year 2023-2024.

Apart from classes in the centers for intensive language learning and the departments of English, the ministry also launched an online platform starting from 02 January (AMHESR, 2022c). As a follow up move to all these initiatives, the ministry founded the national committee for the supervision and management of the training of lecturers and doctoral students

in English. The ministerial decision 0006 of 12 February 2013 stipulates the tasks and objectives of this committee (AMHESR, 2023). The latter is tasked to supervise the functioning of the pedagogical committees created in each university to supervise the training of teachers and doctoral students in English. Other tasks include the coordination of pedagogical activities, the evaluation of the trainees' learning progress, the networking between trainers for the exchange of best practices and expertise, and the development of tailored English programs and courses.

While many among the university lecturers are optimistic about the promotion of the use of English in higher education and scientific research, some voiced their concerns in relation to the implementation of these reforms in the short-term. Some of these observations include the need to provide more specialized training in English pertinent to each subject and the necessity to improve students' level of English to ensure academic achievement (Echoroukoline, 2023). There is also a need to train English teachers who are providing the training, which makes this approach a long-term strategy that might take years to

materialize. Apart from the lack of lecturers with good command in English to start delivering courses in English in the short run, there is also the problem of resources needed to facilitate such profound reforms. Some suggest that there should be a bilingual approach concerning the instruction in higher education because all academic subjects could be taught effectively in English (maghrebvoices, 2023)

A number of observations can be made from the previous discussion of the development of promoting English in higher education. English is increasingly becoming the foreign language of choice for people to learn at all levels of the Algerian education system. The academic community is also very open to the idea of enhancing the use of English as a language of instruction and scientific research. Senior management in the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education seems to take a holistic approach in promoting the use of English in teaching and publishing. The main objectives and motives behind this reform include the need to give the Algerian university more visibility at the international level and to equip students with the required skills to compete in increasingly globalized

economies and markets. The recurring theme is that English is an international language and the language of science, technology and scientific research. What is also noticeable is that the process of promoting English in higher education is a top-down one dominated by the senior management in the Ministry of Higher Education rather than by stakeholders, especially teacher trainers who are the focal point of these reforms.

#### 4. The Study

In this context, this study is thought of as a means to consider and analyze the views of those who constitute the basis of the education process in order to gauge the effectiveness of this process. English trainees and trainers seem to have little say on adopting EMI compared to those in the senior management. Therefore, the main objective is to gauge the attitude of lecturers who are learning English in the English department of Blida 2 University towards their learning experience and the teaching content they are exposed to.

##### 4.1 The Research questions:

This study is guided by two research questions based on two main themes;

- 1- To what extent do lecturers consider learning English in the English department as a positive experience?
- 2- To what extent does the content lecturers are exposed to contribute to their learning progress?

##### 4.2 Method

In order to answer these questions, an online questionnaire was administered targeting lecturers of Blida 2 university enrolled in first year undergraduate studies in the department of English. The total number of these lecturers is 195 from four faculties; faculty of economics, commerce and management (75 lecturers), faculty of law and political science (35 lecturers), faculty of sociology and human sciences (55 lecturers), and the faculty of letters and languages (30 lecturers). These lecturers do not have the same academic status; there are professors, senior lecturers, lectures ... They are also not homogenous in terms of their English level because there was no placement test administered by the department before they were enrolled. While the Ministry of Higher Education required that all university teachers should register for English courses, not all of them did so in the English department as many others are registered in the center for intensive

language learning. Among the 195 targeted population, 49 percent completed the online questionnaire.

The online questionnaire was formulated in simple English. It contains both closed and open-ended questions where they are invited to give reasons and provide explanations. The questions were formulated around two main themes. The first aims to gauge the extent to which participants consider their experience of learning English in this academic year positive. Participants would decide if they see their experience as positive or negative and would also note the frequency of attending classes. The second aims to find out if lecturers believe they are making progress in their learning by the content they are exposed to. They can also provide details about the modules that are helping more than others. There is also a final open-ended question where participants are invited to give any further comments or ideas not raised in the previous questions.

### **4.3 Results<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>For more detailed results with graphs please see [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1DcTH-aJkdUDe5YFWAx9vY\\_8DSorRW6mmb-AwOpM9LUc/viewanalytics?pli=1&pli=1](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1DcTH-aJkdUDe5YFWAx9vY_8DSorRW6mmb-AwOpM9LUc/viewanalytics?pli=1&pli=1)

Among the 195 lecturers enrolled, 49 participants completed the questionnaire; 16 from the faculty of economics, 14 from the faculty of letters and languages, 10 from the faculty of social and human sciences, and 09 from the faculty of law and political science. Though these participants are aware that their enrollment for a degree in English is a requirement by the Ministry of Higher Education, the majority (77.6%) said they are learning English because they like it, and almost half (49 %) of them mentioned the use of English as a medium of instruction as a motive to learn the language.

The results also show that lecturers have a very positive attitude towards learning English with 93.9 percent describing their learning experience so far as positive.

This can also be confirmed by the high attendance rate of the participants despite their commitment to teach and do other administrative tasks as academics. The majority (67.3%) of the respondents said they always attend classes, 22.4 percent said often, and only 10.2 percent said sometimes. Despite their passion to learn English, the majority (53.1 %) of the participants said they want less hours of study, in contrast to (46.9 %) who believe

said need more hours of study. These responses reveal the extra workload lecturers have to assume besides their academic responsibilities. It is worth noting here that these lecturers study the same modules like any first year undergraduate with the same number of hours, except that they study intensively on Saturdays and Thursdays.

In terms of their attitudes towards their progress in learning English and the content they are exposed to in their learning, the respondents seem to have a general agreement on some of the issues. When asked about their progress in learning English, the majority (61.2 %) said they are making good progress, 16.3 percent said they are making very good progress, and 08.2 percent described their progress as excellent. Only 14.3 percent said they are making little progress.

Students were also asked about the modules they think are helping them more in learning English. The skills and grammar seem to have the lion's share of approval by lecturers as the most relevant courses to learn English. A large majority (89.8) chose listening and speaking; 87.8 percent are for reading and writing; and 85.7 percent are interested in grammar. As

for the modules that seem less relevant for trainees to learn English, 55.1 percent chose civilization, 53.1 percent chose study of texts, and 49 percent chose phonetics. To gauge their attitudes towards the content they are exposed to in their learning, the trainees were also asked about the modules in which they would wish to have more study hours through an open-ended question with the opportunity to explain the choices. The respondents seem to agree on the suggestion of having more study hours in the four skills because they believe this would help them understand and produce content in English. They also see grammar as very central to their learning. There is also a general tendency to see specialized modules like civilization, literature, linguistics and study of texts as boring, requiring much preparation or not helping a lot in learning the language these lecturers are aiming to master.

Although the trainees' responses when they are invited to provide any further comments are varied, there seem to be a convergence of views on few issues. The workload is one of the issues raised by the respondents as they find it demanding to manage the academic workload and their study of English. This might also explain

the view of those who want to reduce study hours of some modules. These lecturers would also prefer to be trained by more experienced and qualified teachers.

#### **4.4 Discussion**

The results reveal two main themes; the first is the strong positive attitudes lecturers have about learning English, and the second is the apparent mismatch between the courses' content and learning needs and objectives. The positive experience lecturers have had so far along with their commitments to their studies reveal their support for the promotion of English use in the academic environment. This goes hand in hand with the public and official support for the promotion of English learning and teaching at all educational levels.

The views expressed by the respondents about the content they are exposed to and the degree to which it is helping them learn English highlight the lack of connection between means and objectives. The enrollment in a first-degree program is supposed to help lecturers acquire English, especially the language they would need to deliver their subject courses. Some content like the modules of literature, civilization and linguistics, is

more pertinent to those aiming to specialize in the English language, its literature, and the culture of its people. Such content is not helping lecturers learn English, let alone learn ESP as set out as an objective by the Ministry of Higher Education.

The management at the macro level, in the English department, seems to share the same concerns raised by lecturers. In a short interview with the head of the English department, a number of issues were raised. The first is that the content trainees are exposed to does not match their needs and the field of study. The other issue is the mixed abilities classes that were arranged based on the affiliation of each lecturer (the four faculties) and not on their level of English or on their learning needs and objectives. This would make it more challenging for teachers to prepare lessons that meet the needs of all learners. The lack of permanent teachers with the needed experience and qualifications is another issue to consider. Most of the English teachers in charge of this training are either newly qualified or novice teachers, and are delivering English classes to lecturers who are experts in their field with a long teaching experience. Even at the level of resources,

some modules, like listening and speaking, require some special audiovisual equipment and classes with small number of trainees for better practice and language acquisition.

### 5. Conclusion

The policies initiated by the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education to promote the use of English in the Algerian academia, especially the adoption of English as a means of instruction, are in line with the global trend of English increasingly becoming the language of instruction in many parts of the world. This is especially true when taking into account the motives behind such policies, namely the need to give the Algerian university more visibility and credibility at the international stage, and to give students the necessary tools to compete and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the level of challenges facing EMI implementation, the Algerian context also shares many of the recurring issues that constitute an obstacle to the effective and successful adoption of English as a means of instruction.

The efficient training of teachers in English, especially in ESP, is an indispensable step for the successful implantation of EMI. For this reason, the

involvement of those concerned with the preparation, delivery and evaluation of English courses is an integral part of the training process. Moreover, the objectives set by the senior management, namely the training of all lecturers in ESP to the level that permit them to deliver courses in English, should be dovetail with the means to achieve them. In other words, language centers and departments of English should have the human, financial and academic resources needed to achieve the Ministry's objectives. For better development of teaching programs and resources, coordination between language centers and departments of English is of paramount importance.

For more efficient and improved implementation of EMI in Algeria, more research has to be undertaken by scholars and the government. Future research projects might aim to find out the extent to which the English training offered to lecturers meet their needs when delivering courses in English. Research on the best classroom practices, approaches and methods to deliver this training would also provide invaluable support to trainers. Finally, curriculum and course book design should have its place in this research framework to produce teaching

materials that are pertinent to the Algerian context.

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