

## Challenges and limits of teaching English as a foreign language for economic returns and employability in Algeria

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### Abstract

This study is driven by the fact that English is welcomed everywhere for economic purposes. Algeria, like many countries, has taken several measures towards improving the English language as part of broad economic development programs. However, Algeria's investment in English has little impact on the country's economy and individuals' potential for employment. Research to explore the reasons behind such problems and thus provide myriad suggestions is scarce. Therefore, our primary goal in this work is to provide insights into the challenges and the existing gaps associated with the provision of English language skills as a drive for Algeria's economic advantages. This study uses a content analysis method that relies on local academic library resources and reports from foreign consultancies and organizations, which have been conducted to identify some common features pertaining English teaching and learning situation in Algeria. The findings constructed from our analysis revealed several gaps that thwart the teaching of English as a driving force for Algeria's economic advantages due to various reasons, detailed in the research.

**Keywords:** Economy; English; English as a foreign language; employability.

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## 1. Introduction

Today, the English language has become an open gate to the world trade markets and therefore taking steps in increasing and improving the English language as part of any nation's broad economic development programs has become a *sine qua non*. This leads us to think that when it comes to Algeria, the aim is probably the same. That is to say, economically, the aim of teaching English in Algeria is, like many nations, to compete in the world market.

In line with this, the Algerian government took many steps and measures to improve the English curriculum to increase employability and guarantee the flow of multinational companies into Algeria. However, based on our observation and experience at the English department as well as some investigative local research and reports from foreign consultancies and organizations (see Table 1 below), it has become noticeable that there is a gap between the national goal of English teaching in Algeria as a driving force for economic returns and its teaching/learning situation. Our concern is that despite the government's huge investment in English, English education appears to have little impact on economies and individuals' employment prospects.

Connected to some previous research on the issues in question, this paper aims to provide insights into the challenges and constraints associated with the provision of English language skills as a driving force for Algeria's economic advantages. Identifying the main problems is an area where both the stakeholders in education and teachers can improve to better exploit the economic benefits that teaching/learning the English language embodies. To achieve such objectives, the following research questions are formulated:

1. What are the main gaps that hinder English teaching in Algeria as a driving force for economic advantages?
2. What are the reasons behind such gaps?
3. What solutions can be suggested to promote English for economic advantages?

The significance of this study lies in the fact that the issue of improving the quality of teaching and learning English in Algeria truly needs to be discussed. Therefore, the rationale for carrying out this work is to draw more attention to the situation of teaching and learning English in Algeria. Identifying the main problems can pinpoint the areas where both the stakeholders in Education, especially the guardianships in higher education and ELT teachers need to improve to exploit better the economic benefits that teaching/learning the English language might offer. That is, it is of high priority to make the stakeholders in education and the English teachers at all levels of education aware of the issue, and responsible for being an active actor in ensuring the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning English. As an English teacher in higher education, it is therefore aimed that this study can identify the main problems and thus be able to suggest concrete recommendations that emphasize the enhancement of the quality of English in Algeria.

### 1.1. Literature review

Apart from the individuals' aim of teaching and learning English, it is rational to assume that encouraging the learning of English has strongly been connected to social and /or economic reasons. The major reason is generally framed around the fact that English, the global language, and buying and selling in the world today can only be obtained through obtaining adequate knowledge of trade data and procedures which tend to be in English. Thus, it has become reasonable for many countries, including Algeria, to be proficient in the English language.

For instance, as stated explicitly in India and Sri Lanka's English development program, 'Project English', high proficiency in English is 'Essential for socio-economic development in India and Sri Lanka ... and a vital means of improving prospects for well-paid employment' (Project English, 2009, quoted in Seargeant and Erling, 2011, p. 249). In line with this, similar goals lie behind Bangladesh's 'English in Action' program (EIA), which was a nine-year English language development program funded by the UK government. The main goal behind EIA is 'to contribute to the economic growth of Bangladesh by providing the English language as a tool for better access to the world economy' (EIA, 2010, quoted in Seargeant and Erling, 2011, P. 249).

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This pathway has also been taken by some African French-speaking countries, which have begun to consider the promotion of English as vital for their societies' development and participation in the global economy. For example, as an ambitious plan, in 2009 the government of Rwanda launched an educational plan to switch the nation's entire education system from French to English in a bid to strengthen its ties to its English-speaking East African neighbors, including Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, with which it does much of its trade (Plonski, Teferra and Brady, 2013). According to Freedman et al. (2004), the choice was motivated by the need to open up access to education abroad and develop Rwanda's economy.

Having said that, the question that remains is what are the steps and measures, at all levels, that have been taken by these countries to achieve their intended goals? As it is reasonable, any reform, be it political, social, or educational, has to be supplemented by practical measures to achieve the intended aim and thus guarantee success.

To begin with, as part of their plans to improve English language skills among parents and children, all of India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Rwanda make sure to change classroom practice from traditional to more interactive teaching/ learning methods using ICT materials, which is accompanied with intensive professional teachers' training and continuous support as researched in India (Gupta, 2023).

Another significant plan for closing the skills gap and more generally for increasing employment and economic growth, strengthening the technical and vocational training sector (TVET) in English is perceived as another positive factor in increasing job opportunities (Peng & Yue 2022). Recognizing the utility of vocational training in economic development, many South Asian countries, like Nepal, India, Singapore, and Bangladesh, encourage Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in English designed for post-schools and school leavers to help them acquire knowledge and practical skills relating to occupation in various economics sectors (cited in Erling, 2014, p. 8). That is, it aims at making the Technical and Vocational Education and Training industry-oriented to build a strong correspondence between education and work.

Similarly, due to the importance of English in maintaining its fast-growing economy, China's plan has been supplemented by introducing English from the age of 8 or 9 onwards, in Grade 3 of the national education system and by encouraging private language schools and training institutions that offer vocational training programs in English, which provides job-specific technical training for work in the different domains (i.e., tourism, petroleum, business, media, etc.) (Wang, 2007).

Additionally, another significant part of boosting their economy on a global scale, many countries regard translation services as a key player in this equation. For instance, as part of its political, cultural, and economic opening up, China increased the number of translation agencies and companies (Tian, 2008). The business of translation does not include merely fiction books, but a great number of books related to science, medicine, and engineering. Thus, technical and scientific translation has become a very important part of China's market, which is intimately linked with the importation and exportation of technologies (Tian, 2008; Carolan, 2022). In a nutshell, as can be noticed, economic growth is the main drive behind the encouragement of English proficiency, and all measures are planned to reach such a goal.

## **1.2. Conceptual background**

Similar to many countries, as an action plan to exploit the English language economically, Algeria has taken several ambitious measures and steps towards improving the English language as part of broad economic development programs.

For instance, according to the British Council Profile on ELT in Algeria (1975, cited in Taibi, 2002, p.7), the English language found its way to the Algerian people in the early 60's and 70s mainly concerning the economic tendency, particularly in the field of petroleum, natural gas, iron, and steel. Due to the importance of oil and natural gas as key contributors to the Algerian economy, the government has tried to improve English in the Algerian education system to secure the flow of international companies into Algeria. According to Euromonitor International (2012, p. 57), the Algerian government has begun to consider English as a national priority as the following quote suggests:

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*Improved employability, increased access to scientific research and the ability to retain and attract foreign direct investment can be best achieved by the strong implementation of English education in the country.*

The Algerian government sees English as an open window not only to science and technology but also to other cultures and civilizations. As it has officially been stated by officials, 'becoming part of an international community of people who use English to exchange and share ideas and experiences in the fields of science, technology, culture and civilization' (Ministère de L'Éducation Nationale, 2003, p. 53, quoted in Logbi and Meddour, 2010, p. 19). Conceptually, this means that English language teaching and learning should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather just a means to achieve a particular goal; practically speaking, this means that developing English skills in Algeria is regarded as 'an area in which individuals and societies could profitably invest, as a source of economic advantage' (Grin, 2012, p. 13).

What then are the steps and measures taken by Algeria for improving the English language as part of broad economic development programs? To begin with, at the lower level of education, within the 2002 national educational reform, English was planned to be taught at the first-year middle school education, two grades earlier than in the past (Rezig, 2011), to enable the Algerian learners to have earlier exposure to English. Moreover, in 2008, as part of a five-year collaboration, the Ministry of National Education set an agreement with the British Council and Anadarko Algeria Company to offer training for middle school English inspectors and teachers to help in developing and improving the teaching and learning of English across Algeria (British Council, 2019). According to the British Council in Algeria,

*The Ministry of Education in Algeria has highlighted the learning of English and the promotion of the English language as a key element in reinforcing access to academic, technological, and cultural networks around the world (British Council, 2019).*

The training program included sending a group of inspectors to Norwich Institute for Language and Education for a ten-day program, and teachers' training programs which consisted of workshops and symposiums on how to design effective classroom assessment as well as engage in reflective teaching practices and improve communication (ibid). At the level of higher education, currently, almost all Algerian universities have English departments. Almost all university departments, be it in humanities, technical, or scientific include an English subject in which ESP is taught to meet the specific needs of the learners.

In addition, as part of an ambitious plan, in January 2014, the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research reached an agreement with the UK Government to send 500 Algerian Doctorate students in English literature, linguistics, and language teaching to the UK over the next 5 years (British Council Algeria, n.d.). Similarly, the Algerian government cooperated with the US government by offering Algerian professionals a one-year Master-level program at American Universities under the 'Hubert Humphrey Fellow Program'. Meanwhile, American scholars have come to teach American literature, photojournalism, and biology in Algerian universities under the 'Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program' (U.S. Embassy in Algeria, 2023). This means that decision-makers are fully aware of the necessity of improving the status of English in higher education.

Concerning these measures, it seems quite difficult to understand why English education has such little impact on Algeria's economy and individuals' potential for employment. Certainly, it is not due to lack of investment. However, are these measures sufficient enough to reach the main goal?

### **1.3. Purpose of study**

To find answers thereupon, content analysis was conducted, in which previous research, such as related articles, magister dissertations, and doctorate theses, on the issues of the situation of English teaching and learning in Algeria, were examined concerning the research aim (as detailed below).

## **2. Materials and methods**

This study used a content analysis method that relied on some library resources. Using library resources in scientific research has been privileged for being oriented to practical problems. Stringer (2007) views that using documents as action research is valued because of its ability to extract information and thus broaden

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our understanding of the subject being investigated. Along the same vein, Randolph et al., (2012) indicate that this type of research is highly reliable because of its capacity to re-elaborating and re-assessing knowledge, interpret facts, make inferences, summarize information, draw conclusions, and propose new academic visions of understanding phenomena being investigated. That is, library resources can help researchers identify common research deficiencies and, thereby, serve as a starting point for improving practice and informing policy.

### 2.1. Data collection method

Because of the benefits highlighted above, we used a content analysis method that relied on some library resources as the main data collection. This includes some local articles, Magister Dissertations, and Doctorate Theses as well as some British Council reports, as detailed below (table 1):

**Table 1**  
*Review of the library sources used in this study*

Researchers	Scopes
Euromonitor (2012) British Council (2015 and 2016) Jacob (2019)	Reports from foreign consultancies and organizations.
Mebitil. N (2011). Bouabdallah, and Bouyacoub, (2017), Dakhmouche (2008) Boudersa (2018) Afia and Abdellatif (2020) Assassi (2020),	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic production.</li> <li>Research related to the situation of teaching English at the scientific engineering and technical departments in Algeria</li> </ul>
Idri, N (2009, 2012) Lakehal-Ayat-Benmati (2008) Rezig (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research related to the evaluation of the higher education system from the perspectives of English teachers and students.</li> </ul>
Benadla (2013) Mirza (2017) Kouicem (2019) Benzerroug (2019) Boudouaia (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research related to the evaluation of education in middle and secondary school systems with regard to the teaching approach and constraints influencing the teaching of English as a foreign language</li> </ul>
Benabbed (2016) Kheladi (2017) Mehdaoui (2017) Benmmoussat and Boyakoub (2019) Kerma (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research related to some classroom practices as such: teachers' training, students' perceptions and attitudes towards certain subjects and teaching methods, etc.</li> </ul>

As can be seen from the avenue of these researches, they have not predominantly been intended for the problem being investigated; nevertheless, part of their findings are found to be closely related to our research. Therefore, it is believed that collecting their data and combining their findings will be enormously useful in pinpointing the areas where both the stakeholders in education, especially the guardianships in higher education and ELT teachers need to improve to exploit better the economic benefits that teaching/learning the English language might offer.

### 2.2. Procedure

In terms of procedure, these library resources about English teaching and learning situations are first read and then analyzed and interpreted. The reason for using library sources as research's main tool is that they represent the end of an extensive education and research process that results in new contributions to knowledge.

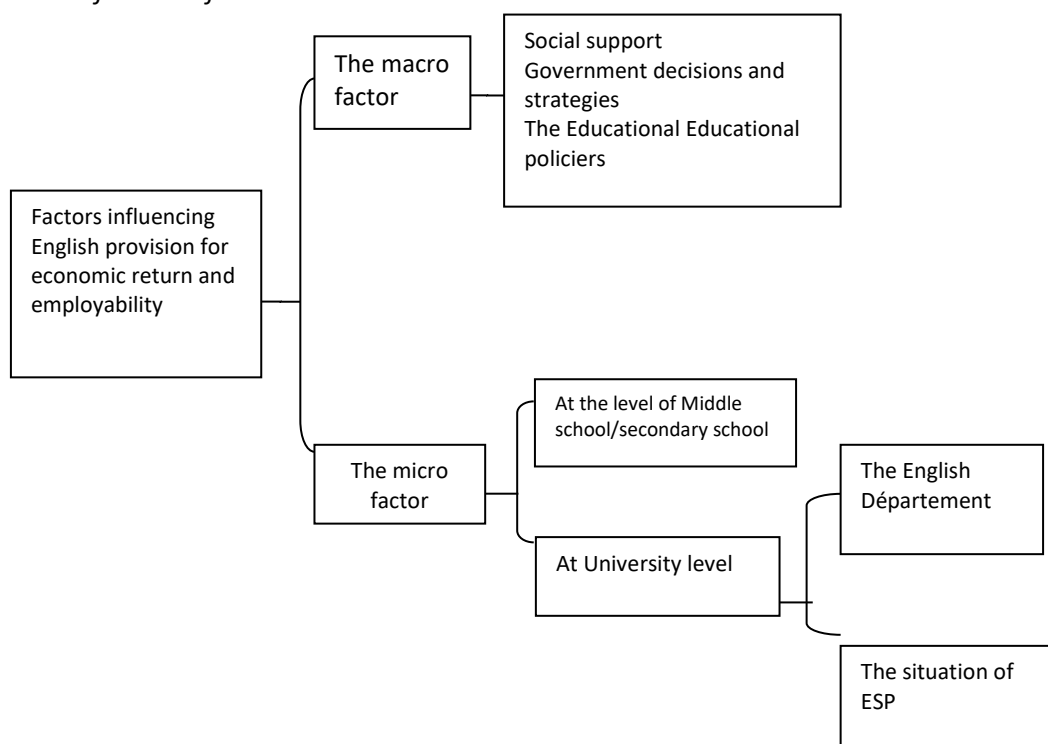
## 3. Results

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Through our examination of the research mentioned above, it is observed that despite the efforts and the growing interest in promoting English in Algeria, many challenges hamper English teaching and learning goals achievements.

This fact has been highlighted explicitly in many British Council reports that outlined the context of English teaching and learning across Arab countries, including Algeria. For instance, the British Council’s first symposium on employability, skills, and opportunities for young people in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), in collaboration with the League of Arab States, reveals that many public English language support programs are not achieving the desired outcome (Erling, 2015). The same is revealed by a British Council (2016) report on "English and Soft Skills in the North African countries, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia". In Algeria particularly, the business trends in Algeria have begun to show some indications that the current standard of English is not adequate for the needs of industry and commerce (British Council, 2016, p. 25). Then, due to the number of factors that influence the provision of English for economic returns, the results obtained from the data collection are classified as 1) macro factors (social support, English status, educational policies, government decisions, and strategies), and 2) micro factors (to refer to the classroom environment at both middle/ secondary schools and higher education). Figure 1 below provides more details:

**Figure 1**  
*Classification of the main results*



### 3.1. The macro factors

This section examines the go-beyond teachers' and learners' factors influencing the provision of English for economic returns.

To start with, it ought to be said that the English language is becoming a trend among younger Algerians. Evidence can be simply seen from its increasing use on social networking sites. However, apart from the virtual world and the professional framework (teachers and a handful of interpreters), English in Algeria is socially absent, and because it is not the Algerian learners’ natural communicative environment, its learning lacks a supporting environment.

Probably, this is one of the primary challenges that might explain why the Algerian students make little progress in English, as advanced by the majority of the researchers being examined herein. For instance, in his research “English and Social Worlds in Contemporary Algeria”, Jacob (2019), found many English language

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teachers at public and private schools complaining about the difficulties of their learners in making any progress in English as “there’s no English outside” (p. 67). In the line of the same thought, in "Exploring English in Education Policy in Algeria: Obstacles to its Promotion", Kouicem (2019) underlined that the absence of a supporting environment and supporting resources such as books, journals, magazines, and TV programs, and the like were among the main obstacles that hinder the Algerian learners to make any progress in English or be motivated to learn it, as there is no English within their environment, as reported by the majority of the 100 respondents.

In some Maghreb neighborhoods, like Morocco and Tunisia, although English was not the colonial language, it has begun to socially emerge as the lingua franca as a result of tourism and business. Therefore, it is not surprising to observe English in the streets and the semiotic landscapes (shops, markets, hotels, etc.). However, as Jacob (2019) observed, in Algeria, the business of tourism is still underdeveloped and associated primarily with members of the Diaspora and their families, and the colonial language, French, remains the main language of commerce.

Therefore, it is not surprising to find that, compared to the North African countries, English penetration in Algeria is very low (Euromonitor, 2012; British Council, 2016; Jacob, 2019). A British Council study measuring English proficiency in Algeria, relying on indicators such as TOEFL scores or online tests hosted on their platform, found that the general level of English was low, with only 7% of the population speaking the language at an intermediate level which is lower than in Morocco and Tunisia (British Council, 2016, p. 29).

Socially and academically, Arabic is the key language, spoken by almost the majority of the Algerian population. English is taught as a foreign language, coming as the second foreign language after French. In a report for the British Council published in 2015, Erling contended that despite English gaining importance and privilege over French for the need to access information from sources rather than French translation, French is still by large the principal language of administration and commerce in the country partly due to the colonial past. In another report published in 2016, the British Council (2016, p. 30), reported that ‘the perception of English among Algerians suffers somewhat at the expense of French, which has traditionally been used as the language of business and public affairs pertinent to its colonial past’. Stating differently, scientific subjects at the university level are taught and examined in either French or Arabic and English is not a mandatory requirement. This includes petroleum and chemical schools (here, it should be noted that English is taught as a separate module (ESP), which in turn suffers from several pedagogical problems).

Consequently, this could be one of the reasons that explain why some Algerian employers in telecommunications, automobile, and consultancy still perceive English as unimportant. As evidence, as part of the British Council research, when some of these employers were asked to rank the importance of English for the ability of a young graduate to secure entry-level employment, only 20% of them indicated that it is very important (British Council, 2016, p. 23). This is simply because all business deals are carried out in French. Likewise, in a study carried out by Euromonitor (2012), it was found that outside the multinational companies of oil and gas, English is considered unimportant because most of the Algerian business is carried out either in Arabic or French, be it a publicly-owned or privately-held company.

In light of this, due to the difficulties of recruiting employees with sufficient English skills, several oil and gas companies have begun providing business English training to their staff (Euromonitor, 2012, p. 72). Herein appears a gap. Although the oil and gas field is the key contributor to Algeria's economy, where a large number of multinational oil and gas companies whose internal communication is in English, French still has the privilege of being the government's preferred language of the university's scientific instructions and business.

At this point, it is needless to say that vocational education in Algeria is also carried fundamentally in French or Arabic. Therefore, the absence of vocational training in English is another problem that hinders Algeria’s investment in English for employability and economic returns. Currently, apart from English, despite the government's huge investments, the TVET sector already suffers from a bad reputation in parts of the world, and Algeria is no exception (British Council, 2016). The reasons, as explained in the British Council report (2015), the TVET is usually characterized by its lack of strategic vision, low quality of training, weak

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linkages between the curriculum and labor markets as well as negative attitudes by many youths as being a low status of qualifications (Erling, 2015, pp. 40-41).

In light of these challenges, it is fairly to say, that the implementation of English vocational education in Algeria needs in-depth structural and pedagogical reforms. Practically speaking, TVET in Algeria faces a lack of instructors who master English, because most vocational teachers in Algeria are often experienced workers who gained their knowledge in either French or Arabic. Besides, most vocational students have poor command language skills, including Arabic, and thus they are not ready to get training in English. This does not mean that the government should keep away from this path, but short- and long-term strategies should be planned to cope with the current challenge. Lessons can be taken from non-English speaking countries that successfully go further in this sector.

Another factor contributing to the low correlation between education and economic growth in Algeria relates to the absence of translation services as an instrumental factor of economic boost. This problem concerns the entire Arab world. Rima Khalaf Hunaidi, Jordanian ex-minister of planning, pronounced it very clearly, "the total number of books translated into Arabic during the 1,000 years since the age of Caliph Al-Ma'moun...to this day is less than those translated in Spain in one year" (WordPress, n.d.). Commenting on this unpleasant fact, Gearing (2009) adds that if Spain translates more books from English to Spanish than the entire Arab world has in 1000 years, imagine the situation with other languages translated into Arabic, that is Spanish, French, Russian, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, etc. Along the same line of concern, in a conversation with Faek for Al Fanar Media in 2014, the head of the Higher Arab Institute of Translation, Iman Bioud confirmed that the translation business is very weak in the Arab region, and it lacks serious and continuous efforts to translate scientific, philosophical and literary texts (Al, 2023).

Finally, considering the macro constraints, which seriously hampers the progress of English, it seems that the government lacks a practical strategy on how to invest in English profitably.

### **3.2. The micro factors**

Having established the macro gaps that hinder the provision of English for economic returns, this section addresses the main gaps found at the micro level. It scrutinizes the major internal factors about English teaching and learning practices at 1) middle and secondary school, and then at 2) higher education.

#### **3.2.1. English in Middle/Secondary School**

Research examining English teaching and learning at middle and secondary schools in Algeria found that gaps in English abilities in Algeria do not have to do only with external factors such as the lack of a supporting environment or with the status of English as being a second language after French, but also with other discouraging pedagogical and classroom practices.

To begin with, compared to some countries that encourage English learning at an earlier age, in Algeria, there is a delay in English language exposure; English language learning starts in middle school when learners are at about the age of thirteen. Research, Harmer (2004) for instance, recommends that exposure to the English language should begin at an early age to be most effective and thus fulfill its goal. Besides, Algerian learners study English just for very limited weekly hours (as noted by Benmoussat, 2003, Lekhal –Ayat, 2008; Benabed, 2016; Mirza, 2017 and Benzeroug, 2019; Kouicem, 2019 among others), which is insufficient to cover the whole English syllabus and develop all the required English language skills. Consequently, English teachers are compelled to

*Cover the syllabus rather than teach effectively following the learners' progressive intake and assimilation capability... [which makes] teachers select only those aspects of language that feature prominently in the BEF and Bacculaureate EFL exam (Benmoussat, 2003, p. 132).*

This puts teachers in uncomfortable situations, which often forces teachers to speed up without caring about the learners' learning outcomes. Thus, to manage the heavy syllabus, many Algerian teachers view that things would be better if English was taught at the primary level; as worded by some of Kouicem's (2019, p.580) participants, it "would have been different if they had learned only a quarter of the planned lessons in the primary school".



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Additionally, along with the time constraints and the heavy syllabus needed to be covered by the end of the year, many Algerian schools suffer from the large classes (consisting of 35 to 45 pupils) and up-to-date teaching materials. This classroom problem, as reported by Mirza (2017) in her doctorate thesis "The Implementation of the Competency-Based Approach (CBA)" often hinders teachers from implementing or promoting peer and group work, which is the basis of the Competency-Based Approach (CBA). In line with the same research, Benzeroug's (2019) findings revealed dissatisfaction among teachers who complained about the difficulty of meeting their learners' needs or keeping them on task as they worked in pairs or groups due to the class size. The same concern was shared by Kouicem's (2019) target teachers who raised such issues.

As reported by Benadla (2013), Mirza (2017), Kouicem (2019), Benzeroug (2019), and Boudouaia (2021), several teachers expressed the problem of their lack of understanding of the concept of the CBA, and thus the lack of understanding on how to apply the curriculum content effectively. For instance, some target teachers who participated in Kouicem's (2019) research felt that it would be better if they were prepared beforehand for the shift toward the CBA. Equally, some teachers who participated in Boudouaia's (2021) research declared that it is difficult to follow the exact curriculum content without any freedom to adjust it. Bearing in mind at Algerian schools, teachers have no say in the development of any national educational curriculum. Instead, they have to accept and apply the curriculum content to comply with the national curricula as well as the ministerial instructions (Law N° 08-04 of January 23, 2008, Article 20, in Boudouaia, 2021, p.1195). Moreover, in Algeria, it is not the teacher who decides, but it is the inspector whose job is to control whether or not teachers follow the same method imposed by the educational authority.

Admittedly, the pedagogical concern expressed by the target teachers who participated in the above research is justified. The success of any teaching approach requires practical training before it comes into effect and free spaces for teachers to handle the curriculum content according to any classroom situation and the lack thereof will often produce opposite results. As reported by one of the teachers, "Developing communicative competence cannot be accomplished by following only the content of the curriculum because the aim is very difficult for learners; rather, having the freedom to adjust to the content to suit learners' abilities is required." Besides, teacher B added: "I can say that autonomy is absent in teaching; I cannot follow the content as it is because it does not suit my learners' level and my aims" (Boudouaia, 2021, p. 1201). In light of such pedagogical issues and classroom environment, developing learners' communicative skills, promoting learning autonomy, and preparing them for lifelong learning, which is the major education goal of the CBA in the first place, has become a non-priority. As advanced by the major participants in the research highlighted above, the teaching process remains traditional – the teachers are the knowledge suppliers and the learner is the passive receiver of knowledge.

As a result, as advanced by some inspectors targeted by Benabed's (2016) thesis "The Didactic Issues of the Algerian English Teachers' Initial and in Service Training Courses: Between Institutional Objectives and Teachers' Expectations", to manage the curriculum content and the classroom environment (i.e., class size and time constraints), the teaching/learning practices have become fundamentally based on theory knowledge at the expense of know-how-to-do. According to Benabed (2016), this theory-based education oftentimes leads students to find meaning "only in the future success of the diploma and to do this, it was sufficient for them to replicate the knowledge, often learned by heart, the day before the exam". That is to say, to quote Chomsky (2013), "to pass tests.... you studied it, you passed the test fine and, two weeks later, you had forgotten what it was about", which is exactly the opposite of true education. Arguing against such mindless skills-based education, Chomsky (2000) stressed that education should be based on developing learners' creativity and critical thinking, not by "a mere transfer of knowledge, consumed through rote memorization and later regurgitated" in state-mandated standardized tests"; this was also emphasized by Moghadam et al. (2023).

Thus, countries that intend to prepare citizens for lifelong learning have begun to develop teaching curricula that promote communication and problem-solving skills. In Algeria however, the pedagogical tradition, not least the English classroom, is still a spoon-feeding in nature, exam-focused, memorization-based, and teacher-centered, which are based on chalk-board teaching method, classroom activities

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consisting of copying from the blackboard with no/little interaction between teachers and learners, divorced from its communicative nature, and, consequently, getting the average grades to pass to the next level has become a motive for learning rather than giving importance to the learning process itself.

In short, in the words of Benzerroug (2019, p, 50), the major challenges and constraints associated with the implementation of English in middle and secondary schools can be summarized as follows:

*EFL teachers in various...schools in Algiers show that there are difficulties in implementing the Competency-Based Approach: insufficiency of time allowance, overcrowded classes, lack of teachers' training, and lack of teaching aids and technological tools in schools.*

This leads us to infer that without reconsidering the pedagogical constraints highlighted hereinabove by the teachers that participated in the above research, the goal of the CBA approach will not produce tangible results, and the Ministry of National Education partnerships with the English agencies like the British Council in the training of middle school and secondary school English inspectors and teachers will continue to remain ineffective.

### 3.2.2. English in the higher level of education

Based on some research papers, magister dissertations and doctorate theses on, for instance, assessment and evaluation of higher educational practices (Lekhal, 2008; Idri, 2009, 2012; Rezig, 2011), classroom practices, students' attitudes, motivation, and teaching methods (Kheladi, 2017; Mehdaoui, 2017; Benmoussat and Boyakoub, 2019), the situation of teaching English at the non-language departments (ESP) (Bouabdellah and Bouyacoub, 2017; Mebitil, 2011; Bouderssa, 2018; Dakhmouche, 2008, Afia and Abdellatif, 2020; Assassi, 2020), it is found that the problems imposed at the lower level of education are not far from that at the university level, at least at the researcher' faculty, Tiaret and Saida.

Therefore, due to the number of factors found in the university setting, the findings are divided into two parts: 1) the English situation at the English department and 2) the technical and engineering department (ESP).

#### 3.2.2.1. English situation at the English department

As it is well acknowledged, communication is the core part of engaging in business. The ambitious goal of the European Union Commission is to make sure that 'Every European citizen should have meaningful communicative competence in at least two other languages in addition to his or her mother tongue'. This means that, above all, the ability to understand and communicate in other languages is a crucial skill for preparing competitive learners for the global labor markets, that is, to communicate with customers, buy and sell, negotiate and bargain business, and the like. Yet, unfortunately, as can be observed by many teachers, many of our students lack communication skills. Of course, others who are not involved in the business of teaching, the students of English in particular, might wonder why a great number of English learners lack communicative competence.

First and above all, it is worthy to mention that, in the Algerian university, the English departments have no say in the selection of its students. As revealed by Benmoussat (2003), Lekhal (2008), Rezig (2011), Mehdaoui, (2017), and Kheladi, (2017), students who enroll in the English departments may come from different streams, viz. Baccaalaureate in letters and philosophy/foreign languages; others are scientific, math, accounting, and economics; they are usually oriented to the English Department based on their average even if they have chosen other streams. Therein lies another major problem. Any pupil enrolled in any stream can claim the right to be enrolled in an English department, despite her/his time of exposure to English learning (Lekhal, 2008). That is to say, enrolling in English language classes does not require an English proficiency test.

Consequently, it is not surprising to find that most Algerian secondary students enroll in English departments with very limited English vocabulary, and this is one of the reasons that a great number of first-year EFL students fail the final exam. For instance, to know the relationship between the student's secondary education background and the failure to learn foreign languages at university, Rezig (2011) designed an English proficiency test, that covered all grammar, vocabulary use, and writing, for first-year students. Her

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findings revealed that among the 153 students who sat for the proficiency test, only 57 succeeded. Among them, as they responded later in a questionnaire, 52 % expressed a negative attitude towards learning English. This was because English was not their first choice; it was rather due to the baccalaureate orientation. In her thesis "Is the Algerian System Weakening", Lekhal (2008) targeted 120 first-year students to know whether English was their first choice, the results were that (35%) of students did not choose to study English. What is more, as Lekhal (2008) found, many students are oriented to the English department against their will. Similar observations are also found in various research examining students' attitudes and motivation towards specific teaching subjects in the English department (for instance, Mehdaoui, 2017; Kheladi, 2017).

This might be one of the reasons that many Algerian English teachers in higher education keep always complaining about the lack of the minimum vocabulary of most of their fresh students. The lack of minimum vocabulary also affects the students as their language deficiency often leads them to participate in class interactions, fearing to make mistakes, which threatens their self-esteem. This usually forces teachers to resort to chalkboard and lecture methods, which are unavoidably teacher-centered. Unfortunately, this off-putting practice often leads to students' lack of motivation.

However, admittedly, students' poor vocabulary and lack of motivation can be solved through ICT use (Fischer & Yang 2022; Windsor, 2021). To achieve success in online higher education, student support is essential for overcoming barriers and ensuring student engagement, motivation, and engagement (Rotar, 2022). As it is well known, today's learners are daily users of technology and are visually oriented; therefore, they may expect the same approach in the classroom. Yet, a class-based technology atmosphere usually requires a small class to better encourage equal student participation and engage them in the learning process.

However, generally, universities in Algeria are characterized by over-crowdedness, due to the rapid increase in enrollment in higher education. According to Jacob (2019), this rapid increase in enrolment has truly put heavy pressure on teachers. Benabed (2016, p. 62), on the other hand, describes crowdedness in the Algerian classes as "a real issue for teachers concerning class, time and course appropriate management", and enduring such crowdedness often leads "to teachers' stress, absenteeism, burnout and early retirement from the teaching profession" (ibid).

It ought to be said that a regular number of students in each class, like the English Department at the University of Tiaret, may consist of 65 to 80. Such an environment often creates Teachers' inability to meet all students' needs; Difficulty in managing the classroom; and Lack of teacher-student interaction. Admittedly, large classes are another very serious pedagogical problem that has led the Algerian university to become a place where both teacher-student and student-students' interactions are limited. In their examination of the effect of overcrowded classrooms on teachers/learners' performance, Lekhal, (2008) and Kerma, (2019) found that such a pedagogical problem is another factor that leads the teaching practice at many Algerian universities to be still predominantly based on the chalkboard and lecture method, which is a teacher-centered. Based on some teachers' responses, in some classes like Oral Comprehension, it seems nearly impossible to make all students take part in the learning process.

Accordingly, within this milieu, as revealed by Khaledi (2017), Mehdaoui (2017), and Kouicem (2019), students' motivation usually takes the form of competition between students that is mainly based on grades. It is not surprising therefore to find that learning at the university level is mainly carried out for the sake of getting the average grades to pass to the next level at the expense of developing competency.

This latter can also be attributed to another problem, which is "the teach-to-the- test method" that characterizes the Algerian educational system, as noted earlier. This approach, which is largely based on memorization of exact information given in class and delivered in handouts, often forces teachers to devote most of their teaching time to students' test preparation. Within this, often denoted as malpractice, the term "achievement" has, thus, lost its intrinsic value in the sense that it means nothing more than scoring well on tests, deviating, therefore, teachers to teach for the test and students to learn for the test respectively" (Benmmoussat and Boyakoub, 2019, p. 203).

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For example, to know the newly baccalaureate students' real English level at Tlemcen University, Benmmoussat and Boyakoub (2019), designed an English proficiency test that is based on communicative functions, which is quite similar to the baccalaureate exam. The results unveiled serious weaknesses in the level of language use displayed by the major participants. Benmmoussat and Boyakoub (2019) concluded that the participants' failure in the test has mainly to do with the teaching habit of gaining knowledge "which has always drawn heavily upon the basic principles of the teach-to-the-test approach", and further the marks they (the participants) obtained in the Baccalaureate English exam, somehow, do not necessarily reflect their real good command of the English language (ibid). Then, it is crystal clear that the teach-to-the-test that characterizes the Algerian educational system is the main reason that leads many of our students to consider marks as a more important motive and objective than gaining knowledge. This specific point has also been reported by the British Council report, in Erling (2016, p. 37) as follows: "Much of students' energy goes into doing well in exams. The purpose of these exams, however, is primarily a form of gatekeeping and selection for further study, rather than ensuring that certain knowledge and competencies are learned". According to Chomsky (2000), this form of education that is based on test-guide-teaching is mindless and meaningless. However, unfortunately, as Chomsky (2000) observed, it is gaining more currency over "learning that addresses the relationship of the self to public life and social responsibility to the broader demands of citizenship.

Another issue hindering the educational quality is the low number of teachers available. Due to the lack of sufficient teachers in some departments, and to cope with the huge number of newly baccalaureate comers, the English department has usually to associate with part-time teachers whose knowledge of the subject matter and the didactic skills are very limited, as also revealed by Idri (2012) at Department of English of Bejaia. This, in return, tends to generate various other pedagogical problems. These pedagogical problems have been revealed by Idri (2012) in her research "Education and Reform to Reach Autonomous Learners: Between Reality and Myth". In the words of her research participants (master 1 and 2 students), besides the lack of qualified teachers in the subject matter, there is an absence of collaboration between teachers when designing and choosing the taught syllabus.

This classroom atmosphere is highly against the major educational reform (LMD), which stresses the importance of developing students' critical thinking and promoting students' centeredness. However, it is fair to say, driving from the conditions mentioned above and our experience at Tiaret University, that achieving the LMD realm is hardly to be achieved currently.

### 3.2.2.2. English in the Non-Language Department (English for Specific Purposes: ESP)

To access knowledge and help students develop the language skills needed for employment, the Algerian government makes a push on English for specific purposes (ESP) in higher education. Almost all non-language departments, ranging from law to engineering, deliver courses in English. Many languages Ph.D. students and teachers have come to consider that gaining English proficiency will allow them to attend or participate in international seminars and conferences, conduct their current and future academic research, and thus progress in their professional careers as they publish in international journals, in English.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that the presence of English in the non-language departments, be it in the humanities, scientific, or engineering, is promising. Based on various local research examining the situation of ESP in Algeria, this field of study is beset with many challenges that hamper its effectiveness. For example, Dakhmouche, (2008), Mebitil, (2011), Bouabdallah and Bouyacoub, (2017), Bouguenous, (2017), Bouderssa (2018), Jacob (2019), Afia and Abdellatif (2020), Assassi (2020) and many others identified many existing gaps between the English skills taught for scientific and engineering students and the skills needed for graduates to satisfy the demand of labor market; For example, graduates' deficiency like the difficulty to recall their previous English language skills to conduct business related tasks such as writing business letter, e-mailing, telephone conversations, and the like. In the following, we attempt to summarize the main findings advanced by the researchers mentioned above.

To begin with, as noted earlier, the language instruction of the scientific subjects at the Algerian universities is taught and examined in French and Arabic. Accordingly, the English Department is left with the responsibility of providing well-trained teachers in ESP. For instance, among many language modules, there

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is an ESP module offered by many the English departments, like Tiaret, at the bachelor and master level; however, because of its insufficiency in terms of content (mainly theory-based), allotted time (1 session per week) and low coefficient (1 coef), it remains unimportant for students compared to other fundamental subjects of higher allotted time and coefficient.

Therefore, as advanced by the research outlined above, till the present day, it seems that the biggest challenge that hinders the promotion of the ESP field in Algeria is the lack of qualified teachers in the subject matter. Apart from the ESP module, which is insufficient, the primary reason so far is that the major postgraduate master programs offered by English Departments are predominantly concentrated around postgraduate specialties like literature, civilization, sociolinguistics, didactics, etc. As a consequence, this leads to a shortage of teachers trained in the field of ESP (Bouabdallah and Bouyakoub, 2017; Mebitil, 2011; Bouderssa 2018; Dakhmouche, 2008), which makes the technical and scientific departments associate with non-specialized teachers either from the English department or Bachelor/Master graduates who lack command in the subject matter.

Remarkably, this situation is further ebbed with heterogeneous classes and insufficient teaching time, which generates more difficulties for the novice unqualified teachers who find themselves in a serious dilemma on how to teach and how to manage the time insufficiency and the class heterogeneity (ibid). However, confusingly, "what to teach!" remains the big question. According to Bouabdallah and Bouyakoub (2017), Bouderssa (2018), Jacob (2019), Afia and Abdellatif (2020), and Assassi (2020), the question of what to teach has mainly to do with the absence of any national guidelines on ESP in Algeria, whether in terms of objectives, syllabus to follow or the number of hours. This, as a result, forces non-specialist teachers to make their way through some international textbooks. Others, as they responded to Jacob (2019), Mebitil, 2011, Bouabdallah and Bouyakoub, 2017, and Dakhmouche, 2008, they simply try to work from a technical vocabulary list or resort to "general English". Students themselves, according to many researchers, have complained that they are not taught ESP. Admittedly, the non-teaching of ESP content will seriously put the students in an advantageous position.

However, there might be reasons behind such. One of the primary reasons for teaching general English, according to some respondents, has always been the learners' poor English language competence. Some teachers, as responded, find it impossible to teach technical language to learners who lack basic language skills.

Under such circumstances, it is then unsurprising to find inconsistency and variation in the teaching/learning content. In his observation and interviews with teachers and students at Tlemcen University and at a science-specialist university in Algiers, Jacob (2019) observed that content variation not only between disciplines but also year-on-year and between students of the same Cohort- what was taught last year is probably different from the following year for the same level. Similar findings were detected by Mebitil (2011) at the Departments of Sciences and Engineering at Tlemcen, Bouabdallah, and Bouyakoub (2017) at the Department of Psychology at Tlemcen University, Dakhmouche (2008) at Department of Computer Science at Constantine, Bouderssa (2019) at the department of sociology at Constantine, Afia and Abdellatif (2020) at the Department of Engineering at Annaba, and Assassi (2020) at the departments of economy, architecture, physics and athlete techniques at Setif. They all referred to the absence of collaboration between the ESP teachers in terms of content as one of the main pedagogical problems that characterizes ESP teaching and learning in Algeria. Jacob (2019, p. 97) summarizes the reason behind the variation in teaching and learning content and approach in Algeria as partly due to teachers' varying trajectories: very few are subject specialists in the discipline, and most of them are English graduates or current postgraduate students.

What is more, the English subject in the Algerian non-language departments is not taken seriously. Due to the low coefficient, English is regarded as only a secondary subject, and as a consequence, the ESP teachers often face a lack of consideration; an English teacher may feel like a "guest-like colleague" or an "illegitimate" whose job is to help students compensate for other subjects. Thus, it is unsurprising that they are usually ignored or invited to teachers' days. This potential lack of legitimacy of ESP teachers vis-à-vis their colleagues has led many English teachers, including the few ESP specialists, to show reluctance to be recruited at some

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of these scientific and technical departments, preferring to join English departments. This potential lack of legitimacy is the reason that may explain, according to the researchers above, why most students hold negative attitudes toward learning English, choosing to focus on their core subjects and perceiving English as a subject that is aimed to compensate for other modules' marks.

Having established the main factors affecting the ESP learning and teaching situations in Algeria, it can also be noticed here that there is also a gap between the society's main goals and the pedagogical strategies and practices of ESP. It is to be noted that the volumes of research that examined the ESP situation should be taken into consideration. The Ministry of Higher Education should push the English departments to offer more postgraduate programs in ESP and also urge the non-language departments to offer recruitment in this field.

#### **4. Conclusion**

By way of summary, the main reasons for the existing gap between the main teaching goal of English in Algeria and its teaching/learning situation can be summarized as follows:

*At The Macro level:*

- Lack of a supporting environment (books, newspapers, TV programs, etc.)
- The implementation of French as a scientific language of instruction instead of English.
- The absence of vocational training programs in English for skilled workers,
- The shortage of technical translation services

*At the Micro level:*

- Pedagogical problems such as lack of practical training, lack of sufficient time, classroom overcrowdedness, etc.
- Baccalaureate orientations (no proficiency criteria for the English department's enrollment)
- Lack of international scholarships for ESP, that is, scholarships devoted mainly to literature and linguistics studies,
- The shortage/lack of ESP postgraduate programs offered by the English Department, that is, lack of basic teaching training in the field of ESP.
- The recruitment of ESP teachers at the EFL Departments, who are supposed to be recruited in other technical/scientific departments,

In short, what is highlighted herein implies that heavy efforts should be made by Algerian ELT practitioners at the university level to remedy the situation.

The present work was motivated by the fact that similar to many nations, the English language has been adopted in Algeria as a way to promote the country's economic competitiveness in a global economy. However, as discussed hereinbefore, there is an incongruity between the goal of English teaching as a driving force for the country's economic development and the strategies and plans for reaching such a goal. Thus, the study aimed to detect the gap between the goal of teaching English in Algeria and its teaching-learning situation.

Relying on several local investigative researches, discussed above, the researcher detects several challenges and barriers that thwart the teaching of English for the nation's economic development. That is, it has become evident that there is a pressing need to make more efforts to produce desirable results for both society and individuals.

The library resources used in this research are not enough to generalize or draw conclusions about the findings. Yet, truly, the problem is so complex. Many efforts should be made at different levels, and avenues in this area of study would prove fruitful.

#### **5. Recommendations**

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To bridge the gap between the main social goal of English teaching and its current teaching/learning situation, we allow ourselves to suggest recommendations, some of which were advanced by teachers in data collection:

- Having true and brave political decisions away from any ideological agendas,
- Providing vocational training programs (Professional skills taught in English) designed for workers working in the economic sectors, that is, oil, gas, tourism, etc.,
- Implementing English at primary schools,
- Encouraging the use of English in Media for wider exposure,
- A general reorganization of the educational system, which should value critical thinking and prepare students for lifelong learning and 21st-century skills
- Implementing English as a medium of scientific instruction, at least at the university level
- Giving more importance to ESP Programs.

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