

English Language Education in Algeria: an added value to International Cooperation

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Abstract.

The re-emergence of English from the status of an international language to that of a global language is nothing but a direct result of the on-going globalization process. The globalization of English is further driven by the growing global economy. This paper tries to shed light on the 21st century-vision of language education, not least English, with teacher effectiveness as a key component and learner involvement as an active partner. It is to this end to wonder about the prospect of English Language Education in Algeria with the assumption that English is to be an added value to embrace cooperation regionally and internationally thus acting as a springboard conducive to technological advancement, economic development and commercial expansion.

Keywords: English Language Education, regional/international cooperation

Introduction

The advent of democracy marking the end of the one-political-party system in the late 1990s initiated overall politico-economic reforms that have led to the exercising of the open-door policy, and thus foreign language-wise assigning the English language a higher status, i.e. the shift of English from the status of an international language to that of a global one. As a result, English Language Education¹ in Algeria has slanted towards the approach that places the learner at the forefront with the teacher's role as facilitator, a provider of creative contexts and supportive environments for language learning. This explicit recognition of English as a global language has led key stakeholders including policy-makers, textbook writers and teachers to reconsider the teaching of English at the different levels of education, middle, secondary and tertiary. Clearly, the importance and value of the English language in the education system at the three levels, primary, secondary and tertiary, ought to be revisited and the newly-assigned educational status of English, worldwide, could serve as an index to inform policy makers to reshape the current policy in the Algerian educational institutions. No doubt, there are issues at stake which would need to be unveiled. However, much depends on the challenge of implementing an adequate language planning policy that strikes the balance between local and the global².

Global Vs. Local

An appropriate methodology ought to account for both the global and local needs of EFL learners. A reconsideration of the notion of appropriate methodology is grounded in the fact that the EFL teaching methodologies and materials developed in Britain and the United States could not be used in the same way they were intended by their original authors once they reach a non-Anglo-Saxon country. Broughton's textbook *Success with English* (1970) and Alexander's series *New Concept English*, namely *Practice and Progress* and *Developing Skills* (1967), which were prescribed EFL textbooks at middle and secondary-school education respectively in the 1970s and early 1980s, were illico presto replaced by home-made textbooks drawing mainly on principles depicting the mainstream culture. As Dickinson (2021) further explains, there are likely to be many

differences between the contexts: differences in the resources, i.e. things like equipment, classroom, teachers, and so on. Differences in aims and objectives, i.e. why the language is being taught, and the examination system through which the students have to demonstrate their learning. There is no doubt, however, that in educating the citizens of tomorrow, as Botlitho notes,

“We should be preparing them to cope with change in our increasingly globalised world. Among other things, this seems to mean laying emphasis on using language as a tool for communication and accessing information and developing transferable skills such as critical thinking and learning how to learn. These features should be in evidence in the curriculum and in textbooks as well as in classroom practices” (Bolitho, 2012, p. 35).

This quotation clearly illustrates what Wedell (2019) describes as an interpretive and dynamic view of the educational process, with an accentuated role of the teacher as a facilitator rather than a fount of knowledge.

Teacher Role Specifications

1. The PLEFTER Model.

Though, admittedly the teaching-learning process has to be learner-centered³, the teacher still performs a role of paramount importance in an EFL classroom. In this very specific context, it is worth noting the motto-like teaching statement, “The EFL teacher is a P.L.E.F.T.E.R.”, put forward by the General Inspectorate of English in the late nineties to specify and define the different roles that the EFL teacher, mindful of his or her duties, is supposed to play on the classroom stage. The acronym P.L.E.F.T.E.R. stands for the following:

Planner, i.e. the teacher sees planning and structuring of learning activities as fundamental to success in teaching and learning.

Linguistic model, i.e. the model learners should imitate.

Evaluator, i.e. the teacher assesses the learners’ progress.

Facilitator, i.e. the teacher simplifies the learning process.

Team member, i.e. the teacher takes part in cooperative activities and team work.

Educator, i.e. the teacher serves as an example suitable for imitation.

Researcher, i.e. the teacher is expected to keep up with the latest development in the field of language learning.

However, this account reflects in part what the teacher, as a practitioner and researcher, ought to do in relation with the requirements of the teaching profession. More importantly, the teacher should account for the specificities of the teaching situation; the teacher is in a better position to know what his pupils need, what their interests are, and what should be done to adjust these needs and interests to the demands of the school curriculum (Bemoussat, 2003).

2. Richards and Lockhart’s Model.

Interestingly, the roles, teachers as practitioners and researchers are supposed to perform, have attracted considerable attention. Richards and Lockhart (2010) provide an account in which they identify eight teacher role specifications; the following are intended to teachers who think about their task and want to improve their classroom performance as well as learning outcomes:

Needs analyst, i.e. the teacher determines students’ individual needs following institutional procedures (e.g. a structured interview) and uses the information obtained for course planning and development.

Curriculum developer, i.e. the teacher develops his own course plans and syllabuses based on students needs.

Materials developer, i.e. the teacher develops his own classroom materials.

Counselor, i.e. the teacher is encouraged to identify students who are having problems and learning difficulties, and to offer individual counsel to students who need it.

Mentor, i.e. the teacher assists less experienced teachers with their professional development.

Team member, i.e. teachers are encouraged to work together as a team rather than to teach in isolation from other teachers in the school.

Researcher, i.e. the teacher is encouraged to conduct research related to language learning, including research in his own classroom.

Professional, i.e. the teacher is expected to continue with professional development by taking part in workshops and conferences, reading professional journals in the field, and joining professional organizations (Richards and Lockhart, 2010, pp. 99-100).

An expanding literature on the concept of professionalism with respect to the management of innovation and change in EFL settings has emerged recently; the teacher as a professional has been elaborated to cover other attributes. The teacher, in this respect, should build up a sound understanding of the principles underlying the teaching practice, not just a collection of technical skills. According to Ur (2019), this profile of the teacher as a professional proper is a cardinal component of the teacher profile in the sense that it “equips them [teachers]

with the ability and authority to criticize input from other professionals and academics and evaluate its appropriateness or acceptability in principle or for specific contexts” (Ur, 2019, p. 3).

3. Spratt et al’s Model.

A few years ago, Spratt et al. (2018) making use of their experience as EFL teachers and ELT project consultants, advocated a model providing a clear and detailed outline on classroom management, not least on teacher role specifications. According to their model, teachers need to behave in different ways at different stages of a lesson plan in order to manage the classroom and to gear learners through the lesson. To successfully do so, teachers are supposed to adopt the following behaviour in a more or less prescriptive way:

Planner, i.e. the teacher prepares and reflects on the lesson before teaching, anticipates problems and selects, designs and adapts materials.

Manager, i.e. the teacher organizes the learning space, makes sure everything in the classroom is running smoothly and sets up rules and routines (i.e. things which are done regularly) for behaviour and interaction.

Monitor/Observer, i.e. the teacher goes around the class during individual, pair and group work activities checking learning and providing support as necessary.

Facilitator, i.e. provides opportunities for learning, helps learners to access resources and develops learner autonomy.

Diagnostician, i.e. the teacher works out the causes of learners’ difficulties.

Language resource, i.e. the teacher can be used by the learners for help and advice about language.

Assessor, i.e. the teacher evaluates the language level and attitudes of the learners by using different means of informal and formal assessment.

Rapport builder, i.e. the teacher tries to create a good relationship with and between learners (Adapted from Spratt et al., 2018, p. 199).

This triadic-oriented teacher role specification, though overlapping at different teacher roles, is in effect, a clear provision of an overall account relating to the ways the classroom is to be managed and sustained in the true sense of the term. It shows empirically how teacher roles ought to match with various aspects underpinning the teaching process. In sum then, effective and fruitful classroom management depends to a larger extent upon the teacher versatility. Yet, English Language Education in Algeria, so to speak, has been hijacked from its ultimate objective: the development of communicative competence in its comprehensive meaning, and paradoxically speaking to score high in tests equates to excel in the use of the English language.

Teaching to the Test Approach

The changes that English Language Education has gone through, moving from a teacher-centred pedagogy to a more learner-centred education, from a textbook-based teaching to a task-based approach, from a summative assessment to a formative assessment, reflect educators commitment and teachers concern in a bid to reach an appropriate methodology which best relates teaching to testing on a communicative continuum. Yet the problematic has not yet been resolved even after decades of continual change, update, and improvement of the English Language Teaching Methodologies. Even worse, the issue has reached a critical state when the main concern and worry of most stakeholders, mainly parents and the educational institution, is shifting from students potential and academic development to students achievement in exams. In this sense, the notion of ‘achievement’ means nothing more than scoring well on standardized tests and high-stakes exams⁴ such as the Baccalaureate exam which is, par excellence, an illustration of what a high-stakes test is.

This high score-academic achievement intimate relationship has conducted EFL teachers to engage in a selection of only those items that likely to feature prominently in exams rather than to teach effectively and with pace according to their learners degree of intake and assimilation. The socio-educational dimension is due to the fact that both parents and the academic institution give too much importance and great value to the result obtained by their offspring and students. In other words, and in terms of accountability, the education institution, in general and teachers in particular, are judged in relation to their students’ success and achievement in exams, not least high-stakes exams. Since independence in the early 1960s, scores obtained in standardized tests have served as a ‘benchmark’ to compare and rank educational institutions throughout the country. In sum then, standardized testing is still regarded as a large-scale measure of schools effectiveness.

To play safe and in an effort to meet the learners’ parents’ expectations and to abide by loyally the education institution’s policy, the teachers, caught between the hammer and the anvil, have generally recourse to the teach-to-the-test approach. This teaching practice is considered to have a negative effect on the teaching/learning process, and consequently, calls into question the reliability of exam results and, by extension, dirties the credibility of the education system as a whole. Additionally, most educators and applied linguists, as rightly pointed out by Schweisfurth 2011, agree that at present tests are no more testing learners’ knowledge and potentials, but testing their ability to reproduce fixed bodies and exact structures of knowledge. As a result,

schools are losing the very intrinsic value that is placed in them as educational institutions with sole attributes encouraging meritocracy and fostering scholastic advancement for those highly motivated and talented students. However, many individual learners, without learning opportunities, cannot develop the competencies and skills that will help them use the language communicatively. One might dare say that testing, which is supposed to be the pedagogical tool to assess and promote learning, comes to act as a the sword of Damocles over English Language Education in Algeria, thus, very likely to be an overt deteriorating element in a teaching approach.

What is more, EFL teachers have to search for ways in which these common practices might be modified or, to some extent, extended to develop the students' communicative abilities. In so doing, we pave the way for the English language to gain a foothold in our educational institutions, not least at tertiary education level. Such an orientation will comfort the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) emphasis on the English language in the educational systems of developing countries to further the goals of national development.

English: A Must-Have Language in Algeria

In today's world globalization and the English language seem to represent the ideal couple and to symbolize the perfect marriage. The widening, deepening and speeding up of interconnectedness on a worldwide basis cannot be achieved first and foremost without a sound knowledge of the English language that, undeniably, serves as a globe-spanning mediating power, i.e. a lingua franca of communication and exchange. Global communication and exchange require a shared linguistic code that has been learned rather than natively acquired (Block and Cameron: 2021). Yet, how can the language skills be taught, not as a self-sufficient achievement but as an aspect of communicative competence. As teachers, we often complain about our students' lack of motivation for EFL studies and say that our students' command of the language is not that 'good', and therefore not adequate to fulfill basic communicative functions. In sum then, the ability to communicate effectively in English is now a well-established goal in any ESP enterprise.

In very practical terms, it is through the English language that financiers, economists, scientists and academics are connected to the world's networks of finance, trade, industry and education. Thus, as one would expect, mastery of the English language becomes a sine qua non condition for success at every step. This pragmatic reality reflecting the capital importance of English in virtually all fields of specialization goes all the way back to Kachru (1985), as shown by the following quote:

In comparison with other languages of wider communication, knowing English is like possessing the fabled Aladin's lamp, which permits one to open, as it were, the linguistic gates to international business, technology, science and travel. In short, English provides linguistic power (Kachru 1986:1).

Admittedly, within the globalization framework, English has become the linguistic tool whereby the desire not to lag behind and be left out of the world is manifested, and hence "English standards have become touchstones of internationalization" (Tam & Weiss 2014: XI), serving in this sense as key factor in sustaining today's influence of the Anglo-American pole over the rest of world. Alongside with that, Ibn Khaldun, the famous Arab sociologist, pointed out in his *Al Mukadima*, "The triumph of a language reflects its speakers' triumph and its position among languages expresses its position among nations".

From a linguistic standpoint and metaphorically speaking, globalization and English are viewed as two sides of the same coin. The following quotations are concrete evidence to back up such an intimate relationship: 'The development of globalization has been associated with the dominance of the English language' (Bottery 2008: 6), while it can also be noted that, 'The power and influence of English have been widely recognized nowadays in the context of globalization' (Chang 2006: 515). More importantly, "Globalization has contributed to the spread of the English language ... the English language is itself an agent of the spread of globalization" (Mouton, 2018: 27). Such rapprochement denotes how globalization has brought English language education to the forefront, and how global English has become the 'flagship' of globalization. Hence, EFL teachers in Algeria and elsewhere must take their place again and reconsider themselves among the most respected intellectuals. They must move beyond the citadel of the classroom to preparing their students to be world citizens in a knowledge-driven society.

From a diachronic viewpoint, the teaching of English in the Algerian schools can be traced back to the mid 1930s as part of the French prescribed curriculum, as the country was under French rule from 1830 to 1962. Therefore, as a developing country, Algeria is constrained to join the new world order's club, and therefore align her economy along that of modern states' lines. This perspective has, somewhat up-graded the status of the English language at the expense of French. What is more, the ministerial orders to include EFL courses and modules at tertiary level for almost all disciplines and specialties signal the state's recognition that a degree of proficiency in English language is an essential part of a well-rounded education. It is a one's duty to say that the

educational authorities have always expressed their will and eagerness to promote ELT in terms of textbook design and teacher-training services.

French-English Language Divide

There are many aspects of tertiary education in Algeria which illustrate the so-called language divide, i.e. French vs. English. This has become a sensitive issue at university level, although, formally speaking, the two languages are labeled as ‘first foreign language’ and ‘second foreign language’ respectively in student academic transcripts and grade sheets. However, the French language takes the lion’s share and the lead as the dominant language of instruction in virtually all scientific and technological disciplines, by way of an example, medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, physics, chemistry and computer science, to mention just a few, are taught through the medium of French.

Since the implementation of the Arabicization process in 1971, university teachers have always expressed their reluctance and resistance to that change. In fact, those at the chalk face did not resist change, they resisted being changed; to the opinion of many teachers, “Arabicization means spending much more time and effort on translating and looking for the right words and concepts than focusing on improving learning outcomes”. A statement report that is expressed and shared by the majority of teachers and backed up covertly by inspectors.

The 1990s pilot experiment to ‘oust’ French from primary education and ‘impose’ English instead did not yield the expected results. The verbs ‘oust’ and ‘impose’ are between quotation marks for a good reason. The educational decision was made on the basis of nationalism rather than nationism to use Fishman’s (1972) dichotomy. The educational objectives of the Algerian School have always been molded to inculcate and engender feelings of nationalism (one state! one language! one nation!) as a counter to ethnicity - multilingualism oblige! However, to split the difference, starting from the academic year 2022–2023, the English language has been re-introduced in primary schools alongside the French language. The French-vs.-English sensitive issue ought to be sorted out at earliest convenience so that to free the Algerian University from the occult powers at work. This language divide impacts negatively on the role and mission tertiary education is supposed to perform and accomplish respectively in order “to avoid lagging behind many comparator countries” (MENA World Bank Development Report (2020)).

Stockholm Syndrome vs. Helsinki Syndrome

Worth noting, a few years ago, Algerian former Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Tayeb Bouzid (2018-2020) posited in very clear terms that “the French language does not get us anywhere” and ordered the country’s 77 universities and higher education institutions to use English rather than French. In an official note addressed to university rectors, the minister noted that, “Within the framework of the policy to encourage and strengthen the use of English in order to give better visibility of education and scientific activities in the higher education system, I urge you to use both Arabic and English in official documents”. Expectedly, the shift from French to English sparked much discussion and hot debates about Algeria’s strong linguistic and cultural ties to France 60 years after the country’s independence in 1962. Is Algeria condemned to push the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’ to its extreme?

This policy of acquisition planning, the strategy to increase the use and number of users of a language through language teaching, received a cold welcome from the francophones. They have always viewed the acquisition of French as un butin de guerre, a war booty, to use Kateb Yacine’s famous terms, therefore a treasured possession as well as a key to economic betterment and modernization, intellectual pursuit and progressive values, and personal development, hence a compromise for some time to come. Beyond the political discourse, it should be noted that French is no longer the property of the old enemy; French, as a language of wider communication, is a tool that can serve many purposes: linguistic, cultural, social, economic and technological. Is that another form of ‘Stockholm Syndrome’? The ‘Helsinki Syndrome’!?

Conclusion

As a conclusion, a broad and multi-leveled question, which to the opinion of many Algerian scholars, deserves a fair share of attention and de facto imposes itself in the present context: How can the Algerian economic model, financial system, commercial outlet, technological industry and scientific research be freed from the grips of the French language. Put differently, how can we make the most of English Language Education in Algeria in the light of today’s multi-faceted world’s demands without ‘ousting’ the merits of the French language? As a legacy of colonialism, the French language has loyally served the country’s interests at

different levels since independence in 1962. Many linguists and language planners still view the French language as a war booty, i.e. as a blessing that is worth caring and sharing. While other linguists and statesmen view the French language as a curse that is worth fighting and chasing. Indeed, it is a very 'tough job' and a daunting task for language planners to find a compromise solution to this very sensitive and thorny issue.

Arguably, the English language is found more useful, more practical and more productive, globalization oblige, to respond positively to the demands of the 21st century. What is more, with the development of many new opportunities for private businesses, and the multiplication of joint ventures with foreign companies resulting from the on-going international cooperation, the English language in Algeria will be assigned a higher status, and thus a must-have language that is, in effect, needed for economic development, technological advancement and commercial expansion. However, in the light of such importance, English Language Education in Algeria needs further refinement and reconsideration to respond positively to the requirements of the newly-established world order.

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Article Endnotes:

1 The terms 'English Language Teaching' and 'English Language Education' might be semantically and didactically equivalent, but we prefer to use English Language Education in an attempt to be truly educative and to give a broader value and meaning to the language learning process. Language teaching can claim to have social significance, and to contribute to the students' general education by introducing them to cultures other than their own.

2 It has been argued that the globalization process and the blurring of national and linguistic boundaries due to the tremendous development in the field of ICT's coupled with the emergence of regional thinking and the revival of ethnic and regional cultures have given rise to the political motto 'Think global, act local', translated into EFL/ESL pedagogy as 'global thinking, local teaching.

3 Many English classrooms are still being described as dominated by the three T's: teachers, textbooks and tests. However, task-based learning is seen as requiring a significant change in pedagogy "from teacher-centred to pupil-centred, from textbook-based to task-based teaching and from summative assessment to formative assessment". In recent pedagogical discourse, a process-oriented, student-centered, and task-based approach has been the most effective for teaching/learning. The ELT research and professional circles have this as "the optimum interactional parameters within which classroom language learning can take place" (Holliday, 1994, p. 54).

4 High-stakes exams are so important in the eyes of many stakeholders in the sense that their results, as Madaus (2016, p. 87) notes "are seen, rightly or wrongly, by students, teachers, administrators, parents, or the general public, as being used to make important decisions that immediately and directly affect them."