

Empowering Educators with 21st Century Skills: Adopting English as a Means of Instruction in the Algerian Universities

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ABSTRACT: *In today's fast-paced and interconnected world, the need for effective instruction tools and communication skills has become more critical than ever before. As a result, teachers are increasingly required to teach using English to all ages and backgrounds. 21st century education is characterized by upgrading and updating teaching practices and incorporating modern methods to cope with the current generation. Indeed, there is an increasing demand for individuals to possess a range of technological, interpersonal, soft skills and critical thinking skills. To meet this demand, it is important for educators to not only teach English but also equip themselves and their students with the 21st century skills necessary to succeed in today's rapidly changing world. This paper proposes an exploration of the intersection between teaching English to teachers and meeting 21st century skills. It will examine the challenges and opportunities involved in teaching English to educators in the Algerian universities and explore effective strategies for developing the skills necessary to thrive in the 21st century. Ultimately, this research aims to provide insights and practical advice for educators who seek to enhance their own language proficiency and empower their students to succeed in the 21st century.*

KEYWORDS: 21st Century Skills, Teaching English, Critical Thinking, Language Proficiency, Higher Education.

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Introduction

In today's globalized world, the ability to communicate effectively in English has become increasingly essential for individuals of all ages and professions. For educators, this need is even more pronounced, as they are responsible for imparting language skills to their students. However, it is important to recognize that teaching English to educators themselves can also have significant benefits and challenges.

By improving their own language proficiency, teachers can not only enhance their ability to communicate with their students, but also become better equipped to teach using English as a means of instruction. In addition, 21st century education requires educators not only to go beyond language proficiency but also develop a range of technological, interpersonal, and critical thinking skills in order to meet the needs of their students and prepare them for success in the modern workforce.

Literature Review

Algerian educational system has gone through a series of changes and reforms. These winds of reforms blow over the Algerian educational system to modernize and upgrade the existing practices, adopting a newly methodology that suits the 21st century skills needed. As schools of thought have come and gone, the Algerian educational framework has witnessed a slow but deliberate shift and progress regarding its curriculum development and teaching methodologies. A number of reforms have been introduced to prepare students to take part in the economic growth of the country in the light of intensive modern research and on-going globalization process. In this vein, Bouchikhi, (2020) states that *"Algerian educational reforms have been driven by the need to modernize and align with global educational standards, focusing on equipping students with competencies necessary for economic participation and social integration"*

Language teaching has been largely influenced by these theoretical principles, and there are a set of shortages and negative aspects regarding its implementation, for instance, teachers seem to be not formed to cope well with these alterations. This implies either that the theoretical suggestions are not applied in the right way or they are inappropriately adapted to the Algerian context. English Language teaching in higher education is extremely widespread; it entails different angles according to the intended teaching objectives. Taking the university as a concrete example, one may think straightforwardly of the word *obscurity*. Despite the fact that teachers normally are provided with the main course content, it appears to be at a crossroad position. Teachers do not work in harmony with each other, testing takes place differently though within the same line of teaching, scoring has no established rules.

Faced with considerable pressure, it was of great necessity and urgent need for the Algerian educational system to cope with the global expectations and adopt the new directions and global trends of higher education. The Englishisation and the introduction of English Medium instruction was one of the most important adoptions Algeria went through during the last decade. In this fashion, EMI introduction was launched as a pilot scheme in the Algerian universities, however, as stated by Belmihoub (2018:50) *"Introducing EMI in Algerian universities has faced significant resistance due to the entrenched position of French in academia and the limited English proficiency of both teachers and students"*. Like many countries, Algeria applied the EMI to meet the 21st required skills within this globalised age. In this vein, Trilling & Fadel, (2009:267) state that

The rapid evolution of the educational landscape requires teachers to go beyond basic language proficiency, encompassing a range of technological, interpersonal, and critical thinking skills essential for preparing students for the demands of a globalized workforce

In fact, Algeria adopted it as a *prêt-à-porter* system that may answer its educational current needs. Among the most important reasons behind this adoption the following:

- Improving the quality of instruction in higher education,
- Compatibility of the training with the global system and European standards in particular,
- Diversifying training paths and linking them to the economic and social needs,
- Seeking to ensure employment,
- Modernizing management and pedagogy.

Language Policy in Algeria: Englishizing Higher Education

Algeria has a complex language policy that reflects its historical, cultural, and linguistic diversity. The country's language policy has evolved over time, and the integration of English has become one of Algeria's priorities recently. A recent decision was taken to integrate English as a means of instruction at university for all fields; this top-down decision has become increasingly questionable as the majority of teachers are not proficient in English. In this vein, Benrabah believes that *"The shift towards using English as the primary medium of instruction in Algerian universities represents a strategic alignment with international educational trends, aimed at improving employability and access to global academic resources"* Benrabah, (2014:38). However, regardless its challenging background, there are several key reasons why Algerian universities are encouraged to use English as a means of instruction for all fields

Algeria, like many countries in the world, is trying to cope with the recent changes and challenges. Undeniably, traditional language barriers might have prevented universities from adopting English as the medium of instruction in the past, globalization has made it more important than ever for students to be proficient in English. In fact, due to the ongoing Globalization process, universities are required to prepare students to get global job market. English has become the dominant language of international communication, and many companies and organizations require employees who are proficient in English.

This decision was taken to replace French with English as the language of instruction and research in universities. Indeed, replacing French with English in the Algerian higher education is not a newly-thought-of decision but rather a result of a long-term strategy of a series of reforms and changes. Like any newly-taken decision, there has been a remarkable resistance to change, and many endeavors have been carried out to maintain the French monopoly in higher education. in the same line of thought, *"despite the theoretical benefits of adopting English as a medium of instruction, practical challenges arise, particularly from educators accustomed to teaching in French or Arabic, leading to a slow adaptation process"* Saad, (2021:117). However, the Algerian authority followed a policy of a flexible transaction to ensure a supple shift from French to maximum use of English.

Algerian policy makers are calling for quality assurance, and to reach this aim, using English as the means of instruction can help ensure that universities maintain high standards of quality and that their graduates are proficient in English, which is increasingly important in many fields. Furthermore, a great deal of the world's leading research is published in English, and to benefit from it, universities must ensure that their students have access to the latest research and can participate in international research collaborations. While there are certainly challenges associated with using English as the means of instruction for all fields, such as language barriers for non-native English speakers and the need for specialized English language instruction for some fields, the benefits of using English as the medium of instruction are clear. Universities that adopt English as the means of instruction can provide their students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in a rapidly changing, globalized world.

This decision is reasonable in the sense that English has become the lingua franca of international communication, and the ability to speak and write in English has become an essential skill for individuals of all professions and backgrounds. For educators, the importance of English proficiency is even greater, as they are responsible for imparting language skills to their students. Indeed, when teachers are proficient in English, they are better equipped to teach in English. Therefore, Galloway & Rose, (2015;89) believe that *"The move to English as a medium of instruction could widen the educational divide, as many students and teachers lack the necessary proficiency, which may hinder their ability to fully engage with the curriculum"*

This can lead to more effective instruction, more engaging lesson plans, and a better overall learning experience for students. It is generally acknowledged that for teachers, having English proficiency can open up new teaching opportunities, including enhancing their professional development and personal growth. In this vein, *Proficiency in English can provide educators with greater access to global teaching resources, enhance professional development opportunities, and facilitate participation in international collaborations"* (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Thus, teachers who are proficient in English can engage with a wider range of people and cultures, which can broaden their horizons and enrich their lives.

Teaching English to Educators: A Defy to Reach

Teaching English to Algerian teachers can be a challenging task as most teachers used to teach using French or Arabic. In this time of ever-changing competences, teachers are in curve to enhance their professional development constantly. The integration of English might be considered as one of the current ways to stay up to date with the latest research and best practices in teachers' field. It can also improve their communication skills with colleagues, students, and international organizations. Above and beyond, incorporating English as a medium of instruction and scientific research may in all probabilities improve teachers' skills and change traditional ways of teaching. In reality, teachers' courses are considered 'outdated' as they teach the way they have been taught. This illogical teaching situation will not work with students who are considered 'digital'. This newly adopted policy may help teachers update their lessons and provide a more engaging and interactive learning experience. Another challenge is raised when it comes to research and academic achievements, English is the primary language of academic research and communication, and having English language proficiency can help Algerian teachers access a wider range of educational resources, including research papers, teaching materials, and online courses which will improve students' outcomes.

Theoretically, this picture seems to be perfect and brings positive results. Paradoxically, teaching English to Algerian university teachers can present several challenges. It is widely recognized that in Algeria, there is a limited exposure to English. In most Algerian universities, teachers have had limited exposure to English language learning, making it challenging to learn the language at an advanced level. This can result in a slower learning process and may require additional resources and support. More to the point, Algerian university teachers have a busy schedule, and finding time for English language classes and study can be difficult. Many teachers have to balance their teaching responsibilities with research work, administrative duties, and family responsibilities. This time constraints will limit and slow down the learning process and progress. It is also recognized that there might exist a certain resistance to change, and some teachers may be resistant to changing their teaching language to English, particularly if they are more comfortable teaching in French or Arabic and it is challenging to change all their courses overnight. This can lead to a lack of motivation and engagement in English language learning. To overcome these challenges, universities can provide additional support for English language learning, including more resources, training programs, and opportunities for language practice. It is also essential to provide a

supportive and encouraging learning environment that takes into account the unique challenges faced by Algerian university teachers.

Teachers' Needed Skills

To effectively incorporate English as a means of instruction, teachers need to have essential soft-skills to be able to assimilate this radical teaching change in their teaching practices. Among these skills, a thorough understanding of the different teaching methods, strategies and techniques to teach in English is highly recommended. They should be familiar with how to maintain a positive learning environment in the classroom. They should know how to manage classroom dynamics, facilitate student participation, and foster a supportive and respectful classroom community.

Teachers need to be technologically competent researchers, as technology plays an increasingly important role in education, teachers should be comfortable using technology in the classroom. They should be familiar with a range of educational tools and resources, such as online learning platforms, interactive whiteboards, and educational software. In fact, we are teaching digital natives, and it is teachers' duty to cope with the generations' needs and preferences. Accordingly, Prensky (2001: 34) states that *"to meet the needs of digital-native students, educators must incorporate technology effectively, leveraging tools such as online platforms and interactive learning resources to enhance engagement"*. Besides, teachers must be able to design and implement effective assessments to measure their students' language proficiency and progress. They should be able to use assessment data to adjust their teaching methods and strategies to meet the needs of their students.

Investigating the Integration of English in Higher Education: A Case Study

In order to shed light on the current English teaching situation in higher education, a case study will be designed to collect data about the current practices. A survey was administered to teachers who are learning English and a questionnaire to teachers who are teaching English to educators. The main objective is to gather a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with teaching English to teachers and develop effective strategies to improve English language teaching practices in the field of education

Strategic Data Collection: Aligning Methodologies with Research Objectives

Teachers-learners questionnaire aims at gathering a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and their views about learning English to use it as a means of instruction and for research purposes. Variations of questions were asked to gather qualitative and quantitative data. Questionnaires reveal that the majority of teachers believe that they have an average level of English, and they never used it as a means of instruction. Oddly enough, a number of teachers state that they use it for research purposes solely.

Teachers were asked about the challenges they will face when using English as a means of instruction, they provided the following important challenges:

- Teachers' own English language proficiency level, they still struggle using English, and might have difficulty conveying complex ideas, leading to potential misunderstandings. The same problem with learners' English proficiency level will lead to difficulties in understanding instructions, lectures, and assignments.

- Renewing their lectures using English with the lack of suitable Materials and Resources, especially that our teachers are accustomed to use materials in their native language. Teachers face the challenge of adjusting their teaching methods and updating their courses.
- Using English as a means of instruction may slower the pace of instruction, this can be challenging when trying to cover a specific curriculum within a limited timeframe.
- Some teachers may resist to Change because they are more comfortable with the previous language of instruction.

When asked about their opinions about the importance of English as a means of instruction in improving students' learning outcomes, teachers' responses vary widely. Advocates confess that English is the language of many academic journals, research, and resources. Teaching in English can provide students with broader access to the latest global knowledge and research findings. Besides, using English as a medium of instruction facilitates international collaboration among students, researchers, and institutions. It enables diverse perspectives and cross-cultural learning experiences. Some believe that learning in English can improve students' communication skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This can be beneficial not only for academic purposes but also for personal and professional growth.

Opponents argue that Algerian is still not ready for such a radical change. Using English as a medium of instruction can exacerbate educational inequalities, as not all students have equal access to English language education and resources. Opponents also argue that English may hinder learning outcomes, as students must have a sufficient level of English proficiency to benefit from this approach. Some argue that an overemphasis on English can lead to a loss of native languages and instead of focusing on the core course; teachers will focus on the means of instruction instead.

When asked about the resources they rely on when

Below is a pie chart representing the different resources for improving English language teaching skills, each with an equal weight as suggested by learners-teachers.

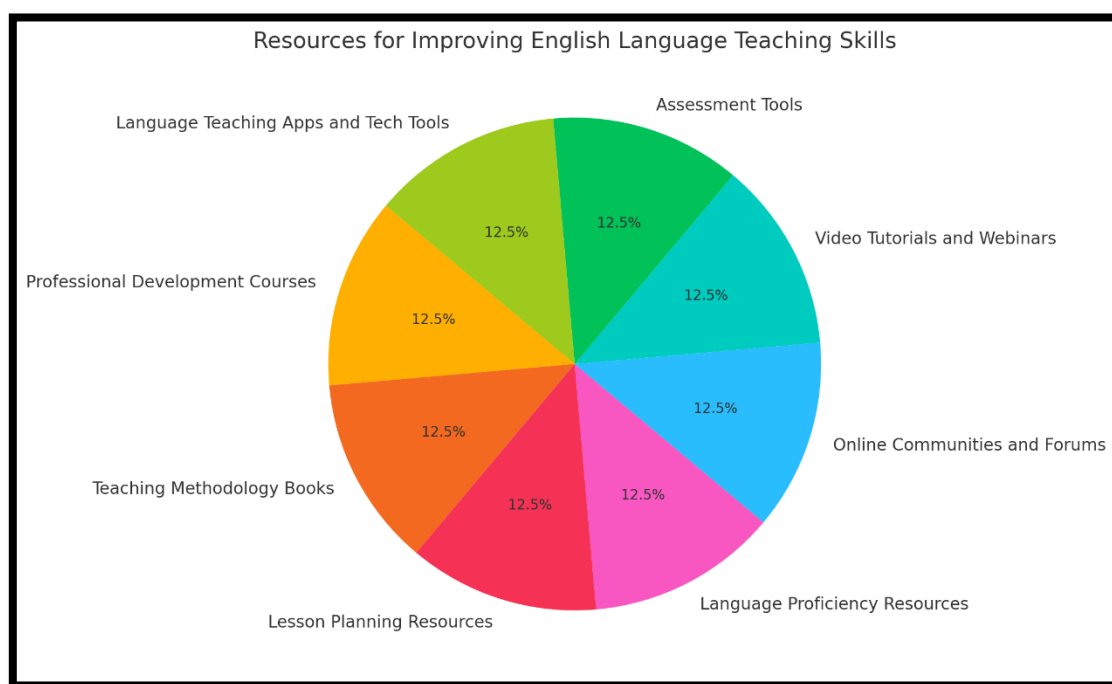


Figure 01: Resources for Improving English Language Teaching

As a last question, it was worth asking teachers about the potential impacts of using English as a medium of instruction in Algerian classrooms. Answers vary; positive impacts are shown in green, while challenges are represented in red in the following bar-graph:

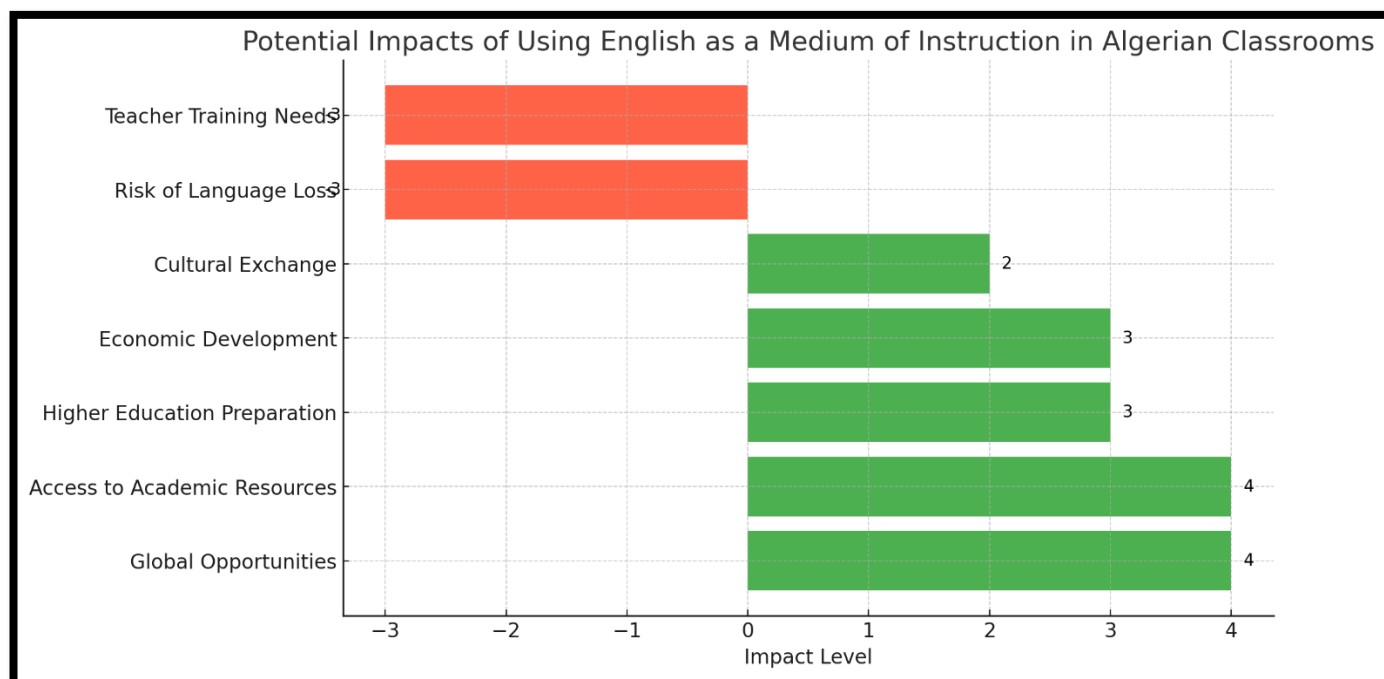


Figure 02: Potential Impacts of Using English as a Medium Instruction in Algerian Classrooms

Unpacking Instructor Perspectives: Questionnaire Analysis

From the side of teachers as instructors, an online survey was conducted to collect data from different universities. Questions are mostly qualitative to provide the teachers with ample opportunities to reflect on their opinions. Results demonstrate that teachers as instructors also face the challenge of teachers'-learners resistance to change. They argue that some teachers still refuse the idea of shifting to English as a means of instructions and this refusal is reflected in their demotivation to learn and develop their professional level. Besides, they share the opinion that English is important in developing our teaching practices. It will unquestionably enhance professional development, improve teaching skills, better opportunities for career advancement, access to international resources, and improve student outcomes.

Teachers also state that it is noticed that traditional teaching methods do not encourage critical thinking and do not cater to the different learning styles and preferences of students. Modern teaching methods, such as project-based learning, task-based learning, and blended learning, are more student-centered and encourage active learning and collaboration.

As for the activities suggested for a better teaching experience, teachers suggest that they try to create an English-speaking environment in their classrooms by encouraging teachers-students to communicate in English. This can be achieved by organizing activities such as debates, and discussions that require students to use English language in a practical context. Besides, they have suggested the following activities for improving educators' English language skills.

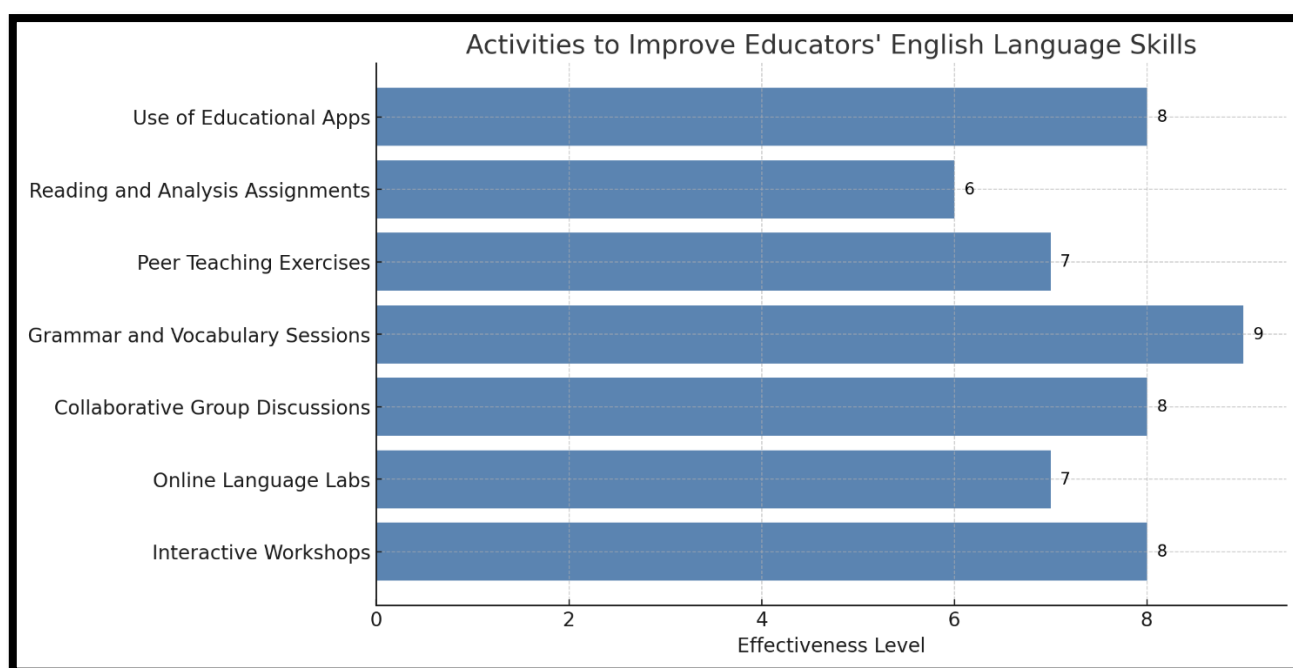


Figure 02: Activities to Improve Educators' English Language Skills

When asked to give their advice for future educators, they all agree that teaching educators can be a collaborative process, teachers have to tap into their strengths, encourage self-reflection, and make learning as applicable as possible to their professional lives. They also suggest to encourage Educators to keep reflective journals, where they can track their progress, identify areas for improvement, and set personal language goals.

Conclusion

The implementation of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in the Algerian educational system holds significant potential but also requires a balanced and strategic approach. EMI could open doors for Algerian students to engage with global academic resources, participate in international collaborations, and expand their career opportunities in an increasingly English-dominated world. However, for EMI to be successful, it is crucial to invest in training teachers, develop robust English language curricula, and ensure equitable access to resources across urban and rural areas. Additionally, it is essential to consider the importance of Algeria's linguistic heritage by maintaining instruction in Arabic and Tamazight, alongside the integration of English. With thoughtful planning and adequate support, EMI could enhance the educational landscape in Algeria, preparing students for global participation while preserving cultural identity.

Teaching English to teachers is an essential step in promoting effective communication, improving instruction, and enhancing personal and professional growth. However, a number of shortcomings and challenges need considerable attention from the part of decision and policy makers. Teaching English to Algerian teachers can provide several benefits such as enhanced professional development, improved teaching skills, better opportunities for career advancement, access to international resources, and improved student outcomes. Algerian institutions should invest in English language training programs to ensure that their teachers have the language skills necessary to thrive in the global academic community.

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Author's Biography

Dr. DJEBBARI Houda is a Senior Lecturer at Oran 2 University, Algeria, specializing in Didactics and Assessment. With a doctorate in this field, Dr. DJEBBARI has cultivated extensive expertise in English language education, driven by a passion to advance teaching methodologies and foster effective language acquisition. Her research interests encompass language assessment, curriculum design, and pedagogical innovation, aiming to bridge theoretical insights with practical classroom application.

Teachers' –Learners Questionnaires

Dear teachers-learners,

This questionnaire attempts to gather data about your experience in using English as a means of instruction in your classrooms. You are kindly requested to answer the following questions. Your responses will help us to better understand the challenges and opportunities associated with using English as a means of instruction in Algerian classrooms.

1. What is your level of English proficiency?

Low ☐ Average ☐ Good ☐

2. Do you currently use English as a means of instruction in your classroom?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what subjects do you use English to teach?

3. How comfortable are you with using English as a means of instruction?

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4. What challenges have you faced when using English as a means of instruction in your classroom?

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5. What support would you need to improve your English language proficiency?

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6. Have you received any training in English language teaching?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what was the focus of the training? Did you find it helpful?

.....

.....

7. According to you, what resources would you need to improve your English language teaching skills?

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8. Do you think that using English as a means of instruction in your classroom improves your students' learning outcomes? Why or why not?

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9. Would you be interested in attending training sessions or workshops on English language teaching?

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10. Do you think that the use of English as a means of instruction in Algerian classrooms should be encouraged? Why or why not?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Instructors' Questionnaires

Dear instructors,

This questionnaire attempts to gather data about your experience in teaching English to teachers. You are kindly requested to answer the following questions. Your responses will help us to better understand the challenges and opportunities associated with teaching English to educators and to improve English language teaching practices in the field of education.

1. What is your experience teaching English to educators?
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2. Have you received any training or professional development in English language teaching? If yes, how helpful was it?
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3. What are the main challenges you have faced when teaching English to educators?
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4. What resources do you use to teach English to educators? (e.g. textbooks, online resources, videos, etc.)
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5. What teaching methods have you found to be most effective when teaching English to educators?
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6. How do you assess the English language proficiency of educators in your classes?
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7. What types of activities do you use to improve educators' English language skills?
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8. What strategies do you use to motivate educators to learn English?
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9. Have you observed any changes in educators' teaching practices as a result of learning English?
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10. What support do you need to improve your own English language teaching skills?
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11. How do you stay up to date with the latest research and best practices in English language teaching?
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12. What advice would you give to other teachers who are teaching English to educators?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.