

A Critical Study of the English Language Used Among Students and Lecturers in the LCE Field

- A Master Speciality in the English Department, Oran2 University -

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Received date: 30/06/2022 Revised date: 26/11/2022 Publication date: 31/12/2022

Abstract

There has recently been an increase in “English as a Medium of Instruction” (EMI) in Higher Education (HE), which has led to some reforms in the educational system, as it becomes easier to reach the latest researches and developments in the field of didactics. However, it has been noticed some dangerous lack of both the practical and the theoretical sides of this aspect, as it is rare to find a pure English discussion the three academic community elements -lecturer, student, administrator-; Nor to find a single study trying to deal with this issue. This article aims at investigating the problems that face the use of English among the students, the lecturers, and the staff of the English department. A mixed method -that included some questionnaires, small interviews and some field notes also- was used in this study with a sample that was chosen carefully from master English students of the languages department of Oran2 university. The results were promising as we could clarify many obstacles in that matter, paving the way for future studies to solve those problems.

Key words: English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI); Higher Education (HE); Academic Community; Educational System.

1. Introduction

This chapter opens with a review of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). A definition of EMI is given, followed by the rationale that drives its inclusion in higher education. Then a brief definition of the LCE field. After that it is necessary to have a look on the relationship

between culture and language as they are the two basic components of the LCE speciality.

“The use of English as a medium to teach and learn in higher education (HE) has grown exponentially over the last ten years” (Macaro, Curle, Pun, An & Dearden, 2018). English medium instruction (EMI) is defined as the use of the English language to teach academic content in places where English is not the first language of the majority of the population. Content learning is often the primary objective. Language learning is often not an explicit educational aim. However, several alternative definitions have been proposed, highlighting the complexity of the term and diversity of approaches to implementing EMI policy. In some contexts, it is very much aligned with goals to develop English language proficiency, and some scholars argue that EMI includes Anglophone as well as non-Anglophone settings. Others prefer the term English medium education (EME), which focuses on all aspects of teaching, learning, research and programme administration. Whatever definition is adopted, however, EMI or EME has clear differences with English as a subject (EaS), where English is taught as a subject itself, although it should be pointed out that the growth in EMI -as it has been referred to as an *‘unstoppable train’* (Macaro, 2015, p. 7)- has led to a significant demand for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes. Various factors explicitly and implicitly (often simultaneously) impact EMI growth, including:

- specific inclusion of EMI in HE policies
- desire to grow international reputation of HE system
- pressure to increase institutional rankings
- role of higher education in countries’ knowledge diplomacy
- bilingual education policies at primary and secondary level
- policies towards English in the workplace.

LCE “Language of speciality, Culture, and Enterprise” is a master speciality in the English department of Oran2 university, it consists of nine modules, which are all concerned in a way or another with the English

jargon of culture and its relation with business and economics. The modules are: Introduction to Economy, Human Resources Management, Commercial and Economical Discourse, Scientific and Technology Discourse, Communication Strategies, Introduction to Marketing, Information and Communication Technologies, Algerian Cultural Heritage, and Translation. Having in mind that it is an English speciality, the main language used to teach is English -normally-.

Since the speciality is related to both language and culture, it would be much better to have an idea about both terms and then try to figure out the relation between them. *“Culture refers to the accumulated beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, religion, behaviours, lifestyles, customs, backgrounds and habits that characterize a particular society; in other words, culture is that whole where different components that build up a nation are put together.”* (Hamane, 2018:23).

Since language has always been the mean that holds members of the society together, it can be considered as a vital part of culture, Snell argues in this vein: *“language is not seen as ‘isolated phenomena’ which is suspended in a vacuum but as an integral part of culture”* (Snell, 1988:39 cited in Homeidi, 2004).

Based on the above definitions, we can conclude that in order to master a language, one has to be a bilingual speaker as well as a bicultural intellectual.

2. Methodology:

This small study followed a **mixed-methods** approach; as it enabled the flexibility and multiple perspectives needed for such kind of investigation: how and how much English is used inside the foreign languages department. Specifically, this entails quantitative data from a questionnaire, and qualitative data gained from interviews and field notes during the whole season.

The research design is an **Ethnography**; as it involves participation and observation -as we had to be in touch with the language users all the time-.Also, for being systematic, comprehensive and topic oriented.

To begin the study, we started by choosing the sample, as we tended to deal only with the students who have shown some interest in their studies, in order to have some more serious and accurate results, some interviews were done, and some questionnaires were distributed to the chosen students mainly about these research questions:

RQ1:

Is the amount of English language used among students inside the department enough?

- What are some reasons that led to the poor use of English among students?

RQ2:

Is the amount of English language used between students and lecturers inside the classes enough?

- What are some reasons that led to the poor use of English between students and lecturers inside the classes?

RQ3:

Is the amount of English language used between students and administrators while interacting enough?

- What are some reasons that led to the poor use of English between students and administrators?

Simultaneously, a deep observation and field noting process were being done during the whole 2021/2022 season, in order to have more realistic and trust worthy results.

The questionnaires were made online, to make the participants more comfortable while expressing their perspectives. To avoid the problem of procrastination and ignoring the surveys, the questions weren't made in a

“Google formular” -as most master students do- but instead, the participants were asked by some direct messages to their messenger accounts to gain more time and efficiency, and it was so effective solution as we received the answers from 90% of the total number of participants.

3. Results and Discussion:

The big majority of the participants have agreed that the amount of English used in the daily conversations inside the foreign languages department is dangerously poor and insufficient, as it was easily noted that Arabic is the most dominant language among students, and a mixed Arabic-French language is totally dominant for the conversations with both the lecturers and the administrators.

3.1 Problems facing the use of English:

Although the title of this speciality LCE looks bright, as *“English for Specific Purposes is perhaps the most vibrant and innovative arena of language teaching and research today”* Tony Dudley-Evans; there are many troubles facing the students, especially concerning the language used, whether between students or even while interacting with the lecturers or the administrators. Here is a try to summarise those problems in the next few lines in an attempt to clarify things to make it easier to find solutions in the future:

a. Amongst students:

Using English in the daily conversations is one of the most powerful tools to enhance the language proficiency, especially among English learners as it is the best way to practice what has been learnt, as they say: practice makes perfect. However; unfortunately, that’s not the case in our English department in Oran, the reasons might vary from **shyness** and **fear** of making mistakes, to **lack of encouragement** from the administration and the lecturers, or even the **lack** of language **competence**.

b. Between lecturers and students:

This rises another dilemma, whether the teacher is obliged to use English all the time or not!? Well, for many reasons, I can say that the

teacher is obliged to use only English while presenting the lectures, first of all; there are some international students whom their one and only common language with the rest is English! Even some students from other parts of the same country -like myself- find some difficulties to understand the local dialect sometimes; Also, there is no doubt that using English would push the students to overcome their fears and pass their limits and start practicing inside the classroom, which leads to encourage them to practice even outside the class. But again; unfortunately, that's not the case that we witness, as the use of English is very low! And most of the teachers use either French (due to their **francophone background**) or Arabic (due to their **low proficiency** of English). Moreover; we have some modules -like Introduction to Marketing and HRM- that the official language used in teaching is French! despite the fact that we are studying a branch in the English department!!

c. Between administration staff and students:

The latest studies shows that one of the fastest ways in language acquisition is surrounding the learner with that target language, and in our case, using English by the administrators would be much helpful to the students' learning process. Nevertheless; The vast majority of the conversations done between the students and the administrators are whether in French or in Arabic, and the reason again is surely the **francophone background** of the staff, and the lack of English **competence** for either the student or the administrator, or sometimes even both.

4. Limitations and guidance for future studies:

After clarifying the nature of the problem, the door now is open for any future studies that can bring the change! As the studies should be practical, and deal with the issue scientifically, logically and more importantly: psychologically, and the main objective is clearly **how to intensify the use of English among our academic community -student, lecturer, administrator-**. Also, we have to keep in mind that the real change won't be only from the students! Since the problem is deeper, the treatment

must also be as deep as possible and affect all the academic community members, even if it led to a change in the system or in the rules if necessary.

5. Conclusion:

ESP is considered one of the most significant developments in the language teaching history, and EBC “English for Business and Culture” is undoubtedly one of its vital branches, which is what’s being taught in our branch LCE. Despite all that, this wouldn’t be that much of effectiveness if it wasn’t carried with the correct tools, and one of the most influential tools is language, as we have to be so careful and strict when trying to solve the miss use of it.

After clarifying the lack issue of using the English language in the English department, and as Albert Einstein said: *“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used to create them.”* We need to think deeply and reconsider our process of learning, and then bring new effective methods and approaches where using English is a basic part of it.

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