

Being in the World:
An Exploration of the Interrelation between Research in English, Thinking
Skills and Problem Solving

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Abstract:

This paper aimed at examining the importance of English as the language of scientific research. In order to achieve this aim, the researchers have adopted the descriptive, analytical and comparative approaches. It would be interesting to assess the importance to further critical and creative thinking in the Algerian curricula and studies by encouraging the language that fits contemporary era, as it can be successfully implemented and managed to acquire a broad range of essential communicative and cultural knowledge to enhance criticality in the learners' minds.

Keywords: Academic Research; Creative Thinking; Critical Thinking; Lingua Franca; Problem Solving.

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Introduction:

“ How can we measure success?” is a universal question that both researchers and policy makers have been trying to answer. Actually, recent educational and research trends emphasize the fact that the most vital elements that prove someone’s success are his/her ability to deal creatively with situations where communication is an essential part to solve problems. Therefore, language is an essential and powerful tool to be invested by individuals.

The World Economic Forum makes success easier to determine by providing a list of the top ten skills in 2020 that individuals need to develop in order to meet the demands of a fast paced growing world. The first three are: complex problem solving, critical thinking and creativity.¹ Hence, higher education’s institutions are supposed to nourish and develop those skills.

2- Rationale (problematic):

Most contemporary trends in education and scientific research reinforce that success lies in the ability to communicate, share, and use information in order to solve complex problems, adapt and innovate in response to new demands and changing circumstances. Hence, new standards seeking for serious adjustment of the basic skill competencies, traditional knowledge expectations and methods in education are indispensable. To meet this challenge, universities must be transformed in ways that will enable students to acquire the critical thinking, flexible problem solving, collaboration and innovative skills they will need to be creative thinkers and good citizens.

In a century that is governed by a dire need for skills more than academic certificates, both students and researchers are required to develop the aforementioned skills in order to survive in a world that is governed by English as a Lingua Franca. Obviously, the language

¹ Pato et al., 2018.

that is mostly used for research in Algeria is French, and this puts the development of research in Algeria at risk.

Unfortunately, Algerian universities do not rank among the best in the world. The number one criterion that is followed in order to classify universities according to “The World University Rankings” website is: the publication of a thousand academic papers within the period of five years. Thinking critically about the situation would lead us to examine its causes and attempt to find solutions as to why there is not enough research conducted by Algerian universities, and the language that is used for research can be the starting point of this research.

3-Purpose of the Research:

In order to investigate this issue, this research has a two-fold purpose. The first is shedding light on the fact that using French for scientific research in Algeria is isolating Algerian researchers and providing them with fewer opportunities of readership and prevalence. The second is examining the importance of substituting French with English as the language for scientific research.

4-Significance of the Research:

The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that the new tendencies in education are leaning towards teaching thinking through the teaching of the language. Language in or of itself is a fundamental functioning system to the mind, the aptitude to investigate and deduce using words and sentences in a well-thought-out language or scientific research. Language is crucial for enhancing encompassing concepts as well as for abstract thinking, something humans have gone forward into doing. In this sense, the study’s significance stems from the nature of the language that affords a set of rules that helps individuals shape their thoughts and create reasonable connotations and attitudes to have positive impacts in their communities.

5-Research Questions:

This humble research attempts to answer the following research questions which spring from the purpose of this study:

1-To what extent can the usage of English for research in Algeria improve students and researchers' basic 21st-century skills?

2-To what extent can the focus on English as a foreign language in higher education improve the quality of research in Algeria?

6- Research Hypotheses:

In this research, it is hypothesized that:

1-The implementation of English in research in Algeria would make Algerian students and researchers develop problem-solving, critical thinking and creative thinking skills.

2-The focus on English as a foreign language in higher education in Algeria would promote the quality of research in Algeria and make it more updated and universal.

7- Languages in the Algerian Context:

What makes humans different from other species is their outstanding ability to acquire and learn languages.² Being a multilingual country, there exists a conflict in Algeria in terms of which language to be the sovereign: the mother tongue (Arabic), the language of the ex-colonizer (French) or the language that is widely used around the world (English).³ Using a post-colonial lens to examine the matter would lead to the consideration of French as a chain that links to the past and prevents from a better future in terms of improving research potential. Wittgenstein reinforces: "The limits of my language are the

² Gleitman & Papafragou, 2005.

³ Benrabah, 2013.

limits of my world,” and it is undeniable that what the French language offers to speakers and researchers is limited in comparison to the English.⁴

8- English Language and Globalization:

Language has been used as a medium to communicate for ages; today due to globalization, English language has become the most valued tenure of communication. In this global world, English, as an international language, is functioning as a source of knowledge and responsiveness. English is, no doubt, a pillar for advancement of career and business to view the vision of future.⁵ Therefore, communication in English has now become an inseparable part rather the life blood of all the domains. Companies, institutions and organizations may function through a communication process that this language creates. The common language, in this sense, articulates shared views and goals to exchange roles and functions in a mutually independent framework. Indeed, the world is becoming more and more globally oriented. Due to globalization, English language arises as a global force.⁶ Its role, hence, should not be denied or ignored.

9-Language and Thinking:

According to Paul, thinking happens innately. However, it should not be unguided. In fact, no less than higher-order thinking is what is required in higher education in this challenging century. With the spread of internet access and social media, individuals, more than any time earlier, are in a dire need to differentiate between facts and views using reasonable and convincing arguments. Hence, the researchers’ task is even harder⁷, which

⁴ Cited in Park, 2012 , p.59.

⁵ See Bodapati.

⁶ See Thiruvengadam.

⁷ Paul & Elder, 2004.

is what can be accomplished by the implication of critical thinking skills to situations. However, in addition to the mind, in order to practise those skills and develop them, one needs first to have updated knowledge and the most updated knowledge is provided in the English language.

10- Research, Language and Personal Growth (Shaping Good Citizens):

Much study on language and cognition manifest the theory that language has a noteworthy impact on memory, behaviour, and general thought processes, equitably robust.⁸ In addition to stimulating students' 21st century skills, condensing education which is more approachable to the defies of a knowledge-based society, personal growth has been persistently called for. Teaching, in this sense, becomes a life-long learning process in gaining momentum with the power of thinking skills. Thus, the importance of conducting academic research in English, as an international language, facilitates the teaching-learning process and allows the students to be fully aware of the solving-problem tools that get them engaged in the challenges of contemporary world.

11-Conclusion :

Accordingly, in order to be aware and cope with the advancements in universal scientific research, a reconsideration of the language that is used for research in Algeria and the implementation of English instead are necessary for quality research and education. As a result, research, creative thinking, critical thinking and problem solving skills, if put together, will form the pieces of the puzzle that will form a large and neat picture of the Algerian researcher, who is in the first place an Algerian citizen.

12-Recommendations :

⁸ See Perlovsky and Kuniyoshi.

The following breakdowns are recommended:

- 1- English language should be given primacy in research and education; it should be the medium of instruction at universities, in particular.
- 2- Encouraging students to study their specialties and fields in English is necessary nowadays.
- 3- Inviting experts from English-speaking countries is crucial to be open to new studies.
- 4- Algeria needs to make use of this world-wide spoken language via the teaching and learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in order to maintain its international image in education and academic research.

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