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TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE INTEGRATION OF EMI IN ALGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract
With the growing spread of English as a Lingua Franca, universities around the world are increasingly offering courses taught in English, the Algerian Minister of Higher Education recently required content teachers to use English as a medium of instruction (EMI) into their classrooms. Nonetheless, the new instruction has led to many apprehensions among these teachers, who must change their mode of instruction at short notice. To ensure a smooth transition, teachers are required to pursue intensive English courses to improve their proficiency. Based on a quantitative method, the study investigates teachers' attitudes and assessment of professional development sessions in Algerian universities one year after the beginning of the English sessions; it gauges the satisfaction of 125 higher education subject-matter instructors with the pedagogical program offered and discusses its impact on teachers' English proficiency. The findings revealed that 46% of teachers are enrolled in the English courses and indicated low satisfaction with the implemented program. Furthermore, these valuable results have significant implications for the design of more effective and successful pedagogical training programs in Algerian higher education. Though the findings cannot be generalized, it does include features that instructors might find valuable.

Keywords: Algerian higher education, English-medium instruction, English proficiency, in-service teacher training, teacher professional development

Introduction
Over the past decades, Higher Education has witnessed significant changes, notably in the language of instruction. The growing spread of English as a Lingua Franca (Galloway & Rose, 2015) has led university faculty members around the world to offer disciplinary content in English. Besides receiving large numbers of students flowing across national borders, universities are collaborating both in research and teaching. Actually, "the top universities are citizens of an international academic marketplace with one […] global education language, English" (The Economist, 8 September 2015). A survey has indicated that 8,089 higher education institutions offered English-taught programs in 19 countries in Europe (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014, p. 15). Like many countries around the world, the Algerian Higher

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Education sector has been affected by globalization during the last decades. To adapt to the global university system, the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research has stipulated a policy to encourage subject-matter instructors to use English as a medium of instruction starting from September 2023. However, the new policy has created confusion and resistance among these teachers due to their limited language proficiency, lack of adequate professional development support in English-medium instruction, and concerns regarding students' comprehension. Henceforth, the minister required content teachers to pursue training courses to ensure a smooth transition, reaching at least a level corresponding to B2/ C1 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2022). He insisted that the purpose of the in-service training is to equip content teachers with sufficient English proficiency to provide their content in English as part of the sector's endeavor to promote the openness of Higher Education institutions, improve its visibility at the international level, and provide students and faculty with better access to research.

The literature on university teachers' professional development has proliferated over the last few years; it ranged from highlighting the importance of professional development in teachers' careers to proposing solutions for the enhancement of training courses and the improvement of quality teaching. Though the professional development of teachers is investigated in many different ways, there is a conspicuous dearth of research that explores the opportunities and challenges associated with professional development programs in Algerian higher education institutions.

It is worth noting that rising interest in teachers' professional development is more noticeable across European higher education institutions as they are increasingly raising awareness about the importance of teacher training to enhance the quality of teaching and thus improve students' achievement. Several reports have been published to underline the significance of nurturing teachers' professional growth within higher education institutions. These reports stress the significance of faculty staff training in higher education. For instance, Mrig et al. (2016) highlighted the willingness of the sector to invest more in professional development activities and offer solutions for improving the different programs to meet teachers' needs and desires. Another report published by the European Union provides a thorough literature review and an in-depth analysis of innovative practices for the professional development of academics in eleven institutions. It points out to the current practices, the prospects, and the challenges higher education institutions in Europe often face (European Commission, 2012; Inamorato et al., 2019).

The literature has also discussed the necessity of professional development programs in higher education (Dutã, 2012). These programs are crucial in offering resources and guidance to support faculty in their teaching, strengthening teachers' performance, promoting continuous development, and encouraging collaboration among staff. Other works emphasized the importance of examining the role of teacher motivation in PD (Alzahrani, 2021; Boyd et al., 2003; MacPhail et al., 2018; Schieb & Karabenick, 2011). Evidence from the literature shows that motivation is a key factor for the success and effectiveness of professional development programs. However, teachers' engagement is usually inhibited by intrinsic and contingent factors (Alzahrani, 2021). Scholarly literature on professional development has also tackled various subjects, including the perceptions of teachers on the effectiveness

of professional development programs in higher education institutions (Fernandes et al., 2023; Huang, 2015; Malik et al., 2015; Megheni, 2021; Pesce, 2015), and the challenges of such programs (Ali & Shafeeq, 2021; Osmane, 2021), among others.

The objective of the study is twofold: (i) to assess teachers' prior knowledge and participation in professional development programs; and (ii) to explore subject-matter instructors' perceptions and evaluation of the English courses proposed by the Ministry of Higher Education before the integration of English-Medium Instruction. By the end of this study, we will offer some recommendations to ensure future successful pedagogical training programs for Algerian university teachers.

Teacher professional development in higher education

Offering effective and adequate programs for teacher professional development is a challenge for educational systems worldwide. With the recent educational reforms, there has been an increasing interest in improving the quality of education and enhancing the professional development of university teachers (Dutā, 2012, p.1004). Accordingly, numerous definitions and research have attempted to delineate the features of teachers' professional development. Galazi (2018) contends that the main goals of teacher professional development are to introduce new tools or skills or update existing skills. It is regarded as an essential component of the teaching profession since teachers need to have the necessary knowledge and skills to understand and implement the curriculum and related instructional resources. On the other hand, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) assert that teacher professional development and training have become indispensable for raising teachers' content knowledge, teaching skills, and practices to meet high educational standards.

Simply put, professional development refers to in-service training intended to upgrade teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical skills in a defined field (Marton & Ramsden, 1988). It is usually viewed as a significant means of enhancing teaching and learning. Because of its significance, professional development needs to be a systematic career-long process.

It is worth mentioning that professional development can be provided in different ways, ranging from conventional credentials, courses, and workshops to 'grassroots-based' strategies which involve teacher collaboration, mentoring, and support networks (Schleicher 2011, p. 219 cited in Galazi 2018, p.10). In the same line of thought, professional development refers to formal education, specialized training, or innovative professional learning intended to help educators, administrators, and teachers expand their professional knowledge, skills, competencies, and effectiveness (Ali & Shafeeq 2021, p.3).

Professional development program for subject-matter instructors in Algerian universities

Algerian higher education has gone through substantial reforms in recent years. As per the directions of the President of Algeria in July 2022, English language teaching was implemented in Algerian primary schools in September 2022. The declaration was not new because the country's officials have advocated the use of English to remedy to the country's poor academic standing in the world university ranking, and also to replace French. (https://orientxxi.info/magazine/article5950).

By placing education as the top priority, the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research is emphasizing the implementation of English not only in research but also as a means of instruction in universities. He stresses the necessity of generalizing English at universities by teaching some modules in English in all disciplines, including methodology and some exploratory materials or horizontal units. It is worth noting that though EMI has been implemented and developed rapidly in some universities across the world, Algeria is still in its first steps as little is known about its process and effects on both teachers and learners alike. Thus, offering effective professional development for subject-matter instructors has become a major concern in developing teachers' English language proficiency and enhancing the pedagogy of individual disciplines for relevance and authenticity (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2016, p.1).

Fryer (1998) contends that if professional development is to be effective, resources must be allocated and directed to meet the individual and institution's target. In the context of Algerian Higher education, the purpose of professional development can be summarized as the acquisition or addition of knowledge, development of language proficiency, and teaching skills that enable subject-matter instructors to deliver lectures in English.

Nonetheless, the top-down policy has led to some resistance and confusion among the majority of teachers. Besides complaining about the absence of communication between policymakers and policy implementers, they express concerns about the hasty switch to EMI arguing that the replacement of one language with another requires a long-term strategy.

Despite the priority given to developing English proficiency of SMIs, many have an A1 or A2 level when at least a B2 is required to teach the subject matter in English. Most teachers are unable to speak English properly which would allow them to use it autonomously in real-world settings. To reassure reluctant teachers, the minister issued a document specifying the mechanisms for the English training noting that "Each university institution, according to its available capabilities, and as a first stage, must establish a program to train its teachers in the English language starting from the academic year 2022-2023, targeting a level of learning that corresponds to at least a B2 level or C1, in Intensive Language Education Centres (CEIL), or by enrolling in a Bachelor degree in English" (Ministry of Higher Education, 2022). Teachers have also the possibility to enroll in a digital platform for remote training in English in cooperation with the American University "MIT" for technologies, which initially targeted about 30,000 university professors (Boutheldji, 2023). The project targets essentially university lecturers and Doctoral Students and aims at elaborating and implementing a training strategy that could effectively prepare them to deliver their lectures in English starting from September 2023.

These different measures are part of professional and in-service training aimed at enrolling all subject-matter instructors in an English course to refresh their knowledge and hone their skills as these training courses take place within the institution to which they are affiliated.

To ensure effective and successful training, the Minister installed a National Commission for Supervising and Monitoring the implementation of the English Training Program. The commission's mission is (1) to help shape the overall

strategy for the smooth implementation of English as a medium of instruction in Algerian Universities, (2) to develop teachers' professional skills, and update teaching methodologies and practices to keep abreast with the latest developments, (3) accompany and assist content teachers in designing their lectures and/or curricula through classroom practice, (4) initiate and /or improve any training program aiming at helping University teachers improve their level in English, (5) create a national network of trainers to encourage exchange of experiences and get feedback to become more competent and efficient, and (6) organize open days to raise awareness of the importance of the English language in improving the visibility of educational institutions among others (Exec. Order no. 0006, 2023).

Method

Participants

The participants in the study were 125 higher education teachers (65 women, 60 men) from a range of Arts and Sciences faculties including Humanities and Social Sciences, Economics, Business and Management, Natural Sciences, Engineering and Technology, Mathematics and Physics. Participants' teaching experience ranged from 03 to more than 15 years. The collection of academic background was limited to essential information to ensure the participants' privacy and, therefore, guarantee anonymity. Our main concern, however, was to look broadly at the impact of English training sessions on participants' experience and achievement of intended learning outcomes. The collection of background information was limited to essential data to prevent the identification of participants and, consequently, ensure anonymity.

Materials and procedure

For the sake of the study, a questionnaire was developed and distributed using Google Forms to collect data from participants and explore the progress of the training sessions at Sidi Bel Abbes and Tlemcen universities. Data were collected from participants at two universities based on accessibility and convenience. To validate the questionnaire, a pilot survey was administered to 25 randomly selected teachers from both universities. Based on their feedback, the items were slightly modified and rewritten for more clarity. The questionnaire was then translated into French to improve the reliability of data, ensure accuracy, and avoid misunderstanding of the questionnaire items. The final draft of the questionnaire consisted of three (03) sections: 1) demographic and background items, 2) teachers' general perception of professional development, and 3) teachers' attitudes towards the Ministry's English training courses. Teachers were invited to complete the questionnaire and share the link with their colleagues to take part in the study. All items were answered with yes/no questions and a 5-point Likert scale. Participants were also allowed to share their opinions and make suggestions for future courses through two open-ended questions.

Microsoft Excel was used as the primary tool for data organization and analysis. The analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, which involved data entry and cleaning to ensure accuracy and consistency, and calculation of percentages to represent categorical variables. Furthermore, charts and graphs were generated to visually present key findings. Since the study aimed to explore trends

and patterns rather than test specific hypotheses, no inferential statistical techniques were employed.

Findings and Discussion

Question 01: Teachers' familiarity with professional development

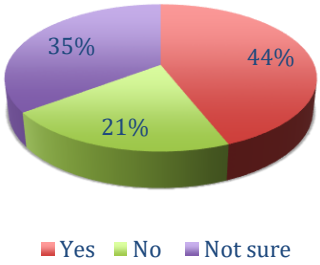


Figure 1. Teachers' prior professional development knowledge

Only 44% of participants affirmed they were familiar with professional development. 20.8% of respondents reported they had never heard of it before participating in the professional development program, while 35.2% still felt perplexed about the meaning and importance of professional development in their careers.

Question 02: Have you ever participated in Professional Development Programs?

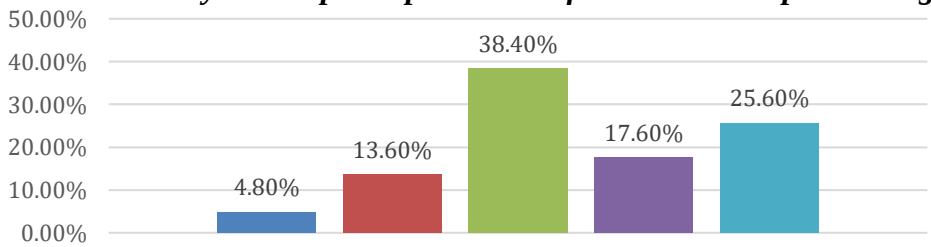


Figure 2. Participation in professional development programs

For the respondents who were familiar with professional development, 38.4% of them stated that they have occasionally enrolled in training programs related to their field of expertise, 25.6% have never attended any training, 17.6% do it rarely while 13.6% asserted that they have frequently taken part in professional development programs. The findings were quite positive and demonstrated a moderate awareness of the importance of professional development in enhancing and improving the quality of teaching and research. These results corroborate Bresdeson's definition of professional development as 'work opportunities that encourage creative and reflective skills in the teachers, thus, enabling them to improve their practices.' (2002, p.663).

Among the professional activities in which teachers have already participated, the majority have attended either conferences, seminars, or even workshops on their subject matter which confirms the necessity of cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers individually and collectively (Avalos, 2011, p.10) in developing their teaching skills and individual research.

Question 03: What impact do professional development programs have on teachers' skills?

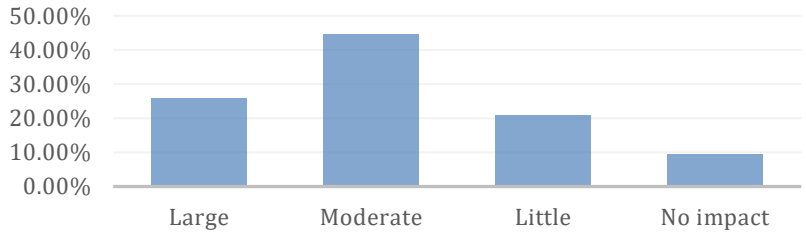


Figure 3. Perceived impacts of professional development programs

The majority of participants, 44.8% affirmed that professional development had moderately impacted their skills. Participants were also positive about the impact of professional development on the improvement of their skills with 25.8% claiming that participating in professional development sessions had a large impact on their skills. However, 30.4% were less positive with 20.8% of respondents stating that it had little impact and 9.6% maintaining that participating in professional development sessions did not have any impact on the improvement of their skills. This data provides a baseline for judging the impact of professional development on improving teachers' skills that occurred as a result of participants' attendance to the different types of in-service training.

Question 04: Ministry's in-service English training program

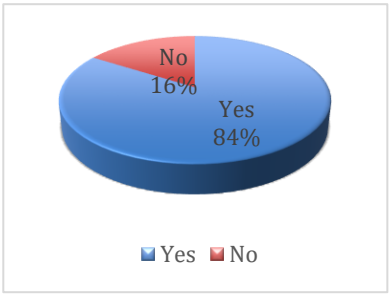


Figure 4. Ministry's in-service English training program

As shown in Figure 4, the majority of respondents 84% confirm having taken notice of the Minister's directives to enhance English language skills to teach the subject matter while 16% affirm that they have not heard of it.

Question 05: Teachers' participation in the English courses

Though teachers' professional improvement in English is essential for a smooth shift to English Medium Instruction (EMI), participants demonstrated a lack of interest and motivation in pursuing the ministry's call for training courses.

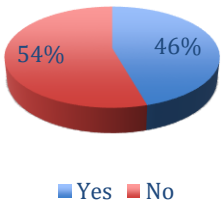


Figure 5. Teachers' enrolment in English courses

When asked if they have taken part in the training sessions, more than half of the teachers asserted that they did not while 45.6% have already started taking courses in English to improve their proficiency. This finding supports the need for the implementation of more strategies for motivating teachers. Boyd et al. (2003) highlighted the critical role of teacher motivation in Professional Development as essential for the success of any training program (Cited. in Schieb & Karabenick, p.7).

Question 06: Teachers' satisfaction with the quality of training

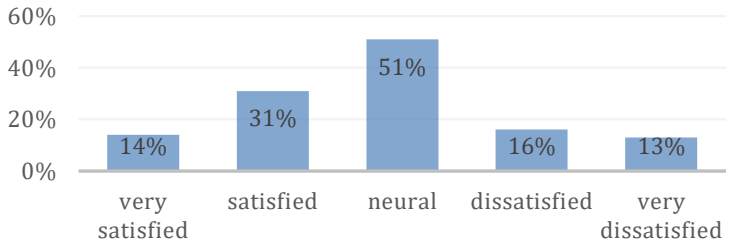


Figure 6. Teachers' satisfaction with the quality of training

Only 14% of participants reported that they were very satisfied with the training as the latter met their expectations and needs while 31% were satisfied. However, 16% and 13% reported they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, respectively, with the English courses. It seems clear that teachers' perceptions of the English courses were not as favorable when compared to the overall satisfaction of participants. Even though teachers showed high motivation to learn and improve their English proficiency, the response averages regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of the courses are lower. This fact can somehow be connected to teachers' poor levels in English which widens the discrepancy between the Ministry's aspirations and the existing reality. In addition to teachers' limited proficiency in English, time constraints and conflict with work schedules increase their affective filter and add to their concern about shifting to EMI at short notice. The short duration of the English courses and teachers' lack of commitment do not allow teachers to effectively apply what they have learned during the training. This highlights the significance of providing a sustainable teacher development program and the need for more coaching for teachers after the training sessions.

Question 07: Reasons for teachers' dissatisfaction

When asked about the causes of teachers' low satisfaction with the English courses in improving their proficiency and teaching skills they learned throughout their training, half of the teachers reported the sessions did not fit their schedules.

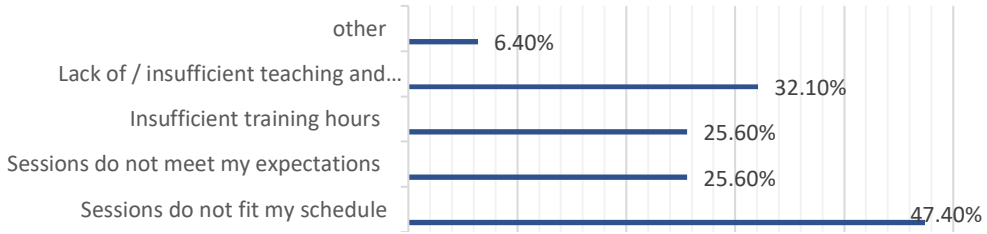


Figure 7. Reasons for teachers' dissatisfaction

Teachers' low satisfaction with the courses ranged from insufficient training hours and disappointment with the content of the courses with 25.6% respectively to lack of and /or insufficient teaching and learning material with 32.1%. It is important to mention that about 7% of respondents reported "a lack of a well-designed syllabus", "inadequacy of lessons," Misunderstanding of the objectives of the training," and "lack of native speakers."

Another reason for teachers' low satisfaction with the courses could be related to the lack of relevance of the courses to teachers' demands, the absence of constructive peer review, and engagement in dialogue with international and national communities to enhance EMI. These findings support the significance of the main elements pointed out by Malik et al. (2015) for a successful teacher professional development program. These characteristics include, for instance, a clear identification of the needs, continuity of training, and monitoring. Teacher professional development programs should also consider teachers' prior knowledge, their teaching methods as well as their specific needs and training objectives (Desimone, 2009). Though teachers seem to enjoy the courses, they contend that more is required such as national training content harmonization, encouragement of content teachers to publish and/or prepare pedagogical documentation in English, and language stays to make the shift more effective.

The findings also indicate that while several teachers have reported participating in general professional development programs, it is important to note that they may not be fully prepared for the specific demands of English Medium Instruction. This highlights a possible mismatch between the broad pedagogical strategies of general professional development programs and the practical linguistic and pedagogical challenges educators encounter when delivering subject matter in English. Consequently, the results emphasize the need for more specialized programs that align more closely with the realities of EMI classrooms.

Conclusion

The year 2023 was different in a myriad of ways for Algerian higher education teachers. The abrupt shift to (English-Medium Instruction (EMI) was unanticipated. Yet, it is undeniable that globalization is reshaping education. Like many other universities across the world, the Algerian university has been impelled to review its means of instruction to adapt to the global university system and ensure

the visibility of its institutions. The research enabled us to have a better understanding of the importance of professional development in teachers' careers and propose solutions and recommendations for improving professional training in Algerian universities. Despite teachers' dissatisfaction with the English course material, they argue that they should take advantage of this chance and step forward in enhancing their language proficiency which will ultimately lead to their professional and scientific improvement.

Feedback from participants regarding the English courses was also valuable and significant to plan and adjust the structure of future English courses in the following academic year. Participants' answers when asked about the challenges and obstacles in the implementation of pedagogical changes indicate the need for supervision from qualified trainers and the rescheduling of their timetables to have sufficient time to practice together efficiently. In addition, one teacher wrote, "The courses are interesting, but fail to meet the needs of the different scientific domains with various pedagogical practices." It is clear from this comment that these teachers require further support to integrate what they have learned so far into practical strategies tailored to their specific and unique pedagogical realities. Based on these findings, it is critical to reconsider certain organizational problems and design more effective English courses to improve the efficiency of future in-service training: Provide teachers with more supervision and mentoring facilitated by experts in the field with new pedagogical approaches, Collaboration between the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Higher Education for better reform of the education system in terms of the language of instruction, and Organize online workshops between content teachers and English teachers.

In comparison to developed countries, it is clear that Algeria's shift to EMI is still at a nascent stage. Despite the commitment of the Minister to help and support teachers in this transition, it remains unclear if teachers will be able and confident enough to deliver their content in English during the current academic year.

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