

Teaching and Testing English in the Algerian Educational System

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Abstract

The relationship between teaching and assessment seems to be direct since they both complete each other. This current paper is an attempt to provide a systematic description of instruction and evaluation in the Algerian educational context within the License- Master- Doctorate reform (LMD reform). The present study has significant benefits in terms of researching the adequacy of applying new approaches in the classroom -as a new envision- for assessing the learners' competences. Using a multiplicity of modes enables the teacher to evaluate his learners' capabilities elaborately and consequently fulfill their needs. This paper is an attempt to answer the question, how can EFL teachers assess their learners' competences with the implementation of new approaches that foster their communication skills. First, it tackles the status of English in the globalization era and the effect of this latter on evaluation. Second, it sheds light on the LMD reform with its main changes that affects teaching and testing, finishing up with speaking about English Language Teaching (ELT) in Algeria and, more precisely in Biskra , to provide data about the implemented methodology of measurement. In the present study, we employed classroom action research to assess the learners' communicative competence using a range of multimodal speaking tasks (videos, games, songs, role- plays, oral presentations, and discussion tasks). We opt for the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods for two chief reasons; first, to investigate the effectiveness of using the multimodality approach while assessing learners' competences and performances, second to explore the area under study. The findings revealed that EFL Teachers might evaluate their learners' abilities using a multiplicity of modes (visual such as videos, auditory such as songs, kinesthetic such as role-plays). Consequently, teachers are highly recommended to use innovative approaches to assess their learners' competences.

Keywords: Algerian educational system, assessment, English Language Teaching (ELT) , License- Master- Doctorate (LMD) , teaching, testing.

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Introduction

Languages are taught for “communication purposes” but –paradoxically- when it comes to the learners’ evaluation, only the linguistic aspects are taken into account. This serious educational problem drives the researcher to ask the question of how can EFL teachers assess their learners’ communicative competence with the implementation of new approaches that foster their communication skills?. So, why is this research relevant? The answer to this question is that most of the teachers’ implemented strategies are monomodal and are one side-oriented and addresses only one learning preference. All this seems unfair to the learners who expected the test to be alternative and multimodal. So the researcher felt it was necessary to get out of the usual (handouts, role plays, drilling, etc.) and apply a new approach in line with the needs of learners and their lacks .

These days, people have little opportunity to choose whether to globalize or not to globalize . The situation is out of hand due to the fast expansion of this newly emerged and profoundly impacted phenomenon that has negative and positive effects on every aspect of life. Being able to derive the maximum advantage of this phenomenon is the mission of society and stakeholders nowadays. There is no doubt that globalization has a profound effect on education in general and the English language teaching in particular. Throughout this section, the researcher investigates the impact of globalization on the English language. Moreover, we portray the vital role played by the English language in the globalization era, and we examine the effect of this phenomenon on teaching and learning in a broad term, we specify the influence of globalization in the assessment process.

English in the Globalization Era

In the previous paper, attention was drawn to the implication of globalization for language learning and teaching. Kubota (2002) argues that people learn languages for economic motives; some commentators go further by saying that foreign languages are treated as an industrial commodities rather than ethnic and national identity. This economic change has its influence on education, culture, and technology. Technological changes impact the language learning and teaching directly. Globalization is defined as a widespread phenomenon in society, economy, and politics. It has its multifaceted influence in our modern life , as stated by Kubota (2002) , who puts forward the view that globalization is a trendy term –that influences the economy, the society, the technology, and the culture .

It should be clear right from the beginning that it is hard to define globalization because it is related to other aspects (economics, politics, and culture). Giddens (1990) defines globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (p. 64). Globalization implies that diverse nations have specific cultural patterns such as food, music, and advertising, while Americanization is quite different; it is when different countries adopt the culture of the United States by acquiring numerous parts of the American culture and permitting multinational organizations such as Coca-Cola, Disney Land . In this context , Friedman (1994) believes that “Americanization is the diffusion of American values, consumer goods and lifestyles” (p. 195). Knowing the difference between ‘globalization’ and ‘Americanization’ is not enough to answer the question of whether the World is becoming globalized or Americanized.

The raised question after defining globalization is investigating the relationship between globalization and English language education. English has increasingly achieved a global status among languages that were dominated before its spread as a universal language, by the time; those languages were downgraded due to the expansion of English as a lingua franca. The following figure shows the world's ten most spread languages (2017)

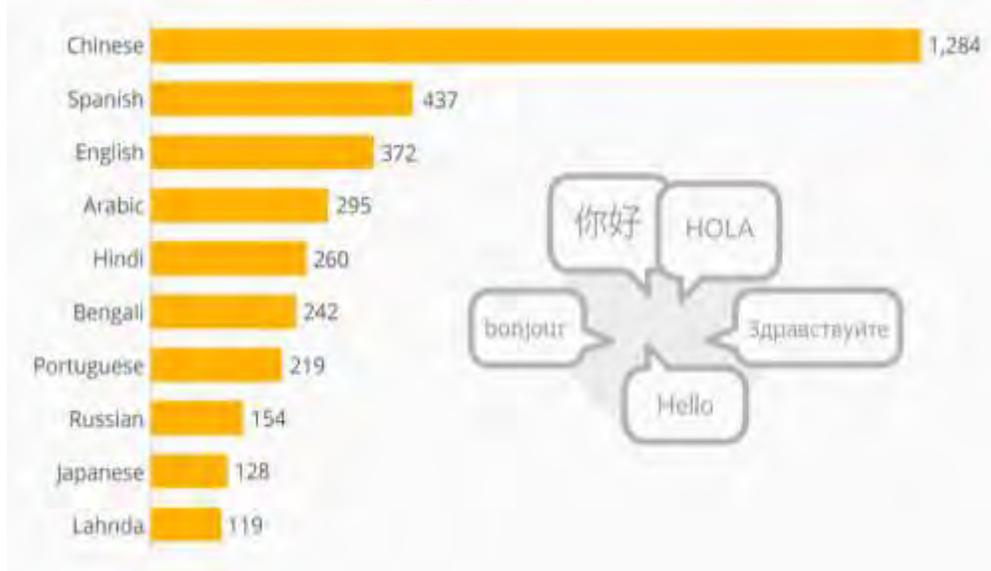


Figure 1. The World most spoken languages (McCarthy, 2018)

From value one, Chinese is by a good deal the most spoken language in the World with 1.28 billion speakers (i.e., 16% of the world population), then Spanish with a total of 437 million speakers. At the same time, English has 372 million language speakers. Arabic takes the fourth position of widely spoken languages, and it includes 19 various varieties; Egyptian Arabic (64.5 million speakers) then Algerian Arabic (29.3 million speakers) (see McCarthy, 2018 for more details).

The Effect of Globalization on English Language Teaching and Learning and Assessment

The spread of English as a global language is a convincing reason for teaching and learning this highly demanded and fully honored language. Thus, the stable relationship between the English language spread and ELT is apparent. English nowadays is learned for pragmatic reasons. In other words, it is a commodity for a lot of people; English learning equals a better job, a higher position, and maybe a future promotion. English language learning and teaching are also related to culture since it provides teachers and learners with an insight into what is happening around them in other cultures (Alfehaid, 2014).

Further, Globalization support communication with millions of people who come from entirely different cultures and connect teachers with experts and specialists who adopt different methodologies and use different materials, the benefit in this way is undoubtedly massive. The experience sounds to be exciting through online interaction between teachers and experts and the application of computer networks in ELT. At this level, teachers have to think about the suitability of such methodologies and materials, in addition to the appropriateness of any form of culture to ELT classrooms (Alfehaid, 2014).

Does globalization have any impact on the assessment? How can assessment procedures change to meet the educational demand of the 21 century? Kamen and MCNeely (2010) add that globalization led to the extension of international testing. Volante (2007) puts forward the view that overemphasis on test scores contributes to the rise of unhealthy competition between teachers and school, which might lead to the lack of cooperation, for example, sharing experiences and methods of teaching (Rigas, 2013).

The test is standardized when the learners are being assessed for scoring, to see their performances and compare it with the achievements of other learners, the federal law “No Child Left Behind” (2001) emerged to put the responsibility of learners’ results on the school staff shoulders; to check whether the learners meet the given standards, the learners’ results decide whether or not to move to the next grade. There are two main attributes for conducting a standardized test. First, they are objective in terms of design; second, they evaluate the learners’ academic knowledge appropriately. A lot of researchers tackled The advantages of standardized testing, Grant (n.d) is among those who support ST, and he assumes that ST is created by people who are not part of the classroom environment which indicates that learners’ scores are highly reliable and free from subjectivity, simply because teachers do not prepare the tests. Yet, they point to what extent teachers achieve their objectives. In the same vein, Gawthrop, (2014) assumes that :

Because standardized tests are created to be unbiased and objective, they supposedly ensure that the score a student receives is an accurate measurement of ability and progress. Validity and reliability are critical components test makers need, to create assessment tools, which create usable inferences about the knowledge and skill of learners in a particular area (p. 6)

Despite this, standardized test strikes terror into the soul of many teachers who fear poor results, regrettably, this leads them to focus on teaching to the test instead of quality teaching (Grant, n.d, p.7). Standardized criteria for Gawthrop (2014) helps to assess and not to determine the learners’ real level of performance:

However, test data is certainly more useful to administrators than learners, because a competent teacher can evaluate a student’s proficiency level based on homework, quizzes, or classroom participation. If standardized tests are not necessary to decide on a learner’ academic level, it raises an important question, whether test results (versus other sources such as teacher input) are the best source for determining policy or curriculum changes. Since standardized tests can only assess, not define, a student’s academic status, it is dangerous for policymakers to rely predominantly on the data provided by these tests.

In light of the drawbacks of standardized testing, a new approach of the assessment called assessment for learning has arisen to wrap up the debate among researchers and educators. Assessment for learning is a procedure used from the part of teachers and learners to modify their used strategies (What is an assessment for learning? / underlying principles of assessment for learning / Assessment for learning / Home - Assessment, n. d.).

Assessment for learning is undoubtedly not assessment of learning which aims to gather information about the learners at the end of the learning process, and grading them based on a set of

standards. AOF is a way of rating both teachers and schools. The future of the assessment seems to be more inspiring when talking about assessment AS learning where learners are in charge of their learning process (Siedlecki, 2012).

It is worth noting at this stage that the 21st-century skills should foster the learners to solve problems and enhance their critical thinking and promote their creativity, innovation, and collaboration skills. Additionally, Trilling and Fedel (2009) emphasize the need to shift the focus of attention from summative assessment to formative assessment and evaluation (cited in Rigas, 2013). But before testing learners on their subject matter, stakeholders, teachers, learners, and even parents should convincingly answer the following question:

Are schools helping learners to develop the required 21-century skills?

Ways of Thinking, which encompasses creativity and innovation; critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making; and metacognition or learning to learn

Ways of Working, which includes communication and collaboration or teamwork

Tools for Working, which addresses information literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy

Living in the World, which provides for citizenship, life and career skills, and personal and social responsibility (Lai, 2012, p. 4)

21st-century skills refer to the core skills required by society, educators, and business leaders to accomplish success in today's world, among those skills; Collaboration, Communication, Critical thinking, and Creativity, all of which called the 4 C's (Lai, 2012)



Figure 2.21 st Century learning balance (Retrieved from Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 38)

Overall, teachers have to prepare learners with both the left side and the right side of the charts of learning practices because the two must work hand in hand (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Those radical changes in teaching and testing in the 21st century drive us to think about its influence on the Algerian educational context.

It is becoming evident that globalization has become a challenge for education and a debatable issue in modern research, especially the theme of globalization's impact on culture. It is worth mentioning that, in the current paper, we precisely tackled the influence of globalization on culture; (English teaching, learning, and assessment). As a step towards globalization, the most noticeable change in the educational system in Algeria was the implementation of the LMD system (2004). So, what is the LMD system? How it impacts teaching and learning in general, and assessment in particular? The following section answers the mentioned inquiries intensively.

The LMD System in Algeria

The gap between the market demand and the University production is instead fostered by the old traditional method. This led the government and the stakeholders in Algeria to re-consider the classical system and to consolidate with the social- economic demand of the country (Sarnou , Koc ,Houcine and Boudiba, 2012) . The final decision was to implement the European educational system in the Algerian universities, thus the LMD system (License, Master, and Doctorate). The LMD system was applied in September 2004; it fosters the curiosity of the academic society concerning the efficiency of this newly executed reform, putting in mind that its implementation is costly with the lack of human and material resources (Bouhadiba, 2013).

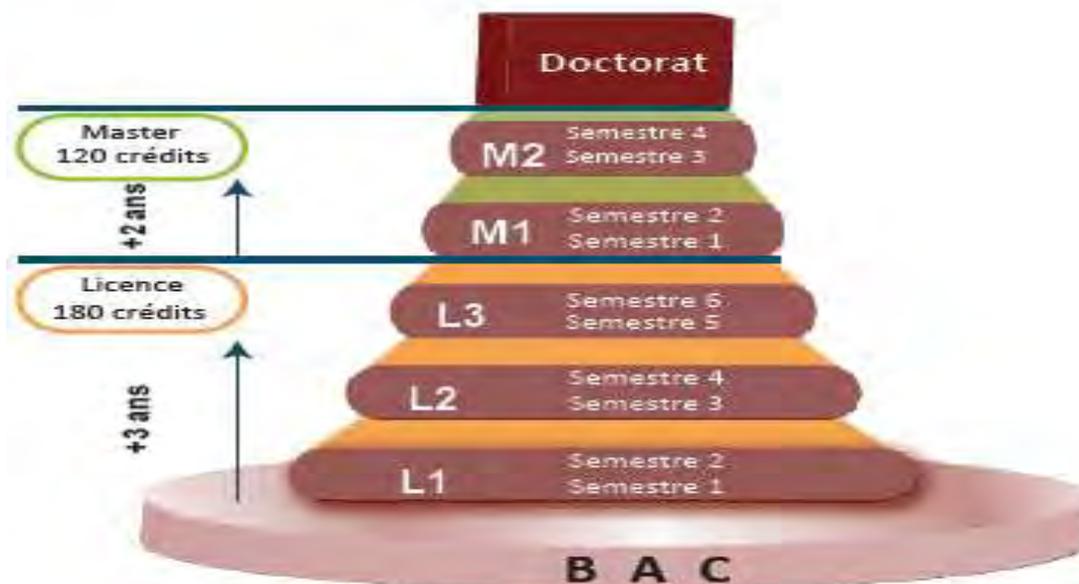


Figure 3. Organization of the training cycle according to the LMD system (the University of Boumerdes, n.d).

As can be noticed in Figure two, the training cycle during the LMD system is composed of three stages (License, Master, and Doctorate):

- ♣ **License:** (BAC +3) Three years of study: six semesters.
- ♣ **Master :** (BAC +5) Two years of study : four semesters
- ♣ **Doctorate:** (BAC +8) Three years of research: six semesters

The main objective of the LMD reform is the openness to the World of globalization and to respond to the changing demands of the 21st century.

Thanks to globalization, English becomes the most powerful language nowadays, this noticeable overspread led the government to adopt this language in their universities, and Algeria is across the board. English is taught as a foreign language which allows the learners to take part in the globalization. The LMD system brought innovative teaching and assessment practices with a radical change in the learners-teachers role (Sarnou, Koc, Houcine, and Boudiba, 2012).

The LMD system has proved its efficacy in all the European countries, that is why it is implemented in most countries nowadays. The local Algerian authorities demonstrate their readiness to adopt such a significant reform to develop their educational system and to move towards globalization. After 1962, Algeria had taken various changes, and the most noticeable one was in 1971, where higher education was Arabized and Algerianized to remove all traces of French colonization. This paves the way for teaching English as a foreign language.

The pre-LMD system is based on four years (license), Two years (Magister), five years (doctorate). This classical system creates a gap between the market demands and University production, and it does not keep up with the new changes of economy, politics , and society in Algeria. This led the policymakers to integrate a new reform that proves its success in other countries. Algeria has coordinated the standards of the Bologna Process which were set in Europe in the year 1999 as a trial to enable Algerian universities to respond to the new changes of globalization, and to cope with the advancement of Science and Technology (Reguig, 2014).

Teaching and Learning and Testing English under the LMD Reform

The application of the LMD system in teaching and learning relies on the following essential elements:

- ***Pedestrianisation*** (Semestrialization): The LMD system relies on semesters rather than years of training ; each year is divided into two semesters. Learners attend around 400 hours, thus, 25 hours per week.
 - ⇒ ***Educational Unit (EU)***: learners are exposed to four central teaching units in each semester ; (the fundamental group, the methodological group, the discovery group, and transversal group)
 - ⇒ ***Fundamental Unit***: it embraces the primary subject for a particular field.
 - ⇒ ***Methodological Unit***: it highlights the methodological tools necessary for completing the training

- ⇒ **Discovery Unit** : it includes all the training materials needed in the learners' specialty
- ⇒ **Transversal Unit**: it comprises the exposition of learners to other languages.
- **Credits**: the full number of credits for each semester is 30/180, these credits are granted when all examinations are all successfully passed.
 - ⇒ **Level 1**: License: three years of essential learning, six semesters (180 credits)
 - ⇒ **Level 2**: Master: two years, four semesters (120 credits)
 - ⇒ **Level 3**: Doctorate: three years, six semesters (180 credits)
- **The Module**: a fundamental unit of University education allocated in one semester. Courses are to be taught theoretically or practically (TD: Tutorial session).
- **Capitalization**: a new principle which acknowledges the learners' ownership of a validated module.
- **Fields**: the diploma obtained by learners must require the name of the specialty or the field (Science, law, language, etc.)
- **Assessment**: learners sit for half-yearly continuous assessment; they have the chance to catch up exams.
- **Validation**: the validation takes place when the learners' global mark is superior or equal to 10.
- **Transferability**: the flexibility of the system paves the way for the learners' mobility.
- **Course- type**: the learners may profit from the movement they pick up to other establishments and even nations.
- **Progressive Orientation**: orienting the learners to new disciplines depending on their progress, outcomes, and academic achievement.
- **Teaching Team**: refers to a group of teachers responsible for a given program (license, master, doctorate)
- **Tutoring**: the teacher role is a guide and a knowledge provider, this does undoubtedly pave the way for a learner-centered approach- (Reguig, 2014).

In addition to the changes at the level of the teaching-learning process, The LMD system brought several changes at the level of curriculum design which can be summarized as follows:

1. Planning and evaluation of the learners' needs as well as those liaised to the socioeconomic market,
 2. Developing multimedia at the level of oral expression and vocabulary,
 3. Encouraging students' enhancement with mobility,
 4. Creating cooperation between universities who share the same objectives and interests.
 5. Create listening cells and audits to register learners' propositions.
 6. Prepare learners for vocational education through the choice of English.
- (Mami, 2013, p. 913)

Despite the significant changes actualized in 2004, such as implementing the LMD reform and the encouraging language switch from French to Modern Standard Arabic. Despite these endeavors, the 2015 UN special rapporteur on education inferred that the nature of training in Algeria stays low

because of a lack of teachers' training and overcrowded classrooms, all of which make quality education harder to achieve.

After having a look at the whole system to understand the current situation better, one should consider the evaluation process under the LMD system. The evaluation of learners learning during each semester is continuous; it takes place at the end of each term. The assessment method used is summative assessment through examinations, quizzes, homework, oral presentations, and essays. Hanifi (2018) assumes that the evaluation of learners' learning cannot conduct well and at will, without considering the following challenges:

In a nutshell, assessment is an integral part of the teaching process. That is why the teacher has to find its principles taking into account the learners' interests and providing them with the needed information and guiding their improvement using motivation and self-assessment procedures.

This newly implemented reform faces a plethora of drawbacks and challenges since 2004, among them the lack of a clear understanding of this reform from the part of both the teachers and learners, the utility of this reform and whether it can be implemented in Algeria are still confusing inquiries. The lack of teachers especially in English department in Biskra University (24 permanent teacher and 41 full-time teachers) all of them (65 teachers) are not trained to teach at the University, The vast number of learners enrolled each year - taking the example of 2017-2018 - which consequently leads to overcrowded classes, the lack of materials such as the Data shows which are not available all the time. Another problem is the sparse library and the lack of English books (1632 edition) in comparison to French books (2189) and Arabic books (5988 edition) one more serious problem is the lack of net accessibility. Table three illustrates what has been mentioned before, and it describes the case of the English department at "Biskra University" in the academic year (2017-2018):

Table 1. *The number of Arabic, English and French books in the department of Literature and Foreign Languages in Biskra (2017-2018 .p.15)*

| The Departments | Number of Titles | Number of Copies |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| The Department of Arabic | 6148 | 38743 |
| The Department of English | 1059 | 4899 |
| The Department of French | 2234 | 9446 |

The goal of this current section is to give an insight into the LMD system in Algeria, and to determine its changes in terms of teaching, learning, and assessment.

ELT in Algeria –The Case of Biskra University

English language teaching in Algeria has gained a noticeable improvement since 1962. Since independence, Algeria has struggled to improve her educational policy to fit with the increasing demands of the globalized era. Globalized Algeria has adopted a new educational system of higher education (LMD system), which brought new changes to English language teaching in Algeria. This

section is a general presentation of the Algerian educational system under the LMD reform. It highlights the English language situation at the Three levels of education (Middle school, Secondary school, and University) with an emphasis on teaching and testing at the level of English Department –University of Biskra.

Before speaking about English teaching in Algeria, it is wise first to look back 60 years ago to figure out why French become the Lingua Franca of Algeria. The French colonization in Algeria increased illiteracy, which reached 90% of the population in 1962. To fight ignorance, Algeria made compulsory education. The Algerian administration consolidated the process of Arabisation to weaken the status of the French language in the Algeria, but the Algerian linguistic cleaning has failed. The French language continued to exert its authority due to several reasons , the Algerian immigrant in France was at the top of the list (Sahel, 2017, p. 1), the Algerian government still faces the same phenomenon till the time of writing this paper which drives us to argue that reducing the use of French language in Algeria and achieving her linguistic independence requires an acute , severe and professional work from the part of stakeholders. Despite its status, English in Algeria is considered as a foreign language, and it is taught after French.

English is considered a foreign language in Algeria in middle school, secondary school, and at the University. In the pre-university education (middle and secondary schools), English is interiorized, the learners' marks in English do not affect their achievement because of its low coefficient (Arabic, Math, Science...). That is why learners lose interest in learning English at both levels.

ELT at University

At University, for learners who study English, all the four skills are essential in addition to fluency and accuracy, they study English for general purposes. As for the specialties, they are different between Universities. In other streams like; Science, Math, or Biology, learners study English for specific purposes (ESP).

Research Methodology and Design

Participants' Profile

Teachers' Profile

The teachers at the University of Mohammed Khider -Biskra are divided into two categories:

- ***Full-Time Teachers:*** Who are between the ages of (28-60) with a teaching experience of (5-25) years. Some maintain a Magister degree (32 teachers), while others carry a doctorate (9 teachers)
- ***.Part-Time Teachers:*** are freshmen masters or doctoral learners with a mid- level experience (1-4) years who usually work temporarily for one semester or the whole year to cover the deficit in the teaching staff, which is a severe problem at the level of the department.

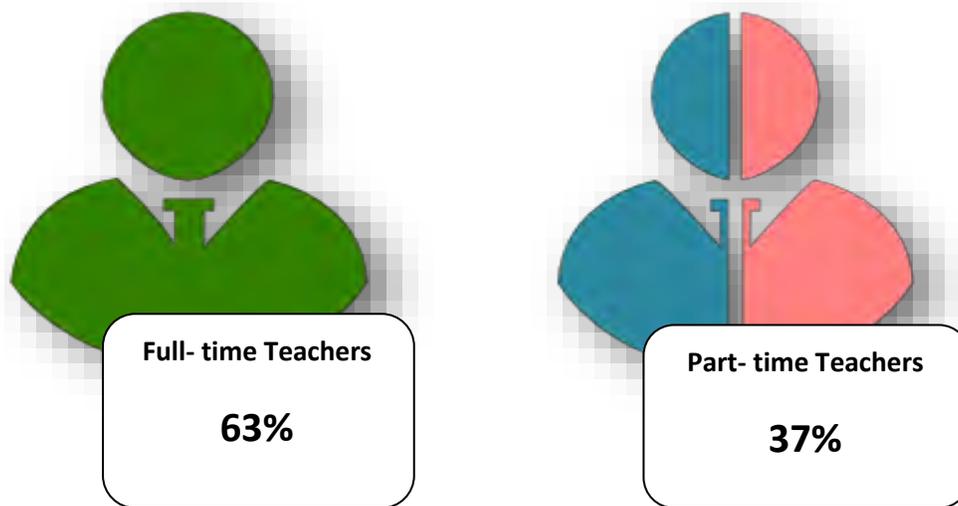


Figure 3. The percentage of full-time and part-time teachers at Biskra University
Learners' Profile:

Third-year learners at Biskra University are judged by their teachers to have an intermediate level in English; they are between the age of (21-40). Learners at the department of Biskra can be sorted as follows (35 learners)

- Visual learners : learn by seeing and reading
- Auditory learners : learn by listening and speaking
- Kinesthetic learners: learn by touching and doing

Based on the belief that knowing the learners' learning preferences helps the teacher to better plan his lessons, and consequently to better assess the learners. A modality questionnaire was distributed to third-year learners at the beginning of the academic year (2017-2018) to figure out their learning styles. The following diagram reveals the findings:

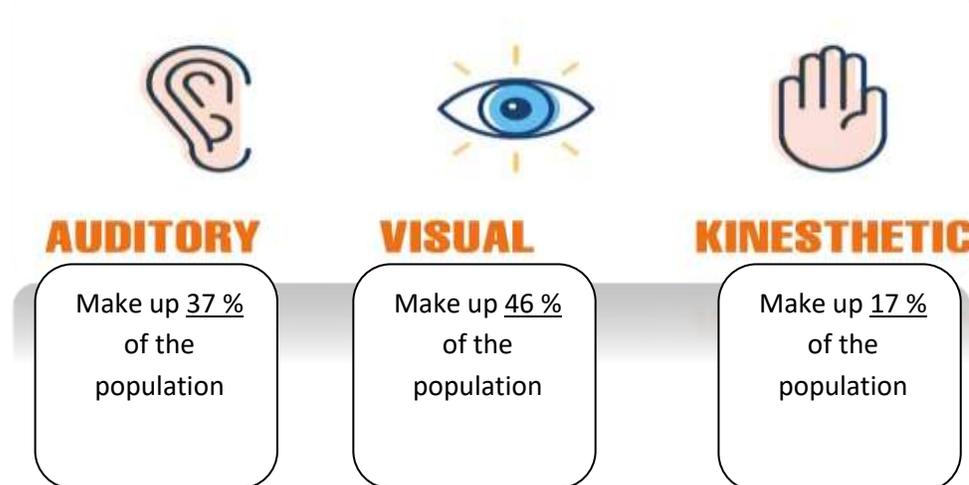


Figure 4. The percentage of third-year learners' preferred learning style

English learners at the University of Biskra appear to rarely participate, ask questions or respond to the teachers' comments; only a few are motivated and active. The reason behind this, we assume, is the drilling technique (DT) adopted by most teachers at the level of the University. Another point is their lack of self - confidence to speak English because they are usually afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at by their classmates. Considering all of these elements in the learners' profile, the researcher conducted action research, implementing multimodal classroom tasks (videos, songs, games, role-plays, and discussion) to get the learners engaged, overcome their fears, and, most importantly, promote their communicative competence. Table 2. demonstrates the exact number of learners in the departments of (English, Arabic , and French) .

Table 2. *The number of learners in the English, French and Arabic Departments (2017-2018)*

| The Departments | Arabic | English | French |
|---------------------|--------|---------|--------|
| Learners' number | 3893 | 2021 | 1697 |
| The Total | 7611 | | |

As it is noticed, the number of learners studying English is higher than the number of those studying French and lower than those studying Arabic.

Teaching and Testing at University

Learners are evaluated for certification for three years to hold the license degree and for two years to maintain the master's degree through yearly examination that takes place twice at the end of each semester. As for those who fail to get the average, they are supposed to have another chance through makeup examination. The primary purpose of assessment at University is to place learners for the next level (placement test) .Tests are generally conducted to measure the degree of mastery of what was taught; some of the tests are oral others are written:

- ***Oral Tests:*** they take place usually in the verbal expression module; learners are assessed at the level of fluency. They are generally asked to prepare a PowerPoint presentation, to act a dialogue or, to tell a story... The examination takes more than one session due to the overcrowded classrooms. Each student speaking time is between 15-20 minutes.
- ***Written Tests:*** Most tests at University are written; all of them tend to assess the learners' literacy (one hour and a half in most cases). Some tests come in the form of direct questions that require short answers or ticking up the right box

The English Department of Biskra

Before speaking about the English Department of Biskra, it is worth talking about the University of Mohamed Khider . Among the 26 universities of Algeria, the University of Mohamed Khider is composed of six faculties and 32 departments and 1383 full-time teachers distributed in the different departments .The Faculty of Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences was established by Executive Decree No. 98/258. Of: 17/08/1998.

- Education at the level of graduation and post-graduation.
- Scientific research activities.
- Training and renewal of knowledge.

The above decree was amended by Executive Decree No. 09/90 dated 17/02/2009. And the Faculty of Arts and Languages was separated from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences, and it consists of two sections and two divisions and specialization, they are as follows:

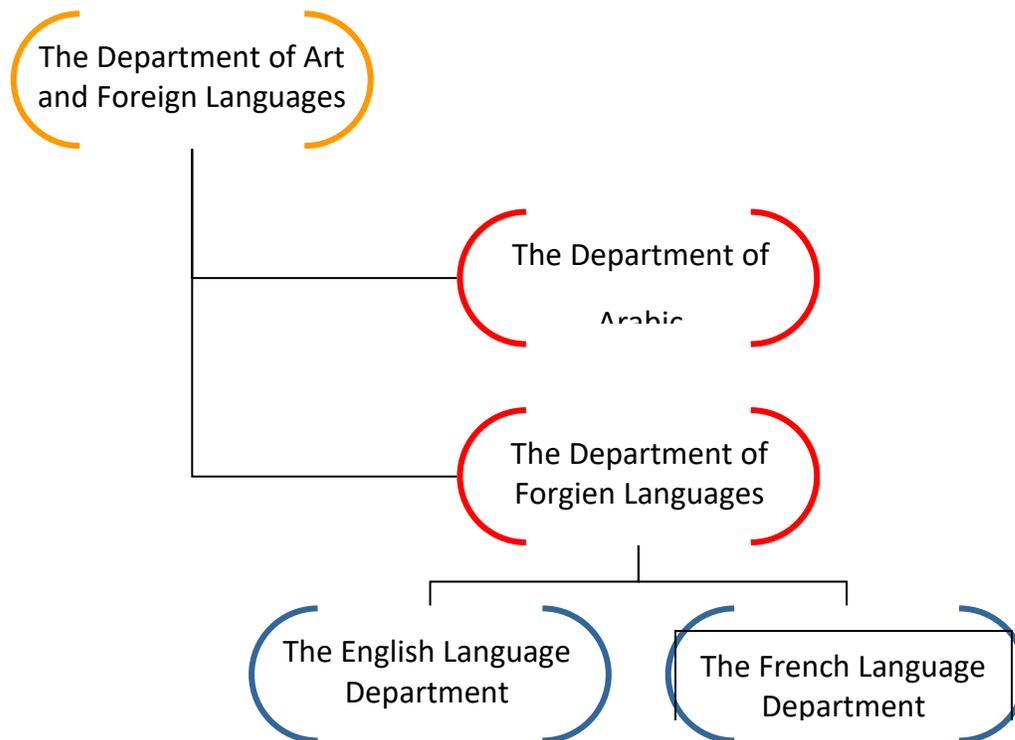


Figure 5. The English Department of Biskra.

Conclusion

The journey's end is only the beginning. The current research paper represents a brief overview of "English language teaching and assessment" for the sake of promoting quality teaching and learning, this is hopefully achieved through an elaborate presentation and description of education and testing in Algeria. It tackles the situation of English language teaching and testing in the globalization Era and under the LMD system. Before rushing to a conclusion about English Language Teaching in Algeria, it is worth remembering that feeling uneasy about the way of assessing the learners' communicative competence was the reason behind conducting the current action research project. This paper provides an elaborate, yet brief description of ELT in Algeria and more specifically in Biskra, it describes the context of globalization and the implementation of the LMD reform. It is critical to conclude that teaching and testing in Algeria need an extra, a profound, and a crucial adjustment in terms of methods and approaches.

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