

English and French in Algerian Higher Education: Competition, Complementarity, and Language Policy

الإنجليزية والفرنسية في التعليم العالي الجزائري:
التنافس والتكامل والسياسة اللغوية

Anglais et français dans l'enseignement supérieur algérien :
concurrence, complémentarité et politique linguistique

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Résumé

This article examines how the recent strengthening of English in Algerian higher education is reshaping the relationship between English and French in teaching, research, and academic publication. It is based on an exploratory questionnaire survey conducted with 19 university teachers from five Algerian universities and across several disciplines (French, English, Tamazight, Arabic, and Sociology). The study combines closed and open-ended questions in order to identify perceptions of the new language policy, its motivations, its practical constraints, and its possible consequences for research practices. The results indicate a strong awareness of the policy among respondents and a broad perception that English is gaining institutional and symbolic legitimacy, especially in relation to international scientific visibility, access to knowledge, mobility, and employability. At the same time, the data show that French still occupies a significant place in administration, some disciplinary traditions, and collaborations within Francophone spaces. The article argues that the current situation should be interpreted neither as a simple replacement of French by English nor as a stable bilingual equilibrium, but rather as a transitional configuration marked by competition, differentiated complementarity, and uneven institutional adjustment.

Keywords

English, French, language policy, higher education, Algeria, academic multilingualism

الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في الكيفية التي يؤدي بها التعزيز الأخير للغة الإنجليزية في التعليم العالي الجزائري إلى إعادة تشكيل العلاقة بين الإنجليزية والفرنسية في التدريس والبحث والنشر الأكاديمي. وتعتمد الدراسة على استبيان استكشافي وُزِعَ على 19 أستاذًا جامعياً من خمس جامعات جزائرية ومن تخصصات مختلفة تشمل الفرنسية والإنجليزية والأمازيغية والعربية وعلم الاجتماع. وقد جمع الاستبيان بين أسئلة مغلقة وأخرى مفتوحة لرصد تصورات الأساتذة حول السياسة اللغوية الجديدة، ودوافعها، وإكراهاتها العملية، وآثارها المحتملة في ممارسات البحث العلمي. وتُظهر النتائج ارتفاع مستوى الوعي بهذه السياسة لدى المشاركين، مع وجود تصور واسع بأن الإنجليزية تكتسب مكانة مؤسسية ورمزية متزايدة، ولا سيما

فيما يتعلق بالظهور العلمي الدولي، والوصول إلى المعرفة، والتنقل الأكاديمي، وفرص التشغيل. وفي المقابل، تكشف المعطيات أن الفرنسية ما تزال تحتفظ بمكانة معتبرة في الإدارة، وفي بعض التقاليد التخصصية، وفي التعاون مع الفضاء الفرنكوفوني. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الوضع الراهن لا يمكن اختزاله في إحلال بسيط للإنجليزية محل الفرنسية، ولا في توازن ثنائي مستقر، بل ينبغي فهمه بوصفه وضعًا انتقاليًا يتسم بالتنافس، والتكامل المتمايز، وتفاوت وتيرة التكيف المؤسسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإنجليزية، الفرنسية، السياسة اللغوية، التعليم العالي، الجزائر، التعدد اللغوي الأكاديمي

Abstract

Cet article examine la manière dont le renforcement récent de l'anglais dans l'enseignement supérieur algérien reconfigure les rapports entre l'anglais et le français dans l'enseignement, la recherche et la publication académique. Il s'appuie sur une enquête exploratoire par questionnaire menée auprès de 19 enseignants universitaires relevant de cinq universités algériennes et de plusieurs disciplines (français, anglais, tamazight, arabe et sociologie). Le dispositif combine des questions fermées et ouvertes afin d'identifier les perceptions de la nouvelle politique linguistique, ses motivations, ses contraintes pratiques et ses effets possibles sur les pratiques de recherche. Les résultats montrent une forte connaissance de cette orientation par les répondants et une perception largement partagée d'une montée en légitimité institutionnelle et symbolique de l'anglais, notamment en lien avec la visibilité scientifique internationale, l'accès aux savoirs, la mobilité et l'employabilité. Dans le même temps, les données indiquent que le français conserve une place importante dans l'administration, dans certaines traditions disciplinaires et dans les collaborations avec l'espace francophone. L'étude défend l'idée que la situation actuelle relève moins d'un simple remplacement du français par l'anglais que d'une configuration transitoire marquée par la concurrence, la complémentarité différenciée et des ajustements institutionnels inégaux.

Mots-clés

anglais, français, politique linguistique, enseignement supérieur, Algérie, multilinguisme académique

Introduction

English now occupies a central place in international scientific communication, higher education governance, and transnational academic mobility. In Algeria, this global reconfiguration intersects with a specific historical trajectory marked by the long-standing institutional presence of French and by recurrent debates on language policy, decolonization, and access to global knowledge. The recent orientation towards a stronger presence of English in higher education has therefore reopened a strategic question: how should the Algerian university manage the relationship between an established academic language with deep historical roots and a language that increasingly structures international scientific visibility?

This article examines that question through the perceptions of university teachers. More precisely, it asks how the new language policy is reconfiguring the relationship between English and French in university teaching, research, and publication. The study focuses on seven interrelated issues: the motivations attributed to the policy; the perceived effects on the balance between English and French; changes in students' language preferences; the practical difficulties attached to the use of English; the opportunities associated with this linguistic reorientation; the consequences for research and publication practices; and the future role of French in Algerian universities.

The article does not claim to provide an exhaustive diagnosis of the Algerian higher education system. Rather, it offers an exploratory, empirically grounded reading based on a limited but diversified set of teacher responses. Its contribution lies in documenting the current transition as a dynamic configuration in which competition, coexistence, and complementarity are simultaneously at work. In doing so, it engages with broader discussions on language policy (Spolsky, 2004), language planning in North Africa (Benrabah, 2007), the role of English in global academia (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006), and the pedagogical implications of language shift in higher education (Borg, 2015).

1. Research design and corpus

To explore the evolving relationship between English and French in Algerian higher education, the study relied on a questionnaire survey administered to 19 university teachers from five Algerian universities. The respondents came from five disciplinary areas: French, English, Tamazight, Arabic, and Sociology. The sample was not designed to be statistically representative of the whole sector; it should instead be read as a diversified exploratory corpus intended to capture informed perceptions from actors directly involved in university teaching and research.

The questionnaire contained 17 items, combining multiple-choice questions with open-ended prompts. It was distributed by e-mail. The closed questions

made it possible to identify major trends, while the open responses provided argumentative nuance and helped reveal the reasons behind the choices expressed by respondents. This type of mixed questionnaire is particularly useful in exploratory research on language attitudes and institutional change (Dörnyei, 2007; Cohen et al., 2017).

The analysis presented here is primarily descriptive and interpretive. Percentages are used to clarify the distribution of responses, but the value of the material lies equally in the qualitative comments provided by respondents. These comments do not constitute direct evidence of institutional reality in a strong positivist sense; rather, they offer access to how policy change is perceived, interpreted, and anticipated by teachers. This distinction is important, because the article deals with perceptions of language policy as much as with policy itself.

1.1. Profile of the respondents

Table 1 presents the respondents according to academic grade. The sample includes professors, lecturers A, lecturers B, and assistant lecturers A. The disciplinary distribution is uneven but sufficiently varied to illuminate several university cultures. English teachers constitute the largest group in the sample, followed by French and Tamazight teachers, while Arabic and Sociology are represented by one respondent each.

Table 2 shows that the respondents are, on the whole, experienced teachers. More than half of them have between 11 and 20 years of experience, and more than one third have over 20 years of experience. This is an important feature of the corpus, because the responses are not those of newcomers only; they come largely from teachers whose judgments are grounded in long institutional experience and in a comparative awareness of change over time.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by academic grade.

Discipline	Professor	Lecturer A (MCA)	Lecturer B (MCB)	Assistant Lecturer A (MAA)	Total
French	1 (25 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (25 %)	2 (50 %)	4 (100 %)
English	2 (22.22 %)	2 (22.22 %)	3 (33.33 %)	2 (22.22 %)	9 (100 %)
Tamazight	1 (25 %)	3 (75 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	4 (100 %)
Arabic	1 (100 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (100 %)
Sociology	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (100 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (100 %)
Total	5 (26.31 %)	5 (26.31 %)	5 (26.31 %)	4 (21.05 %)	19 (100 %)

Source: Author’s field data.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by years of experience.

Discipline	> 20 years	11–20 years	5–10 years	< 5 years	Total
French	1 (25 %)	3 (75 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	4 (100 %)
English	4 (44.44 %)	4 (44.44 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (11.11 %)	9 (100 %)
Tamazight	1 (25 %)	3 (75 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	4 (100 %)
Arabic	1 (100 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (100 %)
Sociology	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (100 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (100 %)
Total	7 (36.84 %)	10 (52.63 %)	1 (5.26 %)	1 (5.26 %)	19 (100 %)

Source: Author's field data.

1.2. Methodological scope and limitations

The exploratory character of the survey must be clearly acknowledged. With 19 respondents, the study cannot claim sector-wide generalizability. The findings should therefore be read as indicative tendencies rather than definitive measurements of national reality. Nonetheless, the corpus remains useful because it captures positions from different disciplines and because the questionnaire combines factual perception with interpretive commentary.

A second limitation concerns the nature of self-reported data. The survey records what teachers say they observe, expect, or fear. It does not directly measure students' actual competencies, publication outputs, or institutional language practices. The value of the survey lies in documenting representations, expectations, and perceived constraints, which are themselves crucial for understanding policy reception and institutional transition.

2. Awareness of the new language policy

This section first considers respondents' awareness of the new policy and their expectations regarding its likely effects on the balance between English and French, before examining the motivations they attribute to this linguistic reorientation.

2.1. Awareness of the policy and anticipated impact

The first result is striking: all respondents reported being aware of the new policy promoting English in higher education. This unanimous awareness suggests that the policy has reached teachers as a visible institutional orientation, regardless of disciplinary affiliation. In terms of policy implementation, visibility is not equivalent to adherence, but it is a necessary precondition for any effective reform process (Fullan, 2007).

Awareness alone, however, tells us nothing about the expected direction of change. For that reason, respondents were also asked how they perceived the likely impact of the policy on the English–French balance. As Table 4 shows,

a majority anticipates a significant strengthening of English at the expense of French, while smaller groups expect either a more moderate strengthening, a maintained balance, or a pattern of reinforced complementarity.

Table 3. Knowledge of the new English-teaching policy among respondents.

Discipline	Yes (n)	Yes (%)	No (n)	No (%)	Total
French	4	100	0	0	4
English	9	100	0	0	9
Tamazight	4	100	0	0	4
Arabic	1	100	0	0	1
Sociology	1	100	0	0	1
Total	19	100	0	0	19

Source: Author’s field data.

Table 4. Teachers’ perceptions of the likely impact of the policy.

Perceived impact of the policy	Number of teachers	Percentage
Significant strengthening of English at the expense of French	11	57.89
Moderate strengthening of English without major impact on French	3	15.79
Balance maintained between English and French	4	21.05
Strengthening of English with increased complementarity with French	1	5.26
Total	19	100

Source: Author’s field data.

2.2. Perceived motivations behind the policy

When asked about the motivations underlying the promotion of English, respondents overwhelmingly associated the policy with alignment with international scientific research. This result is unsurprising in light of the well-documented dominance of English in scientific publication, academic indexing, and transnational circulation of research (Crystal, 2003; Flowerdew, 2008).

Two other motivations were frequently mentioned: the desire to move beyond the colonial legacy attached to French and the broader internationalization of higher education. These two dimensions should not be confused. The first belongs to the symbolic and political history of language in Algeria; the second refers to the strategic positioning of universities in a global academic economy. The open responses indicate that respondents often connect the two, even when they do not interpret them in the same way.

By contrast, employability and social demand were less frequently mentioned in the closed responses. Yet they remain present in the qualitative comments, suggesting that respondents do not ignore these issues but tend to rank scientific visibility and international alignment above labour-market considerations when interpreting state policy.

Table 5. Motivations identified by respondents for the promotion of English at university.

Motivations for promoting English	Number	Percentage
Alignment with international scientific research	14	73.68
Break with the French colonial legacy	8	42.11
Internationalization of higher education	8	42.11
Response to social demand for English	2	10.53
Improvement of graduate employability	1	5.26
Other: 'Just politics'	1	5.26
Other: 'Balance of power. English, being the language of the strongest, is imposed worldwide.'	1	5.26

Source: Author's field data.

3. English and French in Algerian higher education: competition, coexistence, or complementarity?

To assess the perceived evolution of the relationship between English and French, respondents were asked whether they had observed changes in students' interest in the two languages in recent years. Table 6 shows that a majority reported growing interest in English, while no respondent reported growing interest in French. A smaller group observed stable interest in both languages, and another segment perceived a decline in interest in French.

These responses should not be interpreted as direct measures of students' actual practices. They nevertheless suggest that teachers perceive a symbolic and practical shift in favour of English. Such a shift is consistent with the growing association of English with mobility, international publication, and access to scientific documentation. At the same time, the persistence of stable or mixed responses indicates that French remains institutionally present and cannot be treated as already displaced.

Table 6. Teachers' perceptions of students' interest in English and French.

Growing interest in English	Growing interest in French	Stable interest in both languages	Declining interest in French	Declining interest in English	Total
11 (57.89 %)	0 (0 %)	5 (26.32 %)	3 (15.79 %)	0 (0 %)	19 (100 %)

Source: Author's field data.

3.1. Difficulties related to English proficiency

The first challenge repeatedly mentioned by respondents concerns the linguistic proficiency required to teach and learn through English. Several comments converge on the same point: insufficient mastery of English may hinder comprehension, reduce classroom interaction, and make disciplinary content harder to appropriate. The following remarks are representative: “Insufficient proficiency in the English language is an obstacle to understanding concepts”; “Comprehension difficulties for Algerians”; and “Teaching in English requires excellent language proficiency and adapted pedagogical skills, which many teachers do not currently possess.”

These remarks point to a central issue in language policy implementation: a change in medium of instruction cannot be reduced to a symbolic decision. It depends on the linguistic repertoire of teachers and students, on institutional support, and on pedagogical adaptation. In contexts where English is promoted as a language of instruction, lack of proficiency often affects not only comprehension but also confidence, participation, and evaluation practices (Borg, 2015; Norton, 2000).

“Insufficient proficiency in the English language is an obstacle to understanding concepts.”

“Comprehension difficulties for Algerians.”

“Teaching in English requires excellent language proficiency and adapted pedagogical skills, which many teachers do not currently possess.”

“Strengthening our English skills will require considerable effort, as mastering this language demands effort and constant practice.”

3.2. Problems related to teacher training and qualification

A second difficulty concerns the preparation of teachers themselves. The responses repeatedly mention a shortage of qualified staff, insufficient training, and uneven levels of English practice among those expected to teach through English. One respondent notes a “shortage of qualified teachers,” while another refers to “insufficient teacher training and English practice level.”

These comments suggest that the policy may generate a mismatch between institutional expectations and available pedagogical resources. If English is to play a stronger role in higher education, teacher development cannot remain implicit. It requires structured training, disciplinary support, and time for professional adaptation. Otherwise, the reform risks producing symbolic compliance without effective implementation.

“Lack of skills among teachers trained to teach through English.”

“Insufficient teacher training and English practice level.”

“Shortage of qualified teachers.”

“Acquiring an advanced level of language proficiency poses an additional challenge for non-native teachers.”

3.3. Difficulties related to transition and institutional change

Respondents also emphasize the complexity of the transition itself. Their comments evoke changing linguistic habits, attachment to existing academic routines, and the need to preserve linguistic diversity during reform. One response is especially revealing: “It would be difficult to displace French, especially in Kabylia.” Such remarks remind us that language policy in higher education is never purely technical; it is also embedded in regional histories, disciplinary cultures, and forms of linguistic legitimacy.

From this perspective, the move towards English should be analysed as a negotiated transition rather than as a simple replacement process. Research on language shift has long shown that institutional habits, symbolic investment, and community attachment strongly shape the pace and form of change (Fishman, 1991; Hornberger & Ricento, 2011).

“A somewhat difficult transition.”

“Changing linguistic habits.”

“It would be difficult to displace French, especially in Kabylia.”

“English as the language of instruction requires adapted educational policies to avoid inequalities and preserve linguistic diversity.”

3.4. Risks of marginalizing French and local languages

Several respondents express concern that an unbalanced promotion of English could marginalize both French and local languages. One comment explicitly warns that the predominant use of English may restrict students’ expressive resources. Another, from within a French department, insists that English should not become the language of instruction in a field where French is both the object and the medium of study, while still recognizing the usefulness of English for access to documentation.

These responses are important because they complicate any simplistic opposition between English and French. They show that the issue is not merely whether English should replace French, but how a multilingual academic ecology can be managed without weakening disciplinary coherence or excluding students whose linguistic trajectories differ.

“The predominant use of English risks marginalizing local languages and restricting students’ expression.”

“In our French department, English should not be the language of instruction; however, mastery of English can strengthen access to resources useful for the teaching and learning of French.”

3.5. Student assimilation and participation

The assimilation of content through English is perceived as especially difficult for students who have not benefited from strong prior training in the language. Respondents underline that fear of making mistakes may reduce participation and inhibit classroom interaction. In non-linguistic disciplines, this issue is felt even more acutely because students may be asked to process specialised knowledge through a language they do not yet master well.

Here again, the survey highlights a recurrent tension in higher education language policy: the expected benefits of English in terms of access and internationalization may remain theoretical unless accompanied by real pedagogical scaffolding. Without such support, the reform may widen inequalities between students with different linguistic capitals.

“Students’ apprehension of linguistic errors limits their participation in class and reduces academic interaction.”

“In specialities where students do not have strong training in English, content assimilation may become more difficult.”

3.6. Perceived advantages of English as a language of instruction

Despite the difficulties identified above, respondents strongly associate English with a set of academic, scientific, and professional opportunities. Their comments can be grouped into five broad domains: international opening, scientific research, student mobility and employability, educational modernization, and favourable disciplinary contexts in which English is already established.

3.6.1. International opening and visibility

The first set of perceived advantages concerns international opening. Respondents associate English with access to global education, international resources, recent scientific advances, and broader academic visibility. Several comments refer to direct access to knowledge produced in English and to the possibility of improving the visibility of Algerian research abroad.

This perception is consistent with the contemporary structure of scientific communication. For many respondents, English functions less as a prestige language in the abstract than as an infrastructure of access: access to literature, networks, conferences, partnerships, and forms of recognition that shape academic careers.

“Access to global education and resources.”

“Direct access to knowledge produced in English.”

“Online documentation and visibility of production.”

3.6.2. Scientific research and publication

A second advantage lies in research and publication. Respondents repeatedly describe English as the dominant language of scientific publication and as a key condition for international partnerships. This does not mean that French disappears from research practices; rather, English is perceived as the language through which Algerian research can circulate more widely and acquire greater visibility.

Such responses reveal a pragmatic understanding of academic multilingualism. Teachers are aware that publishing in English may increase access to indexed journals, international readership, and collaborative projects, even if this does not automatically invalidate the continued use of French in other scholarly or pedagogical contexts.

“Produce work in English and sign partnerships with English-speaking universities.”

“Visibility and development of scientific research.”

“Access to documentation written in English.”

3.6.3. Student mobility and employability

Respondents also see English as a lever for student mobility and employability. The language is associated with better professional opportunities, stronger international competitiveness of degrees, and easier access to study or career trajectories abroad. In this respect, English is perceived as an academic resource and as a social capital convertible in the labour market.

The importance of this dimension should not be underestimated. Even when employability was not the most frequently chosen motivation in the closed questions, it appears repeatedly in the comments as a practical justification for strengthening English in higher education.

“Better professional opportunities.”

“Enhancing the value of the Algerian degree in the international job market.”

“Mastery of English strengthens employability and academic mobility.”

3.6.4. Educational modernization

Another cluster of responses links English with the modernization of the Algerian educational system. English is associated with curricular renewal, alignment with international standards, and improvement in the ranking and attractiveness of Algerian universities. These claims should be interpreted cautiously: adopting English does not automatically improve institutional performance. Nevertheless, the responses show that English is widely imagined as a vector of modernization and as a sign of insertion into contemporary academic norms.

In this sense, the policy is not only about language. It also carries a model of the university: outward-looking, internationally connected, and more strongly integrated into global circuits of knowledge production.

“Generalization of the language to all disciplines; greater integration of English into university programmes and curricula.”

“Ranking of Algerian universities.”

“Documentation and emancipation.”

3.6.5. Favourable disciplinary contexts

One respondent from an English department reports not having encountered major difficulties with English as a medium of instruction, because students in that field expect to work in English from the beginning of their studies. This remark is important because it introduces disciplinary differentiation into the analysis. The same policy does not produce the same effects across all departments. What is pedagogically unproblematic in English studies may be highly challenging in other specialities.

3.7. Perceived competition between English and French

When respondents were directly asked whether English and French are in competition or in complementarity at the Algerian university, opinions were almost evenly divided between the two options. This near-equilibrium is analytically significant, as it suggests that the current moment is one of uncertainty and reconfiguration rather than of clear consensus. Teachers do not speak with one voice because the institutional situation itself remains unstable, and because the place of each language is still being renegotiated across teaching, research, and academic communication.

Table 7. Teachers’ views on competition or complementarity between English and French.

Teachers’ views	Number	Percentage
Competition	9	47.37
Complementarity	9	47.37
Other / undecided	1	5.26
Total	19	100

Source: Author’s field data

This distribution provides the empirical basis for three main interpretive lines in the respondents’ discourse: first, the perception of English as progressively replacing French; second, the idea of coexistence within a differentiated bilingual model; and third, the influence of globalization and strategic pressure on linguistic choices in higher education.

- Direct competition and gradual replacement. Some respondents explicitly describe English as a language that is progressively supplanting French in

research and academic communication. In these responses, English appears as the language of technological and scientific power, whereas French is portrayed as losing part of its former international centrality. These statements should, however, be understood as respondent perceptions rather than as empirical proof that French has already been displaced across the university system as a whole. They remain highly significant because they show that, for part of the teaching body, the reform is interpreted in terms of hierarchy and substitution rather than in terms of addition or coexistence. In this reading, English is not simply incorporated into the university's linguistic repertoire; it is promoted because it is perceived as more useful, more global, and more strategically valuable.

- Coexistence and differentiated bilingualism. Other respondents adopt a more balanced view. They acknowledge the growing importance of English, while insisting that French remains historically entrenched and practically useful in a range of academic and professional domains. From this perspective, the current transition may lead less to outright replacement than to a differentiated bilingual model in which each language retains specific functions according to disciplinary traditions, institutional practices, and geopolitical contexts. This interpretation is especially important because it reframes the debate. The issue is not simply whether one language wins and the other loses, but how university multilingualism is reorganized when different languages carry different forms of symbolic legitimacy and practical utility. Such a view allows for a more nuanced understanding of linguistic change in higher education.
- Globalization and strategic pressure. A third group of comments explains the current competition through globalization, the knowledge economy, and changing international power relations. These responses place the Algerian case within a broader world system in which English has become deeply embedded in scientific exchange, technological innovation, academic benchmarking, and transnational circulation. Here again, the survey does not provide direct macro-structural evidence; rather, it reveals how respondents interpret the larger forces shaping language policy and academic practice. This is precisely what makes the material valuable. It documents the ways in which global transformations are refracted through local academic perceptions and professional experiences.

Taken together, these responses show that the perception of competition between English and French is not uniform or monolithic. It is mediated by different ways of understanding linguistic change: as replacement, as functional coexistence, or as the local effect of broader global pressures. The section therefore highlights not a settled opposition between two languages, but a moment of transition in which competing interpretations coexist within the Algerian university.

3.8. English and French as complementary languages

Respondents who emphasize complementarity generally argue that English and French occupy different yet compatible domains. In their view, both languages are useful for the country and for the university, provided that language policy remains pragmatic rather than ideological. This position does not deny the rise of English; rather, it argues that institutional rationality requires preserving the resources associated with French while strengthening competence in English.

One particularly revealing comment describes the transition as a pilot experience because French remains strong in administration and in many research environments. This suggests that complementarity is not merely a normative wish; it is also a description of an actually existing distribution of functions.

4. Competition and complementarity in research practices

The relationship between English and French becomes especially visible when respondents are asked about their own research and publication practices. Table 8 shows an exact balance between those who mainly use French and those who mainly use English. Only a small minority report mixed or Arabic-related practices.

This distribution is significant. It indicates that, at the level of actual scholarly work, the transition is still incomplete. English is highly visible and strongly valorized, but French remains equally present in the practices reported by the teachers surveyed.

Table 8. Languages favoured by respondents in research and publication.

Language(s) most frequently used in research/publications	Number	Percentage
French	8	42.11
English	8	42.11
French and English	1	5.26
Arabic	1	5.26
Arabic and English	1	5.26
Total	19	100

Source: Author's field data.

4.1. Perceived impact of the policy on publication language choices

Even though current practices remain divided, respondents overwhelmingly expect the new policy to push research and publication choices towards English.

Table 9 shows that almost all respondents foresee either a significant shift or a broader increase in the use of English. Only one respondent expects little impact.

The interesting point here is the gap between present practice and anticipated evolution. The survey suggests that the current equilibrium between French and English may be temporary. Teachers perceive English as the language whose value is increasing most rapidly within the academic field.

Table 9. Perceived impact of the policy on language choices for research and publication.

Perceived impact on publication language choices	Number	Percentage
Significant shift towards English	9	47.37
Increased use of English	9	47.37
Little impact on current practices	1	5.26
Total	19	100

Source: Author's field data.

4.2. English, French, and international scientific collaboration

The same tendency appears in relation to international collaboration. Respondents overwhelmingly identify English as essential for international scientific cooperation, while nearly half also stress the continuing importance of French for collaboration with Francophone countries. A smaller group explicitly defines the two languages as complementary and necessary.

These results point to a differentiated geography of academic exchange. English structures access to global circuits of visibility and cooperation, whereas French continues to mediate relations within specific regional, institutional, and disciplinary networks. For Algerian researchers, the issue is therefore less a binary choice than a strategic management of multilingual resources.

Table 10. Role of English and French in international scientific collaboration.

Role of English and French in international collaboration	Number	Percentage
English is essential for international collaboration	13	68.42
French remains important for collaboration with Francophone countries	9	47.37
Both languages are complementary and necessary	4	21.05
The new policy will favour collaboration through English	6	31.58
Other: language choice depends on the context of communication	1	5.26

Source: Author's field data.

4.3. Opportunities opened up by the new orientation towards English

When respondents were asked about the opportunities offered by the new language policy, their comments converged around four main themes: international visibility, access to knowledge, mobility and academic integration, and professional opportunities. Taken together, these responses present English not merely as an additional linguistic resource, but as a strategic instrument for repositioning Algerian universities within wider academic, scientific, and professional networks.

- International visibility and outreach. English is repeatedly described as a means of increasing the visibility of Algerian scientific production and improving the international position of Algerian universities. Respondents associate the use of English with participation in global academic networks, stronger attractiveness for international institutions, and broader dissemination of research outputs. These expectations should nevertheless be approached with caution. Publishing in English may facilitate international circulation, but visibility also depends on the quality of research, journal selection, indexing, funding, and institutional strategy. The survey nonetheless shows that English is strongly imagined as a medium of external projection and symbolic academic positioning.
- Access to knowledge and research development. Another major theme concerns access to documentation and scientific knowledge. Respondents insist that English opens the way to a broader corpus of research, recent technological developments, and high-level conferences. They also associate it with greater possibilities for innovation, partnership, and participation in prestigious publication venues. This interpretation is consistent with the structure of global academic publishing, in which a large proportion of indexed scientific production circulates in English. From the respondents' perspective, mastery of English is therefore not a secondary cultural asset, but a condition for fuller participation in contemporary knowledge production.
- Mobility and academic integration. Respondents also connect English with international mobility and integration into exchange programmes and doctoral opportunities abroad. They suggest that weak competence in English currently limits the participation of many Algerian students and researchers in conferences, publications, and transnational academic trajectories. In this respect, English is perceived as a language of circulation: it provides access not only to texts, but also to institutions, networks, and academic pathways. Strengthening English is therefore seen as a way of broadening the university's horizon of action and integration.

- Professional opportunities. Finally, one concise but significant response directly links English to better professional opportunities for graduates. Although brief, this comment condenses a widely shared perception: in a globalized labour market, English functions as a transferable asset that can reinforce the value of university training beyond national borders. In this sense, the promotion of English is not viewed solely through an academic lens, but also through the broader logic of employability and international professional competitiveness.

Overall, these responses show that the turn towards English is imagined less as a narrow linguistic reform than as a broader strategy of academic modernization. For the respondents, English promises greater visibility, wider access to knowledge, increased mobility, and improved professional prospects. At the same time, these expectations remain partly aspirational and would require structural support—training, institutional policy, and material resources—to be effectively realized.

4.4. The future place of French in Algerian universities

The responses concerning the future role of French reveal a nuanced picture. A relative majority expects French to retain a reduced but still significant role, while another substantial group expects its current position to be largely maintained. Smaller groups anticipate marginalization or a more discipline-specific role for French, especially in the humanities.

Taken together, these responses suggest that the future of French is not imagined in uniform terms. For some respondents, French remains too deeply anchored to disappear quickly; for others, its international visibility is too limited to justify a central long-term place in research. Between these positions lies a more pragmatic reading: French may remain important, but in a more selective and functionally differentiated way.

Table 11. Respondents' views on the future role of French in Algerian higher education.

Future role of French in Algerian universities	Number	Percentage	Illustrative reading
Maintaining the current role	5	26.32	French remains institutionally established.
Reduced but still significant role	6	31.58	French loses ground but remains useful in several fields.
Marginalized role	3	15.79	English is expected to dominate academic visibility.
Role focused on specific disciplines	3	15.79	French may remain stronger in the humanities and some professional sectors.

Future role of French in Algerian universities	Number	Percentage	Illustrative reading
Other: plea for multilingualism	1	5.26	Mastery of both languages should be encouraged alongside national languages.
Other: observation of French's decline	1	5.26	French is perceived as less visible internationally than English.

Source: Author's field data

4.5. Rethinking the English–French Dynamic in Teaching and Research

The open comments collected in the final part of the questionnaire call for a broader synthetic interpretation of the ongoing transition. Three major elements emerge from the respondents' remarks: first, the difficulty of moving away from long-established Francophone academic habits; second, the need for a gradual and pragmatic transition rather than an abrupt linguistic rupture; and third, the strategic advantages associated with English in a globalized academic environment. Taken together, these comments suggest that the English–French dynamic in Algerian higher education cannot be reduced either to simple competition or to harmonious complementarity. It must instead be understood as a negotiated reconfiguration shaped by history, institutions, and evolving academic aspirations.

Several respondents describe the shift from French to English as a long-term process rather than an immediate break. One suggests that complete Anglicization, if it ever occurs, could take two generations, while another explicitly warns against brutality. These remarks point to an important sociolinguistic reality: language policies may be announced rapidly, but academic linguistic habitus changes much more slowly. The Algerian university thus appears as a space in which reform is filtered through educational biographies, disciplinary traditions, and accumulated professional routines. Any serious implementation strategy must therefore take this temporal depth into account rather than presupposing an automatic adjustment to new linguistic directives.

At the same time, many respondents favour a balanced transition rather than a zero-sum confrontation between English and French. In their view, English should be strengthened because of its scientific and academic value, but not through ideological opposition to French. This position is particularly important because it separates academic pragmatism from identity-based simplification. From this perspective, a coherent policy would combine stronger support for English with sustained investment in teacher training, material resources, and

pedagogical planning, while preserving the functions that French still performs effectively in certain disciplines and institutional contexts. The central issue is therefore not abstract symbolic rivalry between languages, but the rational organization of multilingual academic resources.

The final cluster of comments emphasizes the strategic benefits associated with English, notably integration into global scientific networks, improved university rankings, broader dissemination of research, and stronger international cooperation. These expectations do not in themselves resolve the practical difficulties identified earlier, but they help explain why English has acquired such strong legitimacy in contemporary academic discourse. For many respondents, English is not simply another foreign language; it is perceived as a strategic academic resource capable of increasing the visibility, mobility, and competitiveness of Algerian higher education.

Overall, these comments invite a nuanced reading of the ongoing transition. What emerges is neither the immediate replacement of French nor the stable coexistence of two perfectly balanced languages, but a gradual restructuring of linguistic functions within the university. In this restructuring, English gains strategic centrality, while French remains embedded in inherited practices, disciplinary traditions, and institutional realities.

Conclusion

This exploratory study set out to examine how university teachers perceive the current reconfiguration of the relationship between English and French in Algerian higher education. The results show a clear rise in the symbolic and practical legitimacy of English, especially in relation to research visibility, access to scientific resources, mobility, and international collaboration. At the same time, they also show that French remains institutionally entrenched and functionally important in several domains.

The survey therefore does not support a simplistic narrative of total replacement. Rather, it points to a transitional situation marked by uneven change, differentiated bilingualism, and strategic multilingualism. In some representations, English and French appear as competitors; in others, they are seen as complementary resources whose value depends on the domain of use. What emerges most clearly is the need for a calibrated language policy that takes account of disciplinary diversity, teacher training, student preparedness, and the preservation of linguistic plurality.

Because the corpus is limited, the findings should be read as exploratory rather than conclusive. Further research should widen the sample, include students and administrators, compare disciplines more systematically, and investigate actual publication practices and language choices in institutional settings. Even with these limits, the study contributes to a better understanding of how the new

policy is being interpreted from within the university and of the tensions that accompany the current linguistic transition.

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