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## **English Language Supremacy and Cultural Transgression in the Algerian University Education**

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### **Abstract**

The present paper reports an ethnographic study that aims to explore the supremacy of the English language in the Algerian university educational system and how it can perpetuate cultural transgression. In recent years, language has shifted from its main purpose as a medium of communication to becoming a tool to implement exotic cultures inside domestic societies. In the Algerian context, English has become exceptionally prestigious and this supremacy notion has created a growing demand for English language instruction at universities and prompted students' preferences to study English as a major. However, this language integration in education has compelled consequential implications on the cultural identity of Algerian students and led to a devaluation of the Arabic language. Despite the global prevalence of English, it is crucial to preserve local languages as a means of cultural heritage conservation. Accordingly, the study is qualitative in nature where data was collected through classroom observation and interviews administered to a sample of English university teachers. This work investigates how students are affected both linguistically and culturally. English university teachers, as this paper vindicates, have observed this cultural impact and how they can potentially intervene in this cultural transgression by developing students' cultural awareness.

**Keywords:** English language, Algerian university, educational system, cultural transgression, cultural awareness.

### **1. Introduction**

The increasing emphasis on English language instruction in Algerian education presents a complex balancing act. English language students often fantasize about having "superior" cultural capital and are seen as more educated and cultivated than those majoring in their native language. This common assumption would eventually create an exclusion among students and shape a socio-cultural gap. The prevalence of English in social and professional spheres implies a linguistic and cultural dominance of the mentioned language. While English proficiency is undoubtedly lucrative, it is decisive to secure and ensure that it does not come at the expense of Algerian cultural identity. The current study, as stated in this paper, aims to explore the impact of English on various aspects of university students' social identity, leading to cultural transgression.

### **Statement of the Problem:**

The prevalence of English as a dominant language of instruction in Algerian universities has led to concerns about cultural transgression and the potential erosion of Algerian cultural heritage. This imposition of this foreign language can alienate students from their cultural roots and undermine the significance of Arabic, the national language. Accordingly, the main question this work conveys is: How does English language prevalence in Algerian university education influence cultural preservation?

### **Hypothesis:**

The dominance of English language will lead to a transgression of the students' cultural identity in the Algerian university.

### **Objectives:**

This research endeavor seeks to:

- Evaluate to what extent English as a language of instruction can influence Algerian cultural identity.
- Explore the impact of English language supremacy on preserving Arabic, the national language, and its role in higher education.
- Investigate the negative outcomes of English dominance, like cultural erosion and alienation of the Algerian cultural heritage.
- Propose potential solutions or strategies to mitigate the negative effects of the English language and promote a balanced approach to language education in Algerian universities.

### **Methodology**

In this article, an ethnographic study will examine the significance of the English language and its culture in the Algerian educational system, particularly within the English department at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University—Setif 2. As previously mentioned, this study relied on participants' observation in the classroom, and a structured interview was conducted to gain a more in-depth comprehension of this phenomenon.

### **Research Design**

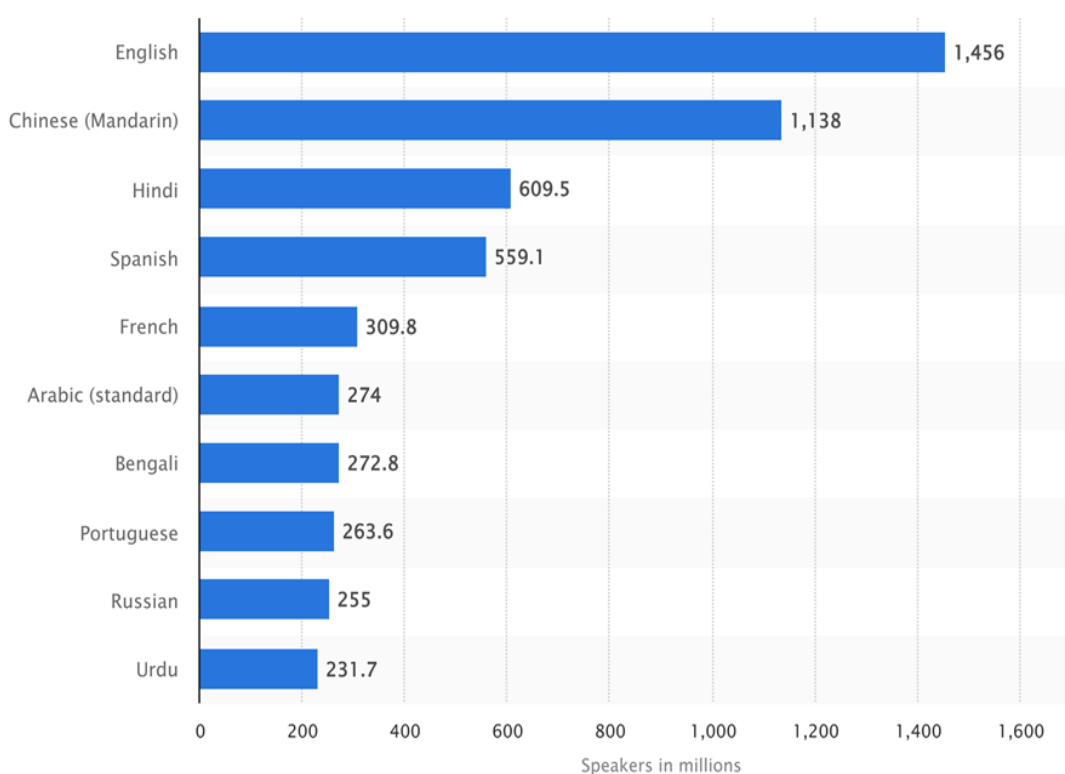
In this study, we opted for two types of qualitative research methods. Ethnography's essence lies in the researcher immersing himself within a group to observe its dynamic insides. Participants' observations were prepared to notice students' language use in various classroom scenarios and such classroom observations enabled the researcher to prove the repercussions of the English language instruction on students' cultural contexts. To complement the data gathered from classroom observations and to proceed the present study, the second method implemented was through interviewing teachers who differ in the field of specialization in the same department. The researcher asked the interviewees questions in one-on-one conversations. Following data collection, the researcher sought to analyze and interpret the findings into a coherent framework that could contribute to the study's objectives.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 The language of globalization

English has become essential for communication and success in the globalized world, with around 1.5 billion people speaking it as either their first or second language (Dyvik, 2024). The English language has been an active bridge in connecting linguistic boundaries and fostering intercultural understanding, delivering a shared platform for people from different linguistic backgrounds to come together and communicate. In other words, English has emerged as the world's lingua franca. Beyza Björkman, in his monograph *“English as an academic lingua franca”* (Björkman, 2018), asserts that:

*“English, in this sense, has reached truly global dimensions no other language has come near before. It is used in various domains, spoken by millions of people for different purposes”.*



**Figure N°01:** The most spoken languages worldwide 2023 | Statista

English is currently used in international organizations, academic conferences, and online forums. It is the undisputed language of business and innovation, but its global dominance is not only due to more than just economic factors but also because of its historical and cultural significance.\*

*The linguist David Crystal stated: “A language has traditionally become an international language for one chief reason: the power of its people.” (English as a Global Language, 1997, p9).*

\* **David Crystal** is a British linguist who works on the linguistics of the English language. His classic book *“English as a Global Language”* is considered as a reference to the history, present status, and future of the English language.

Since the mid-20th century, English has emerged as the language of globalization and international commerce. As European countries rebuilt after World War II, the United States had the opportunity to grow significantly and become an economic powerhouse. English came along for the ride as the global language of business (Guidez, 2020). This means that English is the language that is most commonly used in business, trade, education, and diplomacy around the world.

## **2.2 The English language dominance**

A complex interplay of forces contributed to the supremacy of English as the global language of the world. First, the U.S. became the world's leading economic power after World War II. English is the native language of this country, and this awarded English a significant boost in terms of its global reach (Crystal, 2003). Second, the rise of multinational corporations has also contributed to English expansion. Multinational corporations often have offices and employees worldwide, and they use English as their common language of communication. Third, the development of the internet and media has made it possible for people from all over the world to communicate with each other in English. The internet is a global platform, and English is the most widely used language on the internet. Hence, like in commerce, English supremacy reaches higher positioning in different countries to affect their cultural identity.

The dominance of English language internationally, as well, has various implications. Primarily, it indicates that English speakers have a notable advantage in terms of career progress and job advancement. Moreover, it means that the English culture and values are becoming increasingly superior around the world. Furthermore, it means that people from non-English speaking countries may need to learn English to participate fully in the global economy. The supremacy of English as a global language is an intricate case with many causes and consequences. It is a phenomenon that is likely to continue in the future, as English becomes even more widely spoken in the global world. Therefore, this may lead to what is called cultural transgression. Transgression is the cross-cultural exchange and spread of ideas, values, and practices between two or more different cultures. When cultures interact with each other in a two-way manner, they influence each other and create new forms of globalized identity and cross-cultural social and political organizations (Paleczny, 2016).

## **2.3 The film industry as a cultural tool**

Culture has also played a major role in English's rise to prominence. For example, cinema and music are powerful vehicles for the spread of English, and its use has become associated with American popular culture. Hollywood's universal expansion, prompted by globalization, has fundamentally contributed to the spread of English popular culture. While this has fostered cultural exchange, critics argue that it generated cultural imperialism and homogenization, potentially impeding the preservation of local cinema and culture (Mogul, 2023). In 2023, according to Nash Information Services over 67% of all feature films that were given a theatrical release in the world were in the English language. This means the majority of movies (2036) that were shown in cinemas worldwide were in English which demonstrates the dominance of English in the film industry. English-language films are more likely to be distributed around the world than films in other languages.

The following table provides a linguistic analysis of movie releases in 2023, with the "Share" column representing the percentage contribution of each language to the total worldwide box office revenue for that year. (See table 1)

**Table N°01:** Distribution of movie releases according to language in 2023  
by Nash Information Services

Language	Number of Movies	Total Worldwide Box Office	Share
English	2,036	\$19,170,517,170	67.873%
Mandarin	391	\$6,168,511,470	21.840%
Japanese	305	\$720,514,397	2.551%
Korean	270	\$577,466,370	2.045%
Spanish	368	\$575,165,694	2.036%
Hindi	101	\$358,569,961	1.270%
Chinese	44	\$322,066,046	1.140%

#### 2.4 English globalization threatens to local culture

The globalization of the English language can be seen from many different angles: as a tool for economic success, a creator of new social inequalities, a means of cross-cultural communication and understanding, and a possible passing phase in the evolution of world languages (Johnson, 2009). Nonetheless, it has implicit consequences that incorporate changing societal standards and cultural transgression. In other words, the widespread use of English can make it difficult for cultures to maintain their own unique identities; it prevents cultural empowerment leading to the marginalization of other languages and cultures. David Crystal, the linguist and author of *"The Dictionary of Languages"*, observed that a language dies every 15 days (Crystal, 2003). This denotes that valuable traditions, knowledge, and ways of life are lost every two weeks. According to Heather Murray, the globalization of English leads to the emerging encroachment of English on other languages and cultures in countries everywhere. This argues that English supremacy threatens the identity and cultural background of these communities.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Materials and data collection

As previously stated, this study relied on participants' observation in the classroom which assisted in the verification of how the English language is influential on students' cultural settings. Such observations were prepared on a weekly basis by the researcher who remarked on the language use of students in different situations. To complement the data gathered from classroom observations, a structured interview was conducted to gain a more in-depth understanding of this phenomenon.

The classroom observation was conducted throughout the whole semester. The observer taught the oral expression module. Debates, discussions, and presentations were used to examine the impact of this foreign language on the local culture of the students. The study included 81 participants of third (3rd) year students. They were divided into two groups; each group was taught for three hours weekly aged between 20 and 26 years. All the students belong to the English department at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University - Setif 2.

To reach the bigger picture about the cultural position of this language in the English department from the teachers' perspective, structured interview was conducted with eight (8) teachers included. The teachers had predetermined questions in a set order which can help the researcher to identify the patterns among responses and to distinguish suitable responses between participants while conserving other factors constant.

To provide additional information about the interviewees, the table below (See Table 2) demonstrates their: gender, age, qualification, field of specialization besides the years spent teaching English. In this interview, six teachers are female; yet, the remaining two are male teachers. Of the eight participants, five teachers whose ages were between [25-30] years old, and two others were aged between [30-35] years old, whilst the last one was 43 years old. The interviewees held a variety of academic qualifications, including two doctoral students, two PhD holders, and more two teachers were MCB, whilst the last two were MCA. Three of the teachers are specialized in language sciences. Two are linguistics teachers; while the three remaining teachers are specialized in literature and civilization. Finally, their teaching experience varies between two to twelve years.

The information acquired about the interviewees proved invaluable to the researcher. This led to further investigation into the gender, age, and background knowledge of language sciences teachers at the Department of English, University of SETIF2, might influence teachers' feedback and approaches to language and culture teaching.

**Table N°02:** General information about the interviewees

Gender	2		6	
	Males		Females	
Age	5	2	1	
	[25-30]	[30-35]	43	
Degree	2	2	2	2
	Doctoral Students	PhD	MCB	MCA
Field of specialization	3	3	2	
	Language sciences	Literature and civilization	Linguistics	
Years spent in teaching English	4	3	1	
	[2-5[	[5-10[	12	

### 3.2 Data analysis

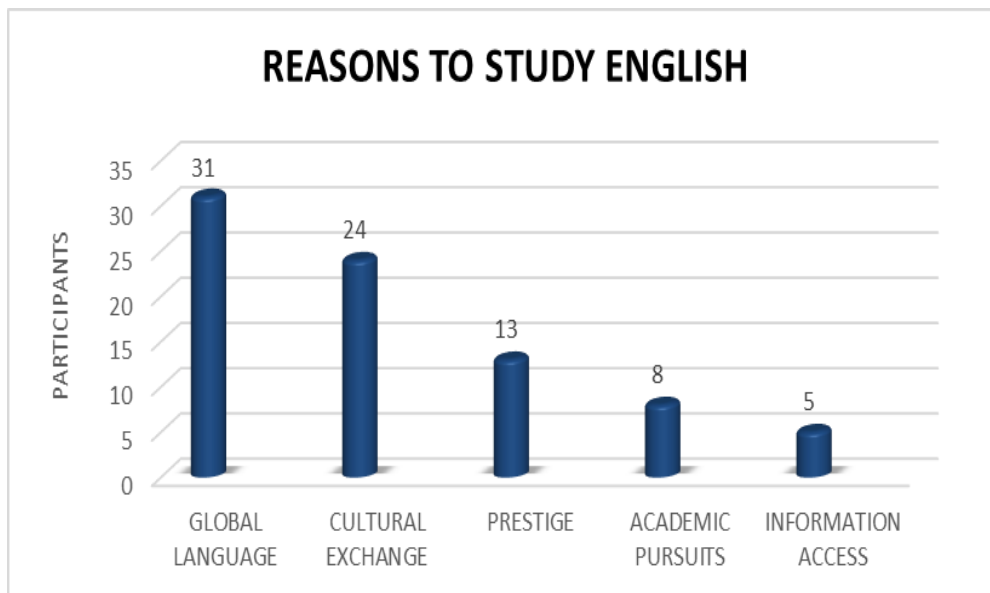
#### 3.2.1 Classroom observation

This study focused on the impact of the English language and culture in classrooms, specifically how much and to what extent students are influenced by this foreign language. Classroom Observation was the research tool implemented and conducted during an entire semester, to investigate students' English usage and how much the native culture is influenced. The table below outlines the procedures followed to explore the impact of the English language and culture on English department students at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University Setif-2. (See table 3)

**Table N°03:** Classroom Observation Form

<b>Classroom Observation Form</b>	
Teacher: Salhi Med Nadhir	Settings: Normal
Students: 81	Time: 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester
Group: 02	Day of week: Tuesdays (3 hours)
Year: 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Subject: Oral Expression
<b>SECTIONS</b>	<b>DESCRIPTIONS</b>
<b>TIME</b>	The observation was conducted during an entire semester, with students receiving three hours of instruction per week. The timeframe was adequate for collecting valid and reliable data and discussing and observing students' orientations toward English language and culture.
<b>STUDENTS</b>	The observer taught the Oral Expression module to 3 <sup>rd</sup> year English department students at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University Setif-2, aged 20 to 26. The study involved 81 students, they were divided into two groups (40 – 41).
<b>TASKS</b>	Oral expression is a fundamental module in which Students' attendance is compulsory. Debates, discussions, talks, and presentations were the main activities. Notes, observations, and reports were collected before, during, and after classes to understand the intentional and unintentional influences of the English language and culture on the students.

Based on the presentations, debates and activities organized in the classroom. Detailed field notes were taken to discuss the motivations behind studying English as a major, 31 students (over 38%) found that they view English as a global language that can improve their communication skills and open doors to international horizons. Additionally, 24 students expressed interest in engaging in cultural exchange, 13 viewed English as a language of prestige, and 8 others sought to advance their academic pursuits. The remaining 5 students aimed to improve their research and information access.



**Figure N°02:** Students’ reasons to study English as a major

### 3.2.2 Structured interview

To lead to higher reliability and validity in collecting qualitative data, we relied on structured interview which included three (3) questions. The teachers' answers to these questions helped to reveal the reasons that drove students to learn English and how this language may influence their first language and native culture.

**Question 1:** *Do students need to know about the culture to learn the English language?*

**Table N°04:** Classroom Observation Form

Answers	Yes	No
Teachers	8	0
Percentage (%)	100%	0%

The eight teachers were unanimous in their belief that effective English language learning requires not only mastery of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) but also a comprehensive understanding of cultural aspects to fully comprehend and utilize the target language. (See table 4)

**Question 2:** *What potential negative impacts might English language have on students' native culture?*

**Table N°05:** Classroom Observation Form

Answers	Negative influence	
	Cultural Erosion	Identity Crisis
Teachers	6	2
Percentage (%)	75%	25%



Most of the interviewees were in total agreement with the idea that students are influenced culturally during the English learning process. The teachers informed the interviewer that while learning this new language can be a positive experience, it can also lead to negative consequences. As mentioned by six (6) teachers, the concept of “Cultural Erosion” happens when native languages and cultures are neglected or undervalued, resulting in their decline or disappearance. Additionally, the remaining two (2) teachers illustrated that excessive reliance on English can weaken one's connection to their native language and culture, potentially leading to an ‘Identity Crisis’. (See table 5)

**Question 3: How can students balance learning English with maintaining their native language and culture?**

**Table N°06:** Interviewees suggested approaches to preserve students’ native culture

Answers	Suggested approaches		
	Cultural awareness	Balanced Bilingualism	Language Policy Review
Teachers	4	3	1
Percentage (%)	50%	37.5%	12.5%

The teachers' responses varied, reflecting the diverse modules they teach. All eight (8) interviewees agreed that students need to strengthen their knowledge of culture during the English learning process. Based on their years of experience, three approaches were suggested to learn English while preserving their native language and culture: half of the interviewees proposed Cultural awareness that can help students link their studies to their own cultural identity. Three teachers talked about promoting a balanced language education approach, which can effectively integrate both Arabic and English which is Balanced Bilingualism. The last teacher presented a language policy review within the Algerian higher education in which re-evaluating language policies is compulsory to align them with the society’s cultural and educational targets. According to the interviewees, the application of such strategies, students can effectively and simultaneously learn English and preserve their native language and culture, fostering a sense of global citizenship and cultural identity. (See table 6)

#### 4. Results and Discussion

In this research paper section, it is essential to highlight the significance of the results found from the classroom observation and the structured interview. After thorough scrutiny, the results have shown some realities about the language-culture dichotomy and how a relationship can be shaped between the two.

A key finding that should be highlighted is that the observation inside the classroom has revealed that a significant majority believe English is a global language that can enhance their communication abilities and open doors to international success. However, there are numerous issues of confusion and uncertainty facing students in the learning process of English, particularly from a cultural perspective. Accordingly, the researcher detected remarkable parameters on how students are negatively captivated by English supremacy, especially in terms of culture. Furthermore, how students are susceptible to sacrifice a part of their local culture for the motive of bearing a resemblance to English people.

Detailed field notes were taken during these observations that served as the foundation for the final ethnographic report on the native language versus the English culture comparison. Through presentations and debates, A comparative analysis was conducted among students that identified another key finding that the English language is often perceived as superior to the native language and culture. The students' attitudes and beliefs revealed a tendency to prioritize the English culture over their native culture, indicating a perceived superiority.

As expected, learning English can simultaneously exert both beneficial and detrimental influences on a student's native culture. These influences can occur in several ways. Based on the report of the interviews, all the teachers noticed that English language learning can have a multifaceted impact on a student's native culture. Exposure to English culture, values, and perspectives often leads to the adoption or adaptation of particular elements, creating a hybrid of native and English perplexity. Moreover, proficiency in English can shape a student's sense of global citizenship which fosters connections with international communities and promotes diverse cultures. However, there's also the risk of cultural appropriation, where cultural elements are misused or taken out of context, resulting in negative consequences.

It's essential to declare that the influence degree differs substantially depending on factors such as cultural background, the quality of English language instruction, and even the student's personality. While learning English can be a positive experience, it's crucial to promote cultural awareness, balanced bilingualism and respect to ensure that the influence is beneficial and doesn't lead to cultural erosion.

## **5. Conclusion**

The present study is an endeavor to explore the impact of the English language use on Algerian university students' culture. The undeniable truth of the English language's status internationally cannot conceal the cultural transgression that will prevail through the learning process. For university students, proficiency in foreign languages is a must which is seen as the only key to knowledge acquisition and entering the international communication world. Based on the qualitative data analysis, the results indicated that most students prioritize English over other foreign languages and they are passionate about learning it.

An approach that can be applied as a solution for such an inconvenient issue of cultural transgression is the intercultural approach to learning foreign languages. The intercultural approach aims to create a sense of cultural awareness between cultures and develop the learner's communicative and intercultural competencies. An essential requirement for cultural awareness in the educational system at universities is a necessity. Consequently, university teachers should seek such an approach to apply it in foreign language teaching programs so that fears of deprivation of Algerian culture and identity can be excluded, as well as to investigate the intricate relationship between language and culture.

This research not merely offers valuable insights into students' perception towards the English language supremacy but also emphasizes the critical role of the teachers using certain approaches in preserving their students' native language and culture. Eventually, the results will contribute to the broader field of teaching approaches by providing a framework for educational studies in Algeria.

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