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**ALGERIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHALLENGES
OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND
FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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Abstract

This paper reports the outcome of a study carried out in four Algerian high schools with 240 Students to obtain a deeper insight into their perceptions of challenges that they are facing in Learning English as a Second Foreign Language in the classroom, in addition, to see whether the gender plays a vital role in challenges. Quantitative data were collected by means of students' questionnaire. The results have shown that the majority of the respondents agree that all, except for one of the statements, which was "I think of a sentence in French first and then translate it into English" contribute to the challenges as English Language learners in Algeria. Hence, it can be concluded that there are six main challenges faced by Algerian students in learning English as a Second Foreign Language. These challenges are the lack of vocabulary in writing, the insufficient amount of speaking lessons to improve speaking skills, the time taken to recall exact pronunciation while giving the explanation, grammar problems in writing, oral fluency while presenting and the lack of confidence in reading in class.

Key terms: English as Second Foreign Language, Algerian High School Students.

INTRODUCTION

English is considered as the international lingua franca all over the world. This language has become the medium of communication for people in sectors such as education, business, research and in many other fields. A person who is proficient in English may be able to avoid many miscommunications and confusions in his everyday life. Thus, English has made this global village smaller as a person can express and exchange information with people of other nationalities easily. In this regard, Graddol (2006) confirms that at present, English is the most learnt language worldwide. All-Issa (2011), echoes the same opinion by stating that English is the language that most of the people like to learn as their second language. In fact, English proficiency level is considered as a scale to estimate a nation's development and growth. Moreover, at present, more than 65% academic publications are being printed in English for the world's larger audience.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to Feryok (2015), foreign language learning is a process in which learners try to learn another language after complete acquisition of their mother tongues. While learning a foreign language, learners try to become familiar with new orthography and pronunciations of letters of the new language. It is indeed a strenuous task for any learner. Many conflicting standpoints exist among the linguists regarding the process of acquiring and learning a particular language.

Algerian students face a lot of challenges in learning English. In this regard, many scholars conducted in depth research and concluded that various factors are responsible for the success or failure of foreign language learners. In this regard, in depth investigations conducted by some scholars claimed that there are different factors which decide the success or Failure of language students.

According to Nicoladis, Charbonnier, and Popescu (2016), age of the learner plays a vital role in the success of a foreign language learner. They argue that learner can acquire a foreign language successfully if the language is introduced to him or her at an early age. On the other hand, many other researchers believe that society, educational system and teaching pedagogy used in a particular context also have an impact on the learners' success in acquiring a foreign language. In addition, the surrounding of the learners' parents and friends play a major role in motivating them to learn a language. Some other researchers claim that lack of motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence hinder in successful learning of a foreign language or English. Similarly, most of the Algerian students face various hurdles in learning

English as a foreign language. So far, only a few research have been conducted on the problems of Algerian students' learning of English as a Second Foreign language. Hence, this paper aims to investigate the challenges Algerian students encounter while learning English as a Second Foreign language.

Identifying the challenges will undeniably affect the students, teachers, material designers and researchers by helping them to overcome these challenges and master English as a second or foreign language after the two mother languages Tamazight and Arabic, Whereas, French is the first foreign language.

1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions can be posed in order to investigate Algerian students' challenges in learning English as a Second Foreign language:

1. What challenges do Algerian high school students face in learning English as a Second Foreign Language?
2. Do the challenges of learning English as a Second Foreign language differ according to the students' gender?

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on pointing out the challenges faced by Algerian high school students in learning English as a Second Foreign Language. The findings of this study will be helpful for the educators and teachers to adopt teaching techniques that solve the problems of students. Moreover, textbook writers and syllabus designers of English Language Learning (ELL) field can write their materials focusing on the problems students face. National policy makers and education planners can also modify their approach to teaching of English language on the basis of this study's findings.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many research have been conducted English language learning and its challenges focus on students of many countries around the world. However, only a few research were conducted on the context of Algerian High School students' English learning and their challenges. This paper presents some of the research related to the objective of this study.

5.1. Pronunciation skills

Cherouana's (2010) qualitative study in Algeria on middle school students' failure to pronounce English words correctly found that the time allocated to teach English pronunciation was not enough. Moreover, the teachers were more interested in developing students' writing skills and the schools lacked proper language laboratories to practice

speaking tasks. The study further pointed out factors such as students' critical age of learning a language, scarcity of good textbooks and suitable environment for learning to be responsible for students' failure to pronounce English correctly.

The researcher agreed with these solutions to improve student's pronunciation but also the teachers of English language should also have good instructions and develop professional teaching skills that will make English more interesting to the students and make students concentrate more. However, before implementing all these new techniques, teachers need to be trained on how to make the subject interesting and how to handle students who get into the class with a negative attitude about English.

5.2. Self -confidence in learning process

Djeabbari's (2013), study focused on teachers' and learners' perception of English pronunciation with regard to learners' actual ability to pronounce English words, their self-confidence and speaking fluency in general. The researcher found that better pronunciations of English phonemes were seen among students who were self-confident and fluent in using English language.

5.3. Authentic Materials to Develop Students in academic writing style

Hallelet (2014) looks at the possibility of using authentic written materials in teaching English grammar. She opines that such exposure help students to learn grammar as well as the style of conversation. These students also display an improved retention of correction in English writing skills.

The researcher of this study agrees with Hallelet's point of view. However it is also important the development of other skills, like listening, speaking and reading should also be kept in consideration simultaneously.

5.4. Teaching and Learning Reading skills

Parajuli (2011) 's research included a hundred students and five teachers of English reading classroom from five different schools in Sindhupalchok district in Nepal. This mixed method study observed reading classes and interviewed teachers of reading skills. The findings showed that the teachers and students of these classes faced most difficulties in reading comprehension.

5.5. The age

In the meantime, Iddou-Derraz (2011) wrote a paper on the success of English learning where she mentioned that the success will depend on the age of the learner when commenced learning English. Firstly, neurologists believe that children have a fresh memory

which is helpful to learn new things around them. Moreover, they gradually learn to control their sensori-motor skills and language skills simultaneously. Secondly, from sociological point of view, children do not have any negative attitude that makes them refuse learning new language. They accept new language spontaneously. Along with all these factors successful learning of English also depends on the amount exposure to the new language, authentic and computerised learning materials.

The age factor is also there among the main elements to success in learning English but, there are several other factors that can affect the process of learning such as teachers, motivations, audio visual aids and useful curriculum.

5.6. The effects of lack qualified teachers and large class size

In addition, Odochi (2012) had identified many difficulties faced by Nigerian students in English class. For instance, certain pronunciations of English are not in the phonology of Igbo, a dialect in Nigeria. Students have difficulty in pronouncing these phonemes. Furthermore, the study pointed out lack of qualified teachers, audio-visual facilities in schools, recorders, and computers etc. as the factors that affect students' learning. Each class of Nigerian schools have a large number of students which do not allow the teacher to look at individual students' progress in learning English. All these factors jointly contribute in demotivating Nigerian students to learn English. The researcher of the study also finds similar situation in Algerian schools.

5.7. Writing difficulties

Al-Othman (2013) points out poor organization of English classes and curriculum as the main reason for writing difficulties in Arab students. He further adds, poor reading practices, lack of authentic materials and resources as the other causes of poor writing skills of these students. The study recommended that appropriate teaching techniques, resources and instruction can improve the situation in these writing classes.

5.8. Lack of teacher training plus old fashioned curriculum

Al-Nasser (2015) states that learning English in Saudi Arabia has many problems. Firstly, English is considered as an optional subject in Saudi Arabia's schools. Introducing English late in these schools is much difficult for a person to learn the language. Often these students just want to pass the subject and do not learn much of the language. Also, mother tongue interference, lack of teachers' training, modern technology, proper infrastructure etc. create anxiety among learners as the classroom environment is not conducive enough for learning.

Being a researcher and a specialist with a long experience in EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia, the researcher feels that some of the points discussed by Al-Nasser (2015) need revision and reconsideration. For instance, Al-Nasser could have mentioned the fact that the teacher of the language class plays an important role in motivating learners. If the classroom lacks certain things, he can make the environment positive by engaging students in various communicative language learning tasks.

Based on the aforementioned studies about the challenges and solutions suggested in learning English language, the researcher can summarise that the teachers of English language require training. Also, the teaching techniques have to be improved by implementing modern technology such as language laboratories, audio-visual materials etc. To make learning more interesting, field trips, visit to native countries, competitions, quiz etc. can be organised by the schools so that students become confident and competent in using English in their daily lives.

4. METHODOLOGY

6.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is descriptive in nature. Quantitative research methods usually involve statistics and numbers. While conducting quantitative research, the researcher collects numerical data and analyzes the data using statistical methods. However, this implies that, for the researcher to use statistical data analysis methods, the data collected must be numerical in nature (Aliaga and Gunderson, 2002). Hence, in this case, the researcher uses a quantitative method in the study.

6.2. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population selected for this study comprises of full-time public school students residing in M'ssila state of Algeria. The target population selected from four different Algerian secondary schools in M'ssila state.

A sample is a set of individuals selected from a population, usually intended to represent the population in a research study. Gravetter and Wallnau (2005) further stated that samples vary in size depending on the study. The sample size considered in this study comprises of 357 full-time secondary school students from the four selected secondary schools. Hence, the total sample that used in this research is selected based on the guidelines described by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

6.3. INSTRUMENT

This study aims at understanding the challenges faced by Algerian students while learning English as a Second Foreign Language and the taken data will be gathered steps from the right sample to overcome the challenges. In order to understand this, the researcher will use the questionnaire to collect information from a selected sample by asking a set of formulated questions in a certain sequence as determined by the researcher Hutton (1990). Many other scholars recommended the adaptation of items from previously used reliable and valid instruments because this measure helps in enhancing the reliability and validity of the newly constructed instrument (Mathiyazhagan and Nandan, 2010). In order to obtain data related to the challenges faced by students in learning English as a second language, this study will adopt questionnaire items from different sources. For instance, items related to challenges were adopted from Nawaz (2015).

5. Results and discussion

Research question 1: What challenges do Algerian high school students face in learning English as a Second Foreign Language?

For the first research questions, the respondents were asked 7 questions to see the most significant challenges for them to learn English as a Second language. The responses are as follows:

Table 1

Item 1: Writing is difficult for me because I have the lack of vocabulary.

Category	Frequency	Percent
strongly disagree	29	12.1
disagree	54	22.5
neutral	27	11.3
agree	66	27.5
strongly agree	64	26.7
Total	240	100.0

For the first question in this category, the respondents were probed on either they think writing is difficult for them because they lack vocabulary knowledge. Out of all the respondents, 26.7% strongly agree and 27.5% agree with this notion. It can be concluded that

the majority of English language learners in Algeria think it is difficult for them to learn writing as they lack vocabulary.

Table 2

Item 2: The conversation course is not enough for me to improve my speaking skill.

Category	Frequency	Percent
strongly disagree	14	5.8
disagree	43	17.9
neutral	28	11.7
agree	96	40.0
strongly agree	59	24.6
Total	240	100.0

The second question in this category investigated whether the respondents feel that the conversation course is not enough for them to improve their speaking skill. Out of all the respondents, 40.0% agree and 24.6 strongly agree with this notion. Hence, it can be concluded that the majority of English language learners in Algeria think that the conversation course is not enough for them to improve their speaking skill. The third question in this category investigated whether the respondents feel that:

Table 3

Item 3: I take a time to recall what exact pronunciation is while explaining something in English.

Category	Frequency	Percent
missing	2	.8
strongly disagree	6	2.5
disagree	32	13.3
neutral	24	10.0
agree	111	46.3
strongly agree	65	27.1
Total	240	100.0

The third question in this category probed on whether **the respondents take the time to recall the exact pronunciation while explaining something in English**. Out of all the respondents, 46.3% agree and 27.1% strongly agree to this notion. Hence, it can be concluded that a majority of English language learners in Algeria think that they take a time to recall what exact pronunciation while explaining something in English.

Table 4

Item 4: I usually face grammar problems while writing an essay.

Category	Frequency	Percent
strongly disagree	7	2.9
disagree	29	12.1
neutral	26	10.8
agree	75	31.3
strongly agree	103	42.9
Total	240	100.0

The fourth question in this category investigated whether **they usually face grammar problems while Writing an essay**. Out of all the respondents, 31.3% agree and 42.9% strongly agree to this notion. Hence, it can be concluded that a majority of English language learners in Algeria think that they usually face grammar problems while writing an essay.

Table 5

Item 5: I have a problem with oral fluency during the oral presentation.

Category	Frequency	Percent
missing	1	.4
strongly disagree	9	3.8
disagree	14	5.8
neutral	18	7.5
Agree	89	37.1
strongly agree	109	45.4
Total	240	100.0

The fifth question in this category explored whether **the respondents have a problem with oral fluency during the oral presentation**. Out of all the respondents, 37.1% agree and 45.4% strongly agree to this notion. It can be concluded that a majority of English language

learners in Algeria think that they have a problem with oral fluency during the oral presentation.

Table 6

Item 6: I think of a sentence in French first and then translate it into English.

Category	Frequency	Percent
missing	2	.8
strongly disagree	44	18.3
disagree	62	25.8
neutral	55	22.9
Agree	52	21.7
strongly agree	25	10.4
Total	240	100.0

The sixth question in this category explored whether **the respondents recall a sentence in French first before translating it into English**. Out of all the respondents, 18.3 % of the respondents strongly disagree, 25.8% of the respondents disagree, 22.9% were neutral about this notion, and only agree (21.7%) and strongly agree (10.4%) with this notion. Hence, it can be concluded that a majority of English language learners in Algeria do not recall a sentence in French first before translating it into English.

Table 7

Item 7: I feel less confident while reading session in class.

Category	Frequency	Percent
strongly disagree	23	9.6
disagree	48	20.0
neutral	38	15.8
agree	84	35.0
strongly agree	47	19.6
Total	240	100.0

The final question in this category explored whether **the respondents feel less confident in a class reading session presentation**. Out of all the respondents, 35.0% agree and 19.6%

strongly agree to this notion. Hence, it can be concluded that a majority of English language learners in Algeria think that they feel less confident in a class reading session presentation.

Descriptive Statistics

According to the descriptive statistic table generated, all of the questions, except for one scored a median scale of 4.00 with indicate that the median response/ scale based on the Likert scale is agree. Hence, it can be concluded that a majority of the respondents agree to the notions given- indicating that lack of vocabulary, the insufficient among of speaking (conversation) instruction, grammar, take a time to recall, oral fluency and the lack of confidence as the challenges they face in learning English. Meanwhile, for the statement, "I think of a sentence in French first and then translate it into English ", the median scale is 3.00 or neutral, showing that a majority of the respondents have neutral feeling over in the use of French translation while using English. Based on the standard deviation, which indicate the spread of the set of observation it can be concluded that all of the questions have a small spread since all of the standard deviation small (between 1.00-1.3). Finally, based on the skewness, all of the questions have negative skewness which means that the mean is less than median, however, as the value of skewness is predominantly low, it can be said that the mean is close to the median.

To answer research question 2: Do the challenges of learning English as a Second Foreign language differ according to the students’ gender?

Table 8

Item 8: The significant demographic factor influencing challenges

Demography factor	Statement	Sig. Level of Chi-Square χ^2
Gender	I have a problem with oral fluency during oral presentation	.01
Age Group	Writing is difficult for me because I have lack of vocabulary	0.01
	I have a problem with oral fluency during oral presentation	0.00
School Name	I take a time to recall what exact pronunciation is while explaining something in English.	0.03
	I usually face grammar problems while writing an essay.	0.01
	I think of a sentence in French first and then translate it into English.	0.01
Respondents’ fields	Writing is difficult for me because I have a lack of vocabulary.	.02
	The conversation course is not enough for me to improve my speaking skill.	.02
	I think of a sentence in French first and then translate it into English.	0.01

Based on the findings, the gender of the respondents influences their belief that the problem of oral fluency during presentation affect their English language learning. Hence, only the respondents ` response to their belief that they have the problem with oral fluency during oral presentation has significant differences between male and female. This might be because females are often more oral than males, where they tend to speak and listen more compered to males. Hence, the female respondent are more concerned over the oral skills. Therefore, the other statements have no significance with gender. Moreover, this is also affected by the age group of the respondents. As mentioned, the study involved students in a high school in Algeria, aged 14-22. In general, this is supported by previous researches such as Cherouana (2010), who focused on learners in Algeria, as well other universal SLA researches specifically, Ellis (1985) advocates adolescents, who make up most of this study's respondents, to be more enthusiastic in learning language, However, older students might find it more difficult to learn English speaking skills as they might find it hard to elicit the desired fluency due to the more significant L1 and L2 interventions. The similar explanation can also be applied to how age influences the lack of vocabulary development which caused great difficulties among the students.

Meanwhile, the students' schools also can influence their beliefs in their ability to recall the correct pronunciation, grammar, and the use of French in translating sentences. Furthermore, the respondents' field also affects their beliefs on the difficulty they face in writing due to their lack of vocabulary, their perception that the conversation course is insufficient and the use of French to translate sentences into English. This some extents were discussed Hellalet (2014), where students in the art stream might be exposed to more authentic materials and be exposed to many more language inputs compared to their friends in the science stream.

Furthermore, the types of school and the students' fields of study might influence the students' motivation to learn the language skills and make them more concerned about the writing skills and the use of translation, as discussed in Gardner (2010).and Ellis (1985). As writing is considered as an important skill, and eventually the skill that will be tested in a public examination, the students take great concern over the skills. In addition, the students in different fields may have different emphasis on speaking skill due to their course requirement, where students studying in the art stream might be required to do the presentation using the English Language, particularly if they are exposed to English Literature or Drama.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

This study has provided valuable inputs of the challenges facing Algerian students as they learn English as a Second Foreign Languages. First, the students believe that their lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge hinders their ability to write. In this light, the teachers should provide more opportunities for them to acquire English vocabulary and grammar skills through the use of authentic materials and task based learning (use of essays). The explicit teaching method is also favoured by the students, hence, teachers can try to increase these types of activities in school.

Moreover, the students believe that the speaking skills, particularly pronunciation are not being emphasised in the classroom, which limit their practice of pronunciation in class and they feel little confidence in using English in the classroom. Thus, teachers must accommodate more authentic speaking activities, such as the students' conversation with peers inside and outside of the classroom to improve their speaking skills.

7. RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The teaching, learning, and acquisition of second language is a multifaceted process, hence, a quantitative study such as this might only capture a small fraction of this phenomenon, hence, future researches can take on the qualitative or mixed approach to provide a more comprehensive outlook on the teaching and learning of English as the Second Foreign Language in Algeria. Furthermore, future researches can look in depth into each specific factor and provide a more inclusive discussion of the factors, so that learners and researchers can develop a thorough understanding of the underlying factors affecting learners of English in Algeria. Finally, the study can be replicated across different demography, for instance, *future researches can take on students from universities or elementary schools and compare how results could differ or similar to each other*

SECTION A: Demographic INFORMATION

Instructions: Please tick (✓) the boxes applicable to you.

1. GENDER
<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
2. AGE GROUP
<input type="checkbox"/> 14-16 <input type="checkbox"/> 16-18 <input type="checkbox"/> 18-20 <input type="checkbox"/> 20 and above
3. SCHOOL NAME
<input type="checkbox"/> Ziri Ben Manad <input type="checkbox"/> Abd Rahman Dici <input type="checkbox"/> Ben Shabira <input type="checkbox"/> Abi Mezrag
4. STUDENT LEVEL
<input type="checkbox"/> The First year <input type="checkbox"/> Second year <input type="checkbox"/> Third year
5. STUDENT FIELD
<input type="checkbox"/> Sciences <input type="checkbox"/> Literature and languages
6. LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION AT MIDDLE SCHOOL
<input type="checkbox"/> Arabic <input type="checkbox"/> French <input type="checkbox"/> Tamazight <input type="checkbox"/> English

SECTION B: CHALLENGES

Instruction

The following set of statements is concerned with your attitude on challenges in which you are facing in learning English. Read each item carefully by ticketing in the most appropriate option using the 5-point likert below.

	Challenges	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Writing is difficult for me because I have a lack of vocabulary.	1	2	3	4	5
2	The conversation course is not enough for me to improve my speaking skill.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I take a time to recall what exact pronunciation is while explaining something in English.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I usually face grammar problems while writing an essay.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I have a problem with oral fluency during the oral presentation.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I think of a sentence in French first and then translate it into English.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I feel less confident while reading session in class.	1	2	3	4	5

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