



Voicing the linguistic difficulties of third year EFL students-teachers of non-English departmental affiliations in Algeria

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Abstract:

This study pinpoints the linguistic difficulties faced by third-year EFL students-teachers affiliated with non-English departments in Algerian universities, with a specific focus on how these challenges impact their productive skills (speaking and writing). Adopting a descriptive-analytical approach within a qualitative research design, data are collected through a focus-group interview following a purposive sampling technique of fifteen (15) third-year students-teachers in the Department of Foreign Languages at Skikda university, Algeria. Thematic analysis is applied to identify common patterns in the interviewees' responses. The findings reveal that despite their dual role as EFL students and university teachers in their own fields, these students struggle with insufficient exposure to English and limited linguistic competence, which in turn hampers their academic and professional progress. Students-teachers' reflections in the focus group interview reveal several recurrent linguistic obstacles. They pronounce lexical limitations, grammatical inaccuracies, and pronunciation difficulties. These difficulties are reported to minimize their fluency and accuracy in both speech and writing making them use a vague and less clear language which contributes to the production of a less coherent discourse. Moreover, the participants also refer to poor organization, limited use of cohesive devices, and difficulties in developing arguments, as writing challenges which undermine the quality of their written productions. As expressed by most of the interviewees, code-switching, low confidence and fear of making mistakes lead to avoidance of classroom participation, further limiting opportunities for practice and improvement. In response to these challenges, students-teachers suggest a number of instructional

interventions to elevate their overall EFL language proficiency. These include focused vocabulary-building activities, targeted grammar instruction, fluency-based speaking tasks, pronunciation practice, and strategies to address first language interference. Additionally, the need for professional development programs for teachers working with non-English department students is also emphasized. Overall, the findings of the study highlight the urgent need for a more context-sensitive and focused pedagogical approaches that address specific academic and academic needs of Algerian EFL students-teachers.

Keywords: EFL students-teachers, linguistic difficulties, productive skills, Skikda university

Résumé :

Cette étude explore les difficultés linguistiques auxquelles sont confrontés les étudiants-enseignants de troisième année en anglais langue étrangère (EFL) inscrits dans des départements non anglophones des universités algériennes. Elle se concentre particulièrement sur l'impact de ces difficultés sur leurs compétences productives, à savoir l'expression orale et écrite. En adoptant une méthodologie qualitative de type descriptif et analytique, les données ont été recueillies à travers un groupe de discussion composé de quinze (15) étudiants-enseignants sélectionnés de manière ciblée. Une analyse thématique a permis de dégager des tendances récurrentes dans leurs témoignages. Les résultats mettent en évidence que, bien qu'ils occupent un double rôle en tant qu'étudiants en EFL et enseignants universitaires dans leur spécialité, ces apprenants souffrent d'une exposition limitée à l'anglais, ce qui affecte négativement leur maîtrise linguistique. Cela freine à la fois leur progression académique et leur développement professionnel. Les difficultés les plus fréquemment citées incluent un vocabulaire restreint, des erreurs grammaticales persistantes et des problèmes de prononciation. Ces lacunes nuisent à la fluidité et à la précision de leur expression orale et écrite, générant un discours souvent vague, peu clair et manquant de cohérence. Sur le plan de la production écrite, les étudiants rapportent des problèmes d'organisation des idées, une utilisation limitée des outils de cohésion, ainsi qu'une difficulté à structurer et développer des arguments. Par ailleurs, des facteurs psychologiques tels que le manque de confiance en soi, la peur de faire des erreurs et le recours fréquent au changement de code entravent leur participation en classe, réduisant ainsi les occasions de pratiquer et d'améliorer leur anglais. Face à ces défis, les participants recommandent plusieurs solutions pédagogiques : enrichissement lexical ciblé, enseignement grammatical spécifique, activités orales axées sur la fluidité,



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exercices de prononciation, et stratégies pour limiter l'interférence de la langue maternelle. Ils soulignent également l'importance de la formation continue pour les enseignants qui encadrent des étudiants non spécialistes en anglais. En conclusion, l'étude souligne l'urgence de mettre en place des approches pédagogiques adaptées au contexte algérien, afin de mieux soutenir les besoins linguistiques spécifiques de ces étudiants-enseignants et de favoriser leur intégration réussie dans les sphères académiques et professionnelles.

Mots-clés : *Compétences productives, difficultés linguistiques, étudiants-enseignants EFL, université de Skikda*

Introduction

Linguistic competence is believed to be the cornerstone of effective communication and academic success within the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning. Accordingly, the success of the latter largely depends on students' prior knowledge and motivation. When these elements are absent, significant obstacles may arise. Therefore, mastering a foreign language is already a demanding task for most learners; A major difficulty encountered by them lies in language proficiency, which directly influences their productive skills, namely speaking and writing (Ellis, 2014).

Within the Algerian higher education context, the use of English is limited and only relies on conceptual and theoretical approaches as French and Arabic are the most dominant languages of instruction. For students with non-English departmental affiliations (those enrolled in disciplines such as biology, engineering, law, or social sciences), it becomes even more challenging for them returning to English after a long period of limited exposure to English and professional use. That is, their provided opportunities to practise the language actively in oral and/or written forms, remain limited, for their being students-teachers preparing to teach while still completing their own studies. This dual role causes pressure and introduces more responsibility for students-teachers especially with no adequate linguistic preparation and pedagogical support.

Students-teachers returning back to studying English after a period of limited or inadequate exposure often struggle to regain confidence and fluency in using the language. They may experience a linguistic disconnect



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between the theoretical foundations of the language and its use in communicative situations needed in their real and professional daily lives. These constraints are mostly represented in their speaking and writing proficiency. These skills do not only require grammatical knowledge but also a level of cognitive engagement, vocabulary size, and context awareness. To illustrate, speaking, for instance, demands accurate pronunciation, and pragmatic competence, while writing requires clarity, coherence, and familiarity with academic rhetorical conventions. Yet, without practice, students-teachers may develop anxiety, hesitation, and negative self-perceptions regarding their English proficiency.

This study therefore, seeks to investigate the specific linguistic difficulties encountered by third-year Algerian EFL students-teachers from non-English departmental affiliations, with a particular focus on reflections on their productive skills. By giving voice to their perspectives, this study also highlights more responsive and contextually appropriate solutions to enhance the linguistic competence of students-teachers, and hence ensure more effective EFL instruction across disciplines.

1. Literature Review

A review of pertinent literature on students-teachers learning EFL indicated that there are various issues facing them during their learning process. Research has shown that students experience difficulties in various aspects of language skills. These difficulties can be reflected in their oral and/or written productions.

1.1. The Importance of Productive Language Skills

One of the crucial aspects of language development is the ability to produce meaning with language. It refers to actively using language to convey meaning, thoughts, and ideas through various forms of communication, such as speaking, writing, and nonverbal cues. It is the outward manifestation of linguistic knowledge that enables a student to communicate effectively with others. This ability occurs in different forms. Speaking is perhaps the most prominent form of productive language since it encompasses a student's ability to articulate words and phrases, construct coherent sentences, and engage in communication. At the same time, writing involves the expression of language in written form, requiring a student to have mastery of grammar, punctuation, and syntax to convey accurate meaning. Moreover, productive language includes non-verbal communication like gestures, facial expressions, and body language, conveying emotions and intentions without spoken or written words. Therefore, when a student displays proficiency in using a language to express themselves, they have strong productive language skills.

The productive language skills of writing and speaking are essential to students' ability to communicate effectively and navigate various social, academic, and later professional situations. These skills play a vital role in fostering interpersonal understanding and enabling students to express their thoughts, ideas, and emotions. The impact of productive language on receptive language is also significant, as the two are interconnected and mutually influential. Therefore, developing productive language skills positively influences receptive language skills, as speaking and writing require students to engage and manipulate linguistic



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structures actively. This active engagement facilitates a deeper understanding of the language, thus enhancing the student's ability to comprehend and interpret spoken and written language. Additionally, effective communication relies on the interaction between productive and receptive language skills. Students must be able to convey their thoughts clearly and accurately while also understanding the messages others convey.

Therefore, teaching productive language skills serves a critical purpose in educational and real-world settings. These skills contribute to the overall linguistic competence of students, helping them to express themselves effectively in diverse contexts.

1.2. Elements in Teaching Productive Language Skills

Some elements that educators should consider when setting academic goals for their students include: First, **Audience** which interprets that understanding the intended audience is crucial for effective communication. Teachers, then, should emphasize the importance of adapting tone, style, and content of speaking and writing to suit the target audience. Second, **Genre** which includes familiarizing students with various genres, such as essays, reports, presentations, and informal conversations, can help them recognize and adhere to specific conventions and expectations. Last but not least, **Purpose** which implies that teaching students to identify and articulate the purpose of their communication, whether informal, to persuade, entertain, or to instruct, is essential for effective speaking and writing.

1.3. Linguistic difficulties constraining EFL speaking and writing

Based on several research studies conducted on the linguistic difficulties encountered by foreign languages students in different academic contexts, literature summarised and synthesised common oral and writing difficulties. The latter may reflect students' competence and performance that researchers regard as limitations. These limitations appear in different aspects of language such as phonology, morphology, syntax and lexis.

➤ Lexical limitations

Vocabulary size predicts both oral fluency and written quality (Nation, 2013). The latter emphasised that restricted lexical repertoires yield high hesitation phenomena in speech (such as filled pauses and repetitions) and lexical recycling in writing, undermining precision and cohesion. Schmitt, (2010) goes in the same line of thought indicating that limited collocational knowledge further depresses naturalness and readability. This knowledge could be manifested in the spontaneous and contextual language production. However, the lack of these language skills harms speech and writing cohesively and coherently.

➤ Grammatical control

This difficulty falls under two main levels: morphology and syntax. The persistent morphosyntactic inaccuracies tense/aspect, subject-verb agreement, article systems are among the most commonly reported impediments in EFL contexts and correlate with reduced accuracy (Ellis, 2015; Hinkel, 2004). For instance, in writing, syntactic underdevelopment also constrains clause combining and



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argument structure, reducing complexity (Ortega, 2009). Therefore, syntactic rules have been a daunting task for Algerian EFL learners because of the interference of the syntactic structures of their first language in constructing English language. Ellis (2014) points “the goal of SLA is the description and explanation of learners’ linguistic or communicative competence...the acquisition of an L2 feature may be considered to have taken place either when it is used for the first time or when it can be used to a high level of accuracy” (p.15). The objective of SLA, then, is describing the learners’ ability to use language correctly and coherently and features could be acquired through the application of language and focus on its correct use.

➤ **Pronunciation and phonology**

Pronunciation challenges significantly affect intelligibility and increase the listener's processing load, as noted by Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010). These difficulties span different levels of speech, including segmental features like the interdental fricatives /θ, ð/ (as in thing or that), suprasegmental elements such as stress and rhythm, and phonotactics (the permissible sound sequences in a language). In critical settings like high-stakes classroom talk, reduced intelligibility can lead to interactional avoidance from peers or instructors, which, in turn, limits the speaker's opportunities for communicative output and language practice.

➤ **Discourse and pragmatics**

Learners face challenges that extend beyond mere grammatical or sentence-level accuracy. They are often struggling significantly with discourse management missing the ability to organize ideas logically, effectively signal their stance or attitude toward a topic, and deploy necessary meta-discourse (Hyland, 2005) to guide the listener through their arguments. Compounding this, pragmatic gaps—misunderstandings or misapplications of speech acts (like apologizing or requesting) and politeness strategies—frequently result in language that sounds formulaic, abrupt, or generally inappropriate, particularly within the demanding contexts of academic and professional registers. This difficulty managing the flow of conversation and applying culturally appropriate social language can make communication feel awkward and undermine the learner's credibility, regardless of their vocabulary or grammar skills.

➤ **Cognitive and affective constraints**

Cognitive load rises when learners must concurrently attend to form and message, magnified under real-time speaking conditions (Skehan, 1998). The Output Hypothesis posits that pressured production promotes noticing of linguistic gaps, but this is contingent on manageable task demands and feedback (Swain, 2005). Affective factors motivation, self-efficacy, and foreign language anxiety strongly mediate productive performance (Dörnyei, 2005; Horwitz, 1986). Students-teachers' dual role can intensify these pressures: they are accountable as model users of English while still consolidating their own proficiency, heightening fear of negative evaluation in both speech and text.



1.4. Classroom realities of students-teachers with non-English affiliation

Students-teachers recruited in non-English departments frequently re-enter formal English study after a period of limited exposure, resulting in fossilized errors, attrition of high-frequency lexis, and reduced automatization (Ortega, 2009). Their professional responsibilities compress available time for deliberate practice, while their teaching context may not afford rich English input. This profile often yields :

- ✓ **Speaking:** low automatized retrieval, limited discourse markers, and restricted interactive moves (clarification requests, prompts).
- ✓ **Writing:** difficulty meeting academic genre expectations (argument structure, evidence integration, citation), and persistent sentence-level errors that obscure meaning (Ferris, 2011; Hyland, 2003).

The literature converges on a consistent picture: lexical limits, morphosyntactic instability, pronunciation challenges, and discourse/pragmatic gaps jointly depress speaking and writing performance. These are amplified by cognitive load and affective pressures, and in Algeria, by multilingual transfer dynamics and inconsistent exposure. While pedagogical solutions are well-documented (genre/phraseology instruction, intelligibility-oriented pronunciation, targeted feedback), their application to third-year EFL student-teachers with non-English affiliations has not been systematically examined.

1.4.1. Transfer in the Algerian context

Algeria's multilingual ecology (Arabic, Tamazight, French, and English) shapes transfer pathways in EFL development (Benrabah, 2007, 2013). Negative transfer is commonly observed in :

- ✓ **Phonology:** influence of Arabic and French phoneme inventories on English vowel contrasts and consonant clusters.
- ✓ **Morphosyntax:** article use and tense/aspect marking often reflect substrate and French-mediated patterns.
- ✓ **Lexicon and discourse:** reliance on French cognates and calques; differing conventions for cohesion (e.g., connector frequency) and stance.

At the same time, cross-linguistic resources can be leveraged strategically: metalinguistic awareness, translanguaging for idea generation, and contrastive noticing to stabilize difficult forms.

2. Statement of the Problem

In Algeria, English is a compulsory subject in higher education, even for students in non-English departments are required to study their specialties and write their dissertations in English. Therefore, their teachers find themselves obliged to switch their language of instruction from Arabic or French to English. The language that they have no background in it. Skikda university launched an English language training program where teachers from different departments have the opportunity to register as first year students-teachers of EFL to get their licence in English. After three years of studying English, many teachers claim that they often face significant linguistic challenges that



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impede their effective productions and communication in English. Accordingly, this study delves into the specific linguistic difficulties encountered by third-year EFL students-teachers, with reference to their reflection on writing and speaking abilities.

3. Research objectives and research questions

There is a need to investigate the challenges that English students-teachers in the Algerian university face and develop strategies to overcome them.

The study addresses this topic for third-year students-teachers across non-English faculties. It contributes by:

- voicing learners' perspectives on barriers to expression,
- mapping those barriers to observable performance in productive tasks, and,
- proposing interventions tailored to Algerian higher education.

Accordingly, the research is guided by the following research questions:

- What recurrent linguistic difficulties do third-year EFL students-teachers of non-English affiliation) report and display?
- How do these difficulties reflect on their productive skills (speaking and writing)?
- Which instructional interventions are perceived as most feasible and effective in the Algerian university context?

4. Methodology

Significance of the study

Although existing research has acknowledged the general difficulties faced by Algerian EFL learners, little attention has been given to student-teachers from non-English departments who find themselves in this unique situation. Their linguistic struggles are not only an academic concern but also a pedagogical one, as they are expected to transition into professional contexts where English is increasingly necessary. Without a clear understanding of the nature of these difficulties and their direct reflections on productive skills, pedagogical interventions risk remaining ineffective or misaligned with their actual needs.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the linguistic challenges experienced by third-year Algerian student-teachers of non-English departmental affiliation, with a particular focus on how these difficulties impact their speaking and writing abilities. By voicing their challenges, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of their learning context and to provide insights for targeted instructional practices that enhance their productive language skills.

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design, as it seeks to explore and voice the linguistic difficulties experienced by third-year EFL students-teachers of non-English departmental affiliation, and to understand how these difficulties are reflected in their productive skills, namely speaking and writing. A qualitative approach is deemed appropriate because it allows for in-depth exploration of learners' perceptions, lived experiences, and



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challenges, which cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures alone.

Participants

The participants of this study were third-year students-teachers enrolled in English language classes at Skikda university in Algeria, while belonging to non-English departmental affiliations (e.g., Sciences, Social and Human sciences, economics, technology and agriculture). This population was selected because they represent a unique group who juggle dual roles as both learners and teachers, and whose linguistic difficulties directly affect their productive skills and professional responsibilities.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who had sufficient exposure to English courses and were willing to share their experiences. A total of 15 participants were recruited and organized into three focus groups, each consisting of five (05) students-teachers. This group size ensured active participation, manageable discussion, and diversity of perspectives.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected through focus group interviews, a method well-suited for eliciting rich and interactive data by encouraging participants to discuss and reflect collectively on their linguistic challenges. Focus groups provide insights not only into individual experiences but also into shared struggles and collective perspectives within the group.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to direct the discussions while allowing flexibility for participants to

expand on relevant issues. The interview questions address key areas :

- ✓ The most common linguistic difficulties faced in learning English.
- ✓ Specific challenges in speaking (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency).
- ✓ Specific challenges in writing (spelling, grammar, sentence structure, organization).
- ✓ The impact of these difficulties on their performance as student-teachers.
- ✓ Coping strategies and support mechanisms they find helpful.

Each focus group interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was conducted in a quiet classroom setting to ensure comfort and minimize distractions. The discussions were conducted in English to allow observation of participants' productive skills, though occasional use of Arabic or French was permitted to ensure clarity of expression.

Data Recording and Transcription

With participants' consent, all focus group discussions were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy of data collection. Detailed notes were also taken during the sessions to capture non-verbal cues and group dynamics. The recordings were later transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were anonymized by assigning codes to participants to ensure confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The focus group interview data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) five six-step framework. The latter includes:



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- ✓ Familiarization with the transcripts through repeated readings.
- ✓ Initial coding of meaningful segments related to linguistic difficulties and their reflections on speaking and writing.
- ✓ Categorization of codes into broader themes (lexical gaps, grammatical inaccuracy, pronunciation difficulties, writing organization).
- ✓ Reviewing and refining themes to ensure they accurately represented the data.
- ✓ Interpreting the findings in relation to existing literature on EFL learning and productive skills.

After transcription, the data were carefully read and re-read to gain familiarity. Codes were generated to capture meaningful units of information related to participants' linguistic challenges and their reflections on productive skills. The codes were then collated into broader themes such as lexical difficulties, grammatical inaccuracies, pronunciation issues, writing challenges, and affective factors. These themes were reviewed, refined, and interpreted in relation to the literature

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the study adhered to the highest ethical standards, participation was entirely voluntary, and comprehensive informed consent was secured from every individual involved. All participants were explicitly and repeatedly assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process, meaning their identities and responses would never be publicly linked. Crucially, participants were guaranteed the right to withdraw from the

study at any stage, for any reason, without facing any form of penalty or consequence. Furthermore, all gathered data were securely stored using protected methods and were strictly used solely for research purposes, thus upholding the commitment to protect their privacy and personal information from unauthorized access or use.

5. Presentation and Interpretation of Results

The findings revealed several key linguistic difficulties which have reflections on oral and written productions of students synthesised in the following:

Lexical Difficulties

Participants repeatedly emphasized their limited vocabulary as a major obstacle in both speaking and writing. They reported difficulties in retrieving appropriate words during oral expression, often leading to pauses, code-switching, or avoidance of complex ideas. In writing, insufficient vocabulary hindered their ability to express precise meanings, leading to repetition and reliance on basic vocabulary. One of the participants' responses indicates the lexical challenges faced in oral and written productions. It is said: *"When I want to explain something in English, I don't find the exact word... so I just stop or use French instead."* This aligns with Nation's (2013) assertion that vocabulary knowledge is central to fluency and accuracy in productive skills.

Grammatical Inaccuracies

A recurrent theme was grammatical instability, particularly in verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and article usage. In speaking, this led to frequent self-corrections or hesitations, while in writing, errors affected clarity and



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coherence. The latter could only be attained through the contextual use of syntactic rules rather than focusing on the accurate structure could be formulated. All participants shared the same difficulty in terms of language use and usage. One of them mentioned: *“Even when I know the rules, when I speak fast, I forget them. In writing, I mix tenses, especially past and present.”* These findings resonate with Ellis (2015), who notes that grammatical control is often less stable under communicative pressure.

Pronunciation Issues

Pronunciation difficulties, especially with sounds not present in Arabic or French (e.g., /θ/, /ð/, consonant clusters), were highlighted as barriers to intelligibility. Several participants admitted feeling anxious when speaking publicly because of fear of being misunderstood. This may prevent them from developing the phonological competence. A participant said: *“Sometimes I avoid saying a word because I know I will pronounce it wrongly and people will laugh.”* This echoes Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, (2010) argument that pronunciation issues not only affect intelligibility but also learners’ confidence which reflects negatively their spelling mistakes and hesitation to produce language.

Academic Writing Challenges

Students identified multiple writing-related difficulties: lack of organization, limited use of cohesive devices, frequent spelling errors, and challenges in developing arguments. Despite years of exposure to English, they felt underprepared to produce coherent academic writing. This problem appears clearly when students are asked to write extended essays and

compositions. A participant confirms: *"I can write sentences, but when I try to write an essay, I don't know how to connect my ideas."* These findings are consistent with Hyland (2003), who stresses that writing requires not only grammatical accuracy but also knowledge of academic discourse conventions.

Affective and Professional Factors

Many participants reported experiencing anxiety, low self-confidence, and lack of motivation. Their dual role as students and teachers exacerbated these feelings, as they felt pressure to perform as role models despite their own struggles with English. Professionally, students-teachers find themselves urged to use English compulsory. Yet, as teachers, their anxiety to make mistakes in front of their students. This prevents them from using English in class. A participant comments: *"As a teacher, I feel embarrassed when I make mistakes in English. It affects my confidence in front of students."* This reflects Horwitz's (1986) concept of foreign language anxiety and Dörnyei's (2005) findings on the role of motivation in language learning.

6. Reflections of Linguistics Difficulties on the Production Skills

The linguistic challenges cited by the students-teachers also reported to have a significant impact on their productive skills' outcomes.

Reduced accuracy and lack of clarity

Students' ability to express their ideas in a more accurate and clear way might be affected by their lack of vocabulary, mispronunciation, and miss grammar use. These would negatively lead them to face challenges in expressing their



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ideas in spoken and written discourses, and hence their overall academic proficiency. That is, students may produce a repetitive vague language unnecessary for articulating their complex and elaborate thoughts and ideas. Individually, each difficulty presents an obstacle; collectively, they severely compromise both spoken and written productions. The net result is that the students' output fails to reflect the sophistication of their underlying knowledge, leading to challenges in assignments, presentations, and examinations, which negatively affects their overall academic proficiency and ability to succeed in high-stakes academic settings.

Poor Fluency and Less Coherence

Students' self-perceived linguistic barriers have a direct, detrimental impact on the fluency and coherence of their output across both speaking and writing. In speaking, these student-teachers reported a frequent and regular reliance on fillers (such as *um*, *uh*, or *like*) and pauses. While natural in small doses, excessive use of these features interrupts the overall flow of speech, breaking up phrases and ideas, which results in a perceptibly less fluent and sometimes halting discourse. Similarly, when writing, the interviewees articulated a struggle to maintain a logical flow of ideas throughout their compositions. This difficulty in transitioning smoothly between sentences and paragraphs, often due to uncertainty about vocabulary, grammar, or organizational structures. This negatively affects the coherence of the written piece, making the argument or narrative challenging for the reader to follow. Collectively, these struggles reflect how core linguistic difficulties manifest as surface-level fluency and

coherence problems, impeding effective communication in both modes.

Code-switching

For many speakers grappling with various linguistic difficulties in a foreign language, the immediate and most reliable strategy for overcoming communication challenges is to resort to the use of their mother tongue (L1). As the interviewees indicated, this often becomes the only viable solution, particularly in spoken communications, where the pressure for real-time output is highest. By temporarily switching to the language they know best, speakers can ensure they keep the interaction flowing and, crucially, express their abstract or complex ideas clearly without the encumbrance of struggling for vocabulary, grammar, or fluency in the target language. This code-switching acts as an essential communicative lifeline, allowing them to fully articulate complex thoughts that would otherwise remain vague or unsaid.

Low Confidence and Avoidance of Participation

The pervasive linguistic challenges faced by student-teachers in both their speaking and writing have a profound emotional and behavioural consequence: they lead to a significant minimization of engagement and participation in the classroom. This self-imposed withdrawal is primarily driven by the fear of embarrassment and public scrutiny associated with making mistakes. Consequently, this pattern of avoidance creates a cycle where the lack of practice stifles language development while simultaneously building anxiety around performance and fostering a low sense of self-confidence in their overall academic and professional



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abilities. Instead of utilizing the classroom as a crucial space for growth and feedback, students- teachers retreat, compounding their difficulties by forfeiting vital opportunities for communication and correction. In this vein, students-teachers commented that the linguistic challenges that they are faced with in their speaking and writing lead them to minimize their engagement and participation in the classroom as they feel embarrassed when making mistakes. This, therefore, may result in building anxiety and low sense of self-confidence.

Suggested instructional interventions to overcome students-teachers' linguistic challenges

By addressing the linguistic difficulties, third-year EFL students-teachers in the Algeria universities suggested a number of coping strategies to improve their productive skills and achieve greater success in their academic and professional endeavors.

- ✓ **Vocabulary Building:** Incorporate regular vocabulary exercises, encourage extensive reading, and provide opportunities for students to use new vocabulary in context.
- ✓ **Grammar Instruction:** Focus on targeted grammar instruction, providing clear explanations and ample practice opportunities.
- ✓ **Fluency Development:** Encourage activities that promote fluency, such as role-playing, debates, and presentations.
- ✓ **Pronunciation Practice:** Provide opportunities for students to practice pronunciation, such as through

listening exercises, tongue twisters, and pronunciation drills.

- ✓ **L1 Awareness:** Help students become aware of how their L1 can interfere with their English learning and provide strategies for overcoming these challenges.
- ✓ **Teacher Training:** Provide professional development opportunities for EFL teachers to equip them with effective strategies for addressing the specific needs of students from non-English departments.

7. Discussion

The findings reveal that third-year EFL student-teachers from non-English departmental affiliations face multi-layered linguistic challenges that directly hinder their productive skills. Vocabulary limitations, grammatical inaccuracies, and pronunciation difficulties were found to negatively affect speaking, leading to reduced fluency, avoidance strategies, and communication breakdowns. Similarly, writing difficulties stemmed from weak grammar, poor lexical variety, and lack of organizational skills, resulting in essays that lacked coherence and clarity.

These results confirm the arguments of Ellis (2015) and Nation (2013), who stress the centrality of linguistic resources for productive performance. They also highlight the affective dimension: student-teachers' anxiety and lack of confidence significantly magnify the impact of their linguistic shortcomings, aligning with Horwitz's (1986) findings on foreign language anxiety. Importantly, the professional role of participants compounds their struggles. Unlike ordinary EFL learners, these student-teachers are expected to embody a degree of competence and authority in English. Their inability to confidently speak and write in English not only



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affects their academic achievement but also undermines their identity and credibility as educators. This underscores the urgent need for targeted pedagogical interventions, such as:

- ✓ Vocabulary-building strategies (collocations, academic word lists).
- ✓ Pronunciation training focused on intelligibility.
- ✓ Genre-based writing instruction to strengthen essay organization.
- ✓ Confidence-building classroom practices, such as low-stakes speaking tasks.

These results underscore the urgent need for targeted pedagogical interventions that prioritize vocabulary expansion, grammar consolidation, and pronunciation for intelligibility, as well as writing strategies that focus on organization and academic discourse. Furthermore, the findings suggest that addressing learners' psychological barriers through confidence-building practices and supportive learning environments is equally crucial. Thus, the study contributes to understanding the unique difficulties of Algerian student-teachers in non-English affiliations and calls for curriculum reforms and professional development programs that address both linguistic competence and affective support.

Conclusion

This study has explored the linguistic difficulties experienced by third-year EFL students-teachers of non-English departmental affiliation in Algeria, and how these challenges are reflected in their productive skills, particularly speaking and writing. The findings reveal that participants struggle with limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, and pronunciation difficulties, all of which hinder their oral fluency and intelligibility. In writing, their difficulties manifest in poor organization, restricted lexical variety, and frequent structural errors, which undermine coherence and clarity.

Beyond linguistic constraints, the study highlights the significant role of affective factors such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and motivational challenges, which further impede learners' productive performance. The dual role of these students-teachers as both learners of English and educators in non-English fields intensifies their struggles, since they are expected to model competence while still grappling with their own linguistic limitations.

In sum, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the specific linguistic and professional challenges faced by Algerian EFL students-teachers with non-English departmental affiliations. By voicing their difficulties, the study not only fills a gap in the literature but also provides insights that can inform curriculum design, classroom practices, and professional development initiatives aimed at enhancing learners' productive skills and preparing them for their dual roles as students and teachers.



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Appendix

Focus Group Interview Guide and Sample Responses

Question 1: What difficulties do you face when speaking English?

Participant A: *"The biggest problem is vocabulary. I forget words during conversation and then I switch to French."*

Participant B: *"I have problems with pronunciation, especially with the sounds /θ/ and /ð/. I feel shy when I pronounce them wrongly."*

Participant C: *"I know grammar rules, but when I speak fast, I forget them and make mistakes."*

Participant D: *"I hesitate too much because I don't feel confident. I repeat the same words many times."*

Question 2: How do these difficulties affect your fluency?

Participant E: *"I cannot speak smoothly. I stop many times to think of the words."*

Participant A: *"When I hesitate, I lose the idea, and sometimes people do not understand me."*

Participant C: *"I avoid participating in discussions because I am afraid of making mistakes."*

Question 3: What are the main challenges you face in writing English?

Participant B: *"Spelling is very difficult. Some words are written differently from the way they are pronounced."*

Participant D: *"I cannot organize my essays. I just write sentences without clear connection."*

Participant A: *"I mix tenses when I write, and my grammar is weak."*

Participant E: *"I don't know how to use linking words correctly, so my text looks like a list of sentences."*

Question 4: How does your dual role as student and teacher affect your language use?

Participant C: *"It increases my stress. I have to be a model for my students, but I am not confident in my English."*

Participant A: *"Sometimes students ask me questions in English, and I don't know how to answer. It makes me uncomfortable."*

Participant D: *"I feel embarrassed when I make mistakes, especially in front of my students."*

Question 5: What strategies do you use to overcome these difficulties?

Participant B: *"I use online dictionaries and translation apps."*

Participant E: *"I practice pronunciation with YouTube videos."*

Participant A: *"I try to read articles in English to learn new words."*

Participant C: *"I ask friends to correct me when I make mistakes."*

Question 6: What kind of support would you like from your English course?

Participant D: *"I want more speaking practice in class."*

Participant B: *"We need feedback on writing, not only grades."*

Participant E: *"More focus on academic writing and essay organization."*

Participant A: *"We should have activities to build confidence, like debates or presentations."*