

BUSINESS ENGLISH BETWEEN PERCEPTIONS AND USE IN ALGERIAN IMPORT/EXPORT COMPANIES*

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Abstract

As English continues to expand its role as the global lingua franca of business, understanding its use in linguistically complex settings becomes increasingly vital. Despite growing attention to Business English (BE) in Western contexts, its adoption in multilingual, non-Western environments such as Algeria has received limited focus. This gap is particularly relevant given the Algerian government's recent promotion of English and the growing preference for it in professional domains. This study investigates how Algerian import–export professionals perceive and use English within a business environment. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight participants from International Business (IB) firms and analyzed thematically using NVivo software. Findings indicate that English is used primarily for external communication with non-Francophone clients, while Arabic and French remain dominant internally. Participants recognized the strategic value of English but reported uneven use due to limited training, language anxiety, and accent-related barriers. Regular users described greater confidence, wider market access, and higher participation in IB events, whereas infrequent users cited missed opportunities. Emotional associations with English ranged from pride and ambition to fear and frustration. Further, some professionals admitted relying on ChatGPT for drafting and improving written communication in the absence of formal BE instruction. The study contributes to research on BE in IB by offering insights from an underrepresented multilingual context and recommends practice-oriented BE training, AI-assisted writing tools, and policy support to align language skills with Algeria's global aspirations.

Key words: *Business English, Algerian import/export, Multilingualism, International business communication, Thematic analysis.*

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1. Introduction

In today's globalized economy, English has become the dominant language of IB communication, serving as the primary medium through which companies negotiate, collaborate, and expand across borders. Its role extends beyond mere linguistic exchange to include the transmission of professional credibility, corporate identity, and strategic intent (Graddol, 2006; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). As businesses increasingly operate in multilingual and multicultural environments, English proficiency is no longer an advantage but a necessity, especially in sectors like import/export, logistics, and energy.

In Algeria, however, the integration of English into business practices occurs within a unique linguistic landscape, where Arabic is the official language and French has long been the dominant language in education, administration, and commerce. Although English is still a foreign language in Algeria, it has recently gained visibility, particularly in international sectors (Aliouche & Nesba, 2024). Algerian professionals increasingly encounter the need to use English in written communication, virtual meetings, and trade negotiations. This shift is further supported by the Algerian government's recent efforts to promote English across education, research, and economic domains. Despite these developments, there is a notable gap in empirical research on how English is perceived and used by business professionals in Algeria. Most existing studies have focused on student needs or classroom settings (Benzerdjeb, 2021; Aliouche & Nesba, 2024), leaving the workplace dimension underexplored. Moreover, Algeria's distinct multilingual environment, dominated by Arabic and French, makes the adoption of English particularly complex, yet crucial for companies aiming to operate internationally (Beddiaf & Ben Safi, 2018; Maouche, 2021). The majority of studies on BE have been conducted in Western contexts, where English is often a second language or widely used as a lingua franca (Nickerson, 2015). Thus, context-specific insights from non-Western, multilingual countries like Algeria remain limited.

Henceforth, this study aims to address this gap by exploring Algerian business professionals' perceptions and experiences with using English in international communication, focusing specifically on the import/export sector. It investigates how English is used, how it is perceived in terms of importance, what challenges professionals face, and what benefits or opportunities it creates. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Algerian professionals use English in IB communication?
2. How do they perceive the importance of English in their IB communication?
3. What are the challenges they face when using English?

This study holds significance at several levels. Practically, it provides valuable insights for companies and training institutions aiming to develop more effective BE programs tailored to Algerian needs. It highlights the specific linguistic and cultural challenges faced by local professionals, thereby helping organizations design training that responds to real workplace communication demands. Academically, it contributes to the under-researched field of BE in non-Western and multilingual contexts, where language dynamics differ significantly from English-dominant environments. It also adds to the growing body of literature linking language

practices to globalization and digital transformation in business communication. Policy-wise, it supports the national agenda of promoting English use in economic sectors, offering evidence that can guide language planning in business and professional training.

2. Literature review

Business communication is essential for companies to function effectively, both internally and externally. It ensures that daily operations run smoothly, decisions are well-informed, and relationships with stakeholders are maintained. Scholars such as Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) and Brannen *et al.* (2017) agree that communication is the foundation of business expertise and success. It supports collaboration, coordination, and reputation management (Haase, 2013; Sinha, 2012; Tiwari & Chaturvedi, 2023). Poor communication, on the other hand, can lead to confusion, mismanagement, and failure. BE is a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) tailored for global business communication. It includes specialized vocabulary, professional interaction skills, and discourse strategies needed in international environments (Karasik, 2020; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). The growing importance of BE is closely linked to globalization, as businesses rely on it to navigate multicultural contexts (Gimenez, 2014; Mishchynska, 2024). BELF, introduced by Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* (2005), refers to the use of English as a neutral tool among professionals from different linguistic backgrounds. Unlike traditional BE, BELF focuses on mutual understanding and business outcomes rather than perfect grammar or native-like use. It helps professionals communicate across cultures by prioritizing clarity and shared goals (Graddol, 2006; Louhiala-Salminen *et al.*, 2005).

Many researchers have investigated different aspects of BE communication. Study by Dhanapala (2023) emphasize leadership communication, feedback, and team motivation. Others focus on the rise of digital communication tools such as emails, video calls, and instant messaging (Munjal, 2017; Tiwari & Chaturvedi, 2023), which are now common in global businesses. Cultural and linguistic challenges have also been highlighted. Hooker (2012) explained that cultural context affects communication and negotiation styles. Nickerson (2015) and Grosse (2004) pointed out the challenges non-native speakers face, including pronunciation and vocabulary gaps, which can hinder business performance. Gimenez (2014) and Boarcaş (2017) noted that professionals now manage multiple conversations on digital platforms, requiring clear communication strategies.

In Algeria, English is not yet dominant but is gaining ground. Beddiaf and Ben Safi (2018) found that English is becoming the preferred language in the oil and energy sectors. Maouche (2021) argued that integrating more English into business education would improve Algeria's global competitiveness. Kerkeb (2013) analyzed email communication between Algerian professionals and native speakers, noting gaps in politeness and structure. Several Algerian studies have examined BE needs and practices. Benzerdjeb (2021) found that BE learners lacked practical communication skills and that courses were often taught by non-specialists. Mebitil (2024) emphasized the need for training in speaking and negotiation for private sector employees. There

have been efforts to improve BE teaching. Khadam (2023) recommended ESP teacher training and more practical course content to better prepare students for the business world. Although many studies have explored specific aspects of BE, there is a lack of research on how Algerian professionals perceive English use in IB.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how Algerian business professionals perceive the use of English in IB communication. The focus is on gathering insights into their attitudes, experiences, and challenges related to BE use in professional settings. A semi-structured interview was employed to explore key themes, while allowing for the emergence of unanticipated insights. Data were analyzed using a hybrid thematic analysis approach, combining deductive coding based on the research questions with inductive identification of emerging patterns. To support this process and ensure analytical rigor, NVivo 10 software was used.

3.2. Sampling and participants

The study targets Algerian professionals working in international or export-oriented companies, where English is used for communication with foreign partners. Professionals in this sector frequently interact with clients, suppliers, and partners from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, making it a relevant and rich context for exploring the use of English in real-world IB communication. A convenience sampling method was used due to the accessibility and availability of respondents. A total of 8 participants were involved, representing the import/export sector. To provide contextual background and support interpretation of the findings, Table 1 summarizes key characteristics of the eight participants, including their job roles, business sectors, years of experience, and frequency of BE use.

Table 1. Background of interviewed professionals

Job Role	Sector	Years of Experience	BE Use	
P1	Sales Manager	Import/export (Agricultural)	12	Frequent
P2	Sales Manager	Import/export (Pharmaceuticals)	10	Regular
P3	Export Agent	Import/export (Automotive)	6	Occasional
P4	Export Agent	Import/export (Electronics)	7	Frequent
P5	Export Agent	Import/export (Textiles)	8	Moderate
P6	IB Development	Manufacturing (Household)	9	Occasional
P7	Marketing	Manufacturing (Construction)	5	Regular
P8	Marketing	Manufacturing (Chemical)	4	Limited

Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was assured. As participants were informed of the study's purpose and their rights before participation. Informed consent was obtained, and all responses were kept confidential. No personal or company names were used in the reporting of results.

3.3. Data collection

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide. The interview consisted of open-ended questions that allowed participants to freely express their views and experiences. Topics included Frequency and context of BE use, perceived

importance of BE, benefits and opportunities associated with BE use, and main challenges faced while using BE. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility and follow-up questions to explore emerging ideas. Participants were contacted via email or phone and interviewed in person for about 20–30 minutes. Most interviews were conducted in Arabic, preferred by participants, to ensure clarity and natural responses, then translated into English for transcription and coding.

3.4. Data analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the flexible and widely recognized framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, theme identification, theme review, theme naming, and final reporting. This method was chosen for its suitability in capturing patterns of meaning across qualitative datasets and for its adaptability to both theory-driven and data-driven inquiries. In this study, the analysis adopted a hybrid approach, both deductive and inductive. That is, while certain themes were predefined based on the interview questions and research objectives (e.g., use of English, perceived importance), others emerged organically from the data during the coding process (e.g., language anxiety, confidence linked to usage frequency). To assist with the organization and interpretation of data, NVivo 10 software was used throughout the analysis process. It enabled us to code textual data efficiently, manage thematic nodes, and track the frequency and distribution of themes across participants.

Regarding the validity and reliability of the findings, several measures were implemented to ensure research rigor and objectivity. This study was conducted by two researchers, we independently coded and analyzed the transcripts using NVivo, then compared and discussed our thematic categorizations. Divergences in coding were addressed through collaborative dialogue until consensus was reached on the final themes. This enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability, reducing the influence of individual bias and reinforcing the trustworthiness of the results.

4. Results

This section presents the key findings. Through thematic coding, five main themes emerged, capturing the multifaceted role of English in professional environments. To provide a quantitative overview of the qualitative findings, Table 2 summarizes the five main themes identified through thematic coding of the interview data. It displays the number of coded references associated with each theme as well as the number of participants who contributed to it. This synthesis helps illustrate the relative weight and recurrence of each theme within the dataset, offering insight into the breadth of experiences and shared perceptions.

Table 2. Summary of main themes identified through NVivo coding

Main Theme	References	Participants
Use of English in Business Communication	42	8
Perceived Importance of English	36	7
Emotional Responses to Using English	28	6
Challenges in Using English	39	8
Use of ChatGPT for English Support	24	5

4.1. Use of English in business communication

Thematic coding of responses produced four interrelated sub-themes:

1. External vs internal use of English.
2. Sector-specific dependence on English.
3. Language use determined by recipient (client's linguistic background).
4. Dominance of written English over spoken English.

First, the analysis revealed that English is primarily used for external communication with international clients, suppliers, and partners, and not at all in internal interactions. Internal exchanges, formal or informal, occur primarily in Arabic and French, often blended fluidly depending on the situation and the speaker. One participant explained: *"We speak Arabic most of the time inside the company, but in meetings or reports we switch to French."* Another participant highlighted the mixing of both languages among staff in daily interactions: *"At work, people speak a mix of Arabic and French. English is never used."*

Further, participants reported varied use of English in their business communication practices, shaped by the markets they serve and the linguistic background of their partners. While some used English daily, others reported using it only occasionally, relying more on French or Arabic in their routine operations (see Table 1). One participant noted: *"Arabic is for internal communication, French is for North African clients, and English is for everything else."* Another explained: *"When communicate with partners from India, or China, English is the only option. but for French-speaking countries, I always switch to French, it's faster for me."* However, for some participants, English use remained limited. One respondent admitted: *"I only use English when I have to. Most of our partners are Francophones"*

Moreover, the findings highlighted the predominance of written communication in BE practices. Several professionals reported using English mainly in written formats such as emails, contracts, and reports, rather than in spoken interactions. As one participant explained: *"I don't speak English that often, but I write it a lot."* Others emphasized the sector-specific nature of English use: *"In logistics and shipping, almost all terms and systems are in English"*

4.2. Perceived importance of English in IB

Participants had differing experiences with the benefits of using English, depending largely on how much they engaged with it in their work. Those who used English regularly described it as a key professional asset that had directly contributed to their career growth, responsibility, and confidence. One participant shared: *"Thanks to my English, I handle most of the international communications. My manager trusts me with that."* Another mentioned: *"I've attended trade fairs in Europe and Asia because I'm the one who can communicate well in English."* Despite the differences in how often English is used, all participants recognized its importance. Thematic analysis revealed four interconnected sub-themes:

1. English as a gateway to global markets.
2. English linked to career advancement.
3. Strategic awareness of its value among low-frequency users.
4. English as a symbol of professionalism and international credibility.

English was widely seen as a gateway language for accessing foreign markets, building trust with international partners, and maintaining competitiveness, particularly non-Francophone regions. It was perceived as a tool that allows companies and professionals to engage internationally and participate in global commerce: *“Whether you use it a lot or not, you must know English.”* Another added: *“Sometimes we receive documents, training, or manuals in English only. If you don’t understand them, you’re left behind.”*

Participants often linked English proficiency to professional advancement. As one business development officer explained: *“My promotion came because I could handle English-speaking clients.”* Another noted: *“We recently signed a deal with a company from India. It wouldn’t have happened if I didn’t manage using English.”* Even those who used English less acknowledged its value. One participant remarked: *“I don’t use it much now, but I know I need it if I want to grow or work abroad.”* English was also seen as a symbol of professionalism, credibility, and international readiness, even beyond its functional use. One participant put it simply: *“In IB, English is your face. If you can’t use it, people don’t take you seriously.”*

4.3. Emotional responses to using English

Beyond the functional aspects of English use, participants revealed a range of emotional reactions. These emotions were often powerful and complex, influencing not only communication behavior but also self-perception, motivation, and workplace dynamics. The analysis identified four key patterns:

1. Pride and growing confidence.
2. The symbolic prestige associated with English use.
3. Anxiety and fear of mistakes.
4. Feelings of exclusion or inferiority.

Several participants described moments of pride and increased self-confidence when they succeeded in using English. Being able to express oneself clearly in English was seen as a personal achievement and a sign of competence. One participant shared, *“When I use English well in meetings, it makes me feel professional.”* Another emphasized the way English elevates their perceived image in the eyes of others: *“Speaking English gives a good impression. Even when people understand French, they respect us more when we use English.”* These experiences contributed to a sense of accomplishment and belonging in IB settings.

Consequently, many participants viewed English as a symbol of professionalism and global readiness, even beyond its practical utility. It was often associated with status, modernity, and competence. One participant commented, *“When we speak English with foreign clients, they see us as serious. It gives a strong impression.”* This perception of English as symbolic capital reveals how language intersects with identity, branding, and institutional prestige in IB contexts.

However, not all emotional experiences were positive. A few participants (two participants) expressed anxiety, particularly related to speaking in English. This anxiety often stemmed from fear of making mistakes or being judged by colleagues or clients. One participant admitted, *“I get nervous in meetings. I know the words, but I feel like I will make mistakes and embarrass myself.”* Another echoed a similar

struggle: *“Even when I prepare, I feel pressure”* These reactions suggest that linguistic competence is often entangled with emotional vulnerability, especially when spontaneous oral performance is required.

Yet, rather than focusing on grammar or native-like fluency, more participant emphasizes that the ultimate goal of using English in business contexts is to transmit ideas clearly and achieve practical outcomes. One participant stated: *“As long as they understand me and the job gets done; I’m not worried about perfect English.”* This reflects a pragmatic and functional orientation toward language use, which prioritizes successful communication over linguistic perfection

4.4. Challenges in using English

Participants reported a range of challenges related to using English in professional settings, which were often shaped by how frequently they engaged with the language in their daily work. Thematic analysis revealed five key sub-themes:

1. Language anxiety and fear of making mistakes.
2. Limited vocabulary and spoken fluency.
3. Difficulty understanding accents and oral input.
4. Lack of practical BE training.
5. Insufficient real-world practice opportunities.

Those who used English regularly, particularly in written communication and direct contact with foreign clients, reported fewer difficulties and showed a more pragmatic attitude toward language use. As one participant explained: *“We use English every day with suppliers and clients. I’m not a native speaker, but I can explain myself, and that’s what matters.”* Another stated: *“Honestly, I don’t care if I make mistakes. The important thing is to be clear and professional. We’re here to close deals, not pass an exam.”* These professionals emphasized that the goal of communication is to get the message across, not to speak perfectly: *“Our partners are not native speakers either. As long as we understand each other, that’s enough,”*

In contrast, participants who rarely used English in their work reported lower confidence levels and greater difficulty in using the language, especially in speaking. The most common difficulties included limited vocabulary, lack of confidence in speaking, and difficulty understanding different accents during phone or video meetings. One participant admitted: *“I get very nervous when I have to speak in English.”* Another shared, *“I can understand emails, but when it comes to replying or speaking in meetings, I really struggle.”*

Several participants also pointed out that they did not receive sufficient BE training during their education, one respondent noted: *“We studied general English at school, but nothing about negotiations or writing business emails.”* Others highlighted the lack of opportunities to practice English in real contexts, one participant remarked: *“If you don’t use it, you lose it. That’s my case,”*. This contrast shows that frequency of use directly influences confidence and performance.

4.5. Use of ChatGPT for English communication support

A notable emergent theme in the data was the increasing use of generative AI tools, particularly ChatGPT, as a practical aid for business communication in English. While not all participants used such tools, those who did described them as

accessible, time-saving, and confidence-boosting resources that helped overcome language-related challenges, especially in written communication. From the data, three interrelated sub-themes were identified:

1. Using ChatGPT to improve the quality of writing.
2. Saving time under communication pressure.
3. Viewing AI as a useful but limited support tool rather than a full solution.

Participants frequently mentioned that ChatGPT helped them produce clearer and more polished English texts. They used the tool to refine grammar, adjust register, or find a more professional tone, particularly in formal emails. One participant explained, *“When I’m not sure how to phrase or want to make it sound more professional, I use ChatGPT. It gives me a base I can adjust.”* For users like this, the tool was not a replacement for thinking or content creation but a partner in improving the final output, especially in messages where tone and clarity mattered.

The time-saving aspect of ChatGPT also emerged as a key benefit, particularly in high-pressure environments where professionals needed to respond quickly and effectively. As one participant put it, *“Sometimes I get urgent messages from clients, and I don’t have time. I paste it in ChatGPT and get a clean version.”* This highlights how AI tools are becoming part of the real-time communication process.

At the same time, participants showed a degree of caution about overreliance. While appreciating the convenience and support, some professionals emphasized that AI tools should be used just to assist. As one participant noted, *“It’s useful, but I still need to understand what I’m saying. I don’t want to rely on it all the time.”*

4.6. Visual illustration of the main findings

A mind-map was developed to provide a concise, visual synthesis of the main findings emerging from the thematic analysis. Figure 1 presents a comprehensive summary of the five major themes and their detailed sub-points.

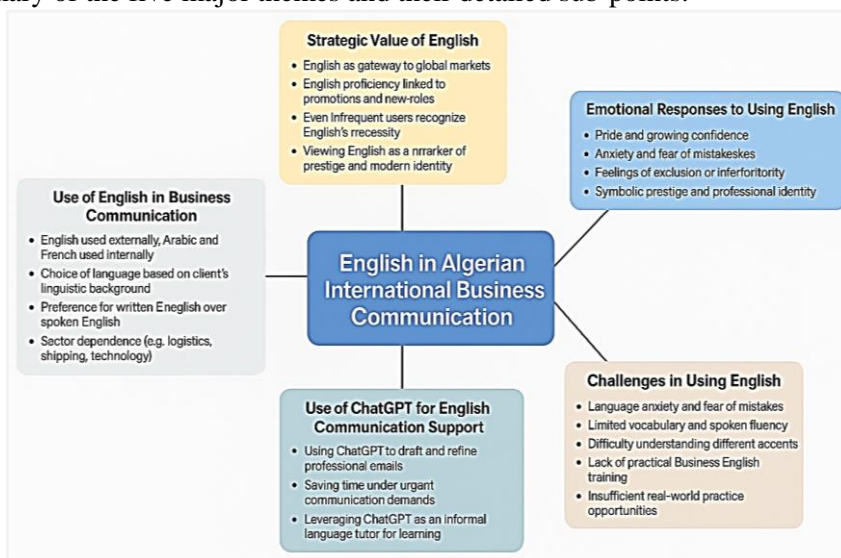


Figure 1. Mind map of key findings: English in Algerian IB communication

In qualitative research, such visual summaries are particularly valuable for distilling complex, multi-dimensional insights and making them accessible to a broad academic audience. Figure 1 illustrates how BE in Algerian IB communication operates as a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by strategic, emotional, and practical factors. It highlights the centrality of BE as both a professional necessity and a marker of modern identity, while also revealing challenges related to language anxiety, limited training, and contextual constraints. Notably, the inclusion of AI use reflects the emerging role of AI tools as support mechanisms in IB communication.

5. Discussion

5.1. Use of English: Practical but uneven

The study confirms that English is not the dominant language in Algerian IB but serves as a selective, pragmatic tool, mainly for external communication with non-Francophone partners. Internally, Arabic and French prevail across daily interactions and formal exchanges, reinforcing Algeria's multilingual business environment, as noted by Maouche (2021) and Beddiaf and Ben Safi (2018). English is typically employed only when communicating with foreign partners, particularly those from non-Francophone regions such as Asia and the Middle East, while French remains the default with Francophone recipients. This recipient-based adjustment supports Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's (2011) view of English as situationally flexible rather than universally imposed.

The study also highlights sector-specific reliance on BE, especially in logistics, shipping, and supply chain domains, where professionals frequently engage with English-language documents, confirming findings by Aliouche and Nesba (2024). Moreover, BE is predominantly used in written formats like emails, contracts, and product documentation, aligning with Maouche's (2021) observation that writing is the main mode of BE use in Algerian IB. This preference for asynchronous communication allows more time for planning and checking, helping professionals manage linguistic challenges.

Overall, BE is used as a contextual and utilitarian resource, shaped by partner language, industry norms, internal company practices, and task requirements. Its flexible use reflects local linguistic realities and professionals' adaptive strategies in navigating IB settings.

5.2. Perceived importance: A universal agreement

Despite variations in BE usage across roles and sectors, participants widely acknowledged its importance in IB. English was viewed not only as a practical communication tool but also as a strategic asset for career development, confirming earlier research highlighting its symbolic and instrumental value in global business (Graddol, 2006; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). Participants who frequently used BE linked it to career progression, increased responsibility, and greater visibility. One noted being entrusted with IB dealings due to their English skills, while others highlighted access to trade fairs and cross-border collaboration, opportunities often inaccessible to less proficient colleagues. These insights support the notion that BE serves as linguistic capital, facilitating access to global markets and enhancing

individuals' roles as international intermediaries (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011; Nickerson, 2015).

Even participants with limited BE use recognized its value, some expressing regret over missed opportunities due to low proficiency. This awareness, despite discomfort or infrequent use, reflects the symbolic weight BE carries in professional contexts. As Rogerson-Revell (2007) observed, BE is increasingly seen as an expected skill for upward mobility and market expansion. Overall, BE is regarded as essential for credibility, global engagement, and professional advancement, reinforcing the urgency many feel to improve their skills in an English-dominated economic landscape.

5.3. Emotional responses to using English

The study reveals a strong emotional dimension surrounding BE use in Algerian IB settings, with reactions ranging from pride and confidence to anxiety, exclusion, and aspiration. These affective responses were closely tied to usage frequency and communicative competence, supporting findings from multilingual workplace research (Brannen *et al.*, 2017; Tange & Lauring, 2009). Regular BE users expressed pride in handling high-stakes communication and viewed BE proficiency as a marker of international competence and self-worth, echoing Tange and Lauring's (2009) view that effective multilingual expression fosters emotional satisfaction. In contrast, participants with lower proficiency reported anxiety, fear of errors, and marginalization, especially in oral interactions. These emotions reflect known patterns of foreign language anxiety and the fear of negative evaluation (Brannen *et al.*, 2017; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010). Some participants also felt excluded from IB duties, reinforcing feelings of professional inadequacy, an issue Rogerson-Revell (2007) linked to the gatekeeping role of BE in multinational operations.

Despite these challenges, many participants adopted a pragmatic approach, focusing on clarity over grammatical perfection, an attitude aligned with the BELF perspective, prioritizes effectiveness in intercultural communication (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010). Hence, BE emerges not only as a tool but as a psychological and social force that shapes identity, confidence, and professional inclusion. These findings underscore the need for affect-sensitive training and inclusive policies to reduce anxiety and enhance empowerment in English-mediated workplaces.

5.4. Challenges: Frequency as a key factor

A key finding of the study is the significant contrast in challenges based on participants' frequency of BE use. Frequent users, often engaged in international communication, developed a pragmatic, goal-driven approach, emphasizing clarity and outcomes over linguistic perfection. Their perspective aligns with BELF principles, which prioritize effectiveness and mutual understanding over native-like accuracy (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010). Conversely, participants with limited exposure reported high language anxiety, especially in spontaneous speech during meetings or calls. Common issues included limited vocabulary, slow response times, and reliance on colleagues, factors that diminished their participation and confidence. These observations echo Benzerdjeb's (2021) finding that low-

proficiency professionals tend to defer BE tasks to others, excluding themselves from key interactions.

Underlying these difficulties is a persistent lack of practice-oriented BE training in Algeria, previously documented by Aliouche and Nesba (2024) and Kerkeb (2013). Participants' struggles reflected broader systemic gaps in business-relevant language education. The consequences, both psychological and professional, include reduced engagement, missed opportunities, and unequal access to international roles, concerns also noted by Benzerdjeb (2021) and Mebitil (2024).

Overall, frequency of BE use emerges not just as a variable but as a powerful determinant of competence, confidence, and workplace inclusion. Regular exposure promotes fluency and reduces fear, while limited use sustains insecurity. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted, interactive BE training that fosters spontaneous use and builds communicative resilience in real-world business settings.

5.5. Use of ChatGPT for English communication support

A novel and emergent finding of this study is the integration of ChatGPT as a support tool for professional BE communication in Algerian IB settings. Despite its growing use, this phenomenon remains largely undocumented in the business literature, highlighting a significant research gap at the intersection of language, commerce, and AI. Participants reported using ChatGPT to improve grammar, tone, and clarity in formal documents such as emails and contracts, particularly in time-sensitive situations. Rather than replacing human effort, the tool was viewed as a supportive aid to enhance professionalism and boost user confidence. It helped compensate for perceived linguistic weaknesses while preserving business credibility in global interactions. While no prior research has explored this use in the IB context, parallels can be drawn from academia. Studies by Rudolph *et al.* (2024) and Lund and Wang (2023) have shown ChatGPT's effectiveness in improving writing, enhancing learner autonomy, and offering real-time feedback. These academic insights mirror business users' appreciation, though notable differences in context and purpose exist.

This integration signals a broader shift toward AI-assisted communication, raising critical concerns about digital literacy, user dependence, and evolving norms. In multilingual contexts like Algeria, future research should explore how such tools affect not only linguistic performance but also communicative behaviors and institutional expectations in IB.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This study examined how Algerian import/export professionals perceive and use BE in IB communication. English, though not dominant, functions pragmatically as a flexible lingua franca mainly for external dealings with non-Francophone partners. Its use is largely written and purpose-driven, reflecting a practical rather than grammatical orientation consistent with the BELF perspective.

Findings reveal that frequent users of BE show greater confidence and career mobility, while infrequent users experience anxiety and exclusion, exposing the impact of uneven exposure and the absence of practice-based BE training. Emotional

responses also varied widely, indicating that affective factors are central to workplace communication and should inform future training design.

A notable insight is the emerging use of ChatGPT to support BE writing and communication, which users found beneficial but potentially risky if over relied upon. Henceforth, educational institutions and companies are urged to develop context-specific BE training that integrates digital literacy and AI use.

Future research should explore BE use in additional Algerian sectors, assess its impact on business outcomes, and evaluate how AI tools affect language skills and workplace communication practices. Such insights would contribute to a deeper understanding of English's evolving role in Algeria's multilingual IB landscape.

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