



Developing English Language Education in the Algerian Educational System: A Critical Analysis of Its Integration in the Third Year of Primary School and Its Impact on the First Year of Middle School Curriculum (2022–2026)

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Abstract

This study investigates Algeria's strategic shift in language-in-education policy, marked by introducing English instruction in the third year of primary education (2022/2023) alongside the exclusive recruitment of specialist teachers. This reform represents an institutional break from the generalist teacher model, formally establishing Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) as a distinct pedagogical field. Utilizing a multidimensional comparative methodology comprising documentary analysis, historical tracing, and structural curriculum comparison the research assesses the reform's implications for the first-year middle school curriculum as the inaugural cohort approaches this transition in 2025/2026.

Findings reveal that learners now study Arabic, French, and English concurrently from age eight. Delivered by university-trained specialists, the new English curriculum employs an action-oriented communicative approach, prioritizing oral skills and interactive, child-appropriate activities. Crucially, the study highlights the urgent need to fundamentally reengineer the first-year middle school curriculum to ensure pedagogical continuity and avert redundancy or educational rupture. Despite considerable implementation challenges, this policy shift reflects Algeria's conscious geopolitical repositioning toward integrating into the global knowledge economy, balancing Francophone and Anglophone spheres. The study concludes with multilevel recommendations to sustain the reform's quality and long-term viability.

Keywords: Language-in-education policy, Curriculum reform, Primary education, TEYL, Algeria.



1. Introduction

The Algerian educational system is undergoing a profound transformative phase that reflects an unyielding national will to keep pace with accelerating global shifts and the imperatives of the digital knowledge economy. Perhaps the most conspicuous, significant, and audacious manifestation of this will is the sovereign strategic decision to introduce the English language starting from the third year of primary education as of the 2022/2023 academic year, thereby surpassing previous reforms that had established its instruction from the first year of middle school since 2003. This decision was neither a mere procedural adjustment in the sequencing of subjects within the learning ladder, nor a circumstantial response to societal demands rather, it constituted an explicit declaration of a fundamental philosophical reconsideration of the country's entire language in education policy. The seriousness of this orientation was tangibly embodied in a parallel administrative and pedagogical decision no less revolutionary in import, namely the Ministry of National Education's decree to recruit specialist English language teachers graduates of university English departments and higher schools for teachers exclusively for the primary stage. This measure unequivocally enshrines the principle of professionalism in modern language instruction and valorizes the specificity of this delicate pedagogical domain, signaling a clear break with the erstwhile conception that any generalist classroom teacher could, after brief training, impart the rudiments of a foreign language to children at the outset of their educational journey.

This study derives its utmost importance from its pivotal and exceptional historical timing we now stand in the 2025/2026 academic year, the very moment at which the first cohort of pupils who received initial English instruction at the hands of specialist teachers reaches the middle school level. This rare historical juncture presents an invaluable field research opportunity to assess the efficacy of this dual reform in both its temporal and human dimensions, to observe its concrete and actual repercussions on learners' educational trajectories, and to identify its strengths and shortcomings. It is an opportunity that demands a deep and nuanced understanding of the complex, multifaceted Algerian context, where Standard Arabic coexists as a national and official language and the primary medium of instruction for scientific and literary subjects Tamazight as a national and official language French as a first foreign language with a strong



and pervasive presence in the economic and administrative spheres and English as a second foreign language introduced at an early age, unencumbered by the same colonial legacy.

This study endeavors to deconstruct a central, compound problematic that can be formulated as follows: How has the decision to introduce English in the third year of primary school, bolstered by the policy of recruiting specialist teachers, impacted the curricular structure and pedagogical practices within the Algerian school? What is the nature and scale of the transformations required in the first year middle school curriculum to ensure the principles of continuity and cognitive integration, while averting the perils of curricular shock or tedium born of repetition? Branching from this axial problematic are several subsidiary questions encompassing the historical context of the decision, the structural and philosophical characteristics of the new curricula, their ramified effects on both learners and teachers, the implementation challenges they face, and ultimately, the formulation of practical, actionable recommendations for continuous improvement.

2. Theoretical Background and Historical Context

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Language Acquisition and Early Plurilingualism

This study rests upon an integrated and mutually reinforcing set of leading theoretical frameworks in the fields of second language acquisition and plurilingualism, which furnish the lenses necessary for analyzing the Algerian experience and interpreting its outcomes. First, the Critical Period Hypothesis, formulated by Eric Lenneberg (1967) and subsequently applied to second language acquisition by Michael Long (1990), constitutes the cornerstone of the theoretical case for the early introduction of language instruction. This hypothesis posits the existence of an optimal "neurobiological window" during which the brain's plasticity and its innate readiness to acquire new phonological and syntactic systems are at their peak, before this capacity gradually declines with the onset of puberty. The early age targeted by the new policy (8–9 years) places the Algerian learner squarely within this golden window, auguring well for the attainment of authentic pronunciation and sound linguistic intuition outcomes that are considerably harder to achieve at later developmental stages.



Moving from the level of biological age to that of classroom practice, Stephen Krashen's (1982) Natural Approach model, through its five renowned hypotheses most notably the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis ($i+1$) provides an application framework of paramount importance. This hypothesis asserts that language acquisition occurs subconsciously when the learner is exposed to comprehensible linguistic input in a natural context, slightly exceeding their current proficiency level in complexity. This theoretically justifies the intensive focus within the new curricula on a continuous flow of spoken English delivered by a specialist teacher, accompanied by gestures and visual aids, as a substitute for the theoretical explication of grammatical rules. Meryl Swain (1985) decisively complemented this model through her Output Hypothesis, contending that the act of producing language (speaking and writing) is not merely the end result of the acquisition process, but a vital component and primary driver thereof. Prompting the pupil to construct sentences and express meaning impels a shift from superficial semantic comprehension to deep syntactic processing, which in turn justifies the new curriculum's emphasis on interactive oral activities that require genuine linguistic production.

In the broader context of plurilingualism that characterizes the Algerian case, the concept of Multilingual Competence, elaborated by Jason Cenoz and Durk Gorter (2015), offers a qualitative shift in understanding. This concept transcends the traditional view that treats each language in the learner's mind as a separate cognitive system wholly isolated from the others, proposing instead the idea of a Common Underlying Proficiency. This model posits that multilingual learners develop shared cognitive and linguistic resources that allow for positive transfer and synergy among the various languages they are acquiring. This concept is crucial for grasping the unique Algerian context, where the learning of Arabic, French, and English occurs concurrently, thereby opening broad avenues for instructional strategies that leverage the similarities between French and English (such as the Latin script system and shared lexical roots), rather than treating them as adversaries vying for the learner's time and memory.

2.2 The Historical Evolution of Language Education and Teacher Training Policy in Algeria

To appreciate the depth of the transformation represented by the current reform, it is essential to situate it within its long and complex historical context by tracing the major phases that have



shaped the philosophy of language education and teacher policy in independent Algeria. The period of intensive Arabization (1962–1990) witnessed strenuous and monumental efforts to establish Standard Arabic as the primary and sole medium of instruction across most educational stages, as a historical and cultural response to the policies of marginalization and cultural erasure pursued by French colonialism. During this foundational phase, English remained utterly peripheral and was absent from mainstream pedagogical discourse. As for teachers, the primary school generalist classroom teacher was responsible for delivering all subjects, including French, without any specialized academic training in language instruction a reality that yielded significant disparities in the quality of language education across teachers and regions.

With the end of the Cold War and Algeria's initial opening to the world came the phase of reassessment and balance (1990–2003), which witnessed the beginnings of a cautious embrace of plurilingualism. Economic globalization and the first technological revolution prompted the state to reconsider the rigidity of its language policy. This phase culminated in a comprehensive educational reform in 2003a reform of immense significance that included two pivotal decisions: advancing the teaching of French from the fourth to the second year of primary school, and introducing English as a compulsory part of the official curriculum for the first time, starting from the first year of middle school. Nonetheless, the primary generalist teacher remained responsible for French instruction, with no fundamental change in the philosophy of their training. Thus, the model of strategic plurilingualism (2003–2022) was entrenched, and although it represented progress, it suffered from two major imbalances: pupils' weak proficiency in English due to its late introduction and limited instructional hours, and a stark disparity in the quality of French instruction at the primary level, contingent as it was upon the generalist teacher's level of training in the subject.

Herein lies the genius of the current reform (2022–present), which transcends the mere advancement of English to the third year of primary school. The essence of this reform resides in the profound awareness that the quality of any language reform ultimately remains hostage to the quality and competencies of its teachers. Hence the historic decision of the Ministry of National Education to recruit graduates of university English departments and higher schools for teachers to instruct this subject exclusively at the primary level. This shift represents an institutional



acknowledgment that Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) is a discipline in its own right, with its own body of literature, strategies, and competencies, and that it cannot be reduced to mere "knowledge of the language" but rather demands deep knowledge of child psychology, interactive classroom management, and the use of songs and games a combination that only specialized academic training can guarantee.

2.3 The International and Regional Context: The Race Towards Early Introduction

The Algerian decision should not be viewed in isolation from a widespread global and regional movement. There exists a clear and accelerating global trend towards introducing English instruction at ever earlier stages of compulsory education. In Asia, English is taught from the primary level in major economic powers such as China, South Korea, and Japan. In Europe, most countries now begin between the ages of 6 and 8, including France itself, which introduced it from the preparatory class despite its stringent policy of protecting Francophonie. In the Arab world, ambitious models such as the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Egypt have introduced English from the first year of primary school, while it is taught in Saudi Arabia from the fourth grade. This global race reflects the transformation of English from a mere "foreign language" into a "basic life and academic skill," serving as the key to accessing scientific and technological knowledge and integrating into the digital economy. With this decision, Algeria seeks to join this global movement and overcome a chronic lag, albeit with a noteworthy particularity manifest in the concurrent instruction of two foreign languages at a very early age, which poses unprecedented challenges.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a multidimensional comparative analytical methodology, specifically designed to address the complex research questions and accommodate the composite nature of the reform under investigation. This methodology integrates three complementary methodological approaches: first, the historical method, to trace the origins of the current language policy and grasp its ideological and pedagogical underpinnings second, the documentary method, for the in depth analysis of official curriculum texts, textbooks, and



ministerial decrees governing the recruitment process and third, the comparative method, to juxtapose the old and new systems and identify the fundamental points of convergence and divergence between them.

The primary data sources comprised official documents issued by the Ministry of National Education, most notably the English language curriculum for the third, fourth, and fifth years of primary school, the former curriculum for the first year of middle school, the pedagogical guide for teachers, and the ministerial decrees related to the recruitment of specialist teachers. Secondary sources encompassed local and international academic literature in the fields of language policy, second language acquisition, and teaching languages to young learners. Content analysis was employed as a technique to examine the structure of the curricula in terms of objectives, linguistic content, activity typology, and embedded cultural values. The chronological scope of the study covers the period extending from 2022 (the commencement of actual implementation) to 2026 (the moment the first generation reaches middle school), with retrospective historical references to preceding periods as deemed necessary.

4. Comparative Analysis of Curricula and the Impact of the Specialist Teacher

4.1 The Former System: Late Introduction and Its Constraints

Prior to the 2022 reform, English instruction commenced in the first year of middle school, targeting pupils aged 11 to 12, with a weekly time allocation of three hours. Pupils started from absolute zero: the alphabet, numbers, and the greeting "Hello, I'm...". Although the official discourse espoused the "competency based approach" and the communicative approach, the actual reality within classrooms revealed predominantly traditional pedagogical practices, almost exclusively centered on grammar rules, translation, and memorization. The teacher, often an English specialist, found himself compelled to adopt a Grammar Translation Method in order to transmit the greatest possible amount of explicit knowledge within a limited time frame. The inevitable outcome of this model was the graduation of pupils equipped with abstract theoretical knowledge about the language (command of verb conjugation rules, for instance), yet suffering from a pronounced and alarming weakness in their ability to deploy it effectively in genuine communicative contexts, particularly at the oral level.



4.2 The New System: A Novel Philosophy and Specialized Delivery

In stark contrast, the new curriculum rests upon a radically different pedagogical philosophy, embracing the Action Oriented Communicative Approach and the principles of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). Instruction commences in the third year of primary school (ages 8–9), with two sessions per week totaling 1.5 hours, featuring an almost exclusive focus in the first year on the acquisition of oral skills through play and kinesthetic interactive activities. The curriculum is organized around short units covering everyday themes close to the child's world greetings, colors, body parts, animals, food, family delivered through songs, games, and short dramatizations. This content expands in the fourth and fifth years to encompass more complex topics, accompanied by the gradual introduction of reading and writing.

It is here that the revolutionary impact of the concomitant decision to recruit specialist English language teachers comes to the fore. This synergy between an interactive curriculum and a teacher fully proficient in the language and its pedagogical tools yields an undeniable qualitative leap. The specialist teacher is not a mere transmitter of information but a living linguistic model, capable of creating a miniature "language bath" within the classroom, conducting all dialogue in English, improvising, correcting errors intelligently and without discouragement, and employing songs and games seamlessly and at a brisk pace. His or her linguistic fluency imparts the confidence to embark upon open ended communicative activities a feat that was difficult, if not impossible, for a non specialist teacher. By the end of the primary stage, the pupil who has studied under such a specialist teacher is presumed to have acquired a lexical repertoire ranging between 300 and 500 core words, a genuine capacity to introduce him or herself and speak about simple everyday matters using short sentences with acceptable fluency and pronunciation, in addition to markedly positive psychological attitudes towards the language.

4.3 The Required Transformations in the First Year Middle School Curriculum

The arrival of learners with genuine and relatively uniform prior attainments, thanks to their guidance by specialist teachers who followed the same curriculum, represents both a challenge and a golden opportunity for the first year middle school curriculum. The old curriculum, which started from scratch the alphabet, "How old are you ?" is no longer in any way suitable, and



persisting with it would inevitably lead to boredom and a loss of motivation. The solution lies in a radical restructuring of the curriculum based on three pivotal principles: first, continuity, meaning building directly upon a solid oral foundation rather than laying the groundwork anew. Second, spiral expansion, that is, revisiting the same themes addressed at the primary level such as family, school, and hobbies but with deeper treatment requiring higher order thinking skills, such as detailed description, comparison, and the expression of feelings and aspirations. Third, pedagogical differentiation, namely designing varied instructional activities that accommodate the inevitable individual differences among pupils arriving from different schools, thereby enabling the middle school teacher to capitalize on this robust foundation to leap toward more sophisticated competencies such as critical reading and creative writing. The proposed content must encompass more complex linguistic structures such as the simple past and future tenses and engage the learner in authentic communicative projects, such as composing an email or conducting an extended dialogue.

5. Impacts on Learners and the Educational System

The impact of deploying specialist teachers at the primary level extends well beyond purely linguistic aspects, engendering a unique pedagogical and psychological dynamic within the classroom. At the cognitive level, the teacher's advanced language proficiency enhances the capacity to create a learning environment rich in auditory and visual stimuli, thereby contributing to the development of high cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness in the child. Under the teacher's guidance, the child becomes capable of making intuitive comparisons among the three linguistic systems being learned Arabic, French, and English with respect to phonological systems, grammatical rules, and writing directionality, thereby strengthening executive functions such as working memory and selective attention. The risk of linguistic interference between French and English in terms of pronunciation and lexical similarity is admittedly present, especially in the early stages, yet research confirms that children overcome this confusion relatively rapidly under the guidance of an aware and specialized teacher.

At the psychological and socio affective level, the impact is even more profound. Through enjoyable communicative activities, initially free from the pressure of grades, the specialist teacher fosters highly positive attitudes towards English. The pupil thus associates the English



lesson with enjoyment, play, and success, leading to a considerable reduction in levels of language anxiety compared to the former model. More importantly, within the Algerian popular imagination, the English language does not bear the heavy burden of colonialism as French does rather, it is perceived as a "neutral" language of science, modern technology, and openness to the world. Learning it under the tutelage of a competent teacher reinforces this perception and makes its acceptance easier for both parents and pupils, contributing to the formation of a new generation that is open minded and self assured .

6. Implementation and Structural Challenges

The greatest and most pressing challenge remains how to generalize this successful model across the entire national territory and ensure its sustainability and quality in the face of deep seated structural obstacles. The foremost and most serious of these challenges is the acute geographic and social disparity. While specialized expertise is concentrated in major cities Algiers, Oran, Constantine rural and remote areas, which are in the direst need of this reform, suffer from a severe and chronic shortage of qualified teachers. The persistence of the current state of affairs, absent robust and exceptional intervention, threatens to yield a harsh paradox: urban children acquiring English fluently at an early age, while rural children are denied this very right, thereby deepening rather than narrowing the educational and social divide. The solution calls for a bold policy of "positive discrimination" through unprecedented and exceptional financial and professional incentives to encourage competent teachers to serve in underserved regions.

The second challenge lies in building an integrated system of continuous professional development and supervision. Recruiting a specialist teacher is the first step, but it is not sufficient. These newly graduated teachers, despite their solid linguistic training, require deep and ongoing training specifically in the specialization of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), which demands particular skills in interactive classroom management, the use of drama and storytelling, and the design of effective educational games. This training must be coupled with an effective pedagogical supervision system delivered by inspectors specialized in this very domain, to accompany novice teachers in the field and resolve their day to day challenges. The third challenge resides in the near total absence of pedagogical coordination among the teachers of the three languages Arabic, French, and English within a single school. The implementation of



an Integrated Plurilingual Approach requires horizontal coordination around themes and projects in order to exploit opportunities for synergy for instance, leveraging the pupil's knowledge of French grammar to facilitate English learning a coordination that is virtually nonexistent at present.

7. Findings and Discussion

Four years into the implementation process, certain preliminary findings of the specialist teacher recruitment initiative can be discerned, and they point, on the whole, to a tangible and encouraging positive impact. Field observations and early reports from inspectors and school principals indicate that pupils who have studied under these specialists exhibit noticeably better fluency and pronunciation, a richer lexical repertoire, and, most importantly, an enthusiasm and high level of motivation towards learning the language that were previously uncommon both in comparison with the former model and even in comparison with their peers in certain schools still supervised by non specialist teachers. This confirms the core hypothesis from which this study proceeds, namely that the quality of language instruction is organically and intimately tied to the degree of the teacher's specialization and linguistic and pedagogical competence. The quality assurance system guaranteed by the specialist teacher at the levels of pronunciation, lexical richness, and the creation of a living communicative environment has, despite facing an existential challenge in scaling to encompass all schools, nevertheless established a new benchmark of excellence. This standard must be fiercely defended and generalized as an irreversible strategic choice, lest the reform be reduced to mere ink on paper across vast swathes of the country.

8. Recommendations

Based on the foregoing analysis, we present a set of multilevel practical recommendations to ensure the sustainability and quality of this national reform:

1. Valorizing and Generalizing the Specialist Teacher Model as an Overriding National Priority: Develop an ambitious and adequately funded emergency plan, bolstered by unprecedented financial and professional incentives, to generalize the recruitment of



specialist English teachers across all primary schools nationwide without exception, granting absolute priority to remote and underserved areas.

2. Effecting a Qualitative Shift in Training Pathways: Establish a distinct and autonomous specialization in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) within higher schools for teachers, focusing on child psychology, interactive methodologies, and technology integration, and reinforced by mandatory, high quality continuous professional development programs for all in service teachers.
3. Radically Reengineering the First Year Middle School Curriculum: Undertake a comprehensive review of the first year middle school curriculum in light of the new and relatively homogeneous competencies of pupils, with an emphasis on differentiation pedagogy, communicative projects, and the integration of all four skills, so as to ensure a smooth transition and build upon prior attainments rather than resorting to repetition that breeds tedium.
4. Establishing a National Observatory for Quality Assurance: Create an independent national evaluation body tasked with developing a unified reference framework for targeted linguistic competencies at each stage, designing calibrated national assessments to be administered at pivotal junctures, and issuing transparent periodic reports on the quality of instruction and the challenges encountered.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, the dual reform pursued by Algeria boldly and intelligently coupling the introduction of English at an early age with the recruitment of academically specialized teachers to deliver it constitutes a veritable qualitative leap in the history of its educational policy. It far exceeds the mere notion of "adding a new foreign language" to the curriculum, aspiring instead to an ambitious societal project aimed at building an integrated and robust multilingual competence from an early age, with quality assured through investment in qualified human capital. As much as this reform poses formidable challenges, particularly in the battle to generalize training and achieve geographic equity across the nation's diverse regions, it embodies, at its core, a bold and farsighted civilizational choice, one that stakes its fortunes on



the quality of human resources as the first and most fundamental prerequisite for any successful and sustainable educational reform. The future of this promising national project remains contingent upon the political and administrative capacity to safeguard the qualitative asset provided by the specialist teacher and to extend it to encompass all of Algeria's children without exception for investing in a proficient and motivated teacher in every primary school is the surest investment in the future of the coming generations and in Algeria's ability to compete and flourish within global knowledge spaces, all while steadfastly preserving its authentic linguistic and cultural identity.

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