



## **The Linguistic Situation vs Education in Post-colonial Algeria**

### **Situation linguistique vs éducation en Algérie postcoloniale**

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#### **Abstract**

Algeria witnessed different changes through history that constructed its identity in terms of language and culture. These historical changes are characterised by the evolution of the Algerian linguistic situation during the colonisation and post-colonial era. However, Algeria has recently been in tune with Globalisation; therefore, the government tends to give more impetus to the global language besides Arabic and French. Moreover, English started to be recognised in Algerian society, especially among the young generation. Today, English is not leading the world only through worldwide speakers and the use of social networks, but its dominance reaches different domains, including education, business, politics, science and technology. This paper aims to describe the status of English in the Algerian linguistic panorama and how it has been injected into the educational system. It will also shed light on the awareness of the young generation towards the linguistic situation in Algeria in general and English in particular. This status enables English to gain power in globalised Algeria and draw its destiny towards being the first foreign language, especially with the remarkable decline of the French language nowadays.

**Keywords:** Post-colonial Algeria- Linguistic situation- Globalisation – English – Education

#### **Résumé**

L'Algérie a connu différents changements à travers l'histoire qui ont construit son identité en termes de langue et de culture. Ces changements historiques se caractérisent par l'évolution de la situation linguistique en Algérie pendant la colonisation et l'ère post-coloniale. Cependant, l'Algérie s'est récemment mise au diapason de la mondialisation ; par conséquent, le gouvernement a tendance à donner plus d'importance à la langue mondiale en plus de l'arabe et du français. De plus, la langue Anglaise est de plus en plus reconnue dans la société algérienne, notamment parmi la jeune génération. Aujourd'hui, l'anglais ne domine pas le monde uniquement grâce à son utilisation dans le monde entier à travers les réseaux sociaux, mais sa domination atteint différents domaines, notamment l'éducation, les affaires, la politique, la science et la technologie. Cet article vise à décrire le statut de la langue Anglaise dans le panorama linguistique algérien et comment il a été injecté dans le système éducatif. Il permettra également la prise de conscience de la jeune génération vis-à-vis de la situation linguistique en Algérie en général et de l'anglais en particulier. Ce statut permettra de rehausser le statut de l'Algérie à l'échelle internationale et de reconsidérer la langue Anglaise comme étant la première langue étrangère, surtout après le remarquable régression de la langue française dans le pays récemment.

**Mots Clés:** L'Algérie post-coloniale - Situation linguistique- Mondialisation- Langue Anglaise- Education

## **1. Introduction**

A set of events characterised the history of the linguistic situation in Algeria. For over one hundred thirty years, Algeria was settled by French colonisers that impacted a chaotic language planning that aimed to eliminate the language, culture and religion of the Algerian population and replace them with the French ones. However, immediately after gaining independence in July 1962, the Algerian government started implementing different policies and reforms, especially in education, to retrieve the value of Arabic and Arab-Islamic culture. Through these reforms, another language was implemented within the Algerian linguistic landscape. A global language that can be defined as a common language which enables people from different backgrounds and origins to communicate with each other quickly, this language is English.

English is gaining more and more territory in Algeria to stay tuned with Globalisation. Moreover, it has started to be recognised within Algerian society, especially among the young generation. The position of English within the educational system as a Second Foreign Language (FL2) may be displaced towards being the First Foreign Language (FL1) thanks to its power as an international language dominating the world. Thus, it occupies a global position that covers various perspectives, mainly communication, education, science, economy and culture.

The present paper lays out some historical events concerning the linguistic situation in Algeria from the colonial era till today in general and in the field of education in particular. It also aims to shed light on the status of the English language and how it is spread within the Algerian educational system. English is taught as a second Foreign Language in middle schools starting from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade and then recently implemented in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in primary school starting from September 2022. Furthermore, this status creates a competitive place within the political, economic and educational Algerian scene. Regarding the future of English, this article provides predictions concerning the changes that the lingua franca may witness.

## **2. Historical Background of The Linguistic Situation in Algeria**

To better understand the sociolinguistic situation in Algeria and its identity crisis, a brief historical overview of linguistic diversity during and after colonisation by the former French colony. However, before France invaded in 1830, the Ottoman Empire had claimed Algeria as its westernmost territory while ceding considerable autonomy to local Muslim elites. “Against the context of this loose imperialism, pre-1830 Algeria was the site of many languages: Ottoman Turkish, literary or classical Arabic, local Arabic colloquial, Berber variants, and, on the coast, even *sabir*, a ‘medieval Mediterranean pidgin’, the blended elements of Arabic, Spanish, Provençal, and other Mediterranean languages” (Benrabeh, 2013, p. 23).

Then, the French settled Algeria from 1830 to 1962 while imposing a protectorate on Morocco and Tunisia for a while (Ennaji, 2005). The French brought advanced administration and education systems. These advancements have enormously impacted linguistically and culturally (Ennaji, 2005).

### **2.1 During Colonisation (1830-1962)**

As quoted by Laitin (1992: 12, 83-84 cited in Sharkey 1012: 432), the French colonial officials wanted to spread the French language in Algeria the same way it has been done in mainland France since 1953. The coloniser wanted to exclude Arabic by reducing its value and status and replacing it with the French language. According to Ezzaki and Wagner (1992, quoted in Bellalem, 2012:1), "France closed all community schools where Arabic was taught

and introduced Arabic as a second language in some schools". Murphy (1977 quoted in Bellalem, 2012:1) adds: "Hence, the general educational policy was to spread the French language as a national and official language".

Nevertheless, Rezig (2011, p. 1329) states that within the French colonisation period, French was imposed on Algerians as the only official language and acknowledged the ongoing effort to conquer Algeria 'by the school' in order to assert the French language over all other 'local idioms', to 'replace ignorance and fanatical prejudices', and in the process to convince Muslims that France was superior (Benrabah, 2013, p. 31), whereas, the status of Arabic was considered as a holy language (Abdulrazak, 1982) and was reduced to become the language used by Muslims only in mosques. Besides the various dialects spread throughout the country, Arabic represents Algerian identity and nationalism. Thirty per cent of pupils were French, while ten per cent were Algerians.

## **2.2 The Nationalist Transition (the late 1960s – late 1990s)**

The national transition in Algeria was a remarkable shift from the French language imposition during colonisation to the Arabic language after independence. Intending to promote Arabic in different domains in Algeria, particularly the domain of education, the government set a policy of Arabisation which aimed to spread the Arabic language and raise its value in Algerian society. Benrabah (2013, p. 51) calls what resulted from a linguistic 'war with diversity'.

## **3. The Policy of Arabisation**

The Algerian officials set a policy of Arabisation by 1962; the aim beyond such policy was to redefine Classical Arabic in education and administration. The Arabisation motivation was that Arabic is the language of independence and to restore the Arab-Islamic identity of the country (Mize, 1978 quoted in Bellalem, 2012: 2).

As stated by Mostari (2003, p. 27), the Arabisation policy achieved great success in reducing the status of French. The set of such policy, there have been intense conflicts between those who defend and promote classical Arabic and those who support the French Language considering it a language of development and progress.

The promotion of literary Arabic as a standard language began in 1964 with a decision that Arabic should be instructed in schools within seven hours per week. However, there was a shortage of outstanding Arabic teachers; many were imported from different Arabic nations (Sharkey, 2012, p. 438). For instance, in the mid-1960s, they asked Egypt to supply the Arabic teachers they needed for their programmes. "When Egypt's President Nasser informed them, in response, that Egypt could not meet their entire demand, the Algerian envoy reportedly told Egypt to send teachers 'even if they were greengrocers'"(Benrabah, 2013, p. 56).

Mostari (2003, p. 29–30) states that the informative profile of the Algerian culture changed drastically with the Algerian autonomy when the vast majority of French and different Europeans left. As most specialists and chairs were Europeans, Algeria lacked very talented and educated individuals. In the instructive framework, the main change taken quickly after autonomy was to show Classical Arabic beginning from the primary level, French turned into a second language (1964). Furthermore, after that, a foreign language using the Foundation School Framework in 1976[...] President Benbella proclaimed in 1965 that Arabisation crusades did not mean the elimination of French. It ought to be noted, notwithstanding, that the

Arabisation procedure was not apparent, and its execution systems were difficult to acknowledge in different spaces, for example, in education.

Furthermore, she concludes that Arabisation has been promoted in Algeria for political reasons instead of being a mere sociolinguistic aspect. However, it has been removed from its nature as a socio-cultural project. Language is then an essential means of socialisation and intellectual pursuit. In addition, Arabisation was criticised for being unable to resist other languages in Algeria and attempting to impose Arabic as the only means of communication throughout the country. (Mostari, 2003, p.39).

#### **4. Educational Reforms (2000- present)**

According to Belallem (2012, p. 2-3), English was brought to and developed within the Algerian educational system for political reasons. Hence, it was a mere tool among the Arabisation policy strategies to displace the French language.

The policy of Arabisation continued within the domain of education. Arabic was mainly taught for all curriculum subjects. French was taught as a foreign language starting in the fourth year of primary school. English was taught from the second year of middle school... more English departments were open in universities, and the design and publication of Algerian-made English language teaching textbooks and learning materials were. (Belallem, 2012, p. 2-3)

By the early 90s, those who supported Arabic showed that they were against teaching French as an essential or primary language. However, their position was refused by the minister of Education. Hence, he decided to implement English besides French. (Laib, 1993:7 quoted in Benrabah, 2007:233). Belmihoub (2012, p. 5) also states that German, Spanish and Russian were implemented besides English as foreign languages. However, they were less important than English. In addition, Benrabah (2007, p. 233) affirms that English threatened the French language to become the second foreign language in Algeria. Regarding the same idea, Miliani (2000, p.22) adds that Anglophones, who want English to be the first Foreign language in Algeria instead of French, argue their suggestion with the idea that English is the language of science and technology. However, this argument could be more persuasive because it is clear that the reasons beyond their position are more political than educational. On the other hand, according to Meliani (2000, p.23), statistics showed that the attempts to include English in primary schools faced an absolute failure. Indeed, people were aware of the political reason behind this decision.

Bellalem (2012, p. 5) says that concerning foreign language teaching, the government redefined French as the first foreign language. The French language was taught in primary schools starting from the 2<sup>nd</sup> year. English was retrieved from the school level and moved to the first year of middle school. Recently, new reform where English gained another status in Algeria and has been implemented at 3<sup>rd</sup>-year primary schools starting from September 2022, reaching the same status as French. This reform is illustrated in the table below:

**Table 1: New structure for Foreign Language Teaching in Algeria**

	Primary (5 years – age 6-10)	Middle (4 years – age 11-14)	Secondary (3 years – age 15- 17)
French	3 <sup>rd</sup> year to 5 <sup>th</sup> year	1 <sup>st</sup> year to 4 <sup>th</sup> year	1 <sup>st</sup> to 3 <sup>rd</sup> year
English	3 <sup>rd</sup> year to 5 <sup>th</sup> year	1 <sup>st</sup> year to 4 <sup>th</sup> year	1 <sup>st</sup> to 3 <sup>rd</sup> year

### **5. The Status and Spread of English in Algeria**

After the Arabisation arrangement of 1971 and the economic changes occurring worldwide, the utilisation of English as a conveying vehicle increased more space inside globalised Algeria. Therefore, aberrations in the utilisation of French began to blur away at the cross-streets, leaving more space for English to be instructed as a foreign language. (Mami, 2013, p. 910)

As it has been stated by Belmihoub (2012, p. 21), in Algeria, a "better future" is related to the West. Suffering from different problems in the country, Algerians think of travelling overseas, looking for better living conditions, mainly to European countries or working in investment companies in Algeria. In this regard, people have started to give more importance to foreign languages, especially French and English. The global status of English enables it to gain power in Algeria in addition to the relations developed between Algeria and the United States.

It is clearly understood that Globalisation significantly affects the Algerian nation. In this regard, English tends to gain more power and importance in Algeria thanks to its global status instead of French, whose status in the world continues to decline. According to Mami (2013, p.910):

After the Arabisation policy of 1971 and the socioeconomic changes worldwide, the use of English as a communicating vehicle started to gain more space within globalised Algeria. Consequently, disparities in the use of French started to fade at the crossroads, leaving more space for teaching English as a second foreign language. (Mami, 2013, p. 910)

According to Rezig (2011, p. 1330), by 1993, the government attempted to allow young children to learn foreign languages in primary. The process was to ask the pupils to choose between French and English to be taught in primary schools [...] However, the process did not cover all primary schools since the primary statistics showed that French was the preferred language among parents.

Additionally, Belmihoub (2012, p 33) states that as a feature of a noteworthy instruction upgrade in the mid-2000s, a few measures were acquainted with some changes according to Algeria's conventional K-12 framework. For instance, notwithstanding progressively across-the-board non-public schools which show English, government-funded schools begin showing this language from seventh rather than eighth grade, keeping in mind the end goal to attempt to enhance understudies' capability. In the same vein, Mami (2013, p. 911) adds that English has been given importance since its implementation within the Algerian educational system. It was

significantly needed at various educational levels. Moreover, the country witnessed widespread TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) schools.

It is globally and strongly argued that English is the leader in development, technology, scientific research, and modernity. This language should be raised to a second language in Algeria. In this respect, Mami (2013, p. 912) says: "As a matter of fact, English has been defined as a second foreign language at the beginning of the 90s, and as a first foreign language after the 2000 reform, to gain the status of the language of science and technology used in lifelong learning in recent years." In the same respect, Benrabah (2014, p. 52-53) argued that the significant factor in the decline of the French language in Algeria is English which would be the language of economy and power instead.

However, Meliani (2000, p. 27) claims that the transformations which intervened the English language teaching in Algeria were not urgent. Besides, they did not answer a social need. The status of English as a foreign language will remain. Despite considerable efforts of political and educational officials concerning the language, it is up to the society to determine its position within the country.

On the other side, the Algerian government launched various cultural and academic programs with different countries to promote the status of English in a competitive linguistic environment. According to Abid-Houcine (2007), while French is still omnipresent, English enjoys tremendous favour among Algerians. (quoted in Belmihoub, 2017: 5). The aim is to build a professional network and promote development in Algeria. For instance, some of the most encouraging specialisations include economics, politics, and engineering programmes. Britain plans to prepare 500 Algerian PhD students in British universities between 2015 and 2020. This project is a success since more than 80% of Algerian students return to Algeria with their PhD degree and get a job directly as a PhD teacher at the university level. As far as the Algerian cooperation with US Embassy is concerned, the involvement of the United States Embassy's Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs in prompting American English and culture needs more attention. The reality is that the US Embassy in Algeria is very active in this regard. "The Public Affairs Section hosts a booth at the Annual Algiers International Book Fair." (Belmimoun, 2017, p. 5). In 2013, the United States Embassy advertised 13 academic, cultural, and professional programs offered to Algerian citizens and broadly defined its goals as follows:

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' youth programs empower the next generation and establish long-lasting ties between the United States and other countries. Exchange programs focus primarily on secondary schools and colleges to promote a mutual understanding of leadership development, educational transformation and democratic ideals. (Exchange Programs, 2013; quoted in Belmimoune, 2017: 5)

Such opportunities are also offered to study in different European countries such as France, Spain, Italy and Portugal, to name a few, through the Erasmus programme. It describes itself thus:

Erasmus Mundus is a cooperation and mobility programme in higher education that aims to enhance the quality of European higher education and promote dialogue and understanding between people and cultures through cooperation with Third-Countries. In addition, it contributes to the development of human resources and the international cooperation capacity of Higher education institutions in Third-Countries by increasing mobility between the European Union and these countries. (Erasmus Mundus, 2017)

## **6. The Future of English**

It is said that no language can stop English from continuing its dominance of the world in the future. Graddol (1997, p. 2) affirms, "There is no imminent danger to the English language, nor to its global popularity- a fact which is recognised by the majority of people who are professionally concerned with the English language worldwide." He adds that "English will still lead the world." However, its status might face challenges concerning some areas due to the transformation in the world's demography, politics, and economy. (ibid, 1997:2). Within the same opinion, Hitchings (2011) states that lately, the hegemony of English in the entire world is strongly challenged by other languages such as Spanish and Mandarin Chinese. The native speakers of both outnumber those of English. However, currently, they are only a little used as a global language. In the same regard, Mydans (2007) reports that although the number of native speakers of Chinese, Spanish or Hindi exceeds those of the English language, they use English in cultural contexts and teach it to their children to enable them to live in such a multicultural world.

As it has been stated in Graddol (1997, p. 3), scholars in different domains state that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world is going to witness a new order which is entirely unrelated to former centuries [...] the role of language and communication will be more significant in different world perspectives; politically, economically, and culturally in a period where an international language has developed. Mydens (2007) mentions scholars' assumption that the continuing spread of English will be accompanied by its fragmentation into many dialects, such as Latin – or probably, completely developed languages called 'Englishes'.

The history of the English language is unique and cannot be repeated. Hence, no language in the future can reach the global status English has today. (Graddol, 1997, p.58) Graddol conceptualises a new language hierarchy for the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century, comparing it with the present-day hierarchy. He considered the change of language positions besides some indicators such as economic and demographic. The results show that there will no longer be a monopoly of languages at the top. In other words, English will not be the only supreme language, but four languages will join it; Chinese, Hindi/Urdu, Spanish and Arabic by the mid of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Despite the shift from monolingualism to multilingualism, linguistic diversity will be reduced with the disappearance of many languages.

## **7. Conclusion**

The linguistic situation in Algeria is complex and deeply affected by historical and political decisions. This paper presented the central policies implemented within the educational system regarding the conflict between languages, mainly Arabic, French and English. This article featured the status of the language in Algeria and the world, where English leads different areas, including communication, science, business, economy, and popular culture. In the same vein, it provided a forecast for the expected future of English.

As it is known that English is globally spread because of its international position; thus, in Algeria, English is no longer considered as a second Foreign Language but as the first Foreign language. It was recently implemented in 3rd-year primary school to be taught as French. Furthermore, starting from November 2022, The Algerian government is trying to introduce English as a medium of instruction at the tertiary level instead of Arabic and French.

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