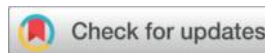




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ENGLISH IN ALGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: BETWEEN POLICY PROSPECTS AND LEGAL REALITIES



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Abstract

The linguistic context of Algeria is characterized by its complexity and diversity, formed by its historical background, post-independence Arabization policies, and growing international relationships. While the official and national languages in the country are Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Tamazight (Berber language), French has long maintained a prominent position in government, education, and administration as a second language. In contemporary contexts, however, English language has gained visibility in numerous sectors, mainly higher education as a medium of Instruction (EMI) and public administrations. This direction echoes the Algerian intention to move beyond the Francophone sphere towards global openness through broader socio-political shifts. Therefore, this analytical paper has explored the emerging role of the English language in Algerian higher education and public administration, highlighting its legal and political dimensions from instruction to application through a review of current prerequisites, legal announcements, and policy prospects.

Keywords: Language Policy, EMI, Higher Education, Public Administration

Introduction

In recent Algerian reforms in education, the approach towards English language has noticed a remarkable evolution through its implementation in different sectors and at numerous levels. According to the 2022 reform, English has been integrated into primary school curricula from an early age. Additionally, it has been adopted as a medium of Instruction (EMI) at universities across all specialities, such as Law and political sciences, since 2023. Thus, this paper examines the policy rhetoric and reforms alongside the legal and institutional

regulations, arguing that while Algeria adopts English as a symbol of modernization and globalization, several limitations and challenges still occur and should be taken into account in the organizational orders and application. This study probes constitutional documents, actual experiences, and available capacities. In this regard, to assess the implications of this linguistic evolution for Algerian higher education and public administration, the study investigates whether the current legal framework accommodates this shift, and the extent to which the introduction of English signals deeper political intentions regarding the real available abilities and total potentials.

This paper explores the contemporary situation in Algeria by framing a comprehensive understanding of EMI in higher education realities and prospections in administration. Thus, it probes the fact into the multinational literature, pedagogical paradigms, and national laws through reviewing the existing literature, policy documents and reports between 2010 and 2025 to assess theoretical frameworks that support the implementation of EMI in multilingual educational settings. This analytical study focuses on a correlational design, which serves as the starting point for future experimental research.

Historical Context and educational Reforms

From independence to the present day, Algerian linguistic policy has undergone a significant change. Since independence, Algeria has pursued a transformative Arabization policy aimed at substituting French in various domains, mainly education and administrative practices. The totality of languages operated in Algeria: colloquial or dialectal Arabic (Algerian Arabic), Standard Arabic (Classical or Modern Standard Arabic), Tamazight and its variations and French) have their particular socio-cultural position. Moreover, each status is the result of a historical evolution and identity tenacity (Mbata, 2019). Consequently, those languages have acquired diverse statuses, which are of critical importance at socio-linguistic and political contexts. (Mostari 2005, p.36)

On September 6, 1993, the Algerian Ministry of Education issued decree (029/MD/93), recommending the gradual introduction of English in selected elementary schools as pilot locations for the project starting in September 1993. (Djouimaa, 1999). Thus, during the 1990s, English was introduced in primary school as a rival to “French under the influence of the pro-Arabization lobby, which comprised Islamists, conservatives, and nationalists” Benrabah (2014) .

However, major reforms driven basically by a Political agenda had been implemented by September 2022 through introducing English in primary school. At universities, the higher education system of Algeria started introducing the LMD (Licence-Master-Doctorat) reform in the 2004/2005 academic year initially called the B.M.D (Baccalauréat-Magister-Doctorat) issued in the Executive

Decree 04-371 of November, 21st 2004 on the creation of a new bachelor degree. In September 2023, the Algerian authorities decided to adopt English as the language of instruction in universities, instead of French in scientific fields and humanities by which Algeria is undergoing a new era of ‘Englishisation’ of higher education.

Those reforms, which have reflected the growing challenges faced by Algerian society and decision-makers, highlight the vital relationship between globalization and language policy as it becomes increasingly essential. Hence, the competition between French and English on linguistic grounds strategically re-emerged.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

In recent years, Algeria has witnessed an increasing interest in English Medium Instruction (EMI), particularly in higher education, as part of broader efforts to internationalize academic programs and reduce reliance on the French language.

English in Higher Education Reform

Since 2022, Algeria has been introducing reforms that implement English at universities and in early education, with plans to replace French in several fields of instruction. In 2023, the Algerian authorities decided to adopt English as the language of instruction in universities, instead of French, starting with the new academic year in September 2023. A recent directive from the Ministry of Higher Education decrees that medicine, pharmacy, and dentistry courses will be taught in English starting from September 2025, marking a significant formal shift. Ideological changes are reflected in certain high-level announcements underlying these reforms, where proponents assert that English increases access to science and equips graduates for international and national opportunities at various levels, including communication, research, scholarship, and profession (Hamane, 2023). In addition, a dynamic interplay between academics and administrators often occurs when adopting English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education (Barnawi, 2021). This interplay reflects different responsibilities, challenges, and priorities, that can shape how EMI policies are interpreted, perceived and enacted in authentic contexts at institutional and classroom levels.

Symbolic Presence of English in Public Administration

Official discourse and instructions display EMI as a strategic necessity in a variety of sectors for a variety of motives. Policymakers believe that learning English will enhance graduate employability and increase access and involvement in scientific research on a worldwide scale. Although French is the *de facto* language in many administrative settings, English is starting to gain traction in external official communications, as in 2019, an official instruction stated that the headings the official documents which were in French must be replaced with English headers instead (Khenioui & Boulkroun, 2023). Several ministries are progressively posting press releases, websites, and MOU (memorandum of understanding) summaries (as between universities) in English to demonstrate international participation. For illustration, the study carried out at Tlemcen University reflects the expanding interface between English and administrative functions in authentic settings (Hammoudi, 2023).

Policy Prospects: Education and Administration

The integration of English in higher education and administration is interlinked in some key ways. It is often claimed that EMI has a hybrid benefit, whereby students gain both English and content knowledge (Rose *et al.*, 2019). Thus, it is regarded as a positive step according to many factors:

- Synchronization of Policy: The government policy, which promotes the use of English first as a language of instruction at universities, signals its intention to expand the adoption of this language in administration, creating a conformed reform trajectory.
- Human capital preparation: University graduates trained in English are expected to possess high English competencies across various specialties and areas, through which they will be able to tolerate cultural differences around the world, to contribute to civil society and the labor market effectively (Khenioui & Boulkroun, 2023).
- Both sectors integrate English as a symbol of modernity and global openness, but in fact, infrastructural limitations and legal ambiguity hinder its functional integration.
- French continues to be the perpetual default language, despite current policy rhetoric. French is the second most widely used language at universities, institutions and administrations, particularly in technical and legal contexts (Belmihoub, 2018). Legally, French retains *de facto* dominance in administrative acts, public notices, and governance. Indeed, the attempt to eradicate the impact of a linguistic system of over 132 years confirmed to be a challenging mechanism. (Khenioui and Boulkroun, 2023; Benhamlaoui and Benzadri, 2024).

Consequently, higher education serves as a solid testing ground for English reforms; however, without administrative support, their impact will be limited. Despite the efforts and procedures previously introduced in this area, the full shift is still difficult due to several factors, as Benrabah (2013) explains that French is still extensively used in ‘universities and government’, which makes the entire switch to English problematic. Therefore, this transition or abrupt change as several instructors consider (Abdaoui & Aggoune, 2023) may hinder development in many domains, unless a careful plan is implemented for the long-term goals to provide administration with sufficient English-language materials.

Legal Realities and Institutional Constraints

Despite growing policy discourse promoting the adoption of English in Algeria, the existing legal framework lacks clarity, which may create a structural and strategic connection between official decisions, legal scope, and practical implementation. Those challenges are summarized as follows:

legislative void and ambiguous interpretation

The Algerian constitution introduces English as the second foreign language, taught in primary schools (since the 2022-2023 academic year) and in middle and secondary schools, as well as in universities. Despite the growth of English use and usage in diverse domains of society, including education, media, and the economy, the Algerian legal framework has not accurately reflected the real status of English in these areas through precise and clear constitutional regulations. English implementation is currently based on institutional and department policies, thus, variations in methodology and content occur. However, significant questions should be addressed concerning instruction content, instructors’ skills, EMI and ESP design. Hence, the lack of regulatory laws of recognition means that English-language documents may lack acceptability. This fact raises concerns and creates issues for administrative and legal clarity.

Capacity constraints

In implementing EMI in higher education, teacher quality is one of the notable challenges; factors such as low proficiency levels, a lack of adequate oral skills, and limited resources may contribute to adverse outcomes in many EMI settings (Oktaviani, 2019). Teachers might feel discouraged as they will have to adapt to the new teaching materials, resources and content spending more time and efforts (ibid.). Likewise, the same scenario will be observed among students who mostly display limited proficiency in English, which can hinder their comprehension of disciplinary content (Macaro et al., 2018). Those factors add to the difficulty and ambiguity of implementing EMI in higher education, as no clear teaching guidelines are provided.

In many fields and specialties, where the study was particularly in French, such as medical sciences (EMI application in September 2025), English does not mainly cause a problem in the technical terms and registers, but in the discrepancy between what students can comprehend and what they can convey regarding the Francophone instructors' English content which is often French-influenced English where English serves as a tool of translation rather than an autonomous linguistic system. In fact, transforming the language policy of a country is usually problematic and challenging because people are accustomed to their language of instruction (Bamgbose, 2000).

Many university graduates and employees lack sufficient English proficiency due to their Arabic or French academic profile. In addition, recently, the training of teachers and employees is often minimal, but logical to some extent, as it begins with general English and progresses to more Specialized English for Specific Purposes (ESP). For this purpose, Intensive Language Teaching Centers (Centres d'Enseignement Intensif des Langues/CEIL) play a vital role in forming PhD students and teachers (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research Correspondence 1797, November 28th, 2022).. However, a common practice is to retrain existing Francophone professors in English, a strategy widely criticized as inappropriate, and a revision of the curriculum is required. In this context, well-structured training programs and revisited syllabi are highly required as Nunan (2003) emphasized its importance.

Consequently, the proper accordance between policy and capacity supports both educational efficacy and implementation utility.

Sociopolitical perspectives

There is a lack of consensus among the Francophone Elite regarding the EMI decision, which is viewed with skepticism and doubt due to several factors. According to many academic publications and public reviews, this shift is largely a matter of political agenda (Douifi, 2021), as political posturing is often intertwined with language policy decisions (Spolsky, 2004; Shohamy, 2006). On the other hand, despite the enthusiasm for teaching in English, mainly in technology and economics faculties, which is highly noted among 66 teachers from various fields and administrative members, comprehensive training is still needed, as the majority of stakeholders claim (Benabdallah, 2023). Those conflicting interpretations reflect deeper tensions over Algerian national identity and ideology, its multilingual history and the legacy .

Opportunities and Implications

Algeria has integrated EMI as a strategic choice to align its universities with global norms and promote access to scientific knowledge, global communication

and economic treaties. Regarding certain multilingual postcolonial states (e.g., Tunisia, Rwanda, India), the process of English integration has been achieved through varying legal and institutional strategies. Algeria's current approach requires binding legal reinforcements to restructure the status of English vis-à-vis French which is rooted in the societal norms, since national ideology and identity reflect the which is interpreted in the language policy reflects the pertinent principles and beliefs of a collective. As Spolsky (2004) explains that post-colonial Arabisation in Northern African nations has established Arabic as an official language, emphasizing the primacy of the Qur'an in cultural and national identity. Furthermore, on a theoretical basis, this shift aligns with Spolsky's notion of a 'tidal wave' of English as the language of global communication which emerges through bottom-up demand and top-down reform. Algeria may need to consider legislation or decrees that clarify the functional status of English in education and administration, specifying when and how English versions of documents carry legal authority.

Despite the challenges discussed above, English presents important future socio-political and economic opportunities:

- English in Algeria serves as a neutral linguistic bridge to settle the tension between Arabic and French, the colonial language, claiming that English is the functional language in international affairs.
- Aligning with global academic standards, Algerian universities and academics will be able to connect with international research, publications, and collaborations based on the increased encouragement towards publishing in English in PhD programs and grades promotion (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2023). As most scientific literature is in English, the shift supports academic competitiveness.
- The contribution of the university and Intensive Language Teaching Centers to the economic, social, and human development of the surrounding environment, meeting the needs of the labour market and company employees, by achieving institutional requirements of English proficiency.
- Language instruction frameworks should be tailored to meet the academic and professional needs by introducing narrow-angled ESP elements into EMI contexts, thereby allowing institutions to alleviate language hurdles and assimilate content (Kırkgöz & Dikilitaş, 2018) .
- At this level of the ongoing English implementation, 'pilot programs' and 'preparatory English semester' are adequate and supportive solutions to

ensure students' readiness (Abdaoui & Aggoune, 2023). For instructors, the Ministry instituted an online training program on the national platform Dual_Edx, directed by the Commission Nationale de l'Enseignement A Distance (CNEAD) since September 2023.

Conclusion

This analytical review focuses on the critical relationship between Algeria's language planning and policy and current conditions when promoting English in both higher education and administration. However, without explicit legal guidelines, adequate human resource readiness, and effective instructions for homogeneous pedagogical frameworks, the functional shift towards English cannot be established significantly. Despite the current approach, it has been proven that the shift towards English is still in its pilot and early stages of the ongoing process, which requires ongoing adjustments through strategic foresight and investigation. Thus, the practical implementation, which positively succeeds in all sectors (education and administration) reflects the solid reform trajectory. Accordingly, conducting future empirical research on these interrelated areas is crucial to evaluating the on-the-ground impact and consequences of policy prospects.

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