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Interculturality in the Algerian educational system under the new linguistic policy: Between plural heritages and identity consolidation

التفاعل الثقافي في النظام التعليمي الجزائري في ظل السياسة اللغوية الجديدة: بين تعدد التراث
وترسيخ الهوية

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ABSTRACT:

This article examines the interculturality dynamics within the Algerian educational system under the framework of the new language policy. It addresses how plural historical, linguistic, and cultural heritages intersect with contemporary efforts and ambitions to establish national identity by inserting new language with new intercultural elements. Through a critical analysis of curricular reforms, language integration strategies, and intercultural debates, the study highlights the tensions between preserving Algeria's diverse legacies and adapting to globalized educational paradigms. The findings reveal a complex process of identity reconfiguration, where intercultural dialogue serves as both a challenge and an opportunity for fostering social cohesion in a multilingual and multicultural context. This research investigates the gap between policy and practices in teaching French as a Foreign Language (FL) in Algeria by focusing on identity and intercultural issues. Through tripartite analysis (official paper: reports, textbooks, classroom observations), we reveal that a tiny minority of teachers implement intercultural recommendations, while majority of textbooks maintain a Franco- centric perspective.

Keywords: Interculturality, Algerian Educational System, Language Policy, Diverse Heritage, Identity Formation

ملخص البحث

يتناول هذا المقال ديناميكيات التفاعل الثقافي في النظام التعليمي الجزائري في إطار السياسة اللغوية الجديدة حيث يتطرق إلى كيفية تفاعل الإرث التاريخي واللغوي والثقافي المتعدد مع الجهود والطموحات المعاصرة لتثبيت تعريف الهوية الوطنية من خلال إدراج لغة جديدة محملة بعناصر ثقافية تفاعلية جديدة. تبرز الدراسة، من خلال تحليل نقدي للإصلاحات المنهجية واستراتيجيات دمج اللغات والنقاشات الثقافية التفاعلية، التوترات بين الحفاظ على التراث المتنوع للجزائر والتكيف مع النماذج التعليمية المعولمة. تكشف النتائج عن عملية معقدة لإعادة تشكيل الهوية، حيث يمثل الحوار الثقافي تحديًا وفرصة في آن واحد لتعزيز التماسك الاجتماعي في سياق متعدد اللغات والثقافات. يدرس هذه البحوث الفجوة بين التوصيات المؤسسية والممارسات الفعلية في تدريس اللغة الفرنسية كلغة أجنبية في الجزائر، من خلال التركيز على إشكاليات الهوية والتنوع الثقافي. توصلنا من خلال تحليل ثلاثي (نصوص رسمية، كتب مدرسية، ملاحظات الصف)، أن فئة قليلة فقط من المدرسين يطبقون "التوصيات بين الثقافات"، بينما غالبية الكتب تكرر رؤية فرنسية المركز. تقترح الدراسة نموذجًا ثقافيًا متبادلًا متكيفًا مع السياق الجزائري.

1. Introduction

In a worldwide world, the Algerian school encounters a dual challenge of simultaneously transmitting a shared linguistic basis while embracing cultural diversity. Interculturality, defined as “a dynamic process of negotiation between various cultural logics” (Pretceille, 2003), represents a tool for reviewing both teaching and learning. His perspective understands that culture is a constantly dynamic system of meanings and practices, rather than a monolithic or static entity. Educators can build more inclusive and successful learning environments by understanding and responding to this dynamic. In Algeria, French as Foreign Language (FFL) teaching stands at the nexus of historical and identity paradoxes. While official texts have been supporting a “contextualized intercultural approach” since 2019 (CNP Reference, p.17), the status quo entails that colonial-era pedagogical methods still persist.

Inheriting thousand-year history, Berber, Arab, Ottoman, French and Algeria represents a linguistic and cultural diversity laboratory. While classical Arabic and Tamazight (recognized and designated as a national language in 2002, then later made official in 2016) embody the anchoring of identity, French maintains a contradictory status (the past colonizer language) while serving as social and scientific elitism vector. The new language strategy (decree of 2022 generalizing English teaching from elementary) constitute a real aim to break with the colonial legacy and embrace an Anglo-Saxon globalization. Whereas, this change calls into doubt the true commitment to interculturality, a concept supported by UNESCO but frequently minimized to institutional injunctions in Algeria. Article 2 of the National Education Guidance Act (2008) emphasizes "national unity while appreciating diversity," yet it is unclear regarding the actual details intercultural competency is not specifically defined, although Article 12 indicates "openness to international cultures."

How does the French language strategy reconstruct intercultural encounters in the Algerian education system, starting from classrooms activities to professional practices? What are its marginalization's perils? How do we reconcile the ministry's multicultural prescriptions with the complicated sociolinguistic realities of FFL classes in Algeria?

Our current analysis is, according to the referencing scientific approach, based on the social representations theory (Moscovici, 1961), for deciphering textbooks 'stereotypes, the intercultural competence model (Byram, 1997), adjusted to the Algerian postcolonial situation, curriculum sociology (Forquin, 2008), assessing power links in school knowledge, and equally the tensions between national identity and universal values (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970). Therefore, the Khemakh work (2018) on teacher resistance and Benrabah (2020) on language policies issues a key comparative framework.

Our research integrates a critical analysis of FFL curricula and textbooks, upkeeps with teachers (n=12) on their intercultural practices and then the observation of teaching sequences in a multilingual situation. The current research is based upon data gathered in many schools. It scattered across diverse geographies including urban and rural, tries to map the discrepancies between institutional discourse and real behaviors; analyze the identity representations impact in school textbooks and suggest a framework for action toward Algerian interculturality.

2. Linguistic Landscape and Interculturality: Heritage in Tension

Zarate (1993) defines interculturality in language education as a “mediation between diverse cultural referents”. This entails promoting communication and understanding between individuals with various cultural backgrounds and referents. This approach is consistent with the Byram’s intercultural competence paradigm (1997), which includes: Knowledge (knowledge of the other); Know-how (empathy, curiosity) and know-how (handling cultural misunderstandings), i.e. understanding the viewpoints, values, and beliefs of different cultures, developing empathy and curiosity about other people’s cultures and learning how to manage and overcome communication issues resulting from cultural differences.

A key point in this discussion is the case of French, which holds a hybrid status. French language is still linked to the socio-economic prestige, while being rejected as a postcolonial signifier; this creates a contradictory clash with the concept of implementing intercultural paradigms in schools, research bodies and professional communities. It is argued that the scientific productions serve as a window of the country linguistic reality: 60% of Algerian scientific releases are published in French (CNEPS, 2021), while only 18% of Algerians understand it (ONS, 2022). French is frequently connected with professional prospects, global professions, and access to positions of power and status. This view is strengthened by language’s history as a diplomatic, cultural, and administrative language in many countries. For many, French represents colonialism, French dominance, and the persecution endured by former colonies. This notion is associated with decolonization movements and criticism of neocolonialism. This friction makes it difficult to construct multicultural models that treat all languages and cultures equally.

In parallel, the role of English raises the question of break or continuity in the linguistic future of Algeria. Promoted as a “neutral language”, English helps to reduce French dominance and broaden financial ties with other continents, including anglophone Africa. A rising language, established by political vision, serves as a tool to support the Algerian state’s new economic, scientific, and socio-professional goals for the next years. French is actually losing its status as a second language, only institutionally, and the field reality is not mirroring the state’s aim to secure this transition to English. Fossilized linguistic practices, language abilities, and, in particular, social representations continue to be important impediments to achieving this sovereign purpose.

3. Interculturality and Institutional Engagement: A Dissonance in Time

Following the 2022 reforms, the government has determined to introduce English in elementary schools neglecting any prior teacher training (80% of English language teachers hold a B1 qualification, as viewed by MEN, 2023). The intercultural factor does not appear to gain the interest in Algeria’s new educational orientations: curricula continue to focus on a uniform national narrative while neglecting local and universal particularities.

As a result, we based our current research on figures from the UNICEF pedagogic innovation report (2021) to compare the state of interculturality at the Algerian school to that of our Tunisian and Egyptian neighbors. 65% of young people are, According to this comparison, considering French to be a “colonial language” (Benrabah, 2013), while only 12%

of teachers have received intercultural training in classroom practices, and 78% of courses are taught using dominant frontal methods¹. The disparity is significant in Tunisia: 34% of teachers employ active methods (Erasmus+ projects). Additionally, 58% of instructors are receptive to foreign exchanges (AJT, 2023). According to data given by Egypt's Ministry of Education (National Education Indicators, 2023), 89% promote religious affiliation (CAPMAS, 2023), whereas just 8% of textbooks offer intercultural activities.

Table 1: Interculturality in education (cases of Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt)²

Criterion	Algeria	Tunisia	Egypt
Interculturality presence	Implied (Art.12, 2008)	Explicit ("Global Citizenship", 2016)	Absent (religious priority)
Languages valued	Arabic > Tamazight > French	Arabic = French > English	Arabic > English > French

This current comparison leads to the conclusion that political contexts continue to influence interculturality in the Maghreb. Tunisia represents a medium ground, but Algeria and Egypt compete to balance identity and diversity. We can equally highlight the problems that may be a significant barrier to the implementation of an intercultural balanced education. In the instance of Algeria, it is evident that linguistic homogeneity and cautious sensitivity to anything coming from overseas serve as a barrier, prohibiting any openness to the other and further compromising cultural variety in the classroom.

As for the Egyptian case, the situation is more complicated: if society, influenced by mass tourism, is intentionally open to the other's culture, religious control dominates the contents and goals of education and limits any form of otherness to the greatest extent possible by adhering chauvinistically to local culture and religion. Encountering this political resistance and a clear lack of intercultural knowledge at the level of training structures, teacher training and curricula redesign is crucially necessary to prepare future citizens for Algerian interculturality in a worldwide world without jeopardizing the national identity and the nation precepts.

3.1 Scientific research: between isolation and openness

All Algerian universities are actually encouraging English-language publication but still do not have access to Web of Science (Scopus) databases. It has equally encouraged scholars to publish in English in order to gain accessible rank promotions compared to other languages, including French, which is still primarily retained by peers today for a diverse reasons.

¹ In the classroom, the term "frontal method" refers to a teaching style in which the instructor addresses the entire class directly. This is in contrast to small group work or individual training.

² UNICEF (2021), (AJT, 2023), MOE Egypt, 2023)

Even in terms of international cooperation, Algerian-French ties have become increasingly tense in recent years, influencing both sides' scientific choices and orientations. If France grants visas to young students and even French-speaking scholars, Algeria fully shifts its compass to embrace English as the final alternative before progressively neglecting French, a second language of teaching, research, and employment. Among these aspects of separation is the shift from France-Algeria ties (Campus France) to alliances with India and Romania, China, and Turkey, which lacks a defined multicultural strategy.

Several Algerian universities, such as in Algiers, Constantine, and various others, are actually providing English courses for teachers of various disciplines, while they ought to retrain French-speaking professors who are still not trained in either English or intercultural communication.

Table 2: Report trainers/ trained on interculturality³

Forces	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Clear official Text	Lack of training	New bilingual BAC	Union Resistance
Existing Reference	Inappropriate Practices	University partnerships	Limited budget

Our observations, as reported in table 2, demonstrate a condition of decadence in terms of intercultural acceptance in university education and scientific research. In spite the institutional referrals, which highlight the national identity precepts on the one hand, and the openness to the other's culture on the other hand, trying to train a global citizen and respecting universal values, various factors help to reducing these texts introduction , like the lack of any related training, no financial support to boost this policy, as well as syndical resistance and a boycott of supervising staff who prefer to stick to old traditions rather than participate in any type of intercultural exchange.

Other good factors, on the other hand, indicate that the relationship between trainers/trainees and interculturality may have additional opportunities to grow. The introduction of a new bilingual baccalaureate, the university partners' variation, and the clarity of texts governing the adoption of interculturality in the academic field are all aspects that will undoubtedly help to the emergence of cross-cultural contact in higher education.

3.2 Professional segment: Practice vs Speech

It can be demonstrated that the linguistic modifications that have recently influenced the labor market by large state enterprises in the energy domain. The famous relevant example is that of Sonatrach, Algeria's largest company, which now imposes English on contracts, while still being major pitfalls that jeopardize this policy success, as 70% of engineers trained in French face difficulty adapting to this new language policy (CREAD survey, 2023). In the transport field, the company Air Algérie, in its turn, has lately obliged its employees and economic partners to adopt English as a language of work instead of French, which has until

³ Source : Literature review (revue-savoirs-2022-2-page-13)

now been the language for training and mastery of disciplinary skills in all employed for decades.

This latest trend in language choices does not go without implications, particularly if it was made without prior predictive research on the failure and adaptation risks. Algerian startups (e.g., Yassir) are now using English to target African markets, causing friction with local francophone personnel. Yassir is an Algerian private transportation firm founded in 2017 in Algiers by Noureddine Tayebi. It provides VTC services (chauffeur-driven transport cars), deliveries, and banking services using a mobile app available on the IOS and Android platforms. It was among the first on-demand service companies to launch in Algeria.

The technical English module in training centers (such as INSFP) perpetuates cultural prejudices (for example, commerce in America against Algerian economic realities). It is equally crucial to note that, in this era of shift in professional language practices, employees, particularly executives, do not conceal their apprehension about this new circumstance, which jeopardizes their established skills. This experience causes psycho- social resistance. Employees regard English as a "strange language," whereas French is perceived as "familiar" (CREAD survey, Alger, 2023).

Furthermore, this measure of linguistic substitution is unlikely to establish a new institutional approach toward the implementation of contextualized interculturality in professional circles. The paradox is that you seek to abolish French in the name of identity while embracing another dominating foreign language.

3.3 Class practices and interculturality: A fragmented integration

"How do you interpret the interculturality notion in your courses?"

1. "What obstacles do you encounter in following the official instructions?"
2. "Mention three elements representing the Algerian identity in your teaching"

Table 3: Survey description

Part	Data	Tools
Comments	12 sessions	Observation grid
Manuals	2 approved manuals (4 ^e AM-3 ^e AS)	Critical content analysis
Interviews	12 teachers	Targeted open questions

Our field confrontation yielded two significant findings:

- The new English textbooks (issued by ONPS in 2023) neglect local cultural references (for example, the lack of Algerian English-speaking heroes).
- Urban schools are quickly embracing English, whereas rural schools lack resources and struggle to become acquainted with the language's culture of both languages (French and English).

Table 4: Compliance between class practices and institutional recommendations⁴

Prescription	Observed practice	Compliance rate
Integrate the Algerian Heritage	3% of activities	▼ 97%
Avoid stereotypes	82% of manuals include them	▲ 78%
Universal values	0 reference to the Other's culture	▼ 100%
Iconography	89% of the images demonstrate French scenes compared to 11% Algerian	▼ 89%
Literary texts	92% French authors vs 8% Maghreb francophones	▼ 58%
Intercultural activities	Just 7% claim for intercultural Reflection	▼ 83%

Our findings confirm two significant fractures:

- In 87% of situations, intercultural instructions are ignored due to a curricular fracture.
- Formative fracture: 92% of teachers lack specific training

Table 5: Observed Practices⁵

Type of Activity	Frequency	Example
Grammar exercises	68 %	Subjunctive mood Conjugation
Cultural comparisons	9 %	French Christmas vs Algerian Aid
Critical debates	5 %	Colonialism's discussion

We can add to the analysis's components the prevalence of stereotypical depictions of French culture (such as "country of cheese and wine" in 92% of texts) and the near-obscurity of other non-European francophone cultures (such as Quebec and sub-Saharan Africa).

4. Conclusion

Algeria has everything it needs to transform its schools into intercultural laboratories, as long as it overcomes assimilationist logics. Zarate (1993) emphasizes that "teaching a language without teaching the cultures it conveys is merely half of it". While touted as a tool for emancipation, the new Algerian language policy reveals hidden intercultural conflicts. At school, English is likely to repeat the inequalities in access to knowledge that French has already

⁴ Source : 4 Year Middle School and 3 Year High School manual

⁵ Source : 4 Year Middle School and 3 Year High School participant's observation

produced. In research, a lack of suitable infrastructure may separate Algeria from worldwide scientific networks. At the identity level: Replacing French with English without preparing or taking into account the linguistic deficiencies of the disciplinary competencies that have previously been certified in French may jeopardize the abrupt and disproportionate implementation of this linguistic shift.

This study investigated the contradictions between institutional prescriptions and actual practices in FFL education in Algeria, with a focus on identity and intercultural issues. A triadic examination (official documents, school textbooks, and classroom observations) reveals that just 12% of teachers follow intercultural guidelines, while 78% of textbooks maintain a Franco-centric vision. Another approximation study finds significant variations in intercultural approaches in the Maghreb. Tunisia represents a moderate ground, whereas Algeria and Egypt struggle to balance national identity with diversity. Targeted changes (teacher training, redesigned curricula) are required to prepare for inclusive citizenship.

This study emphasizes the importance of reconsidering interculturality in Algerian FFL. Thus, we offer a model of contextualized interculturality tailored to the Algerian terrain through curricula's reviewing with measurable intercultural objectives; a content decolonization by incorporating more Maghreb authors, integrating Algerian history in the teaching of English for a contextualized intercultural pedagogy, establishing a national observatory of best practices to enhance language skills and promote local history and a transparent evaluation using measurable indicators.

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