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From Primary to Middle School:

Evaluating Algeria's First Cohort of English Learners

من الابتدائي إلى المتوسط: تقييم الدفعة الأولى من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في الجزائر

Dr. Hichour Hadjira

MCA ,Dr Tahar Moulay University- Faculty of Letters, Languages, and Arts, Department of English Language.

hadjira.hichour@univ-siada.dz

د. هيشور هجيرة

أستاذة محاضرة ١، جامعة سعيدة د. مولاي الطاهر، كلية الآداب واللغات والفنون. قسم اللغة الانجليزية.

hadjira.hichour@univ-siada.dz

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Abstract:

This study presents a preliminary assessment of Algeria's English language education reform, introduced at the primary school level in 2022. It investigates how the reform has been received and supported by primary and middle school teachers, parents, and inspectors, particularly as the first cohort of English learners prepares to enter middle school in September 2025. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. The findings reveal strong public enthusiasm for English, which is increasingly viewed as a modern and globally relevant language. Despite limited parental proficiency and challenges related to curriculum continuity, most stakeholders expressed optimism and support. Middle school educators welcomed the change but raised concerns about the lack of coordination with primary levels, the need for official curriculum updates, and the urgency of teacher training. The study highlights the importance of planning, support, and communication in ensuring the long-term success of early English education in Algeria.

Keywords: English language reform, early language education, Algeria, language policy, stakeholder perceptions.

المخلص:

تُقدّم هذه الدراسة تقييماً أولياً لإصلاح تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في الجزائر، والذي تم اعتماده في المرحلة الابتدائية ابتداءً من سنة 2022. وتتناول الدراسة كيف استُقبل هذا الإصلاح ومدى الدعم الذي حظي به من طرف معلمي المرحلتين الابتدائية والمتوسطة، إضافةً إلى أولياء التلاميذ والمفتشين، لا سيما مع اقتراب أول دفعة من المتعلمين للغة الإنجليزية من الانتقال إلى التعليم المتوسط في سبتمبر 2025. ومن خلال اعتماد تصميم وصفي نوعي، تم جمع البيانات باستخدام المقابلات والاستبيانات. كشفت النتائج عن وجود حماس شعبي كبير لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، التي يُنظر إليها بشكل متزايد كلغة العصر والعلم والانفتاح العالمي. وعلى الرغم من ضعف كفاءة الأولياء في اللغة الإنجليزية وتحديات الاستمرارية بين المقررات الدراسية، أبدى معظم الفاعلين تفاؤلاً ودعماً لهذا الإصلاح. كما رَحّب الأساتذة في الطور المتوسط بالإصلاح، لكنهم عبّروا عن مخاوف تتعلق بانعدام التنسيق مع المرحلة الابتدائية، وعدم وجود تحديث رسمي للمقررات، والحاجة الملحة إلى تكوينات مستعجلة للأساتذة. وتبرز الدراسة أهمية التخطيط والدعم والتواصل الفعال لضمان نجاح تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في سن مبكرة على المدى البعيد في الجزائر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إصلاح تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، التعليم المبكر للغات، الجزائر، سياسة لغوية.

1. INTRODUCTION

The English language has long been viewed as a powerful and attractive means of communication, largely due to its association with globalization. Since the end of World War II, English has succeeded in maintaining its position as the most widely spoken and influential language in the world (Crystal, 2003). One of the key factors contributing to the global spread of English is the rapid advancement of technology, which is strongly linked to English-speaking nations. As technology became more accessible and widespread, English naturally followed, becoming the dominant language of the internet, science, business, media, and international diplomacy (Graddol, 2006).

This global dominance of English has influenced people from all social groups; adults, children, adolescents, males and females, the educated and even the less educated; to develop a growing interest in learning the language. In many non-English-speaking countries, including Algeria, English has come to symbolize modernity, opportunity, and global connection (Benrabah, 2007). For decades, French maintained a dominant position in Algerian education and administration, due to its colonial legacy. However, in recent years, the status of English in Algeria has begun to shift, especially with the government's decision to introduce English into primary schools. This policy reflects broader social and political changes, as well as a growing demand for English as a tool for educational advancement and international integration.

2. Language Planning in Postcolonial Contexts: The Case of Algeria

Language planning and policy is the process through which authorities make deliberate decisions about the roles, development, and teaching of languages within a nation. This process generally includes three main dimensions: status planning (deciding which languages are used officially and in what domains), corpus planning (developing and standardizing the structure, spelling, vocabulary, and grammar of a language), and acquisition planning

(determining how and when languages are taught in the education system) (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997).

In postcolonial countries like Algeria, language planning has been shaped by a complex history of linguistic layering, colonization, and identity struggles. Before colonization, Arabic was the primary language of education and administration, coexisting with Tamazight, the indigenous Berber language. However, during French colonial rule (1830–1962), status planning was radically altered: French became the language of power, education, and elite access, while Arabic was devalued and even banned from public schooling and institutions (Benrabah, 2007; Grandguillaume, 2004).

Following independence in 1962, the Algerian government sought to reassert national identity through status and corpus planning, declaring Arabic the official language and initiating extensive Arabization policies (Benrabah, 2013). These policies aimed to replace French with Arabic in all formal domains, particularly in administration and education. At the same time, efforts in corpus planning were launched to modernize Arabic and expand its functional capacity, especially in scientific and technical fields. However, these efforts faced resistance and practical limitations: much scientific and academic content remained accessible only in French, and Arabic neologisms often lacked public familiarity (Chachou, 2022).

Despite the state's strong Arabization policies, French continued to dominate in key sectors such as higher education, medicine, science, and business, due to its entrenched legacy and the shortage of Arabic resources and trained personnel. As a result, French maintained its status as Algeria's *de facto* second language, even though it was never officially recognized as such in constitutional terms (Benrabah, 2014).

Meanwhile, acquisition planning has undergone multiple revisions. Arabic is introduced from the beginning of primary

school as the medium of instruction, while French traditionally begins in the third year. Over time, demands from Amazigh activists led to the official recognition of Tamazight: first as a national language in 2002 and later as a second official language in 2016 (Aitsiselmi & Marley, 2008). This required further corpus planning, such as standardizing Tamazight varieties and creating school materials.

In recent years, a new wave of acquisition and status planning emerged in response to global trends and internal debates. As English grew in global influence, Algerians increasingly viewed it as a language of science, technology, and opportunity—unburdened by colonial associations. In response to public demand and shifting attitudes, the government introduced English into the third year of primary school in 2022, marking a significant step in acquisition planning. While this policy does not yet replace French, it reflects a broader strategic reorientation in Algeria's linguistic priorities (Tamine, 2022).

The Algerian case exemplifies how language planning is never just linguistic—it is political, ideological, and deeply historical. The simultaneous management of Arabic, French, Tamazight, and now English illustrates the tension between identity, practicality, and globalization in postcolonial language policy.

3. French and English in Algeria: A Shifting Language Landscape

For decades, French has occupied a central role in Algerian education and administration, a legacy of French colonial rule (Benrabah, 2007). Despite national efforts to promote Arabic as the official language after independence, French has remained dominant as a second language in schools, universities, and official institutions (Benrabah, 2014). In contrast, English has traditionally been introduced only at the middle school level, and its functional role in Algerian society has remained limited (Tamine, 2022).

The government's recent decision to introduce English in the third year of primary school, beginning in 2022, represents a significant shift in Algeria's language education policy. This reform, however, was not designed to replace French but to run parallel to it, creating a dual-foreign-language model at the foundation level. While French remains widely used and familiar to most Algerian adults, English is still considered a foreign language, mostly spoken by a minority; university graduates in English studies, internationally mobile professionals, or autonomous learners.

This situation raises pedagogical and social concerns. Children are now being taught a language their parents often do not understand, limiting the potential for parental support; an important factor in successful early language education (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). One might expect resistance to such a reform. However, the introduction of English has been widely welcomed by Algerians, many of whom increasingly view it as a gateway to globalization, technology, and international opportunity (Graddol, 2006). At the same time, French is being increasingly rejected in public discourse, seen as a colonial legacy with diminishing value. This shift reflects deeper sociopolitical tensions and changing linguistic preferences in Algeria's evolving educational landscape.

4. Early English Education and Local Challenges

Research in second and foreign language acquisition widely supports the cognitive and linguistic benefits of early language learning. Scholars such as Nikolov and Djigunović (2011); Lightbown and Spada (2013) argue that early exposure to a second or foreign language promotes bilingualism, enhances metalinguistic awareness, and supports cognitive development. Young learners also tend to acquire more native-like pronunciation and grammatical accuracy, especially when supported by immersive and consistent instruction.

These theoretical advantages may have influenced the Algerian government's decision to introduce English into the third year of primary school starting in 2022. The reform seems to be part of a broader vision to strengthen English proficiency across the population, possibly in preparation for long-term linguistic shifts. Indeed, there have been increasing calls to transition Algeria's higher education system, particularly in scientific and medical fields, from French to English. Building a strong foundation at the primary level may thus be intended to facilitate this shift in future generations.

However, successful early foreign language education depends on more than policy decisions. Implementation must consider key challenges, including teacher preparation, curriculum adequacy, instructional materials, and parental support (Ellis, 2008; Moon, 2005). In Algeria, many parents are not familiar with English, making it difficult to support their children's learning at home. Furthermore, the school system itself may not yet be fully equipped with trained teachers, updated materials, or administrative support to sustain this reform effectively. Without addressing these foundational elements, early English instruction risks becoming a symbolic gesture rather than a sustainable transformation.

Although Algeria introduced English at the primary level in 2022, there is still limited empirical research on how this reform has been received or supported in real educational settings. Much of the existing literature focuses on Algeria's broader language policy history, but little is known about the lived experiences of those directly involved in implementing the reform, particularly teachers and parents. Now, after three full years of implementation, the first cohort of pupils is preparing to transition to middle school in September 2025. This moment is critical for assessing how early English education has been supported and whether key stakeholders are ready for the next stage. Without field-based evaluation, the

feasibility, coherence, and long-term sustainability of this reform remain uncertain.

This study aims to assess the current state of Algeria's primary English reform after three years of implementation by investigating how teachers and parents have supported the early learning process, and by identifying challenges and expectations as pupils prepare to enter middle school. It seeks to achieve the following objectives

1. To explore how teachers and parents have supported early English learning during the three years since its implementation.
2. To examine expectations and concerns regarding the transition to middle school for pupils who have studied English at the primary level.

Consequently, the following research questions are proposed:

1. After three years of implementation, how have teachers and parents supported English learning at the primary level?
2. What are their expectations and concerns regarding the transition to middle school for pupils with a primary English background?

5. Methodology

In order to answer the above research questions, the study adopts a qualitative descriptive design, which is well-suited for exploring participants' real-life experiences, perceptions, and expectations. This approach enables a detailed understanding of how Algeria's early English education reform has been supported at the ground level and how stakeholders view the upcoming transition to middle school after three years of implementation.

5.1 Participants

The study involved four key stakeholder groups:

- a) Ten Primary school English teachers, who have taught English since its introduction in 2022.
- b) 80 Parents of pupils who received English instruction during the three years of primary school.

- c) Ten Middle school English teachers, who are expected to teach this first cohort of English learners starting in September 2025.
- d) Three Middle school inspectors, who oversee curriculum application and teacher preparedness.

This selection of participants offers insights from both the implementation phase and the preparatory phase of the reform's next stage.

5.2 Tools :

To gather in-depth and relevant data:

- a) Semi-structured interviews were conducted with primary school teachers, middle school teachers, and middle school inspectors. These interviews focused on teaching practices, preparedness, observed challenges, and expectations about the reform's future.
- b) An open-ended questionnaire was distributed to parents, allowing them to express their attitudes, level of support, concerns, and hopes regarding their children's English learning and the upcoming move to middle school.

5.3 Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, based on the framework by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved familiarizing with the data, coding significant responses, generating and reviewing themes, and drawing conclusions grounded in the participants' perspectives. Thematic analysis allowed for the identification of common patterns and contrasts across stakeholder groups.

5.4 Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the aim and procedures of the study. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were ensured. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to data collection.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

This section presents the analysis of the qualitative data gathered through interviews

and open-ended questionnaires, in light of the two research questions guiding this study:

RQ1: After three years of implementation, how are primary teachers and parents supporting English language learning at the early stages of schooling in Algeria?

A. Primary School Teachers'

Perspectives

Interviews with ten primary school English teachers, all of whom started teaching in 2022, provided detailed insights into how English language instruction has unfolded at the primary level. Teachers reported that they had received one month of training, part of which overlapped with the beginning of their teaching duties.

They expressed general satisfaction and enjoyment with the curriculum for third year (3AP) pupils, describing it as accessible and engaging. This stage primarily emphasized listening and speaking, with topics such as greetings, days of the week, colors, school items, and toys. Teachers noted that many pupils were already familiar with these topics through digital exposure (e.g., YouTube videos), which enhanced comprehension.

However, the fourth (4AP) and fifth years (5AP) introduced more reading and writing activities, which posed greater challenges. A common issue identified was interference from the French language: pupils often applied French pronunciation and spelling rules when reading or writing in English. This interference is likely due to the fact that pupils begin to engage more deeply with written French around the same time.

Another recurring theme was the limited English proficiency of parents, which created a support gap at home. Teachers explained that while some parents are capable of helping their children, most cannot, leading to concerns about how well learning continues outside the classroom. Nonetheless, teachers acknowledged that parents, even with no English background, were generally supportive of the reform.

On the topic of evaluation, teachers confirmed that they had received appropriate

materials and guidance through ongoing training, although the degree of implementation varied by school.

B. Parents' Perspectives

The questionnaire was distributed to 80 parents whose children had studied English for three years in primary school. Their responses reveal a strong level of enthusiasm and national support for the English language reform.

Parents overwhelmingly viewed English as the language of modernity, global communication, and scientific advancement. Many expressed dissatisfaction with the continued presence of French in the curriculum, describing it as a colonial legacy with limited international value. Some even called for the complete removal of French from schools, arguing that it no longer served a purpose in a rapidly globalizing world.

Despite the fact that most parents did not study English themselves, they were determined to support their children's learning. They described several strategies, such as:

1. Following Facebook pages and YouTube channels created by Algerian English teachers,
2. Enrolling children in private language academies, and
3. Learning English alongside their children to provide better support at home.

Parents were generally satisfied with the curriculum, describing it as accessible, even for non-English-speaking families. The two major challenges they reported were:

1. Inability to assist with homework due to lack of English knowledge, and
2. Language confusion caused by French–English interference.

To resolve these issues, many suggested reducing the number of hours dedicated to French and increasing English instruction, particularly as a way to prevent linguistic overlap and reinforce pupils' new language. The following table summarizes the parents' perspectives :

Table 1: Summary of Parents' Perspectives on the Early Introduction of English in Algerian Primary Schools

Theme	Findings
Attitudes toward English :	Strongly positive; seen as the language of science, technology, and the future.
Perception of French :	Viewed negatively; associated with colonialism and outdated relevance.
Curriculum Accessibility :	Found to be appropriate and understandable, even by non-English-speaking parents.
Support Strategies :	Online tutorials, private classes, self-education.
Challenges :	Limited parental proficiency and confusion from simultaneous French instruction.

RQ2: What are the expectations and concerns of middle school educators and inspectors regarding the transition of pupils with a primary English background into middle school?

C. Middle School Teachers and Inspectors' Perspectives

Interviews with ten middle school English teachers and three inspectors addressed their preparedness and concerns regarding the incoming cohort of pupils who have studied English in primary school for three years.

A major concern was the lack of coordination between primary and middle school levels. Most middle school teachers admitted that they had no prior knowledge of what students had studied in the earlier stages. Only a few had consulted the primary curriculum, mostly due to personal interest or because their own children were enrolled in primary school.

Still, teachers and inspectors shared an optimistic outlook, expecting pupils to arrive with basic English knowledge, which would ease the teaching process and reduce the time typically spent introducing foundational content.

When asked about textbook revisions, both groups confirmed that there had been no official announcement from the Ministry of National Education. However, they pointed to leaked pages from a new didactic guide circulating on Facebook, which strongly suggests that a revised 1AM curriculum is in development.

Participants described the new guide as a significant improvement over the existing 1AM textbook, which was originally created for complete beginners. The leaked material suggests a more coherent, structured approach, focusing on consolidation and progression rather than repetition.

Key features of the new program include:

- Three integrated sequences (*Habits and Preferences, School Life, Past Holidays and Trips*),
- Explicit teaching of all four skills, with clear learning outcomes,
- Use of models for writing, including descriptive and narrative tasks,
- Thematic and grammatical continuity with the primary curriculum.

The following table clearly highlights these key features (Based on M1 teachers' perspectives) :

Table 2: Continuity Between Primary English Curriculum and the Leaked 1AM Curriculum (2025)

Area	Primary Level (3AP–5AP)	Leaked 1AM Curriculum (2025)	Continuity
Skills Covered	Listening, speaking, reading, writing	Same 4 skills explicitly taught	Strong
Themes	School, family, routines, food	Habits, school life, holidays	Smooth
Text Types	Labels, short phrases, simple texts	Descriptive and narrative texts	Gradual
Grammar	To be, have got, present simple	Same + expansion to past tense	Reinforced

Tasks	Q&A, labeling, short writing	Paragraphs with models, storytelling	Appropriate
Instructional Design	Fragmented activities	Integrated and skill-based	Improved

However, several challenges were noted:

1. The curriculum remains unofficial, with no formal announcement or teacher training planned, despite the start of the academic year being close.
2. Only 2 hours per week are allocated to English, while French receives more time. Teachers called for reducing French hours and increasing English exposure.
3. Teachers are expected to transition to a new curriculum without training, despite having used the old one for almost a decade.
4. Pupils repeating 1AM will now be taught using a curriculum that differs from what they received the previous year, potentially leading to confusion.
5. Teachers requested clear assessment rubrics and training to align evaluation practices with the new content.

Despite these concerns, participants expressed support for the upcoming changes, recognizing that the new program is more aligned with pupils' prior learning and offers the potential for more meaningful and sustained language development. One middle school teacher provided a particularly detailed and reflective response that offers a deeper look into the curriculum reform. The teacher described how the previous "Second Generation" program (2016) was widely seen as inconsistent and confusing, particularly the rubrics like the "Initial Situation" and "I Learn to Integrate," which many teachers never received adequate guidance on.

In contrast, the new 1AM curriculum, though unofficially leaked, is viewed positively. The teacher noted that it shows clear alignment with child development theories (Piaget's operational stages,

Vygotsky's ZPD, and Maslow's social-emotional needs). It also shifts away from isolated grammar instruction toward contextualized learning. The redesigned "Initial Situation," for example, is praised for its structure, combining oral and written tasks that activate prior knowledge and prepare learners for the sequence.

Nonetheless, the teacher raised valid concerns about the absence of official training, the late timing of implementation, and the lack of physical resources. "I'm relying on my own efforts to analyse, read, and plan some lessons," the teacher remarked, which illustrates a broader theme of teacher autonomy compensating for system gaps.

4.2 Discussion

This study sought to assess the current state of Algeria's primary English language education reform by examining the perspectives of teachers, parents, and inspectors, especially in light of the first cohort's upcoming transition to middle school. Two key research questions guided the inquiry:

1. After three years of implementation, how are primary teachers and parents supporting English language learning at the early stages of schooling in Algeria?
2. What are the expectations and concerns of middle school educators and inspectors regarding the transition of pupils with a primary English background into middle school?

A. Support for Early English Learning (RQ1)

The findings from both primary school teachers and parents point to a broadly positive reception of the early introduction of English. Teachers expressed satisfaction with the initial curriculum, especially at the third-year level, where listening and speaking were emphasized. Pupils appeared well-engaged, aided in part by prior digital exposure to English media like YouTube. This suggests that informal digital learning is playing a supportive role in early

language acquisition, aligning with what scholars such as Kuppens (2010) and Sundqvist (2009) have observed in similar contexts.

However, as pupils progressed to more reading and writing-intensive levels (4AP and 5AP), challenges began to emerge. A major issue was the interference from French, especially in writing and pronunciation. This linguistic overlap may stem from French being introduced in schools earlier and receiving more instructional time, thus becoming more deeply ingrained.

Despite their limited proficiency in English, many parents showed strong enthusiasm for the reform and were actively supporting their children's learning. They viewed English as a modern, globally relevant language, and many criticized French as a colonial holdover with diminishing value. Their support was expressed through alternative strategies such as online tutorials, home study, and private lessons, demonstrating a remarkable level of motivation even in the absence of language proficiency. This reinforces findings from language policy literature suggesting that parental attitudes significantly influence policy success (Baldauf & Kaplan, 2005).

Yet, the issue of parental language gaps cannot be ignored. Teachers and parents alike acknowledged that a lack of parental proficiency may hinder long-term support, especially as pupils move into more complex language stages. Thus, while the societal attitude toward English is highly favorable, there remains a capacity gap that could affect the reform's sustainability if not addressed through community support or accessible adult education programs.

B. Transition to Middle School: Opportunities and Uncertainties (RQ2)

Middle school teachers and inspectors acknowledged the benefits of having pupils who have already been exposed to English for three years. Many viewed this transition as an opportunity to accelerate learning and reduce the strain traditionally associated

with introducing English from scratch. There was a general sense of optimism about the pupils' preparedness and foundational skills.

However, the discussion revealed a number of institutional and curricular concerns. First, there appears to be a disconnect between primary and middle school levels, with little to no coordination or shared planning. Most middle school teachers were unfamiliar with the primary curriculum, making it difficult to build on pupils' prior knowledge in a systematic way. This gap threatens the continuity and coherence of language education, a key aspect in curriculum planning (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017).

Second, while teachers and inspectors welcomed the leaked drafts of the new didactic guide, they expressed concern that no official announcement or training had yet been provided by the Ministry of National Education. With the academic year approaching, teachers felt unprepared to implement the new curriculum, which reportedly includes significant changes such as:

1. A modular structure with fewer, more focused sequences,
2. A shift from isolated to integrated skill-based learning,
3. Increased emphasis on grammar, writing, and creative expression, and
4. A more professional and coherent instructional design.

They appreciated that the new curriculum aligns more closely with what pupils have already learned in primary school (see Table 2). Yet, concerns about limited instructional time (only 2 hours per week) and the absence of training raised doubts about the effectiveness of implementation. Some also worried about pupils repeating the first-year level (1AM) encountering a completely new curriculum, potentially causing confusion.

These findings are further echoed by a particularly thoughtful teacher response, which acknowledged both the shortcomings of the previous curriculum and the potential of the new one. The teacher emphasized that

the updated curriculum aligns more logically with students' cognitive stages and educational progression and noted that grammar is now better integrated into meaningful contexts.

However, this optimism is tempered by serious implementation issues: many teachers remain untrained, rely only on a leaked PDF didactic guide, and face an academic year that starts in just weeks. As the teacher explained, "Time is not enough for inspectors and teacher trainers to train all teachers... I'm relying on my own efforts." This highlights a common theme in the data: while the reform itself is promising, institutional support and preparation lag behind, leaving teachers to fill the gap on their own.

C. Alignment and Gaps in Language Policy Implementation

Together, the perspectives of teachers, parents, and inspectors reveal a landscape of both promise and risk. The positive societal attitudes, growing parental engagement, and teacher enthusiasm offer strong foundations for reform success. However, the findings also point to critical systemic weaknesses:

1. Lack of vertical coordination between educational stages,
2. Absence of official communication and training,
3. Insufficient instructional time for English,
4. And French language dominance continuing to create interference.

These issues resonate with broader debates in language-in-education planning, particularly in postcolonial contexts like Algeria, where language policies must balance symbolic identity functions with pragmatic educational goals (Hornberger, 2006).

To ensure long-term success, the English reform must be matched by policy coherence, teacher development, and curriculum continuity. The current momentum, driven by strong public demand, provides a unique opportunity for the Algerian government to recalibrate its

language education system toward greater relevance and inclusiveness.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored Algeria's early English education reform from the perspectives of teachers, parents, and inspectors. Overall, stakeholders expressed strong support for the initiative, viewing English as a language of global opportunity. However, challenges such as curriculum gaps, limited parental support, and lack of coordination between educational levels remain. As the first cohort of English learners moves to middle school, urgent action is needed to ensure curriculum continuity, provide teacher training, and officially communicate policy changes. With proper planning and support, the reform holds strong potential for long-term success.

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