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Obstacles to Academic Achievement among Contemporary Algerian Students: A Philosophical Inquiry

عقبات التحصيل العلمي عند الطالب الجزائري المعاصر من منظور الفلسفة

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Abstract:

This study examines the major obstacles to academic achievement among contemporary Algerian students from a philosophical perspective by exploring the factors underlying the decline in their academic performance despite ongoing efforts to improve the educational system. Adopting an analytical approach, the study investigates the relationship between academic achievement and the moral, educational, and social dimensions surrounding the learner. The findings reveal that inadequate parental supervision, excessive attachment to sensory pleasures, and the tendency to view education primarily as a means of material gain rather than as an intrinsic intellectual and educational value constitute some of the most significant barriers to academic success. The study further demonstrates that effective learning is closely linked to a supportive family environment, the reinforcement of moral values, and the development of self-discipline, all of which contribute to shaping a balanced personality that regards knowledge as a path to personal growth and human development rather than merely a tool for immediate benefit.

Keywords: Contemporary Algerian Students; Academic Achievement; Educational Barriers; Family Environment; Educational Philosophy.

المخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل أبرز العقبات التي تعترض التحصيل العلمي لدى الطالب الجزائري المعاصر من منظور فلسفي، من خلال الكشف عن العوامل المؤثرة في تراجع أدائه المعرفي رغم الجهود المبذولة لتطوير المنظومة التعليمية. واعتمدت الدراسة المنهج التحليلي لفحص العلاقة بين التحصيل العلمي والأبعاد الأخلاقية والتربوية والاجتماعية المحيطة بالمتعلم. وتوصلت إلى أن من أهم معوقات التحصيل ضعف المتابعة الأسرية، والانجذاب المفرط نحو اللذات الحسية، والنظر إلى العلم بوصفه وسيلة لتحقيق المكاسب المادية أكثر من كونه قيمة معرفية وتربوية في حد ذاته. كما بينت النتائج أن نجاح العملية التعليمية يرتبط بتوافر بيئة أسرية داعمة، وبترسخ القيم الأخلاقية والانضباط الذاتي لدى المتعلم، بما يساهم في بناء شخصية متوازنة تجعل من العلم غاية للتكوين والارتقاء، لا مجرد أداة للمنفعة الآنية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطالب الجزائري المعاصر؛ التحصيل العلمي؛ معوقات التحصيل العلمي؛ البيئة الأسرية؛ الفلسفة التربوية.

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary Algerian educational landscape is marked by a striking paradox. Despite sustained governmental efforts to modernize the educational system and provide students with the conditions necessary to attain academic excellence, many continue to encounter obstacles that constrain their intellectual development and academic attainment. This challenge cannot be attributed to a single cause; rather, it emerges from the intricate interaction of familial, institutional, social, and ethical factors that collectively undermine students' motivation, weaken their engagement with

learning, and disrupt the relationship between educational effort and its intended formative outcomes¹²³.

From this perspective, academic achievement transcends the boundaries of a purely educational issue and assumes a distinctly philosophical dimension. It invites reflection on the meaning of education, the purpose of knowledge, and the limits of human agency within educational institutions. When knowledge loses its formative value and is reduced to a mere instrument for external success or material advancement, its role as a means of self-cultivation, intellectual awakening, and

personal development inevitably diminishes⁴⁵.

Furthermore, insufficient parental engagement, a deteriorating educational climate, and the weakening of cooperation between home and school all contribute to deepening this crisis and widening disparities in academic achievement among Algerian students. Recent empirical studies have highlighted the significant influence of family environment and family-school collaboration in fostering academic success and enhancing student performance⁶⁷⁸.

A meaningful understanding of this phenomenon within the Algerian context therefore requires careful consideration of the distinctive characteristics of the local educational environment. Such an inquiry enables a more precise identification of the obstacles that impede academic achievement and the mechanisms through which they may be addressed. Against this backdrop, the present article is guided by the following research question: What are the principal obstacles to academic achievement among contemporary Algerian students, and how may they be understood and interpreted through a philosophical lens that integrates ethical, educational, and social dimensions?

1.1. Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to identify and critically examine the major obstacles that impede academic achievement among contemporary Algerian students, with particular attention to the extent to which familial, educational, and ethical factors shape students' motivation toward learning. The study further seeks to explore the relationship between an instrumental conception of knowledge, viewed chiefly as a means to material advancement, and the gradual erosion of the formative and value-laden purpose of education. Moreover, it aims to provide a philosophical framework for understanding this phenomenon in its deeper dimensions, emphasizing that academic achievement is inseparable from the cultivation of character, moral refinement, and personal development.

1.2. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study derives from its engagement with a pressing educational and philosophical issue that concerns both the lived reality of Algerian students and the broader social function of knowledge. Its contribution lies in moving beyond reductionist interpretations of academic underachievement toward an examination of the structural and value-based factors associated with the family, the school, and the wider socio-cultural environment in which learners are situated. Furthermore, the study highlights that improving academic achievement cannot be achieved solely through fragmented educational reforms; rather, it requires a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between education, knowledge, ethics, and the ultimate human purpose of learning.

1.3. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology, as it provides an appropriate framework for examining the educational phenomenon as it manifests within the Algerian context and for analyzing the complex relationships among its constituent factors. In addition, the study draws upon a philosophical approach to interpret central concepts such as knowledge, purpose, self-cultivation, discipline, and motivation, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of the obstacles confronting contemporary Algerian students.

The analysis is structured around three principal themes: the first examines excessive attachment to sensory and material pleasures; the second investigates the absence of effective parental supervision and guidance; and the third analyzes the implications of perceiving knowledge as a means rather than an end. The discussion subsequently culminates in the presentation of the study's findings and recommendations.

2. ATTACHMENT TO SENSORY PLEASURES

One of the most significant challenges confronting contemporary students is their growing attraction to immediate sensory gratification and instinctive desires, a tendency that often weakens their commitment to academic achievement and undermines their moral and behavioral equilibrium. When the pursuit of instant pleasure takes precedence over the pursuit of knowledge, educational life becomes increasingly fragmented, and the educational institution risks losing its formative, ethical, and civilizational functions. Empirical studies have likewise demonstrated that academic underachievement is rarely attributable to a single factor; rather, it emerges from the interaction of behavioral, familial, and environmental influences that collectively shape students' educational trajectories⁹¹⁰.

The gravity of this phenomenon lies in the fact that surrendering to desire in the absence of reasoned self-discipline distances the learner from the principle of rectitude (*istiḳāmah*), which Islamic intellectual tradition regards as the foundation of personal perfection and social order. Without such moral steadfastness, human effort is easily dissipated, and the acquisition of knowledge—which nourishes intellectual capacities and contributes to human flourishing—becomes increasingly difficult. In this sense, self-cultivation cannot be separated from the struggle against excessive desires and the willingness to endure hardship¹¹. This perspective resonates with Al-Qushayri's conception of rectitude and with Ibn Khaldun's view that moral balance underpins both virtuous action and the stability of human civilization¹²¹³.

Accordingly, cautioning against excessive sensory indulgence should not be understood as advocating repression, but rather as promoting moderation and ethical self-regulation within the limits prescribed by reason and moral discipline¹⁴¹⁵.

The pursuit of knowledge, moreover, presupposes a set of moral and spiritual dispositions. As Ibn al-ʿArabi suggests, the

seeker of knowledge should embody qualities such as determination, ascetic restraint, strength of purpose, composure, reflective contemplation, and indifference to praise¹⁶. Yet these virtues cannot be cultivated through individual effort alone; they also require a supportive educational and social environment capable of discouraging deviant behavior and fostering balanced personal development¹⁷. Society itself bears a corresponding responsibility to elevate the status of knowledge and those devoted to its pursuit, recognizing that knowledge is not merely an instrument of material gain but a pathway to human fulfillment and spiritual elevation. Such a conception restores the profound ethical and metaphysical significance of learning¹⁸.

The reform of the social environment begins when knowledge is accorded its rightful place and when educational conditions are organized in ways that preserve the integrity and coherence of the learning process.¹⁹ Within the Islamic-Arab-Algerian intellectual tradition, education is understood as a gradual process of guiding the individual toward moral, intellectual, and behavioral perfection rather than encouraging immersion in pleasures that estrange the learner from his authentic human vocation.²⁰

Consequently, knowledge can bear its fullest fruit only when the heart is purified of vice and moral corruption, for genuine understanding cannot flourish in a soul dominated by unrestrained desire²¹.

From this perspective, the serious provision and effective enforcement of conditions conducive to learning constitute essential prerequisites for cultivating resilience, perseverance, and intellectual discipline among students²². Once learners recognize that the ultimate purpose of knowledge lies in the perfection and elevation of the self, they become capable of distinguishing between what nurtures their development and what hinders it, between transient gratification and enduring value²³. Only then can they approach learning with

intellectual clarity, moral sincerity, and unwavering commitment, free from distractions and practices that undermine their academic growth and personal formation²⁴.

3. THE ABSENCE OF EFFECTIVE FAMILY SUPERVISION AND EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE

Education is fundamentally a social phenomenon whose effectiveness is inseparable from the environment in which it unfolds. It is profoundly shaped by prevailing relationships, value systems, and modes of socialization, rendering the family the primary institution in which the intellectual, moral, and behavioral foundations of the student are formed. Consequently, placing a child within the formal educational system before cultivating habits of discipline, responsibility, and ethical conduct risks undermining the very foundations of the educational process, for education begins within the family before it is consolidated through schooling²⁵²⁶.

Likewise, safeguarding the family environment from corrupting influences and encouraging association with virtuous companions constitute essential preventive measures that protect learners from forms of deviation that may impede their academic progress and weaken their commitment to the pursuit of knowledge²⁷.

The importance of this familial role becomes particularly evident when one recognizes that authentic learning requires not only intellectual aptitude but also moral receptivity and spiritual preparedness. Within this perspective, knowledge does not fully disclose its benefits to those who fail to devote themselves wholeheartedly to its pursuit, nor does it bear lasting fruit in the absence of ethical and spiritual refinement²⁸.

Families are therefore entrusted with the responsibility of instilling in their children, from an early age, the conviction that the pursuit of knowledge is fundamentally incompatible with persistent immoral conduct. The coexistence of learning and vice undermines sound

judgment, corrupts discernment, and renders the individual vulnerable to ignorance, frivolity, and distraction by transient temptations²⁹³⁰.

For this reason, students require sustained and purposeful family support capable of nurturing their abilities and directing them toward constructive ends. Such support is realized through moral formation that precedes academic instruction, making ethical conduct a prerequisite for learning rather than a consequence of it. The more consistently families uphold this principle, the greater the psychological, social, and intellectual stability enjoyed by their children, for human beings remain inherently receptive to formation and influence, much like a precious gem shaped by the engravings imposed upon it³¹. Academic achievement thus flourishes most effectively within a cohesive family structure in which both parents collaborate to provide stability, care, and guidance, while values of solidarity and mutual responsibility extend from the household to the broader community. Such an environment equips students with the resilience and balance necessary to resist fragmentation and personal disintegration³².

Furthermore, the success of the educational process cannot be secured through superficial or merely symbolic parental involvement. Rather, it requires conscious and sustained family engagement that promotes fraternity, mutual support, and moral solidarity as foundational elements of a healthy educational environment. When families actively participate in guiding and accompanying their children throughout the learning process, the school becomes a natural extension of the educational mission initiated within the home rather than a detached institutional sphere. Under such conditions, the prospects for students' academic and intellectual success are significantly enhanced³³³⁴.

4. CONCEIVING KNOWLEDGE AS A MEANS RATHER THAN AN END

Education constitutes one of the defining characteristics of human existence, distinguishing human beings from other forms of life through their capacity for thought, learning, and intellectual development. Through reason and reflection, individuals secure their livelihood, establish social relationships, and participate in the collective production of knowledge. Within this dynamic process, the sciences emerge, evolve, and flourish through engagement with scholars and recognized authorities in learning³⁵. Nevertheless, the contemporary educational reality raises a critical question concerning the decline of intellectual productivity and the limited contribution to knowledge production among Algerian students, revealing a discernible shift from educational and spiritual purposes toward increasingly utilitarian and materialistic conceptions of learning.

When learners become excessively preoccupied with material gratification and sensory rewards, education loses its authentic significance and departs from its higher purposes of moral refinement, spiritual cultivation, and civilizational advancement. Reducing education to a mere instrument for securing employment or achieving material success deprives it of its formative and ethical dimensions, leading many students to perceive educational institutions as functional gateways to economic advancement rather than spaces for human development and self-realization³⁶. Such a reductionist understanding of knowledge may also legitimize the pursuit of success through ethically questionable means whenever material outcomes are prioritized over moral principles. This tendency reflects a worldview in which knowledge is valued primarily for its utility rather than for its intrinsic worth.

In contrast, the genuine seeker of knowledge seeks to harmonize material aspirations with spiritual and ethical commitments, grounding learning within a broader framework of moral responsibility and religious awareness³⁷. From this

perspective, the value of knowledge cannot be measured solely by the accumulation of information, memorization, or intellectual comprehension, but rather by its capacity to bring individuals closer to God, cultivate reverence and moral consciousness, and generate benefits that serve the wider community³⁸.

Consequently, reducing knowledge to a vehicle for material gain often produces adverse effects on learners' character, fostering opportunism, impatience, and a gradual erosion of ethical restraint in pursuit of illusory success. This distortion becomes particularly evident when students are unable to grasp the deeper significance of their educational achievements because the foundations upon which their learning is built are themselves flawed. The ultimate purpose of education is not merely the acquisition of competencies but the formation of individuals capable of meaningful social integration, adaptation, reconciliation, and constructive transformation³⁹. For this reason, prioritizing the ethical and religious dimensions of education remains an essential condition for its success, since knowledge and action, when detached from moral guidance, may lead to confusion, misjudgment, and existential disorientation.

The influence of materialistic values is further manifested in the tendency of some learners to display arrogance toward their teachers and to assume that wealth or social status can compensate for deficiencies in knowledge and understanding. Yet authentic learning can only be attained through humility, respect, and sincere appreciation for scholars and educators. Arrogance distances the learner from wisdom and weakens the sound judgment through which intellectual and human excellence are realized.

Accordingly, deep reflection, sustained contemplation, and spiritual practice should be regarded as pathways to higher forms of knowledge and personal perfection^{40,41}. Restoring the conception of knowledge as an end in itself, rather than

merely a means to material advancement, therefore constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for reforming students' educational trajectories and nurturing both their intellectual and moral development.

5. RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.1. Results

The findings of this study indicate that the obstacles to academic achievement among contemporary Algerian students cannot be explained by any single factor. Rather, they arise from the complex interaction of psychological, familial, educational, and ethical determinants that collectively shape students' learning experiences and academic outcomes. The analysis further highlights the critical importance of self-discipline, moral self-regulation, and personal responsibility as indispensable conditions for overcoming distraction, disengagement, and behavioral deviation.

The study also confirms the pivotal role of the family in shaping students' intellectual and moral development. Active parental involvement contributes significantly to the cultivation of students' abilities, the strengthening of their self-confidence, and the reinforcement of positive educational attitudes, whereas the absence of effective family guidance often fosters negligence, indifference, and weakened academic commitment.

Finally, the findings underscore that academic achievement attains its fullest significance only when it is grounded in ethical values and directed toward higher educational purposes. When learning is reduced to the pursuit of formal credentials, social status, or material gain, it loses much of its formative and transformative potential. Genuine educational success, therefore, depends upon integrating intellectual development with moral cultivation and a clear awareness of the deeper purposes of knowledge and education.

5.2. Recommendations

Drawing upon the findings of this study, the following recommendations are advanced:

- a. Educational policymakers and public authorities should reinforce the implementation of clear and coherent standards of discipline within educational institutions, ensuring that disciplinary practices maintain a formative and pedagogical function that prioritizes guidance and character development alongside deterrence.
- b. Families should be encouraged and supported in assuming an active role in the academic, moral, and psychological development of their children, recognizing the family as the primary institution responsible for nurturing values, responsibility, and educational commitment.
- c. Educational institutions should adopt incentive-based strategies that acknowledge both academic excellence and exemplary moral conduct, thereby fostering sustained motivation, positive engagement, and a culture of achievement among students.
- d. Policymakers should consider measures aimed at reducing social and economic disparities within educational environments in order to strengthen equality of opportunity, social cohesion, and students' sense of belonging to the educational community.
- e. Greater support should be provided for educational initiatives that integrate academic achievement with ethical formation and character development, thereby preserving the humanistic purpose of education and ensuring that knowledge remains a means of cultivating well-rounded individuals rather than merely an instrument of material success.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that sustainable academic achievement can only emerge within a balanced educational environment in which the responsibilities of

the family and the school operate in a complementary and mutually reinforcing manner, and in which knowledge is grounded in a robust ethical and spiritual foundation. The effectiveness of educational development increases whenever meaningful guidance, disciplined conduct, and a culture of recognition and responsibility are firmly established, enabling students to overcome negligence, strengthen their commitment to learning, and expand their opportunities for intellectual and personal advancement.

The study further suggests that genuine educational reform cannot be achieved solely through the provision of material resources or institutional improvements. Rather, it requires a deeper investment in the formation of the individual, cultivating moral integrity, self-discipline, and a clear awareness of the higher purposes of learning. Only under such conditions can knowledge fulfill its true function as a means of self-cultivation, human flourishing, and spiritual elevation, rather than being reduced to a transient instrument for attaining external success.

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⁴⁰ Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid, Mizan Al-Amal, Dar Al-Maaref, Cairo, 1964, p. 361.

⁴¹ Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid, Ma'arij Al-Quds fi Madarij Ma'rifat Al-Nafs, Dar Al-Afaq Al-Jadida, Beirut, 1975, p. 8.