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English as the new language of instruction in Algeria: Sociolinguistic attitudes and didactic challenges among pre-service teachers

الإنجليزية كلغة تدريس جديدة في الجزائر: المواقف الاجتماعية اللغوية والتحديات التعليمية لدى الأساتذة المتربصين

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Abstract:

This study investigates the attitudes of 50 final-year pre-service teachers enrolled at ENS Constantine in Algeria regarding the recent policy shift promoting English as a medium of instruction in place of French. Through a mixed-methods approach combining a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, we sought to explore participants' perceptions of the feasibility and desirability of expanding English-medium instruction (EMI) across different educational levels. The results reveal that while a majority of trainees express positive attitudes toward the increased use of English, they simultaneously stress the importance of preserving French as a complementary language of instruction. The participants identify several challenges that may hinder the smooth implementation of EMI in Algerian schools and universities. Among the obstacles cited are the insufficient English proficiency levels of both teachers and students, the scarcity of high-quality pedagogical resources in English, and the widespread habit of switching code, which complicates full immersion in the target language. These findings highlight the need for a realistic and gradual transition that prioritizes well-designed teacher training programmes and institutional support. A balanced bilingual policy appears to be the most viable solution to meet students' linguistic needs while respecting Algeria's sociolinguistic context. This research contributes to ongoing discussions about language-in-education policy and the future of multilingual education in Algeria.

Keywords: bilingualism; English medium instruction; language policy; sociolinguistic attitudes; teacher training.

الملخص باللغة العربية:

تناول هذه الدراسة تصورات و تقديرات 50 استاذاً متدرباً في السنة النهائية بالمدرسة العليا للأساتذة اسيا جبار في قسنطينة بالجزائر، وذلك فيما يتعلق بالتحول الأخير في السياسة التعليمية الذي يهدف إلى اعتماد اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة للتدريس بدلاً من اللغة الفرنسية. ومن خلال منهجية مختلطة تجمع بين الاستبيان المقنن والمقابلات شبه المنظمة، سعينا لاستكشاف تصورات المشاركين حول مدى جدوى وملاءمة توسيع نطاق التدريس باللغة الإنجليزية ليشمل مختلف المراحل التعليمية. وتُظهر النتائج أنه على الرغم من أن غالبية المتدربين يبدون اتجاهات إيجابية تجاه زيادة استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية، إلا أنهم يشددون في الوقت ذاته على أهمية الحفاظ على اللغة الفرنسية كلغة تدريس مكتملة. وقد حدد المشاركون عدة تحديات قد تعيق التطبيق السلس للتدريس باللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس والجامعات الجزائرية؛ ومن بين هذه العقبات: عدم كفاية مستوى الكفاءة في اللغة الإنجليزية لدى كل من المعلمين والطلاب، وندرة الموارد التربوية عالية الجودة باللغة الإنجليزية، وشيوع ظاهرة التناوب اللغوي (أو الانتقال بين اللغات) التي تعرقل الانغماس الكامل في اللغة المستهدفة. وتسلط هذه النتائج الضوء على الحاجة إلى عملية انتقال واقعية وتدرجية تمنح الأولوية لبرامج تدريب اساتذة المستقبل المصممة بعناية وللدعم المؤسسي. ويبدو أن تبني سياسة ثنائية اللغة متوازنة يمثل الحل الأكثر قابلية للتطبيق لتلبية الاحتياجات اللغوية للطلاب مع مراعاة السياق الاجتماعي-اللغوي في الجزائر.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

ازدواجية اللغة؛ التدريس بالإنجليزية؛ السياسة اللغوية؛ الاتجاهات اللغوية الاجتماعية؛ تدريب الاساتذة

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Algeria has initiated a major shift in language-in-education policy by aggressively promoting English at the expense of French. In 2022, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune decreed that English

be introduced in primary schools (Saad Allah, 2023), and by 2025 the Ministry of Higher Education instructed universities to replace French with English in first-year science and medical courses (Sawahel, 2025). These top-down decisions mark a turning point in

Algeria's sociolinguistic landscape. Historically, French held a prestigious position as the language of modernity, science, and upward mobility in Algeria (Belmihoub, 2018, p. 144). Even decades after independence, French remained deeply entrenched in academia as a bridge to technological and socioeconomic advancement. However, a growing number of Algerians—especially youth—now perceive English as the language of opportunity in a globalized world (Saad Allah, 2023; Belmihoub, 2018). English is seen as the dominant international lingua franca of science, technology, and diplomacy, which is a key reason policymakers are elevating its role in education. The push for English is not purely pedagogical; it also carries political undertones. Observers note that Algeria's pivot to English is motivated in part by a desire to reduce reliance on the former colonial language, French, amid periodic tensions with France (Sawahel, 2025). Indeed, this linguistic shift fits into a broader North African trend of re-evaluating the Francophone legacy in favor of greater linguistic neutrality and global integration.

While policymakers have embraced English, questions remain about on-the-ground implementation. Prior studies suggest that students and educators in Algeria generally hold positive attitudes toward English as a vehicle of economic opportunity and knowledge access (Belmihoub, 2018, p. 163). An overwhelming majority of Algerian youth favor multilingualism – supporting the teaching of both English and French rather than a one-for-one replacement. At the same time, implementing a sudden switch to English-medium instruction (EMI) faces pragmatic challenges. Algeria currently ranks low on global English proficiency indices (Sawahel, 2025), reflecting generally limited English mastery in the population. In higher education, many students and faculty lack the requisite English skills for a full shift from French (Sawahel, 2025). Classroom practices also lag behind policy rhetoric: instructors habitually resort to French (and Arabic) when teaching content, and the dominance of

French in curricula is seen as a major obstacle to adopting English-only instruction (Kadi, 2022, p. 655). Code-switching remains widespread – for example, in one university survey, 84% of lecturers reported frequently alternating between French, Arabic, and English to help students understand lessons (Touahmia & Bakar, 2024, p. 61). Such realities highlight a potential disconnect between language policy and actual classroom practice.

To date, several studies have explored aspects of this issue. Kadi (2022) surveyed university teachers and found optimism that “Englishisation” could enhance Algerian higher education's global standing, but also a plethora of difficulties in integrating English in the classroom (Kadi, 2022, p. 658). Other research on university students' attitudes showed strong support for English as a means of scientific progress, alongside a continued positive view of French in a bilingual balance (Belmihoub, 2018). However, little attention has been given to pre-service teachers at the secondary level – the very people who will soon be expected to implement these new language policies in their own classrooms. This research intends to fill that gap by concentration on future middle and high school teachers in training. We investigate how these trainees perceive the rise of English in Algeria's educational context, how they balance English vs. French in their attitudes, and how prepared they feel to teach in an English-dominant environment. The research was conducted at ENS “Assia Djebar” in Constantine, a teacher-training college where students specialize in teaching either English or French, making it an ideal setting to gauge the didactic implications of the country's shifting language priorities.

It is important to point that the rise of English in Algeria must be viewed in the broader context of English as a global language. Globalization has accelerated the proliferation of English as a shared language in the 21st century, giving it a dominant role in science, technology, business, and education. Many formerly French speaking or Arabic speaking societies now consider

English essential for participation in the global economy and knowledge society. In Algeria, this global dominance of English exerts a powerful influence on language policy. Language planning theory suggests that decisions about the medium of instruction are often driven by the perceived economic and scientific utility of languages.

Today, English is widely seen as a language of modern progress and international integration—free from the colonial baggage associated with French—and thus more politically palatable to promote. Bellalem (2014) notes that during Algeria's 1990s experiment with introducing English in primary schools, the government's motivations were dual: at a macro level, aligning with global politico-economic trends that favour English, and at a micro level, "turning the page" on the French colonial legacy in favour of a neutral language. However, as Macaro et al. (2020, p. 15) caution, "EMI policies often fail to account for local pedagogical realities and the need for teacher support systems," which may explain persistent gaps between official decrees and classroom practice.

At this level, we specify that Algeria's linguistic landscape is richly multicultural but also hierarchical. After independence in 1962, Arabic (specifically Modern Standard Arabic) was elevated as the national and official language, and extensive "Arabization" reforms were implemented in education. French, however, maintained a strong presence—especially in higher education and technical fields—due to its colonial legacy and continued utility. For decades, debates over language of instruction were dominated by a tug-of-war between Arabic and French. English remained a tertiary language: introduced only in secondary school and with limited functional roles in society. Notably, in the early 1990s there was a pilot policy to introduce English earlier, as the first foreign language in some primary schools instead of French. English was rolled out in Grade 4 nationwide by 1995, but this reform was later reversed under political pressure and practical challenges.

The failure of that early initiative illustrated how ideological resistance and lack of preparation (e.g. too few trained teachers and materials) can derail language reforms. In the ensuing years, English gradually re-entered the conversation, buoyed by a new generation's attitudes. Surveys in both Algeria and neighbouring Morocco have found that younger, educated groups increasingly value English for its role in technology and socioeconomic advancement, sometimes even more so than French (Belmihoub, 2018, p. 163). At the same time, French remains deeply ingrained in Algeria; as one observer quipped, "modernity speaks French" in North Africa (Abdat-Hadjadj, 2024). The current policy shift toward English thus unfolds in a complex diglossic and bilingual environment where Algerian Arabic (Darja), Modern Standard Arabic, French, and now English each have established domains and symbolic significance.

Moreover, in sociolinguistics, language attitudes refer to the opinions, beliefs, and predispositions that speakers have about languages and their use. Attitudes are crucial in multilingual settings because they can influence behaviour (e.g. willingness to learn or use a language) and affect the success of language policies. Algerian attitudes toward English and French have been studied in recent years, especially among youth. Belmihoub (2018) found that among Algerian engineering students, English is viewed very favourably as a means for personal and national development. Participants in that study described English as a "useful vehicle of economic opportunity and knowledge transfer" (Belmihoub, 2018, p. 163) and overwhelmingly supported additive bilingualism—adding English while retaining French rather than replacing French. In fact, respondents unanimously supported teaching both English and French in schools, indicating that promoting English need not imply rejecting French. Another recent study of university faculty and students reported that attitudes were not a principal barrier to implementing EMI; most

stakeholders acknowledged English's importance, though some had reservations about the pace of change (Touahmia & Bakar, 2024, p. 60). Such generally positive attitudes are encouraging, because even the best-crafted policy can stumble if the people expected to carry it out—teachers and students—are not psychologically on board. Affective and behavioural dimensions thus require equal attention alongside cognitive support systems.

It is now appropriate to clarify that English-medium instruction (EMI) refers to teaching academic subjects in English in contexts where the usual language of education has been something else. Algeria's current reforms essentially aim to establish EMI at the secondary and tertiary levels of education, especially in science-related disciplines (Sawahel, 2025). Adopting EMI on a wide scale involves significant didactic and logistical challenges. A key issue is language proficiency: both teachers and learners must have sufficient command of English to handle complex subject matter (Sawahel, 2025). In Algeria, where general English proficiency is relatively low (classified as "low" in international indices), this is a serious concern. A related challenge is the development of appropriate curricula and materials in English. Without updated textbooks, reference materials, and assessment tools available in English, teachers will struggle to deliver content effectively. Teacher training is another critical factor. Most in-service teachers in Algeria were themselves educated in Arabic and French and may not have the pedagogical skills to teach effectively in English without further training. Bellalem (2014) argues that introducing English as a medium of instruction requires a "transitional teacher training and development system" to prepare educators for the new approach. As Tatzl (2015, p. 12) emphasizes, "initial teacher training programs rarely include adequate modules on content teaching through English, leaving new instructors under-prepared." In practical classroom terms, code-switching is likely to remain a

common strategy during the transition period. Alternating between languages can be pedagogically useful to explain difficult concepts, but it also indicates that full immersion in English has not yet been achieved. Kadi (2022) observed that nearly all surveyed university teachers frequently slipped into French or Arabic when attempting to teach in English, largely to mitigate students' comprehension difficulties. Smit (2018, p. 8) further notes that "the persistence of code-switching in EMI classrooms frequently signals an incomplete transition to full English immersion." This underscores a didactic paradox: English may be mandated as the official medium, yet other languages are still needed in practice to facilitate learning. Finally, cultural and identity considerations come into play. The language of instruction affects a lot of teachers and students relate to the content and to their own identities. Some Algerian educators worry that emphasizing English could marginalize Arabic or French cultural content, while others believe it will open doors to global knowledge. Balancing these concerns is part of the didactic challenge of EMI—finding a way to improve English usage in education while sustaining Algeria's multilingual heritage.

In summary, the literature suggests that Algeria's move toward English in education is driven by globalization and internal politics, supported by generally positive attitudes among the young, but faces significant practical hurdles. This conceptual background informed the present study's focus on gauging how pre-service teachers themselves view these developments. We now turn to the methodology used to explore these questions.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The study focused on pre-service teachers enrolled at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) "Assia Djébar" in Constantine, Algeria. A total of 50 trainee teachers in their final year of the program participated. To capture perspectives related to both major foreign languages in Algeria,

the sample was evenly divided : 25 trainees specializing in English teaching and 25 specializing in French teaching. All participants were preparing to become middle or secondary school language teachers (of English or French). Their ages ranged from 21 to 24 years (mean $\approx$ 22), and 60% of the sample were female. Around 80% of participants reported Algerian Arabic (Darja) as their mother tongue, while about 20% were native speakers of Tamazight (Berber). All had studied French as a second language since primary or middle school, and English as a foreign language since at least middle school, following the typical Algerian curriculum.

2.2. Research design

We employed a descriptive survey design with mixed methods. Data were collected via a self-administered questionnaire consisting of a combination of closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was administered in English, with clarifications provided in French or Arabic if requested (given participants' bilingual proficiency). It comprised three main parts: (1) background information (age, gender, native language, etc.); (2) Likert-scale items probing attitudes towards English and French in education, and self-assessed readiness to teach in English; and (3) open-ended questions inviting comments on the perceived benefits and challenges of the shift to English-medium instruction.

For the Likert-scale statements, participants indicated the degree of agreement on a five-point rating scale (from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree"). Key statements included assertions such as "English should replace French as the primary language of instruction in Algerian universities," "French should continue to be used alongside English in higher education," and "I often use French or Arabic to explain things when teaching in English." These items were designed to gauge not only support for the new policy, but also preferences for a bilingual approach and actual language-use practices. The questionnaire was reviewed by two

experienced sociolinguistics researchers for content validity, then piloted with a small group of 5 ENS students, leading to minor wording tweaks for clarity.

2.3. Procedure

After obtaining informed consent, we administered the questionnaires during a scheduled seminar session. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was assured. All 50 questionnaires were completed and returned on site (100% response rate). Participants were encouraged to answer frankly and to elaborate on their opinions in the open-response sections. In addition, to enrich the quantitative data, we conducted brief follow-up interviews with 6 volunteers (3 from the English-specialist group, 3 from the French-specialist group). These semi-structured interviews (approximately 15 minutes each) allowed participants to discuss their attitudes and experiences in more depth—particularly regarding any classroom teaching practicums they had completed. The interviews were conducted in the participant's preferred language (English or French), then transcribed and translated into English where necessary for analysis.

2.4. Data analysis

Quantitative data from the Likert-scale items were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics. We calculated response frequencies and percentages for each item and, where relevant, compared responses between the English-specialist and French-specialist subgroups. Two-sample t-tests were performed on key attitude measures to check for statistically significant differences between the subgroups. Given the modest sample size, results are reported descriptively, with any statistically significant differences at $p < 0.05$ noted. Qualitative data from the open-ended responses and interviews were analyzed thematically. We used an inductive coding approach to identify recurring themes and concerns mentioned by the participants. Three main themes emerged: perceived advantages of "Englishization," perceived obstacles and challenges, and strategies or

supports needed for implementation. These themes aligned closely with the survey focus areas and provided a framework for integrating the qualitative insights with the quantitative findings.

By combining numeric survey results with illustrative quotes and examples from the interviews, our analysis aimed to provide a comprehensive picture of the trainees' perspectives. In the next section, we present the results of the study, organized around the main topics of interest, and we interpret them in light of the context and literature discussed earlier.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Participants' Profile

All 50 participants completed the survey, and their background characteristics are summarized in Table 1. The group reflects the typical ENS student-teacher demographic: majority female, bilingual in Arabic-French, and in their early twenties. The equal split between English and French specialization students allows for direct comparisons of each subgroup's attitudes in subsequent analyses. Notably, all participants reported at least intermediate proficiency in French, and all the English-specialists reported having an upper-intermediate to advanced level of English (many holding a B2 or C1 certification). Among the French-specialists, self-rated English proficiency was more varied (generally intermediate on average), since English was a secondary focus in their training. This background suggests that even the French-major trainees are fairly comfortable in English (having studied it for years), though not as much as their English-major peers—a point to keep in mind when considering their attitudes about using English in teaching.

Table 1. Participants' Profile (N = 50)

Characteristic	Distribution
Gender	30 female (60%); 20 male (40%)
Average age	22 years (range 21–24)
Native language – Arabic	40 (80%)
Native language	10 (20%)

– Tamazight	
Teaching specialization	25 English (50%); 25 French (50%)

3.2. Attitudes Toward English vs. French in Education

The survey results revealed a nuanced set of attitudes regarding the role of English and French. **Table 2** presents three key Likert-scale statements and the summary of responses, which capture core aspects of the language-in-education debate. Overall, there is strong enthusiasm for elevating English, tempered by a clear desire to retain French in some capacity. There is also candid acknowledgment of practical realities, evidenced by the high percentage of trainees admitting to frequent code-switching in class.

Table 2. Selected Survey Statements and Response Summary

Survey Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
1. <i>“English should become the primary language of instruction in universities.”</i>	60%	20%	20%
2. <i>“French should continue to be used alongside English in higher education.”</i>	80%	10%	10%
3. <i>“I often use French or Arabic to clarify</i>	75%	15%	10%

when teaching or explaining in English."			
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(Note: "Agree" includes both *Strongly Agree* and *Agree* responses combined; similarly for "Disagree." Percentages are rounded to the nearest 5% for simplicity.)

These results indicate that a majority of the trainee teachers support the policy direction of expanding English. For statement 1, 60% of respondents agreed that English should become the primary medium of instruction at the tertiary level, while only 20% outright disagreed. However, support for English does not imply a rejection of French. In fact, an even larger proportion (80%) agreed with statement 2, that French should continue to be used alongside English in higher education. This suggests that most respondents favour a bilingual model rather than an exclusive switch – they envision English rising in importance but not completely displacing French. Many of the same students who agreed that English should be primary also agreed that French should be maintained, reflecting an *additive bilingualism* perspective. As one interviewee (an English-major) explained: "*English should lead the way in science and research, but completely removing French would be a mistake – we need both.*" This balanced outlook aligns with previous studies showing positive orientations toward multilingualism among Algerian students (Belmihoub, 2018). It appears the next generation of teachers largely imagine a multilingual educational system where English grows in usage but French remains a valued complementary asset.

The third statement in Table 2 addresses actual classroom practice: 75% of all trainees acknowledged that they often resort to French or Arabic to help students understand when teaching in English. This is a strikingly high percentage, although not surprising given the context. It mirrors findings among current university faculty in

Algeria (Kadi, 2022) and confirms that code-switching is deeply ingrained as a classroom strategy. Even the trainees most enthusiastic about "Englishization" recognize that, at present, many students simply do not comprehend lessons entirely in English. Interview comments underscored this point. For example, a French-specialist trainee recounted her recent middle-school teaching practicum: "*I tried to use only English in my English classes, but when students looked confused, I had to explain in Arabic. They wouldn't get it otherwise.*" Such experiences make clear that language barriers in the classroom are an everyday reality. Interestingly, a few English-major trainees noted that they themselves sometimes needed to consult French textbooks or explanations when first encountering complex concepts during their own university studies, highlighting that the challenge of EMI can affect even teachers-in-training who learned content in French.

It is worth examining differences between the English-major and French-major subgroups on these attitudinal items. As expected, there were some contrasts reflecting their language specializations. The English-option trainees showed much stronger support for making English the primary medium: about 80% of the English-major group agreed with statement 1, compared to 40% of the French-major group. The French-major trainees, on the other hand, were nearly unanimous (over 90%) in agreeing that French should continue alongside English (statement 2), whereas the English majors were a bit less emphatic (roughly 70% agreed). In fact, several French-major interviewees expressed personal concern or ambivalence: "*I love English too, but I wonder what will happen to French teachers like us. Will there still be a demand for French in the future?*" Despite these differences, it's important to note that neither group was "against" English – even among the French-specialists, most acknowledged English's importance; they differed mainly in advocating a more gradual or dual-language approach. Statistical

comparison confirmed that the English-major group's mean support for an all-English medium was significantly higher than the French-major group's (t-test, $p < .01$). Conversely, the French majors were significantly more in favour of retaining French ($p < .05$ on that item). On statement 3 (switching code), both groups reported high levels of switching between languages (approximately 72% of English majors and 80% of French majors said they do so often). This slight difference in code-switching frequency was not statistically significant ($p > .10$), indicating that the habit of falling back on French/Arabic in class is prevalent among trainees regardless of specialization.

3.3. Perceived Benefits of the Shift to English

In the open-ended responses, participants elaborated on what they see as the advantages of increasing English's role in education. A common theme was that adopting English in academia would yield significant academic and professional benefits for Algeria. Many trainees wrote that English is "*the language of science, technology and globalization*," echoing the rhetoric of policymakers. They believe that if students master English, they can access more up-to-date scientific literature, collaborate internationally, and generally improve the quality of research and higher education. "*It will open doors for our students*," one respondent wrote simply. Some trainees also mentioned employment prospects, arguing that English proficiency will make the upcoming generation more competitive in the global job market. These views correspond with those expressed by university instructors in earlier studies – for instance, teachers surveyed by Kadi (2022) felt that Englishization would "*give the Algerian university a global reputation and lay the foundation for a renewal in educational practices*" (Kadi, 2022, p. 649). Our participants likewise see the shift as potentially transformative. In their descriptions, they frequently used words like "*modernize*," "*internationalize*," and "*innovate*" when discussing the impact of expanding English-medium instruction. This

positive outlook is consistent with expert commentary that integrating English can help Algeria better prepare students for a globalized economy where English is dominant, put the country "*in tune with*" technological advances, and give local research greater international visibility (Sawahel, 2025).

Another perceived benefit that emerged is an interesting sociolinguistic one: linguistic neutrality and openness. A few participants noted that English, unlike French, carries little historical resentment in Algeria. As one English-major argued, "*English is just a tool – nobody here feels it threatens our identity the way French sometimes does*." In their view, English can be adopted without the colonial-era baggage, potentially reducing the politicization of language in education. This sentiment resonates with Bellalem's observation that many Algerians see English as a language "*with no colonial connotations*," making it more socially acceptable as a medium of instruction in a proud post-colonial nation (Bellalem, 2014). Additionally, some trainees suggested that a greater emphasis on English could actually boost overall multilingualism rather than diminish it. Because English would be learned in addition to (rather than in place of) Arabic and French, students might end up more linguistically versatile. These individuals advocated for *trilingual* competence (Arabic-French-English) as the ideal outcome, giving Algerian students "the best of all worlds." This perspective is optimistic: it assumes adding English will not subtract from French or Arabic proficiency if handled properly.

3.4. Perceived Obstacles and Challenges

Despite the generally positive view of English, the participants were keenly aware of the challenges involved in moving toward English-medium instruction. The most frequently cited concern (mentioned by roughly 68% of respondents in an open-ended prompt) was *insufficient English proficiency among students*. Trainees worry that many secondary-school students – especially those outside urban or elite schools

– do not currently have the English level to understand subject matter if it were taught primarily in English. This aligns with the fact that Algeria’s overall English proficiency is low on global indices (Sawahel, 2025), and it corroborates what the trainees have observed during their teaching practicum experiences. One French-major trainee described a classroom scenario: *“I tried a bit of science in English in a middle school geography lesson; the pupils were completely lost. They haven’t had enough English yet to follow.”* Such anecdotes underline a structural issue: introducing English earlier (in primary grades) may eventually improve students’ proficiency in the long term, but for now there is a mismatch between policy ambitions and students’ current language preparedness. Indeed, in Kadi’s study of university teachers, a majority highlighted “students’ low proficiency in English” as a major hindrance to using English as the medium of instruction (Kadi, 2022, p. 654). Our trainees echo this from a secondary education perspective – if even many university students struggle with English, then younger secondary students would struggle even more unless the transition is very carefully scaffolded.

A second major challenge is the *entrenched dominance of French*, which the trainees see evidenced in both their own habits and the education system’s infrastructure. As shown by our survey (Table 2), three-quarters of respondents admitted to regularly switching to French/Arabic when attempting to teach in English. They consider this both as indicators and as sources of this problem. On one hand, it reflects that teachers (even future ones) do not feel English alone is sufficient to carry a lesson – often because students will not grasp everything. On the other hand, this continual fall-back to French means students get less exposure to English in practice, potentially slowing their improvement in English and thus perpetuating the cycle. Participants identified switching code and the habit of using French terminology as a crutch as significant obstacles to fully embracing

English. In the questionnaire, 84% responded “Yes” when asked if “the current dominance of French in the classroom is an obstacle to replacing it with English,” which closely matches findings from prior research with in-service teachers (Touahmia & Bakar, 2024, p. 61). Moreover, French is deeply embedded in curricula, textbooks, exams, and teacher-training programs. At present, all science textbooks in Algerian secondary schools are still in French, and most current science/math teachers were themselves trained in French (Benslimane, 2022). Trainees remarked that without updated materials in English, teachers will simply translate French content on the fly or teach bilingually. Thus, the *lack of English-language resources and content* was another oft-mentioned challenge. One English-major trainee who tried to prepare a demo biology lesson entirely in English noted that finding equivalent terminology in English and ensuring the students understood it was “*very challenging*” – much of her lesson time was consumed just teaching the English terms. This corresponds with practicing teachers’ observations that students have “limited vocabulary and jargon related to their field in English,” requiring extra time to teach terminology before actually teaching concepts (Kadi, 2022).

Another obstacle area is *teacher preparedness and training*. The participants – especially those in the French section – felt that they have not been adequately trained to teach subject content in English. The English-major trainees are being trained to teach English, but they are not necessarily trained to teach other subjects (like science or math) in English. Meanwhile, the French-major trainees are obviously trained to teach French, not to teach in English at all. If language policy eventually extends EMI into secondary-school science or other subjects (as some anticipate for the future), it would place teachers like the French-major trainees in a very difficult position. Even within the current scope (teaching English as a subject), trainees felt that their curriculum at ENS, while covering general pedagogy, did not specifically prepare them for managing a

low-English-proficiency classroom using modern techniques. They expressed a need for more courses or workshops on EMI teaching strategies—such as how to simplify complex content into accessible English, how to reinforce subject-specific vocabulary, and how to effectively use bilingual techniques without resorting purely to translation. The consensus was that significant professional development would be needed for both new and existing teachers to handle an English-medium paradigm. This is precisely what experts have cautioned. Professor Fouzi Bellalem, for instance, noted that Algeria lacks a sufficient number of faculty prepared to teach in English and that building this capacity “takes years of intensive language training” (cited in Sawahel, 2025). Similarly, our soon-to-be teachers recognize that they themselves will require ongoing training. It’s worth quoting one French-major student’s candid comment: *“If they suddenly tell me to teach my history class in English, I wouldn’t know how – I’d need training first, otherwise I’d resist the change.”* This reflects the fear that without proper support, even well-intentioned teachers might be resistant or unconfident, which could undermine the policy’s success. Prior surveys of Algerian educators have indeed found some resistance rooted in lack of readiness and training opportunities (Kadi, 2022).

Finally, participants brought up *cultural and motivational factors*. A number of trainees observed that not all students (or even teachers) are intrinsically motivated to embrace English—some see it as just another subject they have to pass. One interviewee from the English section noted, *“In my practice teaching, some pupils only care about getting the required grade in English; they’re not really interested in using it.”* This lack of genuine motivation could hamper the effectiveness of increased English instruction. It is also mentioned in Kadi’s study, where teachers reported that some students “have almost no internal motivation to learn English beyond the grade” (Kadi, 2022, p. 655). This points to a didactic challenge of how to engage students with

English in a meaningful way, especially if it’s suddenly used to teach subjects where they previously didn’t encounter it. There may also be identity and attitudinal issues for some communities: in regions or schools where French has long been part of the local academic culture, students and parents might initially feel uneasy or even resist English taking over, perceiving it as a threat to the status of French (or to the role of Arabic as the national language). Though our survey did not directly measure community sentiment, a few trainees—particularly French-specialists—alluded to a sentimental attachment to French, calling it part of Algeria’s educational heritage or effectively a “second national language.” Managing such sentiments will require sensitivity.

3.5. Support for implementation

When asked what would help ease the transition to greater use of English, the participants overwhelmingly recommended a gradual and well-supported approach. This aligns with expert recommendations that Algeria should take a “gradual, well-supported and inclusive approach” to the English shift (Sawahel, 2025). From the trainees’ viewpoint, a gradual approach means incrementally increasing English content in courses rather than enforcing an abrupt switch. Many suggested starting bilingual programs where materials are provided in both French and English, and where teachers can comfortably mix languages while students build proficiency. One practical suggestion was to begin by offering optional workshops or supplementary tutorials in English for scientific subjects at the secondary level, as a way to prepare both students and teachers without immediately mandating that all core classes be taught in English. This echoes calls by researchers to expand successful pilot programs (for example, a well-known English-medium engineering program at the Algerian Institute of Electrical Engineering) slowly and only as readiness allows (Abdat-Hadjadj, 2024).

Training and resources were the other key supports identified. Participants strongly

believe that comprehensive teacher training programs must accompany the policy shift. This training should include intensive English language up skilling for teachers, pedagogical training specifically for EMI (as noted above), and exposure to international best practices in bilingual education. The idea of short-term exchange programs or bringing in experienced instructors from English speaking contexts was even mentioned. Interestingly, these parallels suggestions made by outside observers: for instance, Salomon (in Sawahel, 2025) proposed that hiring visiting faculty or facilitating international exchanges could help universities transition to English. At the school level such measures may be harder to implement, but within teacher training institutes like ENS, inviting guest lecturers or implementing modules led in English by proficient educators could build local capacity. Nearly all participants also highlighted the need for new teaching materials: updated textbooks, lesson plans, audio-visual resources, etc., in English or bilingual format. As one trainee quipped, “We can’t just tell teachers ‘teach in English’ but then hand them a French textbook – that won’t work!” However basic this point sounds, it highlights that policy mandates must be accompanied by material support on the ground.

The trainees’ recommendations align closely with those given by in-service practitioners in Kadi’s survey and by other commentators (Sawahel, 2025). These include: providing high-quality in-service training to meet international standards, adopting or developing modern bilingual curricula, enhancing English teaching at earlier stages (so that students enter higher levels with better English skills), and even raising language proficiency entry requirements for certain university programs to ensure students can cope with English instruction. Some trainees also advocated maintaining a strong foundation in French and Arabic literacy as a springboard – essentially, not neglecting general language education in the push for English. The overall

stance can be summarized as: be prepared and don’t rush.

To illustrate, one English-major participant suggested a phased timeline: introduce EMI gradually in secondary schools by first teaching a few non-language subjects in a bilingual format (e.g. a science module taught in both English and French), while simultaneously providing extra English classes to students. Only after a few years, once students and teachers have adjusted, would the program move to predominantly English instruction. This kind of phased plan would allow for adjustments along the way. It reflects a common sentiment in our data: enthusiasm for the end goal (more English use in education) coupled with insistence on scaffolding the process.

Finally, many trainees see their own generation’s role as crucial in this sociolinguistic change. They consider themselves part of a new wave of educators who are more adept in English and more open to changing methods. An English-major interviewee confidently said, “We, the new teachers, will be the connection between the old system and the new. We can adapt because we understand both French and English.” This highlights a potentially important factor: the generational shift in the teaching workforce may naturally facilitate the transition to EMI. The current cohort of ENS graduates, being mostly bilingual and having grown up in an era of globalization, might be more flexible and creative in integrating English while respecting the existing linguistic context. They essentially see themselves as mediators of change – which underscores why understanding their attitudes (the focus of this study) is so important.

4. Discussion

In sum, the data clearly show a desire for balance between the two languages: participants want to embrace English’s expansion, but not to the total exclusion of French, and they readily acknowledge the practical necessity of using French or Arabic in the classroom for now. It is yet to be seen whether this holds true in real practice, but it

is important to note that the next generation of teachers is imagining a scenario of linguistic enrichment rather than a zero-sum competition between languages.

An effective implementation of EMI might need to reassure stakeholders that French is not being discarded disrespectfully; rather, English is being *added* for practical benefits. In short, the change must be framed not as a loss of French, but as a gain of English, preserving a positive view of Algeria's multilingual identity; that in why the results of our study show that this country pre-service teachers are largely positive about the increased prominence of English and see clear pedagogical and professional benefits. However, they also remain pragmatic: they strongly favour a bilingual approach, are keenly aware of the obstacles in language proficiency and classroom practice, and call for measured implementation supported by training and resources. These insights resonate with and add nuance to broader discussions in Algerian sociolinguistic and educational policy circles.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored Algerian pre-service teachers' sociolinguistic attitudes towards adopting English as the primary language of instruction. The findings indicate strong support among future educators for enhancing the role of English in education, viewing it as crucial for international openness, improved access to global scientific knowledge, and better career opportunities for students. However, participants clearly favour maintaining a balanced bilingual approach, expressing a desire to retain French as an essential part of Algeria's educational landscape and cultural heritage.

Participants also identified several significant obstacles that policymakers and educators must carefully address. Foremost among these are students' low proficiency levels in English, the widespread classroom reliance on French and Arabic through habitual code-switching practices, and the severe lack of educational resources available in English.

These practical challenges highlight the importance of ensuring policy decisions are firmly grounded in the realities of classroom experiences and available institutional capacities.

The study's findings have several implications for language-in-education policy in Algeria. First, the generally positive attitudes of trainee teachers towards English represent a favourable foundation for educational reform; however, this enthusiasm alone will not guarantee success without targeted support. Policymakers should design explicit transitional bilingual strategies, including the creation of bilingual teaching resources and assessments to help ease teachers and students into this linguistic shift gradually. Second, extensive capacity-building is urgently needed among educators. Institutions should prioritize intensive professional development programs, focusing on enhancing English proficiency and providing specialized training in English-medium instruction methods, such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Third, adopting a gradual, phased approach is essential to facilitate a smoother transition, minimize disruptions, and address potential resistance effectively.

Ultimately, embracing English as a language of instruction offers Algeria a significant opportunity to strengthen its educational system's global competitiveness without compromising its multilingual heritage. The success of this linguistic transition will largely depend on culturally sensitive, practical policy choices and sustained engagement with teachers, whose active participation and readiness will be crucial for achieving Algeria's ambitious educational goals.

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