

The Impact of Pre-School Education on Algerian EFL Learners' Performance in the English Class: A Case Study

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Abstract

At the turn of the twenty-first century, a slow shift towards using the English language amongst Algerian youngsters has been noticed. This shift is attributed to the influence of the families' upbringing approach on their children due to the significance of the English language in different life domains. Consequently, this paper attempts to investigate the impact of pre-school education on Algerian first-year middle school learners' performance in the English class and the parenting practices that help develop early English language proficiency. To gather the necessitated data, this mixed-methods study opted for two data collection tools: the test and the interview. To achieve the purpose of this study, a sample of 30 first-year pupils was selected based on a non-probability purposive sampling technique. The study findings indicated the effective impact of pre-schooling on learners' academic achievement. The study sample showed a positive attitude towards learning English claiming that it broadens their knowledge and boosts their language skills.

Keywords: English language comprehension, family upbringing practices, home learning environment, learners' performance, pre-school education



Introduction

Parents' involvement in children's home-based and school-based education is seen as vital to the process of producing harmonious and educated societies. The family, be it the first educating environment for children, plays an instrumental role in their children's exposure to languages. In Algeria, the importance of acquiring the English language has quickened its steps in the last few years mainly due to globalization. Parents have become more aware about the need to master the essential skills of the English language at early stages. They believe that early education helps in developing children's cognitive, emotional, and social skills, leading to a well-shaped character, behaviour, ethics, and cultural identity. Accordingly, this research endeavours to discuss the instrumental role of family upbringing practices on their children's level of English language comprehension. In furtherance of this aim, this paper aims at bringing to light the effectiveness of pre-

school education on middle school learners' English language development and class performance.

I- Literature Review

1. Pre-Schooling and Parental Involvement

Childhood is a critical and rapid developmental stage where children grow physically, cognitively, and emotionally. The family's role and parental style in shaping children's early language system is of valuable importance at this age (Sadiq et al., 2024). According to Al Saud (2021) "The family is the first nucleus of socialization, the first future of the child, and responsible for their normal social upbringing" (p. 112). That is, the family is a pivotal institution that arms children with the required language skills to prepare them for social and educational life. This is further stressed by Al Saud (2021) who asserts that "The language affiliation of an individual is achieved within the family first" (p. 116).

The significance of parental involvement in education, whether home-based or school-based one- has been acknowledged for over 40 years. The inclusion of parents and community has become more prominent in educational research over the years (Fullan, 2007). More pointedly, the family is the most potent environment where kids grow and learn. When parents assist their kids' early learning, this really helps them do better in school and also behave better and come to school equipped with the needed values, skills, and behaviour. What parents do when a child is very young has the biggest effect on how they grow up (Alam et al., 2018). This view aligns with Reynolds' et al. (2001 as cited in Voorhis et al., 2013) who argue that "Research has been accumulating for decades on the importance of high-quality pre-school education to prepare children for their journey through school" (p. 1). To prevail this stance, it is imperative for parents to establish the right and effective home learning environment for their kids. They need to provide their kids with a stimulating and supportive learning environment where abundant socio-emotional and cognitive skills are targeted.

Parents' involvement and interest in educating their children the English language has occurred in tandem with the rise of the use of the target language worldwide. Indeed, "A happy family life as well as home environment plays a vital role in language learning. Family support and proper guidance keep children on right track and help facilitate learning process" (Alam et al., 2018, p. 37). In the same spectrum, Pugh and De'Ath (1984) postulate that "... the quality of children's early interactions with adults close to them –usually parents- clearly has important implications for their development into competent, caring and fully-realised adults" (p. 136).

The parents-children relation and the attitude towards the children's schooling differ substantially. There are parents who are more welcoming, warm,

and supportive; whereas, others might be rejecting or even negligent. Some parents are smart and competent while others may be uneducated, illiterate, or unaware of their influential role in promoting their kids' pre-schooling practices, even though they love them (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989, as cited in Alam et al., 2018). Indeed, parents' perceptions are essential in building their children's literacy and language development (Safwat & Sheikhany, 2014).

2. Supportive Parenting Practices

Different studies have shed light on the indispensable role that families can play in shaping their children's pre-schooling linguistic knowledge. The parenting practices refer to the "...activities that parents conduct to support their children's development and well-being. This includes the nature and quality of the parent-child relationship and parenting activities" (Voorhis et al., 2013, p. 40). To amplify, these activities do not only enhance the linguistic skills; they in fact help improving children's social, interactive, and academic skills the thing that makes it a hard task to perform. Along the same line, Safwat and Sheikhany (2014) argue that children's language growth seems like a complex process that is highly demanded for their social interaction, success in whatever sector, and school readiness. Plainly, parents are the primary people to get in touch with their kids on a daily basis; henceforth, they are always regarded as the child's first teacher. This view is further emphasised by Andritsou and Chatzidimou (2022) who declare that "Family is considered as a distinct sociolinguistic domain that shapes a significant sociocultural context" (p. 100). Consequently, it is much influential that children get support from their families as part of their early schooling. Providing an unfavourable learning environment might have a deleterious effect on the child's academic achievement (Alam et al., 2018).

Notably, the role of families in children's language development and education is significant. In this regard, Latreche and Hoadjli (2021) assert that this way of thinking is more prevalent in certain countries compared to others. In Algeria, most parents would rather let their kids learn and grow on their own without interfering. Only in the past few years has there been a clear rise in parents getting involved at schools. They are now more aware about the contributory role they may play in boosting their kids' language literacy.

The natural setting where a child grows up has always been seen as key to how they develop in any domain (Alam et al., 2018). How parents view their children's language growth, their attitude, and thoughts about it are fundamental for parent-child interaction (Safwat & Sheikhany, 2014). It is suggested that parents could get help in this regard so they can keep a good connection with their children and help them enlarge their language knowledge.

Although parents' impact on their children's language development has been well documented, educators, linguists, and policy-makers remain tentative and ambivalent about the potential of parents in charting their kids' academic outcomes. It is quite noteworthy to state that the relationship between home environment and children's academic success cannot be always realisable. It necessitates various aspects and considerations to maintain the desired outcomes. Bourdieu (1990, as cited in Ruhul, 2018) declares that kids from rich families probably have more chances that help them. However, kids from families with low social standing and poor income struggle to enhance their language skills as they do not have the basic support they need from their family which is considered as an essential prerequisite in the process of pre-schooling (p. 40).

II- Methodology

This research aims at getting in-depth insights about the usefulness of children's pre-schooling, and how can this boost their English language skills and performance in the classroom. It further endeavours to provide a holistic perspective on the impact of parents in their children's pre-schooling process. To this end, this study attempts to offer thoughtful answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the impact of pre-school education on first-year middle school learners' performance in the English language class?

RQ2: Does pre-school education help first-year middle school learners to develop their lexical knowledge in the English language?

1. Research Approach

For designing successful research, "we need to be systematic so that by the end we can stand by our results with confidence" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 15). Correspondingly, being systematic entails the adoption of the right research approach. As mentioned earlier, the chief aim of this research is to get insightful data about the impact of parents' involvement in their children's pre-schooling phase, and how effective and fruitful this involvement can be. Alternatively, the approach opted for in this study is mixed-methods which, at its basic sense, merges between both qualitative and quantitative tools and analysis (Dörnyei, 2007). The rationale behind this choice lies in the complex nature of the investigated phenomenon. As stated by Creswell (2014), combining both qualitative and qualitative approaches would enhance the validity of the results and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem than either method could offer independently.

2. Participants

Data were collected from Okba Ibn Nafaà middle school in Mila forming a sample of 30 first-year pupils. The sample comprises 18 females and 12 males who were selected following the non-probability purposive sampling technique. Denscombe (2010) postulates that "Purposive sampling operates on the principle that

we can get the best information through focusing on a relatively small number of instances deliberately selected on the basis of their known attributes” (pp. 34-35). The purposive sampling technique was used to select a class that included both pre-schooled and non-pre-schooled learners. According to Denscombe (2010) “Purposive sampling works where the researcher already knows something about the specific people or events and deliberately selects particular ones because they are seen as instances that are likely to produce the most valuable data” (p. 35). Henceforth, the selection was based on the class teacher’s informed feedback regarding the learners’ educational backgrounds, which allowed the researchers to identify a naturally occurring group containing the two required categories of participants. This ensured that the target sample was appropriate for examining the comparative impact of pre-schooling and parental involvement on learners’ performance in the English class.

3. Data Collection Tools

In order to collect the necessary data and to achieve the purpose of this research, the researchers sought for two data collection tools. This incorporated the focus group interview and the test.

a- The Test

To provide a detailed and more accurate description to the research problem that is mainly about investigating the impact of children’s pre-schooling on their lexical growth and performance in the English language class, the test was used as a chief data collection tool in this research. The level and age of the participants were overtly considered when designing the test, and henceforth four simple and easy tasks were designed; each task is scored 5 points. Clearly, the test’s salient concern is to attest the learners’ English lexical knowledge.

The test was constructed following the prescribed testing norms adopted at the Algerian middle schools. The researchers made sure that the content, format, and level of difficulty were appropriate for the learners’ level. The designed tasks were mainly about filling in the gaps, matching, colouring, and providing the right word for the provided pictures. For example, in one of the tasks, the students were provided with pictures illustrating the parts of the day, and they were asked to put the right word under each picture (the words were given by the teacher).

The test was conducted with one group following the causal-comparative design. In this type of research, the researcher introduces no manipulation or intervention. He/She compares two or more groups (in this study, the researchers compared the two naturally existing subgroups) that differ on a particular variable. That is, determining the cause of already existing differences between individuals that were not randomly selected (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

b- The Focus Group Interview

The interview is a useful data collection tool that enables researchers to obtain in-depth data about the phenomena under investigation. As Wallace (1998) notes, interviews are used "... when we want to tap into the knowledge, opinions, ideas and experiences of our learners ..." (p. 124). Likewise, Gall et al., (2003) explain that "A group interview involves addressing questions to a group of individuals who have been assembled for this specific purpose" (p. 238).

The focus group interview is a subtype of interviews. One commonly acknowledged characteristic of focus groups is that their size generally ranges from 6 to 12 people, claiming that a larger number would make it difficult for everyone to participate (Dörnyei, 2007). In this research, however, the researchers conducted a focus group with 30 middle school pupils. This adaptation was possible because the questions were straightforward and most of them were semi-structured. In addition, the researchers ensured that all participants were given the opportunity to contribute.

The interview was conducted mainly to conjure up a plausible idea about whether or not their parents' upbringing approach had an impact on their English language development. The interview constitutes of six questions that are divided upon three themes.

4. Procedures

This study attempted to get a thorough investigation of the impact of pre-schooling in the Algerian families on their children's academic performance in the English language. The study took place at the beginning of the school year 2024/2025, and it spanned a month and a half duration (6 weeks). Firstly, the researchers contacted the headmaster and the teacher who teaches first-year groups to obtain their consent to conduct the study with one group. Secondly, the researchers contacted the group (that consisted of 30 pupils aging between 11 and 13) for the first time just to know them and prepare them for the focus group discussion phase.

The next week, the researchers had another contact with the pupils in order to inform them that they will sit for a simple test in English. Next, the learners sat for the designed test that mainly measured the richness of their lexical repertoire. In the last session, the researchers corrected the test with the learners and thanked them for their cooperation. After that, the focus group discussion took place. The learners' answers were recorded and translated to English because still they cannot formulate meaningful sentences in English, although some of them tried to utter various words in English as an attempt to show that they already have some background knowledge. To maintain accuracy, a meaning-based approach was employed in order to preserve the original ideas that learners intended to convey. After the initial translation, the researchers reviewed the transcripts twice to verify consistency and clarity. The occurred discrepancies were discussed and resolved collaboratively.

5. Data Analysis Procedures

The gathered data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Qualitative data gathered by means of the focus group were translated (many pupils had to code switch between Arabic and English in order to clearly communicate their ideas), coded, and clustered into themes, and were analysed using thematic analysis. According to Ahmed et al., (2025, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006) "Thematic analysis is one of the most widely used methods for analysing qualitative data, offering a structured yet flexible approach to identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within a dataset" (p.1). Following the Braun and Clarke (2006) steps of thematic analysis, familiarization with the raw data was the first step in the qualitative analysis. Reading and re-reading data helped in generating initial codes that were grouped under broader themes. After the interpretative thinking and the process of reviewing the themes, few themes were discarded and some others were refined. Then, the remaining themes were named. These coherent steps helped in providing a detailed account of themes, linking the findings to the literature and the research questions.

Quantitative data, on the other hand, were analysed in terms of the pupils' marks in the test following the single-item score. A single-item score is "...an individual score assigned to each question for each participant ... These scores provide a detailed analysis of each person's response to each question on an instrument" (Creswell, 2012, p. 177). In addition, the independent samples t-test was carried out using SPSS (Version 27) in order to highlight any statistically significant differences between the two subgroups.

6. Ethical Considerations

Since the study participants were minors, ethical procedures were carefully followed. Permission to conduct the research was first obtained from the school headmaster and the class teacher. The researchers explained the aim and procedures of their study and ensured that the pupils' names and answers will remain confidential. Same explanations were provided to the learners in an age-appropriate language, and their voluntary participation was ensured, making sure that they can withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study, and the gathered data were used only for research purposes.

III- Findings

1. The Test

After the focus group discussion, the target sample sat for a test to check on their general lexical knowledge in the English language. Their marks are displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

The Test Results

Pre-schooled Learners' Marks		Non-pre-schooled Learners' Marks	
	14.0		12.5
	16.0		12.0
	13.0		10.0
	14.0		15.0
	15.0		11.0
	13.0		11.5
	18.0		08.5
	11.0		07.0
	16.0		10.0
	15.5		09.0
	10.0		06.5
	15.0		12.0
	12.5		11.0
	16.0		08.0
	13.0		10.0
	$\Sigma X_1 = 212$		$\Sigma X_2 = 154$
1)	$X_1 = \frac{\Sigma X_1}{N_1}$	$\Rightarrow$	$X_1 = \frac{212}{15} \Rightarrow X_1 = 14.13$
2)	$X_2 = \frac{\Sigma X_2}{N_2}$	$\Rightarrow$	$X_2 = \frac{154}{15} \Rightarrow X_2 = 10.27$

The results displayed in Table 1 stresses the role of home-based pre-schooling on strengthening the learners' linguistic skills and classroom performance. This finding emphasizes the fundamental importance of parental involvement in maximizing their learners' potential in learning the English language and mastering its basics at early ages. On the other hand, learners with limited or no home-based pre-schooling displayed low performance and sat for the test with limited lexical resources. This highlights that the lack of parental involvement may delay vocabulary development and ultimately minimizes early language literacy.

Table 2

Independent Samples t-test Results for Learners' Test Scores

Group	N	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Pre-schooled Learners	15	14.13	2.11	4.86	26	< .001	1.76
Non-pre-schooled Learners	15	10.27	2.25				

Note. N: number, M: mean, SD: standard deviation, t: t-value, df: degree of freedom, p: p value

As illustrated in Table 2, the data gathered through the test were analysed using SPSS v27. The t-test was conducted to compare the test scores of pre-schooled

and non-pre-schooled learners. The results indicated a significant difference between the two subgroups, $t(26) = 4.86$, $p < .001$, indicating that pre-schooled learners outperformed the non-pre-schooled ones. The calculated effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.76$) suggests a strong significance, meaning pre-schooling had a positive impact on learners' English comprehension.

2. The Focus Group Interview

Data gathered by means of the focus group discussions were first transcribed and then subjected to open coding. Important and key words were highlighted and labelled according to their relevance to the research questions. Next, the initial codes were grouped into categories based on similarities in meaning. After that, the categories were reviewed and refined leading to the appearance of three main themes: Theme 1: Learners' Attitude and Early Exposure to English, Theme 2: Parental Involvement and Learners' Pre-schooling, and Theme 3: Boosting Performance in English.

To amplify, when a learner says "*... my mother is a teacher of English and she teaches me some words every now and then*", and another one declares "*My mother ones taught me colours, numbers, and greetings in English through songs on YouTube*", these responses were initially coded as Parental Involvement, then it was refined and transformed to Parental Involvement and Learners' Pre-schooling. The same systematic coding process was followed to generate the other themes based on the learners' own words.

Theme 1: Learners' Attitude and Early Exposure to English

The first theme compiles three questions that are geared towards getting insightful data about the respondents' general view about learning English. When asked if they enjoy learning the English language, all learners showed their positive attitude and readiness to start the English classes with their teacher. Many of them said they already know few words and expressions in English, and that was actually the aim of the second interview question. One learner said: "*I really like the English language ... I have always enjoyed watching cartoons in English. I even have a short story in English*". Another one reported: "*I cannot wait to start learning about numbers, colours, jobs, ... My elder sister was a student at that middle school and she told me that the English class is amazing, that is why I am excited to start the lessons with my teacher*". Another participant declared: "*English is an important language now which means that we need to learn it especially if one of us wants to study or work abroad*". Surprisingly, today's kids are fully aware that the English language is the world's lingua franca, and that they will need it sooner or later. This must be an information that was transformed to them by their parents or relatives.

For other learners, English is viewed as a mere school subject. One respondent stated: "*I know only few words in English and I hope to learn more here*".

in the classroom". Similarly, another one said: *"We will learn English here for four years and I wish I will be excellent at it"*. Based on these answers and more, the targeted sample showed a positive attitude and reflected remarkable enthusiasm towards learning English, no matter if they already have some background knowledge about it or not.

Theme 2: Parental Involvement and Learners' Pre-schooling

Moving to the second theme that comprises two questions, the learners were first asked how did they manage to know all those words in English. Although their responses varied considerably, many of them agreed on the usefulness of TV and YouTube channels that are dedicated for kids. One of the interviewees said: *"I watch some Disney cartoons on MBC3 ... I cannot understand everything, but sometimes I can get the meaning of some words through the scenes"*. Another learner claimed: *"... my mother is a teacher of English and she teaches me some words every now and then"*. In the same spectrum, a learner said: *"I learned many words in English mainly through songs. For example, I can name the different parts of my body easily because of the body parts song"*.

Moving to the next question, many learners attributed their readiness and positive attitude towards learning English to the support they received at home on the part of their fathers and/or mothers. One of the answers was: *"Daddy bought me many times short stories and games in English. I have also ones in Arabic ..."*. For another one: *"My mother ones taught me colours, numbers, and greetings in English through songs on YouTube"*. She added: *"... whenever she has free time, we rehearse what I learned in a joyful atmosphere"*. For another respondent: *"My parents are always busy. They do not help me to learn anything in English"*. In the same vein, another learner postulated: *"When I chat with my mother, she usually tries to insert some words in English and then gives me the meaning in Arabic ... and after a while she asks me about those words again to check whether or not still I remember them"*. Based on the learners' answers and the way they responded to these two questions, it can be concluded that they enjoyed being taught by their parents in a funny way. Parents are usually viewed as heroes by their kids, and everything they do to their children is usually valued and appreciated.

Theme 3: Boosting Performance in English

This theme consists of one question that attempts to have a comprehensive idea about the learners' perceptions about their actual process of learning the English language, especially that now they have it as a school subject. One of the interviewees responded: *"I will carry on learning English now with my teacher and classmates. Of course, I will not stop learning at home"*. For another one: *"I am sure I will learn more and more about that language with my teacher, and I am really excited about that"*. In the same vein, a learner said: *"My parents are always busy,*

but now I am with my teacher and I will learn a lot with her". Moving to the other learner: *"Unlike my classmates, I did not learn a lot at home regarding English, but I will do my best here in the classroom and learn as much as I can"*. Overall, the majority of the learners displayed notable enthusiasm to learn the English language. They want to start discovering that language with eagerness and genuine interest.

3. Discussion and Analysis of the Results

This study addressed the role of parents in equipping their children with a fruitful pre-schooling of some basics of English in order to enrich their children's English vocabulary knowledge. Indeed, the parents' role in this regard cannot be accentuated enough. Developing children's language and cognitive skills is a foundational step to their communication and academic growth. One of the most distinctive traits of the parents is that they are the first people that engage in the language development of their children. Henceforth, excluding them from the schooling process or in case they do not have a positive parent-child relation, this would, wittingly or unwittingly, result in a variety of language related problems. The results obtained by means of the interview and the test highlighted the positive impact of parental involvement in their children's pre-schooling. As illustrated in the data displayed above, the learners who received some sort of pre-schooling regarding the English language outperformed the learners who did not. Even though, the majority of the learners participated in this study showed a positive attitude towards learning English regardless of their knowledge about it. Their readiness and enthusiasm were remarkable.

The study results are compatible with the study that was carried out by Fantuzzo et al., in 2004 where parents' reports on a 13-item measure of the home learning environment were positively correlated with preschool students' receptive vocabulary. This aligns with the results obtained from another study conducted by Cohen et al., (2012) where the home learning environment- measured by the Learning and Literacy subscale of the Home Observation for the Environment (HOME)- was positively associated with preschool students' vocabulary and letter-word identification skills. These findings align with the current study, as both indicate that early exposure to language input is instrumental in developing foundational linguistic skills. Moreover, the study that was conducted by Mistry et al., using the same subscale (HOME), also supports this conclusion. It reported positive results through a study they carried out in 2010 where home simulation of language was positively related to a composite score of preschool students' reading, math, and vocabulary measures. Therefore, the present research reinforces the growing body of evidence indicating that early schooling and parental support contributes significantly in enhancing children's language skills.

The obtained results in this study also helped in answering the research questions stated earlier. Starting with the first research question, it is clear that the pre-school education that some learners received helped them in passing the test successfully. Indeed, the role of parents in this regard needs to be encouraged. When it comes to general classroom performance, however, it is too early to answer this question since the study took place at the beginning of the year. Moving to the second question which investigates whether parental involvement and pre-schooling expands learners' lexical knowledge, the test results substantiated the fact that parental involvement and home-based pre-schooling contributed significantly to the development of learners' lexical knowledge and language skills. In particular, the study findings suggest that parents have a decisive role in developing their kids' language skills and providing them with a solid foundation in English at early ages of their childhood.

4.Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small (just one class of 30 learners) which led to the restriction of the findings' generalisability. Secondly, the study followed a one-group design, meaning there were two subgroups to compare instead of two groups. Consequently, the learners' performance in the English class cannot be attributed with absolute certainty to their pre-schooling/non-pre-schooling background. There might be other factors that influenced their class performance. Thirdly, the findings need to be interpreted with caution as the duration of the study was short. It was not enough to observe and collect the necessitated data about the learners' performance. Henceforth, further research with larger samples is recommended to extend the findings and conclusions of this study. An experimental design with a control and experimental groups may yield richer insights, especially if conducted within an extended duration.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding more research is still needed in this area, the effect of family upbringing on learners' level of English language comprehension is dynamic and multifaceted. This study indicated that parents are a contributing factor in the schooling process of their children. They can help boosting their children's English comprehension at an early age mainly through engaging them in a host of activities including fun educational games, puzzles, reading stories, and so forth. These activities reported, in return, positive results regarding the learners' lexical knowledge. Apparently, the latter is not the only targeted skill; the learners' cognitive skills will also be enhanced. For these reasons and more, learners should be motivated well at home because home is the first place where children start learning and building up their personality. Therefore, this research has not been

conducted to bring about theories, but rather to highlight the pivotal significance of the exposure the learners receive at home under the guidance of their parents, the first educators, and how far can this exposure help in maximising their potential for learning the English language.

Pedagogical Implications

Due to the drawn results and the positive attitude of the learners, a number of implications are henceforth stated. It is useful to raise awareness amongst families about the effective impact of parental involvement in children's schooling, the thing that would provide better academic outcomes. Provide guidance and more information about successful pre-schooling and home-based learning so that both parents and their children would benefit more. Encourage child-parent and teacher-parent kind of relationships. When they work in harmony, this would result in better educational outcomes. This would also ensure a successful transition from home-based to school-based learning. Parents are highly required to use fun learning with their children due to its vital role in sustaining children's motivation, engagement, and creativity. Parents need to be fully aware about the various constituents of an effective home-based learning environment. Parents may receive trainings to increase their sophistication of their language skills.

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