

Representations of Public Education Teachers towards Private Schools - A Field Study
on a Sample of Teachers in Tlemcen

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Received: 11/01/2024 Accepted: 29/11/2024 Published:22/12/2024

Abstract:

This field study aimed to explore the representations of government education teachers about private schools. We utilized interviews as the main tool to collect data of field study, which covered three fundamental themes: the respondents' metadata, their understanding of private schools, and their perception of the actors involved in the educational process of private schools. The study concluded with the following results:

Private schools prioritize financial gain and promote class-based, resulting in unequal access to education between students in private versus public schools.

Respondents are divided into two groups: one supporting private schools, believing they are of high quality and aiming for excellence in education, and one opposing them, seeing them as businesses and investments that take advantage of their attendees.

Keywords: representations; private schools; public schools.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions are facing numerous challenges and difficulties in confronting the rapid changes and adaptation methods resulting from the technological and cognitive revolution of our present times. The school is the sole institution with the capacity to enhance the efficiency of educational institutions and consequently developing an individual to be well-prepared in all facets of their personality. Due to the falling standards and mounting pressure exerted on government schools, Algeria, among other countries in the world, has had to pave the way for private investment in education and reduce the burden of public spending on education.

The Ministry of National Education introduced certain conditions and standards for the establishment of private schools. Given the importance of the issue, we decided to conduct a study on a specific aspect of it - namely, the representations of public school teachers towards private schools.

A field study was conducted, resulting in a set of important conclusions based on a pre-prepared plan.

1.1. Problematic:

Following independence, Algeria found itself with an educational system structured to obliterate the national identity components of the country such as its history, language, and religion. Meanwhile, it promoted teachings of the Christianity and French language in support of France's integrationist policies and to strengthen its influence in Algeria. However, this resulted in widespread illiteracy and lack of human and material resources in the country. In response, Algeria initiated, at this time, free education opportunities through direct employment and collaborated with other Arab countries to address the country's educational shortcomings in framing. While making some transitional modifications to the

inherited French education system, Algeria aimed to establish an education system that reflects the country's Arab-Islamic character.

All of the aforementioned statements are part of the policy of reforming the Algerian educational system, as it attempts to adapt to current challenges and global transformations. These efforts have resulted in significant accomplishments, including the development of important infrastructure, the establishment of compulsory and free education, and an increase in student enrolment. However, despite these achievements, the education sector in Algeria continues to face serious economic and social pressure due to overcrowding, limited resources, and the Ministry's inability to address some of the major challenges (Mdelah, 2020, p. 16).

Under these circumstances, the government has implemented educational reforms that require the participation of the private sector in education. The aim is to ease the pressure on the public sector and to improve and upgrade education in Algeria. These schools are licensed by the Ministry of Education and are created according to explicit publication for various tasks and program implementation. Despite their late appearance in Algeria, they have experienced widespread acceptance, particularly in major provinces. The spread of this phenomenon has caused a wide debate between supporters who deem it a complement to the concept of quality education and a response to global developments in teaching and learning methods, particularly given the inadequacy in education performance of the public sector and the growing educational challenges. Opponents, however, argue that it exacerbates class distinctions and serves only for financial gain.

In light of the above, this study aims to explore the representations of government education teachers towards private schools. This is being done by posing the following question:

- **How do government education teachers perceive private schools?**

- Furthermore, does this perception correspond to the researchers' position on supporting or opposing private education?

1.2. Hypotheses:

The representations of government education teachers regarding private schools revolve around their emphasis on class distinctions and their focus on financial gain, which creates a disparity in educational opportunities between students in public and private schools.

2. Conceptualisation:

2.1. Representations:

•Linguistically:

It is the representation or conception of something, the visualization of it and the ability to picture it in one's mind, resulting in the individual having an image or form of the thing in their mind (Anonymous author, 2016).

As specified by the "Le Robert" dictionary that:

- Representations are a process that is based on the perception of reality. It transforms social facts such as people, situations, and contexts into symbolic statements that reflect our values and standards. It is a type of knowledge or set of characteristics and features that are applied to a social subject in order to achieve a scientific objective (Ben Hamou, 2015-2016, pp. 22-23).

- Terminologically:

According to Raymond Boudon and others in their book Dictionary of Sociology, representations are a set of beliefs and perceptions held by individuals about a particular subject, which limit them to the community they belong to (Boundon, 2005, p. 199).

- On the other hand, Jodelet defines representations as a form of knowledge that emerges from common sense, meaning a social thinking process that involves social and

functional aspects. Representations are helpful in communication, with a practical aspect to it. Therefore, we understand everything about the individual and manage their social influences, including the material and intellectual aspects (Jodelet, 1989, p. 63).

- Moscovici, a prominent thinker, has dedicated significant attention to the concept of representation. He emphasizes that representations have functions, which enable individuals to organize and regulate their understanding to direct their behaviours within their living surroundings. Additionally, representations facilitate communication between individuals by establishing regulations that govern their interactions (Anonymous author, 2016).

2.2. The concept of private schools:

There are multiple definitions of private schools, which differ, and can be summarized in the following points: they are schools that provide education in exchange for fees, their establishment is subject to certain conditions, and they are granted formal accreditation by the Ministry of Education, on the condition that they comply with established regulations.

2.3. The concept of public schools:

Public schools are educational establishments that are affiliated with the Ministry of Education and are funded through the national budget.

3. Fieldwork aspect of the study:

3.1. Identification of the study field:

This study has been conducted on a sample of public school teachers and commenced on September 2021 until June 2023. We conducted preliminary surveys, documented them and simultaneously reviewed the relevant literature and references for our research topic.

3.2. Research methodology:

Initiating any scientific research requires the incorporation of various techniques and methods to comprehend and explore the nature and specificity of the subject.

In our research, we employed the method of interviewing, which is one of the principal direct methodological techniques for collecting data. One of the significant advantages of using the interview method is that it gives the researcher a means to gain a detailed understanding of the topic being studied through direct communication and interaction.

Furthermore, it is a verbal interaction that involves a confrontation where the person conducting the interview seeks out information, opinions, or beliefs from another person to obtain objective data.

For this study, we used an interview guide that included a set of questions, which we grouped into three themes to help us understand and analyse the topic in more depth (Saïd Aïchour, 2017, pp. 291-292).

3.3. Research Society and Study Sample:

The research society for this study comprises public school teachers. We conducted interviews with a group of teachers, following a pre-determined interview guide. The research society constitutes a specific, clearly defined group of individuals, documents, and other..., that are of interest to the researcher and on which results will be generalized.

It is also defined as a collection of all cases that fall under a set of specified determinants. Based on the above, the research society can be understood as all the terms that a researcher is interested in studying, whether human or material, as long as they share certain characteristics and are determined according to the nature and objectives of the research in order to generalize its results.

Researchers face obstacles that may prevent them from studying an entire society, and thus they turn to using a sample as a representation of a part or aspect of the units of original society being investigated. This sample is carefully selected and studied in order to uncover shared characteristics that can be extrapolated to describe the entire study society. The

sample is known to be a partial group of the study society that is selected in a specific way, and the study is conducted on it. The results are then used to generalize them to the entire original study society (Saïd Aïchour, 2017, pp. 291-292)..

As stated previously, the research society for this study was comprised of public education teachers. The observation method used was unlikely, and the sample was chosen randomly. The interviews were conducted with the teachers using a pre-prepared interview guide consisting of pre-planned questions. The initial interviews were exploratory, aiming to gain insight into the respondents and their opinions on the subject. Subsequently, in-depth interviews were conducted, which were longer in duration and produced more comprehensive information. Among the teachers, some were collaborative and responded to questions easily, providing interactive discussion about the research subject. Conversely, some teachers were cautious and reserved in their responses to the interview questions.

4. Analysis of Interviews:

Using the interviews, we conducted with a group of teachers focusing on the representations public school teachers use for private schools - a field study on a sample of public education teachers in Tlemcen province - we concluded that this research could help us better understand the view public school teachers have towards private schools, as they are the most closely related group to the school from all aspects, be it organizational or educational.

4.1. Metadata of Respondents:

As an initial question and to start the subject, we relied on the first theme which is the personal data of the respondents, which includes: age, gender, educational level, economic status, and marital status.

•Gender of Respondents:

The study was conducted with 25 female teachers and 8 male teachers, which means that the majority of the interviews were done with female respondents.

● **Respondents' Age:**

The interviews were conducted with teachers of different age groups ranging from 25 to 52 years old. This age variation and generational differences make the research subject diverse and rich in terms of the views provided to meet the need of the research topic and its nature.

● **Educational Level of Respondents:**

The educational level of respondents is revealed through the research's title, which usually indicate their university-level education. Most teachers hold Bachelor's and Master's degrees in various scientific and literary majors, and therefore the high educational level of families plays a significant role in managing and directing their affairs, including their children's education. We find that knowledge is highly valued, and academic excellence and investing in children's cognitive potential are often primary strategic considerations for families. This suggests that the educational aspect of parents and families plays a major role in supporting and encouraging innovative activity, as well as achieving adaptation and development in their environment and social milieu.

● **Marital Status and Economic Status:**

Through prerequisite data and interviews with the research society, consisting of public education teachers, we can conclude that their economic status is average. This implies that they are neither high-income earners nor low-income earners, and this variable has a bearing on the respondents' responses and the outcomes of the research. Regarding marital status, most teachers are married and primarily responsible for a family of two to three children in terms of their upbringing and education. Therefore, the economic outcome contributes in one way or another to their way of life. The higher the economic status, the more it helps to meet the family's various material and ethical needs.

4.2. Respondents' perception of actors in private schools:

The focus of this theme is to explore the representations of public school teachers in private schools by understanding their perspective on actors in the educational process in these schools. This will be done through three main elements:

•Their Perception of Private School Teachers:

Respondents have a consensus that private school teachers are mostly products of the public sector and public schools. The majority of the teachers in these schools are either retired from public schools or have prior experience teaching in them. As previously mentioned, during interviews with respondents, where they unintentionally compared the public and private sectors and commented that private schools did not contribute to the preparation of distinguished teachers with specific qualifications. These comparisons can be explained by a teacher's professional identity, including their level of awareness of the teaching profession and their understanding of how to improve their performance. A teacher's professional identity is a component of the social, cultural, and political context in which they operate. It shows how teachers perceive themselves and their interpretations of their constant interaction with the social and educational context in which they conduct their work, as well as their awareness of the roles and educational practices they are expected to adhere to as teachers (Nidham Al-Jaia, 2023, p. 30).

What we found among respondents was a thorough understanding of all the details of working in private schools, gained through experience working in the private sector before moving to public schools, or through interaction with colleagues who have worked in the private sector. For instance, the relationship between administration and teachers is a collaborative one, with the primary goal of achieving the best possible outcomes for students. Working conditions and available resources, such as equipment and material structures, also contribute to the seriousness and discipline of the work.

●**Their perception of private school students:**

The student is regarded as the fundamental pillar of education and learning in any type of school, private or public. Their proper formation and development are among the top priorities set by the educational system. However, respondents have emphasized that private school students are considered as a product for investment projects. Their main concern is making profits, rather than investing in the formation and education of a graduate from a private school. This is visible through the high tuition fees and annual fees that parents pay. Recently, parents of private school students have been pressured to pay fees despite the interruption of studies due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All of these signs indicate a lack of confidence in such schools before enrolling any students, there must be careful selection to ensure a good education.

According to one respondent, the belief that private schools are superior in offering advanced education or what is called quality education, and enhancing students' competencies by equipping them with additional skills like language acquisition and talent development, is nothing but a catchy phrase routinely used to lure parents fed up with the dismal situation of public schools, which is affecting their children's schooling experience in terms of class overcrowding, inadequate supervision, and the incidence of school violence. The lack of communication between school administration and parents, among other issues, further justifies why parents choose this type of school to invest in their children.

●**Their perception on school administration in private schools:**

According to the respondents, the administration of private schools is a modern and somewhat democratic that aims to please parents and collaborate among themselves to achieve positive and satisfactory outcomes for all parties involved. School administration can be defined as any organized efforts made by the principal and their team in conjunction with the administrative and educational staff of the school to achieve predetermined goals.

Additionally, school administration can be characterized as a collection of communication between student-teacher interactions, student-curriculum interactions, and student-peer interactions, all directed towards attaining the objectives of the curriculum through a set of educational and learning processes and situations (Merabt & Malki, 2013, p. 137).

Among the respondents' teachers, some have chosen to enroll their children in private schools, despite their profession in government schools, for various reasons including the element of security and safety that they find in the administration of private schools. One of the respondents, who has children attending a public elementary school where she also teaches, enrolled them in a private school that aligns with the educational principles and values she taught them once they reached the middle school level. She has complete trust in the school director and said, "I enrolled my children in that school, and I have complete faith in the director's educational and moral perspectives." The respondent emphasizes that her primary concern lies in the ethical and educational aspects, with the academic aspect following closely behind. It is essential that the student is safe intellectually, educationally, and religiously. The student's academic performance and understanding of the lessons are not as important as their overall well-being. Parents can help their child make up for any academic shortcomings, and teachers are there to assist them. Any moral decay or lack of supervision within the school is a severe issue that requires attention. As such, the school principal, where the respondent's children attend, closely monitors the ethics and behavior of all students through her administrative team's efforts. The school has surveillance cameras, educational advisors, and a psychotherapist who accompanies students on a psychological, educational, and behavioral level, among other services. If any inappropriate behavior is exhibited by the student, the parents shall be notified if necessary.

Based on the respondent's experience in enrolling her children in a private school, it is evident that the private school administration is the primary reason for her choice. It is a modern school that embodies democratic educational principle, which respect the student's

individuality and demand humane treatment that befits them as human beings with their freedom and independent entity. The school administration relies on persuasion instead of intimidation and strives to convince the students and staff rather than instilling fear, oppression, and control, unlike the administration of educational schools, which is dominated by oppression, abuse, spreading fear among staff and students, and not providing them with opportunities for discussion and expressing their opinions. Thus, they are expected to abide by whatever the school principal wants and follow the instructions without discussion or objection. As a result, students' motivation to study in school based on traditional administration is driven by fear of punishment and psychological distress, rather than a sense of reassurance and mental ease (Merabt & Malki, 2013, p. 138).

As a final point, and as a result of the aforementioned advantages of private school administration, this does not necessarily imply that there are no shortcomings. In addition to the high costs, one respondent who has previously taught at a private school notes that her students have an attitude that says, "We have already paid for our education, so we can do whatever we want." This attitude is reinforced by the school's administration, so any complaint filed by a student or group of students against a specific teacher, and even if this complaint is often invalid. For instance, if students do not respect the teacher, the latter may react in a certain way. In this case, the administration stands on the student's side, and the teacher may receive a warning or even be fired from their job. This all falls under the category of the teacher's inferiority complex and presenting criticisms or feedback in front of students, among other reasons.

5. CONCLUSION

Private schools in Algeria are a critical subject in the educational field, particularly in light of the various reforms aiming to improve the overall educational system. In this study, we aimed to identify the public school teachers' private schools through a field study conducted using interviews. After following the necessary steps and data analysis, we arrived at the following results:

- Despite the fact that private schools provide high-quality education that sets them apart from public schools in certain ways, respondents stress that this does not necessarily make them superior in every aspect. In some cases, these institutions have strayed from their educational objectives and instead prioritize business and investment. What is realistically observed is that the adopted prices are not accessible to everyone, which raises questions about the available educational opportunities and promotes the principle of class-based inequality, and results in a lack of social justice. This enables a certain social class to benefit from private education services more than other classes. This is indicative of the accuracy of the hypothesis which suggests that public school teachers' representations of private schools are that they are primarily focused on class concept and profit-making, leading to unequal educational opportunities between students attending public versus private schools.

- Views among respondents are divided into two groups: one that supports private schools and another that is against them. Both groups defend their positions with distinct pieces of evidence. Regarding the supportive group, they see these schools as high-quality institutions that prioritize both form and content, dedicated to delivering quality education and fostering an integrated relationship between students, teachers, and administration. The opposing group firmly rejects these schools as a result of the moral slippages of their students, according to respondents. These schools instill intrusive thoughts and values that are inconsistent with the Algerian educational system and propagate concepts and practices that undermine national identity, such as celebrating foreign holidays, wearing clothes that

are incompatible with the school's regulations, elevating foreign languages, marginalizing Arabic, and glorifying Western figures. These negative influences adversely affect the students' Algerian Islamic identity, ultimately leading to a crisis of identity among private school students.

In conclusion, it can be stated that private schools have been the subject of widespread debate in recent times, with supporters hailing them as an addition to the Algerian education system, while opponents cite numerous drawbacks. In this situation, the responsibility is not solely placed on the private schools and their administrators; the parents also have a role to play in making a sound decision regarding the school their children attend. This was confirmed by public education teachers in this study.

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