Sociological Approaches to School Guidance: From Philosophical Roots to Practice Dilemmas in Algeria

المقاربات السوسيولوجية للتوجيه المدرسي: من الجذور الفلسفية إلى إشكاليات الممارسة في الجزائر

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Abstract: This article aims to provide a critical sociological analysis of school guidance in Algeria by examining its philosophical foundations, revisiting classical functionalist approaches, and relating them to contemporary educational practice. The study conceptualizes school guidance as a complex social process shaped by individual, social, cultural, and economic determinants, rather than merely a technical educational choice. Methodologically, the analysis employs a critical-analytical approach, drawing on the functionalist contributions of Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons to explain the role of schooling in social integration and the organization of educational pathways. However, the study reveals significant limitations in the assumption of institutional neutrality and objective guidance criteria when applied to the Algerian context. The findings demonstrate that students' socio-economic backgrounds significantly influence their academic orientation, suggesting that existing guidance mechanisms may inadvertently contribute to the reproduction of educational inequalities across different academic streams. Accordingly, the article proposes an integrative analytical framework combining sociology, psychology, and anthropology to redefine school guidance as an empowering process that strengthens students' self-awareness and social engagement. Ultimately, the study calls for context-sensitive guidance policies that promote educational equity and enhance the effectiveness of the educational system. By bridging the gap between theoretical scholarship and professional practice, this research contributes to the ongoing debate on educational justice and the socio-economic role of schooling in developing societies.

- **Keywords:** Philosophical Foundations, Practice Dilemmas, School Guidance, Sociology of Education, Sociological Approaches.

- **الملخص:** يهدف هذا المقال إلى تقديم قراءة سوسيولوجية نقدية للتوجيه المدرسي في الجزائر عبر تحليل جذوره الفلسفية، واستحضار المقاربات الوظيفية الكلاسيكية، وإسقاطها على واقع الممارسة التربوية المعاصرة. وتصنف الدراسة التوجيه المدرسي كسيرورة اجتماعية معقدة تتشكل بفعل المحددات الفردية والاجتماعية والثقافية والاقتصادية، بما يتجاوز كونه مجرد اختيار تعليمي تقني. من الناحية المنهجية، تعتمد الدراسة على المنهج التحليلي النقدي، مستندةً إلى الإسهامات الوظيفية لكل من إميل دوركايم وتالكوت بارسونز في تفسير دور المدرسة في تحقيق الاندماج الاجتماعي وتنظيم المسارات التعليمية. غير أن الدراسة

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تكشف عن محدودية واضحة في افتراض حيادية المؤسسة المدرسية وموضوعية معايير التوجيه عند تطبيقها على السياق الجزائري. وتبيّن النتائج أن الخلفيات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية للمتعلمين تؤثر بشكل جوهري في توجيه مساراتهم الدراسية، مما يشير إلى احتمال مساهمة آليات التوجيه القائمة، دون قصد، في إعادة إنتاج اللامساواة التعليمية بين مختلف الشعب الدراسية. وبناءً على ذلك، يقترح المقال إطاراً تحليلياً تكاملياً يجمع بين السوسيولوجيا وعلم النفس والأنثروبولوجيا لإعادة تعريف التوجيه المدرسي كعملية تمكينية تعزز وعي المتعلم بذاته وبمحيطه الاجتماعي. وفي الختام، تدعو الدراسة إلى تبني سياسات توجيه تراعي خصوصية السياق المحلي لتعزيز العدالة التعليمية ورفع فعالية النظام التربوي. ومن خلال تجسير الفجوة بين البحث النظري والممارسة المهنية، يساهم هذا البحث في النقاش الجاري حول العدالة التربوية والدور السوسيواقتصادي للمدرسة في المجتمعات النامية..

- **الكلمات المفتاحية:** إشكاليات الممارسة؛ الجذور الفلسفية؛ التوجيه المدرسي؛ سوسيولوجيا التربية؛ المقاربات السوسيولوجية.

- Introduction:

School guidance has traditionally been conceptualized as a neutral educational mechanism designed to align students' abilities and aspirations with appropriate academic and vocational pathways. Rooted in classical sociological and philosophical traditions, this perspective assumes that educational institutions operate according to objective and meritocratic principles, ensuring fair distribution of opportunities. However, a growing body of contemporary research challenges this assumption, highlighting the extent to which guidance practices are embedded in broader social structures and power relations (OECD, 2024, pp. 12-15; Reay, 2024, p. i863).

In many contexts, particularly in non-Western societies, school guidance cannot be understood solely as a technical or pedagogical process. Instead, it must be analyzed as a socially constructed practice shaped by cultural norms, economic inequalities, and institutional constraints. In this regard, Algeria presents a particularly relevant case. The country is currently experiencing significant socio-economic transformations, including persistent youth unemployment (exceeding 25% among university graduates), regional disparities between coastal and inland areas, linguistic diversity (Arabic, Tamazight, French) affecting educational access, and a widening gap between school curricula and labor market needs (Benabid, 2024, pp. 33-35;

Daradirah & Shawish, 2024, p. 58). These dynamics raise critical questions about the effectiveness and equity of existing guidance systems.

Despite the richness of classical sociological contributions- from philosophical reflections in Plato and Aristotle to functionalist analyses in Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons- these frameworks often remain insufficient to fully capture the complexities of school guidance in contemporary Algerian society. Their emphasis on social integration, institutional neutrality, and meritocratic selection tends to overlook the influence of social background, cultural capital, and structural inequalities on students' trajectories (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, pp. 25-30; Tobbi, 2026, p. 108).

Accordingly, this article aims to bridge this gap by providing a critical sociological analysis of school guidance in Algeria. It seeks to (1) revisit the philosophical and functionalist foundations of guidance theories, (2) assess their explanatory limits in the Algerian context, and (3) propose an integrative analytical framework that combines sociological, psychological, and critical perspectives. By doing so, the study moves beyond descriptive accounts toward a context-sensitive understanding of guidance as a dynamic and contested social practice.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing debate on educational equity by questioning the assumption of institutional neutrality and by proposing a re-conceptualization of school guidance as a process of empowerment rather than mere social allocation.

1. Study's problem:

Despite the rich contributions of classical sociological approaches to understanding school guidance, a pressing need remains to evaluate the adequacy of these theories in explaining the reality of practice in non-Western contexts, particularly in Algeria, which is undergoing profound social and economic transformations. This leads to the central problematic of this article: How can classical sociological conceptions of school guidance be critically reassessed in light of the

specific socio-economic, cultural, and institutional challenges facing the Algerian educational system?

This central question branches into the following sub-questions, which are designed to link theoretical analysis with practical applications within the Algerian context:

- How did sociological thought on education and guidance evolve from its philosophical roots to its modern functionalist form?
- What mechanisms do the functionalist approaches of Durkheim and Parsons propose to understand the school's role in guiding individuals, and how are these mechanisms reflected (or not reflected) in Algerian guidance practices?
- What specific contextual factors- such as family cultural capital (Tobbi, 2026), regional disparities in school quality (Daradirah & Shawish, 2024), and linguistic barriers in assessment practices- limit the explanatory power of classical functionalist theories in the Algerian context?
- What are the limitations of these theories, and how can they be transcended by more complex, context-sensitive approaches that integrate sociological, psychological, and critical perspectives tailored to the Algerian reality?

2. Study's Hypotheses:

This study is based on the following hypotheses:

- Classical sociological approaches (from Plato to Parsons) offer a rich but idealized vision of the guidance function, assuming the neutrality of the school and the objectivity of its selection criteria.
- Applying these theories to the Algerian reality encounters major dilemmas due to the specificities of its social, economic, and cultural context.
- The criteria of competence and desire in guidance are not neutral but are saturated with social backgrounds, thus reproducing inequalities rather than addressing them.

- There is a need to integrate the sociological perspective with other theoretical contributions (psychological, anthropological) for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

3. Study's Objectives:

- To identify the major theoretical contributions in sociological thought regarding education and guidance, while critically examining their epistemological foundations and hidden assumptions.
- To understand the mechanisms proposed by these theories for the school's role in guiding individuals toward their social roles, and to assess how these mechanisms manifest (or fail to manifest) in Algerian educational practices.
- To critically evaluate the effectiveness of these theories in explaining the reality of school guidance in Algeria, specifically by revealing how supposedly neutral criteria (e.g., competence, desire) are saturated with social and cultural backgrounds.
- To provide an analytical vision that reveals the limits of classical theories and paves the way for more context-sensitive approaches that integrate sociological, psychological, and critical perspectives tailored to the socio-economic and cultural specificities of Algeria.

4. Study's Importance:

- **Theoretical Importance:** It contributes to a deep critical reading of the sociological heritage concerning guidance, linking ancient philosophical roots to modern functionalist trends. Moreover, it moves beyond a purely descriptive account by questioning the assumption of institutional neutrality and by proposing an integrative epistemological framework that combines sociology, psychology, and anthropology. This theoretical reorientation seeks to transform school guidance from a mechanism of social adaptation into a process of critical empowerment.
- **Applied Importance:** It provides an analysis of the reality of school guidance in Algeria, benefiting policymakers and practitioners. It is an attempt to apply critical sociological analysis to a pivotal educational policy, revealing the hidden social

dimension in a process that appears technically neutral. Specifically, the study highlights how guidance practices in Algeria may unintentionally reproduce social inequalities by favoring students with greater cultural capital. It also calls for context-sensitive policies that account for regional disparities, linguistic diversity (Tamazight, Arabic, French), and the economic constraints faced by disadvantaged families. As such, the findings are intended to inform concrete reforms—such as delaying early orientation decisions, training counselors in cultural competence, and implementing equity audits of guidance outcomes (OECD, 2024, p. 67).

5-Research Methodology:

This study adopts a critical analytical approach that begins with the description and examination of major sociological theories related to school guidance, followed by a critique of their limitations and underlying assumptions, particularly in non-Western contexts. It also seeks to apply these theoretical frameworks to the reality of educational practice in Algeria. In response to reviewers' comments, the analysis is structured around specific sub-questions, such as how official guidance criteria (e.g., the transition from middle to secondary education or stream allocation) reflect social inequalities, and how family background, as a form of cultural capital, challenges the assumption of institutional neutrality.

To ensure a concrete link between theory and practice, the study draws on documented examples from the Algerian educational system, including official policy guidelines, statistics on stream distribution, and the role of family counseling. This approach allows abstract theoretical concepts to be translated into observable and critically analyzable practices. The analysis is based on official reports from the Algerian Ministry of Education (2015–2023), as well as recent academic literature on education in Algeria (Tobbi, 2026, p. 103; Daradirah & Shawish, 2024, p. 55; Benabid, 2024, p. 40), in addition to available statistical data on stream distribution by region and socio-economic background.

6. Conceptual Framework: Toward a Context-Sensitive Model of School Guidance:

This study proposes a conceptual framework that redefines school guidance as the outcome of the interaction between three interrelated dimensions:

6.1 Structural Dimension (Sociological Perspective):

This dimension refers to the influence of social structures such as socio-economic status, cultural capital, regional inequalities, and institutional norms. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, p. 28), students' trajectories are shaped not only by their abilities but also by their access to symbolic and cultural resources that align with the school's expectations. Recent empirical evidence from Algeria confirms that family cultural capital significantly affects early educational achievement and orientation outcomes (Tobbi, 2026, p. 106).

6.2 Individual Dimension (Psychological Perspective):

This dimension focuses on students' cognitive development, identity formation, and emotional maturity. Theories such as Piaget's cognitive development (Piaget, 1954, p. 45), Erikson's psychosocial stages (Erikson, 1968, pp. 128-135), and Vygotsky's sociocultural approach (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 84-91) highlight that educational choices are not purely rational decisions but evolve through developmental processes and social interactions.

6.3 Institutional Dimension (Educational Practice):

This dimension includes the policies, procedures, and practices of school guidance systems, such as evaluation criteria, counseling processes, and orientation mechanisms. It also reflects the degree to which these practices are transparent, equitable, and context-sensitive. International evidence suggests that guidance systems can either reproduce or mitigate inequalities depending on their design (OECD, 2024, pp. 33-36; Van de Werfhorst, 2025, p. 8).

6.4 Interaction Mechanism:

School guidance outcomes emerge from the dynamic interaction between these three dimensions. When institutional practices ignore structural inequalities or developmental needs, guidance processes risk reproducing social inequalities rather than reducing them (Schindler et al., 2024, p. 45; Sturm, 2024, p. 940).

6.5 Implication for Algeria:

This framework shifts the understanding of school guidance: from neutral allocation to socially embedded process; from selection to empowerment; from standardization to context-sensitive intervention.

1. Philosophical Foundations of School Guidance:

1.1 Socrates:

Socrates linked true knowledge to self-awareness through dialogue and questioning, defining educational guidance as a process aimed at helping individuals discover their own capabilities rather than receiving ready-made answers. However, in the Algerian context, this dialogical model faces both epistemological and practical constraints. The prevailing teacher-centered and exam-oriented educational culture leaves limited space for Socratic forms of guidance, while students from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack the linguistic and cultural capital necessary to engage effectively in such interaction. Recent empirical evidence from Algeria supports this observation, showing that students from less privileged backgrounds frequently struggle to participate meaningfully in dialogical educational settings (Tobbi, 2026, p. 107).

To make Socratic dialogue genuinely empowering in Algeria, counselors must first address structural inequalities in students' linguistic capital by providing compensatory and supportive interventions before engaging in dialogical guidance. According to OECD recommendations, such an approach requires strengthening equity-oriented counseling practices and ensuring targeted support for disadvantaged learners (OECD, 2024, p. 52). Ultimately, translating Socratic principles into practice

demands culturally responsive counselor training and structured support for students' expressive and analytical skills; otherwise, the ideal of self-discovery risks becoming an ideological framework that overlooks deep educational inequalities.

1.2 Plato:

Plato linked education to the ideal city, arguing that the educational system should identify each individual's dominant faculty and direct them toward the most appropriate social and occupational role. However, his hierarchical model- where theoretical education is reserved for ruling classes and vocational education for laborers- raises important questions about institutional neutrality in school guidance systems. In the Algerian context, guidance is officially designed to be inclusive and non-discriminatory; however, a hidden Platonic hierarchy may still operate in practice. Students from families with higher educational and cultural capital are more likely to be directed toward prestigious scientific streams such as medicine and engineering, not only because of measured academic performance, but also because they possess cultural codes that align more closely with institutional evaluation criteria. This situation challenges the assumption of institutional neutrality and shows how social privilege can be transformed into perceived academic merit.

Overcoming this implicit Platonic hierarchy requires the implementation of transparent equity audits of guidance outcomes according to socio-economic background, as well as mandatory training for counselors to recognize class-based biases in assessing "ability" and "motivation" (OECD, 2024, p. 71). Without such critical reflexivity, Plato's ideal of matching individual disposition to social function risks reproducing and legitimizing existing social inequalities rather than ensuring genuine merit-based educational allocation.

1.3 Aristotle:

Aristotle viewed education as a structured process in which the child's mind is shaped progressively in accordance with the needs of the state and society. He emphasized a staged model of education, beginning with physical and moral training,

followed by higher intellectual development. Within this framework, education is intended to cultivate rational and well-formed individuals capable of fulfilling their social roles. However, in the Algerian context, critical orientation decisions are often introduced as early as the fifth year of primary school (ages 10–11), which raises serious concerns regarding students' cognitive and emotional readiness for such high-stakes choices.

Drawing on Piaget's theory of cognitive development, many children at this age are still operating within the concrete operational stage and have not yet developed the formal operational thinking required for abstract planning and long-term academic decision-making (Piaget, 1954, p. 178). In response to this developmental mismatch, Algeria could consider piloting a delayed orientation model at the end of middle school (around ages 14–15) within selected schools and assessing its impact on student satisfaction and stream completion rates. Without such reforms, the Aristotelian ideal of guiding individuals toward rational and self-determined lives remains difficult to achieve, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who lack sufficient educational scaffolding to navigate early and consequential academic choices

1.4 Ibn Khaldun:

Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), in his *Muqaddimah*, linked education to the rise and decline of civilizations ('umran), arguing that excessive reliance on harsh memorization ('aqd al-malahik) weakens intellectual faculties and suppresses creativity (Ibn Khaldun, 2004, pp. 540–541). His dialectical perspective- where society shapes education and education, in turn, transforms society- directly challenges top-down guidance systems that simply allocate students into academic streams without critically assessing whether these pathways correspond to broader social and economic needs. Recent studies on educational inequality in Algeria confirm that, despite notable progress, significant disparities in access and quality persist across regions. In particular, current social support policies tend to focus

primarily on primary education in rural areas, while secondary education remains comparatively underserved (Benabid, 2024, p. 37; Daradirah & Shawish, 2024, p. 60).

When applied to the Algerian context, several key implications emerge. First, existing guidance practices still emphasize rote learning and exam performance, which reflects the very pattern criticized by Ibn Khaldun. Second, the persistent mismatch between educational outcomes and labor market needs indicates a breakdown in the dialectical relationship between education and society. Third, a Khaldunian reform perspective would require replacing purely grade-based orientation with broader aptitude-based exploration, actively involving families and local communities in guidance processes, and continuously aligning educational streams with evolving economic realities. Without such structural adjustments, school guidance risks reducing learners to mere "human capital" rather than developing them as active agents capables of contributing to social transformation.

2.The Positivist Perspective:

2.1 Auguste Comte:

Auguste Comte founded sociology as a project aimed at applying the methods of the natural sciences to the study of society, viewing education as a key instrument for achieving social consensus, moral cohesion, altruism, and functional specialization based on perceived differences among individuals (Comte, 2001, pp. 45–50). Within this positivist framework, school guidance can be understood as a mechanism of social allocation that identifies individual abilities and directs learners toward appropriate social and occupational roles. However, a critical reading of Comte's perspective reveals a strongly unidirectional logic in which education primarily serves to maintain social stability, in contrast to Ibn Khaldun's more dialectical vision, where education both reflects and transforms society.

In the Algerian context, Comte's assumption of "hereditary differences" carries significant risks, particularly the naturalization of social inequalities. In practice, measured "aptitudes" are often shaped by accumulated advantages such as socio-

economic status, regional disparities, and differences in school quality, rather than purely innate abilities. Furthermore, Comte's emphasis on universal consensus may inadvertently suppress legitimate cultural and linguistic diversity within Algerian society. For this reason, guidance policies should not be limited to adapting students to existing labor market structures, but should also empower them to critically engage with and, where necessary, transform these structures. This requires maintaining a reliance on empirical evidence while rejecting the tendency to treat existing social arrangements as natural or fixed. Such a critical interpretation is consistent with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, p. 25).

3. The Functionalist Approach:

The functionalist approach represents one of the most prominent theoretical currents in sociology, focusing on the role of social institutions in maintaining the balance and stability of society. Proponents were concerned with interpreting the educational process within the context of socialization, considering that the school is a social institution whose goal is to prepare and train youth to perform their roles in adulthood (Al-Rushdan & Ja'neini, 2002, p. 42). Its most prominent representatives are Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons.

3.1 Émile Durkheim (1858-1917):

Émile Durkheim viewed education as a social fact governed by objective laws, where society imposes structured patterns of thought and behavior on younger generations to ensure social continuity (Durkheim, 1922/1956, p. 66; 1925/1961, p. 41). He argued that the child is naturally egoistic and that education functions to construct the social being through processes of social inheritance (Graff & Le Bihan, 1996, p. 29), ultimately shaping individuals in accordance with the needs and expectations of society (Durkheim, 1922/1956, p. 72). Within this framework, school guidance plays a central role in social adaptation, functional differentiation, and the reinforcement of collective conscience (Durkheim, 1893/1984, p. 134).

In the Algerian context, although the education system seeks to promote national identity and civic cohesion, Durkheim's assumption of a homogeneous collective conscience overlooks significant social stratification and cultural diversity (Daradirah & Shawish, 2024, p. 59). As a result, schooling is experienced unevenly: students from privileged backgrounds often perceive it as a form of empowerment, whereas those from marginalized rural areas may experience it as alienating. Moreover, Durkheim's rather negative view of the child contrasts with humanistic psychological perspectives, such as Rogers' emphasis on intrinsic growth and self-actualization (Rogers, 1969, p. 125), and may unintentionally justify authoritarian guidance practices that suppress students' authentic aspirations. In contemporary Algeria—characterized by youth unemployment, globalization, and shifting value systems—there is also an increasing disjunction between school values (such as meritocracy and discipline) and social realities (including corruption and informal economies), which can generate conditions of anomie rather than integration (Benabid, 2024, p. 42). Therefore, guidance policies should acknowledge these tensions and move toward critical, context-sensitive interventions instead of imposing a purely top-down moral order.

3.2 Talcott Parsons (1902-1979):

Talcott Parsons, as one of the leading figures of functionalist sociology, conceptualized the school as a subsystem responsible for preparing individuals for their future social roles through two main functions: socialization, which involves the internalization of shared values such as achievement and discipline, and selection/distribution, which classifies individuals into appropriate positions within the social structure (Parsons, 1951, p. 215; 1959, p. 298). He further argued that modern educational systems are primarily governed by the principle of achievement rather than ascription, meaning that academic performance should outweigh family background in determining educational and occupational trajectories, thereby ensuring a rational allocation of competencies (Parsons, 1951, p. 165).

In the Algerian context, however, this Parsonian model faces significant empirical and theoretical challenges. While official discourse in school guidance emphasizes meritocracy and standardized performance, family background continues to exert a strong influence on educational outcomes (Tobbi, 2026, p. 108). Students from highly educated families are disproportionately represented in prestigious scientific streams, even when academic achievement is comparable, which suggests that ascriptive factors remain operative. This pattern aligns with Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, according to which privileged families transmit linguistic competencies, aspirational dispositions, and familiarity with the implicit norms of evaluation that structure school success (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, p. 29). Moreover, assessment tools such as standardized tests and grades are not entirely neutral, as they are shaped by unequal access to resources, including school quality, private tutoring, and regional disparities. Consequently, the Algerian guidance system cannot be understood as a neutral mechanism of talent allocation, but rather as a field in which social inequalities are subtly reproduced and legitimized through the discourse of merit.

4. The Need for a Critical Turn: Limits of Functionalism:

Despite their heuristic value, functionalist approaches such as those developed by Durkheim and Parsons are marked by three major blind spots that are particularly significant in the Algerian context. First, they tend to assume social consensus and therefore downplay social conflict: Durkheim's notion of a "collective conscience" overlooks the possibility that school values may be in tension with the lived experiences of students in marginalized or disadvantaged communities. Second, these approaches often treat the school as a neutral "black box," without critically examining how power relations shape definitions of "merit," "ability," and "success." Third, they prioritize adaptation to existing social structures rather than considering the transformative potential of education.

In the Algerian case, where youth unemployment, regional inequalities, and linguistic diversity generate competing social expectations and value systems, a strictly functionalist model of guidance risks reinforcing the very inequalities it claims to reduce (Van de Werfhorst, 2025, p. 12; Schindler et al., 2024, p. 48). For this reason, a critical shift in perspective is required, drawing on sociological and pedagogical traditions such as Bourdieu's theory of reproduction, Freire's critical pedagogy, and post-colonial approaches to education. This critical turn will be further developed in the following section.

5. Critique and Evaluation: Projection onto the Reality of School Guidance in Algeria:

After reviewing the main theoretical frameworks, a critical reading can be presented that reveals the limits of these theories and the possibilities of their application in the Algerian context.

5.1 Critique of Early Philosophical Conceptions:

Socrates' focus on dialogue is reflected in Algerian guidance practices through individual and group interviews. However, this focus may neglect students' genuine interests if not linked to an understanding of their social contexts. A student from a modest background may not possess the same confidence or linguistic repertoire to express their aspirations clearly.

Despite Plato's concern for freedom of thought, his view of theoretical education as nobler finds an echo in Algeria. While guidance is theoretically neutral, a critical question remains: Does it remain so in practice? It is observed that certain scientific streams such as medicine and engineering often remain confined to specific social groups, not only due to academic excellence but also due to their possession of cultural capital that enables success. Here, guidance mechanisms may reproduce hidden inequalities, mimicking the Platonic hierarchy.

Aristotle confined the education of reason to higher stages. However, the Algerian reality shows that academic project construction begins early from the fifth

year of primary school, raising a question about students' maturity for such fateful decisions. This highlights the importance of psychological theories concerned with cognitive and emotional development, which emphasize considering developmental characteristics in the guidance process.

To deepen this critique, it is necessary to move beyond the mere identification of limitations toward a constructive proposal for change. The early philosophical conceptions, while valuable, remain abstract and decontextualized. In the Algerian context, translating Socratic dialogue into practice requires not only training counselors in dialogical techniques but also addressing the structural inequalities that affect students' verbal confidence and linguistic capital. Similarly, overcoming the Platonic hierarchy demands transparent, equity-oriented guidance policies that actively counterbalance the advantages conferred by family background. Finally, respecting Aristotle's developmental stages would require delaying critical orientation decisions until the end of middle school (around age 14–15) and implementing developmental assessment tools that respect cognitive maturation. **For comparison,** Tunisia postponed its orientation decisions from age 12 to 15 in 2018, resulting in a 15% reduction in stream mismatch (Ben Amor, 2020, p. 52). Algeria could learn from such regional experiences.

5.2 Critique of the Functionalist Approach in the Algerian Context:

With Comte, we find an emphasis on education's role in progress, which Algerian reforms strive for. However, contemporary critique reveals that objective criteria in school selection are not neutral but carry the values of the middle classes. A student from a modest background does not enter school with the same cultural capital (language, concepts, aspirations) as a student from a privileged background. Therefore, school selection may reproduce social inequalities.

Projecting Durkheim's vision onto Algeria raises questions about whether the educational model can still achieve social cohesion in a society undergoing profound transformations. In light of globalization, economic difficulties, and changing values, a

growing rupture may exist between the school's values and social reality. The school instills values like diligence, while the student sees increasing difficulties in obtaining employment even after academic success, weakening the socialization process Durkheim described.

Parsons depicts the school as a neutral institution selecting students based solely on competencies. The critique here is peak: Is guidance toward a stream subject only to desire and abilities, or to broader social considerations? Desire itself is a social construct formed within a specific family context. A student from a family with scientific culture will have greater readiness to choose a scientific stream, not only because of their abilities, but because this path appears natural in their environment. Furthermore, the Parsonian model focuses on adaptation, ignoring the possibility of conflict between the individual's roles or between their aspirations and society's expectations.

Beyond these theoretical critiques, the Algerian context presents specific practical challenges that hinder the effective application of any guidance model:

First, resistance to change is rooted in bureaucratic inertia and centralized decision-making. The Algerian educational system operates under a highly centralized ministry structure, where guidance policies are issued top-down with limited local consultation. Counselors and school principals may resist new approaches if they perceive them as additional burdens or if they lack ownership over the reform process.

Second, the shortage of trained personnel is acute. **According to a 2021 Algerian Ministry of Education report, the national average is one counselor per 1,200 students, reaching 1:2,500 in some rural areas (compared to UNESCO's recommendation of 1:250) (Benabid, 2024, p. 44).** This makes individualized, developmentally appropriate guidance practically impossible. Many counselors also lack initial and in-service training in modern guidance theories (e.g., career construction theory, narrative counseling) or in critical sociological perspectives on inequality.

Third, material and infrastructural deficits affect guidance quality. In disadvantaged areas, schools may lack dedicated guidance offices, psychological assessment tools, career resource centers, or reliable internet access for online career exploration. These deficits disproportionately harm students from low-income families, who cannot compensate through private resources.

To overcome these challenges, this article recommends a phased, context-sensitive implementation strategy, starting with pilot programs in a subset of schools (urban, peri-urban, and rural) to generate local evidence, investing in low-cost, high-impact interventions such as teacher training in basic guidance skills, peer mentoring, and community partnerships, leveraging digital technologies (e.g., mobile-friendly career platforms) to reach underserved populations, and establishing a national observatory on school guidance that monitors equity indicators and disseminates best practices (OECD, 2024, pp. 93-95).

6. Toward a Synthetic Approach to School Guidance in Algeria:

The previous critical reading reveals the necessity of moving beyond a single theoretical model and transitioning toward a synthetic approach that benefits from various knowledge fields.

6.1 Integration Between the Sociological and the Psychological:

The integration between sociological analysis, which focuses on structural determinants, and psychological analysis, which examines individual motives and developmental processes, represents a methodological necessity for understanding school guidance in the Algerian context. In practice, students' educational choices cannot be explained solely through cognitive abilities or social background, but rather emerge from the interaction between subjective factors and objective social conditions. This perspective highlights the relevance of Kurt Lewin's field theory, which emphasizes the continuous interaction between the individual and their environment (Lewin, 1936, p. 45).

Beyond Lewin, contemporary psychological theories offer additional tools for rethinking school guidance in Algeria. Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development provides a framework for evaluating whether students at different ages possess the logical and abstract reasoning skills required for independent career decision-making. Given that orientation in Algeria often begins at an early age (around 10–11 years), when many children are still in the concrete operational stage, this suggests that such decisions should be postponed or considered provisional and subject to revision (Piaget, 1954, p. 178). Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory further emphasizes the identity versus role confusion stage during adolescence (12–18 years), highlighting the importance of exploration and self-discovery in the formation of stable educational and vocational identities, and cautioning against premature closure of academic pathways (Erikson, 1968, pp. 128–135).

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory adds another dimension by stressing the role of social interaction and scaffolding in cognitive development. Applied to school guidance, this implies that counselors should act as mediators who bridge the gap between students' current level of understanding and their potential academic trajectories, while taking into account the cultural tools available to them, such as language, family support, and community resources (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 84–91). From a practical standpoint, a Vygotskian approach would involve identifying the student's current level of self-understanding, collaboratively constructing possible educational and career pathways within their zone of proximal development, and providing culturally relevant scaffolding such as family narratives and community role models. This approach contrasts sharply with the dominant Algerian practice, which is largely based on standardized testing and score-based orientation.

6.2 Considering the Specificity of the Algerian Context:

Western theories, which emerged in specific historical and socio-cultural contexts, cannot be mechanically applied to the Algerian reality without critical adaptation. Algeria is currently undergoing profound social transformations

characterized by rising unemployment, a housing crisis, shifting social values, and persistent economic constraints. These structural conditions significantly shape students' educational trajectories and the formation of their academic and professional aspirations. Consequently, there is a growing need to develop interpretive models that are context-sensitive and capable of capturing the specific dynamics of Algerian society, rather than relying on imported theoretical frameworks that may overlook local realities.

Specifically, any context-sensitive model for Algeria must take into account several interrelated dimensions, including linguistic diversity (Arabic, Tamazight, and French) and its impact on students' learning pathways and academic performance, regional disparities between coastal urban centers and inland or rural areas in terms of school quality, infrastructure, and employment opportunities (Daradirah & Shawish, 2024, p. 61), the role of family and tribal networks in shaping aspirations and access to educational and professional resources, the tension between traditional values and modernizing forces, which influences students' willingness to pursue non-traditional careers, particularly for girls in mixed-gender environments, and the growing importance of the informal economy, which may provide alternative pathways that compete with formal educational routes. In this perspective, a context-sensitive guidance model must be empirically grounded in local realities rather than simply imported from Western paradigms, and should ideally be supported by systematic comparative studies with countries such as Tunisia and Morocco in order to distinguish uniquely Algerian specificities from broader regional patterns (Ben Amor, 2020, p. 55)."

6.3 Guidance as Empowerment:

Instead of viewing school guidance as a mechanism for adapting students to the labor market (the functionalist view), it can be viewed as a tool for empowering them and helping them understand and potentially change society. This requires transcending the conservative tendency in classical approaches and opening up to

critical theories like Bourdieu's and humanistic theories that see the individual as an active agent.

In practical terms, an empowerment-oriented guidance model in Algeria would include fostering critical consciousness among students about how social structures (class, region, gender) shape their opportunities, without falling into determinism, developing students' agency and decision-making skills through participatory activities such as career exploration projects, student-led conferences, and peer mentoring, engaging families and communities as partners in guidance, rather than viewing them as obstacles, advocating for policy changes that address structural barriers (e.g., scholarships for disadvantaged students, improved school infrastructure in rural areas), and measuring guidance success not only by labor market placement but also by students' self-reported satisfaction, confidence, and sense of purpose (OECD, 2024, pp. 101-105; Reay, 2024, p. 870).

7. Results of the Study:

- Sociological approaches provide a rich but classical heritage, often bound by an idealized functionalist vision that assumes school neutrality. This assumption is epistemologically unsustainable, as it ignores the ways in which school practices are embedded in broader power relations.
- The neutrality of the school is highly questionable; criteria of objectivity and competence are saturated with social and cultural backgrounds. In the Algerian context, students from privileged families benefit from cultural capital that aligns with the school's implicit expectations, giving them an unfair advantage in guidance outcomes.
- Guidance mechanisms in Algeria, as currently practiced, may contribute to the hidden reproduction of social inequalities. This occurs through seemingly neutral procedures (grades, tests, interviews) that disproportionately favor students from urban, educated, and economically secure backgrounds.

- There is an urgent need for theoretical integration (sociological, psychological, and critical) to understand and address the complexities of guidance. Specifically, integrating Piaget's cognitive development theory, Erikson's psychosocial stages, and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory with Bourdieu's critical sociology provides a more robust framework than any single approach alone.
- The Algerian context requires the development of analytical models that are more sensitive to its specific socio-economic and cultural dynamics, including linguistic diversity, regional disparities, family structures, and the influence of the informal economy.
- Practical challenges such as bureaucratic resistance, counselor shortages (e.g., ratios exceeding 1:1200 in some regions), and material deficits must be addressed through phased, context-sensitive implementation strategies rather than wholesale importation of foreign models.
- An empowerment-oriented guidance model, focused on critical consciousness and student agency, offers a promising alternative to the functionalist adaptation model, though it requires significant investment in counselor training and policy support.
- A comparative lens with Arab countries (e.g., Tunisia, Morocco) is currently absent from this analysis and should be addressed in future research

8. Conclusion:

This article has demonstrated that school guidance is not a neutral technical process but a complex social practice formed by the interaction between the subjective and the objective, the individual and the structural. Through a critical sociological lens, it is evident that understanding and developing this practice requires a deep awareness of the limitations of classical functionalist theories and an openness to critical and humanistic perspectives. The analysis calls for a fundamental reconsideration of guidance mechanisms in Algeria to make them more responsive to students' social and cultural specificities, thereby reducing the gap between the

theoretical discourse of equal opportunity and the practical reality of persistent inequality.

Consequently, this study invites a re-conceptualization of school guidance not merely as an administrative mechanism, but as a socially embedded process shaped by power relations and structural contexts. Moving beyond a descriptive account of inequalities toward actionable, context-sensitive reforms requires a sustained commitment to empirical investigation. Crucially, the theoretical critique developed here must be complemented by field-based studies that examine how guidance decisions are actually made, how students and parents perceive the process, and how these outcomes affect academic trajectories and labor market integration in the Algerian context.

Future research should adopt mixed-methods designs to capture both the statistical patterns of inequality and the subjective meanings students attach to their choices. Quantitative research could measure the relative weight of ascriptive factors- such as family background and region—versus meritocratic factors, while qualitative approaches could explore the lived experiences of disadvantaged students and the professional dilemmas of counselors. Furthermore, comparative research with neighboring North African contexts, such as Tunisia and Morocco, would be invaluable in distinguishing local barriers from broader regional patterns. Ultimately, only through such empirically grounded and context-sensitive research can Algerian policymakers design evidence-based interventions- such as equity audits and enhanced counselor training- that promote true educational equity and enhance the overall effectiveness of the educational system.

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