

The Role of Educational Texts in the Acquisition of Knowledge and the Consolidation of Identity The Fifth Grade of Primary School as a Model

دور النصوص التعليمية في اكتساب المعرفة وتثبيت الهوية

الصف الخامس ابتدائي أنموذجاً

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Abstract:

Texts occupy a position of paramount importance within the educational curriculum. They are selected with great care, presented as pedagogical texts, and incorporated into textbooks in accordance with clearly defined instructional objectives. Given their crucial role in shaping the learner's linguistic, cognitive, emotional, and intellectual repertoire, this study seeks to approach the educational texts presented to fifth-grade primary school pupils, bearing in mind the sensitivity of both the educational stage and the age group concerned. It attempts to uncover their positive aspects, while also identifying the shortcomings that ought to be addressed.

Within this framework, we will seek to answer a central question: To what extent do these texts serve the stated objectives of enabling the learner to acquire scientific knowledge, and what role do they play in consolidating the elements of national identity?

Keywords: educational text, identity, belonging, globalization, textbook

ملخص:

تكتسي النصوص أهمية بالغة في المنهاج التعليمي، فهي تُنتقى بعناية فائقة وتقدم على شكل نصوص تعليمية، وتدرج في المقررات وفق أهداف تعليمية مسطرة. ونظراً لما تكتسيه هذه الأخيرة من أهمية بالغة في تكوين الرصيد اللغوي، والمعرفي، والوجداني، والفكري للمتعلم؛ فإننا سنحاول مقارنة النصوص التعليمية المقدمة لتلاميذ السنة الخامسة ابتدائي باعتبار حساسية المرحلة التعليمية والعمرية لهذه الفئة من التلاميذ، محاولين الكشف عن جوانبها الإيجابية، كما نتلمس ما اعترها من ثغرات يجب تداركها.

وفي هذا الإطار سنحاول الإجابة عن سؤال رئيس: ما مدى خدمة هذه النصوص للأهداف المسطرة من اكتساب المتعلم لمادة علمية وكذا دورها في تثبيت عناصر الهوية الوطنية؟

الكلمات المفتاحية: النص التعليمي، الهوية، الانتماء، العولمة، الكتاب المدرسي

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1. Introduction

Modern pedagogical approaches aim to convey information to learners through all possible means, particularly those that are most effective. At the primary level, knowledge

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acquired through engaging stories and narratives capable of capturing the learner's attention proves more beneficial than any other type of instructional session. The Ministry of National Education has capitalized on this dimension to transmit a wide range of linguistic and intellectual knowledge according to the claims of educational authorities and to socialize learners in accordance with the values of national identity (Islam, Arabism, Amazighity).

Through an examination of the educational texts presented during this sensitive phase of the learner's intellectual development (with the fifth grade of primary school as a model), we will attempt to address a principal question: To what extent do these texts fulfill their intended objectives in enabling learners to acquire scientific knowledge, and what role do they play in consolidating the elements of identity?

This overarching problem gives rise to several subsidiary questions, the most important of which are:

Were the texts selected according to a clear methodology and well-defined objectives?

Do these texts achieve their intended purpose, particularly with regard to consolidating identity ?

What are the principal shortcomings of these texts?

To this end, we will adopt both inductive and analytical methods. By surveying the texts included in the fifth-grade curriculum and analyzing their content, we aim to assess the extent to which they respond to their intended objectives in providing effective pedagogical material and in consolidating national identity among learners at this stage.

First: Criteria for the Selection of Texts

In any educational system, texts are selected in accordance with conscious, well-considered objectives. They are proposed for discussion and enrichment by specialists and stakeholders concerned with this educational material, which is regarded as one of the most effective pedagogical tools. Given the special place texts occupy in the hearts and minds of young learners and in light of a reality that is constantly changing and dynamic, where sources of information are no longer confined to the school alone it has become imperative for those responsible for the Algerian school system to be attentive to this matter and to take into account all the challenges facing learners at this sensitive stage of development. These external challenges are embodied in the globalization of the economy, with the consequent demands for very high levels of qualification, as well as in scientific and technological advancement, which has led to the emergence of a new form of society: the society of knowledge, technology, and information.

It has therefore become necessary to design new curricula based on sound methodological choices and clear visions in terms of purposes, objectives, and aims that admit no ambiguity. Such curricula must be guided by a conscious, forward-looking perspective that delineates the intended trajectory for Algerian youth, as well as the means and tools required to achieve it thereby ensuring that our conservative society does not drift away from its authentic identity.

As pedagogical tools that provide learners with direct knowledge, texts also function as subtle channels through which information is conveyed to the learner's subconscious. They contribute to shaping identity and to constructing a solid value-based foundation that is not easily affected by subsequent ideas. Texts implant within the learner the culture of his or her society, reinforcing a sense of belonging and an awareness of distinctiveness from other cultures. This, in turn, safeguards against dissolution or disorientation in the desert of doctrines and affiliations that flow in through the open sky of satellite channels, the Internet, and other media means that have become difficult, if not impossible, to control.

Experts enumerate several roles played by the school as the true architect of the learner's personality linking the learner to his identity and strengthening his belonging to his nation and civilization. The importance of socialization lies in its capacity to shape minds, instill values, and embed within the child's consciousness knowledge, concepts, and moral principles derived from the customs and traditions of society. Its ultimate aim is to exert a profound influence upon the learner.

It is self-evident that the learner begins to receive knowledge from the moment he sets foot in the school. He is introduced to instructions and guidance concerning discipline and conduct what behaviors are expected and what are not how to coexist with peers and accept them as they are, the etiquette of standing and showing respect, offering greetings, venerating the national flag, respecting the national anthem, and appreciating the immense sacrifices of the martyrs. He is also taught proper manners in eating, the culture of cleanliness, and comportment in accordance with Islamic ethics, among other values. Once inside the classroom, he receives knowledge that shapes him into a member of his society one who respects its beliefs, honors its symbols, and embraces what his community holds sacred. All of this aims at achieving social adjustment or social conditioning by protecting the child from the impurities and shortcomings of society that is, from negative aspects of the external environment. Such guidance positively influences the pupil's socialization and assists in the formation of a personality that harmonizes with the developments of modern education, thereby enabling him to integrate soundly into his society.

Sociologists, however, view the school as merely a stage upon which the dynamics of the larger society are enacted. It plays a fundamental role insofar as it is shaped by and remains subordinate to the prevailing social and political system. From this perspective, individuals are not the primary reference point; rather, one must begin with society itself. In this context, socialization emerges as the principal factor in refining and shaping the child's identity.

The Algerian learner finds himself torn between two trajectories. The supervising ministry seeks to make the school environment a reflection of the learner's daily life, so as to render education more meaningful and more closely connected to his lived reality. Yet educational theorists in Algeria often fall into the trap of idealism, assuming conditions they believe to be available to all learners. In reality, pupils in what is often referred to as "deep Algeria" experience a profound disjunction between their lived circumstances and what they

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are taught at school, owing to the distance separating these lessons from their everyday reality.

The Algerian learner thus lives in two distinct states within a single school day: he abides by rules and regulations within the confines of the institution, yet completely disengages from them once he leaves it. This suggests a lack of harmony between his school reality and his daily life.

Such a situation constitutes a genuine threat to the values, morals, and customs that the school seeks to instill in learners. These are often perceived as mere pieces of information detached from reality much like other facts they study, which they receive as abstract data but do not witness reflected in their everyday experience. A striking example of this contradiction lies in the frequent emphasis at school on pride in Islamic values, in the Arabic and Amazigh languages, and in speaking Arabic. Should the learner attempt to practice these ideals within his social environment, he may be met with ridicule and contempt, labeled as backward or regressive. Conversely, if he speaks a foreign language, he is more likely to be regarded as cultured and open-minded, among other favorable attributes. The problem persists so long as society has not articulated a comprehensive vision in which the school assumes a leading role, rather than bearing the burden alone for such isolation can only lead to inevitable failure.

Second: The Presence of Identity in the Texts of the Arabic Language Textbook

Definitions of identity vary according to the intellectual orientations of those who seek to define it. Yet, ultimately, identity constitutes the inevitable outcome of a set of interrelated factors in which multiple agents participate, leading to a necessary result. "Identity thus begins and takes shape through knowledge, in its broadest sense knowledge whose first seeds are sown by the family, then nurtured and developed by the school, before being completed through interaction with the street and society in its vast and complex existence. Through the family, the individual learns from early childhood sounds, movements, and emotional responses, and acquires the values of his society" (Ismail, 2011)

Khalil Nouri defines it as follows: "If we wish to provide a general definition of this identity, we may say that it signifies belief in the creed of this nation, pride in belonging to it, respect for its civilizational and cultural value, the manifestation of Islamic rituals and adherence to them with pride, and the feeling of individual and collective distinction and autonomy" (al-'Ani, 2009)

Religious affiliation constitutes a fundamental pillar in the question of identity. Every nation takes pride in its religious belonging, which shapes its collective consciousness and outlines its social trajectory, embodied in the relationships among its members on the one hand, and between them and members of other nations on the other. "From this perspective, it may be said that religion or creed are essential elements in the formation of the identities of societies and individuals. This reality does not apply solely to Arab-Islamic society; it also extends to other societies, where religious motives often dominate the shaping of identity, as they rarely depart in their modes of thought and behavior from the frameworks

defined by their religions and beliefs” (‘Allawash, 2018)

The Arabic and Amazigh languages even if only partially emphasized at this stage are likewise among the fundamental pillars that the educational system seeks to entrench, to keep alive and in active circulation, and to ensure their correct usage according to their rules in academic contexts and, ideally, in daily interaction among members of society. “Speakers of the Arabic language constitute an independent nation with distinct and clear beliefs, possessing a culture, a civilization, and a vast geographical expanse. The Arabic language is a principal component of Arab identity, for it unifies its speakers socially, culturally, and politically. The Arabic language derived its authority from the symbolic status it attained within the intellectual and cultural system” (Language and Identity in the Arab World, collective authors, 2013)

This represents a genuine aspiration of the wise members of this nation, and curriculum designers have accorded it due importance. The accompanying document to the fifth-grade curriculum states: “The accompanying document embodies society’s genuine desire for the Arabic language to become an essential, living, and beautiful part of our lives, and to constitute a vital element of our cognitive and emotional formation guiding us toward discovering our values and distinctive features, appreciating our heritage, and taking pride in it”.

Third: The Contents of the Textbook

The Arabic language textbook for the fifth year of primary education (second generation) in Algeria comprises eight thematic units addressing a range of intellectual, scientific, and cultural issues. Each unit revolves around a central focus of interest and is subdivided into twenty-three instructional sequences. Each instructional unit includes a set of activities extending over four pages: two pages devoted to language use, while each axis is structured around a memorization text, an integration text accompanied by a written project, and a documentary text each allocated one page.

These thematic axes are as follows: human values; social life and services; national identity; sustainable development; health and nutrition; the world of science and discoveries; stories and tales from heritage; and travel and journeys. Each axis presents a selection of texts related to its theme.

What concerns us in this study are the literary texts contained in the textbook, numbering thirty-five in total. These are distributed across prose genres (the novel, short story, tale, proverbs, biography, and life writing), poetry, and travel literature. Our inquiry will be confined to examining the presence of national identity within the prescribed texts.

A survey of the texts that address identity reveals that they are distributed across various literary forms, the majority being prose texts. Most of these appear in the “National Identity” unit, which contains six texts. Five of these belong directly to the “National Identity” axis, while one prose text appears under the “Social Life” axis, namely “The Profession of Tomorrow,” which refers to Algerian customs and traditions in celebrating success in the Baccalaureate examination.

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The five prose texts in which the national dimension is directly realized contain numerous markers referring to Algerian history, the liberation revolution, the martyrs, national figures, and religious occasions and celebrations. Among them is the text “Takfarinas Speaks,” which presents the figure of a historical Algerian leader who resisted Roman colonial rule, symbolizing resistance and often evoking pride and a sense of belonging to the homeland. The same text also refers to the hero Jugurtha and to the subsequent resistances described in the textbook as honorable struggles.

The second text in the “National Identity” axis, entitled “We Are All Children of One Homeland,” evokes the condition of Algerians during the colonial period and how the colonizer sought to divide them. Reference is made to the teacher who would place Kabyle children in one row and Arab children in another a bitter reality experienced by the Algerian people, as colonialism imposed this pattern of segregation. In contrast to colonial institutions, the parallel indigenous system played a significant role in preserving the cohesion and unity of Algerians, represented in the system of Quranic schools, where the Holy Qur’an was taught and where solidarity and the principles of national identity were instilled. There, all studied together, conscious that they were indeed children of a single homeland.

The third prose text, entitled “A Precious Land” (Arḍ Ghāliya), addresses the theme of land and love of homeland, evoking the Babors Mountains, which witnessed fierce battles between the mujahideen and the colonizer. It recalls the martyrs and underscores the value of land and homeland.

The fourth text, “Our Lofty Flag” (‘Alamunā al-Shāmikh), speaks directly of the national flag as the unifying banner of this people.

The fifth text, “Heroes from the Homeland Whom We May Not Know”, consists of biographical sketches of national figures from Algerian history, in an attempt to introduce learners to prominent personalities of the nation.

As for the poetic texts in which the national dimension is present, there are two: the first, “Labour Day”, addresses an occasion that is both national and international; the second, “For You, O My Homeland”, in which the poet celebrates the glories of the homeland.

The final text in which the national dimension appears through popular customs and traditions is the travel narrative “My Journey to ‘Ayn al-Şafrā’.” This is a descriptive account portraying the condition of nomadic Bedouins, their way of life, their manner of trading and spending the day in the marketplace, their return to their dwellings, and their subsequent journeys.

Despite the existence of clear legal texts and decrees mandating attention to, and reinforcement of, the national dimension so as to implant it in the learner’s consciousness, we observe that the proportion of texts devoted to national identity is extremely limited in comparison with other texts. Even those included cannot be said to have truly touched the

learner's inner sensibility or left a deep impact, given their predominantly narrative character. We do not, for instance, find texts devoted to Emir Abdelkader, Larbi Ben M'hidi, Didouche Mourad, or others too numerous to enumerate whose memory inspires pride, dignity, and nobility. Likewise, Islamic texts are absent: no account of the Prophet's biography (peace be upon him), nor of the Companions, nor of the Tābi'ūn who followed them, nor even texts on the Islamic conquests. More striking still is that, in the reading textbook, Qur'anic verses or Prophetic hadiths appear only twice. Here one must ask: what is the rationale behind marginalizing the religious dimension, especially when compared to developed Western countries that do not refrain from expressing pride in their religion and creed, and from incorporating this dimension into texts that serve their own religious formation?

Fourth: Text Titles and Belonging

Educational programs seek to establish and consolidate national constants and values through the curriculum. Logically, these values and constants should be reinforced with increasing intensity as the learner advances in age. Yet a simple quantitative assessment reveals that the proportion of lessons devoted to consolidating national values is minimal compared with the number of texts that claim to connect learners to foreign literatures literatures that themselves are imbued with the values and constants of their producers.

A cursory examination of the titles included in the fifth-grade textbook shows that among the twenty-three targeted values, none explicitly emphasizes the preservation of Islamic, Arab, or Amazigh identity despite the sensitivity of this educational and developmental stage, and despite the fact that this year serves as a bridge between primary education and middle school. Instead, most of the lessons ultimately promote values that, directly or indirectly, serve globalization and dissolution into a so-called global identity that no longer respects particularity, but operates within broad frameworks that may at times clash with our morals, religion, and identity.

Out of twenty-three texts, only four explicitly address identity and belonging: "Takfarinas Speaks," "We Are All Children of One Homeland," "A Precious Land," and "Journey to 'Ayn al-Şafrā'".

All other titles are general enough to apply to any society across the globe. Where, then, is specificity? Where is religious identity? Where is linguistic identity? And so forth. Even the values mentioned above cannot be deemed sufficiently significant when measured against what has been neglected at best. The question thus remains: Is this the result of haste in implementing reform upon reform and if so, that is indeed a grave matter? Or is it intentional and if that is the case, the matter is graver still?

In underscoring the absence of texts that consolidate identity while transmitting knowledge, we do not seek to diminish the value of other principles. Rather, the essential must first be firmly rooted, before proceeding to what is important.

Fifth: Identity and the Tsunami of Globalization

Preserving identity amid this turbulent sea of ideas that floods the open sky is among

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the most arduous tasks entrusted to society in general, and to the school in particular. Confronting such challenges requires full awareness of the stated objectives, as well as of the harsh reality whose negative repercussions have become increasingly difficult to control. Those at the helm of the Ministry of Education must demonstrate the dynamism and flexibility necessary to keep pace with the multicolored invasion carried through modern technologies especially during the early developmental stages of youth, which constitute the foundational base and serve as a kind of preventive vaccine against negative influences that may lead to the distortion of identities and estrangement from the nation's civilizational roots.

Safeguarding the cultural identity of any society in the face of the threats posed by globalization cannot be achieved through isolationism or withdrawal from a world that has effectively become a small village. Rather, it entails equipping the individual with the necessary immunity through a deliberate and purposeful education supervised by the state. Such education introduces learners to their material and intellectual heritage transmitted across generations and provides them with the knowledge, values, principles, and skills that enable them to interact with the contemporary world without compromising their personality or identity. However numerous the institutions that seek to fulfill this role, the school remains uniquely burdened with this major responsibility. It embodies this mission through the curricula it implements, which constitute one of the most significant inputs in the educational process and contribute to sound educational outcomes. The content of these curricula thus exerts the greatest influence in instilling within pupils and learners the value system embraced by society.

Yet a careful observer discerns a number of texts that contribute to shaping the consciousness of pupils at this sensitive stage in ways that may allow certain values to infiltrate their awareness, thereby negatively affecting the objectives outlined by educational policy aimed at consolidating national identity.

The inclusion of certain texts drawn from world literatures at such a formative stage constitutes a risky gamble. "From here, we must put an end to this danger and prepare ourselves for it on the human, intellectual, rational, social, psychological, religious, historical, and cultural levels, so that we may preserve for our nation its identity and continuity. In the face of this struggle and the attempt to impose the dominance of the Other armed with technology, media, and social networks that may advance into our homes are we not confronted with a major challenge of this kind of conflict? And in response to those curricula and educational programs possessed by the Other as instruments for distorting the image of the Self, has the Self attempted to craft its own image through its curricula, to reconstruct it, and indeed to preserve it?" (Ismail, 2011)

This may be summarized in a set of pressing questions that this research paper seeks to raise: How can the educational text contribute to the construction of the Algerian child's identity culturally, historically, religiously, doctrinally, civilizational, intellectually, scientifically, and nationally while preventing certain ideas and beliefs from subtly

infiltrating pupils' minds without our awareness, particularly if the classroom teacher fails to notice them?

Conclusion and Findings

Far from casting accusations or invoking conspiracy theories, we conclude with a set of findings that reflect genuine efforts on the part of those responsible for the Algerian educational system to advance this sensitive sector. Nevertheless, the transformations of our era tend to disrupt fragile calculations and unsettle systems that seek the shortest path to reform by relying on the experiences of others especially when insufficient attention is paid to the differences of social specificity, culture, and belonging. The principal findings of this modest effort may be summarized as follows:

The texts included in the fifth-grade Arabic language textbook are rich in a wide array of values that may broadly be described as shared human values.

The texts that address national identity lack depth; they may even be described as fragmentary, referring only to simple and superficial aspects of national unity.

There is a clear marginalization of the religious and doctrinal dimension in the selected texts, raising numerous questions regarding the underlying reasons and objectives.

There is a complete absence of narrative texts reflecting Arab-Islamic character. If the child does not internalize the values of authentic Arab-Islamic culture at this formative stage through the school, where is he to acquire them especially in an age of globalization in which imported culture often prevails over indigenous culture?

It would have been more appropriate to reconsider the place of religious values and to accord them their due status within the hierarchy of values, for they are among the foundational principles that guide and regulate other values.

The textbook's reliance on a single direct text reflecting the Amazigh dimension namely, "Takfarinas Speaks" confirms that it fails to adequately realize an essential component of Algerian identity as stipulated in official Algerian documents.

The selected texts are insufficient, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to elucidate the dimensions of national identity. It would have been preferable to include texts that are stronger and deeper in artistic, aesthetic, and linguistic terms.

In their overall orientation, these texts appear closer to serving the logic of globalization than to fostering pride in belonging and particularity. This is a matter that demands vigilance, especially in a climate saturated with destabilizing cultures, and in light of the conditions of a society living under the "open sky" of global media.

In conclusion, we propose the initiation of an in-depth debate involving specialists entrusted with safeguarding the nation's identity and particularity. Such a discussion should be accompanied by the reinforcement of texts that promote the values of belonging and national identity, given their vital role in protecting younger generations from the cultural invasion that we observe eroding the youth of the nation at large.

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