

ENGLISH IN ALGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: PROSPECTS AND REALITIES

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Abstract

The teaching of foreign languages in Algeria is a subject that has raised a great deal of controversy. The case of the teaching of English at the primary level is one of the themes that have generated a dilemma. This small scale study tries to debate this decision taken by the government considering scientific and social facts all together with the feasibility of this project. The main objective of this study is to demonstrate whether Algeria is well prepared to successfully teach English to primary school pupils. Therefore, it endeavors to explore the following question: "Does Algeria possess all the required means to teach English at the primary schooling level?". To this end, the study is descriptive in nature, and uses a questionnaire to collect fifty (50) teachers' opinions and perceptions from the English department at Batna 2 University and Batna primary schools. The results obtained indicate that, indeed, the teaching of English at this level sounds rather hasty, for enormous efforts must be invested in the scientific framework to preparing both qualified teachers and suitable programs. A rethinking of the overall policy stands as a must.

Keywords: *Teaching English, primary school, prospects, realities.*

1. Introduction

Over the last decades, the teaching of English gained momentum cross world. According to the Euromonitor International site (2012) and Rezig (2011), English was, in 2012, spoken by 7% of Algerians. Learning this language is also explained by the fact that many Algerians have emigrated to English-speaking countries. The last Algerian education policy calls for the integration of English at the primary school level, whereas this language was taught only at the college. This has created a ceaseless and controversial debate. At the outbreak of the 21st century, Algeria has become open to the global world and encouraged the teaching of foreign languages as part of the Algerian educational agenda. Thus, this research endeavors to collect teachers' perceptions towards the integration of English at the primary school, and attempts to showcase whether this policy will prove successful.

2. Objectives

The current study aims at highlighting whether Algeria is prepared to successfully teach English to primary school pupils. It discusses the decision taken by the government after considering scientific and social facts all together with the feasibility of the prospected project. It aspires to collect teachers' perceptions of the integration of English at the primary level. More importantly, it intends to explore the different challenges faced by teachers of English after the implementation of the newly devised regulations with respect to the integration of English at the primary schooling level. It seeks to raise awareness among policy makers about teachers' challenges and requirements faced after the implementation of this new reform. Its main purpose is to investigate the following question: "Does Algeria possess all the required means to teach English at the primary schooling level?".

3. Literature review

Undoubtedly, English is the 21st Century universal language. Two decades ago, Crystal (2003) claims that "more than 350 million people around the world speak English as a first language and more than 430 million speak it as a second language" (p.69). Thence, it is conceived to be the Lingua Franca of

the modern world and the language of science, research and technology. Education in Algeria is free and compulsory for Algerians from the ages of 6 to 15 (Singh, 2016). Language-education policy is core in the government's educational agenda. The Algerian government has taken many decisions to cope with the continuous changes happening in the educational landscape. The Algerian educational system has experienced many controversies over the subject of languages. Henceforth, this study is an attempt to address the issue of integrating English at the primary school from researchers' and teachers' viewpoints.

4. Research methodology design

To address the research question and to consider the research objectives set, this study is descriptive in nature and uses a questionnaire to collect teachers' perceptions from the English department at Batna 2 University and Batna primary schools. Fifty (50) questionnaires were administered, but only a sample of forty (40) responded due to time constraints. Data collected have been processed using Google Form.

The population's characteristics, namely, gender, age, teaching experience, and degree are summarized as follows: This study's population includes 71.8 % Females and 28.2 % Males. The participants' age in this piece of research ranges from 21 to 72. Teachers' age is an important factor in knowing the extent to which these agents are effective in their teaching. It might determine the efficacy of how these teachers may behave towards a vulnerable category of learners. According to Zafer and Aslihan (2012), cited in Ismail, Arshad, and Abas (2018, p. 146), teachers who are at least 41 years old prove more effective classroom managers than teachers who are younger. This seems to accredit the claims and perceptions, towards the integration of English in primary schools, given by the teachers included in this study. Teachers' experience is also pivotal for this study. The majority of participants are well experienced teachers with a mean rate of almost 18 years of teaching experience. As documented by the literature, teachers' ability to impart knowledge contributes significantly on students achievements in schools (Alufohai and Ibhafidon, 2015), cited in Ismail, Arshad, and Abas (2018, p. 146). With respect to teachers' degree, the majority of teachers who participated in this study do hold PhD and Magistère (MAA) degrees with 30% and 25 % respectively.

This means that teachers are well experienced and possess enough background which makes them aware of their profession difficulties. Based on the data obtained from the participants' characteristics, the teachers could be considered to be qualified, experienced, skilled and well trained teachers. Undoubtedly, this positively influences their perceptions and viewpoints. .

5. Results and discussion

Results obtained indicate that, indeed, the teaching of English at this level sounds rather hasty, for enormous efforts must be invested in the scientific framework to prepare both qualified teachers and suitable programs. Results are distributed accordingly.

5.1. What was your initial training before working as a teacher?

When participants were asked what was their initial training before becoming a teacher, they answered as follows (Table 1):

Table 1.

1	University training to teach English
2	Nothing
3	Extensive training at ENS (National School for Teacher Training)
4	Institute of Technology of Education (ITE)

The above table indicates that the majority of participants do have prior training before becoming teachers in highly recognized Algerian institutions like ENS and ITE with the exception of few teachers who did not. This item adds to the previous characteristics about teachers. This might confirm that these teachers have a long experience in dealing with the academic context and the teaching learning enterprise.

5.2. Do you accept integrating the teaching of English at primary school?

Figure 1.

Do you accept integrating the Teaching of English at Primary School?

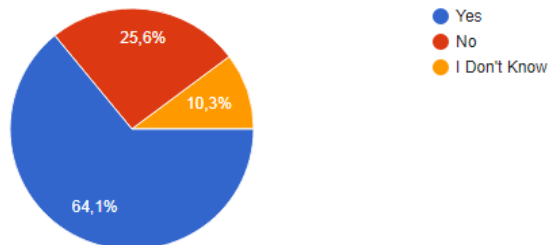


Table 2.

1	English is so important today. It is used everywhere. I believe Algerian school should have used English years ago.
2	It is the language of international communication; particularly, in the domains of business and scientific research
3	It is important for pupils to be familiar with the basics of the language from an early age so that they can keep them firmly in mind.
4	It is quite important in terms of developing in young learners some positive attitudes toward English. Moreover, it is scientifically proven that young learners learn a language quickly.

From Figure 5. and Table 2., it is shown that the majority of teachers of English, with representative rates of 64.1% and 25.6% for “Yes” and “No” respectively, consider that the integration of English at primary school stands mandatory because it, above all, opens horizons for worldwide opportunities.

5.3. Do you think the primary school pupils would be overloaded with learning three to four languages at the same time?

Figure 2.

Do you think the primary school pupil would be overloaded with learning three to four languages at the same time?

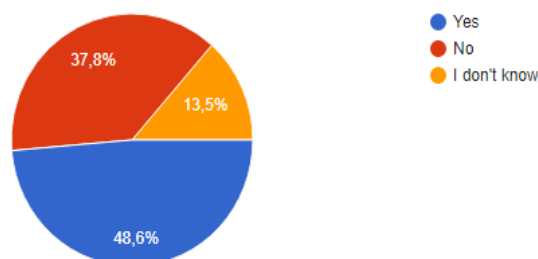


Table 3.

1	Pupils will be reluctant to study so many languages especially in this young age where they think only of playing. Their curriculum is already overloaded. They will get bored.
2	Pupils would be so difficult for them to learn more than one or two languages. In this case, much attention should be given to "how to teach them"
3	The primary school pupil is in the perfect age of language acquisition. Since the Algerian society is already a multilingual society then it is perfectly acceptable to add an overly used language as English to the primary schools curriculum.

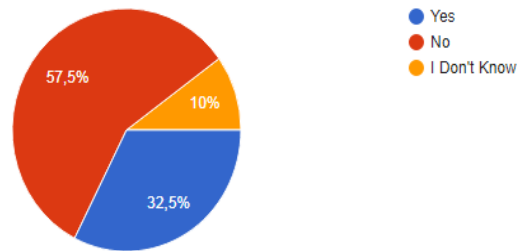
Data obtained confirmed that 48.6% of teachers think affirmatively that pupils at primary school are overloaded as opposed to 37.8% who think the opposite. It seems that those teachers who responded with “No” do not realize that none of these languages is a mother tongue to the exception of Tamazight

which is taught as a local dialect, but not as a unified and codified language cross Algeria. Henceforth, they do not realize that pupils are not in an acquisition situation, for it is a learning activity in contact with the teacher.

5.4. Do you think that Algeria has the required means for the integration of English at primary school?

Figure 3.

Do you think that Algeria has the required means for the Integration of English at Primary School?



The chart above (Figure 7) indicates that 57.5% of teachers claim that Algeria does not provide the required means to teach English at primary school as opposed to 32.5% who affirmatively replied by “Yes”. This indicates a disparity in views among teachers. The few ones who believe Algeria has the required means probably think that the teaching of English is limited only to the presence of a teacher and learners, regardless of teachers’ qualifications, learners’ motivation, and other factors at work in a language class.

5.5. Is Algeria ready to integrate the teaching of English at primary school?

Figure 4.

Is Algeria ready to integrate the teaching of English at Primary School?

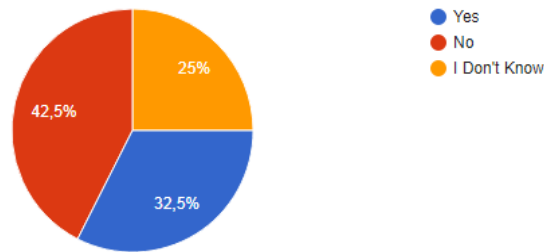


Figure 8. showcases that according to 42.5% of the teachers, Algeria is not ready yet to integrate English in primary school as opposed to 32.5% who claimed the opposite. Probably, those teachers who answered with “yes” are not aware of the factors that interplay in the teaching of a foreign language.

5.6. What kind of challenges primary teachers of English might face?

Table 4.

1	Lack of adequate training, lack of appropriate curricular, absence of resources and means, not well prepared to deal pedagogically with young pupils
2	I think the only challenge is the loadedness. That's why Algerian school should make pupils choose one foreign language.
3	The only challenge I guess will be related to the fact that learners might be confused by being overwhelmed by two foreign languages.

The above Table 4. demonstrates that among the prominent challenges that might be faced by teachers of English in primary schools are the lack of adequate training, the lack of appropriate curricular, the absence of resources and means , and teachers' ill-preparation to deal pedagogically with young pupils in overloaded classes and curricular.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, this study has demonstrated, with evidence, that the integration of English at primary school is a policy that needs reconsideration because Algeria does not yet possess the human and material resources to cope with the application of this decision. According to teachers, it is a decision that requires a re-thinking and more preparation to implement it successfully and to train global citizens.

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