

**The Status of Mother Tongues and Linguistic Policy in Algeria**

وضع الألسنة الأم والسياسة اللغوية في الجزائر

**Dr. Lahmar Mohamed<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Brahmi Mohamed<sup>2</sup>, Pr. Mahieddine Rachid<sup>3</sup>**

- 1- University of Ahmed Draia, Adrar (Algeria), [med.lahmar@univ-adrar.edu.dz](mailto:med.lahmar@univ-adrar.edu.dz).  
LDP (laboratoire langue, discours et plurilinguisme).
- 2- ENS Mostaghanem (Algeria), [muhammadbrahmi@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadbrahmi@gmail.com).
- 3- University of Ahmed Draia, Adrar (Algeria), [doy.fll@univ-adrar.edu.dz](mailto:doy.fll@univ-adrar.edu.dz).

Received: 18/11/2022

Accepted: 28/05/2023

Published: 13/07/2023

**Abstract**

The sociolinguistic landscape in Algeria has often been categorized by its richness and complexity where all local, official, and even foreign languages coexist. Considering this array and diversity, Algeria has opted for Arabization as a language policy in its education. The final aim is to protect and maintain its national identity. Arabization has side-lined mother tongues and is considered daily communication with a devalued and denigrated status. The present study sheds light on the status of languages in use in Algeria and brings into focus the influence of Arabization on the status of the spoken mother tongues. Furthermore, it explores Algerian speakers' attitudes toward their mother tongues. The results have shown that most Algerian speakers seem to disapprove of introducing mother tongues in education as they might diminish the status of Arabic.

**Keywords:** linguistic policy, mother Tongues, Arabization, education in Algeria.

**المخلص:** غالبًا ما يصنف المشهد الاجتماعي اللغوي في الجزائر من خلال ثرائه وتعقيده، كما تعتبر الجزائر مكانًا تتعايش فيه كل من اللغات المحلية، الرسمية وحتى الأجنبية. نظرًا لهذا التنوع في المشهد اللغوي، انتهجت الجزائر "التعريب" كسياسة لغوية في نظامها التعليمي. الهدف من هاته السياسة، كما كان دائمًا، هو حماية هويتها الوطنية والحفاظ عليها. هذا وتلقي الدراسة الضوء على حالة اللغات المستخدمة في الجزائر، وبصورة أدق، تركز على تأثير التعريب كسياسة على وضع الألسنة الأم في البلاد. علاوة على ذلك، تحاول الدراسة استكشاف مواقف وانطباعات الناطقين باللغة الجزائرية تجاه لغاتهم الأم. هذا وقد أظهرت النتائج أن غالبية المتحدثين الجزائريين يبدون رفضهم لفكرة إدخال اللغة الأم في التعليم على أساس أن هذه اللغات قد تهدد مكانة اللغة العربية وتقلل من قيمتها.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** السياسة اللغوية، الألسنة الأم، التعريب، التعليم في الجزائر.

Corresponding author: Dr. Lahmar Mohamed, e-mail: [redmed73@hotmail.fr](mailto:redmed73@hotmail.fr)

## **1. Introduction**

The present research sheds light on the position of languages in the Algerian sociolinguistic context, more precisely, the impact of Arabization as language policy on the mother tongues status in Algeria. It draws on data and theoretical results of a bilingual questionnaire delivered to a sample of two categories. The first category includes university students from three different departments. For more reliability, the second group involves non-educated people who do not belong to a university. The sample consists of fifty student volunteers and non-educated people, made of twenty-eight girls and twenty-two boys.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Mother Tongues and Foreign Languages in Algeria: Conflict or Coexistence?**

The debate on the status of languages raises issues that fall outside the scope of linguistic planning in the country. This lack of legibility lies in the principles that lay the foundation for language planning in the country. This contradiction is found particularly in the legal texts relating to the generalization of the use of the Arabic language with many references to ideological belonging to the Arab nation.

This political orientation which characterizes the setting up of the first institutions led to a crisis situation, and the state was revealed as vulnerable to religious fundamentalists who, in the name of this double legitimacy; historical and constitutional, claim the application of the precepts of Islam (the return to sharia) and the establishment of an Islamic state! The religious referent has become and remains a constant of all the regimes that have succeeded one another in Algeria. This position finds part of its explanation in the very history of Algeria. Everything that happened played around the concept of the nation: the Algerians' need to assert their existence as a sovereign state facing an occupier who has worked to eradicate their identity and languages. The Arabic language had a graphic and rich literature, yet the colonial state did spare no effort to

destroy existing school structures. The French language is enacted as the only official language to the exclusion of all others.

In this linguistic landscape characterized by the presence of mother tongues (Arabic dialects and Berber ...), classical Arabic, and English, the French language does not seem to have lost all position after independence because it not only is still recognized as a chance for social climbing, but it also remains a widely used communication tool even outside the economic sector.

The co-existence of languages results in the Algerian linguistic situation may be put as Triglossia (Youssi, 1995, 30,31); it is, generally defined, as a linguistic situation where three languages manifest as functional, often hierarchical, the relationship between each other.

## **2.2. Arabization Policy**

After its independence, Algeria has opted for Arabization as a language policy in national education. Its main objective was to protect and uphold its national identity (Berrabah, 2007, 230). As Grandguillaume(2002: 153) states:

*“Following their independence, each of the three states planned their Arabization. Their ultimate goal was to advance the Arabic language as the official and national language. They conceived of this enterprise as a restoration of the national personality in opposition to the cultural alienation associated with colonizing during which Arabic has been pushed aside by French in important domains.”*

Arabization is meant to give recognition to the Arabic language as a reaction against the ostensibly predominant language at that time, i.e., French. The policy also aims at preserving the authenticity and Arab-Muslim values and beliefs (Berrabah, 2007, 231). This being the case, however, Arabization has denied any interest in mother tongues in Algeria. They are relegated to everyday use only with a devalued and denigrated status. In a similar vein, Berrabah (2007, 232) maintains that this language policy has been set in motion by the people in power and by ideologists as a cultural fact of independence.

Several scholars have explored Algeria's linguistic situation since the country's independence from France in 1962. Specifically, scholars have addressed the policy of Arabization, which has dominated Algeria's linguistic policies for decades. Thus, many have written about the motivations and consequences of this policy.

What has been particularly marked in Algeria was that the colonizer opened it to the modern world but in the context of a foreign language, and in the context of extreme valuation of Western civilization. At this time, Algeria was well-focused on modernity, but in a foreign language. The dispossession is thus inscribed both in the language and in the reality of colonial dependence. It is, therefore, necessary to restore a language corresponding to one's own identity and to express what has not been until then that foreign contribution. Motivations that can promote Arabization in Algeria are not technical, modernity is provided mainly by the French language, in which management of the economic and administrative apparatus, in which is disclosed teaching (Zoulikha, 2002, 833).

Algeria has developed an Arab-Islamic ideology, which considers that linguistic diversity is a danger to unity and a divisional germ and that only monolingualism can guarantee this national unity. Management of the language issue and cultures in Algeria calls into question the cultural identity and the effects of French colonization. The language plays a unifying role to the extent that it is by appropriation to other groups that membership or non-membership of a group is associated with certain political or ideological acts. Language is no longer seen as a means of communication fulfilling, among other things, a specific social function. It has become a criterion of ideological belonging.

### **2.3. Educational Reform Policy**

The main subjects of the reform policy in Algeria since the year 2000 concern the low level of teachers and bettering their socio-economic development, revision of curriculum content, and the status of foreign languages. In this perspective, the National Commission for the Reform of Education

System was created in March 2000 (CNRSE). This scientific panel consists of 153 teachers and scholars. The aim is to diagnose the components of the educational system, and vocational training and modernize the entire education sector. Following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the Algerian authorities decided to include the educational reform policy as part of the global war on terror (Karmani, 2005: 263). The late president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika emphasized that school reform is a challenge for the Algerian current educational system.

### **3. Methodology**

The number of informants having participated in the present survey is 50. Obviously, they were alienated into two groups. The first comprises students from different departments at Ibn Khaldoun University Tiaret (biology, French, and English). The participants in the second part are people who seem not to belong to the university. We tend to justify our choice by the fact that the main emphasis of the present paper is to get a panoramic view of how Algerians, both educated and non-educated, view their own mother tongues.

For the present study, we devised a questionnaire that contains questions of the multiple-choice type, where the participants put a tick in the corresponding boxes after reading the questions attentively. The results of the questionnaires serve to test people's views and attitudes towards the integration of mother tongues in the educational system as official languages of instruction.

#### **3.1 . Results and Analysis**

##### **1. *How do you feel about Arabization as a linguistic policy in the Algerian educational system?***

<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Don't understand</b>
<b>44%</b>	<b>45.5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5.5%</b>

**Table N1: Participants' Attitudes towards Arabization**

As the table shows, (44%) of the respondents express their agreement with the country's language policy, while (45.5%) disagree with it. the following responses are cases in point.

**Respondent1:** *I find it a very wise decision and also an important process that allows some priority to the Arabic language. Arabic is obviously the language of the holy Quran and literature. Thus, it is a must to make it the language of education.*

**Respondent2:** *I think it is an essential step made by the government as an attempt to a better language policy. As a matter of fact, we live in an Arab country and Arabic must be the first language of education in Algeria.*

**Respondent3:** *I think that we need to protect our language from disappearing. So, it is a good move by decision-makers. Studying subjects in French doesn't make any sense, while we could translate them into Arabic. Besides, the Arabic language reflects our culture and traditions.*

**Respondent4:** *Arabization subtracted the mother languages such as Tamazight and Algerian dialectal Arabic. I see that these varieties are important too, especially if they are to be used as languages of instruction in schools.*

**Respondent5:** *I do agree with the policy of Arabization to the extent in which it reflects our identity, but at the same time I don't agree with it in that it is useless in the job market.*

**Respondent6:** *It's unfair; this language policy doesn't take into consideration other minorities such as Berber people who have never been introduced to Algerian Arabic.*

It is clear that the statements above disclose the respondents' attitudes towards Arabization. These attitudes, I think, are characterized by some degree of uncertainty, in the sense that some of the respondents conceive of Arabic as their mother tongue within which they identify themselves. Therefore, it should be protected and used as the language of education. For them, mother tongues should be used only in everyday communication with the impression that these languages, if they thought of them as languages, are fruitless if they are to be used in formal spheres, especially in education. The results appear to go in conformity with those (Edward, 1994, 76). Accordingly, the nature of attitudes is conditioned by two chief factors, mainly "standardization" and "vitality. The former factor, as the name indicates, refers to the fact that if a given language is codified and recognized by the state as an official language, it will be more

valued. Vitality is described as the set of functions served by language. The coming questions validate this claim.

**2. Do you agree with the idea of introducing mother tongues in Algerian primary schools as a language of instruction?**

<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Don't understand</b>
<b>45%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>9%</b>

**Table N2: Opinions about Introducing Mother Tongues in Education**

As shown in the table above, the answers are correspondingly distributed between those who do agree to introduce mother tongues in Algerian primary schools and those who do not. The statements below demonstrate this state of affairs.

**Respondent 1:** *I totally agree with the idea. Mother tongues are the only languages that may help a child achieve high cognitive competencies and easily develop critical thinking skills*

**Respondent 2:** *This is a meaningless policy that will create other problems for the coming generations.*

**Respondent 3:** *It is a wrong choice as mother tongues are not yet standardized and they are still far from being structural and formal.*

**Respondent 4:** *I think that mother tongues are no more than just dialects and we use them in our daily life.*

**Respondent 5:** *Of course, I agree. It will be beneficial and helpful for our kids of different mother tongues. It may also enable them to have more access to knowledge in a direct way.*

**Respondent 6:** *I don't think that introducing mother tongues in primary schools is a wise move because I don't see these languages as powerful as Arabic.*

As ought to be apparent, the informants' answers vary from those who rigidly believe that introducing mother tongues will have positive effects on students' academic performance. However, as obvious in their answers, others believe that to be introduced, other must be standardized first. Others, however,

think that mother tongues are the shortcut to simplifying pupils' exposure to knowledge.

**3. *According to you, what are the expected outcomes of teaching mother tongues in Algerian schools?***

For the intelligibility of analysis, respondents' answers are divided into three categories. The first category involves people who are 'optimistic'. The second category includes those who are 'pessimistic'. We devoted the third category to those who are 'neutral'.

<b>Optimistic</b>	<b>Pessimistic</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
<b>40%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>10%</b>

**Table N3: Participants' Expectations from Teaching Mother Tongues**

The table shows that (50%) are pessimistic about the outcomes of integrating mother tongues as part of the Algerian teaching system. (40%) of the participants, on the other hand, are optimistic. The statements below provide a stimulating illustration of this issue.

**Respondent 1:** *This may probably harm the Arabic language which should be promoted and more supported in Algeria. I think that Arabic must be the language of education in all cycles and primary schools in particular.*

**Respondent 2:** *I don't think that the outcome will not be pleasing. I don't see any need for including mother tongues in teaching.*

**Respondent 3:** *I expect alow proficiency in other languages.*

**Respondent 4:** *I think it will enhance the quality of education in the country since learners will have easier access to knowledge without the barrier of learning a foreign language.*

**Respondent 5:** *1. Ease of understanding. 2. Illiteracy rate will diminish.*

**Respondent 6:** *The educational reforms don't make any sense.*



## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1. Language Attitudes towards Mother Tongues in Algeria**

Research has revealed that the great majority of Algerians adopt a negative attitude toward their mother tongues. Benrabah (2007, 236), for example, tries to examine language attitudes toward the mother languages and languages used in Algeria among university students. The results indicated that voice dialing and configuration are determined by the language courses of the students. Equally important is the study demonstrated that several respondents expressed an attachment to certain languages through the use of social support, as is the case in French and English, and for communication in informal areas through the use of native languages.

The languages in use, Arabic, French, and Berber, whose co-presence has its origin in the history of the Maghreb as a whole, are traversed by a deep crisis, as well as multilingualism and diglossia (Enn (Benrabah, 2007) (Edward, 1994)aji, 2005, 157). Since the independence of the country, and despite the quantitative progress of schooling, the quality of Arabization has deteriorated. The crushing of popular languages, Arabic dialect, and Berber, deprives society of important linguistic tools. One can say that the linguistic conflict is general, opposing, for various reasons, the languages in use. Three languages, Berber, Arabic, and French, as well as regional varieties of each, are in use in the country. An alphabet using Tifinagh characters is still in use today in Tuareg, in everyday life and correspondence, while culture and literature are oral.

## **5. Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the status of the languages in use in Algeria, particularly, the influence of Arabization as language policy on the status of mother tongues in the country. The researcher tried to shed light on the attitudes of Algerians toward their different mother tongues. The results of this document show that the Algerians' attitudes towards their mother tongues are not so strong, if not negative. Most of the participants seem to disagree with the idea of introducing mother tongues in Algerian schools on the basis that

these languages could cause a threat to the state of Arabic. For them, Arabic is the language that represents them and their identity in the eyes of the world.

No one can deny the fact that the recognition of Tamazight as a national language reflects a desire to settle the war existing between the arabo-phones and the francophones in the country. This legality should not rely on a permanent opposition to the Literary Arabic which needs scientific regeneration and renewal based on methodological research. Therefore, the process of building and preserving a national identity should go beyond the official language. Despite its denial to integrate the Francophonie, Algeria is, inevitably, the second French-speaking country in the world where the fashion for the English language is expressed by a large segment of the Algerian society (Abid-Houcine, 2007:152). Besides, many Algerians are aware that Arabic-French bilingualism and the mastery of English are all suitable ways to acquire formal knowledge and overcome all kinds of disagreements and misunderstandings.

## **6. References :**

1. Abid-Houcine, S., (2007), "Enseignement et éducation en langues étrangères en Algérie : la compétition entre le français et l'anglais", *Droit et Cultures*, Paris, N°54 (2), pp. 143-156.
2. Benrabah, M. (2007 (S, 2007)). Language-in-education planning in Algeria: historical development and current issues. *Language Policy*, 6, 225-52.  
Doi:10.1007/s10993-9046-7
3. Edwards, J. 1994. *Multilingualism*. London: Routledge.
4. Ennaji, M. 2005. *Multilingualism, Cultural Identity, and Education in Morocco*. New York: Springer.
5. Grandguillaume, G. (2002). Les enjeux de la question des langues en Algérie. *Les Langues de la Méditerranée*, Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, pp. 141-165. (Youssi, 1995)
6. Karmani, S., (2005), "English, 'terror', and Islam", *Applied Linguistics*, 26(2), June, pp. 262-267.
7. Youssi, A. 1995. The Moroccan Triglossia: Facts and Implications. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 112:29-43.
8. Zoulikha, B. (2002). Bilingualism in Algeria and the making of the nation. Proceedings from Actas 02: *II International Symposium on Bilingualism*, 831-840.

**Appendix**

**Questionnaire**

*This questionnaire is part of a research paper in the field of Sociolinguistics. Your contribution is highly appreciated and will be duly acknowledged. All the information herein provided will be kept strictly confidential.*

**VERY IMPORTANT:**

- ✓ *Please do not write your name.*
- ✓ *Please choose or put the most appropriate answer for your case.*
- ✓ *Please answer all questions with precision and do not leave any blank.*

<b>Gender:</b>	Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Female <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Mother tongue:</b>	Algerian Arabic <input type="checkbox"/>	Berber <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Others:</b> Please specify.....			
<b>Foreign languages:</b>	French <input type="checkbox"/>	English <input type="checkbox"/>	Spanish <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Others:</b> Please specify.....			

*Please respond to the following questions. Make sure to read the whole question carefully before you respond. Remember! This is not a test, so there are no wrong or right answers; just respond as spontaneously as you can.*

**1. How do you feel about Arabization as a language policy in the Algerian educational system?**

.....

.....

**2. Do you agree with the idea of introducing mother tongues in Algerian primary schools as a language of instruction?**

.....

.....

**4. According to you, what are the expected outcomes of teaching mother tongues in Algerian schools?**

.....

.....

**4. What can be done to incorporate Mother Tongues into the Algerian educational system?**

.....

.....

**I. Please read these statements and choose among the sets of response options provided.**

Statements	Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Using mother tongues as the language of instruction in primary school is a necessity.					
2. Arabization as a language policy can be a successful policy.					

*The Status of Mother Tongues and Linguistic Policy in Algeria*

---

<b>3. Using foreign languages as the language of instruction other than Arabic is a necessity.</b>					
<b>4. I could have done better if my courses in primary school had been taught in my mother tongue.</b>					
<b>5. I think teachers should not use mother tongues in class</b>					
<b>6. Arabization degrades the status of Mother tongues in Algeria.</b>					
<b>7. Learning Algerian Arabic in Algeria is a necessity.</b>					
<b>8. Learning Berber (Tamazight) in Algeria is necessary.</b>					
<b>9. Learning Arabic in Algeria is necessary.</b>					
<b>10. Learning English in Algeria is a necessity.</b>					
<b>11. Learning Spanish and German in Algeria is a necessity.</b>					
<b>12. Algerian government should look After mother tongues spoken by its people.</b>					