

***Factors Leading to Academic Delay in French and English:  
A Field Study conducted on a sample of Middle Schools in  
Saida and El-Bayadh.***

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**Abstract:**

This study aims to determine the factors that lead to academic delay in foreign languages (French and English as a model). The researchers designed a questionnaire consisting of 30 items divided into three axes, and applied this questionnaire to a sample of 70 middle school French and English teachers in Saida and El-Bayadh, Algeria. Statistical analysis was conducted for the collected data using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version (23). The results of the study revealed that the most important factors leading to academic delay in foreign languages were:1-Weak teachers training and teachers incompetence.2-The adoption of a curriculum that did not match the students' mental and psychological capabilities.3-The non existence of statistical significant differences determining the factors leading to academic delay attributed to the difference in teachers' specialization.

**Key words:** Academic delay; Foreign languages; Middle schools; Teachers competence; Teachers training.

## Introduction:

Academic delay is an educational and social problem. It is commonly defined as a decline of achievement rate in a particular subject or subjects below the average level of the pupil if compared to other ordinary peers. This problem appears in all educational stages from primary to secondary schools. Foreign languages take the major part of this problem because they are not easy to teach. In this regard, Visatone (2005) stated that in every hundred students there are twenty students who suffer from a general lag that is why many researchers have been studying and analyzing it.

Studies have shown that Algeria witnessed a serious decrease in the level of foreign language education. In this sense, French language course is experiencing a serious delay, especially in the middle schools. This fact was emphasized in a study conducted by Benghzala (2018). Benghzala's study reported an underperformance in foreign languages, especially French despite the efforts of the Algerian government in teaching this language (pp. 350-352).

The serious delay in foreign languages is the result of different factors. Some of these factors are related to the pupils, others are related to the teacher, and some are related to the curriculum and learning environment. In this vein, several studies, most notably Mansouri's study (2015), Syed Abdul Hamid's study (1995), and Kirk and Calvin's study (1984) have indicated that there are different factors that lead to the academic delay, such as the lack of qualified teachers who need to undergo training that allow them to teach well. In addition, the absence of modern teaching strategies and methods supported by technological and pedagogical means is another major factor leading to academic delay in foreign languages.

Foreign languages are of high importance, for they support the student, help him to cross into the world of knowledge, and refine his personality. That being the case, Algeria seeks to give great importance to the teaching of foreign languages to recognize the world heritage, and to keep pace with the scientific and technological development. This is notably based on French and English in middle and high schools; however, despite all the efforts exerted in this area there is still a significant lag, and poor achievement in foreign languages. Thus, this study aims to identify the factors leading to the student's academic delay from the middle school French and English teachers' points of view. Accordingly, the researchers address the following general question:

- What are the factors that lead to academic delay in French and English from the point of view of middle school French and English teachers?

Subsequently, the following questions are derived:

- What are the most important factors that lead to academic delay in French and English?

- Are there statistically significant differences in determining the factors leading to academic delay in French and English attributed to teachers' specialization (French and English)?

### **1- Significance of the study :**

Ziadi (1999) views that academic delay is a multi dimension dilemma. It is a psychological-pedagogical-social problem facing families, specialists and everyone related to the educational field. As the learner suffers from academic delay, he is affected on the emotional side. His sense of academic failure results in his low self-esteem, and the feeling that he is not qualified to successfully meet the requirements of life (p. 50).

It is necessary, then, to give priority to all specialists and those responsible for learning and educational field. The final aim is to reveal the factors that lead to academic delay, give opportunities to those involved in the educational field, especially teachers, to express their views on this phenomenon. Such opportunities would help to propose solutions to academic delay.

## **2- Objectives of the study:**

The present study was carried out with the following objectives:

- Identify the factors that lead to academic delay in French and English from the point of view of middle school French and English teachers.
- Finding out the differences in determining the factors leading to lag in French and English subjects.

## **3- Operational definitions:**

### **3-1- Academic delay:**

The decline of achievement rate in a particular subject or subjects below the average level of the pupil if compared to other ordinary peers. This problem is due to various reasons, some of which are related to the pupil himself, physical, psychological or mental conditions; and others to the family and social environment. (Mohammed Subhi, 2000, p 11)

### **3-2- Late pupils:**

Pupils who cannot achieve the required level in the classroom and are late in their academic achievement compared to their peers in a subject or group of subjects (Boutros, 2010, p. 450). INJRAM defines them in the same direction as those who are not able to achieve the required level in classroom (cited in Talaat Hassan, 2008).

### **3-3- Foreign language:**

In this study, a foreign language refers to French and English taught to students in middle schools, based on the curriculum, which is attached by responsible committee.

### **4- Previous Studies:**

#### **4-1- Ravard's study (1982):**

This study aimed to identify the reasons that led to the low level of achievement in language subjects for pupils. The results revealed that teacher efficiency is the most important factor to explain the differences recorded in the rate of academic failure both within the classroom and between educational institutions among them. (Mansouri, 2015)

#### **4-2- Al-Maqtari's study (2000):**

The aim of this study was to identify the problems of comprehension among Yemeni students in French. The study focused on reading and understanding French language texts found in the Department of French and Arabic at the Faculty of Arts, Sana'a University. The result showed that the difficulties in understanding French texts are not only due to the low level of the student in French, but also due to the fact that they lack general information, especially the linguistic ones. The latter reasons affect the students' level of language and make them unable to understand, analyse and synthesize these texts. (Al-Aker, 2011, p. 92)

#### **4-3- Alakraa's study(2002):**

The study is entitled 'grammatical and morphological overlap in learning the French language for the Yemeni student'. This study deals with grammatical and

morphological errors done by the student when writing in French. The study tried to identify the reasons leading to grammatical and morphological errors, and the phenomenon of grammatical and morphological overlap and teaching it by the researcher working as a French language teacher in the French language department in the University of Damar, Yemen. The study revealed many errors in writing despite the continuous correction of these errors .It concluded that the learner confuses on what he knows in his mother language and what he acquires from the learnt language (Al-Aker, 2011, p. 59).

#### **4-4- Hamar's study (2008):**

This study aimed to identify the impact of the captive environment on the motivation of the pupil, and the pedagogical competence in teaching foreign languages. For this purpose, the researcher designed a questionnaire applied to a sample of high school students. The results showed that the success or failure of the process of teaching foreign languages is related to the psychological and physical factors surrounding teachers and students, as well as the programs and methods relied upon to provide these programs.

#### **4-5- Mansouri's study (2015):**

This study aimed to determine the role played by school factors in academic delay. The study described and analyzed the factors and then listed them in three aspects:

- Teacher's character, gender, age, experience and their impact on academic achievement.
- -General conditions for teaching, in particular techniques and means included in the educational process.
- The instability of the educational system affects the student's achievement and the overall environment of

the school.

#### 4-6- Andersen's theory:

Andersen introduced his theory of "The Art of Sensitivity in Awareness". This theory explains the different abilities students display and the grades they earn. This theory explains how the emotional interest of the student helps them to focus on information based on a relevant system of processing information. In this sense, Andersen (2013) points out that:

How sensitive we are in understanding information is based on our emotional stability to be either fascinated in it or distracted from it and so the accuracy by which we connect to and build up our memory networks of association (p.162) .

Andersen (2013a) believes that student's competence in languages in this art is not dependent upon intelligence or genetics, but on the ability to control the two factors the student's mind continually struggles to control. In this regard, there are two rules that govern the student's mind 1. Am I Safe? 2. What is the most interesting thing for me? (Andersen (2013a, p.162)

According to Andersen (2013a, p.162, 2021) this art can be successfully achieved if parents and then teachers know how to transfer it to the child. In this regard, Andersen (2013a) points out that:

If the student has no problems at home, feels happy and secure with others in the class and feels security from their teacher, they are safe. If not in any of these three areas, they are not safe. When safe they have the potential to concentrate fully on the information to be

learned. If the teacher (and most do not know how to) explains the point of a lesson to the developed understanding of each individual student in the class in a fun and stimulating way then, with having a sense of security, each student will develop a high understanding of it Andersen (p.162).

Andersen (2013b) states that the key to such development is to realize how understanding develops progressively in each student and for the teacher to know how to correct earlier misunderstandings. This relies upon the teacher's knowledge and important explanation of the rules upon which knowledge does and only can progress. When the teacher does not know or realise this, they accept the lower performance of the student as being of a genetic ability, which it is not.

Andersen (2013a) underscores the fact that any lower performance of one student lies simply in confusion or misunderstanding of earlier rules that hold them back from progressing as well as students who gained a more successful understanding of those earlier rules. All of this is easily correctable if the teacher knows how to overcome the psychological barriers and emotional difficulty that hold back the student's attempt to progress in their learning (Andersen 2013a p.162). Thus, acquiring skill in a second language is no different than learning any subject in the curriculum, in that it is based on the successful acquisition and practice of the rules by which it exists and develops.

## 5- Classification of academic delays:

Academic delay is classified into:

A. General academic delays: It means the low level of the pupil in all subjects.



**B.** Special academic delays: The low level of achievement of a pupil is associated with one or two subjects.

**C.** Extended academic delay: Where the pupil's achievement falls below the level of his ability over a long period of time.

**D.** Circumstantial study delay: School delays are the result of stressful or emergency situations, bad experiences, an acute emotional situation such as the death of a loved one or a certain illness, or moving from one school to another. (Zahran, 1998, p. 234).

## **6- Behavioral indicators for late pupils:**

The late pupil differs from other pupils by many cognitive, emotional, social, health and behavioral characteristics, the cognitive features of the late student are:

- Poor ability to solve problems that require general mental components or meanings.
- Slow return time.
- Poor ability to concentrate and a decline in his/her level.
- Failure to move from one idea to another.
- Low level of recognition of causes, level of analysis and discrimination.
- Straying away from logic and inability to think logically.
- Superficial perception.
- Shyness, selfishness, lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence, lack of self-esteem, dependence on others, excessive respect for others (Mohammed Subhi, 2000 pp. 11-14).

## **7- The importance and objectives of foreign language education in the Algerian schools:**

Foreign languages are included in Algeria from the primary level, especially the French language in the curriculum, and continue to be taught to advanced stages until

university. Algeria believes that the adoption of foreign languages in education is a civilized behavior because it helps refine the Algerian personality to keep pace with the globe as well as benefit from technology and scientific advances. It also helps discovering cultures, benefiting from technology and scientific development, and expanding cultures and human presence.

Since the establishment of the national charter (1976), Algeria has emphasized the importance of teaching foreign languages as an entry point to science and scientific research. French language is classified as the first foreign language in Algeria due to colonial and historical consideration and social context, and is considered the second language after Arabic, followed by English.

## **8- Study Sample and Tools:**

### **8-1- Study sample:**

The researchers selected the sample in a random way, where the individuals reached 70 teachers of the French and English subjects in some of the middle schools in Saida and El-Bayadh, Algeria. The sample comprises 30 French teachers and 40 English teachers.

### **8-2- Study tools:**

To test the questions of the study, the researcher designed a questionnaire based on the texts and previous studies related to the topic of research, and divided the questionnaire into three dimensions:

1<sup>st</sup> Dimension: factors related to the learner (pupil).

2<sup>nd</sup> Dimension II: factors related to the curriculum.

3<sup>rd</sup> Dimension III: factors related to the teacher and teaching strategies.

Statistical analysis was conducted for the collected data using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version (23). The questionnaire was exposed to a number of specialised researchers.

### 9- Results of the Study and Interpretations:

In order to answer the general question of the study\_ ‘What are the factors that lead to academic delay in French and English from the point of view of middle school French and English teachers?’ \_the researcher adopted the calculation of means and percentages of each segment in each dimension according to the following tables:

**Table (01): The percentages and the arithmetic means of the factors related to academic delay in the first dimension (the learner).**

N	First Dimension: Lerner	Means	Percentages
01	Limited student capabilities	2.98	61.50%
02	Lack of motivation for the learner to learn foreign languages	3.50	69.50%
03	The student's dislike of foreign languages	3.40	67.20%
04	Difficulties related to what the student learns and applies in other similar situations	3.40	67.20%
05	The laziness of the student, which is due to emotional and	2.10	50%

	social disorder		
06	Ease of losing self-confidence	3.10	63.40%
07	The student's belief in his inability to learn foreign languages	3.10	63.40%
08	Weak pupil's attention in foreign language classes	3.50	69.50%
	<b>Total</b>	2.75	55.20%

Table No. (1) indicates that in the first dimension, the means are very close, and most of the items are equal to 3.50. This means that the student's attention is weak in the foreign language classes, and that the student dislikes to learn them with difficulties in applying what he learns in similar situations. Also, the table shows that the student believes that he has no ability to learn foreign languages which is an indicator to the academic delay for learning French and English.

**Table (02) shows percentages and arithmetic means of the factors related to academic delay in the second dimension (curriculum)**

N	Second Dimension Curriculum	Means	Percentages
1	Difficulties in foreign languages	2.10	50%
2	Difficulties of the foreign language curriculum	3.10	60%
3	Classroom overcrowding does not allow a good education	3.20	64.50%
4	Lack of promotion of extra-curricular activities in teaching foreign languages	3.14	64.10%
5	Inadequacy of the curriculum	3.14	64.10%

	with the capabilities of students		
6	The incompatibility of the curriculum in foreign languages with the tendencies and desires of the students	3.80	75%
7	The separation of the curriculum from the surrounding environment	2.02	46%
8	Density of the curriculum and the lack of volume in teaching foreign languages	3.75	71%
	Total	3.03	58.50

Table (2) indicates the role of the curriculum in the process of academic delay. This is shown through the values of Means that are also close. We find that the highest value is 3.80. The incompatibility of the curriculum with the tendencies and capabilities of the learner and the lack of the programmed hourly volume of teaching languages contribute significantly to the academic delay.

**Table (03): The percentages and the arithmetic Means of factors related to academic delay in the third dimension (teacher and teaching strategies)**

N	Third Dimension: Teacher and teaching strategies	Means	Percentages
1	The absence of modern means and methods in teaching languages	3.69	74.10%
2	Teachers use of traditional methods	3.20	63%
3	Teachers neglection of individual differences	3.30	61.05%
4	Poor teacher training	3.69	74.10%

5	Teachers' non control of the curriculum	3.14	64.10%
6	Teachers 'lack of familiarity with educational and psychological theories.	2.02	46%
7	Distinction among students on the part of teachers	2.02	46%
8	The inability of teachers to achieve classroom interaction	3.30	61.05 %
<b>Total</b>		3.06	59.02%

Table No. (03) indicates the teacher's and teaching strategies role in the academic delay. The highest mean value which reached 3.06 is related to the weakness of the teacher's training in foreign languages, the absence of modern techniques for teaching foreign languages, as well as the teacher's neglect of individual differences, and his lack of control over the curriculum cause the student's academic delay.

**The answer of the second question:** 'What are the most important factors that lead to academic delay in French and English?' In order to answer this question, the overall mean of the dimensions are used. Consequently, it appears that the arithmetic means in all dimensions were closer, especially the third dimension 'teacher and the teaching strategies' with the second one 'the school curriculum'. The value of the arithmetic mean was 3.06 for the third dimension; while, the value of the arithmetic mean in the second dimension was 3.03. The value of the arithmetic mean in the first dimension was 2.75. We conclude that both the teacher and teaching strategies dimension with the curriculum dimension

contribute significantly to the process of academic delay.

**The answer of the third question:** ‘Are there statistically significant differences in determining the factors leading to academic delay in French and English attributed to teachers’ specialization (French and English)??’

To answer this question, the researcher used the (T) test to determine the differences between two independent groups: Table No. (04) illustrates this:

**Table No. (04): the differences between two independent groups**

Group	Number	Mean	standard deviation	(P) Value	(T) Value	Significance level	Significance of differences
French	30	3.85	1080	0.33	2.44	0.554	Non significant
English	40	3.88	1.102				

Table (04) reveals that there are no statistically significant differences at the significance level 0.05. The (T) value is 0.554, which is greater than the level of significance between teachers of the two different specializations. Therefore, teachers of the two different specializations (French and English) consider the same factors that lead to academic delay in these two subjects.

### Conclusion:

The results obtained show that the teacher plays an important role in language teaching operation. The lag or weakness in English and French is mainly due to the teacher who is the main element that directs the educational process. This is confirmed by the study of Mansouri (2015) and Hamar (2008) which emphasizes that the cognitive characteristics of

the teacher, the training he undertook, his excellence regarding the specialty, the attempt to inspire and motivate learners and his awareness of the curriculum plays a significant role in saving the learner from academic delay. This was also confirmed by Ravard (1982) who found that the failure rate of language teaching is mainly due to poor teacher competence.

The impact of the teacher is greatly manifested in the educational process, especially in the early stages of Education. Building the relationship between the teacher and the pupil on the basis of emotional sensitivity, self-esteem, tendencies, love, and appreciation contributes significantly to the refinement and construction of the student's personality as emphasized by Andersen (2013a;2013b; 2021).

A good teacher-learner rapport increases the teacher's enthusiasm in the teaching process, which drives him to use a diversity of teaching strategies and creating an interactive atmospheres and a clean climate. This is possible especially with the technological advances that allow the use of different means particularly in teaching languages.

It is also important to mention the fact that the curriculum, when it does not originate from the pupil's environment, and reflects his orientation, abilities and psychological and mental characteristics, cannot serve the pupil, but contributes to his low motivation and academic delay. This in return may lead him dropping out of school, as confirmed by Ravard's study (1982).

The learner himself may also be one of the factors that lead to his delay, and contribute to his poor achievement for various reasons that may be psychological, or social. Thus, it is necessary to take care of the learner and serve him psychologically and socially. This can be achieved by guidance and sensibilization programs because the family plays a fundamental role in the child's life, as confirmed by Hamar's study (2008). In this sense, the family's effect has a



substantial impact in helping the school to uplift the pupil's knowledge level especially in the field of languages.

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