

The Teaching Of French In Algerian Universities: Issues And Challenges

SAADOUNI Hadjer ¹, ACHOUR Yasmine ²

¹University of Mohamed Khider Biskra (Algeria), E-mail: hadjer.saadouni@univ-biskra.dz

²University of Mohamed Khider Biskra(Algeria), E-mail: yasmine.achour@univ-biskra.dz

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Abstract:

This article examines the teaching of French in Algerian universities. It focuses in particular on the factors that are causing the decline in the level of French among higher education students.

In this study, we will try to determine the status of French in the Algerian context, which is both paradoxical and constant.

Furthermore, we will focus on the teaching of French in Algerian universities, taking into account the multilingual context of Algerian students.

To this end, we have chosen the questionnaire survey method. The survey was conducted at the Center for Intensive Language Teaching (CEIL) of the Si El-Haouès-Barika University Center, and we selected students from the scientific fields as our sample.

Keywords: university; teaching; French; level; student; CEIL.

Introduction

The presence of the French language in the Algerian linguistic landscape is the result of the Frenchification policy implemented by French colonialism since the French conquest of Algeria in 1830, which lasted 132 years.

Indeed, this language occupies a privileged place in Algeria at all levels (social, economic, institutional, educational, legal, etc.).

This article aims to assess the status of French in the Algerian context after 60 years of independence.

It is in the sphere of education that the place of French is the most complicated because it was "proclaimed" as a foreign language after independence through the implementation of the Arabization process.

It is currently the most widely used language in all sectors, after school Arabic. In some situations, it is even more spoken and written than Arabic itself.

On the other hand, it has been found that most students, especially in the scientific fields, encounter difficulties in continuing their studies in the French language.

In this perspective, we ask ourselves:

What are the factors causing this deterioration in the level of students in the scientific fields (mathematics, technical sciences, and biology) who are enrolled in the (CEIL) of the Si El-Haouès-Barika University Center?

As hypotheses, we propose the following:

- ❖ There is a considerable gap between the primary and secondary education provided in Arabic and the higher education where the scientific fields are taught in French.
- ❖ Students no longer read, which would impact their language level.
- ❖ The influence of the family environment would impact learning a foreign language.

First, we thought it necessary to present an overview of the place occupied by this language in the local context.

Second, we will explain the status of French in higher education. Finally, we will suggest some solutions to improve the learning of French.

To this end, we surveyed the Si El-Haouès-Barika University Center, particularly the Center for Intensive Language Teaching (CEIL). We designed a questionnaire for students enrolled in the scientific fields where teaching is mainly provided in French, particularly in mathematics, technical sciences, and biology.

We, therefore, analyzed our corpus quantitatively to provide explanations afterwards, and qualitatively to describe and formulate interpretations.

1. French in Algeria

Algeria is a multilingual society. This multilingual situation is due to its geographical location, which has been marked by different civilizations throughout history (Greeks, Romans, Ottomans, Arabs, French, etc.).

In the same context, Khaoula Ibrahimi affirms that multilingualism in Algeria is structured around three distinct linguistic domains: Arabic, Berber, and foreign languages (Khaoula Ibrahimi, 2004).

Indeed, this multilingualism represents diversity and linguistic richness.

Calvet L.J. describes communities as social entities where different groups meet and overlap continuously. This multilingualism means that languages are in permanent contact. These interactions can occur at the individual level or within the community (Calvet L. J., 1994: 32).

Despite the existence of different foreign languages that have influenced the Algerian language from antiquity to the present day, only French has benefited from particular importance.

According to Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimi, French was imposed on Algerians by force and violence, thus representing one of the essential elements of France's policy towards Algeria (Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimi, 1997: 4).

Its place is paradoxical in Algeria: considered the enemy's language, it is widely used in different formal situations and daily life.

SEBBA affirms in this sense that the French language occupies a unique position in Algeria, where it holds an undeniable predominance. Although it is not the official language, it conveys the official aspect. Although it is not the main language of instruction, it remains a vector of knowledge transmission. Although it is not the language of identity, it continues to influence the collective imagination in various ways through different channels. It is widely recognized that most activities in administrative structures, both at the central and local levels, are conducted in French (SEBAA.R, 2002).

Officially, French is categorized as a foreign language, however, it has been found that French remains the most widely used language in the Algerian sociolinguistic context.

2. French in Higher Education in Algeria

After independence, the Algerian state wanted to reclaim its Arab-Muslim identity while implementing an Arabization system as proclaimed in the 1963 constitution.

This desire for Arabization is particularly evident in the field of education. The government introduced Arabic into the primary school system and French was considered a foreign language. However, the reality is quite different, because the French have a privileged role in Algeria, in all areas.

With this Arabization process, France completely changes its status. This language, which is considered a foreign language, becomes a means of success, in other words, it completely changes its status: from a subject taught from primary to secondary school, to that of the language of instruction of the different departments at the university.

Asselah-Rahal states in this sense that students are confronted with courses given by a teacher, but using a language that seems foreign to them, even if they have studied it for nine years. (Asselah-Rehal, 2001)

Newcomers to university find it difficult to continue their studies in a language that they do not master.

The objectives set for the teaching of the French language at all levels of the curriculum do not necessarily meet the expectations of the university due to the change in the language of instruction.

Talib Ibrahimi confirms that students notice that there is a significant gap between secondary education in Arabic and higher education where French remains the predominant language in multiple scientific disciplines. (Taleb Ibrahimi, 2004).

On the other hand, the problems that hinder the learning process are treated by different fields of analysis. Talbot states in this sense that the social, cognitive, psychoanalytic, psycho-

pedagogical, and biological field is analyzed in sociology and pedagogy mainly through the observable factors of the difficulties encountered by learners during their learning process. Throughout the history of education, this notion has been mainly approached from three distinct perspectives: "the student", "the family context" and "the school".(Talbot, 2005, p.7).

The family context and the school have a strong impact on the learning of a foreign language.

On the other hand, a good teacher ensures effective learning. Gaouaou emphasizes in this sense that the teacher should encourage in his students the appreciation of languages, the desire to understand others, and the willingness to free themselves by relying on the principles and values of the language they are learning. However, the teacher should ask himself how he can help learners develop positive relationships with others, rather than focusing solely on the amount of information about a country and its culture to include in his course. (Gaouaou, 2009, p214).

On the other hand, learning a foreign language is learning about a new culture. Culture plays an important role in the process of learning foreign languages. This is why the learner must apprehend a new culture other than his own, he must therefore open himself up to other cultures because, according to Gaouaou, language is the main, if not the only, means of exploring another culture; understanding words and their connotations requires an understanding of the culture. (Gaouaou, 2009, 212). This can only be achieved when the teacher and the learner fight against negative representations of the Other's culture.

3. Survey

3.1 Survey Content

We decided, then, to see to what extent higher education students experience difficulties in using the French language.

To this end, we opted for the questionnaire survey method because it seems to us the most appropriate for the fieldwork advocated by sociolinguistics.

We have therefore produced a questionnaire on "learning French in the Algerian university".

The questionnaire prepared as part of our work is intended for students of the Center for Intensive Language Teaching (CEIL) of the Si El-Haouès-Barika University Center and our sample consists of 40 students from the scientific fields where courses are generally given in French (mathematics, technical sciences, and biology).

3.2 The Questionnaire

3.2.1 Gender of the students interviewed:

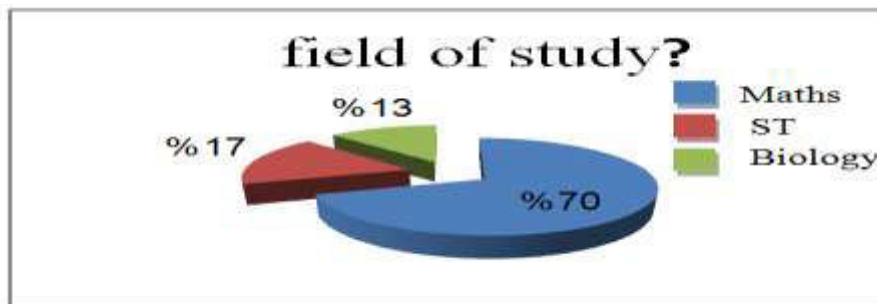


Sex

- Female: 80%
- Male: 20%

We found that our sample consisted of 80% women and 20% men.

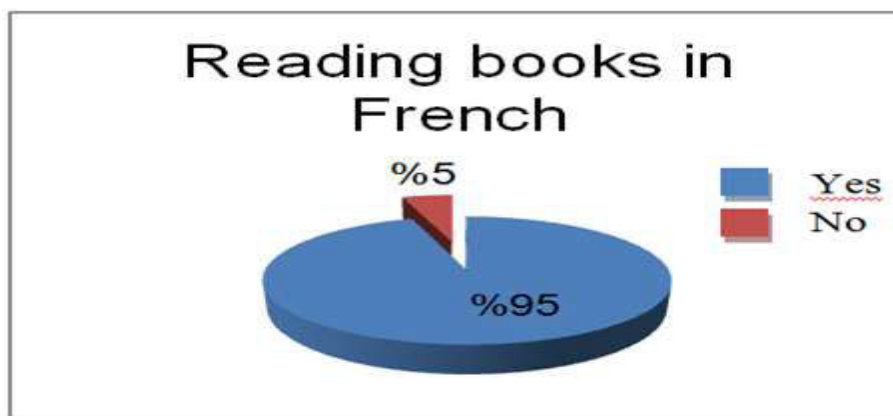
3.2.2 field of study :



What field are you studying in?

We found that mathematics department students represent the large majority of our sample with 70%, technical sciences with 18% and biology

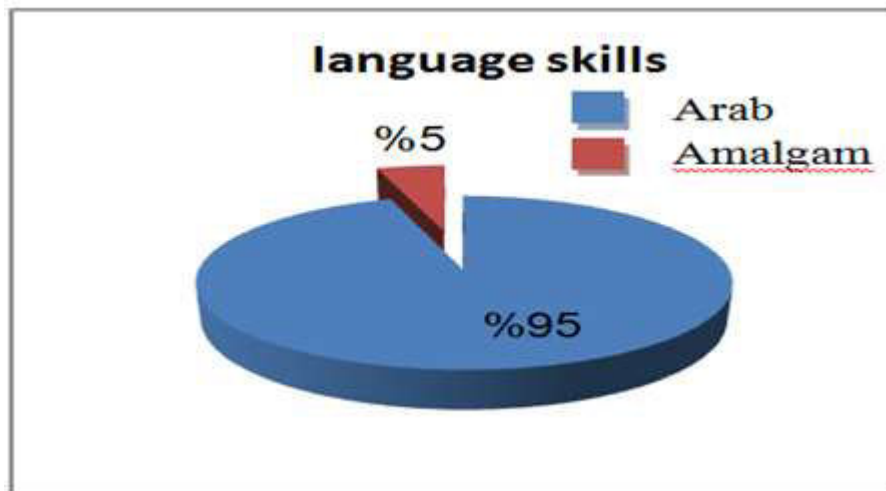
3.2.3 Reading



Do you read books in French? If not, why?

We found that 75% of students do not read books in French because they find it too difficult to read in French.

3.2.4 Language Skills



What language do you speak most often at home: Arabic, French, or other?

We found that Arabic is the language most spoken at home by students with 95% and 5% a mix of French and Arabic.

3.2.5 Understanding of the French Language

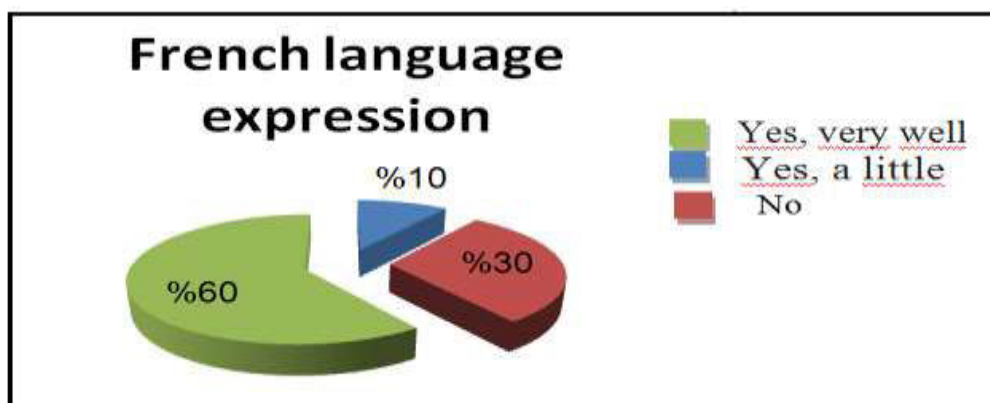


Do you understand your teachers when they speak in French?




- Yes, very well
- Yes, a little
- No

We found that 20% of students understand French very well, 28% say they understand it a little, and 52% say no.

3.2.6 French language expression:



Do you speak French?

-  Yes, very well
-  Yes, a little
-  Not at all

We found that 10% of students speak French very well, 30% say a little, and 60% say no.

3.2.7 Written production skills:

Task: There is a company that is offering a job opening. Can you write a short job application letter to convince the recruiter about the position?

Analysis: The responses provided show that the majority of students are unable to write a job application without violating the subtleties of French grammar. Here are some examples:

"Hello. I am... I graduated with a bachelor's degree in mathematics and I hope to find a job in your company."

"I am honored that you accept my application..."

"My name is... I finished my studies in technical sciences, I wanted to apply for a job..."

"I have the honor to ask you to accept my job application in your company."

"I would like to bring to your attention that I am in the second year of a bachelor's degree in biology..."

Reading these examples, we can realize that the situation has reached a critical stage.

3.3 Analysis and Synthesis of Results:

Our article focuses on a problem that is linked to the deterioration of the level of Algerian students. We hypothesized that there would be a considerable gap between fundamental and secondary education in Arabic and higher education where scientific fields are taught in French. In

addition, students no longer read, which would impact their language level. Furthermore, the influence of the family environment would impact learning a foreign language.

Through our analysis and the results obtained, we will strive to explore our research question and validate or refute these hypotheses.

We arrived at the following results:

Our sample is composed of 80% women and 20% men. Students from the mathematics department represent the large majority of our sample at 70%, technical sciences at 18%, and biology at 12%.

We found in particular that 75% of students do not read books in French, because they find it difficult to read in French, which impacts their language level. This observation raises several questions about French reading skills among students. Indeed, this gap could have a significant impact on their exposure to the language and on their ability to understand and master it. In addition, this finding could indicate a lack of motivation or interest in reading in French. Students may perceive the language as difficult, which could explain their reluctance to read in French.

We also observed that Arabic is widely used at home by students, representing 95% of cases. This finding highlights that most students are accustomed to communicating in Arabic at home, which can create obstacles in their learning of French. This predominance of Arabic at home suggests that students feel more comfortable in their mother tongue, which can influence their learning of French and their ability to communicate in this language. Furthermore, this situation can also reflect a strong cultural and linguistic identity linked to the Arabic language among students, which can influence their attitude towards learning French.

We also found that only 20% of students understand French very well, while 28% claim to understand it a little, and 52% say they do not understand it at all. This finding is worrying because it suggests that more than half of the students could encounter difficulties in following courses taught in French at university. This lack of understanding may be due to a lack of adequate language preparation for students before entering university. This highlights the importance of strengthening language skills from the primary and secondary levels, to better prepare students to follow courses in languages other than their mother tongue.

As for written production skills, the results show that most students have difficulty writing a job application without making grammatical or spelling errors. Indeed, during the interviews, many errors were observed, which raises questions about the effectiveness of French language teaching at all levels of the educational system.

These difficulties encountered by students could be attributed to several factors, including a lack of practice in writing in French or an insufficient understanding of grammatical rules. This underlines the need for more in-depth grammar and spelling instruction, as well as more targeted writing exercises, as part of French language learning.

4. Some Proposals for Improving the Learning of French in Algerian Universities

To get out of this alarming situation, it is imperative to enhance the place of French in school. In other words, it is necessary to train primary and secondary school students well in French to transmit to them the foundations of correct and academic French.

In addition, the content of the French program must be revised upwards, because the teaching content and the decrease in the number of French hours have their share of responsibility.

Moreover, it is necessary to motivate the learner to learn this foreign language by varying the activities so that he does not get bored, for example, through the introduction of technology in the classroom. Indeed, it is an excellent way to promote student attention.

It is also necessary to find ways to motivate learners to read and encourage them by bringing them to participate in events around reading and by making academic trips to the library.

For teachers, it is necessary to think about training them first, then each of them will have to give themselves a continuous training plan in French which will ensure the updating of their knowledge so that they can transmit knowledge.

Conclusion:

Algerian students have difficulty handling the French language. The causes are multiple, as we have seen, but it is important to apply techniques to improve the level of French among students.

Like any foreign language, French allows you to look at the world differently, to open up to new cultures, to develop your personality, and this is the first message that you have to pass on to students that learning French is to open up to other professional horizons and that it's learning at the same time with their mother tongue. This offers them several advantages and should be taken as an additional asset for their knowledge, and not as an alienation of their culture or values.

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