



Akademik Eğitim ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi (AJESS Journal)

Teaching English in Algerian Primary Education: Reality and Challenges

Dr. Houaria Elhadj Ali, Scientific and Technical Research Centre for the Development of the Arabic Language (CRSTDLA), Algeria

elhadjalihouaria79@gmail.com ; ORCID: 0009-0007-1720-7074

Dr. Abdallah Bouhassoun, Scientific and Technical Research Centre for the Development of the Arabic Language (CRSTDLA), Algeria

abid77bou@gmail.com ; 0009-0001-2204-3808

Pr. Yamina Leyla Moussaoui, Scientific and Technical Research Center for the Development of the Arabic Language, Research Unit, Tlemcen, Algeria
y.moussaoui@crstdla.dz ; ORCID: 0009-0000-3202-1672

Article History

Received: 16-04-2026; Accepted: 18-09-2026; Published: 15-10-2026

Abstract

This research paper sheds light on the teaching of English as a second language at the primary education level in Algeria, alongside Arabic as the mother tongue. This development responds to the requirements of the modern era, which increasingly necessitates the presence of English in various forms of international communication, given its status as a global language that learners are expected to acquire and master from an early age. However, introducing a foreign language at the early stages of education is not without obstacles and challenges. Educational authorities have therefore adopted a number of measures and implemented different approaches that have demonstrated their effectiveness in achieving the intended objectives. Among the main aims of teaching English are opening learners up to the Western world and enabling them to keep pace with the digital age, in which English constitutes one of the principal gateways to knowledge and communication.

Keywords: English; primary education; Algeria; challenges; second language.

1. Introduction

Learning and mastering a second language have become requirements of the modern era. They are no longer regarded as a luxury, as they may have been in the past, but rather as a necessity imposed by numerous factors, particularly the explosion of knowledge and technology and increasing openness to different fields of knowledge through foreign languages other than Arabic.

The importance and status of English in the modern world are undeniable. It has become the principal global language used across a wide range of sectors, particularly education at all levels. In order to keep pace with these developments, Algeria has recently adopted a policy of teaching foreign languages at the primary level and has officially introduced English as a second foreign language alongside French.

The purpose of this research paper is therefore to address several major questions currently raised in the educational field:

- What obstacles and challenges do learners face when learning English at the primary education level?
- What measures and approaches can contribute to the successful teaching of English at the primary level?
- What objectives are expected to be achieved through the introduction of foreign-language education at the primary level?

2. Objectives of Foreign-Language Learning

Foreign-language learning falls within the framework of multilingualism advocated by UNESCO, which seeks to support efforts aimed at promoting and encouraging cultural diversity. The organization has been entrusted with promoting multilingualism and issued a resolution in 1999 entitled “Implementing a Global Language Policy Based on Linguistic Pluralism,” followed by other initiatives addressing the same issue.

Multilingualism may be understood as the ability of an individual to use several languages, thereby contributing to the protection of cultural heritage and the promotion of values such as mutual understanding, peace, and tolerance (UNESCO, 2019).

Countries around the world are encouraged to include the learning of at least two foreign languages among the priorities of their educational systems and to implement this priority through a comprehensive approach, particularly by investing in foreign-language teacher training and introducing foreign-language instruction at early educational stages. At these ages, learners possess cognitive capacities that may facilitate language learning and help them become aware of the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity (UNESCO, 2019).

3. Foreign-Language Teaching in Algerian Primary Education and Its Objectives

Like many countries around the world, Algeria has followed the trend of introducing foreign-language teaching at early educational stages, particularly primary and middle school. At the Council of Ministers meeting held on 30 April 2002, a number of measures were adopted to strengthen foreign-language education, including:

- teaching French as the first foreign language in the second year of primary education instead of the fourth year;
- teaching English as a second foreign language in the first year of middle school instead of the fourth year of primary education (Khadidja, 2015/2016).

French-language teaching at the primary level subsequently went through two major stages. During the first stage, French was introduced in the second year of primary education in the 2004/2005 academic year. This required a comprehensive revision of the language curriculum, the reorganization of its content, its redistribution across the different levels of the learners’ educational trajectory, and the allocation of a new number of teaching hours. During the second stage, French was introduced in the third year of primary education in the 2006/2007 academic year (Khadidja, 2015/2016).

The objectives of foreign-language teaching include:

- opening learners up to the cultures, customs, and traditions of other peoples, since this can be achieved through learning and mastering their languages, based on the principle that language is a vessel of culture;
- facilitating communication among peoples;
- strengthening relations between successive generations and fostering respect for cultural differences among languages;
- promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence among peoples.

4. Teaching English in Algerian Schools

The importance and status of English in the modern world are undeniable. It has become the principal global language used across different sectors, particularly education. Numerous studies have advocated teaching English in order to keep pace with technological developments, since English has become a major language of communication among peoples throughout the world. Its widespread use and large number of speakers have made it a language of many scientific fields, including medicine, engineering, chemistry, and modern technology.

Studies have shown that children can learn foreign languages alongside their mother tongue. Individuals who possess proficiency in more than one language have also been shown to outperform those who master only one language, as demonstrated by intelligence tests. In addition, learners who study a foreign language may achieve better academic results than those who do not study one, as demonstrated by school-readiness testing.

In order to keep pace with these developments, Algeria recently adopted a policy of teaching foreign languages specifically at the primary level. English was officially introduced in the third year as a second foreign language alongside French, following an in-depth study by educational and psychological experts and specialists. This measure implemented the latest decision of the Council of Ministers, chaired by President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, on 20 June 2022. Following the announcement of this decision, parents expressed concerns about learners’ ability to cope with the various subjects prescribed at the primary level, particularly in the third year. They also questioned whether learners’ age allowed them to learn two foreign languages at that stage.

In contrast, studies have indicated that the earlier language learning begins, the better the potential outcomes, provided that the objective is accurate and effective second-language learning and that such learning remains compatible with the cultural, social, and political conditions prevailing in the learner’s country.

This view is also associated in the paper with Penfield’s physiological interpretation of language acquisition. According to this perspective, there is a critical period in the development of the brain’s neural tissue during which the acquisition of verbal signaling systems can occur relatively naturally. Before this stage, the brain is not sufficiently mature

and flexible, whereas after it, the necessary degree of flexibility gradually decreases, making the acquisition of a new verbal system a less direct process.

The learner's age at the primary level is therefore considered appropriate for learning two languages and, according to the experts cited, learners are physiologically well prepared for this process. Some scholars have also attributed the success of second-language learning to children's openness and readiness to discover new experiences. Children's learning is characterized by considerable flexibility, particularly in their nervous systems. As they grow older, they become increasingly influenced by acquired habits and previous educational experiences and consequently depend more on specific motivations and systematic, purposeful learning. One specialist, after examining the psychological foundations of bilingual education, stated that introducing a second language at an early stage is highly desirable, provided that the objective is genuine bilingualism rather than merely teaching it as a school subject. Successful second-language instruction also requires experienced teaching staff. Accordingly, exposing children to a second language and preparing them to accept and learn it, while maintaining the mother tongue as the principal language, presents no fundamental difficulty.

This view is also attributed to Gesell in a report of the Modern Education Foundation, according to which young children enjoy language experiences and are ready to learn through listening and communication with others, particularly in play situations. At this stage, learning may be driven by intrinsic motivation, and children are emotionally receptive to learning a second and even a third language.

5. Strategies for Successful Second-Language Learning

Second-language learners, particularly at the early stages of education, face a number of obstacles that may hinder the learning process. To overcome these difficulties and facilitate instruction, several factors need to be taken into consideration, the most important of which are the following:

A. Teaching Staff

Teaching staff constitute a key component of the educational process in general and of language education in particular. In bilingual education, teachers represent a fundamental pillar on which instruction rests, and consequently they bear a particularly important responsibility. Bilingual education commonly faces the problem of an insufficient number of qualified teachers.

Foreign-language teachers must therefore receive appropriate preparation and training consistent with the requirements of contemporary language education. Professional pedagogical preparation is indispensable and should include the study of teaching methods, educational principles, and the foundations of educational psychology.

The specialized seminar on foreign-language teaching in general and technical education in Arab countries, organized by the League of Arab States in 1974, proposed several measures for training foreign-language teachers, including:

- short summer, evening, or daytime in-service training courses;
- correspondence-based training;
- visits to countries where the target foreign languages are spoken;
- organizing seminars and conducting international research;
- organizing model lessons;
- providing references, dictionaries, and periodicals that contribute to foreign-language teacher training;
- establishing local research and study centres specializing in foreign-language education.

B. Textbooks and Teaching Materials

Providing textbooks is an essential requirement for planning bilingual education. Educational institutions must therefore ensure that a sufficient number of textbooks and teaching materials are available and that comparable resources are provided for both languages. Although this may appear theoretically straightforward, the reality is different. One of the major difficulties encountered by many bilingual education systems is a shortage of the required materials. This constitutes a major source of the problems affecting foreign-language education, resulting in imbalances and disparities in the capacity to produce and distribute textbooks and other educational materials.

6. Ways of Ensuring the Success of English Language Teaching in Educational Institutions

In order to ensure the success of foreign-language education, and English-language teaching in particular, the responsible authorities have made considerable efforts to achieve this objective. The curriculum constitutes the fundamental basis and genuine foundation of education in general and foreign-language education in particular.

The design of a foreign-language curriculum in any country is linked to several factors, including:

A. Language Policy

The language policy adopted by a country determines the choice of a particular foreign language from among several alternatives. As is well known, English has become the most widely adopted and used language worldwide. The state therefore allocates a specific budget to teaching the foreign language, determines the objectives to be achieved, specifies the time

allocated to instruction, and, most importantly, identifies the age or educational stage at which the target foreign language is to be introduced.

B. The Social and International Status of the Target Foreign Language

The social and international status of the target foreign language, as well as the extent of its dissemination and use in vital fields, must also be taken into consideration. As previously noted, English currently occupies a leading position because it is the principal foreign language used in political, economic, and diplomatic activities. It is also taught in schools from the early educational stages and serves as a medium of learning in many universities in the Middle East, particularly in scientific disciplines.

C. Scientific Theories Underpinning Curriculum Design

Curriculum design should take into account the scientific theories on which curricula are based, including psychological theories of learning, linguistic theories, sociolinguistic approaches, educational theories, and recent pedagogical and technological developments. These theories do not necessarily enter directly into the preparation of curricula; rather, curriculum specialists should draw on them as guiding principles. They influence the construction of curricula, their division into instructional units, and the identification of the language skills to be taught. They also constitute a foundation for selecting appropriate teaching methods, instructional techniques, educational materials, and pedagogical technologies, while contributing to teacher training both before and during service.

D. Selection and Organization of Curriculum Content

The curriculum content should be selected and its components organized into instructional units, with appropriate topics whose vocabulary can be transformed into tasks, activities, practices, and language exercises. The objectives of foreign-language education should be based on learners' needs at each school year, the time allocated to the language, and the method adopted for teaching it.

E. Integration and Coordination among Curriculum Components

It is essential to ensure integration among the different elements of the curriculum and coordination between them. One of the most important stages in curriculum development is continuity between one educational stage and the next. As Naïf Kharma points out, what is proposed for one school year should extend what was established in the preceding year and prepare learners for the following year, without gaps or discontinuities; the progression should therefore be logical and natural. Horizontal integration should also be considered in order to establish links among the branches of a given subject and, as far as possible, among the subjects taught during each school year.

F. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Curriculum Development

Effective monitoring, evaluation, and continuous development of the curriculum should be ensured through the use of feedback. Teachers play an important role in this process because their experience in implementing curricula enables them to identify their strengths and weaknesses and provide observations regarding the suitability of the curriculum and its various components and their compatibility with learners' needs, abilities, and interests. This process should take into account new pedagogical, scientific, and technological developments and introduce the necessary adjustments in accordance with the country's educational policy and the learners' environment, thereby supporting pedagogical development.

G. Language Games, Dialogue, Situational Learning, and Small-Group Work

Language games and dialogue, situational teaching, and small-group work should be adopted in ways that place the learner at the centre of the learning process. A recent study has demonstrated the effectiveness of cooperative learning in English-language teaching, as reflected in improved learner achievement compared with conventional instruction. Such approaches also contribute to motivating learners and developing self-discipline.

H. Methods of Teaching English

Several methods can be adopted for teaching English. The most common include the following:

Grammar-Translation Method

Also known as the traditional method, this is one of the oldest approaches used in foreign-language teaching. It does not focus primarily on oral communication; rather, it gives greater attention to translation, reading, and writing. The mother tongue is used to explain foreign-language vocabulary, and learners are encouraged to memorize words presented in specific lists. The language of written texts was regarded as a standard of quality that learners were expected to master in order to achieve the desired linguistic competence. Teachers were largely free to select literary texts that they considered useful for developing learners' linguistic and intellectual resources, without being restricted to a teacher's guide.

In this traditional approach, grammatical and syntactic errors received limited attention. Consequently, the method was characterized by a low level of cognitive integration and did not sufficiently encourage learner creativity. It was therefore subjected to substantial criticism and gradually declined toward the end of the nineteenth century.

Direct Method

The Direct Method emphasizes discussion and oral communication as central means of teaching English. It does not rely on translation as a means of foreign-language instruction and instead places considerable emphasis on learner motivation.

Teaching procedures are adapted to learners' interests, cognitive needs, and intellectual abilities, and instructional content is organized progressively, moving from simpler to more complex material.

Natural Method

This method is associated in the paper with François Gouin and his series method, which consists of successive and interconnected linguistic units. A sequence of sentences is presented in which verbs appear in chronological order, for example when describing the steps involved in carrying out an action. The method, however, did not prove successful in foreign-language teaching and learning.

Oral Method

The Oral Method refers to procedures and techniques designed to activate oral language use within the classroom and to promote spoken interaction as part of the learning process.

Active Method

The Active Method involves learners' physical participation through dialogue role-play and expressive reading accompanied by movements and gestures, which can increase learner motivation. It also includes an interrogative technique based on questions.

Repetition Method

The Repetition Method is based on the principle that the more learners repeat linguistic material, the more effectively they learn it.

Conclusion

The study ultimately leads to several conclusions:

- Children can learn foreign languages alongside their mother tongue without this necessarily affecting their mother tongue.
- Learning a second language is a necessary requirement from both an individual and a societal perspective.
- Second-language learning constitutes an important component of basic education and a significant aspect of personality development in the contemporary context.
- Learning a second language at an early age, particularly at the primary education level, can provide learners with proficiency in more than one language, and multilingual learners may demonstrate advantages over those who master only one language.
- The Direct Method is considered one of the most effective approaches to foreign-language teaching because it emphasizes learner motivation and takes progression into account when developing instructional content.

References and Notes

1. See: Mahmoud Ahmed Al-Sayyid, "Arabic and Foreign Languages and Their Position in Public Education in the Arab World," *Journal of the Arabic Language Academy in Damascus*, Vol. 87, Part 3.
 2. Ibid.
 3. The source text attributes this discussion to Gesell and the cited educational report.
 4. See the same reference, p. 10.
 5. See the same reference, p. 10.
 6. See: "Problems Faced by Teachers of the Lower Basic Stage in Teaching English in Government Schools in the Nablus Directorate," p. 32.
 7. See the same reference, p. 10.
 8. See the same reference, p. 10.
 9. See: "Problems Faced by Teachers of the Lower Basic Stage in Teaching English in Government Schools in the Nablus Directorate," p. 32.
- Source URL cited in the original document: <http://www.arabacademy.gov.sy/uploads/magazine/mag87/mag87-3-1.pdf>