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**From Arabic to French: Exploring Obstacles
Encountered by Algerian Students at Es-Salam
National Semi-Medical Institute–Oran-''**

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ABSTRACT

This case study investigates the impact of the language shift from Arabic to French on first-year students at the Es-Salam National Semi Medical Institute in Oran, Algeria. The study aims to explore the challenges that students face during this language transition and its impact on their academic performance and learning experiences. A mixed-methods approach was used, including surveys and interviews with first-year students. The findings indicate that students face significant challenges during the language shift, such as difficulties with comprehension, limited access to learning resources, and a loss of confidence in their academic abilities. Furthermore, the study reveals that socioeconomic backgrounds and prior educational experiences significantly impact the students' ability to adapt to the language shift. The study concludes with recommendations to support the success of first-year students during this language transition period in Algerian universities.

Keywords: Algerian, language shift, obstacles, first-year students, Semi Medical Institute

INTRODUCTION

The language policy in Algerian higher education institutions presents significant challenges for students whose first language is Arabic (L1) when the instruction language shifts from Arabic to French. This transition can result in frustration, disappointment, and even dropouts among students. Research has demonstrated that students who struggle to learn in a second language may perceive themselves as failures, leading to low self-esteem, anxiety, and reduced motivation. Furthermore, leaving the institution due to language difficulties can have negative financial and social implications, causing a loss of confidence and motivation.

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds or with limited exposure to the French language may encounter additional barriers and require additional support during this language shift. To address these challenges faced by first-year students at the El-Salam National Semi Medical Institute, as well as the broader context of Algerian higher education, this study aims to investigate the difficulties and provide recommendations to enhance student success during this language transition period. By understanding the specific challenges students face and considering socio-cultural and educational factors, this study aims to develop effective strategies and interventions to mitigate the negative impact of the language shift and foster positive learning experiences.

This study focuses on examining the challenges encountered by first-year students at the EL-Salam National Semi-Medical Institute in Oran when transitioning from Arabic to French as the language of instruction. Employing a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews, the study will explore the influence of the language shift on students' academic performance, learning experiences, and personal lives. The findings will provide insights into the difficulties experienced during this transitional period and contribute to the development of strategies to support student success. To conduct this research, the following research questions and hypotheses were put:

Research Questions

1. What challenges do first-year students at the EL-Salam National Semi-Medical Institute in Oran face when transitioning from Arabic to French as the language of instruction?
2. How does the language shift impact students' academic performance, learning experiences, and personal lives?

3. What factors contribute to students' ability to adapt to the language shift?

Hypotheses:

1. First-year students at the El-Salam National Semi-Medical Institute in Oran, whose first language is Arabic (L1), will encounter significant challenges during the transition to French as the language of instruction.
2. The language shift will negatively affect students' academic performance, learning experiences, and personal lives.
3. Students' socio-economic backgrounds and prior educational experiences will significantly influence their ability to adapt to the language shift.

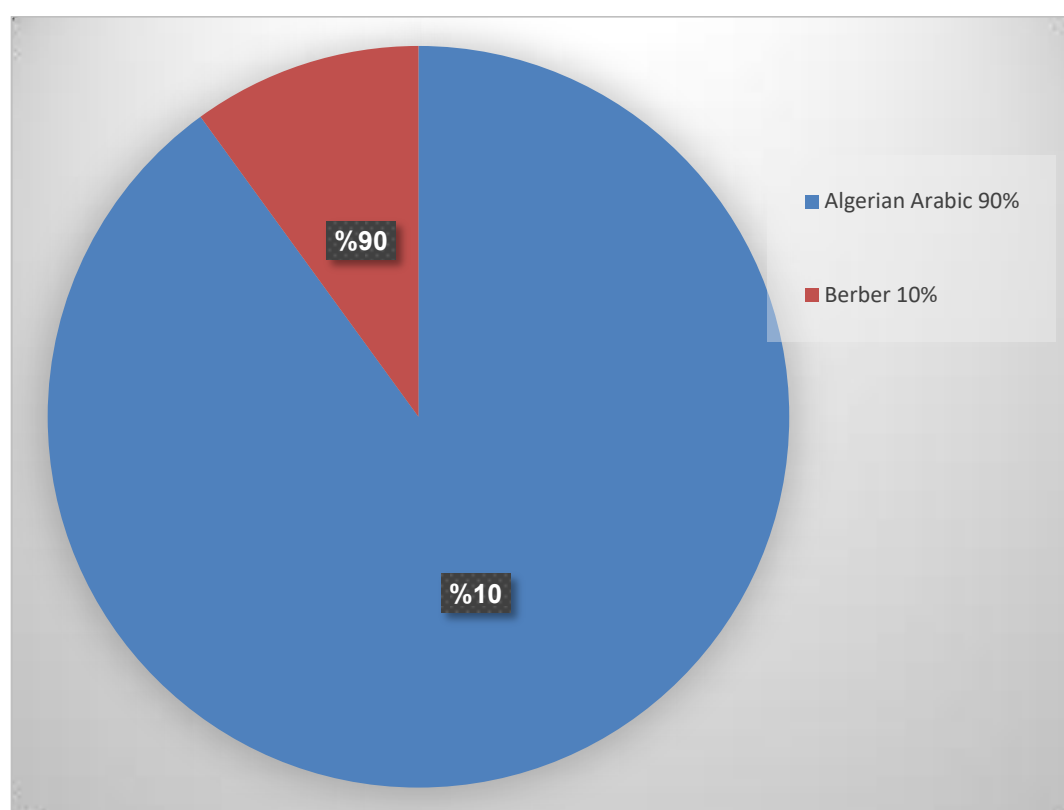
2- The Linguistic Map in Algeria

Algeria is an Arab country located in North Africa, by the Mediterranean Sea. Its geographical location has led to diverse linguistic influences, resulting in a complex language situation. Today, Algeria has multiple languages in use, including Arabic (Classical and Modern Standard), Tamazight and its variations such as Kabyle, Chawi, Mzabi, and Targui, French, and, more recently, English. This linguistic diversity reflects the varied languages spoken in Algeria.

The official languages of Algeria are indeed Arabic and Tamazight (Berber), as stated in the country's constitution. Arabic has been recognized as the official language since 1963, while Berber was constitutionally recognized as a national language in 2002 and officially recognized alongside Arabic in 2016. This constitutional amendment signifies the importance and status of both languages in Algeria (Constitution of Algeria (2016).

The native languages of the majority of Algerians are Algerian Arabic and Berber. Algerian Arabic is spoken by approximately 90% of the population, while Berber is spoken by around 10% Maamri (2016). Kabyle, a specific Berber language, holds prominence as the most widely spoken Berber language in the country.

Figure(01): Native Languages in Algeria



In certain regions, Kabyle is taught and has partial co-official status, albeit with some restrictions, particularly in parts of Kabylie Maamri (2016). In the Sahara, more conservative Bedouin dialects, grouped under the name Saharan Arabic, are spoken.

The linguistic situation in Algeria is complex and multi-faceted, characterized by multiple discourses and positions, as noted by Maamri (2016). The coexistence of Arabic, Berber, and French, along with the diverse dialects and variations within these languages, reflects the intricate linguistic diversity and cultural dynamics of Algeria. According to Zeddour (2018),

“The situation in Algeria presents a multifaceted complexity, where tensions arise from the coexistence of French, the language of the former colonial power, and Arabic, the newly adopted national language. Moreover, this complexity is further intensified by the dichotomy between classical Arabic and colloquial Algerian Arabic, as well as the diverse Berber dialects in relation to Arabic. Valuable insights can be derived from the Algerian context and applied to other states grappling with similar challenges in formulating their linguistic, educational, and cultural policies”.

3- Language Education Policies in Algeria: From Elementary to Higher Education

Language policy in Algeria encompasses various levels of education, from elementary to higher education, and plays a significant role in shaping language instruction and linguistic diversity in the country. At the elementary or basic level, Arabic serves as the primary language of instruction, reflecting Algeria's linguistic and cultural heritage.

This policy aimed to strengthen national identity and reduce the influence of French colonialism. Many textbooks and academic materials were translated into Arabic, and professors were encouraged to teach in Arabic. French is taught as a second language only from the third year. At secondary school level, French has the same status, as it is taught as a second language.

In middle and secondary schools, Arabic continues to hold its position both as a subject and as a medium of instruction. Consequently, the role of French is restricted, and students are less likely to be exposed to this language, which is primarily a remnant of Algeria's colonial past. Despite this, French maintains a significant presence in the education system, particularly in middle and secondary schools. It is taught as a second language and frequently used for teaching specific subjects like mathematics, science, and technology Bouhadiba, (2010). The inclusion of French in the curriculum aims to equip students with bilingual skills and improve their prospects for higher education and employment opportunities.

Ouali (2014), Rahal, (2017) claim that implementing language policy in higher education presents various challenges. Language proficiency is a crucial aspect, as students may enter higher education with varying levels of proficiency in Arabic and French. This proficiency gap can create disparities in academic performance and hinder students' access to higher education Belhiah,(2019). Additionally, ensuring the availability of qualified instructors proficient in both Arabic and French, as well as appropriate teaching materials, is crucial for effective language instruction in higher education.

According to Belhiah (2019), Gordon (1978), addressing language policy in Algerian education requires a comprehensive approach that considers the linguistic needs and rights of students at all educational levels. It involves ensuring equitable access to education, promoting bilingualism or multilingualism, and fostering an inclusive environment that values the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students. By addressing the challenges and

opportunities presented by language policy, Algeria can create an education system that supports linguistic inclusivity, enhances academic achievement, and preserves cultural identities Maougal, (2017).

4- French Language Status in Algeria

Since gaining independence in 1962, Algeria has maintained a special relationship with France due to a shared cultural and historical heritage. As a result, French has held a privileged position in Algerian society and has become associated with social and intellectual prestige. Despite efforts to Arabize the country, French has maintained its position in various institutions, including government, media, and education. In higher education, French has retained its distinguished status, with the majority of courses in scientific fields being taught in French. According to Benrabah (2007), "In universities, 95% of post-graduate courses in sciences and 95% of undergraduate courses in medicine and technical disciplines are taught in French" (p. 233). French is also used for administrative tasks, with official documents and meetings commonly conducted in French. Even in departments of English, French is often used for both documents and meetings. This privileged status of French in Algerian institutions can be attributed to the country's colonial history, where French was the language of the colonizers and subsequently became the language of instruction. Despite efforts to promote the use of Arabic, French has maintained its dominance in the scientific and technical fields. As Benrabah (2007) states, "Despite Arabization policies that aimed at replacing French with Arabic in education and public life, French has not only survived but has also maintained its position as the dominant language of science and technology in both Algeria and Morocco" (p. 243).

5- The Rational of the Study

The inspiration for this article originated from the observation of a significant challenge encountered by my daughter upon joining a semi-medical institute. She experienced a state of frustration upon discovering that all lectures were being delivered exclusively in French, with no Arabic language being utilized by the teachers. As a result, my daughter and her classmates, along with thousands of Algerian students throughout the national territory, were compelled to shift their learning from Arabic to French. This experience highlights the critical issue of language barriers in academic settings and emphasizes the need for further research to better understand the impact of language policy on students' academic success.

The language shift in Algerian universities has been attributed to the colonial history of the country, where French was the language of the colonizers and subsequently became the language of instruction. This has resulted in a linguistic divide between the elite, who have mastered French, and the majority of the population, who have not. As a result, many students struggle to adapt to the language, Boumedienne, (2008) Chalabi, (2011), Hamrour, (2018), Zeddour, (2018).

Methodology:

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The research design included a survey and interviews with first-year students at Esalam National Semi-Medical Institute in Oran. The survey was administered online using Google Forms and included closed-ended questions to collect quantitative data. The interviews were conducted in-person and via video conferencing, allowing for open-ended questions and discussion to collect qualitative data.

Participants:

The study participants were first-year students at Esalam National Semi-Medical Institute in Oran, who had experienced the language shift from Arabic to French as the language of instruction. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which ensured a representative sample of students from various socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.

Data Collection:

Data collection took place over a period of three months, from January to March 2020. Participants were invited to complete the online survey, which included questions about their demographics, socioeconomic background, academic performance, and their experiences with the language shift. The survey was distributed to a total of 150 first year students of different specialties such as nursing, nutrition specialists (dietetic), hygienist, midwifery, medical laboratory and radiology technology, and physical therapy. The 150 participants responded to the study.

Following the survey, 10 students were selected for interviews based on their survey responses and their willingness to participate in the study. The interviews were conducted in-person and were recorded with the participants' permission. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and focused on the participants' experiences with the language shift, their academic performance, and their personal lives.

Data Analysis:

1- Experiencing language shift from Arabic into French

The data analysis reveals that the majority of participants at Es-salam National Semi-Medical Institute in Oran have experienced a shift from Arabic to French as the language of instruction in their first year. Only a small minority reported not experiencing the shift due to prior exposure to French subjects at the university or elsewhere.

2- French Proficiency Level among First Year students

When asked to self-report their proficiency levels in French prior to the language shift from Arabic to French as the medium of instruction, the findings revealed that a majority of the participants, 85 students (56.6%), reported being beginners in French. Additionally, 40 students (26.6%) claimed to have an advanced level of proficiency, while 25 students (16.6%) stated that they were fluent in French. These results provide insights into the linguistic capabilities of first-year students in adapting to the language shift in the educational context of Es- salam National Semi-Medical Institute in Oran, Algeria.

Table(01): French Proficiency Levels among First Year students at Es-Salam National Semi-Medical Institute in Oran

French Proficiency Level	Number of Students	Percentage
beginner	85	56.6%
advanced	40	26.6%
Fluent	25	16.6%
Total	100	100%

It should be noted that the majority of students enrolled in various disciplines offered by the institute belong to the scientific track and were excellent students who achieved high scores in the baccalaureate examination. The table below provides acceptance rates in the Paramedical Field 2021

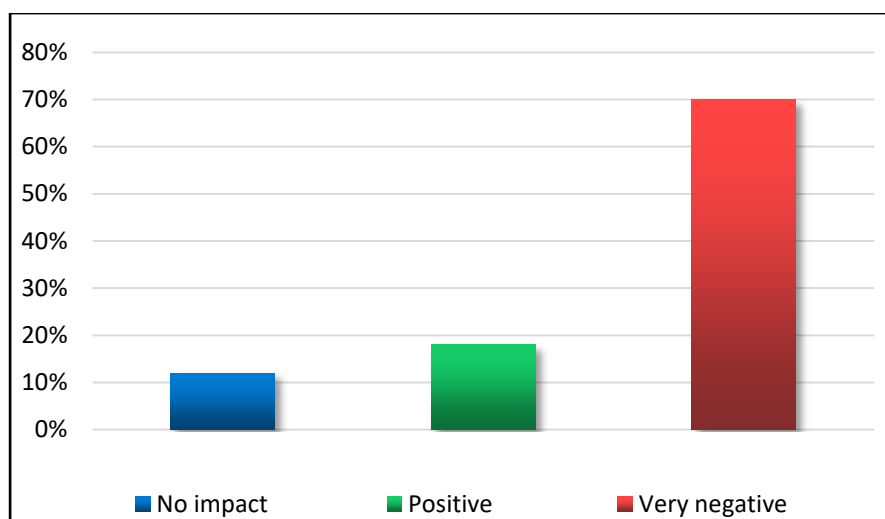
Table (02): Acceptance Rates in the Paramedical Field 2021

Speciality	Acceptance Rate
Public Health Nurse	14.51
Public Health Radiographer	15.81
Medical Masseur	15.66
Public Health Nutritionist	13.93
Occupational Therapist	15.10
Pharmaceutical Preparer	15.20
Psychomotor Therapist	15.22
Public Health Expert	15.43
Orthopedic Device Designer	15.16

3- The impact of the shift from Arabic to French

One aim of the research was to discover how the shift from Arabic to French impacted their academic performances. Students' responses were divergent to a big extent. 18% students reported that this shift had positively impacted their academic performance, while 12% students stated that it had no impact. However, the majority of students about 70% claimed that the shift had a very negative impact on their academic performance.

Figure (02): The impact of the shift from Arabic to French



4. Difficulties Encountered during the Language Shift

The data reveals that a significant portion of students face difficulties in their academic pursuits. Specifically, 19.3% struggle with understanding lectures, while 58.6% encounter challenges with written assignments. Additionally, 22.1% represents various factors that contribute to the third difficulty, including lesson overload, teachers' absenteeism, and inadequate time allocation. These findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address these specific issues and enhance the overall learning experience.

5- The impact of the shift from Arabic to French on students' personal lives

The shift from Arabic to French as the language of instruction has had noticeable effects on students' personal lives. The data analysis reveals that 16.8% of surveyed students spent more time on studying, while 25.9% reduced their time for other activities. Additionally, 38.0% reported increased levels of stress and anxiety. Surprisingly, only 5 % stated no impact on their personal lives. These findings emphasize the substantial influence of the language shift on students' time management and emotional well-being.

6- Strategies for Facilitating Students' Adjustment to the Language Shift

When asked about strategies to adapt to the language shift from Arabic to French, the surveyed students provided diverse responses. Among the students surveyed, 21.1% expressed that extra language classes and support would be beneficial. Additionally, 36.1% believed that allocating more time to learning the new language would be helpful, while 31.1% emphasized the potential of technology, such as online courses and group work. These findings

suggest that a combination of language support, time management, and technological resources could effectively assist students in adjusting to the language shift.

7- Satisfaction with Institution's Support in Language Shift Adjustment

From the analysis, we can see that the majority of respondents are dissatisfied (43.33%) or very dissatisfied (18%). The combined percentage of satisfaction (very satisfied + satisfied) is 26%, which is lower than the combined percentage of dissatisfaction (dissatisfied + very dissatisfied) at 61.33%. Additionally, 12.67% of respondents indicated a neutral response.

Based on these results, it appears that a significant portion of the respondents are dissatisfied with the language shift from Arabic to French. This suggests that there may be areas for improvement or concerns that need to be addressed.

8-Recommendations for Future Research:

While this study provides valuable insights into the impact of the language shift on first-year students at the Es-salam National Semi-Medical Institute, there is still room for further research. Future studies can explore the long-term effects of the language shift on students' academic and professional trajectories. Additionally, investigating the effectiveness of specific interventions and support programs aimed at helping students adapt to the language shift would be beneficial. Furthermore, comparative studies across different institutions or regions in Algeria can provide a broader understanding of the challenges and potential solutions in different contexts. Finally, examining the perspectives of educators and policymakers on language policies and their implementation can contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

9-Conclusion

In conclusion, the transition from Arabic to French as the language of instruction at the Es-Salam National Semi-Medical Institute in Oran presents a complex set of challenges for first-year students. This language shift significantly impacts their academic performance, learning experiences, and personal lives. Students encounter difficulties in understanding lectures, grappling with new vocabulary and terminology, and adjusting to a different language learning environment. By understanding the specific challenges faced by students and taking into account socio-cultural and educational factors, effective interventions can be developed to mitigate the negative impact of the

language shift and promote positive learning experiences. With the implementation of comprehensive support measures, the Es-salam National Semi-Medical Institute in Oran can empower first-year students to overcome language barriers and thrive academically, ensuring their success in their medical education and future careers.

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11- Appendices

Interview

Interview: Students' experience with the language shift from Arabic to French at Esalam National Semi-Medical Institute

Interviewer: Good morning, thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Can you tell me about your experience with the language shift from Arabic to French at Esalam National Semi-Medical Institute?

Student 1: Well, I found it very challenging. I was used to studying in Arabic, and suddenly, all the lectures were in French. It was difficult to understand everything the teacher was saying, and I felt like I was missing out on important information.

Interviewer: Can you describe some of the specific difficulties you encountered?

Student 1: Sure. One of the biggest problems was the terminology. Medical terms in French are very different from Arabic, and it was hard to keep up. I had to spend a lot of time looking up words in a dictionary, which made the lectures even harder to follow.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can you tell me how this affected your academic performance?

Student 1: I struggled a lot in the beginning. My grades were lower than they had been in high school, and I was worried I wouldn't be able to keep up with the course material. It was frustrating because I knew I was capable of doing better, but the language barrier was holding me back.

Interviewer: I see. Can you describe any other impacts this shift had on your personal life?

Student 1: Well, I had to spend a lot more time studying than I had before, just to keep up. That meant less time for other things, like spending time with family and friends. It was a big adjustment, and I felt like I was missing out on a lot.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing that. Can you tell me if you think there are any strategies that could have helped you adjust to the language shift more easily?

Student 1: I think having more language support would have been helpful. Maybe if there had been extra classes or tutoring available, that could have made a big difference. And having more time to adjust to the new language before diving into complex material would have been helpful too.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time and input.

Language Shift Questionnaire

- 1.** What is your first language?
- 2.** How many years have you studied French before joining Esalam National Semi-Medical Institute?
- 3.** How comfortable do you feel speaking and understanding French?
- 4.** Do you find it difficult to follow lectures in French? If yes, please describe the challenges you face.
- 5.** Do you feel that the language shift has affected your academic performance? If yes, please describe how.
- 6.** Do you feel that the language shift has affected your learning experience? If yes, please describe how.
- 7.** Have you experienced any emotional or psychological difficulties as a result of the language shift? If yes, please describe.

8. Have you received any support or assistance to adapt to the language shift? If yes, please describe.

9. How do you think the language shift could be made easier for students?

10. Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding the language shift from Arabic to French?

10. Questionnaire

1. Have you experienced a shift from Arabic to French as the language of instruction in your first year at Esalam National Semi-Medical Institute in Oran?

- Yes

- No

2. How would you rate your level of proficiency in French prior to the shift?

- Beginner

- Intermediate

- Advanced

- **Fluent**

3. How did the language shift impact your academic performance?

- Positively

-Negatively