

The Battle between French and English in the Algerian University: Ideological and Pedagogical Stakes

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Abstract : Algeria is characterized by a fragmented language education policy. While pre-university education is entirely conducted in Arabic, higher education remains linguistically divided, with some fields offered in Arabic and others exclusively based on French. Within this linguistic policy, English remains far behind French. However, there has been a significant shift in the state's linguistic orientation since the social riot of March 2019, known as El-Hirak, which ousted away the ex-president. Since then, social calls were voiced to get rid of French, and English started to receive an unprecedented political push. The historical decision only came at the beginning of the academic year 2023-2024 when the ministry of higher education imposed English as medium of instruction (hereafter EMI), especially in scientific and technological fields. As such, this paper considered this abrupt switch in the medium of instruction and its effects on the community of teachers. Building on a socio-psychological approach, teachers' attitudes towards EMI were measured. Data were collected using classroom observation, semi-structured interviews and a survey. The results showed that a clear majority of teachers hold negative attitudes towards EMI. The point is that they are linguistically incompetent, and they are not ready yet to deliver content subjects in a language they have no, or little, command of. The study showed the importance of considering attitudes in the 'policy-formation' stage before the 'implementation' stage. The findings also proved that teachers are not passive bystanders; they can rather be the final arbiters imposing themselves as policy-makers resisting ministerial instructions through their linguistic practices inside the classroom which only acknowledge French. The study showed the necessity to avoid sudden switch and opt for gradual change, without putting aside those who are directly concerned with political/pedagogical measures (teachers, learners, etc).

Keywords : micro planning, EMI, language education policy, agency

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