

RESEARCH ARTICLE	Quality of secondary education between reform goals and actual performance: case study of high schools in bejaia	
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Abstract		
This study examines the impact of educational reforms on student performance in the Wilaya of Béjaïa. Its primary aim is to assess whether the secondary school reforms introduced in 2002 have provided effective solutions to the broader issue of teaching quality, with a particular focus on language and mathematics proficiency. The research was conducted across seven secondary schools located in the eastern, western, and central parts of Béjaïa, involving a sample of 380 participants, including students, parents, and teachers. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. The findings indicate that the educational reforms implemented by the state in secondary schools are a major contributing factor to the decline in teaching quality and student academic performance.		
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Introduction

In Algeria, as in all countries around the world, school occupies a central place in the organization of society. It is considered a socializing institution for younger generations, aimed at shaping them into future citizens. It is also the place where individuals develop their personalities and acquire the education that ensures social integration and cohesion within a society and a nation. It forms the foundation of development and provides the best framework for progress and the advancement of society (Ministry of National Education, p. 37). Moreover, as a fundamental sector in the socialization of individuals and one that has a direct influence on the economic system, the Algerian educational system has undergone profound transformations with the aim of improving its performance both qualitatively and quantitatively. Given the importance of the education sector, our country has made efforts to establish a truly comprehensive system to reflect the remarkable progress recorded in the field of education and training. As a result, a policy of widespread, compulsory, and free schooling for all children of school age up to the age of 16 was adopted, along with the arabization of teaching and the Algerianization of staffing at all levels. According to Article 53 of the National Education Orientation Law, "It is stipulated in the Algerian Constitution, particularly in Article 53, that education is an inalienable right.". It is also compulsory and free for all children of school age up to the age of 16." (Ministry of National Education, pp. 22-23)

Furthermore, since independence and up to the present day, Algeria has had to address the shortcomings in school education inherited from colonialism. As a result, the pre-reform assessment of secondary education highlighted a significant imbalance between general secondary education, which enrolled the majority of students, and technological and technical secondary education, which was still largely neglected. This imbalance raised the issue of insufficient information and guidance at the end of basic education, which in turn affected orientation at the end of secondary

school, whether towards training centers or university. Moreover, the baccalaureate success rate, ranging between 25 and 35 percent, was considered far too low (Benharakat, 2004).

In this regard, the drawbacks that hindered the achievement of the goals of the 1976 reform—particularly in the democratization of education—had negative consequences that not only increased classroom heterogeneity but also led to what Curtis refers to as “[...] a kind of generalized illiteracy” (Benharakat, 2004), meaning a preference for quantity over quality. This resulted in overloaded curricula and overcrowded classrooms, with some classes exceeding 45 students.

Moreover, the current educational system is the outcome of numerous reforms (the 1976 fundamental school reform, the first-generation reform in 2002, and the second-generation reform in 2017) that the Algerian education system has undergone throughout the sixty years following independence. These reforms were sometimes partial and at other times fundamental (general), leading to a series of pedagogical changes. Among the most significant were the adoption of the basic school model as stated in the 1976 policy, the reform of higher education in 1971, and several other smaller-scale reforms, both legislative and organizational, in basic and secondary education, vocational training, and higher education (Bouflaja, 2006, p. 119). These limitations exposed the shortcomings of the former system, which prompted the establishment of a new educational policy and a comprehensive overhaul of the entire school system, launched in 2002 (first-generation programs). This initiative, implemented in 2002 with the support of UNESCO’s PARE pilot program, affected not only the school curricula across all three educational levels—from preschool to the final year of high school—but also their duration. In primary school, new subjects were introduced: French began to be taught from the third year of primary school, and English was introduced starting from the first year of middle school (Benharakat, 2004).

Algeria ultimately opted for a new reform launched in July 2002, with the aim of benefiting from the new advances of economic globalization, scientific and technological knowledge, and large-scale mastery of new information and communication technologies. The assessment carried out at the time focused on “the overhaul of content and learning methods, as well as a reorganization of the structures of national education, which had also become essential in order to allow Algerian society to adapt to and integrate into a globalized context.” (Xavier, 2005, p. 08)

The reform also aimed to lift the Algerian school system out of its stagnation and to address the shortcomings of the old educational system. As sociologist Hassani Zohra pointed out: “The 2002 reform in Algeria emerged in the wake of numerous criticisms directed at the National Education system for its lack of quality, effectiveness, and equity. From that point on, a reform was initiated with the objective of improving the system’s efficiency and responding to the challenges facing society. Two major initiatives were launched: the school curricula, restructured into a competency-based format, and the school textbooks, which became the cornerstone for the widespread implementation of the reform.” (Zohra, p. 15)

Furthermore, the reform of the National Education system involves implementing a series of measures centered around three key elements: the overhaul of pedagogy (where the objective-based approach has now been replaced by the competency-based approach) and disciplinary fields, the reorganization of the educational system, and the improvement of teacher qualifications (measures have been proposed and implemented regarding the training of teachers at all educational levels) (Boubekeur, 2009).

This is why we situate our work within this field of study. The aim of our work is to investigate the factors that influence the Algerian educational system. This leads us to pose the question that particularly concerns our scientific curiosity: Have the reforms introduced in secondary education in 2002 provided solutions to the problems of teaching quality in general (the quality of school curricula, the quality of teacher training, the quality of teaching methods, and the quality of resources for the development of pedagogical work...), and specifically in the mastery of languages and mathematics?

2. Methodological Framework of the Research

To clarify our reflection, we focus on the following questions:

The Algerian state has adopted a series of reforms in the educational system, but according to specialists, these reforms are not studied, which explains the absence of a strategy with short- and medium-term objectives. In other

words, the educational system, as an accumulative process that should adopt better strategies, lacks continuity and coherence between its reforms. Furthermore, the quality of teacher training is also at stake; it can only be complementary in improving the educational system. As emphasized by the head of the education sector, “the quality of education can only be improved by supporting the teacher, who must be trained and should not be content with just a university degree.”

Our interest here is in the influence of educational system reforms on students and on the level of professional competencies of secondary school teachers. How can we relate the reforms, the training of secondary cycle teachers, and their impact on students’ mastery of essential subjects (such as mathematics, Arabic language, and French language)?

According to statistics (researcher from CENEAP), many students, as mentioned above, leave school prematurely without qualifications or adequate levels. How can we explain this dropout? Is it due to a lack of motivation among secondary school students or a total disengagement on the part of the parents?

Based on the questions raised in the problem statement, we have formulated the following hypotheses:

H1 - The absence of a well-studied strategy in the educational system reforms has negatively affected the quality of teaching in languages (Arabic, French) and mathematics.

- The lack of adequate training for secondary school teachers regarding the new school curricula hinders the quality of teaching in languages (Arabic, French) and mathematics.

H2 - The lack of motivation among secondary school students and the disengagement of their parents from the goal of academic success negatively influence the quality of teaching (in the case of languages and mathematics).

Within this methodological framework, we will attempt to present in detail the methodology adopted to address the research questions. This includes, first of all, all information related to sampling, data collection methods and techniques, as well as the techniques and methods used for analyzing the collected data.

2.1. Sampling and Its Techniques

Since we cannot access the entire population for our research, we chose to use sampling, which consists of selecting a sufficient number of cases to inform us about the whole (Pierre, 1991, p. 56).

Thus, the samples in our study involved several individuals. More specifically, we distributed the questionnaire to different actors within the educational community (the samples consist of students, teachers, and parents from the same schools).

Choice of Teachers: We opted for a probabilistic sample for the teachers of mathematics, Arabic, and French because mastery of these subjects is fundamental to students’ success and their continuation of studies, particularly for their professional integration.

We chose a stratified random sample (from a total of 77 teachers—that is, all the mathematics, Arabic, and French teachers from the selected high schools were surveyed; this was carried out at the regional level, specifically in the Wilaya of Bejaia), which allows, for each stratum, the random selection of an individual.

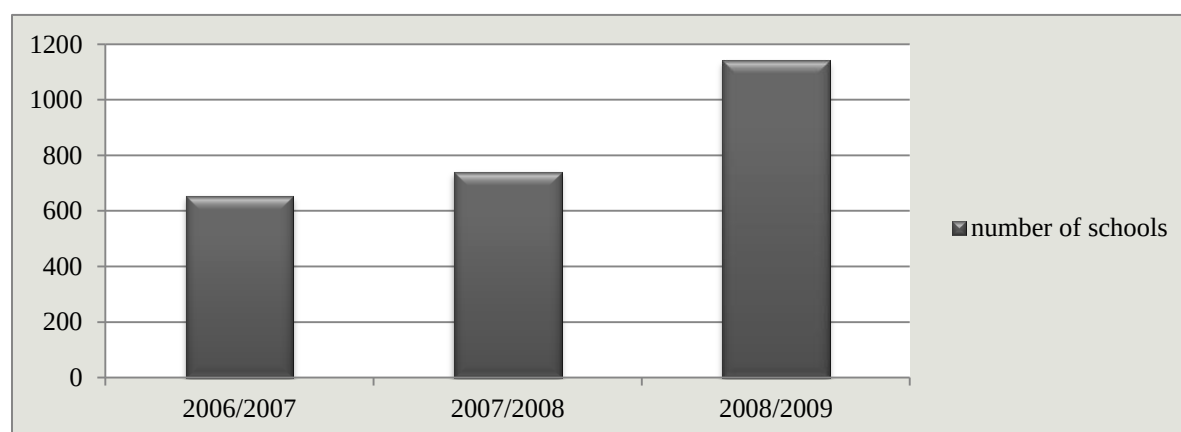
The following table illustrates the frequency rate of teachers according to the subject taught.

Table 01. Composition of the Sample by Subject Taught:

Subject Taught	Absolute Value	Percentage (%)
Arabic	26	33.76
French	27	35.06
Mathematics	24	31.16
Total	77	100

We distributed the questionnaires among three categories of teachers, taking into account the variable of the subject taught. Mathematics and languages are among the most valued subjects by the current educational system and, consequently, by the students.

In this regard, the reform has brought about a genuine transformation of the existing system: Concerning the strengthening of scientific and technological education starting from primary school, then continuing into middle school with subjects such as mathematics, natural sciences, physical sciences, and technology, and finally in secondary education with the technological track and the mathematical techniques track. The following graph traces the evolution in the number of institutions that have opened the (TM) track in the second year of secondary school.



Source: (Boubkeur 2009, p. 73)

Regarding the Teaching of the Arabic Language, The Arabic language is one of the components of the triptych of national identity and, as the national and official language, it is the language of instruction for all subjects at all levels of the educational system (Karim, 2002). President Abdelaziz Bouteflika emphasized this clearly: “The constitution stipulates that Arabic is the official and sole language. However, this varies in practice.”

In this regard, the implemented measures include:

- The establishment of revised curricula and new textbooks;
- The use of new information and communication technologies in the teaching of the Arabic language;
- The development, with the support of the Academy of the Arabic Language, of a genuine effort to translate significant references of the universal scientific, technological, and cultural heritage to and from Arabic;
- The revaluation of the Arabic language coefficient in the middle school diploma exam, which was increased from 4 to 5;

The increase in the number of hours dedicated to its teaching. (National Center for Educational Documentation, 2003)

Regarding the development of foreign language teaching, which involves opening up to the world and to others, it has become a necessity and an obligation. As our former President of the Republic, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, said: “The integration of foreign language teaching into the various cycles of the educational system aims, on one hand, to allow direct access to universal knowledge and promote openness to other cultures, and on the other hand, to ensure the necessary links between the different levels and tracks of secondary education, vocational training, and higher education.” (Boubkeur, 2009, p. 12) The essential measures include the early introduction of French teaching in primary school, then the teaching of English in the first year of middle school, the use of universal symbols in the

teaching of scientific subjects in middle and secondary schools, and finally the introduction of bilingual terminology in the margins of each page of the relevant textbooks. (Boubkeur, 2009)

Selection of students and classes: The sampling was carried out with third-year secondary students, involving 202 students out of a total of 451 (including 123 girls and 77 boys), given the predominance of girls in the schools chosen for our study (the much larger presence of girls in the final year). Additionally, Algerian families have developed and become much more open in recent years, which has increased the enrollment of girls in schools. We can also explain this phenomenon by the fact that boys, as soon as they fail, leave school to work and earn a living, whereas girls prefer to continue their studies rather than stay at home. “Girls are the majority almost everywhere: their enrollment rate in middle and secondary cycles is 46%, while that of boys is 32%. Their proportion in higher education is close to 60%.” According to CNES, “this phenomenon is due to sociological and economic reasons, since school is perceived by girls as a space for emancipation and a means of social promotion. This is what drives them to persist in their studies.” (Iman, p. 22)

Moreover, “since the girl is primarily responsible for her own learning, the way she perceives herself and the interest she gives to school play an important role in her academic performance.” (Akoué, 2007) In other words, the relational skills that dominant modes of education develop in girls—originally intended to confine them to their future role as mothers—become assets for succeeding in school, whereas the masculine behaviors of self-assertion valued in boys’ education poorly prepare them. Boys cannot easily conform to school norms. For example, Duru-Bella states “that young girls are better regarded by teachers, given equal results, because they exhibit more school-appropriate behavior and qualities of self-presentation and care that allow them to better meet the demands of the institution.” (Nicola, 1998) Georges Falouzis, for his part, says “they concentrate more easily and disrupt less actively. School offers a model of school conformity that could be described as feminine.” BARRERE A. and SEMBEL N.: Op.cit., p. 56. Also, Gilly asserts, “on the contrary, the male socialization world, which values self-assertion and even aggressiveness, is somewhat contradictory to school requirements, which would explain the less lenient attitude toward boys.” (Ibid, p. 56)

We chose this class solely because we consider it to be an essential level within our country’s educational system. Not all students enrolled in the third year of secondary school during the 2012-2013 academic year were included, except for two classes at each institution, where a selection of students was tested (one class from the literary stream and another from the scientific stream). Our choice was influenced by the strike movement, which prevented us from properly working to question the students, and most of them refused to answer our questions (the teachers’ strike followed by the students’ strike).

The table below illustrates the composition of the sample according to gender.

Table 2. Composition of the sample by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	125	61.88
Male	77	38.5
Total	202	100

Based on the data from this table, it is noticeable that a significant number of students filling the schools are girls. Indeed, according to the study conducted, we made the following observation: the number of girls exceeds that of boys. This can be explained as follows: girls like studying and prefer to focus solely on their studies. Their time is fully devoted to this. On the other hand, boys tend to drop out more easily and struggle to overcome the obstacles they face. Consequently, girls dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to their studies and succeed more easily than boys.

Choice of schools and regions: However, the sampling was carried out among secondary schools, for which strata were defined. Due to the limited time to conduct this research, we decided to limit the survey to seven (07) secondary schools (out of a total of 21 schools in the Bejaia province), and with the aim of enriching our research work by fairly selecting different regions between the implantation zones (urban city center schools, semi-urban schools, and schools

in the East and West of the Bejaia province) in order to demonstrate and measure the students' level and identify the various explanatory factors affecting educational performance.

The choice of the students' parents:

The students' parents are considered as agents of the educational system and have a responsibility in monitoring and supporting at home.

Canadian researchers Maryse Potvin, Deslandes, and Cloutier highlighted the role of parental involvement in children's academic follow-up as "a fundamental element in their academic success."

For this reason, they were chosen.

We opted for a non-probabilistic sample for the students' parents, specifically the snowball sampling method. The difficulty in finding students' parents (due to the absence of a nominative list of parents) pushed us to choose this technique.

The following table shows the composition of the sample according to gender.

Table 3. Composition of the sample by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	61	60.4
Female	40	39.6
Total	101	100

For the students' parents, we received 61 responses from male parents, representing 60.4%, and 40 responses from female parents, representing 39.6%.

2.2. Method and techniques used

To achieve our research objectives, we chose to use both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. Our research was conducted in seven secondary schools in the wilaya of Bejaia (East, West, and downtown Bejaia).

The information used to construct the data was collected in the field within secondary schools of the wilaya of Bejaia. This stage of the research took place during the period from January 2014 to June 2014. The first phase, which lasted one month (January 2014), involved conducting interviews. The second phase, lasting two months (February and March 2014), was dedicated to distributing questionnaires to 380 respondents (questionnaires addressed to 77 teachers, questionnaires reserved for 202 students, and questionnaires intended for 101 parents). During the third phase, we spent 15 days (from April 1 to April 15, 2014) collecting information related to the targeted sample through observation. In the fourth phase, we devoted two and a half months (from April 15, 2014, until the end of June 2014) to gathering additional information about the hosting institutions.

Data Collection Instrument: We used data collection instruments: a questionnaire reserved for learners, a questionnaire administered to teachers (Arabic, French, and Math), and a questionnaire distributed to students' parents.

The questionnaire addressed to learners: In our case, the questionnaire administered to third-year secondary students includes 24 questions, both closed and open. It consists of four parts:

The first part concerns personal data and the characteristics of the learner's family such as (gender, age, type of housing, parents' educational level, parents' socio-professional category). This part is used to classify the sample. It also allows us, during our analysis, to observe the influence of the family environment on the variables studied.

The second part contains information about the students' language proficiency with the aim of examining their competence regarding language learning. The third part includes information about the students within their school environment and their relationship with the programs and training. The fourth part is devoted to the nature of the

learners' motivation.

The questionnaire for secondary school students was tested on 10 of them.

The questionnaire addressed to teachers: The questionnaire for teachers included both open and closed questions. Our questionnaire contains a total of 28 questions.

Before starting the actual survey, the research questionnaire was tested on 5 secondary school teachers. The structure of our questionnaire consists of the following parts:

The first part of the questionnaire focuses on identifying the respondents, such as gender, age, level of education, professional seniority, socio-professional status, and the position held.

The second part addresses questions about the nature of educational reforms.

The third part focuses on teachers' motivation, as well as its impact on academic performance.

The fourth part covers interpersonal relationships.

The questionnaire addressed to students' parents: Before administering the questionnaires to students' parents, who have responsibility for monitoring their children's schooling, we conducted a pre-test with 7 individuals. Our questionnaire contains the following parts:

The first part focuses on personal data such as (gender, level of education, socio-economic status).

The second part includes language preferences and supervision of school activities.

Observation grid: We were able to observe several sessions with teachers in the classroom in order to get an idea of the different teaching methods used by the teachers, as well as to identify the obstacles that students face in their studies.

Conducting interviews: Next, we chose the interview technique with the principals of the visited schools. This allowed us to interview them directly and in a meaningful way. During these interviews, we tried to focus the discussion on the subject that interests us the most.

2.3. Data Analysis Method: The quantitative data collected in this research were subjected to statistical processing. To do this, we used the Sphinx software for data analysis.

The quantitative analysis was complemented by qualitative analysis of data obtained from interviews with the principals. The interviews were recorded using a voice recorder, with the consent of the school officials. That is, this tool (voice recorder) is considered a direct recording device instead of writing. It allows you to save time as well as to perfectly record the information.

Conclusion

This study analyzes the discrepancy between the objectives of educational reform and the actual quality of teaching in secondary schools in the Bejaïa region. The findings highlight that the recent reforms implemented by the Algerian state have largely contributed to the decline in students' academic performance, particularly in language and mathematics.

While students express a desire for academic success, they often lack motivation and proper guidance from teachers, many of whom are inadequately trained. The survey revealed that only 15.6% of teachers received initial training on new school programs, while the rest were left unprepared. Most training seminars were short-term and poorly scheduled, often held during holidays, which further discouraged teacher engagement.

Additionally, the study points to the socio-economic factors influencing educational outcomes. Many teachers enter the profession with only a bachelor's degree due to economic necessity, not pedagogical vocation, and are often unfit to implement reformed curricula. The failure of the LMD system is also noted, as it produces underqualified graduates.

Parental involvement is another critical issue. Despite good intentions, most parents (75%) do not assist their children with homework, regardless of their own education level. This disengagement is attributed to work fatigue, lack of time, and evolving social dynamics, particularly affecting mothers.

The study concludes that the success of educational reform depends on multiple factors: meaningful teacher training, structural changes in the education system, active parental involvement, and open communication between students, teachers, and families. Without these foundational changes, reforms risk remaining superficial and ineffective.

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