RESEARCH ARTICLE

Implementing the Communicative Approach in Language Skills Teaching within the Algerian School System: From Pedagogical Foundations to Classroom Realities after the 2003 Educational Reforms

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Abstract

Over the past decades, language education has undergone a profound pedagogical transformation, shifting from traditional approaches centered on grammatical accuracy and rote knowledge toward learner-centered methodologies that emphasize meaningful communication and social interaction. Within this paradigm shift, the communicative approach has emerged as a dominant framework in language teaching, prioritizing the development of communicative competence and the practical use of language in authentic contexts. In Algeria, this approach was officially adopted within the competency-based educational reforms of 2003, with the objective of enhancing learners' ability to use language effectively across real-life situations, both inside and outside the classroom. Despite its strong theoretical foundations and institutional endorsement, the practical implementation of the communicative approach in Algerian schools continues to face significant pedagogical, institutional, and contextual challenges. This paper aims to examine the extent to which the communicative approach has been translated from pedagogical conception into actual classroom practice in Algerian schools. It first explores the theoretical underpinnings of the communicative approach, particularly the concept of communicative competence as articulated by Hymes and later expanded by Canale and Swain. The study then traces the integration of this approach into the Algerian educational system following the 2003 reforms and analyzes its current manifestations in classroom teaching practices. Through an analytical and descriptive methodology, the study identifies key obstacles that hinder effective implementation, including insufficient teacher training, overcrowded classrooms, limited instructional time, assessment practices that prioritize form over meaning, and a lack of authentic communicative materials. The paper further discusses the gap between curricular intentions and pedagogical realities, highlighting the tension between prescribed communicative objectives and traditional teaching habits. Finally, the study proposes a set of practical strategies aimed at strengthening the application of the communicative approach in Algerian schools. These include revising teacher training programs, aligning assessment methods with communicative goals, integrating task-based and interaction-driven activities, and fostering a supportive classroom environment that encourages learner participation and autonomy. By addressing both theoretical and practical dimensions, this paper contributes to ongoing debates on language education reform and offers actionable insights for improving language skills teaching within the Algerian educational context.

Citation

Introduction:

Language education has witnessed a qualitative shift in its curricula and methods in recent decades, moving from a focus on grammar and purely cognitive aspects to an emphasis on the communicative function of language as a tool for social interaction and the transmission of meaning. Within this framework, the communicative approach has emerged as a pedagogical orientation that places the learner at the center of the educational process, granting them an active role in developing their linguistic and communicative competence.

Since the 2003 reforms, Algeria has adopted this approach within its competency-based educational system, aiming to develop learners' language skills in a way that aligns with their communicative needs both inside and outside the school. However, the transition from this pedagogical concept to effective classroom practice still faces numerous challenges, which this paper attempts to address.

Given the transformation underway in language education and Algeria's adoption of the communicative approach since the 2003 reforms, the main question arises: To what extent has the Algerian school system been able to implement the communicative approach in teaching language skills, and what challenges hinder its effective application in classroom practice?

Sub-questions:

1. What are the theoretical foundations of the communicative approach to language teaching?

2. How did the Algerian educational system adopt this approach within the 2003 reforms?

3. What is the current state of the communicative approach in classroom practices in Algerian schools?

4. What are the most significant challenges and difficulties faced by teachers and learners in implementing this approach?

5. What are the possible ways and mechanisms to enhance the effectiveness of the communicative approach in teaching language skills?

Importance of the study:

The importance of this study lies in:

• Theoretical significance: Enriching educational and linguistic studies related to the communicative approach and its place in language teaching.

Applied Significance: Diagnosing the reality of classroom practice in Algeria to help identify strengths and weaknesses in implementing this approach.

Practical Significance: Providing practical and implementable proposals that contribute to developing language skills teaching and improving the quality of learning.

Study Objectives:

95 – www.imcra.az.org, | Issue 1, Vol. 9, 2026
Implementing the Communicative Approach in Language Skills Teaching within the Algerian School System: From Pedagogical Foundations to Classroom Realities after the 2003 Educational Reforms
Mehrez Ounissi; Hamdi Chaouki

This study aims to:

1. Clarify the pedagogical foundations of the communicative approach in language teaching.

2. Highlight how this approach has been integrated into the Algerian educational system since the 2003 reforms.

3. Diagnose the current application of the communicative approach in teaching language skills in Algerian schools.

4. Identify the challenges and difficulties that hinder its implementation in classroom practice.

5. Propose mechanisms and strategies to activate the communicative approach and achieve its desired objectives.

1. The Communicative Approach:

The communicative approach is a modern pedagogical method in language teaching that views language as a tool for actual communication in real-life and social situations, rather than simply teaching its rules abstractly. The primary goal of this approach is to equip the learner with communicative competence, that is, the ability to understand and produce linguistic messages effectively in different contexts, taking into account the linguistic, pragmatic, social, and cultural dimensions.

Dell Hymes (1972) defined communicative competence as: "The ability to use language appropriately in different social situations, taking into account the grammatical rules, the social, cultural, and pragmatic context of the discourse. (Hymes)"Fathi Ali Abdel Aziz also sees the communicative approach as: "an educational approach that seeks to make language primarily a tool for communication, by training the learner to actually practice its skills and use them in real situations.(Aziz)"

Thus, it can be said that the communicative approach aims to develop learners' overall communicative competence, enabling them to understand and produce discourse in diverse situations, based on the integration of the linguistic aspect (grammar and vocabulary) and the pragmatic aspect (use and context). This is achieved by training them in the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, making the learning process more realistic and effective. Since communicative competence is the primary goal of this approach, it is important to examine its concept and components.

1.1. Communicative competence:

Communicative competence is defined as: "The ability and continuous innovation without relying on a specific pre-defined set of rules for producing and understanding speech. It is the ability to confront and adapt to the unexpected situation that is capable of development, i.e., the ability to do something effectively, proficiently, and with the least possible effort." It is a mental faculty responsible for managing language in its three paths: production, understanding, and use. That is, communicative competence represents the broadest framework that integrates the linguistic, cognitive, social, and cultural aspects, making it a fundamental condition for real communication in daily life (Ashir).

1.2. Components of Communicative Competence:

Canal and Swain (1980) presented a framework that has become one of the most prominent models in the field of language teaching. They identified four integrated components of communicative competence, which work together to enable individuals to communicate effectively and flexibly in various situations. These components are (Canale):

• Linguistic (Grammatical) Competence: This includes knowledge of the linguistic system, encompassing grammar, morphology, vocabulary, and phonetics—that is, the ability to produce and understand language correctly in terms of both form and grammar.

• Sociolinguistic Competence: This refers to understanding the social and cultural rules that govern language use and grasping the social context of communication. This helps the learner choose appropriate style and expressions according to the situation and the audience.

96 – www.imcra.az.org, | Issue 1, Vol. 9, 2026
Implementing the Communicative Approach in Language Skills Teaching within the Algerian School System: From Pedagogical Foundations to Classroom Realities after the 2003 Educational Reforms
Mehrez Ounissi; Hamdi Chaouki

• Discourse Competence: This is the ability to organize linguistic units into coherent and cohesive texts, ensuring the coherence and logical sequence of ideas within a conversation or written text.

• Strategic Competence: This is the individual's ability to overcome obstacles that may hinder the communication process by employing compensatory strategies such as paraphrasing, allusion, or using nonverbal cues to ensure the continuation of interaction.

Thus, these components together constitute the core of communicative competence, which aims to enable the learner to use language effectively in various social and cultural contexts, achieving communicative goals with the greatest possible accuracy and appropriateness.

1.3 Pedagogical Principles of the Communicative Approach:

The communicative approach to language teaching is based on a set of pedagogical principles that place the learner at the center of the educational process and language as a means of communication and practical use. These principles can be summarized as follows:

1. Learner-Centeredness:

The learner is a key player in constructing their own learning, while the teacher's role is limited to guidance and facilitation (Miloud).

2. Communication as the Goal of Learning:

The primary objective is to use language in real-life communication situations, not simply to memorize rules and vocabulary in isolation (Talhawi).

3. Authentic Communicative Situations:

Language is taught through real-life situations that mimic reality, such as dialogue, discussion, and letter writing (Rajm).

4. Integration of Skills:

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are taught in an integrated and interconnected manner, not in isolation.

5. Focus on Comprehension and Production:

Learners are trained to receive (understand) and produce (express) linguistic messages simultaneously (Talhawi).

6. Attention to the Socio-Cultural Dimension:

Language learning is inseparable from the social and cultural contexts of the learning community, as it enhances the learner's awareness of the values and culture of others.

7. Cooperative Learning:(Rajm)

Encouraging group learning, role-sharing, and interactive work that enriches communication.

8. Meaning over Form (Fadoul):

The focus is on conveying meaning first, then addressing errors gradually without disrupting the flow of communication. Through these principles, it becomes clear that the communicative approach transcends traditional rote learning towards interactive and functional learning, making language a living tool for communication and thought. Furthermore, these principles, if applied flexibly within the classroom, provide learners with broader opportunities to develop their communicative competence gradually and realistically.

97 – www.imcra.az.org, | Issue 1, Vol. 9, 2026
Implementing the Communicative Approach in Language Skills Teaching within the Algerian School System: From Pedagogical Foundations to Classroom Realities after the 2003 Educational Reforms
Mehrez Ounissi; Hamdi Chaouki

1.4. The Communicative Approach and its Relationship to Linguistic and Communicative Competencies: Linguistic competence is an essential and indispensable condition for the learning process, as learners need to be familiar with linguistic structures in order to use them correctly. However, the communicative approach makes communicative competence the central goal, where learners strive to apply their linguistic knowledge in real-life situations to produce clear and contextually appropriate discourse. From this perspective, this approach emphasizes the integration of competencies, neither excluding nor diminishing the importance of rules, but rather incorporating them into communicative activities such as conversations, role-playing, and letter writing. This approach also highlights the social and cultural dimension of language, considering it a means of integration and interaction within the environment, not merely a system of formal symbols.

To further illustrate this connection, the following table shows the relationship between language, competencies, and the communicative approach, with practical examples demonstrating how it is embodied in classroom practices (Zahra):

Practicalexamples	Description	The element
Activities for recognizing sounds, new vocabulary, and basic structures through a short text.	A symbolic system of human communication, consisting of sounds, words, structures, and meanings.	thelanguage
Exercises involving sentence transformation, word substitution, and filling in gaps with correct grammar.	Mastering the linguistic system: grammar, vocabulary, syntax and morphology.	Languageproficiency
For example: a conversation in the market, a group discussion, writing a formal letter.	The ability to use language appropriately in social and cultural situations, including: grammatical, pragmatic, rhetorical, and strategic.	Communication skills
Organizing interactive activities: group discussion, collaborative project, group report writing, simulation of life situations.	A modern pedagogical approach that makes communication the primary goal of language teaching, and focuses on developing communicative competence through real-life classroom practices.	Communicative approach

2.Teaching Language Skills in Light of the Communicative Approach:

The primary goal of teaching language skills is not merely to provide the learner with formal knowledge of the language, but rather to enable them to use it in real communicative situations, whether oral or written. From this perspective, the communicative approach focuses on developing the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in an integrated manner, making communicative situations both the starting point and the end goal of learning (Barakat). Listening skills: These are a key entry point for acquiring other skills. Learners practice listening to diverse texts such as dialogues, speeches, and conversations, with the aim of understanding the overall message and the specific details. In light of the communicative approach, the focus is on grasping meaning within its context rather than simply memorizing vocabulary or grammar rules.. (Sharaf)

 Speaking skills: These aim to enable learners to express their needs and ideas in realistic communicative situations. In the early stages, greater emphasis is placed on fluency and effectiveness rather than formal accuracy, through activities such as dialogue, role-playing, simulations, and collaborative projects (Abdel-Majid). Reading skills are not taught as a mechanical process of decoding, but rather as a means of understanding meaning and interacting with texts.

98 – www.imcra.az.org, | Issue 1, Vol. 9, 2026
Implementing the Communicative Approach in Language Skills Teaching within the Algerian School System: From Pedagogical Foundations to Classroom Realities after the 2003 Educational Reforms
Mehrez Ounissi; Hamdi Chaouki

Therefore, texts are presented in functional situations such as reading an advertisement, a letter, or an article, with an emphasis on comprehension and inference strategies (al-Din).

Writing skills: This is considered a communicative activity directed towards a specific recipient, where the learner practices writing letters, reports, and articles related to their real-life needs. A practical approach is adopted, based on planning, drafting, then reviewing and evaluating. (Al-Qasimi). With this perspective, the communicative approach highlights that the development of language skills is not done separately or purely technically, but rather within an integrated framework that makes language a tool for interaction and influence in the social and cultural environment.

2.1Pedagogical Strategies for Integrating Language Skills:

The integration of language skills is a fundamental pillar of the communicative approach. Listening, reading, writing, and speaking cannot be considered in isolation; rather, they must be integrated into real-life learning situations. This makes learning closer to the actual use of language, instead of being limited to fragmented, formal practices.

1.Integrated Activities:

Integrated activities are an effective way to connect skills, as they present learners with a combined activity that integrates listening, reading, writing, and speaking simultaneously.

Example Classroom Application: Reading an advertisement, discussing it orally, and then assigning students to write a similar advertisement.

Pedagogical Value: Integrating skills into a single activity, making learning functional and dynamic (Qoura).

2.Classroom Projects:

An educational project represents a practical framework for gathering resources and developing communication skills. A practical classroom example: Creating a school magazine that integrates: Reading (researching sources), Writing (producing articles), Listening (conducting interviews), Speaking (presenting results to classmates. Pedagogical value: Developing communication skills through a group project that reflects collaborative learning (Zouaoui).

3.Role-playing and simulation:

This activity is considered one of the most effective pedagogical strategies in language teaching, as it integrates listening and speaking through role-playing scenarios. It may be followed by a writing activity to enhance writing skills. Example classroom application: Simulating a conversation in a market or a job interview, then writing a report or letter related to the situation. Pedagogical value: Enhancing oral fluency, connecting learning to real-life contexts, developing communicative competence (Al-Abed).

4.Integrated Project-Based Learning:

An integrated project encompasses various language skills in a continuous and integrated interaction.

Example Classroom Application: A school trip project that includes: reading texts about the destination, preparing a written report, group discussion, and then giving an oral presentation. Pedagogical Value: Building complete communicative competence and achieving integration between knowledge, action, and communication (Bouamra).

3.The Reality of Implementing the Communicative Approach in Algerian Schools:

Since the 2003 reforms, the Algerian education system has undergone a fundamental pedagogical transformation, shifting from objectives-based teaching to competency-based teaching, while adopting the communicative approach in language teaching. This trend came within the framework of modernizing the Algerian school system and linking language learning to its practical and communicative functions within society. Reports from the National Institute for Educational Research indicate thatMinistry of National Education, National Institute for Educational Research, Report on Curriculum Reform in Algeria, 2007, p.45.The new curricula have been redesigned to address problem-

99 – www.imcra.az.org, | Issue 1, Vol. 9, 2026
Implementing the Communicative Approach in Language Skills Teaching within the Algerian School System: From Pedagogical Foundations to Classroom Realities after the 2003 Educational Reforms
Mehrez Ounissi; Hamdi Chaouki

solving situations, requiring learners to use language in contexts closely resembling everyday life, with a focus on educational projects and interactive activities. At the program level, textbooks are based on integrated activities that combine listening, speaking, reading, and writing, within a framework that places the learner at the center of the educational process and transforms the teacher's role into that of a facilitator and guide rather than a mere transmitter of knowledge (Bouchouat) ..However, field studies have highlighted that classroom practice still faces several difficulties; overcrowding in classrooms, which may exceed forty students, weakens interaction and limits individual participation (Ghallab) .Furthermore, the weak training of some teachers in communicative approach strategies, especially those accustomed to the didactic style, constitutes an obstacle to the activation of this approach. (Slimane)Added to this is the limited availability of didactic resources such as laboratories and digital media, as well as the pressure of exams and curricula that focus more on cognitive achievement than communicative performance.

As for evaluation studies, they have revealed a gap between theory and practice; reports from the National Institute for Educational Research have shown this.The communicative activities stipulated in official documents often devolve into rote memorization and the completion of formal exercises. Therefore, the success of the communicative approach remains contingent upon the continuous professional development of teachers, the provision of pedagogical resources, and a revision of assessment methods to better align them with the requirements of communicative competence.

4.Strategies for Assessing Communicative Competencies:

Assessment within the communicative approach is a holistic and structural process that goes beyond testing basic knowledge (grammar, vocabulary) to measuring the learner's ability to use language in real communicative contexts. Algerian researchers emphasize that the effectiveness of this approach depends on the extent to which assessment strategies align with the multiple dimensions of communicative competence (Bouchouat).

First: Standards of communicative competence: Based on the concepts of Canale & Swain (1980) adopted by Algerian pedagogy، (Ghallab A. H.)The dimensions can be summarized as follows:

1.Linguistic competence: knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.

2.Pragmatic competence: the appropriateness of language to the context and situation.

3.Socio-cultural competence: respect for social norms and etiquette.

4.Strategic competence: the ability to compensate for deficiencies through paraphrasing or using cues.

Second: Assessment strategies:

1.Formative assessment: conducted during classroom activities through direct observation, using observation grids and checklists.. (Slimane)

2.Oral assessment: through dialogue, role-playing, or short presentations, focusing on fluency, accuracy, and language appropriateness.

3.Written assessment: writing functional letters or reports, emphasizing clarity of thought and logical flow.

4.Portfolios: allow for the gradual monitoring of the learner's progress through their written and oral output.

5.Project-based assessment: such as creating a school magazine or recording a podcast, where collaboration, creativity, and functional language use are evaluated.

6.Self-assessment and peer assessment: enhance the learner's awareness of performance standards and motivate them to develop their skills.

7.Performance-based assessment: placing the learner in real or simulated situations (purchasing, debating, filing a complaint) to assess their adaptability.

100 – www.imcra.az.org, | Issue 1, Vol. 9, 2026
Implementing the Communicative Approach in Language Skills Teaching within the Algerian School System: From Pedagogical Foundations to Classroom Realities after the 2003 Educational Reforms
Mehrez Ounissi; Hamdi Chaouki

Third: Practical assessment tools:

Pedagogical literature recommends using:

 Rating scales to determine performance levels.

 Observation cards during classroom interaction.

Rubrics are used to illustrate specific criteria such as fluency, linguistic accuracy, and interactivity.

5.The Role of Technological Tools in Supporting the Communicative Approach:

Educational technology has become a pivotal element in the contemporary educational process, providing interactive digital tools and media that help learners use language in functional and real-world contexts. Within the communicative approach, which makes communication a central goal of learning, technology has emerged to offer additional opportunities for interaction, self-directed learning, and collaboration among learners (Boukhalfa).

First: The relationship between technology and the communicative approach:

 The communicative approach aims to enable learners to practice language in real-life situations.

 Technology, on the other hand, provides digital spaces that simulate daily life, such as educational platforms and social media networks.

 Researchers emphasize that integrating the two enhances interaction, independence, and the diversity of learning resources (Ahmed)

Second: The Role of Technology in Supporting the Communicative Approach:

1.Enhancing Listening and Speaking Skills:

 Using educational videos and audio programs podcasts.

 Conversations via applications Zoom, Google Meet.

 Recording conversations and listening back for self-assessment.(Quraishi).

2. Developing Reading Skills:

 Providing e-articles and digital books.

 Utilizing interactive reading applications to enhance comprehension strategies

.3..Developing writing skills:

 Creating class blogs and educational forums.

 Utilizing collaborative writing platforms such as" Google Docs"

4.Creating a virtual communication environment:

 Educational chat rooms and online learning games.

 Virtual reality for simulating real-life situations (Ahmed).

101 – www.imcra.az.org, | Issue 1, Vol. 9, 2026
Implementing the Communicative Approach in Language Skills Teaching within the Algerian School System: From Pedagogical Foundations to Classroom Realities after the 2003 Educational Reforms
Mehrez Ounissi; Hamdi Chaouki

5.Facilitating collaborative learning:

Online group projects (e-magazine, podcast.

Sharing presentations via platforms such as"Moodle"و "Classroom."

Third: Benefits of Integrating Technology into the Communicative Approach:

Increased learner motivation and engagement.

Compensation for the lack of traditional methods.

Providing opportunities for individual and group learning outside the classroom.

Addressing individual differences through self-paced learning.

Enriching the learning environment with audio-visual resources.

6. Recommendations and Suggestions: After presenting the theoretical and practical aspects of the communicative approach, and highlighting its advantages and challenges within the Algerian educational context, it remains essential to offer a set of recommendations and suggestions that can contribute to better implementation of this pedagogical approach and overcome the challenges that still hinder its optimal application:

1. At the Teacher Level:

Strengthening Pedagogical Training: The necessity of including in-depth training courses in communicative approach strategies, particularly in designing authentic communicative situations.

Changing the Teacher's Role: Shifting from "instructor" to "facilitator" and guide for learning, thus providing learners with greater opportunities for interaction (Younes).

Diversifying teaching methods: Integrating cooperative learning, role-playing, project-based learning, and the use of digital technologies.

2. At the learner level:

Developing motivation: Through activities related to the learner's interests (group projects, simulations of real-life situations.

Encouraging free expression: Making linguistic errors part of the learning process, not a barrier to communication.

Developing independence: Encouraging learners to use digital resources and supplementary books for self-directed learning.

3. At the curriculum and program level:

Reviewing content: Making learning situations more relevant to the learners' social and cultural context.

Integrating skills: Incorporating activities that integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing within a single context (Bouguerra).

Addressing individual differences: through diverse activities that allow for varying levels of participation.

4. Regarding resources and assessment:

102 – www.imcra.az.org, | Issue 1, Vol. 9, 2026
Implementing the Communicative Approach in Language Skills Teaching within the Algerian School System: From Pedagogical Foundations to Classroom Realities after the 2003 Educational Reforms
Mehrez Ounissi; Hamdi Chaouki

Providing didactic resources: equipping classrooms with language labs, audiovisual resources, and digital platforms.

Reforming the assessment system: adopting multiple assessment tools (portfolios, oral assessments, project-based assessments) instead of relying solely on written exams (Zerrouki).

Encouraging self-assessment and peer assessment: to develop learners' awareness of their level of communicative competence.

Conclusion:

The communicative approach is not merely a new alternative to language teaching methods, but a profound pedagogical shift that places the learner at the center of the educational process and aims to empower them to use language in real-life situations. Field experiences in Algerian schools have highlighted that the implementation of this approach remains contingent upon several fundamental conditions, primarily the continuous pedagogical training of teachers, the development of educational content that aligns with learners' needs and daily lives, and the adaptation of assessment to genuinely measure communicative competence rather than simply the recall of theoretical knowledge.

Furthermore, it has been shown that the integration of language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), the use of modern technological tools, and the reliance on practical activities (simulation, dialogue, and classroom projects) can enhance learner motivation and strengthen their ability to communicate effectively. However, successfully implementing this approach requires a sustained commitment to reform encompassing curricula, training, resources, and assessment simultaneously.

Thus, it can be said that the communicative approach, if consciously applied and supported by all educational stakeholders, will contribute to developing an active, creative learner capable of integrating into society, using their language as a tool for thought, interaction, and action.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to ethical standards governing educational and academic research. As the research is based on document analysis and theoretical examination of pedagogical practices, it did not involve direct experimentation on human subjects. Nevertheless, academic integrity was maintained throughout the study, with careful acknowledgment of sources, respect for intellectual property, and objective representation of educational realities.

Author Contributions

- **Dr. Mehrez Ounissi:** Conceptualization of the study, development of the theoretical framework, analysis of the communicative approach, and drafting of the manuscript.

- **Dr. Hamdi Chaouki:** Literature review, analysis of the Algerian educational context, interpretation of findings, and critical revision of the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

103 – www.imcra.az.org, | Issue 1, Vol. 9, 2026
Implementing the Communicative Approach in Language Skills Teaching within the Algerian School System: From Pedagogical Foundations to Classroom Realities after the 2003 Educational Reforms
Mehrez Ounissi; Hamdi Chaouki

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104 – www.imcra.az.org, | Issue 1, Vol. 9, 2026
Implementing the Communicative Approach in Language Skills Teaching within the Algerian School System: From Pedagogical Foundations to Classroom Realities after the 2003 Educational Reforms
Mehrez Ounissi; Hamdi Chaouki

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105 – www.imcra.az.org, | Issue 1, Vol. 9, 2026
Implementing the Communicative Approach in Language Skills Teaching within the Algerian School System: From Pedagogical Foundations to Classroom Realities after the 2003 Educational Reforms
Mehrez Ounissi; Hamdi Chaouki