

Multilingualism, Diglossia, and EFL Struggles: Teaching English in Algeria's Primary Classrooms

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Abstract:

This study explores the challenges Algerian primary school pupils face in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), focusing on the influence of the country's multilingual context and prevailing teaching practices. Using a convergent mixed-methods design, data were collected from three wilayas—Algiers, Laghouat, and Médéa—selected for their contrasting sociolinguistic environments. Quantitative findings from pupil surveys ($n = 180$) and basic assessments, along with qualitative data from classroom observations and interviews (12 teachers, 18 pupils), revealed that vocabulary and pronunciation are major areas of difficulty, worsened by limited exposure to English outside school. Regional contrasts were evident: pupils in Laghouat showed more enthusiasm for English, while those in Algiers leaned toward French. The concurrent introduction of French and English was linked to cross-linguistic interference and cognitive overload, especially in under-resourced classrooms. Teaching remained largely traditional, with minimal use of communicative or learner-centered approaches. Teachers across regions called for more training and support. The study recommends flexible curriculum reforms, multimodal materials, and teacher development aligned with learners' linguistic realities. These findings offer practical implications for early EFL instruction in multilingual, postcolonial contexts like Algeria.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language, Algeria, multilingualism, primary education, language acquisition, teacher practices, language policy

1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, proficiency in English has become a cornerstone of academic achievement, global communication, and access to information. As a result, many countries have integrated English into their national education systems at increasingly earlier stages. Algeria, a linguistically diverse nation with a complex colonial and postcolonial legacy, has recently joined this trend by introducing English at the primary education level. While this policy aligns with global shifts and aims to prepare future generations for international engagement, it also presents significant challenges in a context marked by multilingualism, diglossia, and structural disparities.

Algerian pupils typically grow up navigating multiple languages simultaneously—Algerian Arabic dialects, Tamazight (Berber), Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), and French. The addition of English as a foreign language introduces both opportunities and complications. Unlike previous generations who encountered English at the secondary or university level, today's young learners are expected to begin acquiring English skills in a foundational stage of cognitive and linguistic development. Yet, the pedagogical infrastructure to support this transition—qualified teachers, adapted curricula, and instructional resources—remains underdeveloped.

While Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories offer valuable insights into the processes of language learning, many of these frameworks were formulated in monolingual or bilingual contexts. Their applicability to Algeria's multilingual classrooms remains underexplored. Furthermore, the research literature on EFL acquisition in Algeria is disproportionately focused on secondary and tertiary levels, with limited attention paid to the primary stage, where early linguistic foundations are formed.

This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the cognitive, pedagogical, and sociolinguistic challenges that Algerian primary

school pupils face when acquiring English. Through a mixed-methods approach that includes both qualitative case studies and quantitative surveys, the research investigates how SLA theories can be contextualized and adapted to inform more effective language instruction in Algeria's unique educational environment.

This study was designed to explore four central research questions concerning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in Algerian primary schools:

1. What are the main EFL-related language difficulties encountered by Algerian primary school pupils?
2. How does the multilingual context of Algeria impact children's acquisition of English?
3. What teaching practices are currently employed to address these issues in EFL classrooms?
4. What pedagogical strategies can improve EFL learning among young learners in Algeria?

The paper proceeds by reviewing key SLA theories and educational research relevant to multilingual contexts, analyzing field data from diverse Algerian school settings, and offering practical recommendations for policy and pedagogy. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of English language education in Algeria and to support evidence-based improvements in teacher training, curriculum design, and language policy implementation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Understanding the acquisition of English by Algerian primary school pupils necessitates grounding in both classical and contemporary theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). A foundational theory that continues to shape EFL pedagogy is Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which argues that learners acquire language most efficiently when exposed to input slightly beyond their current level of competence—termed "i+1" (Krashen, 1985). In the Algerian context, however, this principle is often difficult to apply. Limited exposure to English in both school and society constrains

pupils' access to rich, comprehensible input. This lack of linguistic immersion poses a significant barrier to language acquisition, particularly in regions where Arabic and French dominate communicative and instructional spheres (Asseum & Aissaoui, 2024).

Another influential framework is Jim Cummins' distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). While young learners may develop conversational fluency in English relatively quickly, they tend to struggle with academic language tasks that require abstract reasoning and metalinguistic awareness (Cummins, 2000). This disparity is especially evident in multilingual societies like Algeria, where pupils are simultaneously navigating multiple languages with different roles in education, home, and media (Serai, 2022).

The Interlanguage Theory also remains highly relevant in examining the progression of Algerian EFL learners. Interlanguage, an evolving linguistic system shaped by learners' first languages, often exhibits characteristics of cross-linguistic transfer (Selinker, 1972). In Algeria, pupils' dominant languages—Algerian Arabic dialects, Berber, and French—tend to influence their English production in both beneficial and obstructive ways. More recently, this theoretical insight has been expanded by translanguaging studies, which show that learners consciously and strategically shift across languages to compensate for linguistic gaps, reflecting a fluid and dynamic multilingual competence (Serai, 2022; Abdellaoui, 2023).

Modern SLA research has also moved toward incorporating sociocognitive dimensions, particularly through frameworks such as the L2 Motivational Self System and Attribution Theory. These approaches emphasize the learner's identity, perceived competence, and future aspirations as critical determinants of success (Dörnyei, 2009; Sebai & Meccawy, 2025). Such psychological factors are particularly salient in Algerian classrooms, where English is often viewed as aspirational yet distant from daily experience.

2.2 Multilingualism and Education

Algeria's educational environment is deeply embedded in a complex multilingual framework, comprising Algerian Arabic dialects (Darja), Tamazight (Berber), French, and, more recently, English. While multilingualism is often associated with cognitive advantages—such as enhanced metalinguistic awareness, flexible thinking, and improved problem-solving abilities—its benefits are not always evenly realized in educational settings (Bialystok, 2001). In Algeria, language functions are highly stratified: Darja is used in informal communication, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in academic and formal domains, French in scientific and administrative sectors, and English as a recent addition in primary education (Benrabah, 2014).

This stratification creates an educational paradox. Learners are frequently exposed to multiple languages simultaneously, but in disjointed ways that may result in language confusion and inconsistent proficiency across domains. Recent studies emphasize that when language instruction lacks coherence or a clear pedagogical framework, young learners may experience difficulties in separating linguistic systems, leading to habitual code-switching and hybrid forms of expression (Badari, 2024; Sayeh & Razkane, 2022).

Recent literature emphasizes the complex sociolinguistic interplay between Arabic, Tamazight, French, and English. Bouherar & Salem (2025) argue that a meaningful multilingual curriculum must move beyond policy to practice, advocating for region-sensitive pedagogies. Similarly, Hadjeris (2025) introduces the concept of "pluriversal linguistic citizenship", urging educators to embrace learner identities that cut across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Research shows that students' success in English increases when instruction is contextually grounded in their first languages and cultures (Rabehi, 2025). However, uncoordinated language use continues to confuse learners, resulting in fragmented competencies and overreliance on translation.

2.3 Language Learning Difficulties in EFL Contexts

The challenges faced by young learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in Algeria mirror those observed across

similar multilingual and postcolonial contexts. One of the most persistent issues is limited vocabulary acquisition, largely due to restricted exposure to English both inside and outside the classroom (Khaled, 2023). Without authentic communicative contexts or access to engaging materials, learners struggle to build the lexical range necessary for basic comprehension and expression.

Pronunciation presents a persistent challenge for many young Algerian EFL learners. Difficulties often arise not only from phonological differences between English and the learners' first languages but also from the lack of systematic phonetic instruction in early EFL curricula. Learners may struggle with producing English sounds that are phonetically similar but articulatorily different from those in Algerian Arabic or Berber, such as vowel contrasts and consonant clusters uncommon in their native phonological systems. Additionally, many teachers lack training in teaching pronunciation explicitly, which means that learners are left to approximate unfamiliar sounds using their existing language repertoires. This leads to a reliance on L1-influenced pronunciation patterns, contributing to intelligibility issues and reduced oral confidence (Reyane, 2023; Abdellaoui, 2023). Reading difficulties are compounded by the linguistic shift from right-to-left (in Arabic) to left-to-right (in English), as well as differences in decoding strategies and orthographic systems (Wagner et al., 2022). Writing in English also presents significant obstacles, including syntactic transfer from Arabic or French, a lack of exposure to cohesive devices, and underdeveloped skills in planning and organizing ideas (Akram, 2024; Letaief & Hadi, 2023).

Recent studies reaffirm that vocabulary and pronunciation remain core challenges in Algerian EFL classrooms. Sennagh & Sibachir (2024) observed persistent interference from Arabic and French in both written and oral production. Boualli (2025) highlights the additional challenge of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), suggesting that learners often struggle with pragmatics and cultural nuances due to limited exposure.

A growing area of concern is the impact of dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties in EFL. Folia & Malisiova (2025) conducted a cross-national review—including Algeria—and reported a lack of preparedness among EFL teachers to identify or support dyslexic pupils, further disadvantaging them in English classes.

2.4 Teaching Practices and Pedagogical Challenges

The effectiveness of EFL education at the primary level depends critically on the quality and relevance of teaching practices. In the Algerian context, however, several systemic issues hinder the implementation of age-appropriate and communicative teaching methodologies. One of the most pressing concerns is the shortage of trained EFL teachers at the primary level. Many teachers have backgrounds in secondary or tertiary education and lack training in how to teach younger learners (Reyane, 2023).

Instructional methods currently employed in many classrooms still reflect outdated models such as the grammar-translation method. In this model, learners memorize rules and lists of vocabulary without practicing real-world communication, thereby developing limited functional proficiency (Abdellaoui, 2023). Another major instructional challenge involves the limited amount of classroom time allocated to English, often just one to two hours per week. This restricted exposure makes it difficult to reinforce language learning effectively, especially in large classes with diverse learning needs (Akram, 2024; Hussaini Adam & Kerkeb, 2024). Taibi & Daffri (2023) argue that Algerian EFL instruction remains locked in outdated paradigms influenced by academic coloniality. The new EFL policy shift (2023) toward English at earlier grades lacks classroom-level follow-through, due in part to resource and training deficits (Bouherar & Salem, 2025).

Still, promising alternatives are emerging. R'boul (2025) documents how low-cost storytelling and project-based learning improved oral fluency and engagement among primary pupils in the Maghreb. Likewise, Boukef et al. (2025) explore how pedagogical translation between Arabic and French can scaffold English learning if used consciously, not as a crutch.

The reviewed literature converges on several key insights about second language acquisition within Algeria's multilingual educational landscape. SLA theories offer critical lenses through which to interpret pupils' struggles in acquiring English. However, these theories must be contextualized within the realities of diglossia, cross-linguistic transfer, and fragmented instructional environments.

Multilingualism, though potentially enriching, becomes a source of linguistic confusion when not supported by coherent pedagogical and policy frameworks. Learners' difficulties in vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, reading, and writing are compounded by systemic challenges: limited classroom time, insufficiently trained teachers, and pedagogical approaches that fail to prioritize communicative competence.

3. Methodology

To address our research questions comprehensively, the study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. This design was selected to balance the breadth of information needed to map linguistic trends with the depth of insight necessary to understand classroom practices and sociolinguistic influences.

3.1 Research Design

The study followed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, wherein quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and analyzed separately before being integrated during interpretation. This structure enabled the researcher to identify widespread linguistic difficulties (RQ1), examine the sociolinguistic environment's influence (RQ2), observe classroom pedagogy (RQ3), and explore contextually grounded strategies for improvement (RQ4).

Quantitative data, collected through pupil surveys and language assessments, focused on identifying patterns in learner difficulties and linguistic exposure. Qualitative data, obtained through classroom observations, teacher and pupil interviews, provided insights into instructional methods, language attitudes, and the multilingual setting's role in shaping English acquisition.

3.2 Research Sites and Participants

The study was conducted in three Algerian wilayas: Algiers, Laghouat, and Boumerdes. These regions were strategically selected based on their contrasting sociolinguistic profiles and educational environments:

- Algiers represents a highly urban, French-influenced context, where pupils are often exposed to French both at home and in public life.
- Laghouat, located in the central highlands, offers a more Arabic-dominant linguistic setting, with pupils demonstrating greater curiosity toward English than toward French.
- Medea provides a semi-urban context where French and Arabic coexist, and learners' attitudes toward English appear transitional.

A total of 180 pupils, aged 8–10 years (Grades 3 to 5), were surveyed using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across age groups, gender, and region. In addition, 12 English language teachers (four per wilaya) and 18 pupils (six per wilaya) participated in the qualitative component of the study. These participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals who could offer detailed insight into teaching practices and language experiences.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

To address the research questions, multiple instruments were developed and deployed, each targeting a different dimension of the study:

- Learner Surveys (RQ1, RQ2): Pupils completed a structured questionnaire designed to assess their perceived challenges in learning English, their exposure to English outside school (TV, internet, family), and their attitudes toward English in comparison to Arabic and French. The survey used Likert-scale items and open-ended prompts adapted to young learners' comprehension levels.
- Language Assessments (RQ1): Pupils undertook brief oral and written tasks designed to assess vocabulary recall, pronunciation accuracy, and simple sentence construction. These assessments provided objective data to triangulate with the pupils' self-reports.

➤ **Classroom Observations (RQ2, RQ3):** Over a three-week period, classrooms in each region were observed using a structured observation protocol. Focus areas included teacher language use (English, Arabic, French), interactional patterns, instructional techniques (e.g., repetition, visual aids), and pupil engagement.

➤ **Semi-Structured Interviews (RQ2, RQ3, RQ4):** In-depth interviews were conducted with both teachers and selected pupils. Questions for teachers focused on instructional strategies, curriculum constraints, classroom management, and their perceptions of English within the local language ecology. Pupil interviews explored language preferences, emotional responses to learning English, and reflections on classroom experiences.

Each instrument was developed in Arabic and French, with simplified English versions where appropriate, to accommodate varying levels of proficiency among younger pupils.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection phase spanned eight weeks, organized into overlapping stages to maximize efficiency and minimize disruption:

➤ **Weeks 1–2:** A pilot study was conducted with a separate school cohort in Laghouat to test survey and assessment instruments. Items were revised for clarity, and internal consistency was verified using Cronbach's alpha.

➤ **Weeks 3–4:** Pupil surveys and language assessments were administered in all six participating schools. Teachers assisted in clarifying instructions but were not involved in scoring or interpretation to reduce bias.

➤ **Weeks 5–7:** Classroom observations were carried out during regular English lessons. Each observed class was visited at least three times to allow for a representative picture of teaching practices. Teacher and pupil interviews were conducted during school breaks or after hours, depending on availability and preference.

➤ **Week 8:** Final data consolidation took place, including informal debriefings with teachers to clarify any observed patterns or unexpected findings.

All ethical protocols were rigorously followed, including informed consent from parents, the right to withdraw, and full anonymization of participant identities.

4. Findings of the Results

This section presents a thematically organized and theory-informed interpretation of the mixed-methods data collected from Algiers, Laghouat, and Médéa. Findings are analyzed with reference to core Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories and triangulated across quantitative scores, learner/teacher perceptions, and classroom observation.

4.1 Regional Variations in Proficiency: Rethinking Urban Advantage

Quantitative data reveal significant regional disparities in learners' English proficiency (Table 1). Pupils in Laghouat consistently outperformed their peers in vocabulary recall ($M = 7.8$) and pronunciation accuracy ($M = 7.1$), with a slight edge in sentence formation. This finding challenges assumptions that urban centers inherently provide better linguistic outcomes. Laghouat's semi-rural context, with less linguistic interference from French, may offer a more favorable language ecology for acquiring English phonology and lexicon. Additionally, learner motivation appeared stronger in Laghouat, where English was perceived as novel and prestigious, contrasting with the indifference observed in Algiers. This aligns with Norton's (2000) theory of language and identity, where learner investment is shaped by social positioning and symbolic value.

Table 1. Mean Scores in Core English Skills by Region (n = 60 per wilaya)

Skill	Laghouat	Médéa	Algiers
Vocabulary Recall	7.8 (±1.2)	6.3 (±1.1)	5.9 (±1.4)
Pronunciation Accuracy	7.1 (±1.3)	6.0 (±1.0)	5.5 (±1.3)
Sentence Formation	6.9 (±1.1)	6.5 (±1.2)	6.0 (±1.3)

4.2 Media Exposure as Informal Input: Supporting the Input Hypothesis

A statistically significant correlation between weekly media exposure and vocabulary performance ($r = .61, p < .01$) underscores the critical role of informal, out-of-school English input. Pupils who engaged with English-language media for more than five hours per week—via YouTube, cartoons, or music—demonstrated superior lexical knowledge and pronunciation skills (Table 2).

Table 2: Performance Based on Levels of Media Exposure

Exposure Level	Vocabulary Score	Pronunciation Score
High	(5+ hrs/week)	7.9 7.3
Medium	(1–4 hrs/week)	6.5 6.1
Low/None	None	5.3 5.0

This pattern supports Krashen’s (1985) Input Hypothesis, emphasizing the necessity of comprehensible input, as well as Schmidt’s (1990) Noticing Hypothesis, wherein repeated exposure to salient linguistic forms enhances intake. Learner testimonials further illustrated how digital content served as both a linguistic and motivational resource:

“English is from YouTube — I want to speak like them.” – Pupil, Laghouat

“In class it’s like science. But on TV it’s like play.” – Pupil, Médéa

4.3 Learner Challenges: Beyond Aptitude to Input and Methodology

Survey responses and interviews identified vocabulary retention (63%) and pronunciation (49%) as the most prevalent difficulties, followed by issues with reading/listening directionality (42%), attributed to script orientation shifts from Arabic to English (Table 3). These challenges reflect not a lack of aptitude but a lack of sustained exposure, multisensory learning, and contextual use.

Table 3. Self-Reported Language Challenges (n = 180)

Reported Difficulty	% Reporting
Vocabulary Retention	63%
Pronunciation of English Sounds	49%
Reading/Listening Directionality	42%

The lack of auditory modeling and minimal classroom use of English were consistent across all sites, limiting phonological development and reinforcing shallow processing.

4.4 Pedagogical Tensions: Traditional Practices vs. Emergent Innovation

Observations revealed a dominance of grammar-translation and teacher-led instruction, limiting learner output and communicative competence. Across most classrooms, code-switching to Arabic and French was frequent but unstructured, amplifying L1 interference. Visual and audio aids were rare.

Yet, in Laghouat, teachers improvised innovative strategies—mobile apps, drawing games, and roleplays—which fostered active participation and peer correction. These grassroots practices reflect Kumaravadivelu’s (2006) “postmethod pedagogy,” where teacher agency emerges in response to localized constraints.

4.5 Triangulating Findings: Implications for Policy and Practice

A triangulation matrix was developed to synthesize findings and highlight convergence across data sources. Thematic links between learner performance, instructional quality, and media exposure underscore systemic issues—but also reveal paths for targeted reform.

These findings reinforce the need for flexible, context-sensitive reforms in Algeria's early EFL programs. Rather than applying uniform solutions, policy should recognize the influence of regional linguistic ecologies, prioritize teacher training in communicative and multimodal methods, and integrate learners' informal digital experiences into formal curricula.

5. Discussion

This section synthesizes the study's findings in relation to the four research questions (RQs), interpreting them through relevant SLA frameworks while considering the impact of multilingualism, instructional practices, and sociocultural factors on English acquisition among Algerian primary pupils.

5.1 RQ1 – What Are the Main EFL-Related Language Difficulties Encountered by Algerian Primary Pupils?

The study identifies vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation as the most persistent challenges, confirmed through test results, self-reports, and classroom observations. Learners frequently reported forgetting new words, especially in contexts lacking repeated exposure or meaningful use. Pronunciation difficulties were largely attributed to the absence of auditory modeling and the phonological influence of Arabic and French.

These challenges align with research by Lightbown and Spada (2013) and Cameron (2001), who emphasize frequent auditory input and contextualized vocabulary instruction for young learners. However, the Algerian multilingual context adds complexity. In addition to L1 transfer, learners contend with L3 interference from French, which exerts both lexical and phonological influence. This reinforces the need to expand SLA models to better capture multilingual acquisition

environments, where cross-linguistic interaction is layered and context-specific.

5.2 RQ2 – How Does Algeria’s Multilingual Context Affect Children’s English Language Acquisition?

Findings reveal that the concurrent introduction of French and English—without adequate sequencing—often leads to cross-linguistic interference, syntactic confusion, and cognitive overload. Rather than additive bilingualism, the current model introduces competing inputs without structural coordination, affecting learner focus and accuracy.

Importantly, the sociolinguistic profile of each region influenced learning outcomes. In Laghouat, where French has a weaker social presence, learners performed better and exhibited more enthusiasm for English. In contrast, pupils in Algiers—where French dominates—struggled more with English and viewed it as secondary. These findings are consistent with Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, illustrating how perceived language status and learner identity influence motivation and performance.

Krashen’s Input Hypothesis (1985) assumes the availability of stable, comprehensible input. Yet in fragmented multilingual settings, input is inconsistent, often code-switched, and insufficiently English-focused. This supports calls for translanguaging and ecological approaches that recognize learners’ dynamic linguistic repertoires and the sociopolitical dimensions of language exposure.

Additionally, the simultaneous introduction of two foreign languages—French and English—at the same developmental stage without clear curricular boundaries risks fragmented proficiency. While early multilingual exposure can enhance metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok, 2001), in this case it often led to confusion, false cognates, and defaulting to French under pressure. These outcomes reflect Cummins’ (2000) threshold hypothesis, suggesting that unless adequate proficiency is reached in each language, academic benefits are unlikely to materialize.

5.3 RQ3 – What Instructional Practices Are Currently Used in EFL Classrooms?

Across all three wilayas, instruction remained largely teacher-centered, translation-driven, and reliant on the grammar-translation method. This approach limited opportunities for spontaneous speech, neglected visual/auditory stimuli, and reinforced passive learning habits. English was infrequently used as a medium of classroom communication, and instructional time was minimal.

However, the study observed small but impactful innovations in Laghouat, where some teachers introduced roleplays, mobile apps, and storytelling activities. These practices reflect what Kumaravadivelu (2006) terms "postmethod pedagogy," where educators act as reflective practitioners adapting methods to local needs. These grassroots initiatives showed promising results, including improved learner participation, peer interaction, and contextualized language use.

5.4 RQ4 – What Strategies Can Enhance Learner Motivation and Engagement?

Informal media exposure emerged as a critical factor in learner motivation and performance. Pupils who regularly engaged with English-language cartoons, YouTube content, and music consistently outperformed peers with limited or no exposure—particularly in vocabulary retention and pronunciation. This substantiates Krashen's comprehensible input theory, while extending it into learner-directed, media-rich environments.

Within classrooms, even simple interventions—drawing games, storytelling, group work—proved effective when implemented. These strategies support Brewster et al. (2002) and Nikolov (2009), who advocate for multisensory, affective learning environments that engage young learners emotionally and cognitively. Importantly, these approaches do not require high-tech resources but do depend on teacher initiative and training.

5.5 Broader Implications and Theoretical Contributions

The findings challenge monolithic understandings of SLA by revealing that English learning in Algeria is deeply shaped by local language ecologies, societal language hierarchies, and learner identity formations. The higher performance of pupils in Laghouat, a semi-rural region with minimal French interference, questions urban-centric assumptions about educational advantage and highlights the role of reduced linguistic competition in fostering clearer English acquisition. The study underscores the need to reconceptualize SLA models for multilingual, postcolonial contexts. Traditional bilingual models often assume stable L1–L2 dynamics, which fail to capture Algeria’s fluid, stratified, and overlapping language use. Translanguaging and decolonial SLA frameworks offer more nuanced lenses through which to interpret learner behavior in such settings.

Finally, the observed pedagogical innovations underscore the transformative potential of teacher agency. Despite structural limitations, some educators are already reimagining instruction in ways that respond to learners’ sociocultural realities. Scaling these practices will require systemic support, localized training programs, and curricular reforms that validate both global competence and local relevance.

In sum, early English acquisition in Algeria is not just a cognitive or instructional challenge—it is a deeply sociolinguistic process shaped by history, hierarchy, and hope. A multifaceted, locally responsive approach is essential for unlocking the full potential of English learning in primary education.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the multifaceted challenges and opportunities in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to primary school pupils across three sociolinguistically distinct regions in Algeria—Algiers, Laghouat, and Médéa. By employing a convergent mixed-methods approach, it illuminated how multilingual environments, instructional practices, and informal learning contexts interact to shape young learners’ English acquisition.

Findings consistently revealed that vocabulary and pronunciation are key areas of difficulty. These challenges stem less from cognitive limitations than from systemic factors such as minimal exposure, traditional teaching approaches, and insufficient instructional time. Notably, pupils in Laghouat outperformed their peers, suggesting that lower exposure to French and stronger learner motivation can create more favorable conditions for English learning.

Informal digital media emerged as a critical driver of incidental learning. Pupils with regular access to English-language content outside school displayed higher levels of lexical knowledge and pronunciation accuracy. These findings underscore the value of integrating informal learning channels into classroom instruction.

Encouragingly, some teachers—especially in Laghouat—are already implementing innovative strategies, including mobile-assisted learning, storytelling, and group work. These grassroots practices highlight the potential of teacher-led reform and align with postmethod pedagogy principles.

To advance EFL instruction in Algeria, the study recommends context-sensitive curriculum reform, expanded teacher training focused on child-centered methodologies, and the inclusion of multimodal, culturally relevant materials. Policy should recognize regional linguistic diversity and support bottom-up innovation in tandem with top-down planning.

Ultimately, this study affirms that early EFL education in Algeria is a complex, situated endeavor. While challenges remain, the building blocks for transformative change are already present—in the creativity of teachers, the enthusiasm of learners, and the evolving sociolinguistic landscape in which English is being learned.

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