

## **Language Attitudes towards Teaching Tamazight Language in Tlemcen's Primary Schools**

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### **Abstract**

The language situation of Algeria presents an extraordinary mosaic picture, characterised by the existence of a panoply of languages and varieties. Namely, Modern Standard Arabic, French, which are generally used in formal settings while Algerian Arabic and Berber with its regional variations are found in informal contexts. This linguistic diversity presents complex diglossic and multilingual situations. In turn, these linguistic situations have amplified the tension between speakers, especially with the amalgamation of Tamazight in language teaching. To this vein, the current research paper is geared to deal with the question of language attitudes towards the inclusion of Tamazight in the Algerian educational system in general and teaching it in Tlemcen primary schools in particular. In other words, it addresses the implementation of the new language policy which requires teaching Tamazight to all children and the attitudes of both parents and teachers towards the new policy. In this sense, data were collected quantitatively and qualitatively through a questionnaire and an interview. To this end, the findings indicate that the majority of the informants shared negative attitudes towards teaching Tamazight in primary schools. It was also found that most informants declared that Tamazight represents a part of Algerian identity, although they were not motivated towards incorporating it in the new educational system.

**Key words:** Algerian educational system, attitudes, language policy, Tamazight, Tlemcen speech community

## **Introduction**

Since 2000, Algeria has conducted many reforms in its educational system. The inclusion of teaching Tamazight is among them. This step has been regarded as a turning point in the Algerian educational system because the introduction of Tamazight in the Algerian primary school is considered the first step for the revival of Berber identity which constitutes an important part in Algerian history, culture and linguistic diversity.

Experts in the field of language teaching have recognised the fact that the introduction of Tamazight in the educational process is an important step in language revival because this may strengthen national unity. This means that building a national identity must take into account that the Arabic language is not the only language that reflects the real identity of the Algerian society. Hence, the revival of Tamazight and its introduction in education has moved from a political policy into recognition as the second national language. This event opens the gateway for the language to regain a part in the Algerian culture and identity, although it is a difficult step. In this vein, Maddy-Weitzman (2011) highlights that: “the process of reshaping and redefining the meaning of [...] Algerian identit[y] has already begun and will surely be fraught with tension and difficulty” (p. 44) (as quoted in Recharad et al., 2007, p. 64).

Although there have been enormous efforts to introduce Tamazight to all schools in all wilayas and at all levels, the language was taught only in four Kabyle wilayas. In 2006, the Minister of National Education, Mister Boubekeur Benbouzid, took the first limelight to revive Tamazight as a national language and endeavoured to introduce it in the BEM<sup>1</sup> and Baccalaureate exams. However, the reality that faces them is that “there are no students who can suitably read, write, recite or conjugate any Amazigh verb in the three principal tenses!” (Maddy-Weitsman, 2011, p. 193). In contrast, this does not mean that teaching Tamazight is restricted to Kabyle regions. Indeed, the language has been introduced to some primary schools in some

wilayas such as Tlemcen where there are some regions that still use Berber expressions like Beni Boussaid in Maghnia and BeniSnous.

To this end, the choice of embarking upon this research work sprang from the fact that there is a lack of scholarship about teaching Tamazight in Algeria in comparison to Morocco where linguists and experts in language teaching conducted many researches, hoping that this may help in improving teaching materials. Thereby, this research paper aims at identifying the reasons behind the failure of teaching Tamazight in primary schools of non-Kabyle communities through testing their attitudes towards teaching Tamazight. It also implies to take into account the teaching situation of Tamazight in some primary schools. Therefore, the current research paper argues for a rational and a consistent way that may help in introducing Tamazight in all Algerian primary schools. From the foregoing discussion, our research enquiries fall on the ensuing research questions which are presented as follows:

1. What are the attitudes of Tlemcen community towards the recognition of Tamazight as a national language?
2. How do they react to its introduction in primary schools?
3. What are the reasons behind the failure of teaching Tamazight in non-Kabyle communities?

Taking into consideration the above research questions, the following hypotheses can be put forward:

1. Tlemcen speakers share negative attitudes towards the inclusion of Tamazight in primary schools, although a small minority is for its introduction since it is a part of the Algerian identity and pupils have to learn more about the components of their culture.
2. They accept the introduction of Tamazight, although they are not in favour of its teaching.
3. Experts in the field of education failed to introduce Tamazight due to the lack of teaching tools and the negative attitudes displaced towards incorporating it in the new educational system.

## **1- The Challenge of Integrating Tamazight in the Algerian Educational System**

During the 1980s and 1990s, the Algerians start demanding an end to the Francophonie status of Algerian school and administration. However, this bilingual state, where Arabic is regarded as a second language to the exclusion of the Tamazight language and other varieties, has led to much controversy and a struggle for the recognition of Tamazight as a national language. This struggle resulted in a great tension leading to strikes for one year (1994-5). The strikes were “touching all levels of education from grammar to medical schools” (Silverstein, 2014, p. 219). These strikes led to a boycott and a declaration of a war which hastened the authorities “to create a High Amazigh Commission (HCA) to study how to incorporate *amazighité* into the national media and educational structures” (Silverstein, 2004, p. 219). In the same line of thought, Ennaji (2014) stated that “The Algerian state attempted to defuse Amazigh demands by making cultural concessions including the creation of a course in Amazigh Studies at the university level, Tamazight broadcasts on television, and recognizing Berber identity as a pillar of national identity” (p. 26).

In 2006, experts tried to find solutions in order to integrate Tamazight in the educational system. They found that there was a problem with its scripts. Some of them agreed that Tamazight should take Arabic scripts, i.e., they sought to contain “Tamazight within the Arab language and culture’s symbolic universe through steps to standardise the writing of Tamazight in Arabic script” (Maddy-Weitzman, 2011, p. 193). On the other hand, Maddy-Weitzman (2011) added that there were many experts who were against this view claiming that:

The subject seemed to have been long ago in favor of the Latin script, thanks to the efforts of Kabyle Diaspora intellectuals who had taken the lead over many years in working to transform an essentially oral language into modern, written one. (p. 193)

They also maintained that using the Arabic script is a waste of time. They claimed that “Turkey [...] used the Latin script without affecting its Muslim identity” (Maddy-Weitzman, 2011, p. 194).

Additionally, one may argue that Tamazight teaching remains an elective not a compulsory subject, even though there have been indelible efforts to introduce it in the Algerian educational system for both communities since it strengthens the Algerian identity and deepens the new generations’ knowledge of their cultural heritage. Hence, it is interesting to note that the efforts made and partial recognition of Tamazight in 2002 “can be considered a first step towards the establishment of a society that values its plurality” (Benrabah, 2013, p.69).

## **2- Methodology**

The current study is an exploration which depends on quantitative and qualitative research tools mainly a questionnaire and a focus group interview.

- Quantitative: a semi structured questionnaire was distributed to 110 informants from different occupations, genders, ages and educational backgrounds. In fact, the central aim behind the use of the questionnaire is to test the informants’ attitudes towards the introduction of Tamazight in primary schools.
- Qualitative: a focus group interview was made with 10 respondents from three primary schools. The informants were from distinct educational backgrounds and occupations.

## **3- Research Sample**

As mentioned earlier, the sample of the current research paper consists of 110 informants from different occupations, educational background, ages and genders since relying on just one parameter to test the attitudes of the respondents may not be reliable. Furthermore, the researchers have selected 10 teachers from three schools since they have a direct relation with the subject.

The central reason behind selecting teachers only for the interview is that they will provide the researcher with relevant information about the educational system and the attitudes of both pupils and their parents towards learning Tamazight since it remains an elective module. The following table provides an overview about the participants:

**Table 1. Informants' participation in the questionnaire**

Occupation	Number	Males	Females	Number of the Questionnaire Returned
Teachers	50	16	34	50
Doctors	13	03	10	13
Students	27	13	14	27
Shopkeepers	09	06	03	09
Administration	11	07	04	11
Total	110	45	65	11

Hence, data of the questionnaire had been collected from different regions in the Wilaya of Tlemcen and during the whole year. All the informants answered all questions and returned the questionnaire. The researchers concentrated on educated informants to provide more information to test their attitudes.

#### **4- Data Analysis and Results Discussion**

##### **Questionnaire**

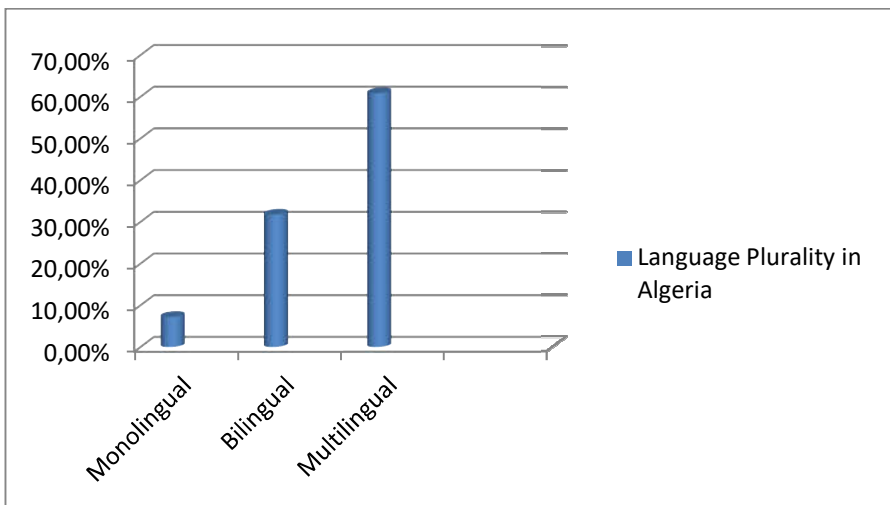
The questionnaire was answered anonymously and contained six sections. However, the researchers had taken five essential questions that have a link with the research questions stated above.

**First Question:** Do you consider Algeria a monolingual, a bilingual or a multilingual country?

- Monolingual.
- Bilingual.
- Multilingual.

**Table 2. Language plurality in Algeria**

<b>First Question</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Expressed in %</b>
Monolingual	05	03	08	7.27%
Bilingual	12	23	35	31.81%
Multilingual	28	39	67	60.90%
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>110</b>	



**Figure 1. Language plurality in Algeria**

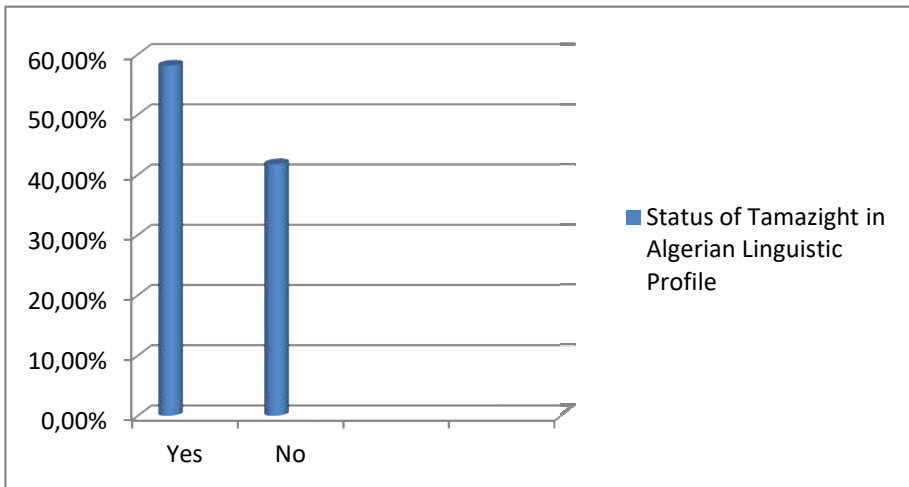
The central aim of this question was to test the informants' knowledge about the languages used in Algeria and linguistic pluralism. In this regard, most of the informants (60.90%) declared that Algeria is a multilingual country, while 31.81% affirmed that it is a bilingual state. The first informants claimed that Algerians have knowledge in three languages; mainly, Standard Arabic, French and English. In contrast, other respondents argued that they have a good linguistic background in both French and Arabic and not in English. Consequently, Algeria is classed in the list of bilingual countries.

**Second Question:** Do you consider Tamazight as a language?

- Yes
- No

**Table 3. The status of Tamazight in Algerian linguistic profile**

Second Question	Males	Females	Total	Expressed in %
Yes	23	41	64	58.18%
No	22	24	46	41.81%
<b>Total</b>	45	65	110	



**Figure 2. The status of Tamazight in Algerian linguistic profile**

As shown in the above table and figure, about 58.18% of the participants argued that Tamazight is a language and a part of the Algerian linguistic profile, whereas about 41.81% of the respondents highlighted that Tamazight is not a language. The first informants justified their answers claiming that it is a language that has a grammar, vocabulary and a written literature. They also confirmed that the language has gained recognition as a national language, while the second group maintained that it is a variety which needs further standardisation. They added that most of its literature, grammar rules, syntax and semantics are not written in books. They further observed



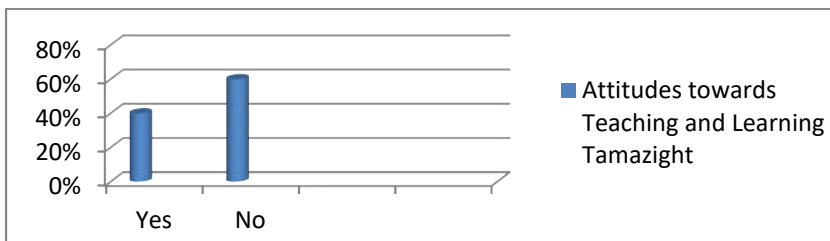
that in order to consider a variety a language, it should have a written not an oral literature, grammar books and dictionaries. They also added that in order to standardise it, experts face the problem of which variety they have to select.

**Third Question:** Do you think that Algerians have to learn Tamazight?

- Yes
- No

**Table 4. Attitudes of Tlemcen individuals towards teaching and learning Tamazight**

Question Three	Males	Females	Total	Expressed in %
Yes	11	33	44	40%
No	34	32	66	60%
<b>Total</b>	45	65	110	



**Figure 3. Attitudes of Tlemcen individuals towards teaching and learning Tamazight**

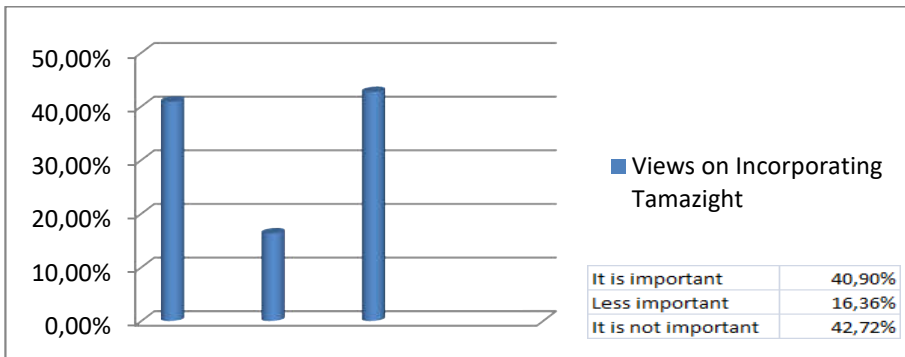
This question has attracted the attention of the informants since their views and attitudes vary towards teaching Tamazight. In fact, about 60% of the informants declared that Tamazight should not be taught or learnt since it is a variety spoken by a small minority, while most of the Algerians speak different Algerian Arabic dialects. On the other side, about 40% of them shared positive attitudes towards teaching and learning Tamazight since it constitutes an indelible part of the Algerian language, culture and identity. They also added that the Algerians should learn Tamazight in order to have knowledge about the linguistic diversity that exists in their country.

**Fourth Question:** What do you think about the incorporation of Tamazight in the Algerian educational system?

- It is important.
- Less important.
- It is not important.

**Table 5. Views on the incorporation of Tamazight in the Algerian educational system**

Fourth Question	Males	Females	Total	Expressed in %
It is important	12	33	45	40.90%
Less important	07	11	18	16.36%
It is not important	26	21	47	42.72%
<b>Total</b>	45	65	110	



**Figure 4. Views on the incorporation of Tamazight in the Algerian educational system**

As the previous table and figure demonstrate, about 42.72% of the informants maintained that learning Tamazight is not important, whereas 40.90% of them were with the view that introducing Tamazight in the Algerian educational system is of paramount importance. The main reason behind the negative view towards the incorporation of Tamazight lies on the fact that this process faces many obstacles due to the lack of pedagogical tools, while other participants based their views on the point that the language needs to be revived since it is the language of their ancestors and has to be preserved because it reflects an essential part of the Algerian culture

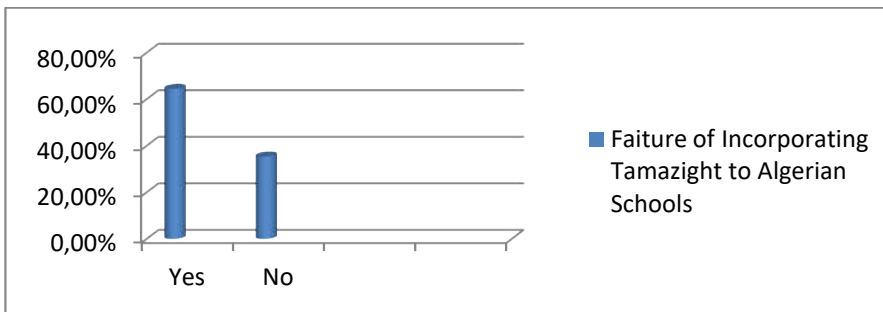
and identity. They also said that it has to be standardised and introduced in the educational system like the Arabic Language.

**Fifth Question:** Do you think that the Algerian educational system fails to incorporate teaching Tamazight to non-Kabyle communities?

- Yes
- No

**Table 6. Views towards the failure of incorporating Tamazight to Algerian schools**

Fifth Question	Males	Females	Total	Expressed in %
Yes	31	40	71	64.54%
No	14	25	39	35.45%
<b>Total</b>	45	65	110	



**Figure 5. Views towards the failure of incorporating Tamazight in the Algerian schools**

In fact, the views of the respondents vary as the previous table and figure illustrate. About 64.54% of the participants posited the view that the new reforms, which attempt to integrate Tamazight in the Algerian educational system, have failed in non-Kabyle regions since the language has been put as an elective choice, not, compulsory. They commented on this view maintaining that the new generation needs to study international languages that they need in research, mainly English. In contrast, about 35.45% of the participants disagreed in the view. They based their opinions on the point that the system does not fail to incorporate Tamazight in the Algerian schools since it is taught in Kabyle regions and some parts of the country.

## **Interview**

As mentioned earlier, the interview was held with 10 teachers from three schools. One primary school was in Beni Boussaid in Maghnia and the remaining schools were in Tlemcen town. The interviewees gave the researchers different views depending on their experiences. Henceforth, the researchers had taken the most important questions from the interview according to the research questions:

**First Question:** What do you think about teaching Tamazight? Is it useful?

Six teachers out of ten claimed that teaching Tamazight is useful but not essential. They agreed that the authorities have taken the first steps towards incorporating the language in the educational background but they made it elective not compulsory; hence it is only selected by Berber pupils for studying. On the other side, four teachers, especially those who teach in Beni Boussaid, argued that teaching Tamazight is essential since it may help in its revival, protection and maintenance. They also added that some experts have taken the limelight on maintaining the language through creating a Berber Department in both Tizi Ouzou (1990) and Bejaia (1991) which opens doors for students to graduate in Berber language and literature.

**Second Question:** Do you think that Tamazight represents the Algerian identity or heritage?

In fact, the answers of the interviewees vary. Two teachers observed that Tamazight constitutes an indelible part of the Algerian identity. They added that it takes an important part of the Algerian cultural heritage and linguistic patrimony since the latter contains a rich literary and oral tradition including proverbs, popular songs, folk tales and riddles which can be published in books of literature and taught to the next generations.

**Third Question:** Is the Tamazight language incorporated in your primary school?

The answers of teachers from the Beni Boussaid region are very interesting and may signal a turning point and a challenge to the failure of teaching Tamazight in non-Kabyle regions. They highlighted that both parents and pupils supported the choice of learning the Tamazight in order to protect their cultural identity because there are many regions in Tlemcen which still use Tamazight or at least its vocabulary such as BeniSnous, Beni Boussaid and Zwiya. They added that these communities speak Algerian Arabic, but their variety is rich in Tamazight vocabulary. However, they declared that they face many difficulties in teaching Tamazight because of the lack of teaching materials.

### **Recommendations and Data Interpretation**

In the light of what has been raised and discussed through this paper, one can suggest that the findings of both the questionnaire and the interview are of paramount importance because they can serve as building stones for further research in order to integrate Tamazight in the educational system in all Algerian schools for all levels. Significantly, the findings demonstrate that preserving linguistic diversity or plurality is a necessity since the country will offer a great deal of openness on other cultures and languages on the one hand and protecting the national heritage which constitutes an eminent place in the Algerian identity on the other hand. In the light of this view, Crystal (2000) posits the following point:

Preservation of linguistic diversity is essential, for language lies at the heart of what it means to be human. If the development of multiple cultures is so important, then the role of languages becomes critical, for cultures are chiefly transmitted through spoken and written languages. (p.33-34)

Most importantly, it can be claimed that the negative attitudes displaced towards teaching Tamazight are based on the claim that it is not essential for international communication and business because English and French enjoy much prestige as languages of developed nations that the Algerians should learn. The results also imply that a

small minority of the respondents shared the view that Tamazight should be valued in order to preserve and maintain a source of their culture and identity. This can be realised if they will push the wheel for the challenge of reviving the language through writing grammar books, dictionaries and turning oral traditions into a written literature.

Interestingly enough, the results also reveal that language diversity in the Algerian context provides a rich terrain for research for specialists in both Didactics and Sociolinguistics, so that it may help in developing more methodical approaches for language planning and policy. Another important result gained from the analyses of data is that there is no need to change or make reforms concerning the introduction of Tamazight in the educational system, but they have to make both pupils and their parents aware of the positive benefits of incorporating the Tamazight language in early education.

## **Conclusion**

The current research paper discusses the status of Tamazight in the Algerian educational system. It is also a contribution that questions language policy and planning undertaken by educationalists. Besides, it attempts to guide people's attitudes towards understanding the benefits of learning Tamazight, which constitutes an indelible part in the Algerian linguistic profile and patrimony. Although the findings of this research paper are just some results and recommendations that shed light on the Algerian linguistic situation on the one hand and language planning in early education on the other, they may be taken as points of departure for more scholarship in order to preserve the cultural heritage for the next generations since reviving a language means protecting its oral traditions. It is also of utmost importance to note that it has to do with the attitudes which should be changed since providing good strategic language planning to introduce the language is not enough and realising positive results cannot be achieved overnight.

## Footnotes

1. Brevet de l'Enseignement Moyen.

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