

The impact of parents' educational level on the Algerian pupils' French language learning at primary schools

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Abstract

The principal objective of this paper is to investigate the impact of parents' educational level on Algerian pupils' French language learning at primary schools. It seeks to highlight how the parental educational level influence learning French. The sample population is selected from five different primary schools from the Wilaya of Tlemcen. It includes pupils from the fifth grade and their teachers of French. The data are collected using a questionnaire and an interview. After the analysis of the results, the researcher finds a significant positive relationship between parents' educational level and pupils' French language learning achievement. In conclusion, the study yields valuable information for researchers and education stakeholders to enable them to help the pupils to perform better in their learning. It can help the parents to support their children in their educational attainment, and to make the teachers aware of the difficulties faced by their pupils, and aid them to adopt relevant strategies to remedy the problems.

Keywords: Educational level; French; language learning; primary schools; pupils.

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1. Introduction

1.1. "Second languages are any languages other than the learner's 'native language' or 'mother tongue'" (Methcell and Myles 2014:5). Learning this type of language is a conscious process that requires taking into consideration many aspects such as the different social backgrounds of the learners. That social context may determine how a person assimilates and develops all the language skills that he/she needs to learn a new language. Many researchers confirm that individuals' second language learning is related to several social factors. **Literature review**

The purpose of this section is to elicit the status of the French language in the Algerian educational system and to shed light on some studies that were made on the effect of parents' educational level on their children's achievement at school.

1.1.1. *The status of the French language in the Algerian educational system*

Algeria is an Arabic country that was colonized for 132 years by the French; consequently, it absorbed the heaviest colonial impact. After Algeria's independence in 1962, the country faced a dualistic educational system inherited from the French period and the strengthening of French in every social and cultural aspect. The Algerian government had to build a new system of education keeping the Arabo-Islamic identity. It tried to restore "the unity of its speech community by using one official and national language which is Classical Arabic" (Nokla, 2021:149). Therefore, it adopted the system of Arabization to solve linguistic problems.

However, that was not a simple task for Algerians, since the French language was a key factor in access to the different fields of work. As a result, there was a clear need to retain French as the medium of instruction in certain branches of education and as a means of access to scientific progress. The use of Arabic and French languages in education and administrative fields appeared as an inevitable task for the Algerian Government. In October 1962, the first president of independent Algeria -Ben Bella declared that Arabic would be taught alongside French. Since then, French is taught in all Algerian primary, middle, and secondary schools and even used as a language of instruction at universities in certain specialties.

1.1.2. *Studies on the effect of Parents' educational level and their children's achievement*

Many studies have tended to identify the relationship between Parents' educational level and their children's achievement. For example, Davis-Kean (2005) conducted a study and found that educational outcomes are influenced by family background in many different and complex ways. In particular, the educational level of the parents which have been consistently found to be an important variable in explaining variance in learner achievement.

She asserts that the assistance, homework monitoring, and motivation the parents provide for their children promote their learning competence. It has been also proven by Asad khan et al. (2015) that high-level educated parents influence their children's achievement and lead them to perform well. An investigation by Dubow et al. (2009) on the effects of parents' education on children's educational and occupational success reveals that learners' educational attainment is linked to parental educational level.

In this respect, Sharma and Jha (2014) find that parents play a very important role in their children's learning since they provide an adequate home environment and educational resources that can influence positively their children's education. As for the study conducted by Plunkett and Bámaca-Gómez (2003), they find that the educational level of the parents is linked to the learning outcomes of the learners, and parents with lower levels of education may not be able to provide appropriate guidance and assistance to their children.

According to Spolsky (1985), second language achievement depends on many conditions including social context which can give opportunities for language learners. And since the parental educational

level is a part of the social context, it can affect educational attainment in general and second language learning in particular.

1.2. Purpose of study

In this study, the researcher intends to identify the influence of the educational level of the parents on French language learning at Algerian primary schools. Accordingly, the present investigation seeks to answer the following questions:

- a. To what extent does the parents' educational level affect the process of learning French at primary schools?
- b. How can the parents' educational level be considered to improve French language learning?

Trying to answer the above research questions the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1- The parents' educational level affects the process of learning French at primary schools in ways that can determine either success or failure of the learner.

H2- Both the parent's educational level and their support are needed to motivate pupils and enhance their language skills. School authorities should also encourage parents who are highly educated to be involved in their children's French language learning and make sure to assist the pupils whose parents have low education.

2. Materials and Methods

Scientific research requires the use of the most adequate method to ensure collecting the suitable data that enables the researcher to answer the questions under investigation. For this reason, the researcher adopts an exploratory case study. In this respect, Nunan (1992) maintains that the case study is a 'hybrid' in that it tends to use many procedures in gathering and analyzing data. Consequently, it helps the investigator to analyze and clarify the impact of the parent's educational level on learning French at the Algerian primary schools.

2.1. Participants and sampling

It is impossible to study the entire population. Hence, the information can be obtained from a small group of the total population in such a way that the data gained is representative of the whole population under investigation. In this respect, Cohen et al. (2007:100) argue that investigators "[...] often need to be able to obtain data from a smaller group or subset of the total population in such a way that the knowledge gained is representative of the total population under study".

Accordingly, in this research, the sample population includes eighty (80) pupils from primary schools and ten (10) teachers of French. The researcher opts for an exploratory case study based on consulting five different primary schools from four (4) distinct areas located in the Wilaya of Tlemcen, namely, Tlemcen city, Maghnia, Boughrara, and El Bttim. The names of the schools with their geographical locations are presented in table 1 below:

Table 1

The names of the primary schools with their geographical locations

Primary school	Geographical location
Hafed Tnessi	Tlemcen city
Rahou Ahmed	Maghnia(centre)
Mohammed Boulouar	Maghnia(outskirt)
Liani Tidjini	Boughrara
Maamouri Mohammed	El Bttim

2.1.1. Pupils' profile

This investigation concerns eighty (80) pupils (40 males and 40 females) who are selected from the fifth grade at the primary school level during the school year 2020-2021 to answer the questionnaire addressed to them. Their age ranges from eleven (11) to thirteen (13).

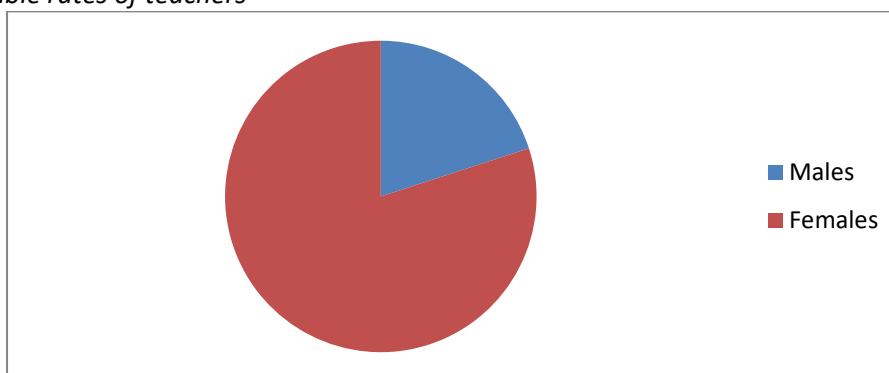
The choice of these pupils is since they are at a level in which their parents' assistance is required in their learning process. The high rate of the pupils' group in comparison to the small rate of the teachers' group, lies mainly in the fact that the present research emphasizes the impact of parents' educational level on their children's French learning rather than on the teaching process.

2.1.2. Teachers' profile

The study also involves ten (10) teachers of French whose gender variable rates are represented in figure 1 below.

Figure 1

The gender variable rates of teachers



The teaching experience of those teachers differs from one to another. It varies from five (5) years to twenty-seven (27) years as shown in the following table.

Table 2

The experience of the teachers of French

Teacher	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Years of experience	5	6	6	7	10	10	17	25	26	27

Most of the teachers taking part in this research hold the degree of 'Licence'; they are in charge of the two grades, including the fifth one at the primary level (Table 2). The respondents are from five different primary schools in the Wilaya of Tlemcen. The selection of the teachers of French at primary schools stem from the belief that they can provide important information about the impact of the education level of the parents on the pupils' achievement in the French language. Thus, an interview was conducted with them.

2.2. Data Collection instruments

This investigation requires the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from different sources to reach answers to the research questions. Thus, a mixed-methods approach is adopted in the study using two distinct research instruments mainly pupils' questionnaires and teachers' interviews.

2.2.1. Pupils' questionnaire

The investigator conducts a questionnaire with eighty (80) primary school pupils from the fifth grade to elicit the educational level of their parents and identify the extent of their involvement in their children's learning process. It is worth noting that the questionnaire includes seven (7) questions that vary from close-ended, mixed, and open-ended questions.

Bearing in mind that piloting the research instrument helps in avoiding bias and misunderstanding, the researcher made a try-out by distributing the questionnaire to some pupils who were not a part of the target sample population. Indeed, when answering some questions, those pupils found some difficulties in understanding certain questions.

Consequently, the investigator had to change the wording of some questions to make them understandable. After that, the researcher administered the questionnaire to the sample population and made sure to provide further clarifications about the questions whenever needed.

2.2.2. Teachers' interview

For the sake of collecting more in-depth information, the researcher carried out a structured interview with ten (10) teachers of French. This research instrument aims at checking the role of the parent's educational level in determining the learners' achievement. The interview is also employed to understand the interviewees' perception and their interpretations regarding the situation studied. The interview is composed of five (5) questions that vary from open-ended to close-ended questions. The interview questions were piloted with a small sample of individuals before being used to find out whether the questions are yielding the needed information and also to avoid ambiguity. It should be mentioned that all the questionnaire items are translated into Arabic whereas the interview questions are translated into French to cooperate with the informants' capacities.

2.3. Data analysis

In the present research, the investigator opts for both a quantitative and a qualitative data analysis to ensure reliability and to have multi-levels of analyses. In this respect, Dörnyei (2007:45) asserts that:

We can gain a better understanding of a complex phenomenon by converging numeric trends from quantitative data and specific details from qualitative data. Words can be used to add meaning to numbers and numbers can be used to add precision to words.

Therefore, this type of analysis enables us to have a deep understanding of the influence of parents' educational level on learning French at primary schools and helps in increasing the credibility of the current study.

3. Results

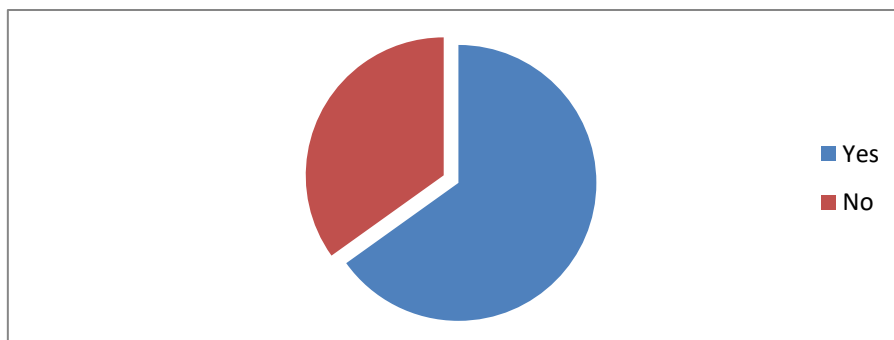
In this section, the results will be discussed and analyzed. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses are used in this research. In addition, the researcher has used additional illustrations to support her data analysis.

3.1. Results of the pupils' questionnaire

After extracting data from the questionnaire that was conducted with 80 primary school pupils from the fifth grade, the researcher found that 70 % of the informants love learning French because they consider it a prestigious language and a subject that helps them to achieve better scores in the exam. On the other side, 30% of them state that they don't like it as they find difficulties in learning this language (Figure 2).

Figure 2

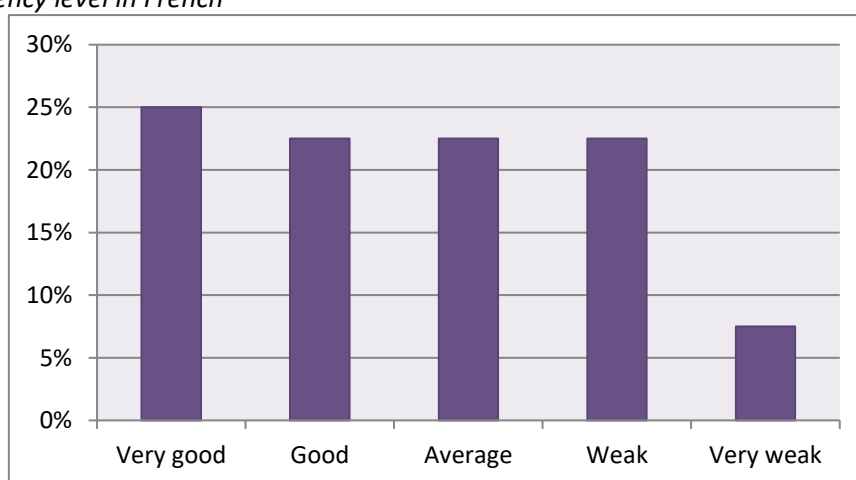
Attitudes toward French language learning



When asking the learners about their level in French and concerning their results of the first term exam in this language, the data below were obtained (Figure 3).

Figure 3

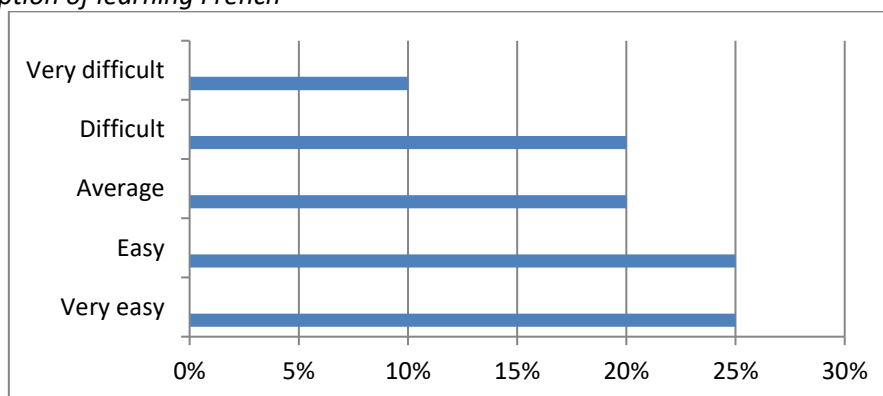
Pupils' proficiency level in French



Then, the investigator tried to know how the learners perceive learning French. The bar graph (figure 4) below elicits well their answers.

Figure 4

Pupils' perception of learning French



Regarding mothers' educational level, 32.5% of the mothers are secondary school graduates whereas 22.5% of them have a university diploma. As for fathers' educational level, almost 30% of the fathers are secondary school graduates whereas 22.5% of them are university graduates (Table 3).

Table 3

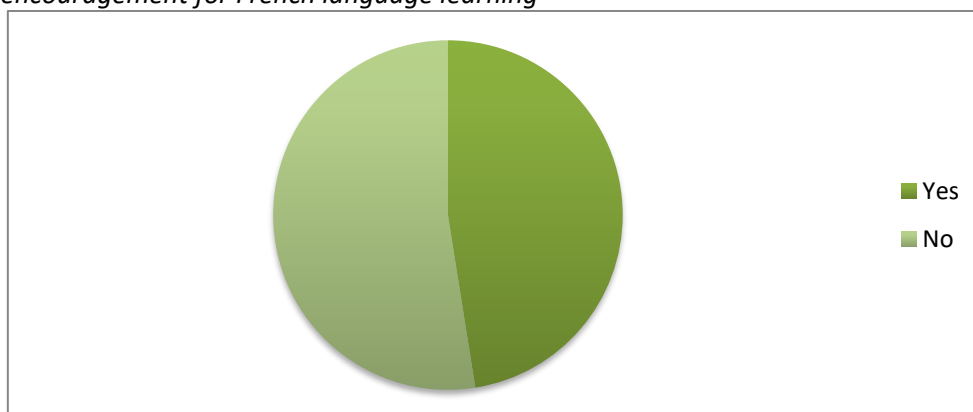
Parents' educational level

Educational level	Fathers (80)	Mothers (80)
Illiterate	0%	0%
Primary school	25%	25%
Middle school	20%	25%
Secondary school	32.5%	30%
University	22.5%	20%

When the researcher asked the pupils if their parents encourage them to learn French, 47.5% of them said yes whereas 52.5% of the informants said no.

Figure 5

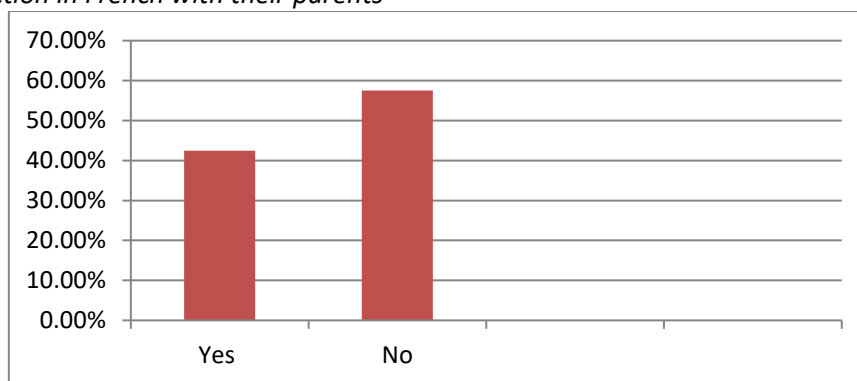
Parental encouragement for French language learning



After that, a question was formulated to know if the learners use French to interact with their parents at home using French, 42.5% of them said yes while 57.5% of them said no (Figure 5).

Figure 6

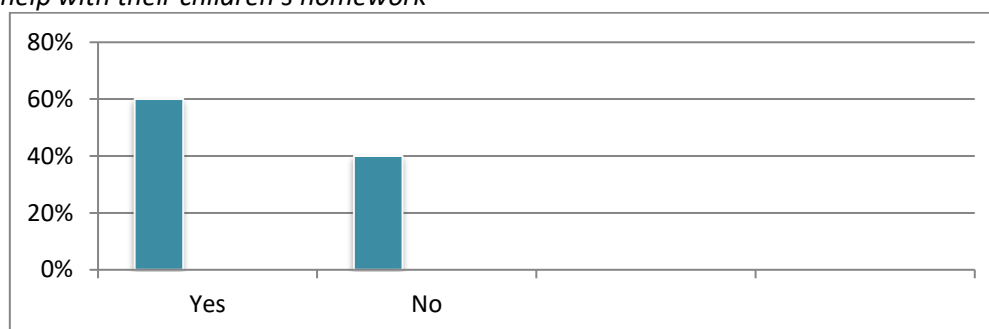
Pupils' interaction in French with their parents



The last item in the questionnaire was designed to recognize whether the parents help their children in doing their homework, 60% of the respondents replied saying yes while 40% said they did not receive any aid in doing their tasks (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Parents help with their children's homework



3.2. Results of the teachers' interview

The information yielded from the interview, which was carried out with the teachers of French, revealed that the learners face a set of language difficulties in reading comprehension and oral and written expression. They also pointed out certain problems they encounter in their teachings like the lack of both teaching materials and parental cooperation.

When asking them if they communicate with the pupils' parents about their language achievement, only 2 teachers among 10 said that they do. Concerning the relationship between the parent's educational level and the pupils' language achievement, 9 teachers said that highly educated parents get involved in their children's learning process. They claimed that parents with high levels of education generally want their children to be exactly like them.

Hence, they give more attention to assistance to their children with the different types of homework and assignments. They asserted that this kind of parents also has a positive impact on the thinking and performance of their children. However, 1 teacher cited that there are cases where pupils with illiterate parents achieved results similar to those with highly educated parents.

Additionally, the interviewees suggested some solutions to reinforce parental involvement in their children's French learning process. They said that school authorities should organize meetings with the parents to encourage them to help their children and to discuss with them the problems that are encountered in the French learning process. They asserted that special assistance must be given to pupils whose parents are illiterate or have a low level of education.

4. Discussion

This section is devoted to discussing the results obtained from the questionnaire and the interview. It has been proved that parents' level of education is one of the most important psychological and sociological variables influencing children's French learning. Learners whose parents have higher levels of education are more motivated to learn because "motivation is one of the main determinants of second/foreign language (L2) learning achievement" (Dörnyei, 1994: 273). Accordingly, they can use more effective learning strategies than children of parents with lower levels of education. Respectively, parents who do not go beyond elementary or middle school are not able to give proper help to their children in second language learning.

5. As the results revealed, the pupils whose parents are highly educated, have a high level of involvement in their children's learning process. This type of parents encourages their children to develop cognitive and language skills during their development, especially during the onset of their schooling years. Consequently, children receive aid when doing their homework and they can participate in different cultural activities. In addition, the parent's educational level allows them to be in easy contact with teachers to sustain the students' performance. By reinforcing

parents' involvement and assistance, pupils can perform better in their French learning.**Conclusion**

The main aim of this research is to evaluate the effect of parents' educational level on their children's French language learning in Algerian primary schools. According to the outcomes of the study, the two research questions are affirmed. First, the parent's educational level affects the process of learning French at primary schools in ways that can determine; to an extent; either success or failure of the learner. Second, both the parent's educational level and their support are needed to motivate pupils and enhance their French language skills. In this respect, Hosseinpour et al (2015:176) state that "a child's family is the most influential part of his/her life. Therefore, parents have a major role in their children's education". Accordingly, it is of paramount importance for parents, teachers, and school authorities to work together to provide all pupils with quality learning opportunities and equal treatment in schools.

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

1. School authorities should make the parents aware of their crucial role in increasing the educational attainment of their children.
2. Schools ought to organize training and create opportunities for parents to become engaged in their children's learning process.
3. Teachers need to have permanent contact with the pupils' parents to inform them about classroom learning activities and give them ideas to help their children do their homework.
4. Educated parents should make sure to provide learning facilities to their children at home.
5. Both teachers and parents need to agree altogether on strategies to aid the learners to overcome any difficulties they face in French language learning.
6. School authorities should provide special assistance to pupils whose parents are illiterate or have low educational levels.
7. Government should organize training, seminars, and workshops on new teaching methods and their implementation in schools to enable all pupils coming from different familial backgrounds to have equal chances in educational attainment.

5.1. Limitations of the Study

This research has its limitations. Firstly, the learners' parents were not involved in the study, but information about their educational levels and their participation rate in their children's French language learning was provided by pupils through the questionnaire. Additionally, the sample of the study is restricted to five primary schools.

5.2. Suggestions for Further Research

For future studies on this topic, researchers can direct questionnaires to parents too and involve learners from different educational levels including middle and secondary schools to make the results more generalizable.

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